Columbia River Gorge Commission
Information Technology Strategic Plan (ITSP)
2023-2025

The Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC) Information Technology (IT) Strategic Plan reflects the Agency's dedication to optimizing and maintaining CRGC's IT infrastructure, identifying areas for IT efficiency and innovation, and investing in the IT workforce. CRGC recognizes that IT is a critical component that supports CRGC's mission. The IT Strategic Plan directly aligns with the goals of CRGC's Strategic Plan.

Background on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and the Gorge Commission

The spectacularly beautiful Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area stretches 85 miles along the Columbia River and includes 292,500 acres that covers portions of three Oregon and three Washington counties. Formed by ancient lava flows and sculpted by incredible Missoula floods, the Columbia River Gorge carves an impressive corridor through the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington as the great Columbia River flows to the Pacific Ocean. As the only sea-level route from the Great Basin to the Pacific Ocean, the Columbia River Gorge is a land of contrasts. The western Gorge, with an average annual rainfall of 75 inches, is a place of misty mountains, rich forestlands, and more waterfalls than any area in the country. The eastern Gorge, with an annual rainfall of fewer than 15 inches, is a place of rim-rock bluffs, rolling hills, farms, and ranchlands.

The Columbia River Gorge is renowned for its cultural resources and geologic history. Cultural resources, epitomized by the Indian petroglyph "She Who Watches," trace a human history in the Gorge that is more than 10,000 years old. They include prehistoric sites and historic structures. Natural Resources include wildlife, plants, streams, lakes, wetlands, and riparian corridors that are found in abundance throughout the National Scenic Area. The National Scenic Area is known worldwide for the variety and quality of recreational opportunities: windsurfing, hiking, fishing, mountain biking, kayaking, kiteboarding, and rafting on the two Wild and Scenic Rivers—the Klickitat and White Salmon Rivers in Washington. The Gorge's scenic resources span a diverse array of landscapes including rain forests, rolling farmlands, and semi-arid grasslands.

National Scenic Area Act

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 544–544p) was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on November 17, 1986. The Act mandates the protection and enhancement of scenic, cultural, natural, and recreation resources and the protection and support of the Gorge economy. A total of 292,500 acres were designated for special protection on both sides of the Columbia from the outskirts of Portland-Vancouver in the west to the semi-arid regions of Wasco and Klickitat counties in the east.

The Act created the National Scenic Area, authorized the states to enter into a compact creating the Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC), required the CRGC and U.S. Forest Service to adopt a regional management plan, and required counties to adopt land use ordinances consistent with the management plan.

Columbia River Gorge Compact

The Columbia River Gorge Compact is the agreement between Oregon and Washington establishing CRGC. It is codified at RCW 43.97.015 and ORS 196.150. The Washington and Oregon governors each appoint three commissioners; one of those three must be a resident of the National Scenic Area. The six gorge counties each appoint one commissioner. The Area Manager for the U.S. Forest Service National Scenic Area office is a nonvoting member. This structure creates an even balance between state and local appointees and Washington and Oregon appointees. The compact also specifies how the states fund the CRGC and other specific CRGC authorizations. CRGC's authority is derived from the compact and the compact incorporates the Act by reference, so references to CRGC's authority typically cite directly to the Act "to perform all functions and responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of this compact and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act. [Compact Article 1(a)]."

Commission's Responsibilities

CRGC acts as the primary regional planning agency and one of the chief stewards of a national treasure – the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Among its many roles, CRGC develops and implements policy for land use and resource protection on non-federal lands. CRGC is responsible for coordinated and consistent implementation of the National Scenic Area Management Plan and land use ordinances. In order to effectively protect resources and support the regional economy, CRGC is responsible to coordinate and facilitate the efforts of two states, six counties, four Columbia River Treaty tribes, several federal agencies, residents, and citizens. CRGC is also responsible to hear and resolve appeals of land use decisions in the National Scenic Area. CRGC's programs are based on its federal statutory responsibilities described by the National Scenic Act and in the bi-state Columbia River Gorge Compact.

