

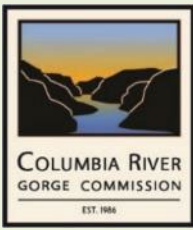
# COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE COMMISSION



## 2025-27 Budget Presentation



**Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director  
Columbia River Gorge Commission  
March 13, 2025**



# Columbia River Gorge Commission



- ❖ 1986 National Scenic Area Act: 2 Purposes
- ❖ Gorge Commission Role
- ❖ Key Performance Measures
- ❖ Budget Drivers
- ❖ Environmental and External Factors
- ❖ 2023-2025 Commission Accomplishments
- ❖ Commission Priority Initiatives
- ❖ 2025-2027 Governor's Budget (Oregon's Share)
- ❖ POP 101: Access Database Replacement – Phase 3

**National Scenic Area Act Passed By Congress November 17, 1986**





**“The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act of 1986 is a bold and innovative vehicle which recognizes that a median position between little or no Federal protection for a scenically important area on the one hand, and a wilderness or national park designation on the other, is both prudent and necessary in this age.”**

*~ Sen. Mark Hatfield*

# Two Purposes of the National Scenic Area Act (Sec. 3)

A scenic landscape featuring rolling green hills under a blue sky with light clouds. In the foreground, there is a field of vibrant yellow and purple flowers, likely lupines, in full bloom. The hills in the background are covered in lush green grass and some darker patches of trees.

## Purpose

**(1) to establish a national scenic area to protect and provide for the enhancement of the scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources of the Columbia River Gorge; and**



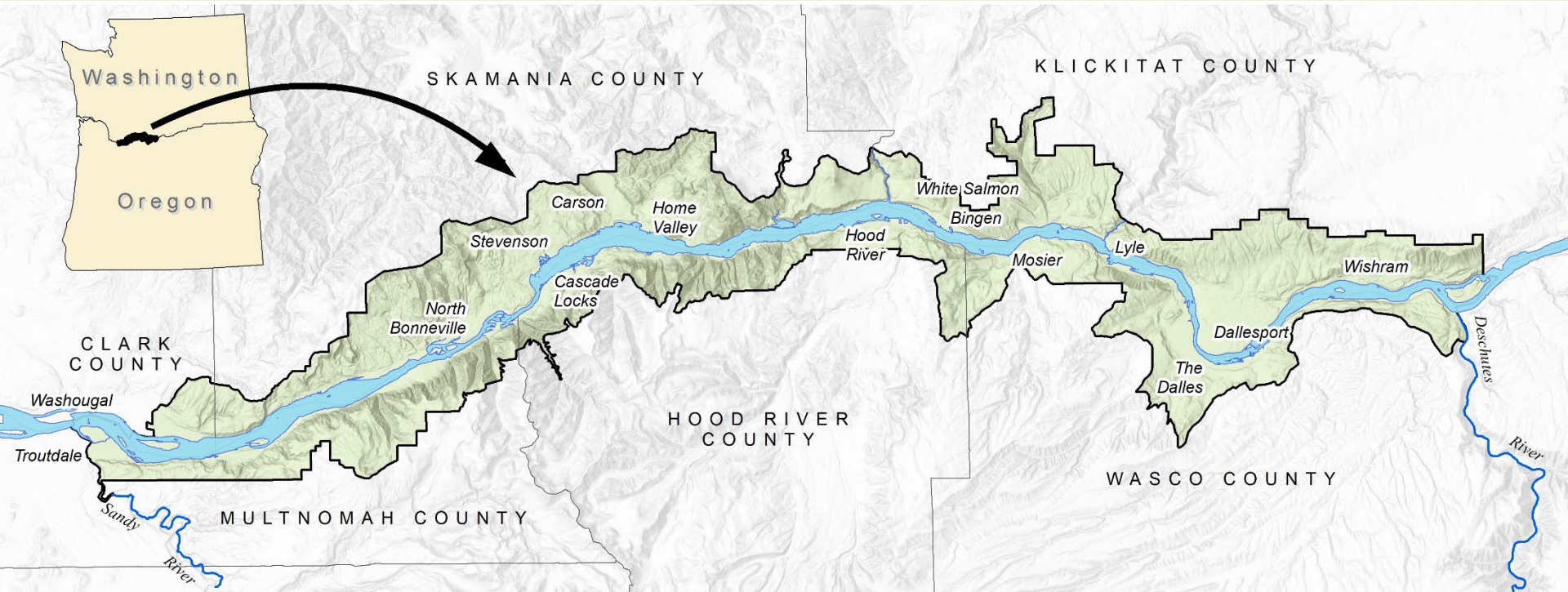
## Purpose

(2) to protect and support the economy of the Columbia River Gorge area by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas and by allowing future economic development in a manner that is consistent with paragraph (1).

# Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

85 miles of the Columbia River  
292,500 Acres

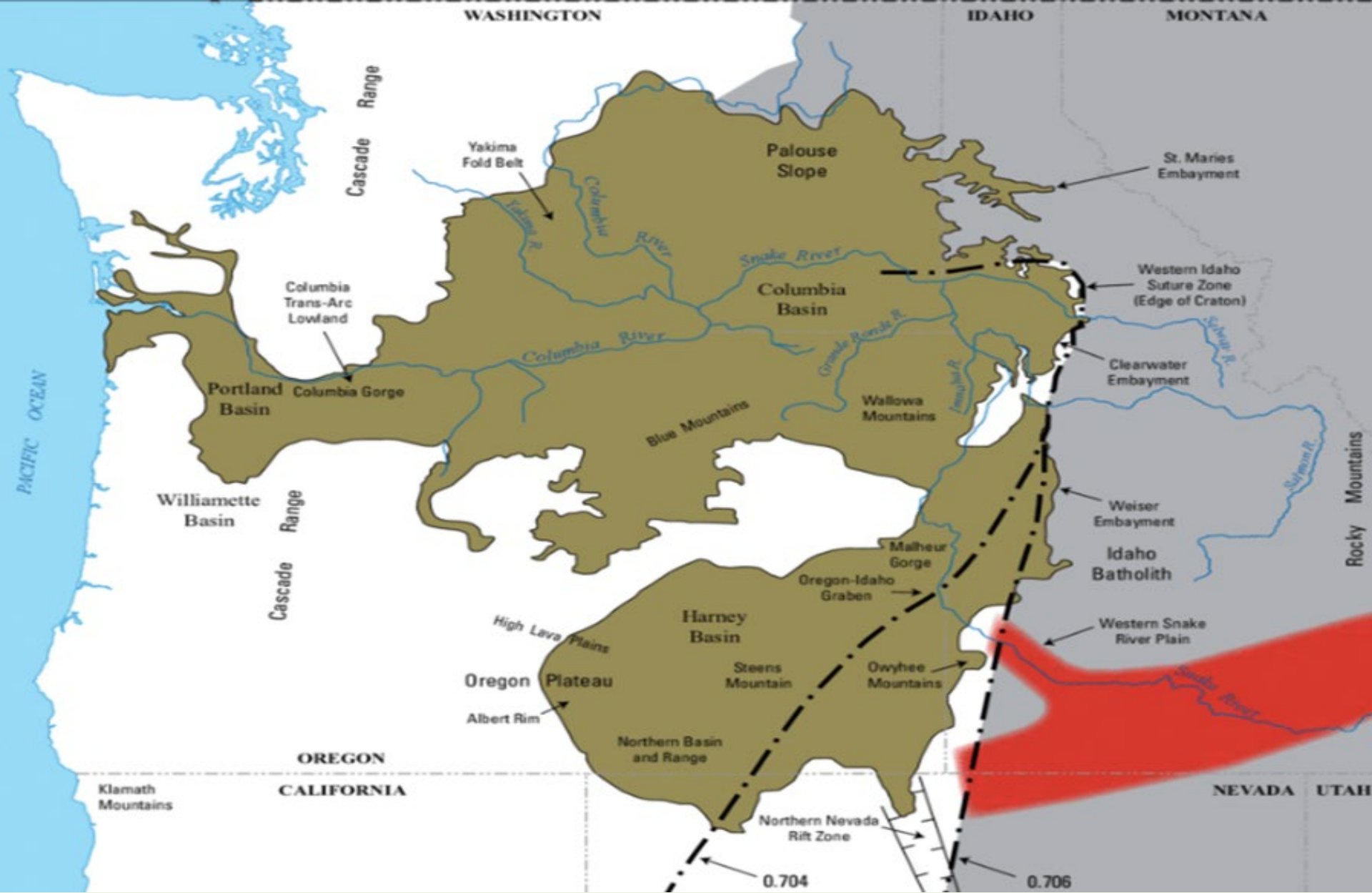
*Largest and Most Unique NSA in the United States*

