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Columbia River Gorge Commission

2023  
CLIMATE  
ACTION  
ANNUAL  
REPORT

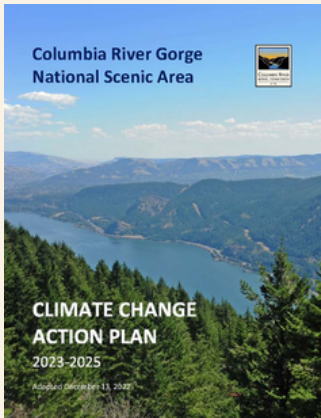
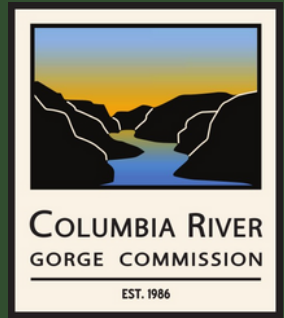
March 12, 2024

[www.gorgecommission.org](http://www.gorgecommission.org)

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## Climate Action in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area



The **Climate Change Action Plan** is a guide to climate action in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The Action Plan includes priorities for adaptation (adjusting to climate change impacts) and mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing storage of carbon in habitats and working lands).

This report highlights progress in 2023 for the climate action priorities below. Each priority has associated goals and actions that guide staff efforts. A full list of the 16 goals can be found in the appendix on page 9 of this report.

### OVERALL PRIORITIES



#### Inclusive Climate Action

Engaging with diverse communities and partners across the Gorge



#### High Climate Resilience Areas

Identifying and conserving areas expected to support species in a changing climate

### ADAPTATION



#### Cold Water Refuge Streams

Protecting water temperature and flow for fish



#### Wetlands

Improving wetland habitat for associated plants and wildlife



#### Tribal Treaty Rights

Supporting Tribes to ensure ecosystems and land use promote accessible, thriving First Foods



#### Oak Woodlands

Improving oak woodland habitat and corridors

### MITIGATION



#### Regional Transportation

Reducing single-passenger vehicle travel and promoting regional transit



#### Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

Increasing charging stations and collaborative electrification planning



#### Carbon Sequestration

Enhancing land-based carbon sequestration in habitats and working lands



#### Fire Risk

Supporting resilient forests and fire-adapted communities



## 2023 Progress on Climate Action Priorities

In 2023, we focused limited staff resources to make progress on Tribal Treaty Rights and Inclusive Climate Action priorities first, as these have immediate goals and set the stage for implementation of other priorities. We cultivated relationships and understanding of Tribal connections to this region through presentations to the Commission, meetings with county planners, and Climate Stewards community training. More work is needed to identify specific strategies for First Foods protection with the Columbia River Treaty Tribes. Below are key accomplishments by priority. Goals for each priority are paraphrased below and numbers correspond with the goal list on page 9.

**83** Total Actions in the Climate Plan

**58%** Actions Underway

PRIORITIES	2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS
 <p><b>Tribal Treaty Rights</b></p>	<p><b>Goal 1:</b> Goals, strategies, and policy approaches for First Foods protection by 2023</p> <p><b>Key Accomplishments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) and Yakama Nation Climate Plan presentations to Commission</li> <li>• Tribal Connections to Mid-Columbia presentation to county planners with Elaine Harvey from Yakama Nation and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission</li> <li>• Commission presentation to Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Tribal Council</li> <li>• Presenter at CTUIR Climate Pollution Reduction Grant listening sessions</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Inclusive Climate Action</b></p>	<p><b>Goal 5:</b> Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan with climate equity goals in place by 2025</p> <p><b>Key Accomplishments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Columbia Gorge Climate Stewards Training Pilot: 16 community members participated and 14 partner organizations, Tribes, and agencies engaged</li> <li>• Panelist for Adapting to Climate Change in the Gorge Conference with 80 participants</li> <li>• Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Team: 5 community organizations participated in orientation meeting</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Carbon Sequestration in Habitats and Working Lands</b></p>	<p><b>Goal 10:</b> Goals, strategies, and actions for enhancing carbon sequestration in habitats and working lands established by 2030</p> <p><b>Key Accomplishments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VSI habitat and agriculture map provides baseline information to explore carbon sequestration strategies</li> <li>• Participated in Oregon Climate Action Commission’s listening session on Natural and Working Lands Fund investment priorities</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Cold Water Refuge Streams</b></p>	<p><b>Goals 11 and 12:</b> Summertime water temperatures on cold water refuge (CWR) streams do not increase and flow goals established by 2030</p> <p><b>Key Accomplishments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperature and flow Vital Sign Indicators approved by Commission</li> <li>• Columbia River Federal Caucus CWR project update to Commission</li> <li>• CWR Climate Stewards field trip with Yakama Nation Fisheries and CRITFC to learn about sedimentation impacts to fish at mouth of Klickitat and White Salmon rivers</li> </ul>

