



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission
FROM: Jessica Olson, Senior Natural Resources Planner
DATE: March 8, 2022
SUBJECT: **Work Session***: DRAFT Climate Change Action Plan (v03.08.2022)

PURPOSE

This staff report provides an overview of the DRAFT Climate Change Action Plan (attached as version 03.08.2022 for purposes of the March 8, 2022 Commission meeting). Commissioners provided staff with comments on an earlier internal draft, distributed in February 2022 for Commission review and feedback. This work session allows staff to summarize and address key points Commissioners raised. During the Commission meeting on March 8, 2022, staff will invite discussion around a few focused questions. This staff report describes next steps in the process of preparing the draft Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) for public review and comments.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the Commission and USDA Forest Service completed its review and revision of the Management Plan that establishes land use and resource protection policies for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (NSA). Responding to the urgency and importance of climate change, the two agencies developed a new climate change chapter with General Management Area (GMA) and Special Management Areas (SMA) provisions. At the heart of this chapter is direction to the Gorge Commission to develop and adopt a Climate Change Action Plan and Forest Service support for this effort.

Setting the stage for CCAP development, the climate change chapter of the revised Management Plan identifies several important action planning topics: streams and riparian areas, forest resources, protected habitats, invasive species, wildfire, Treaty Tribe priorities, agricultural lands, and transportation. The CCAP explores these topics and prioritizes actions that will result in improved Management Plan policies; implementation guidance and best management practices; partnerships and support for other efforts; and long-term monitoring and information sharing at a regional level.

This action plan builds upon two foundational assessments specific to our region:

- USDA Forest Service General Technical Report: Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation in the Columbia River Gorge, Mount Hood National Forest, and Willamette National Forest (in press)
- Summary of Climate Change Impacts on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (Wozniak 2018)

ACTION PLAN OVERVIEW

The CCAP provides a foundation for understanding climate change impacts in the NSA and a guide for necessary adaptation and mitigation actions. The action plan centers on the Gorge Commission's responsibilities to protect and enhance resources through its land use role. It lays out an overall approach for building climate change resilience and identifies concrete near-term priorities and actions to accomplish in 2022-2025, advancing climate adaptation, emissions reduction, and equity goals.

Timeline of the CCAP process

The Commission approved a scope, framework, and timeline for the CCAP in March 2021. Next, staff convened multiple meetings of a Review Committee, consisting of partners from federal, state, and local governments, tribes, and non-governmental organizations working on climate change initiatives. Together with the Review Committee and other partners, staff summarized vulnerabilities for resources and values affected by climate change impacts and identified options to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and enhance carbon storage. Strategies and actions in the draft CCAP address these vulnerabilities and emissions sources.

In September 2021, staff hosted a public webinar examining forest resources and partner efforts to address fire and other climate change impacts on forested lands. In November 2021, staff hosted a workshop for agricultural producers and professionals to learn more about climate resilience on working lands.

Staff provided an early internal draft of the action plan to Commissioners in February and gathered their written feedback. Today's Commission meeting is an opportunity to discuss a few key questions related to the feedback from Commissioners that will help staff finalize a draft for public review and a 60-day comment period later this month.

Scope of the Climate Change Action Plan

The CCAP's geographic scope is the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Guided by our shared mandate defined by the NSA Act and Management Plan, the Gorge Commission is working closely with the USDA Forest Service as a lead partner in this effort. The action plan was developed collaboratively and relies in large part on USDA Forest Service data and resource specialists' expertise. Actions support the land use responsibilities the two agencies have in the NSA. As an agency responsible for land management and emergency

response, the USDA Forest Service has many roles and opportunities to address climate change that are not addressed in the CCAP.

Many other agencies, communities, tribes, and organizations across the region are also working on climate resilience efforts that intersect with strategies and actions in the CCAP. We hope others will find value in this action plan and work together with us to achieve our shared climate adaptation and mitigation goals.

The action plan takes on climate change *adaptation*, dealing with the impacts of climate change on the resources the Commission protects, and *mitigation*, reducing the sources and enhancing the sinks of GHGs, where the Gorge Commission has a role.

Equity

As the Commission works on a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategy and builds relationships with community groups, the CCAP identifies areas of greatest potential to influence equitable processes and outcomes in our work. This aspect of the action plan will continue to deepen and broaden as our DEI work progresses and as we learn from others, such as Oregon’s Equity Blueprint (2021) and people-centric climate change vulnerability assessment (in-progress).

Structure of the Action Plan

Introduction

- Provides the context and scope of climate change action planning for the Commission.

Part I: Climate Change Adaptation in the NSA

- Describes resources and values that are impacted by climate change, vulnerabilities, risks, and opportunities for the Commission to improve resilience.

Part II: Climate Change Mitigation in the NSA

- Describes opportunities for the Commission to influence GHG emissions and sinks.

Part III: Commission Priority Strategies and Actions

- Identifies near-term priority actions for 2022-2025 and longer-term actions for Commission consideration as capacity allows or new information emerges. This section is the springboard for action. It can be deepened, broadened, and regularly updated as needed.

Part IV: Tracking Progress and Measuring Success

- Describes a framework for tracking progress toward CCAP goals and priority actions, integrating with the Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) program.

CCAP Implementation Guide

- This tool will be finalized based on the approved CCAP. It provides a quick reference table of priority actions with supporting details including timeframe, cost, and anticipated impact of each action.