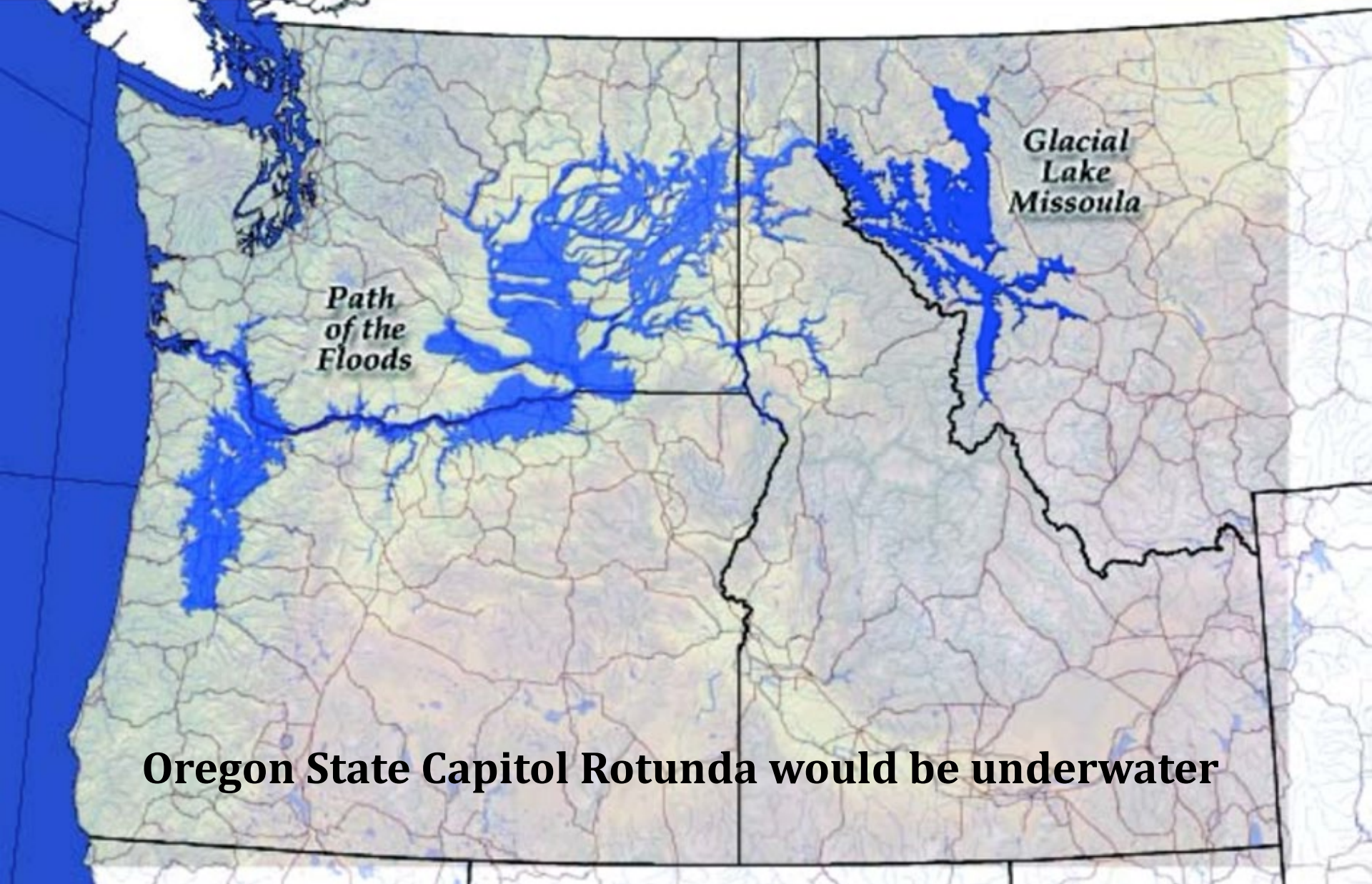


# What Makes the Gorge So Unique?

- ❖ Ancient lava flows erupted from fissures in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon and flowed to the coast 17 million years ago
- ❖ Columbia Gorge basalts are three miles thick
- ❖ Missoula Floods shaped Gorge landscape 15,000 years ago
- ❖ Only sea-level passage through the west coast mountains
- ❖ Three ecoregions from Western Cascades, Eastern Cascades, and dry Columbia Plateau
- ❖ Hundreds of unique species of plants and wildlife





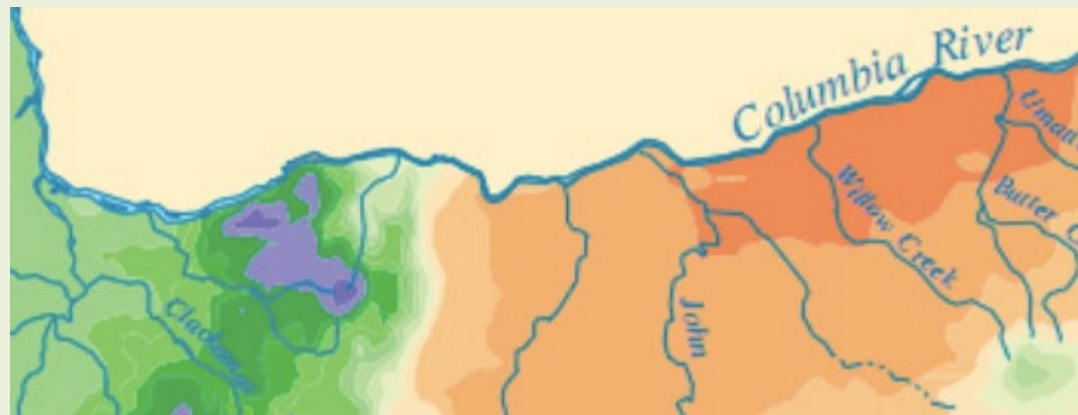
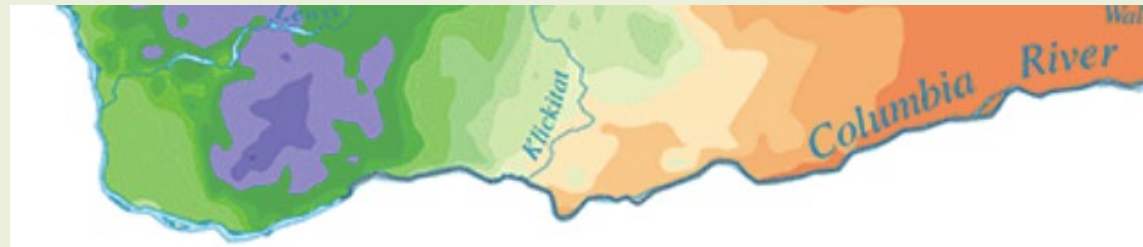
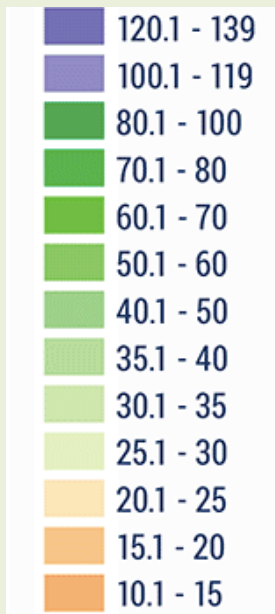


