



**TO:** Columbia River Gorge Commission

**FROM:** Jessica Olson, Senior Natural Resources Planner, and Lisa Naas Cook, Vital Sign Indicators Planner, Gorge Commission

**DATE:** December 13, 2022

**SUBJECT:** **Action Item\*:** Updated Information on Public Comment Received and Request to Approve National Scenic Area Climate Change Action Plan

---

## **Purpose**

The Columbia River Gorge Commission staff is presenting the National Scenic Area Climate Change Action Plan for the Commission’s consideration and adoption. The final Climate Change Action Plan reflects input from members of the public, partners, and Commissioners during the public comment period from May 5 to August 9, 2022, as well as the public comment opportunity at the September 13, 2022 Commission meeting.

Staff welcomes questions, discussion, and any final changes needed. We request the Commission’s approval of the Climate Change Action Plan during the December 13, 2022 Commission meeting.

## **Update since November 8, 2022 Commission Meeting**

Attachment A contains background information about the Climate Change Action Plan presented at the November 8, 2022 Commission meeting. At that meeting, a representative of the Oregon Farm Bureau asked for additional time to review the final version of the Climate Change Action Plan. In addition, Mary Repar also asked for additional time to review the final draft. The Commission approved an additional two weeks for review of the final version of the Climate Change Action Plan and to provide an opportunity for staff to discuss questions from the Oregon Farm Bureau, Mary Repar, and other individuals who would like more time to review the Action Plan.

Claire Lynn, with Oregon Farm Bureau, spoke with staff and discussed various aspects of the Action Plan and impacts on agriculture. During a Zoom meeting, staff discussed the key revisions in the final Action Plan that addressed Oregon Farm Bureau’s two main comments related to agriculture:

- Staff updated wording in the Oregon White Oak Woodlands priority actions to reflect our interest in protecting oak woodlands from conversion and fragmentation. Removed the “limiting new cultivation” language under Strategy 2 action (page 57 in final Action Plan).

- Staff added emphasis on incentives and clarified that not all conservation practices are applicable to every crop or operation.

Claire expressed support for these revisions and offered no further suggestions. Staff has also been in touch with Greg Addington, new Oregon Farm Bureau Executive Director, and received no additional comments on the Climate Change Action Plan.

Mary Repar reviewed the final Action Plan, and her comment letter is included in Attachment B. In response, staff added the Vital Sign Indicators: 2009 State of the Gorge Report to the list of milestones on page one of the Executive Summary. Other policy-related comments have been noted as considerations when staff begins policy development work called for in the Action Plan.

Commissioners offered substantive comments:

- Controlling and preventing fires is not just an adaptation, it is mitigation.
- Fire breaks protect homes, not forests. Putting more homes in the forest leads to more fires. The same is true for recreation.
- Expressed that it would be helpful if staff provided the highest priority issue areas that should lead the decisions on policy for the next Management Plan update.
- Agreed that regular reporting will be important to track progress made to implement the Action Plan.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Commission approve the Climate Change Action Plan as presented. Staff will finalize any changes requested and will complete a thorough final formatting and grammar review of the approved Action Plan, post it to our website, and share it widely. The Action Plan is a living document that will guide the Commission's work on climate action in the National Scenic Area for years to come and will be reviewed regularly and updated as needed. As per the Commissioners' request, staff will provide reports back to the Commission as follows:

- 1) Monthly updates from the staff as part of Executive Director's Report. \*
- 2) Quarterly more in-depth updates with summaries of in-progress and completed actions.
- 3) An Annual Report with deliverables tied to specific goals in the Action Plan and to policy options we are developing for consideration in the next Management Plan update. This report will also include staff recommendations on updates or adjustments to the Action Plan if needed. These updates may include:
  - Updating priority actions to reflect accomplished actions and new priority actions;
  - Updating the Action Plan with new information; and

- Completing companion assessments or plans to supplement the Action Plan (an example could be a carbon storage inventory).
- 4) If the two state legislatures approve a new position for a Climate Change Program Manager, then staff will present a revised workplan and timeline to implement the Action Plan.

(\*Just a reminder that Jessica Olson will be out on parental leave until March or April 2023, so monthly updates during that period may not be possible until she returns.)