

## Columbia River Gorge Commision

	2019-21 Actual	2021-23 Legislatively Adopted	2021-23 Legislatively Approved *	2023-25 Current Service Level	2023-25 Governor's Budget
General Fund	1,125,684	1,382,749	1,408,207	1,321,358	2,292,644
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>1,125,684</b>	<b>1,382,749</b>	<b>1,408,207</b>	<b>1,321,358</b>	<b>2,292,644</b>

\* Includes Emergency Board and administrative actions through December 2022.

### 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. CRGC employees are Washington State employees.

### CSL Summary

By the interstate compact, Oregon and Washington are to equally share the joint operating costs of the Commission. The Commission's budget consists of two programs - Joint Expenses (operating costs) and Commissioner Expenses (direct cost of the Commission members appointed from Oregon). Washington also pays for all the costs for one position responsible for permitting in Klickitat County. 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). Generally, the cost of salaries and other employee compensation related costs usually increase at a rate greater than standard inflation. This means adjustments will likely be needed so the Oregon professional services payment will match the Washington personal services costs. More work between the legislative budget offices of Oregon and Washington will be required once Washington personal services increases are finalized. The total 2023-25 CSL of \$1,321,358 is a decrease of 6.2% from the 2021-23 legislatively approved level. The decrease is primarily due to the phase out of the costs of the first phase of Access Database Replacement project. The Governor's budget includes a policy package for the second phase of this project.

### Policy Issues

An ongoing CRGC issue is interest in increasing staff to restore to the previous levels that allowed for more planning and review. The joint Commission budget now supports an executive director, legal counsel, four planners, an administrative analyst, and a GIS/planner.

The Commission is currently working on an Access Database Replacement project. The project will be implemented through the purchase of an industry standard, customizable, off the shelf cloud-based workflow license. Phase 1 was funded in 2021-23 (\$212,500 for Oregon's share) and phase 2 resources are being requested for 2023-25 for migration and execution of the project. This project had received endorsement from both State's Information Technology oversight agencies as well as the Legislative and Executive branch budget offices.

### Governor's Budget Summary

The CRGC 2023-25 Governor's Budget includes three policy packages (amount represents Oregon's share and is all General Fund) and represents a 73.5% increase from CSL:

- **Phase 2 of the Access Database Replacement** -- Builds upon the phase 1 of this project undertaken in 2021-23 for replacing the existing outdated database for tracking and recording land use applications and approving land use permits in the CRGC designated area. Phase 2 2023-25 estimated cost of this project is \$905,000 for completion in 2023.
- **Geographic Information System (GIS) Manager** -- increases the current half-time GIS manager to full-time at a cost of \$63,224. Responsibilities of this position have and will continue to increase during 2023-25. This position is the agency's only IT position, and it is often requested to perform other non-GIS IT functions.
- **Lease Increase** -- includes \$5,638 for sufficient resources to cover the lease increase for the CRGC space. A new six-year lease was recently signed by the Commission.

The Washington Governor's budget includes funding for three other packages -- additional legal counsel resources, a diversity and equity initiative, and a climate change related position. These packages would require an additional \$360,693 for Oregon's share.

### Other Significant Issues and Background

The Commission is involved in a court case related to the Washington Governor's emergency restrictions around COVID-19 and whether the Commission was legally allowed to conduct virtual meetings. One complication is that the Commission represents two states with separate legal counsel (Attorney General Offices). The Commission does not have Attorney General costs included in its base budget and providing uncertainty as to how any legal costs would be covered by the Commission and the two states that support its funding.

### Key Performance Measures

A copy of the Columbia River Gorge Commission's Annual Performance Progress Report can be found on the LFO website:

[https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lfo/APPR/APPR\\_CRGC\\_2022-07-13.pdf](https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lfo/APPR/APPR_CRGC_2022-07-13.pdf)