



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

DATE: March 8, 2016

SUBJECT: NEXT STEPS: Coordination of Transportation Priorities in the National Scenic Area

**Background:**

At the February 9, 2016 Columbia River Gorge Commission meeting, the Commission approved a staff recommendation as follows (see attachment):

- 1) Amend the current work plan to include .03 FTE as part of “Special Issues” to allow staff participation in the important discussions with regional partners and track the process as it relates to our management plan goals. This will require reducing time to be involved in other general categories such as general “Gorge-wide partner meetings” that serve as outreach. Staff further recommends that the Commission designates one or two Commissioners who are interested in the NSA transportation issue to also be involved in the partner meetings.
- 2) Staff also recommends that the Commission request the transportation partners to work closely with Commission staff and designated Commissioners to develop the list of priority projects within the NSA and return to the Commission in summer 2016 with their recommendations.

**Staff Follow-up:**

Staff will be participating in a Mid-Columbia transportation meeting hosted by MCEDD on March 10, 2016 in The Dalles with local and regional partners that will be focused on “providing safe and efficient transportation system to enhance the livability and economic vitality of the Mid-Columbia region”. Staff will attend this meeting to become more informed about current transportation priorities and plans in the region and will have an opportunity to discuss the transportation needs/plans specifically within the NSA with the participants. In the next three months, staff, in consultation with regional partners, will refine a list of “criteria” or NSA values that will serve as the lens by which to review existing lists of transportation projects and long term needs that will have already been adopted or prepared by the various jurisdictions within the NSA in both states. Staff will also collect relevant information and work with local and regional partners categorize the level of importance (high, medium, low) with the goal of finalizing recommendations within the NSA to the Gorge Commission with a request to support the transportation priorities identified within the NSA that are consistent with the management plan goals. This option keeps the Gorge Commission staff engaged, but recognizes that staff from other agencies/transportation entities will provide the necessary regional leadership to move this bi-state effort forward.

Currently, the management plan provides guidance for some transportation priorities, but only as they relate to enhancing recreational use and improving access to and safety at recreation sites for the traveling public, with emphasis on meeting NSA recreation goals. Participating in this regional planning effort provides additional information that will be useful for the upcoming management plan review process.