



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Secretary of Agriculture Concurs with the revised Gorge 2020 Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

February 23, 2021 — Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

The Secretary of Agriculture has concurred that the revised Gorge 2020 Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is consistent with the National Scenic Area Act.

The Columbia River Gorge Commission focused on updates to increase protections in the Scenic and Natural Resources chapters, as well as Economic Development, Land Uses, Urban Area Boundary revisions, and Recreation chapters. “Working closely with the USDA Forest Service as our partner, we engaged government agencies, the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, Friends of the Gorge, ports, stakeholders, and the public in 142 meetings over four years to seek their input and technical advice,” said Krystyna Wolniakowski, Executive Director of the Columbia River Gorge Commission. “Because of the urgency of addressing climate change impacts in the Gorge, we added a new Climate Change Chapter and will begin developing a climate change action plan in 2021.”

Significant changes to the Management Plan include:

- Updating, clarifying, and providing consistency within the language and tools so the plan can consistently protect, enhance, assess and monitor existing resources
- Cideries are now an allowed use which may permit tasting rooms and commercial events
- Allowing incidental value-added products from the local region to be sold at fruit and produce stands
- Expanding stream buffers from current 100 to 200 feet on 7 specific rivers to protect salmon
- Adding a new Climate Change chapter better protect and support the resources and economy of the National Scenic Area
- Clarifying the extent of a minor revision to urban area boundaries

With the concurrence determination, the Gorge Commission will now formally transmit the revised Management Plan to the counties in the National Scenic Area to incorporate into their county

ordinances. “The revised Management Plan is a significant milestone in effectively managing the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, said Glenn Casamassa, the Regional Forester for the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region. “The Plan highlights the strong partnerships in the Gorge and the intent to support the economic development in a manner consistent with protecting the scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources for which the Area was established.”

The National Scenic Area Act recognizes the Gorge as a national treasure whose resources are to be protected and economies supported. The Act directs the Gorge Commission and the Forest Service to review the National Scenic Area Management Plan as necessary to protect the scenic, cultural, natural and recreation resources, and to support the economy consistent with resource protections. The revised “Gorge 2020” Columbia River Gorge Management Plan was approved by the Gorge Commission on October 13, 2020 and was transmitted to the Forest Service on November 23, 2020.

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area encompasses 292,500 acres of Washington and Oregon, where the Columbia River cuts a spectacular river canyon through the Cascade Mountains. The USDA Forest Service manages National Forest lands in the National Scenic Area and works together with the Columbia River Gorge Commission to protect and enhance scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the Columbia River Gorge while encouraging local economic development consistent with that protection. Learn more about the Forest Service at www.fs.usda.gov/crgnsa and more information about the Gorge Commission at www.GorgeCommission.org.

Specific information about attending monthly Commission meeting webinars is available on the Gorge Commission’s website: www.gorgecommission.org.



File Code: 1920
Date: February 19, 2021

Ms. Krystyna Wolniakowski
Executive Director
Columbia River Gorge Commission
PO Box 730
White Salmon, WA 98672

Dear Ms. Wolniakowski:

This letter contains my determination on the revised Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (*Revisions*) adopted by the Columbia River Gorge Commission (Commission) on October 13, 2020 and submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture on November 23, 2020. On May 19, 2004, the Secretary delegated the authority, to concur whether the revised Management Plan is consistent with the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act (Act), to me as the Pacific Northwest Regional Forester. The Act requires a concurrence determination within 90 days of the November 23, 2020 Gorge Commission submittal of the revised Management Plan (16 U.S.C. §544d(f)(1)). This 90-day period expires February 21, 2021.

The Act requires that “No sooner than five years after adoption of the management plan, but at least every ten years, the Commission shall review the management plan to determine whether it should be revised.” (16 U.S.C. §544d(g)). The Commission reviewed the entire revised Management Plan and focused revisions on natural and scenic resources, economic development, land uses, recreation and urban area boundaries. Additionally, a Climate Change chapter was added to the revised Management Plan. The Commission and Forest Service staff revised portions of the revised Management Plan in response to its review, fulfilling the requirements of the Act. The Commission and Forest Service conducted approximately 140 meetings and hearings in the course of the plan revision, including publication of the draft revised Management Plan and public hearings prior to final adoption of the revised Management Plan.