Mission

CRGC's mission is to establish, implement and enforce policies and programs that protect and enhance the scenic, natural, recreational, and cultural resources of the Columbia River Gorge, and to support the economy of the area by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas and allowing economic development consistent with resource protection.

Administrative Rules

CRGC has adopted administrative rules for open meetings, disclosure of public records, financial disclosure, conflicts of interest, public contracts, and administrative procedures. The Act requires these rules must be consistent with the more restrictive of the two states' statutes on these subjects. CRGC reviews its rules after each legislative session to ensure they continue to comply with that requirement. Additionally, CRGC maintains specific rules for appeals, enforcement, and other actions it handles on a regular basis. CRGC files its rules with the Oregon Secretary of State and Washington Code Reviser, but the rules are not technically part of the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) or the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) because they are not state agency rules. Oregon includes CRGC's rules in its printed and online versions of the OAR compilation, but Washington does not include them in the WAC compilation.

Management Plan

Congress called for the preparation of the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area to ensure that land in the National Scenic Area is used consistently with the purposes and standards of the National Scenic Area Act. CRGC and Forest Service must

revise the management plan at least every 10 years to ensure that it is updated with the best science and adapted to address new challenges (such as climate change). CRGC and Forest Service adopted the management plan in 1991 with input from four Columbia River treaty tribe governments, county and city governments, state and federal agencies, citizens, and non-governmental organizations. In 2004, the agencies completed the first 10-year revision. CRGC may amend the management plan between revisions if it finds that conditions in the National Scenic Area have significantly changed. The Secretary of Agriculture must concur with revisions and amendments to the management plan. In 2016, the Gorge Commission again reviewed the management plan and after 4 years of technical and public meetings, the Commission adopted a new plan in October 2020 with concurrence from the Secretary in January 2021.

The management plan contains the land use and resource protection standards, non-regulatory programs, and projects for protecting and enhancing Columbia River Gorge resources, as well as a description of the roles and relationships of governments and agencies responsible for implementation of the National Scenic Area Act. The Forest Service develops the land use regulations for federal land and land in the "special management areas." CRGC develops the land use regulations for the general management area. The management plan does not directly apply to the 13 urban areas.

Information Technology at CRGC
As a small bi-state land use planning and regulatory agency, CRGC only has 8.5 full-time planning and administrative staff, and no IT staff. CRGC contracts IT/computer maintenance services with Radcomp Technologies, a local company in White Salmon, Washington. Funding from the Oregon and Washington legislatures has not been available to support dedicated IT staff. In addition, CRGC has been operating with an archaic Access database that requires manual entry and retrieval of information, is not indexed or searchable, and is not linked to the agency's GIS system. Retrieval and analysis of information and data have been cumbersome and inconsistent.

In order to fulfill the CRGC's mission and responsibilities, IT systems need to increase security, effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, accountability, and capacity to better serve the National Scenic Area. Challenges CRGC is facing in the 2023-2025 biennium include:

- **There is increasing demand to use new technology, but we are facing reduced resources** – demands for new capabilities continue to grow while the current budget environment requires CRGC to plan for potential reductions in the biennial operating budget.
- **Rapid development of new technology** – an ever-changing technology landscape has led to the increase in the use of mobile devices, data storage capacity, and telecommunications sophistication but CRGC cannot keep up with those advances nor take advantage of new technology tools that would help the work of the Commission.
- **Emphasis on Information Security** – increasing legislative and public attention on better access to information while reducing security risks can only be possible if resources are available to design new, more secure information management systems that are cloud-based and disaster-proof which the current paper file system is not.

With legislatively approved funding for 2021-2023, CRGC was able to conduct Phase 1 Access Database Replacement Project and hired project management contractors to assess gaps and identify possible solutions for a more secure information management system. CRGC used the "gating process" and worked very closely with Washington OCIO and Oregon Enterprise Information Services to manage Phase 1

deliverables. Phase 1 was successfully completed and CRGC was provided with funding from the Oregon and Washington legislatures for Phase 2 which will replace the Access database with a new, cloud-based information management system.