Area impacted by Glacial Lake Missoula and the Floods

# Transition Zones

Temperate marine climate, to rain forest,  
to dry grasslands in 85 miles

Rainfall in Inches



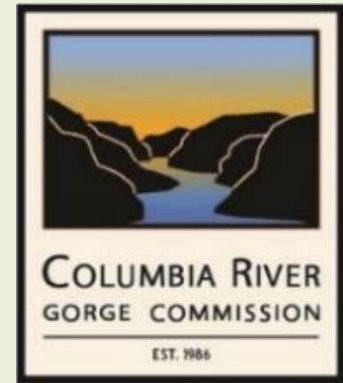
# NSA Treaty Tribes



# What is the Gorge Commission?

**Bi-state regional agency** created by a compact between Oregon and Washington in 1987

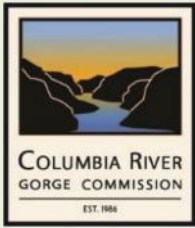
**Mission** is to establish, implement, and enforce policies through a long-range comprehensive Management Plan for the bi-state Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area to fulfill purposes of the National Scenic Area Act, hear land use appeals within the National Scenic Area, and co-manage the NSA with the USDA Forest Service



# Gorge Commission Role

- ❖ Quasi-judicial body to hear land use appeals in the NSA
- ❖ Convener of committees to inform and engage communities and experts to implement Commission priorities
- ❖ Partner to support community initiatives and funding requests that are consistent with the NSA Act and Management Plan
- ❖ Thought leader on national compact law
- ❖ Certification of OIB and WIB loans
- ❖ Leader on regional climate stewards and initiatives





# Bi-State Inter-Agency Collaboration and Key Partners

Engage and coordinate a large web of stakeholders and agencies, in addition to serving individual and business landowners in the NSA



# Bi-State Inter-Agency Collaboration and Key Partners (cont'd)

- ❖ **Two State Governors**
- ❖ **Two Legislatures**
- ❖ **Four Treaty Tribes**
- ❖ **Six County Commissions**
- ❖ **Five County Planning Departments**
- ❖ **Thirteen Urban Areas**
- ❖ **Federal Agencies**
  - USDA Forest Service
  - National Park Service
  - US Fish and Wildlife Service
  - EPA
  - USGS
- ❖ **Numerous State Agencies**
- ❖ **Five Ports**





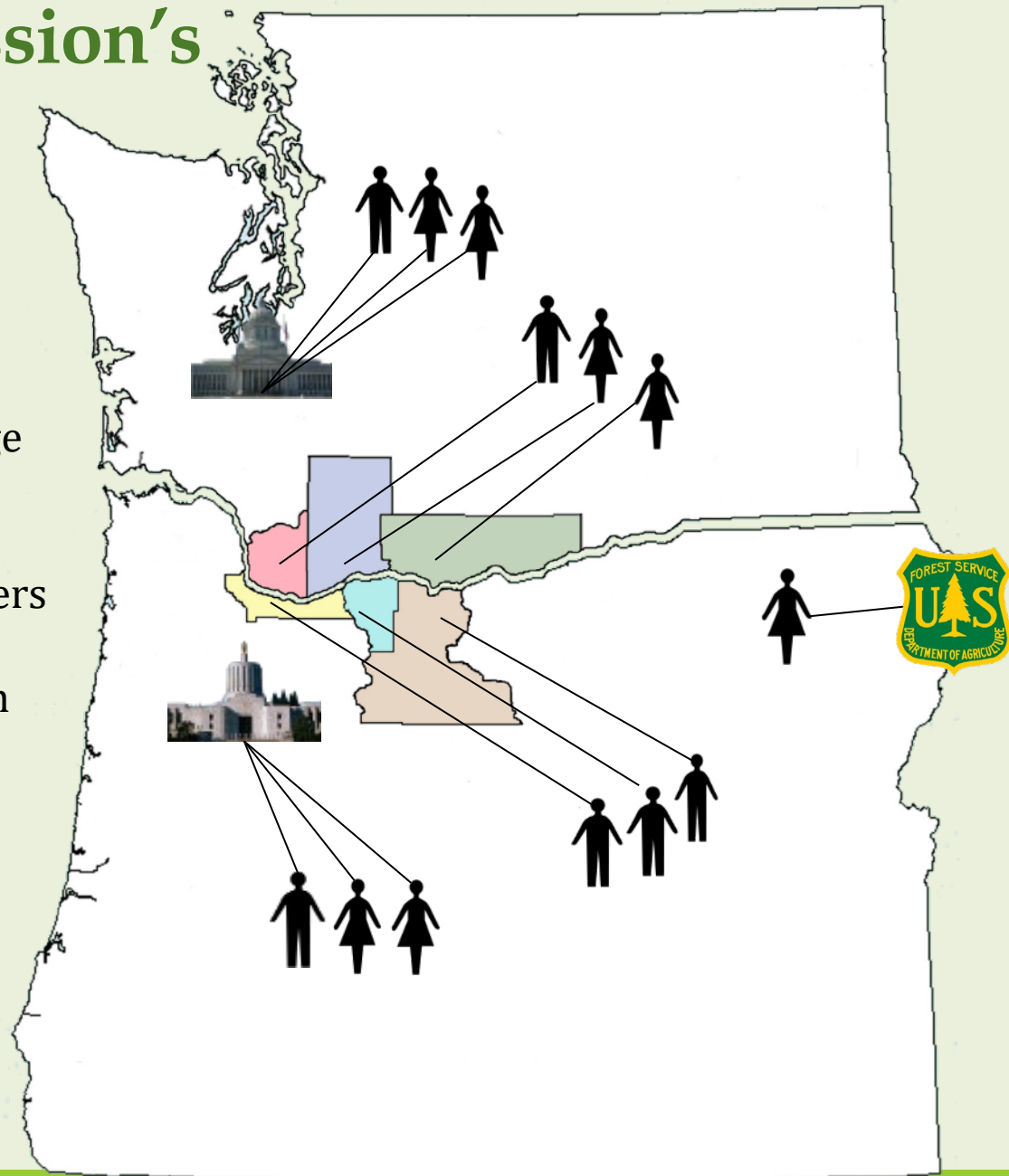
# The Gorge Commission's 13 Members

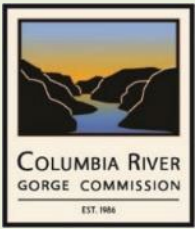
Each of six counties selects a Gorge Commissioner

