

## ANALYSIS

### Item 60: Columbia River Gorge Commission DEI Outreach Initiative

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**Analyst:** Alex Perkins

**Request:** Appropriate \$50,000 General Fund to support implementation of the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative.

**Analysis:** The states of Oregon and Washington equally share the joint costs of the Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC) 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.

When Congress called for the preparation of a Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the Commission and U.S. Forest Service were tasked with revising the Management Plan at least every 10 years to ensure that land in the National Scenic Area is used consistently with the purposes and standards of the National Scenic Area Act. The 2020 revision of the management plan included the adoption of a new diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statement and policies. One of the policies directs the Commission to develop a DEI plan to address systemic inequities identified in its work and policies.

Over the 2021-23 biennium, Commission staff worked with its stakeholders and local, state, federal, and tribal government partners to develop and implement a DEI Strategic Plan. This plan, approved in December 2022, includes forming a Pro-Equity Anti-Racism team involving stakeholders and underrepresented communities. It also specifies the need for DEI training for staff and board members, translating Commission materials into Spanish, and revising internal DEI policies.

While the Commission has a planner to lead these initiatives, it does not have a designated budget for the related expenses in 2023-25. The Commission is requesting a \$50,000 General Fund appropriation to implement the DEI initiative, which includes supporting the cost of DEI training, outreach, and translation services to better align the Commission to standardized and inclusive processes. The \$50,000 represents half the cost of this effort, with Washington already having approved its 50% share.

**Recommendation:** The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means recommend appropriating \$50,000 General Fund in a budget reconciliation bill during the 2024 legislative session for the Columbia River Gorge Commission to support the cost of implementing the diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative.

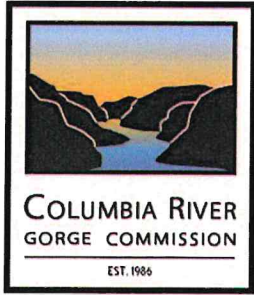
**Request:** Appropriate \$50,000 General Fund for the implementation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) outreach initiative.

**Recommendation:** Approve the request during the 2024 Legislative Session.

**Discussion:** As a bi-state agency, the Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC) is requesting \$50,000 General Fund to cover Oregon's half of DEI project cost – Washington has already approved its 50 percent of matching funds during its May 2023 Legislative Session. In collaboration with stakeholders; local, state, and federal agencies; and the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, CRGC developed a DEI Strategic Plan which was approved by the Commission in December 2022. The DEI Strategic Plan called for the formation of a Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) team, CRGC staff and board DEI training, translation of commission materials into Spanish, and the review and revision of internal DEI policies and procedures.

The \$50,000 request represents Oregon's share of the funding and will cover costs for facilitators to conduct eight outreach workshops in the National Scenic Areas, in both English and Spanish, to engage at least 80-100 under-represented residents of the Gorge. Additional outreach will include services to translate fact sheets and other informational materials into Spanish – in response to public testimony received by CRGC during the Gorge 2020 Management Plan revision process – as well as reimbursement to volunteer community members of the PEAR team for mileage and other travel costs associated with CRGC engagement. The planned work aligns with both Washington and Oregon's DEI initiatives.

**Legal Reference:** Appropriation of \$50,000 General Fund to supplement the appropriation made by chapter 352, section 1, Oregon Laws 2023, for the Columbia River Gorge Commission, 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 \$50,000 in General Fund appropriation to expand our outreach to implement our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative. 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.

### **Agency Action**

The Commission staff spent two years during the 2021-2023 biennium working collaboratively with stakeholders, local, state, and federal agencies, and the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, in Oregon and Washington conducting outreach and preparing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan that was approved by the Commission in December 2022. The DEI Plan called for the formation of a PEAR team (Pro-Equity Anti-Racism) with stakeholders and under-represented community members in the Gorge. The Plan also outlined the need for staff and board DEI training, translation of Commission materials into Spanish, and the review and revision of internal DEI policies and procedures. The Commission has a planner on staff who can lead this effort, but the agency does not have any funding in the 2023-2025 biennium budget for the additional costs associated with trainings and translations.

### **Action Requested**

The Commission is requesting \$50,000 of General Fund appropriation to support DEI training, outreach, and translation services to better align our agency to standardized and inclusive processes, and to collaborate with under-represented communities in the National Scenic Area. No FTE are requested for this position since the Commission has a staff person who can lead this effort. Washington has already approved its 50% portion of this initiative. The Commission's request reflects only Oregon's 50% portion of this initiative. As a bi-state agency, with both states of Oregon and Washington ramping up efforts to create and implement DEI programs with additional

outreach, the agency cannot meet either state's goals without some additional modest resources to help us put our DEI strategy into action.

The \$50,000 of Oregon's share of the funding would pay for skilled facilitators to conduct eight outreach and training workshops in the National Scenic Area in both English and Spanish and result in engaging at least 80-100 under-represented residents of the Gorge. Additional outreach would include translation services to prepare factsheets and other information materials about the National Scenic Area in Spanish to better inform the public of the Commission's work in response to public testimony the Commission received during the Gorge 2020 Management Plan revision process. Finally, the funding would help volunteer community members of the PEAR team to receive reimbursement for mileage and other travel costs to supplement their time spent engaging with the Commission. The participation of the PEAR team members is critical to our agency gaining a deeper understanding of systemic inequities related to the National Scenic Area land use regulations and could lead to policy revisions in the Management Plan during the next review cycle.

### **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