## PRIORITIES

## 2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**Electric Vehicle Infrastructure**

**Goals 2 and 3:** Public EV fast charging available every 25 miles on I-84 and SR-14, and Gorge strategy for desired charging locations by 2025

**Key Accomplishments:**

- Hood River County Energy Council, County-Level EV Infrastructure Planning Committee member
- WA Electric Vehicle Charging Program grant award to Community Enrichment for Klickitat County for first public charging station in Lyle



**Fire Risk**

**Goals 4 and 13:** 2,200 acres of fuels reduction treatments by 2025, and 6 community-based fire adaptation groups in the Gorge by 2030.

**Key Accomplishments:**

- 1,900 acres treated on National Forest System lands toward 2025 goal
- WA Fire Adapted Community Learning Network: Climate action planning and wildfire risk presentation to network and learned about fire mitigation and adaptation practices at annual meeting with 56 participants from 29 organizations across WA



**High Climate Resilient Areas**

**Goal 16:** 70% of high climate resilient areas are protected by conservation status by 2035

**Key Accomplishment:**

- Joint workshop with Friends of the Gorge Land Trust at Land Trust Alliance national conference: "Incorporating Climate Resilience Areas and Inclusive Community Engagement in a Climate Action Plan"



**Oregon White Oak Woodlands**

**Goals 6 and 14:** Maps of critical oak habitat and policy options developed by 2025, and oak woodlands maintained or improved by 2030

**Key Accomplishments:**

- Initial VSI oak map complete
- Oak and Fire Adapted Communities Climate Stewards field trip
- Oak habitat condition assessment tool available for landowners through East Cascades Oak Partnership



**Regional Transportation**

**Goals 7 and 8:** Gas-powered single occupancy vehicle trips decrease and transit ridership increases annually through 2025

**Key Accomplishments:**

- Oregon Department of Transportation presentation to Commission on Historic Columbia River Highway and Mitchel Point Tunnel restoration
- Ongoing coordination with transportation partners through Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance, and Gorge Stewardship Network



**Wetlands**

**Goals 9 and 15:** Wetland extent and distribution mapping complete by 2025, and wetland extent and function increasing by 2030