Two Governors select three Gorge Commissioners

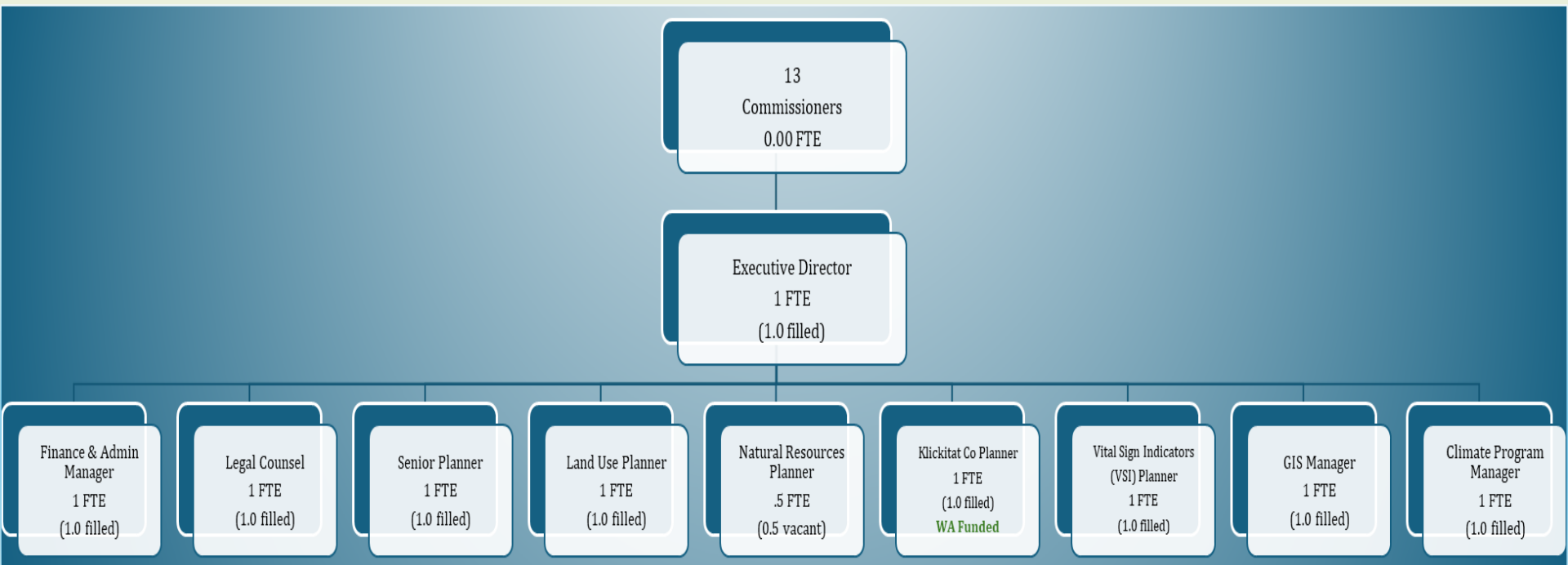
Three of the six are tribal members representing Yakama Nation and Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs.

The United States Secretary of Agriculture selects one USFS representative





# Organizational Chart 2023-25



Bi-State FTE	8
WA Only FTE	1
Total FTE (filled)	9
Total FTE (WA authority)	9.5

The Management Plan is protecting our treasured landscape and resources...



...as a vibrant place where 55,000 people live, work, and recreate



with over 3,000,000 US and international visitors each year contributing to the economy



