

Natural Resource Updates in Gorge 2020

Gorge 2020 is a three-year process to review, and revise as necessary, the **Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) Management Plan**. The CRGNSA Management Plan protects **natural resources** from potential destruction, displacement, or degradation when development or changes to land uses occur. The plan focuses on natural resources defined as wetlands, streams, ponds and lakes, riparian areas, wildlife and wildlife habitat, rare plants, and priority habitats and is designed to protect these resources from overuse, destruction, disturbance and fragmentation through resource. The natural resource chapter includes objectives, policies, and guidelines for the GMA and SMA for these resources.

How Updates Were Identified and Proposed

The goal of the technical review is to update, clarify, and provide consistency within the language and tools of the chapter so the Management Plan can consistently protect, enhance, assess and monitor the existing natural resources and ensure efficiency in carrying out the purposes of the Act.

The Gorge Commission and Forest Service convened a Natural Resources Technical Team in June 2018 that included Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Natural Resources, Klickitat County Planning Department, Multnomah County Planning Department, Oregon Biodiversity Information Center, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, US Forest Service, Wasco County Planning Department, Washington Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Natural Heritage Program, Yakama Nation Fisheries. The team met several times in 2018 and 2019. In December 2018, staff presented to the Commission an update on the technical revision, including some examples of the corrections and updates being considered. At the Commission meeting on May 14th, 2019, staff presented an initial draft chapter for Commission and public feedback, and the current draft addresses that feedback. The Commission reviewed and approved final chapter updates on April 29, 2020.

Synopsis of Proposed Updates

- Applicable state and federal agency authorities and the applicant's responsibility to comply with laws and policies were clarified.
- The term **priority habitats** is more clearly used through, and a single set now applies in both GMA and SMA. Other terms such as "natural areas" and "wildlife areas" and associated Table 2 were replaced or removed.
- The **endemic plant list** was updated.
- Updated and clarified Part II, Chapter 7 to clarify requirements for wildlife and rare plant surveys for particular uses.
- Goals and objectives for **water resources** were updated, removing the phrase to "increase the quantity" of wetlands to better reflect the existing goal of creating wetlands only as a last mitigation to compensate for wetland loss. The preferred approach is to protect existing wetlands and encourage proactive improvement of wetland habitats. Changed references to address water resources collectively, when appropriate to consolidate redundant policies that apply to wetlands, streams, lakes, and ponds.

- Objectives were updated to describe the approaches and tools the Commission currently uses to achieve resource protections, including using regulation, promoting incentives, and supporting conservation easements that protect natural resources.
- Climate change references added.

Modifications to Definitions

- Rehabilitation and Enhancement Plans (Water Resources), Wildlife Management Plans, and Protection and Rehabilitation Plans (Plants) are now referred to as Mitigation Plans. “Mitigation” in the Plan is defined to include all of these actions.
- Updated “sensitive wildlife species” to “rare” as a term, given that “sensitive” is both a specific type of status and also a generic term for status species. The term “rare” is used to refer to all status species, including those that are listed “sensitive” under federal, state, and Forest Service rules.
- “Rare” plants now explicitly includes plant communities or ecosystems ranked by WA Natural Heritage Program or ORBIC as vulnerable using NatureServe global and state status rankings.
- When referencing external standards, such as the Wetland Delineation Manual, added the phrase “as may be revised from time to time” to allow for future updates.
- In the definition of rare plants (moved from Goals to Policies), “This includes designated native plant communities” was added to clarify that representative or sensitive native plant communities in either state database are treated in the same way as mapped rare plant locations/populations.

Formatting / Editorial Changes

- Minor edits to introductory language.
- To improve readability and streamline the chapter, several policies for GMA wetlands and streams have been combined into policies for “water resources”.
- Moved definitions of sensitive wildlife and rare plants out of their respective Goals sections and into Policies.

What’s Next?

Public comment will be accepted on the draft Management Plan from **June 1 to June 30, 2020**. The Gorge Commission and Forest Service will also host two informational Zoom video webinars:

- Proposed Changes to the Management Plan: **June 11, 2020 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.**
- Public Comment Virtual Open House: **June 25, 2020 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.**

For more information on how to submit comments and to register for these webinars, visit the Gorge Commission website: www.gorgecommission.org.

After all comments are reviewed, staff will provide a summary to the Gorge Commission at their July 2020 Meeting. The final draft of the Management Plan will be presented for Commission approval at the August 2020 meeting.

Questions about this chapter? Contact Jessica Olson – jessica.olson@gorgecommission.org