**Key Accomplishment:**

- Initial VSI wetlands map complete

# Action Spotlight: Vital Sign Indicators Program

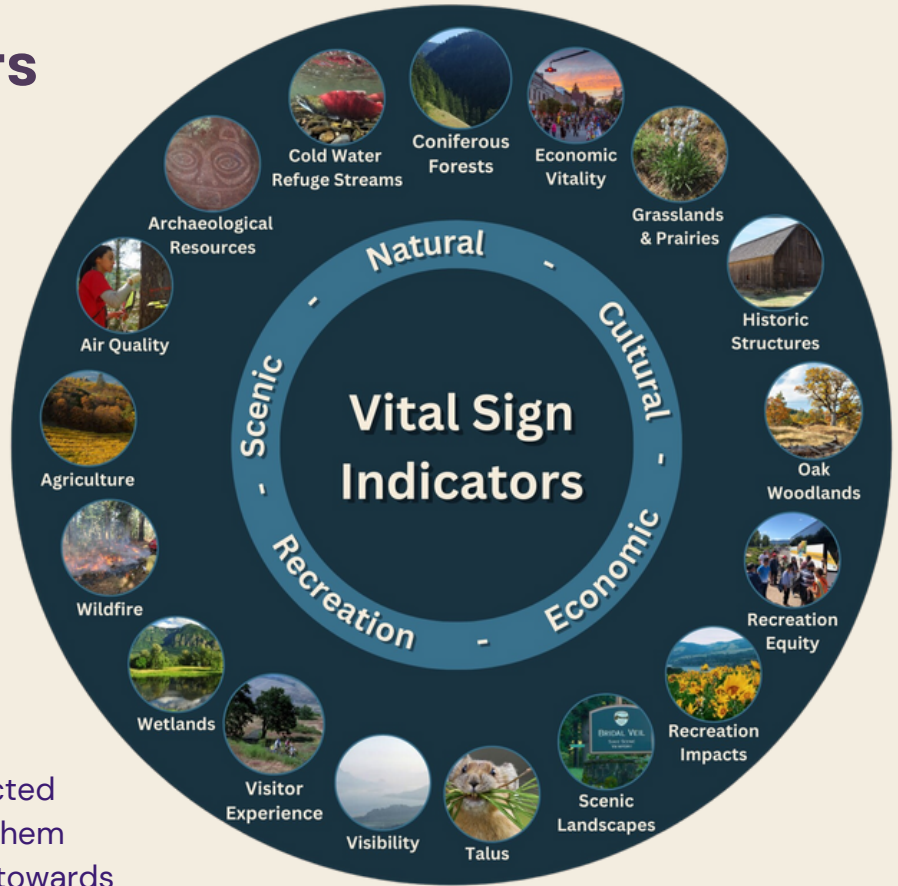
Monitoring the health of the  
Columbia River Gorge  
National Scenic Area

The Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) Program helps us assess how well we are achieving Management Plan goals in the National Scenic Area. Vital Sign Indicators are measures that track trends and conditions over time.

These indicators span a range of protected resources and habitats, and several of them serve as important progress measures towards goals in the Climate Change Action Plan. Cold Water Refuge Streams, Fire Risk, Oregon White Oak Woodlands, and Wetlands are all VSI and Action Plan priorities. VSI monitoring data directly support several climate actions and goals.

In December 2023, the Commission approved a strategic set of Vital Sign Indicators for implementation in 2024. Work is underway to finish monitoring plans, gather data, and build a public-facing platform to begin reporting in 2025.

For more information on VSI, visit: [www.gorgecommission.org/initiatives/vital-sign-indicators](http://www.gorgecommission.org/initiatives/vital-sign-indicators)





# Action Spotlight: Columbia Gorge Climate Stewards



In Fall 2023, sixteen community members participated in the first Climate Stewards training course offered in the Columbia Gorge. Students learned about climate change impacts, communication methods, and local efforts to advance community and ecosystem resilience. Presentations, field trips, and online learning provided opportunities to work on Climate Change Action Plan priorities.

The original Climate Stewards curriculum was developed by the University of California. The Oregon State University Extension Service, Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, and Columbia River Gorge Commission partnered with University of California to adapt the training for the Columbia Gorge.



**Capstone Celebration:** Climate Stewards capstone projects support Action Plan priorities including Cold Water Refuges, Wetlands, Fire Risk, and Inclusive Climate Action.



**Fire Adapted Communities:** Roland Rose, USDA Forest Service Fuels Planner and Division Chief, shows how a recent prescribed burn improves oak habitat and reduces fire risk.