## Scenic Values

**Ensure that new development  
does not diminish the quality of  
views within the National Scenic  
Area**

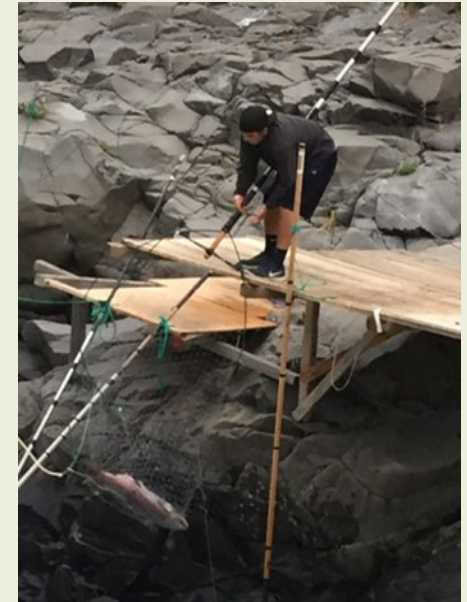
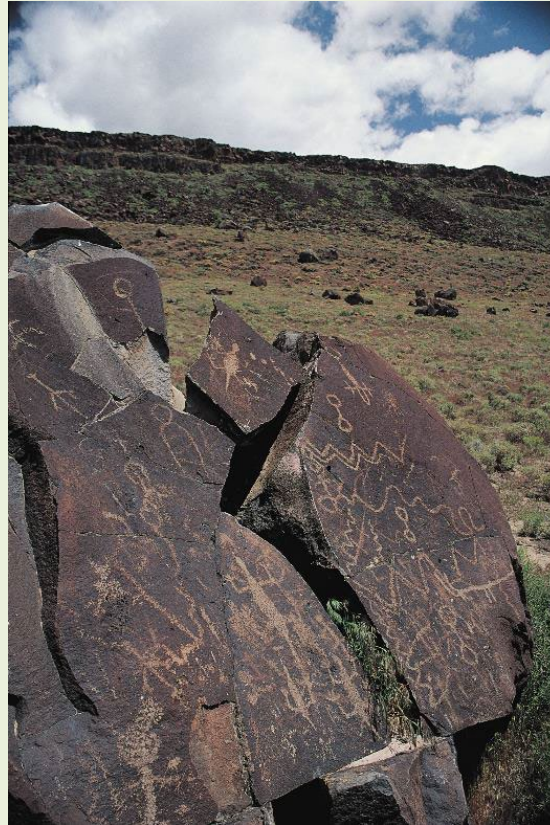
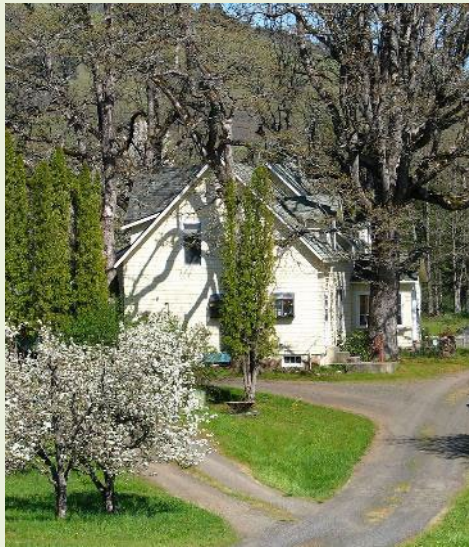
# Natural Resource Protections

Includes monitoring and land use policies for native plants, wildlife, and habitats, as well as air and water quality.



# Cultural Protections

**Includes archaeological and historic resources, and tribal treaty rights**



# Recreational Opportunities

Provides access that maintains and enhances environmental quality and experiences for users



