

TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Lisa Naas Cook, VSI Program Manager, Columbia River Gorge Commission
Sage Ebel, Natural Resources Planner, Columbia River Gorge Commission
Jessica Olson, Advisor, Columbia River Gorge Commission

DATE: March 12, 2024

RE: **Information Item***: 2023 Climate Action Annual Report

Purpose

This memo provides an overview of the first annual report on the Gorge Commission's 2023-2025 Climate Change Action Plan. The report describes progress toward Action Plan goals and provides a summary of 2023 key accomplishments. Staff welcomes questions, discussion, and reflection on the key questions included at the end of this memo during the March 12th Commission meeting.

Background

The Columbia River Gorge Commission approved the Climate Change Action Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area on December 13, 2022. The final Climate Change Action Plan reflects input from Tribes, agencies, organizations, and community members throughout the process of developing the plan from March 2021 to December 2022. In 2023, we began implementing the Action Plan with existing staff resources, approximately 0.5 FTE borrowed from current positions. We asked for an additional 1.0 FTE in the 2023-2025 biennium to fully implement the Action Plan. At the time of this report, staff awaits the final status of the Commission's funding request to the Oregon legislature and will provide an update at the March 12th Commission meeting.

Over the past year, staff has provided regular updates on progress implementing the Climate Change Action Plan. Monthly, staff provides highlights of climate change efforts during the Executive Director's report. Quarterly, staff provides a dashboard detailing progress on climate action priorities in the current work plan timeline. These reports provide an overview of accomplishments, risks or emerging issues, staffing and resources, and projected next steps. Quarterly reports are available at www.gorgecommission.org/initiatives/climate-change.

The attached annual report provides an overview of progress across all 10 Action Plan priorities as well as next steps for continued progress.

Climate Change Action Plan Priorities

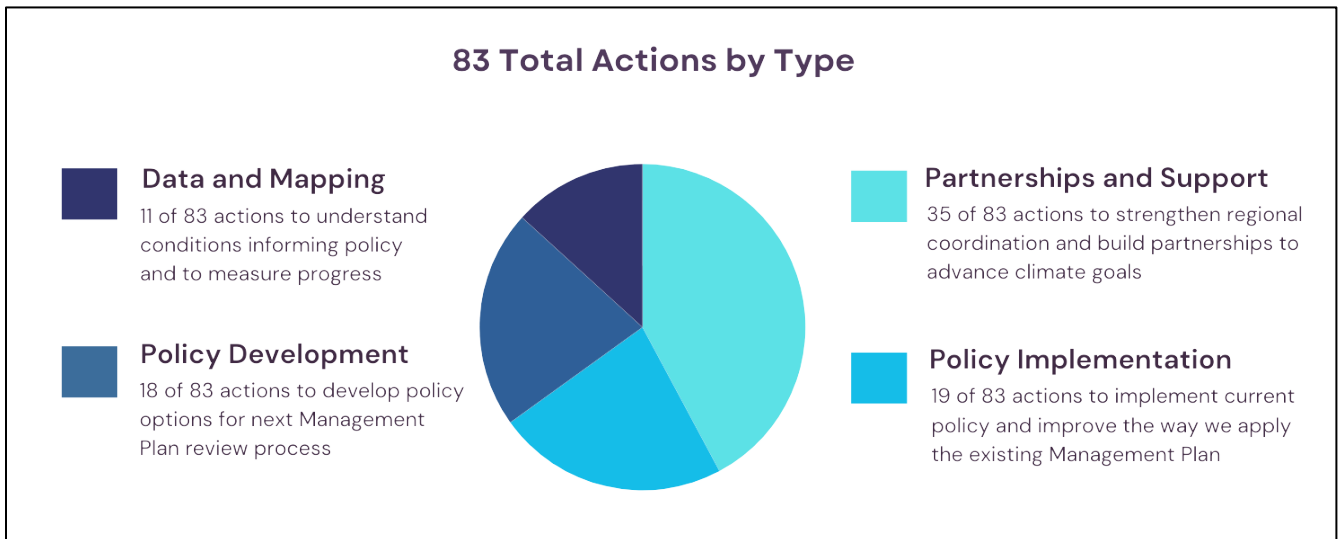
The Climate Change Action Plan identifies ten priorities for climate resilience, adaptation, and mitigation in the National Scenic Area:

- Carbon Sequestration in Natural and Working Lands
- Cold Water Refuge Streams and Riparian Habitat
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure
- Fire Risk
- High Climate Resilient Areas
- Inclusive Climate Action
- Oregon White Oak Woodlands
- Regional Transportation
- Tribal Treaty Rights
- Wetlands

Each priority has associated goals, strategies for approaching the priority topic, and detailed actions the Commission intends to take or support others to accomplish. The full list of goals is included in the accompanying 2023 Climate Action Annual Report Appendix on page 9.

