



## **COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE COMMISSION 2019-2021 BUDGET REQUEST**

### **Protecting Watersheds and Salmon Promoting Economic Vitality Reaching More Landowners Streamlining Permits**

**The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act** was passed by Congress in 1986 to create the National Scenic Area. The Columbia River Gorge Commission was created in 1987 as a bi-state agency to protect the scenic, natural, cultural and recreation resources while promoting economic development compatible with resource protections. The National Scenic Area spans 85 miles of the Columbia River from Washougal/Camas in Clark County to Maryhill in Klickitat County, covering 292,500 acres of forest, agriculture, and recreation areas and encompassing two National Wild and Scenic rivers. The 13 Urban Areas within the Columbia River Gorge are exempt from the National Scenic Area Act Management Plan, but are important partners working together with the Commission.

**The Columbia River Gorge Commission** has 13 members: 3 appointed members from the Governors of Oregon and Washington, one non-voting member appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture who serves as the Forest Service National Scenic Area Manager, and one from each of the 6 counties in the NSA (Clark, Skamania, Klickitat, Wasco, Hood River and Multnomah Counties).

**2019-2021 Budget Request:** The Columbia River Gorge Commission receives biennial appropriations from the Washington and Oregon Legislatures at equal funding levels. The agency currently has 6 staff to manage all aspects of implementing the Management Plan while also creating a new “Gorge 2020” Plan to address emerging issues for the next decade.

Governor Brown supports a maintenance level budget plus two “Policy Option Packages” that includes one new additional full-time land use planner position and one technical database upgrade for a total of **\$1,300,000** for the biennium (matched by Washington). This additional capacity will:

- \* improve our ability to reach out and work with landowners and agencies
- \* increase efficiency and responsiveness with an easily accessible on-line permitting system
- \* address pressing issues such as climate adaptation and resilience, watershed health and tourism
- \* implement Vital Sign Indicators to measure agency performance in implementing the Act
- \* promote economic vitality and certify loans and grants to start-up businesses in the NSA

**Improving our ability to reach out and work with landowners and agencies:** Expand our partnerships with conservation districts to assist landowners with land use applications.

**Increasing our efficiency and responsiveness with an easily accessible on-line permitting system:** With a new data base system, permitting can be streamlined, permit processing time can be reduced, data entry efficiencies are gained, and staff can have quick access to full permitting histories on a parcel of interest.

**Addressing pressing issues such as climate adaptation and resilience, watershed health, tourism:** We have an opportunity to plan ahead for sustainability of our scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources in the face of a changing climate. As an example, the Columbia River and tributaries in the NSA support salmon populations that are critical to the health and function of aquatic systems, provide fishing opportunities for tribal communities and recreational anglers, and sustain the Orca populations in Washington state. By protecting habitats, water quality and flows in NSA watersheds through climate adaptation strategies, wild and hatchery fish will thrive. The large increase in tourism due to the popularity of the Gorge necessitates a comprehensive approach to protect human safety and resources--a new recreation plan will be developed.

**Implementing Vital Sign Indicators** to measure agency performance in implementing the Act: Indicators such as scenic quality, air and water quality, intact wildlife migratory corridors, and diversity of new business start-ups and their economic impact in communities provide data and trends for tracking quality of life in the NSA over time.

**Promoting economic vitality:** The economic vitality of the National Scenic Area and the health of the scenic, natural, recreational, and cultural resources of the Columbia River Gorge are interdependent. Protecting agriculture and forest lands by allowing sustainable harvests in vineyards, orchards and woodlands, certifying loans and grants to start-up businesses in the NSA, and working closely with the ports and Urban Areas to support economic vitality plans helps to meet both purposes of the NSA Act. Unemployment rates in Gorge counties now equal that in both states.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2017-2019**

**Launched "Gorge 2020"**, a comprehensive review and update of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan that is required to be evaluated every 10 years. Formed technical teams to examine issues of recreation, land uses, climate change, scenic and natural resources. Worked closely with the US Forest Service and other partners to develop a roadmap and workplan to be completed in 2020.

Conducted more than **60 public outreach meetings** with city councils, county commissions and planning staff, four Treaty Tribes, state/local and federal agencies and Gorge-wide stakeholders.

Convened an **Economic Vitality Work Group** with participants from 28 Gorge business groups, ports, tribes and economic development entities to discuss and improve implementation of both purposes of the National Scenic Area Act resulting in a revised economic development chapter in the management plan. Participated in panels for the **Pacific Northwest Economic Region Summit**.

Finalized all the **legal descriptions** for the 13 urban area boundaries and exterior boundaries of the National Scenic Area to provide clarity of land use designations for landowners and communities.

**Conducted landowner outreach workshops** in partnership with the Underwood Conservation District (Skamania and Klickitat Counties in WA) to provide education and technical assistance for rural landowners to develop stewardship plans and increase understanding of NSA standards on their lands. Plans to duplicate in Oregon are underway.