

<b>Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC)</b>					
	<b>2017-19 Actual</b>	<b>2019-21 Legislatively Adopted</b>	<b>2019-21 Legislatively Approved *</b>	<b>2021-23 Current Service Level</b>	<b>2021-23 Governor's Budget</b>
General Fund	991,912	1,160,612	1,160,612	1,204,071	1,349,300
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>991,912</b>	<b>1,160,612</b>	<b>1,160,612</b>	<b>1,204,071</b>	<b>1,349,300</b>
* Includes Emergency Board and administrative actions through January 2021.					

### Program Description

The Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC) was authorized by the 1986 Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act and created as a regional agency through an interstate compact between Oregon and Washington. The Commission was established to implement the National Scenic Area Act's purposes of protecting and enhancing the scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources of the Gorge while encouraging compatible growth within existing urban areas of the Gorge region and allowing future economic growth. The Commission acts as the primary regional planning agency for the Columbia River Gorge and is responsible for developing and implementing policy for land use and resource protection on non-federal lands in the National Scenic Area.

The Commission consists of 13 appointed members - six appointed by local governments (one each from the six Gorge counties in Oregon and Washington), six appointed by the states of Oregon and Washington (three each by each state's Governor), and one ex officio member appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture (generally filled by the manager of the U.S. Forest Services' National Scenic Area office). The Commission hires an Executive Director and has an office in White Salmon, Washington.

### CSL Summary and Issues

By the interstate compact, Oregon and Washington are to equally share the operating costs of the Commission. The Commission's budget consists of two programs - Joint Expenses and Commissioner Expenses. Only the Joint Expenses program is required to be equally funded by the two states. The Current Service Level (CSL) budget for the Commission is generally only changed in the Oregon process for standard inflation and any adjustments to the State Government Service Charge (SGSC).

One potential issue with this CSL approach is that the Oregon budget does not include any positions (the Commission employees are Washington employees), but Oregon pays for half of the position costs which are budgeted as professional services. The professional services category generally only receives the standard inflation amount. Since personal services costs tend to increase at a higher rate than standard inflation, an exceptional inflation increase is generally available for non-state employee personnel costs (contract providers). Since it is almost certain that Washington costs for the Commission employees will be higher than standard inflation, adjustments will likely be needed so the Oregon professional services payment will match the Washington personal services costs. More work between the two budget offices of

Oregon and Washington will be required once Washington personal services increases are finalized. The total 2021-23 CSL of \$1,204,071 is an increase of 3.7% from the 2019-21 legislatively approved level.

It has also become apparent that the State of Washington does not attempt to only match the Joint Expenses program and looks at the total Oregon appropriation for the Commission. Therefore, for simplification, Oregon will target the total for purposes of matching Washington's level of funding for Commission operating expenses.

### Policy Issues

An ongoing issue facing the Commission is the continuing interest in increasing staff in order to restore to previous levels that allowed for more planning and review. Commission was up to 10.00 FTE in 2009. The 2019-21 budget did include the addition of a position (Vital Sign Indicators Land Use Planner), bringing the Commission to its currently authorized total of 8.00 FTE (Washington employees). Oregon's share of this new position was \$90,000 General Fund. The purpose of the Vital Sign Indicators position is to develop and implement the "Vital Sign Indicators" project; the project is designed to monitor and track measurable indicators to ascertain if the agency is effectively implementing the Management Plan. The Commission budget now supports an executive director, legal counsel, three planners, an administrative analyst, a GIS/planner, and an administrative secretary.

The Commission's 2021-23 requested budget includes only one policy option package related to Oregon's share of the cost of an Access Database Replacement project. This IT project was first included in the 2019-21 budget with an anticipated cost of \$425,000 (\$212,500 per State). The project would be implemented through the purchase of an industry standard, customizable, off the shelf cloud-based (SaaS) workflow license with enough seats for all Commission planners and staff. The Commission anticipated this being a two-phased project over two biennia between initiation of the project, needs assessment and database design in 2021-23 and then migration and execution in 2023-25. This project had received endorsement from both State's Information Technology oversight agencies as well as the Legislative and Executive branch budget offices, however in the Washington budget process, the funds for the project were not included in the Commission budget but in an overarching "IT Pool" budget for the entire state. As such, Oregon could not provide matching funds that were not included in the Commission's budget. This problem was set to be addressed during the 2020 Regular Session but ultimately could not.

### Other Significant Issues and Background

The Commission is required by the National Scenic Area Act to review, revise, and implement a Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area no less than every five years and no more than every ten years. In October 2020, the Commission adopted its most recent plan. Part of the latest plan attempted to clarify the extent of minor revision to urban area boundaries. Wasco County and The Port of the Dalles have challenged the plan in a recent court filing. Additionally, the Commission has another court case recently brought forward in Clark County, Washington related to the Washington Governor's emergency restrictions around COVID-19 and whether the Commission was legally allowed to conduct virtual meetings. While both of these cases were only recently filed and have not yet progressed

to a hearings phase, the Commission does not have Attorney General costs included in its base budget and there is a question as to how any legal costs would be covered by the Commission and the two states that support its funding.

The Commission's Governor's Recommended Budget of \$1.3 million General Fund is a 12.1% increase from CSL. This budget reflects the net between reductions in services and supplies totaling \$67,271 to eliminate standard inflation due to General Fund constraints and the inclusion of the \$212,500 General Fund for the Access Database Replacement project.

#### Key Performance Measures

A copy of the Commission's Annual Performance Progress Report can be found on the LFO website [https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lfo/APPR/APPR\\_CRGC\\_2020-09-16.pdf](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lfo/APPR/APPR_CRGC_2020-09-16.pdf)