Climate Actions

Part III of the [Climate Change Action Plan](#) lists **83 actions** to achieve the goals for the 10 priority topics above. The graphic below highlights the four main types of actions that make up this list.



Action Examples

- **Data and Mapping:** Monitor stream temperature on cold water refuge streams through Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) monitoring program.
- **Partnerships and Support:** Connect interested communities with funding resources to advance climate goals such as WA Electric Vehicle Charging Program grant award to local economic development organization for first public charging station in Lyle.
- **Policy Implementation:** Work with East Cascades Oak Partnership to provide oak habitat assessment tool and best management guidance to landowners.

- **Policy Development:** Develop policy options for Commission consideration during the next Management Plan review process such as options to reduce permitting barriers for stream enhancement projects (e.g., permit-exempt or streamlined enhancement possibilities). Commission policies in the Management Plan may be regulatory or non-regulatory and inform long-range planning and land use permitting in the National Scenic Area. In the Climate Change Action Plan, actions to “develop policy options” are intentionally broad to allow the Commission to consider if, and how, it might adapt existing policies or develop new programs, policies, or guidelines.

2023 Overview of Efforts

In this first year of Action Plan implementation, the Commission focused limited staff resources on three of the four categories above: data and mapping, policy implementation, and partnerships and support actions. Many of these actions set the stage for the policy development actions to come.

Of the ten climate priorities in the Action Plan, staff focused first on Inclusive Climate Action and Tribal Treaty Rights, as these priorities have immediate goals and also prepare us to implement other priorities. For more details, see Appendix A: 2023 Climate Action Work Plan Timeline.

The Tribal Treaty Rights goal in the Action Plan—to identify specific goals, strategies, and policy approaches for First Foods protection and access—is the earliest of all goals, intended to emphasize the importance of First Foods, not impose a deadline on staff-to-staff coordination with Tribes. Staff respectfully acknowledges that Tribes receive many requests for their engagement, and our commitment to learning and building relationships is ongoing. For this reason, staff suggests that the Commission’s Tribal Treaty Rights goal be considered an ongoing guide for our work with Commission staff work objectives included in annual work plans.

Based on Tribes’ input that shaped this goal, our work in 2023 has focused on improving understanding of Tribal Treaty Rights and Tribes’ climate priorities through presentations to the Commission, county planners’ network, and Climate Stewards program. We have also integrated Tribal perspectives on the interconnected nature of cultural and natural resource protection in our Vital Sign Indicators approved by the Commission in December 2023. Continuing our work with Tribes to identify specific strategies for First Foods protection is a priority for 2024, as noted in Appendix B: 2024 Climate Action Work Plan Timeline.

Climate Actions Integrated in Annual Work Planning

The Climate Change Action Plan is designed to be adaptive. In our effort to continue progress on actions underway and initiate work on those not yet started, staff suggests documenting through annual reporting when specific actions become a regular part of how we work.

The table below lists actions that are now ongoing elements of the Gorge Commission’s operations and programs.