I based my concurrence determination upon whether the revised Management Plan is consistent with the nine standards and the two purposes of the Act (16 U.S.C. §544d(d) and §544a). I also based my concurrence determination on the revisions to the Management Plan for both the General and Special Management Areas; the unchanged portions of the revised 2004 Management Plan; and subsequent amendments that have already been concurred upon.

The revised Management Plan continues the existing structure of the Management Plan. The revisions focus on updating, clarifying, and provide consistency so the Management Plan can consistently protect, enhance, assess, and monitor the resources and ensure efficiency in carrying out the purposes of the Act. I find the revised Management Plan is consistent with nine standards and the two purposes of the Act. I base my conclusion upon my review and the recommendation



of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Acting Forest Supervisor Christy Cheyne and the review by her staff.

In conclusion, I concur that the revised Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is consistent with the Act.

I thank the Gorge Commission and staff for your efforts to review and revise the Management Plan, while continuing to protect and enhance the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources, and while protecting and supporting the economy of the area. A management plan is rarely satisfactory in all ways to all parties; however, the revised Management Plan will improve implementation while retaining protection for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Sincerely,

GLENN
CASAMASSA

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GLENN CASAMASSA
Date: 2021.02.19
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GLENN P. CASAMASSA
Regional Forester

cc: Christy Cheyne, Acting Forest Supervisor, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

Summary of Substantive Changes in the Revised Gorge 2020 Management Plan

The following is a list of some of the substantive changes to the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, which was approved by the Gorge Commission on October 13, 2020 and received concurrence from the US Secretary of Agriculture on February 19, 2021.

- Adopts a Climate Change chapter with policies that are guiding the development and implementation of a Climate Change Action Plan for the National Scenic Area.
- Adopts a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement and policies that are guiding the creation and implementation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work plan for the Gorge Commission.
- Expands the buffer zone for certain identified cold water refuge streams from 100 feet to 200 feet.
- Updates wetlands protection policies to require no loss of wetlands, rather than the previous standard of no net loss.
- Includes new policies regarding the urban area boundary revision process, including a cumulative maximum increase of 50 acres or 2%, whichever is less, of the current acreage within an urban area. The Commission will further clarify the adopted policies in rulemaking; no timeline has been established for that process.
- Allows cideries, following the guidelines established for wineries.
- Allows fruit and produce stands to sell a broader range of agricultural products and other incidental materials.
- Includes new guidelines in some land use designations for owner-occupied “overnight accommodations,” limited to 90 room nights per year.
- Requires county planning departments to provide applicants with information on Firewise standards, and encourages applicants to meet those standards while meeting other National Scenic Area guidelines.
- Exempts buildings that are 1,500 square feet or less from the compatibility guideline for scenic resource protection.
- Updates guidelines for recreation developments, including new “recreation setting” descriptions for each Recreation Intensity Class.
- Updates the Economic Development chapter to be consistent with changes to the Management Plan and with current and projected economic development practices.
- Updates the Agricultural Income Test for new dwellings on Agricultural Land, requiring applicants to produce \$80,000 in gross agricultural income in 2020 dollars, indexed annually to inflation, before a dwelling can be permitted.
- Disallows new dwellings on lands designated as Commercial Forest or Large Woodland.

This is not a complete list of changes made to the Management Plan; many changes were clerical or did not have policy implications. The final adopted Management Plan is available on the Gorge Commission’s website, www.gorgecommission.org. For anyone interested in all the edits made, a redline version is also available on the Commission’s website. For more information, please contact Joanna Kaiserman, Sr. Land Use Planner at joanna.kaiserman@gorgecommission.org.