IT Vision
Stakeholders, CRGC staff, Gorge Commissioners, agencies, counties, and the public have access to the information and online tools needed for protecting resources in the National Scenic Area in a secure, open, transparent, mobile, and modern environment.

IT Mission and Priorities
CRGC will ensure that staff, commissioners, and partner agencies are given the IT tools necessary to efficiently implement the National Scenic Area Act and Management Plan.

1. Evaluate, understand, recommend, design, purchase, and implement new hardware, software, applications, data, and services with consideration of emerging, maturing, and aging technologies and business needs.
2. Secure and protect current and future CRGC data and applications: A new cloud-based information management system will increase the security and accessibility of 35 years of data.
3. Ensure CRGC data and applications are available to staff, partners, stakeholders, and the public: A new cloud-based system will allow information to be online and accessible to the public, landowners, and others who seek information and trends in the National Scenic Area.
4. Provide resources to secure technical support for mission-critical CRGC systems and training for staff.
5. Improve procedures, leadership, management, and trained staff.
6. Develop and follow IT strategic, budget, investment portfolio, continuity of operations, incident response, disaster recovery, and security plans.
7. Help maintain IT-related agency policies, procedures, standards, and forms.
8. Create an IT Governance Committee with Commissioners, senior staff, and quality assurance consultants to ensure data management is up-to-date, transparent, and available to the public.

IT Values
CRGC is a small bi-state agency with 8.5 staff positions and 13 Commissioners who oversee and manage the policies and guidelines to implement the National Scenic Area Act. As stewards of the largest national scenic area in the U.S. to protect resources and support economic vitality, CRGC holds many values that reflect a deep commitment to the public. Given that secure IT is one way to provide service to the public through better agency management and access to information, CRGC is committed to the following values:
- Teamwork—small CRGC team works well with each other and the public to collaborate and problem solve through sharing information;
- Leadership—CRGC is a leader in the Gorge to demonstrate excellence in public service through the protection of resources and transparency of operations;

- Communication—CRGC updates its website and is always communicating with agencies, stakeholders, the public, legislators, and Governors, as well as universities;
- Customer Service—CRGC strives to provide assistance to anyone who is interested in the work of the Gorge Commission or who needs assistance with a land use issue;
- Integrity—CRGC operates in a transparent, fair, and accountable way;
- Agency/ Program/ Project/ Individual Perspective—CRGC respects the thinking and ingenuity of each staff person while creating teams to implement projects and programs that benefit the public and NSA resources;
- Innovation and Problem Solving—CRGC does not have many resources so is always "thinking outside the box" in innovative ways to solve problems, and sometimes reaches out to others to find solutions without re-creating the wheel. Solving development review problems is what CRGC does every day.
- Continuing Technical Professional Development—CRGC believes in staff training to develop the professional capacity to be able to implement CRGC's mission and goals.

IT Strategies
1. Improve data management through a new cloud-based information management system.
2. Improve access to 35 years of information by scanning, consolidating, organizing, and centralizing CRGC paper and digital documents, data, and information in the ACCESS database.
3. Reduce IT costs and expectations by following the 80% / 20% rule of function/cost – fit business to existing configurable-off-the-shelf products—an evaluation of options for CRGC would be available through a contract to conduct an assessment of information needs and then determine what product would be most appropriate for a small agency.