Priority	Action	Description of Ongoing Status
Fire Risk	Track wildfire occurrence and fuels reduction treatments through Vital Sign Indicators.	VSI Monitoring Program
Fire Risk	Join the WA Fire Adapted Community Learning Network of diverse agencies, organizations, and communities across WA and report key learnings on relevant policies, best management practices, and community outreach strategies periodically to the Commission.	WA Fire Adapted Community Learning Network Member
Inclusive Climate Action	Host or co-host a community celebration that introduces the National Scenic Area and the Gorge Commission to interested community members who are unfamiliar with the NSA. Provide Spanish or potentially multi-lingual engagement opportunities.	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program
Inclusive Climate Action	Launch the Gorge Climate Stewards Program, in partnership with OSU Extension and local experts. The program is an intensive, interdisciplinary, action-oriented training for community members in the Columbia River Gorge to develop their skills in climate stewardship and carry out capstone projects that advance goals in this Action Plan. Graduates of the program become a cohort of active, empowered climate stewards.	TBD (based on funding and partner capacity)
Oregon White Oak Woodlands	Work with East Cascades Oak Partnership to develop tools to assess current condition in various oak system types (e.g., savannah and woodland) and learn more about potential future structure and function of these habitats.	VSI Monitoring Program
Overall	Track and regularly share legislative news and funding at state and federal levels connecting to Commission climate change priorities. Encourage Commission discussions of legislative priorities for climate change work.	Updates to Commission and Partners
Overall	Continue to address climate change through the agency Risk Register, a tool that evaluates various risks to our mission and day-to-day operations. Where the Action Plan identifies how resources are threatened by climate change, the Risk Register identifies how climate change threatens the Commission's ability to meet the two purposes of the National Scenic Area Act.	Administrative Operation
Wetlands	Make field visits with interested county planners to wetlands in the Gorge to learn about best practices, landowners' permitting experiences, etc. Visit Friends of the Gorge Land Trust western pond turtle sites.	Coordination with County Planners and Partners

Several actions above are integral parts of ongoing Commission programs and require sustained funding and capacity to continue:

- **Vital Sign Indicators** monitoring provides baseline data and ongoing information about climate action priorities including cold water refuge streams, Oregon white oak woodlands,

wetlands, and fire risk. In 2024, staff is completing monitoring plans, acquiring data, and building the platform to begin reporting in February 2025.

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion** efforts include establishing a Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) team, coordination with partners, and co-hosting community events. In 2024, staff is focused on working with the PEAR team to develop climate justice and equity goals. Other priority actions include involving youth in our climate change work and translating key materials into Spanish.
- **Climate Stewards** training pilot is an example of an action that may become part of ongoing Commission programs, depending on funding and staff capacity. At this time, Oregon State University Extension Service is exploring options to license the University of California Climate Stewards course for use in Oregon. Several community partners are interested in continuing to offer a course in the Columbia Gorge. Staff will update the Commission as we learn more. A list of the first cohort's capstone projects is provided in Appendix C: 2023 Columbia Gorge Climate Stewards Capstone Projects.

Overview of the 2023 Annual Report

The attached annual report is intended to be a visually engaging summary of climate action progress that can be shared with different audiences. The report includes an overview of climate priorities in the Climate Change Action Plan, key accomplishments in 2023, highlights from the Climate Stewards community training pilot, and next steps for 2024 and beyond.

Staff continues to work on improving our materials and welcomes feedback on this annual report from Commissioners and the public at the March 12th meeting.

Next Steps

- Staff will share an update on the Commission's Climate Change Action Plan implementation funding priorities during the Executive Director's report at the April Commission meeting.
- Staff will present the next Climate Action Quarterly Update at the July Commission meeting.

Topics for Commission Consideration

- How satisfied are you with the content and format of climate action updates provided to the Commission over the past year (e.g., level of detail, frequency, and accessibility of information)? What suggestions or feedback do you have for staff?
- Are there any topics in the annual report that you would like to learn more about during a future meeting with a guest presentation and discussion?







Appendix A: 2023 Climate Action Work Plan Timeline

This chart provides an overview of the key staff work items for two Climate Change Action Plan priorities in 2023, Tribal Treaty Rights and Inclusive Climate Action.

2023 Climate Action Work Plan Timeline

Climate Change Action Plan
Adopted (12/13/2022)



	CCAP Priority	February 2023	March 2023	April 2023	May 2023	June 2023	July 2023	August 2023	September 2023	October 2023	November 2023	December 2023	2024	2025
Commission Action Update	(Note: Monthly updates to be included with Executive Director's Report starting in May 2023.)		Commission review draft quarterly report template	Quarterly Update			Quarterly Update			Quarterly Update			Climate Action Annual Report (March 2024)	
Staff Work	Tribal Treaty Rights: First Foods Policy Approaches			 Tribal Treaty Outreach and Meeting Schedule Identified	Convene meetings with staff from Columbia River Treaty Tribes to discuss and develop policy approaches for First Foods protection and access						 Report on Goals, Strategies, and Policy Approaches for First Foods Protection and Access			
	Inclusive Climate Action				 Gorge Climate Change Symposium: Panelist for Adaptation & Action Session				 Gorge Climate Stewards Pilot Program Launch		 Gorge Climate Stewards Pilot Completed	 Strategies and Actions for 3 Key Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Goals Completed by Pro-Equity Anti-Racism Team		








Key:




 Interim Outcome toward Climate Action Goal

 Completed Outcome toward Climate Action Goal

Appendix B: 2024 Climate Action Work Plan Timeline

This chart highlights key staff work items in 2024 across the 10 Climate Change Action Plan priorities.