How to use the Action Plan

Agency work planning: The CCAP guides staff work and Commissioner actions to develop policies, improve Management Plan implementation, integrate information into decision-making, monitor progress, and leverage partnerships for the time period 2022-2025.

Budget justification: The CCAP also supports Commission budget requests for critical components of implementing the CCAP. Priority actions in the CCAP support the agency's core mission and many actions benefit other Commission priorities.

Evaluation and reporting: The CCAP provides a framework for tracking efforts and outcomes, in coordination with VSI. This demonstrates progress, accountability, and our agency commitment to climate change action.

Broadening our reach: Staff have been building relationships with partners who embrace the CCAP's goals and support the work.

DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN PRIORITY TOPICS

Climate Change Adaptation Priorities (2022-2025)

- Cold water refuge streams and riparian habitats
- Wetlands
- Tribal Treaty Rights, including culturally-important plants
- Oregon white oak woodlands

Climate Change Mitigation Priorities (2022-2025)

- Regional transportation, including transit
- Electric-vehicle infrastructure
- Carbon storage in habitats and working lands
- Fire risk

SUMMARY OF EARLY COMMISSIONER COMMENTS AND STAFF RESPONSE

Overall Commissioner comments were positive and supportive of the initial draft. The following points are some, not all, of the suggestions or concerns expressed.

A few themes emerged from Commissioner suggestions on the early draft CCAP:

- Clarify methods and figures in specific places
 - ✓ In response, staff updated a few graphics and explanations. We will share some of those during the March 8 meeting.
- Use action-oriented language and focus on outcomes
 - ✓ In response, staff changed language, where appropriate, replacing words like "engage," "explore," "support," and "might" to more action-focused and decisive terms.

- ✓ Staff added desired outcome statements for each of the eight priority action topics in Part III.
- Clearly convey importance of recommended actions, what it will take to achieve them, and how they will result in the greatest impact(s).
 - ✓ Staff is working to tie each action to an intended impact in the CCAP Implementation Guide table. Additional information and analyses are needed to describe potential outcomes or goals for reducing emissions and storing carbon.
 - ✓ The Implementation Guide (in progress) is also going to allow Commissioners to see the relative costs, resources, and staff commitment required to accomplish priority actions.
- Complete an emissions inventory and set emissions goals, in addition to our current priority actions to build a general carbon storage inventory.
 - ✓ The current version of the CCAP identifies this strategy and action for **emissions reduction**: Consider options to complete an emissions inventory and establish specific transportation-related GHG emission goals. Provide a work session for the Commission, sharing available data to inform discussion.
 - ✓ The current version of the CCAP identifies this strategy and action for **carbon storage**: Learn more about the carbon storage contributions of different land cover types and land management practices. Map and assess relative carbon storage contributions of different habitats considering changes in land use, wildfire, conversion, and invasive species.
- Clarify or address ties between vehicle miles traveled and housing, recognizing that housing relates to DEI and CCAP work in a variety of complex ways.
 - ✓ Staff made a slight shift in the mitigation section in Part II and the priority actions list in Part III to provide more clarity about housing and emissions goals. This is a large and complex issue of interest to the Commission; however, at this point we do not recommend additional CCAP actions specific to housing.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

During the March Commission meeting, staff will provide an overview of updates we have made to the early draft CCAP and invite discussion of key questions we have identified based on Commissioner comments and staff work on these topics to date. Staff is specifically seeking guidance on climate mitigation questions, listed below, that will help us finalize the draft for public review. We invite public comments during the work session, recognizing this is an early draft that may change before it is released for the 60-day public comment period.

Discussion Questions

Question 1: Do you recommend any further prioritization, or clarification of the Commission's role at this time, within and among the four mitigation emphasis categories:

- Reducing fire risk,
- Protecting and enhancing carbon storage,
- Reducing transportation-related emissions, and
- Supporting E-V infrastructure?

Question 2: In one year, when we revisit the CCAP and discuss if shifts need to be made to the priorities, what do you want to see achieved or answered on these mitigation priorities?

Some additional questions to consider:

- Should the Commission focus climate mitigation efforts on the greatest GHG emissions sources, but where we have less direct influence and role (transportation), or on land-based emission reduction opportunities (land use policy and management) that contribute less to overall emission reductions, yet connect more directly with our influence and role?
- To align with our mission and responsibilities as a land use agency, should emissions efforts focus on policies, perhaps relating to recreation specifically rather than broader partnership efforts? Or given our regional role, should the Commission focus on high-level political levers to bring attention to regional transportation needs?
- The Commission passed a resolution expressing concern about fossil fuel transport through the NSA in 2014. Recognizing there are limitations to the Commission's authority in this area, should the resolution be somehow included in the CCAP?

PUBLIC PROCESS

Staff welcomes comments on the draft CCAP when it is released later this month for a 60-day period. Staff will host Question and Answer sessions during the review period; these will be advertised on our website (<http://www.gorgecommission.org/initiatives/climate-change>), by email, and in a press release. Commissioners are encouraged to share the next version of the draft CCAP with their networks. Commissioners are also encouraged to provide additional comments during the 60-day comment period.

The Executive Director, in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, will coordinate outreach to each of the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes' Tribal Councils and to each of the six Gorge County Planning Directors and their staff. A final action plan will be released for Commission review after all public comments have been reviewed in summer 2022.