# Economic Vitality

**Encourages growth in Urban Areas and allows development outside UAs that is consistent with resource protections**

**Ensures that Agricultural and Forest uses are protected, wineries and commercial recreation allowed**



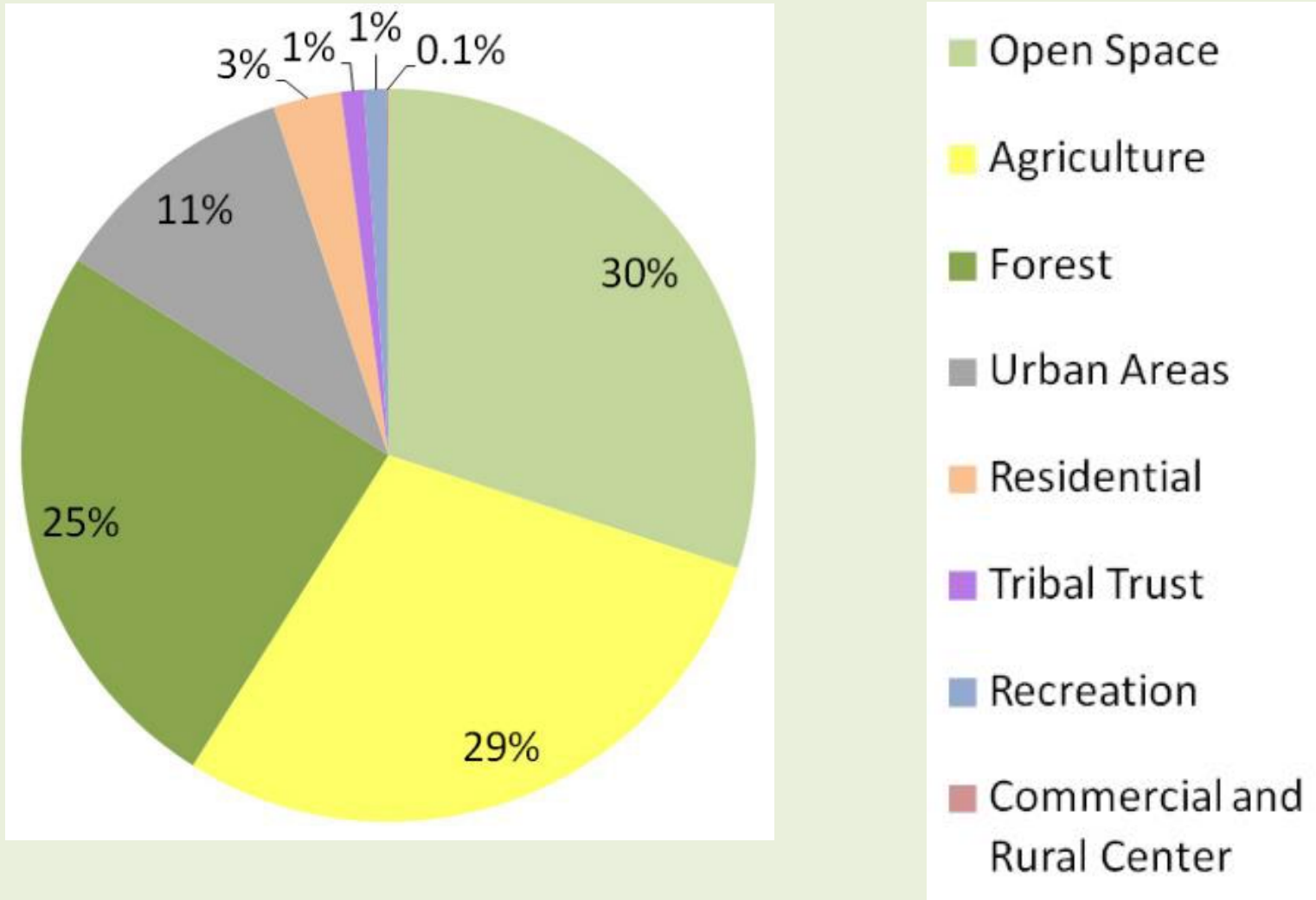


# Gorge Commission Supports Economic Vitality

- ❖ Certifying Oregon Investment Board (OIB) loans for small business startups
- ❖ Certifying Washington Investment Board (WIB) loans for small business startups
- ❖ Providing support for infrastructure project grants
- ❖ Providing comment letters on proposed developments
- ❖ OIB Loans & Grants 2020 to present = \$1,702,745 (13 Grants & Loans)



# Land Use Designations in NSA



# Gorge Commission Role

## Land Use - Regional Planning

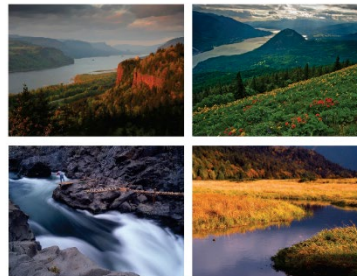


5 Counties Adopted  
Ordinances



Klickitat County

**MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
for the  
**Columbia River Gorge**  
**National Scenic Area**



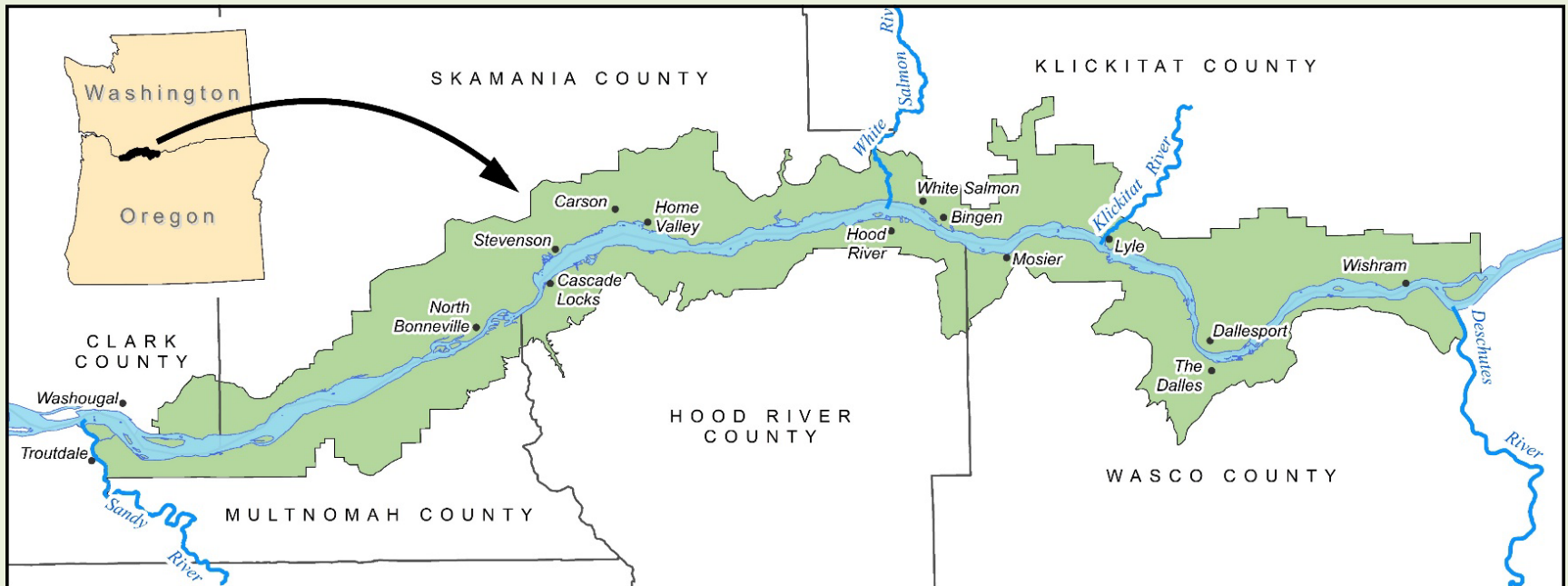
OCTOBER 2020 REVISION

# Monitoring NSA County Permits

- ❖ Review county development review notices
- ❖ Record development reviews in database