CCAP Priority		Mar 2024	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Jul 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025
	Tribal Treaty Rights							Staff/ Commission Meetings with Treaty Tribes Underway					First Foods Protection Recs
	Inclusive Climate Action					Update on PEAR Team's Climate Equity Work							Climate Equity Recs from PEAR Team
	Wetlands		Wetlands Monitoring Plan Complete	Initial Data Compiled				Data Refined By CRGC					VSI Annual Reporting
	Oregon White Oak Woodlands		Oak Monitoring Plan Complete	Initial Data Compiled				Data Refined By CRGC					VSI Annual Reporting
	Fire Risk		Historical Fuels Data Compiled					Extent & Distribution Data Compiled		Fuels Data Received		Preliminary Fuels Reductions Goals for NSA	
	Regional Transportation						Data Analysis Plan Developed						Annual Transit Ridership Data Analysis
	Electric Vehicles				Workshop: EV & Management Plan					Locations & Types of Charging Stations ID			

CCAP Priority		Mar 2024	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Jul 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025
	High Climate Resilient Areas											Convened Partner Meeting on Goals and Strategies	
	Cold Water Refuge Streams			Initial Temp Monitoring Design Complete	Temp Probes Installed	Historic Data Compiled			Flow Monitoring Design Workshop				VSI Annual Reporting
	Carbon Sequestration							Review Natural and Working Lands Plans					

Appendix C: 2023 Columbia Gorge Climate Stewards Capstone Projects

The list below highlights the projects that 2023 Climate Stewards course participants chose to focus on in their communities. Many of these projects support Climate Change Action Plan priorities.

Project	Climate Change Action Plan Connection
Coho Salmon Surveys Post Condit Dam Removal Conducted salmon spawning surveys with Native Fish Society on several tributaries to White Salmon River, a priority cold water refuge stream in the Gorge.	Cold Water Refuge Streams
Cold Water Refuges Brochure Developed an accessible overview brochure describing role of cold water refuges in the Gorge and what residents and visitors can do to protect them.	Cold Water Refuge Streams
Cold Water Refuge Monitoring in the Gorge Explored current temperature and flow monitoring with photos and site descriptions of several monitoring locations in the Gorge.	Cold Water Refuge Streams
Protecting Cold Water Refuges in the Gorge Developed a story map describing state of the science, importance for Yakama Nation, and actions community members can take to protect cold water refuge streams.	Cold Water Refuge Streams
Shorelines Campaign Developed online form for community members to report riparian land use concerns regarding the White Salmon River.	Cold Water Refuge Streams
Smoke Monitor at Stevenson School Working with community members to add smoke monitor to school in Stevenson as part of the Smoke Ready Gorge regional air quality monitoring network.	Fire Risk
Trees of the Gorge: Planting Native Trees for Climate Resilience Working with partners to plant native trees and shrubs across the Gorge. Extensive work completed at Sandy River Delta.	High Climate Resilient Areas
City of White Salmon Climate Action Plan Participated in committee developing a community-led climate action plan.	Inclusive Climate Action Work
Climate Education at Mosier Community Middle School Developed plan for climate education field trips for middle school students in 2023-24 school year.	Inclusive Climate Action Work
How Does Business Respond to Climate Change? Developing presentation for local businesses on climate impacts and opportunities to address climate change in their work.	Inclusive Climate Action Work
Incorporating Trauma-Aware Approaches in Conservation Organization Programs Developing a plan to integrate trauma-aware principles discussed in the Climate Stewards course in stewardship workdays and climate workshops with the Latino community.	Inclusive Climate Action Work
Dark Skies in the Gorge Working with DarkSky Oregon and county and city planning departments to identify ways to improve night sky quality in Hood River area.	Light Pollution is part of Vital Sign Indicators Program
Restoring a Neighborhood Wetland Working on wetland restoration project in Hood River neighborhood to enhance wildlife habitat, improve water storage, and reduce fire risk. Developed outreach website for the project.	Wetlands, Fire Risk
Beavers and Climate Resilience Sign Developed an educational sign for Mosier community describing why beavers are important for climate resilience.	Wetlands, Fire Risk