

Agricultural lands in the Gorge: Shaping Gorge Commission actions for climate change resilience and mitigation

Part I: Climate change effects on NSA agriculture

November 16th

Participants: Ken Bailey, Thomas Lumpkin, Valerie Fowler, Alice Williamson, Kelsey Galimba, Mike Guebert, Sarah Sullivan, Yesenia Sanchez Oates, George Oats, Ilene Le Vee, Dan Richardson, Robin Dobson, Lisa Perry, Kris Schraedel, Cole Provence, Greg Holmes, Jennifer Euwer

Commission and staff: Ashley Thompson, Jim Morgan, Jessica Olson, Lisa Naas Cook, Joanna Kaiserman

DRAFT NOTES

Overview of the Commission's CCAP

"CCAP Overview" attached

- CCAP began as a Commission directive to staff.
- Aiming for early 2022 to have an actionable workplan for the Gorge Commission.
- Broad framing for the CCAP is established in the recently revised Management Plan.
- We are addressing climate change adaptation through the SNCRs: the scenic, natural, cultural, recreation resources protected by the NSA Act, and the second purpose of the Act that protects economic development compatible with resource protections.
- Commission is working on several adaptation needs and three mitigation areas. Working lands are a opportunity to build resilience and reduce or offset emissions.
- Meant to be a living document that is updated with new information or emerging opportunities.
- For more information on the CCAP:
<http://www.gorgecommission.org/initiatives/climate-change/>

Pre-meeting survey summary

- We reviewed the document that was sent out ahead of the meeting.
- Discussion points
 - There could be some over or underrepresentation of certain crops. The Gorge Commission can help support farmers in the region with the harsh climate realities we face.
 - Impressed by the list of climate mitigation strategies and a lot of wisdom from people on how to protect their enterprise or protect land. Many opportunities for peer-to-peer learning.

- A lot of good things out of survey, as a landowner and operator going to be looking at what regulations and opportunities there will be coming in the future related to climate change. Role for Gorge Commission would be to support applications for grants to practice climate mitigation strategies.
- Agree that GC's authority is limited in this arena. However, I would champion any effort made by the Commission to exert its political/public influence.

Presentations - Kelsey Galimba (OSU Ext), Sarah Sullivan (Gorge Grown)

“Galimba – Climate Change in NSA” and “Gorge Grown Climate Change Pres 11.21” attached

- Current conditions and overall ag trends
- Climate-related challenges or needs for agriculture

Discussion with the panelists (Kelsey, Sarah, Mike Guebert (East Multnomah SWCD, farmer) *What do you feel poses the greatest challenge AND what are opportunities to build resilience into the future?*

- Mike: Biggest challenge is changing rainfall patterns; no rain in the summer, rain in shoulder seasons is more variable. Costing an extra \$10,000 in hay to feed animals because of dryer spring. Going to be a supply issue this winter for many livestock farmers. Wildfire is another big challenge when evacuating livestock. Evacuation could use more discussion.
- Kelsey: Priorities may change from year to year—may be heat one year, smoke another. Water shortage is going to get worse. Need to be thinking about irrigation.
- Sarah: Every year is different, and one thing we can control is soil quality and retaining water in the soil. Interested in learning more about how to support growers in improving soil.

Group discussion

- There are many opportunities, but they are costly- such as application of compost, mulch. Requires carbon emissions to transport. Equipment is expensive. Need to make it more economically feasible for farmers to sequester carbon.
- Need to help farmers implement strategies to sequester more carbon, recognizing some don't pay for themselves in greater returns. Improving soil carbon is a way to trap water in the soil. Can also add carbon to the soil to increase water retention.
- We're producing our own biochar, planting trees in the pasture that will provide shade and forage for animals.
- All these effects hit the small to medium sized farmer more than the large-scale farmers. They need help determining what they need to do, not have to solve all of the problems themselves.
- Entering into strategic planning process at SWCD. Focusing on climate and equity in this plan. Could be opportunity for collaboration in different counties.
- One of the biggest issues Ecology is trying to address in the gorge is cold water refugia now that the Columbia River temperature TMDL has been finalized. We are

also working on projects on the White Salmon and Klickitat Rivers. We also have funding opportunities that we provide through the local Conservation Districts like the Underwood Conservation District in White Salmon

The National Scenic Area and Management Plan (staff presentation)

“Agriculture – Management Plan” attached

- Participant discussion of the final slide – some ideas the Commission has had about opportunities to support farmers and improve outcomes for ecosystems and farms
 - The \$80k income threshold for farms seems like it would likely support either highly capitalized operations or existing agriculture types, but less so smaller ventures and people trying new crops
 - Maybe GC could be the facilitator to bring people together to share programs, foster bi-state conversations about how to address climate mitigation and adaptation on a regional scale.
 - Recognizing the second purpose of the NSA Act is to protect economic development consistent resource protection, how do you protect agricultural lands while protecting natural resources? Regenerative agriculture, protecting biodiversity. I think this gives Commission the opportunity to take a more active role than it has in agriculture. Look at possibility of regulation—don’t like regulation more than anyone else, but there has to be an alternative way to get more farmers to help implement regenerative ag concepts. Need to help pay farmers be able to implement—need an organization or entity to administer these funds.
 - Commission has unique position in this landscape with these producers that seem to have the same need for solutions to the same problem.
 - Article on orchard economics in Hood River county in 2021:
<https://appliedecon.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/oaeb/pdf/aeb0066.pdf>
 - Encourage growers to talk to your local conservation districts about cost-share benefits for growers. Haven’t had any growers in Klickitat county apply for these programs.
 - Caution the GC in getting involved rather than just as a support mechanism. Farmers have so much to respond to already. COVID and OR OSHA are one example.
 - Growers want to see that strategies will work for them. You will get more willingness from growers for choosing to participate in these strategies, rather than mandating, many growers I know feel the same.
 - Seeing shift in vegetation with temperature and climate changes. Would be interested in research or information about shifts in native vegetation as well as the crops and suitability for different crops in the future.

Resources sharing

- Participants share programs, funding, other resources. We've compiled these and will build upon them in Meeting II.

In order of preference, participants support diving deeper into these topics

Thursday:

- Soil health and carbon storage strategies
- Water scarcity
- Potential for Commission to support emerging needs in our permitting
- Certification or branding opportunities for climate-smart ag

Closing and next steps

- The discussion and resources we gathered will be shared back in meeting notes. The recording and presentation slides will be made available.
- All are always welcome to Gorge Commission meetings the second Tuesday of each month.
- We will be sharing a draft CCAP for public input early in 2022.
- We will see some of you on Thursday!