

ANALYSIS

Item 59: Columbia River Gorge Commission Climate Action Plan Position

Analyst: Alex Perkins

Request: Appropriate \$138,000 General Fund to support the cost of a Climate Science Program Manager position.

Analysis: 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 is responsible for implementing the National Scenic Area Act's purpose 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 states of Oregon and Washington equally share the costs of the agency while the costs of each state's Commissioners are paid by the appointing state. 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.

During the 2021-2023 biennium, the Commission worked with stakeholders and the agency's state, local, federal, and tribal government partners to prepare the Climate Change Action Plan. Unanimously adopted by the Commission in December 2022, the Climate Change Action Plan is a guide to climate adaptation and mitigation for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Given that climate change is an urgent threat facing every land and resource manager in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, carrying out the priorities included in the Climate Change Action plan are central to the mission of the Commission. The Commission currently lacks the staff capacity to sufficiently implement the plan while fulfilling its other responsibilities. The addition of a Climate Science Program Manager position would enable the Commission to increase outreach and collaboration with partners to carry out the adaptation and mitigation strategies articulated in the Climate Action Plan.

The Commission receives its position authority from Washington state, which has already approved authority for establishing the position. Washington is also supporting 50% of the salary and benefits cost for this position. To support the remaining 50%, the Commission is requesting an increase of \$138,000 General Fund.

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means recommend appropriating \$138,000 General Fund for the Columbia River Gorge Commission in a budget reconciliation bill during the 2024 legislative session to support the cost of a Climate Science Program Manager position.

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Columbia River Gorge Commission
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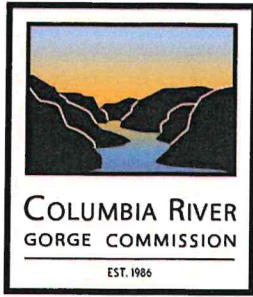
Request: Appropriate \$138,000 General Fund for Oregon's portion of a Climate Science Program Manager position.

Recommendation: Approve the request during the 2024 Legislative Session.

Discussion: As a bi-state agency, the Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC) is requesting \$138,000 General Fund to cover Oregon's half of a Climate Science Program Manager position. CRGC receives its position authority from Washington, who has already approved its 50 percent of matching funds and approved the position authority (1.00 FTE) in its regular May 2023 Legislative Session. In collaboration with stakeholders; local, state, and federal agencies; and the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, CRGC has developed a Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), which was approved by the Commission in December 2022. The CCAP was developed as a response to public comments calling for the protection of the scenic, natural, cultural, recreational, and economic resources of the National Scenic Area of the Gorge and aligns with the ongoing efforts of Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Land Conservation and Development, and the Oregon Department of Energy to develop a statewide climate action plan.

Increased staffing capacity is necessary to coordinate the efforts needed to implement the CCAP – with only eight full-time staff, CRGC does not have the personnel resources to implement the CCAP and fulfill all other requirements of the agency. As such, CRGC is requesting \$138,000 General Fund for Oregon's half of a dedicated Climate Science Program Manager position to carry out the CCAP as approved by the Commission.

Legal Reference: Appropriation of \$138,000 General Fund to supplement the appropriation made by chapter 352, section 1, Oregon Laws 2023, for the 2023-25 biennium.



Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

December 4, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs:

Nature of the Request

The Columbia River Gorge Commission (Commission) is requesting \$138,000 in general fund appropriation to increase staff capacity to implement our Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) approved by the Commission in December 2022. The funds would be invested in hiring a Climate Science Program Manager position and cover 50% of the salary and benefits for a 1.0 FTE position. The funds requested are 50% of the total cost since Washington already approved the other 50% matching funds in its regular May 2023 legislative session and approved 1.0 FTE authority for establishing the position at the Commission.

Agency Action

When the Commission updated its Gorge 2020 Management Plan in October 2020, an additional chapter was included that directed the agency to prepare a Climate Change Action Plan. The Commission received hundreds of public comments supporting this effort given the importance of protecting the scenic, natural, cultural, recreation and economic resources of the National Scenic Area in light of the potential impact of climate change on unique Gorge ecosystems. The Commission then spent the 2021-2023 biennium working collaboratively with stakeholders, local, state, and federal agencies, and the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, in Oregon and Washington, to prepare the Climate Change Action Plan which was approved by the Commission in December 2022. However, without a new Climate Science Program Manager position, the Commission does not have the staff capacity to continue to coordinate the extensive efforts needed to implement the plan with all of its partners and still fulfill all the other responsibilities of managing a bi-state agency with a small bi-state staff of 8.0 FTE. Most recently, the Oregon Governor's office announced that Oregon DEQ, OR DLCDC, and OR DOE are coordinating efforts to develop a statewide climate action plan. The Commission wants to be part of these collaborative efforts as a contributing agency to Oregon's plan but needs additional capacity to be able to partner with these agencies and other stakeholders along with the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes. In recent meetings with Tribal Councils, they were very appreciative of the Commission's efforts to include the need for cold water refuge

monitoring and actions to protect salmon and First Foods protection along with other cultural resources important to the tribes.

Action Requested

The Commission requests \$138,000 of general fund appropriation to fund a Climate Science Program Manager position. The Commission receives its FTE authority from Washington state, which has already approved authority for establishing the position at the Commission. Washington has also approved its 50% of the cost of this position that would cover salary and benefits. The Commission's request reflects only Oregon's 50% of the cost for this position that would benefit the entire 85 miles and 292,500 acres of the National Scenic Area.

Legislation Affected

The Commission received its 2023-2025 biennium budget through House Bill 5008 that is Oregon Law 2023 Chapter 352, Section 1. If additional funding is approved, HB 5008 would need to be amended to add the supplemental general fund appropriation.

Sincerely,



Krystyna U. Wolniakowski
Executive Director
Columbia River Gorge Commission