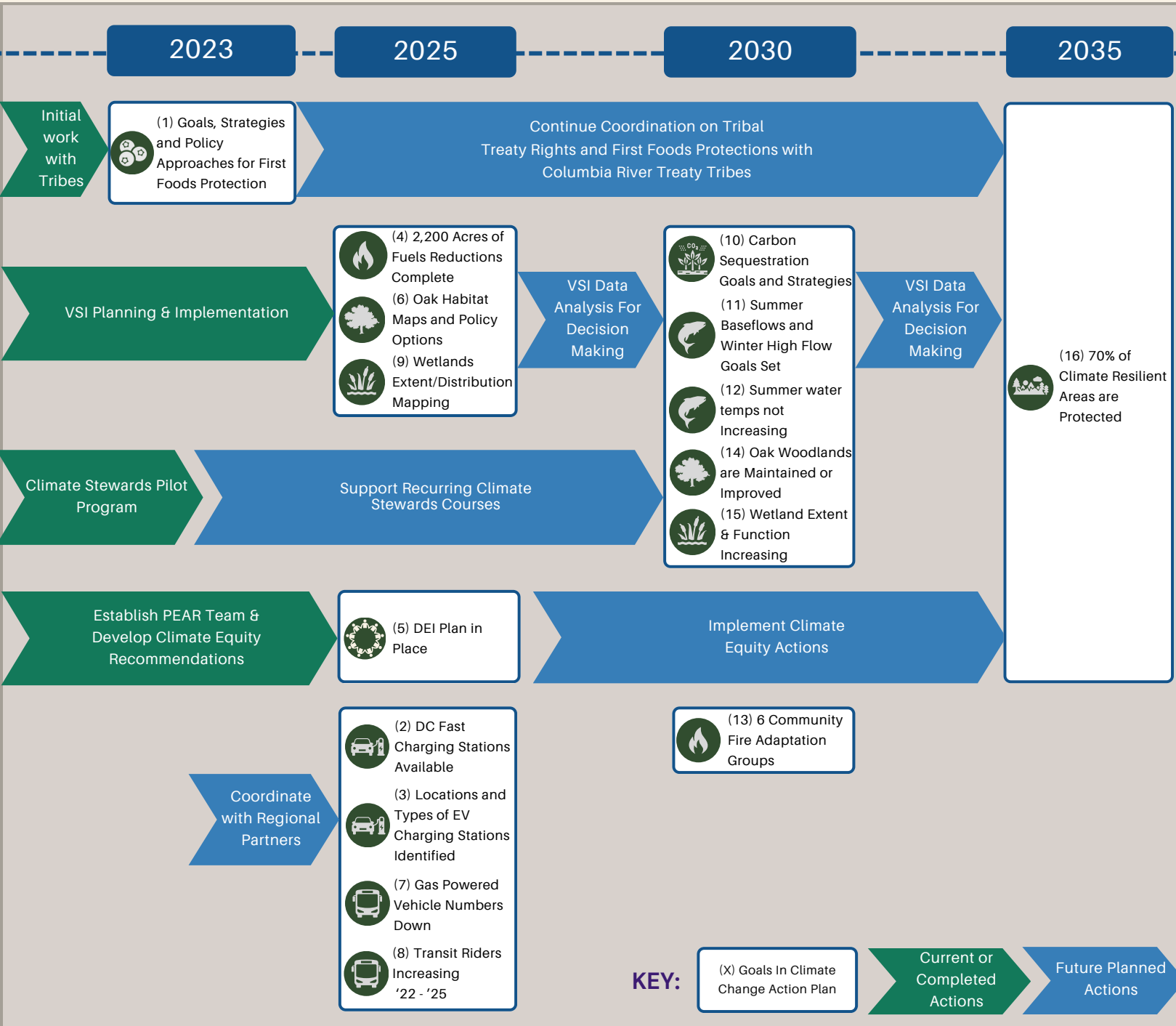
**Cold Water Refuges and Tribal Treaty Rights:** Elaine Harvey, Yakama Nation Member and Columbia Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Watershed Department Manager, describes cultural connections to the sacred First Foods of the Columbia River region.



**Climate Resilient Farms:** Yesenia Sánchez Oates, Pear Bloom Farm owner, discusses regenerative agriculture at her orchard.

## Climate Action Goals Timeline

Each of the climate priorities has one or more goals summarized in the table on page 9. Goals are descriptions of what we want to accomplish for each climate adaptation or mitigation priority in the Action Plan. They are designed to be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. In 2023, collaboration with Tribes to learn more about First Foods protection, developing the Vital Sign Indicators program, launching Climate Stewards training, and establishing the Pro-Equity Anti-Racism team support goals for 2023, 2025, and beyond.



## 2024 Plans & Next Steps

Our work in 2024 will build on key accomplishments from 2023 and focus on meeting 2025 goals. Many actions contribute to several goals simultaneously and lay the foundation for accomplishing goals for 2030 and beyond. Some key actions for 2024 are highlighted below.



**Continue work on Vital Sign Indicators Program to accomplish goal of first annual report in February of 2025.**



**Collaborate with Treaty Tribes to identify goals, strategies, and policy approaches for First Foods protection.**



**Coordinate with partners to identify electric vehicle infrastructure needs and provide technical assistance to Gorge planners.**



**Identify climate equity recommendations and establish DEI Plan in collaboration with PEAR Team.**



**Compile and analyze available public transportation data and evaluate progress towards 2025 goals.**



## Thank You

We are deeply grateful to all who are working on climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation efforts across the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and broader region. Thank you to the many partners we have worked with on efforts highlighted in this report.

