

To: The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Commission  
Subject: Comments on the draft revised Management Plan  
Date: June 25, 2020  
From: Theodora Tsongas, PhD, MS

Good Afternoon Commissioners:

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas, an environmental health scientist. I have lived in the Pacific Northwest for 25 years, and in Oregon for 20 years after moving here to be with family. The natural beauty of the Columbia Gorge is a source of great joy and it is what keeps me centered. It is the place I go to find quiet and solace in times of difficulty, and the first place I share with visiting friends and family. I live in the city, so I understand the health benefits of preserving and protecting natural ecosystems.

Your work is very important, and I appreciate your efforts over the past three years to revise the management plan. However, I am concerned that the proposed revisions will not protect this valuable national asset. I urge you to reconsider and revise the management plan so that present and future generations can benefit from your work.

Most important, there is no analysis in this plan of the changes that will happen due to rapidly accelerating climate disruption. If this plan is to be relevant to current and future conditions and effective in protecting the National Scenic Area, it needs to be significantly improved. Climate disruption, as you well know, is a significant and urgent threat to our life support systems on this planet, including the biological systems and ecosystem services from which we benefit in the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area. This means radical changes in how we evaluate and manage this asset to protect it. It means that we must stand strong against the economic interests that can irreversibly damage the Gorge's fragile balance. As I see it, you have relegated consideration of climate impacts to a last minute deliberation at a time when we are faced with double public health emergencies, climate disruption and a pandemic. Your job is to protect and conserve this asset and the natural habitat within it. You must have a plan to mitigate the damaging impacts of climate change, and because we do not have much time to slow down these impacts before we reach a point of no return, you must set a 1-year target date to adopt a climate action plan. This means you need to understand how the ecosystems within the area are likely to be impacted by changes such as increased heat, drought, wildfires. The plan can allow NO reduction in habitat protection; it must prohibit loss or damage to wetlands; it must limit new dwellings in forested areas; it must prevent conversion of forest land to protect the carbon sink that trees provide, to mitigate the effects of climate change. It must protect and increase stream, lake and pond buffers. And it must make sure that no changes to urban area boundaries are made, even minimal ones, because the economic benefit of this protected area to the local urban areas is absolutely dependent on the protection of this scenic ecological area. Suggestions that more room is needed for urban development within the Gorge are false as space is available for development under current boundaries. Thank you for your very difficult work. I have to ask that you persist in protecting this precious national asset, for all of us, in the true sense of the National Scenic Area Act and protect fish, wildlife, sensitive plants, and human health in the Gorge.