CRGC Work Plan Priorities for IT
1. Work in collaboration with WA OCIO and OR EIS to replace the old Access Database with a cloud-based system. Funding was received in the 2021-23 biennial budget to begin the first phase of the project. (Completed)
2. Work in collaboration with WA OCIO and OR EIS to replace the old Access Database with a cloud-based system. Funding was received in the 2023-25 biennial budget to begin the second phase of the project. (Ongoing)
3. Maintain a stable working environment for staff with the current Access database. (Ongoing)
4. Improve results by focusing on training staff on Access until a new information management system can be implemented (Ongoing)
5. Upgrade ArcGIS applications for permits and land use evaluations. (When funding is available)
6. Replace aging servers (Completed)
7. Replace aging hardware and software with the newest technology for a five-year life span (Completed)
8. Scan and migrate paper files data and information into the new cloud-based information management system (Completed)
9. Support staff transition to Microsoft 365. (Completed)
10. Implement MDM software on cellular devices. (Completed)
11. Migrate from Windows 2016 to Windows 10. (Completed)
12. Continue to work with external IT contractor Radcomp Technologies for IT maintenance (Ongoing)
13. Administer, maintain, support, and further develop the CRGC website to allow linkage with data the public needs to know. [Ongoing]

14. Test website and applications for accessibility, prioritize, and resolve issues. (Ongoing)
15. Update the cyber-security plan (Ongoing)

CRGC SWOT Table

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Dedicated staff - Executive Director support - Gorge Commissioners support - Public support - External technical knowledge, skills, and experience through contractor (Radcomp Technologies) - Phase 2 contractors - Quality Assurance contractor	- Outdated/antiquated Access database in use - No internally trained IT staff - No internal developer staff - No time or funding for technical training - Access database is not integrated with the Agency's Geographic Information System (GIS) - Duplicate data entry, manual data entry, not searchable in current database - Security risk with server failure or if disaster such as fire occurs
Threats	**Opportunities**
- Time consuming public record requests - Tenured staff retirement who are familiar with current ACCESS system but no training for new staff - Changing and proliferating technologies – hardware, network, security, software without the platform to use it - Increasing security threats with AI - Increasing complexity of needs for data to answer questions in land use - Increasing IT laws, policies, and procedures	- New/improved technologies exist– Microsoft 365, MDM, Cloud, ArcGIS Online, - WaTech OCIO oversight consulting - WaTech OCS security consulting and services - WaTech Enterprise Services support - OR EIS oversight consulting - DES purchase and contract consulting - Additional funding from Legislature obtained to secure new cloud-based information management system

Performance Analysis
1. Access database is not fully meeting agency needs. CRGC seeks more capability with a new cloud-based database in Phase 2.
2. Staff need more training on software (Access, ArcGIS).
3. CRGC cannot use new technologies since there are limitations with hardware and the current Access database which uses an outdated platform.

IT Goals & Objectives
1. With funding secured for Phase 2, identify the best new design to meet the needs of CRGC IT with a cloud-based, more secure information management system.
2. Train CRGC staff with the new IT system.
3. Migrate and index information from 35 years of paper files and from 15 years of Access database into the new IT system.
4. Link the data with GIS for geospatial referencing in the National Scenic Area to better identify tax lots, parcels, land use designations, protected areas, and land ownership patterns.
5. Improve customer service by designing an online land use development application system that would automatically populate the CRGC database and be searchable and indexed for easy retrieval and processing.
6. Improve IT governance with a steering committee to oversee the transfer of data and data management strategies moving forward.

IT Performance Measures—integrated with existing Key Performance Measures
1. Improve customer service: an online permit system will accelerate and reduce the time needed to review important information from landowners and be able to make decisions on permit approval much faster, thus increasing customer satisfaction scores. Public record requests will be more timely as the data/information will be indexed and more accessible. Questions about development patterns and risks to resources will be easier to retrieve and analyze by the Gorge Commissioners and by the public with a cloud-based system integrated with GIS.
2. Reduce time in processing permits with an online permit system: The 72-day timeline for reviewing and approving permits will be met more frequently with a reduced processing and evaluation period.
3. Improve the public's knowledge of the National Scenic Area: With additional IT capability, updated licenses, new ArcGIS integration, and the most recent information about the National Scenic Area available, the residents, visitors, and agencies who need information will have more knowledge and awareness of the National Scenic Area and resources.
4. Improve IT security: With better and updated IT tools and technology, there will be less security risk and fewer data breaches.