- Columbia Land Trust/East Cascades Oak Partnership
- Columbia Gorge Climate Action Network
- Columbia Gorge Food Bank
- Columbia River Federal Caucus
- Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
- Community Enrichment for Klickitat County
- Comunidades
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
- Confederated Tribes and Bands of Yakama Nation
- Hood River County Energy Council, County-Level Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Committee
- Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust
- Friends of the White Salmon River
- Mid-Columbia Community Action Partnership
- Oregon Climate Change Research Institute
- Oregon State University Extension Service
- Pear Bloom Farm
- Underwood Conservation District
- University of California, Climate Stewards Program
- USDA Forest Service, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
- US Geological Survey
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network

## Want to learn how you can support climate action in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area?

We welcome opportunities to collaborate, share resources, and learn from one another as we work together to build resilience in natural habitats, working lands, and diverse communities across the Gorge.

Learn more by visiting our website or contact Lisa Naas Cook with the Gorge Commission at [Lisa.NaasCook@gorgecommission.org](mailto:Lisa.NaasCook@gorgecommission.org). The Commission typically meets by Zoom on the second Tuesday of every month, with a few hybrid meetings each year. All meetings are open to the public.

# 2023 CLIMATE ACTION ANNUAL REPORT

## APPENDIX: GOAL LIST



Goal #	Priority	Goal
1	Tribal Treaty Rights	By 2023, the Commission has identified specific goals, strategies, and policy approaches for First Foods protection and access, created with the Columbia River Treaty Tribes.
2	Electric Vehicle Infrastructure	By 2025, public direct current (DC) fast charging is available at least every 25 miles along I-84 or SR-14, and 50% of Urban Areas have public Level 2 or DC fast charging stations.
3	Electric Vehicle Infrastructure	By 2025, the gorge has a strategy for the desired locations and types of charging stations, and partnerships in place to implement them by 2030.
4	Fire Risk	By 2025, combined efforts on public and private lands in the NSA result in at least 2,200 acres of fuels reduction treatments. Fuels reduction includes thinning encroached or overstocked stands and prescribed burning. With support from the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network and multiple partners, the Commission will set long-term acreage targets based on forest types, Land Use Designations, and other considerations.
5	Inclusive Climate Change	By 2025, the Commission has completed a comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan with specific, measurable, and timebound goals to advance climate equity.
6	Oregon White Oak Woodlands	By 2025, critical corridors for oak woodlands and deer habitat connectivity are identified and policy options are provided to the Commission. Through work with East Cascades Oak Partnership (ECOP), comprehensive oak habitat maps are available.
7	Regional Transportation	By 2025, the number of gas-powered single occupancy vehicle trips across the Gorge decreases from 2022 levels. This goal will be supported by transit, shuttle, and parking solutions.
8	Regional Transportation	From 2022-2025, transit ridership increases each year.
9	Wetlands	By 2025, baseline extent and condition for wetlands are established and support implementation of the Management Plan's goal of no wetland loss.
10	Carbon Sequestration in Habitats and Working Lands	By 2030, based on VSI monitoring and with partner input, the Commission has set goals for summer baseflows and winter high flows.
11	Cold Water Refuge Streams	By 2030, summertime water temperatures on NSA cold water refuge streams do not increase and are trending towards federal/state water quality standards for temperature
12	Cold Water Refuge Streams	By 2030, summertime water temperatures on NSA cold water refuge streams do not increase and are trending towards federal/state water quality standards for temperature.
13	Fire Risk	By 2030, at least six community-based groups in the NSA are leading community fire adaptation to prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildfire.
14	Oregon White Oak Woodlands	By 2030, based upon information generated through Goal 6, Oregon white oak woodlands and corridors in the NSA are maintained or improved.
15	Wetlands	By 2030, wetland extent and function are increasing. Based on VSI information, more detailed goals can be set at this time with targets for wetlands acreage and condition.
16	High Climate Resilient Areas	By 2035, 70% of high climate resilient areas are protected by conservation status, as defined in this plan.