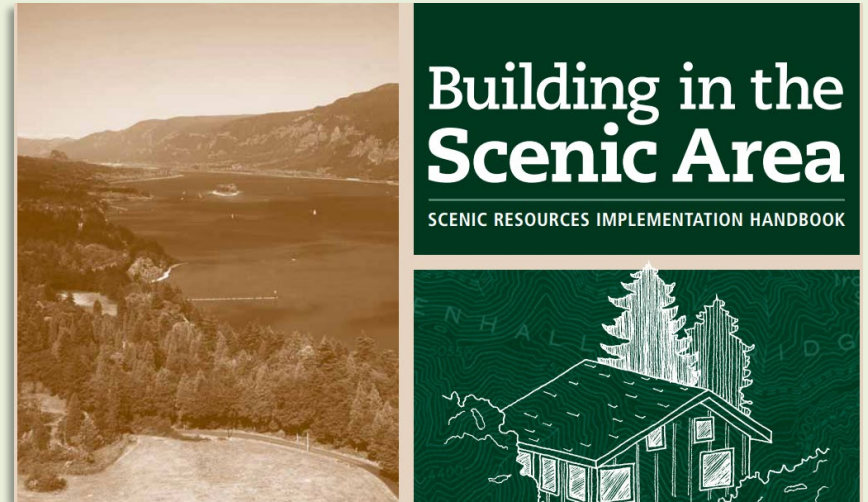
If necessary:

- ❖ Submit comments on development reviews
- ❖ Appeal county decisions



# Design Guidelines – Getting to “Yes”

- ❖ Providing tools for understanding land use in the NSA
  - Building in the Scenic Area Handbook
  - Fire-resistant landscape recommendations
- ❖ Planners manage and update these resources regularly
- ❖ Planners and applicants work together to achieve mutual goal



# What if the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area never existed?

## Beacon Rock



Original photo courtesy of Christian Platt  
AI photo images courtesy of Friends of the Columbia Gorge

## Cape Horn from Columbia River



Original photo courtesy of Paul Thomson  
AI photo images courtesy of Friends of the Columbia Gorge

# Cape Horn from Oregon's Vista House



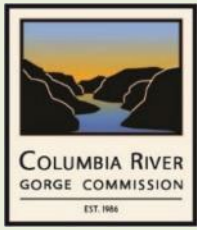
Original photo courtesy of Mike Cooke  
AI photo images courtesy of Friends of the Columbia Gorge



# Cape Horn Overlook



Original photo courtesy of Kenji Sugahara  
AI photo images courtesy of Friends of the Columbia Gorge



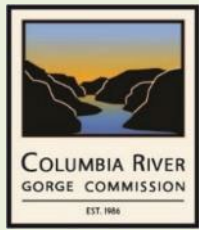
# Management Plan Update



“... at least every ten years, the Commission shall review the Management Plan to determine whether it should be revised.” Sec. 6(g)

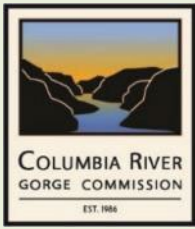
- ❖ Revision completed in October 2020
- ❖ Secretary of Agriculture concurrence in February 2021
- ❖ Transmit to Counties to develop ordinances March 2021
- ❖ Next Plan update to begin in 2027 as resources allow





# Key Performance Measures Reporting Year 2024 (2023 Data)

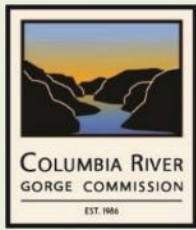
- ❖ **KPM #1** – County Decisions: Percentage and number of county decisions where Gorge Commission comments were addressed in the decision  
**Target 100% / Actual 100%**
- ❖ **KPM #3** – Customer Service: percentage of customers rating their satisfaction with the agency’s customer service as “good” or “excellent”, overall customer service timelines, accuracy, helpfulness, expertise, and availability of information  
**Target: 90% / Actual 100%**
- ❖ **KPM #4** – Percent of total best practices met by the Board  
**Target 95% / Actual 96%**
- ❖ **KPM #5** – Number of public presentations  
**Target 40 / Actual 46**



# Budget Drivers



- ❖ Need to pro-actively engage with counties, the public, agencies, and Treaty Tribes to implement the Management Plan
- ❖ Rapidly growing population and regional recreation demands requires a coordinated bi-state interagency response
- ❖ Need for thorough and consistent monitoring and review of all county development applications and actions (NSA Act)
- ❖ Need to recognize and plan for climate change impacts on NSA resources and respect Tribal Treaty Rights
- ❖ Need to engage with historically underrepresented and marginalized communities



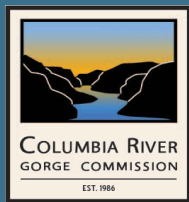
# Environmental & External Factors Affecting Budget Requests



- ❖ Need to coordinate and lead climate change resilience and adaptation
- ❖ Need to recognize historic inequities and review policies and programs to be more inclusive
- ❖ Need to address county planning capacity for NSA development reviews - DLCDC grants driven
- ❖ Need to increase outreach and online access to agency permits, programs, and land use regulations
- ❖ Need to address increasing public records requests with online/web-based capabilities

# Columbia River Gorge Commission 2023-25 Biennium Accomplishments





# Vital Sign Indicators Program

Monitoring the health of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area to assess how well we are achieving Management Plan goals



# VSI: Notable Accomplishments

- ❖ **Enhanced Water Monitoring:** Supported the installation of a flow monitoring gage on the Little White Salmon River, a crucial cold-water refuge, improving water management and conservation efforts.
- ❖ **Supported Trail Data for Land Management:** Supported the development of the unofficial trail dataset with the Forest Service, ensuring informed decision-making for land use and conservation.
- ❖ **Strengthened Collaboration:** Compiled critical data from 18+ partners, amplifying their contributions to directly shape management decisions.
- ❖ **Enabled Monitoring:** Supported the installation of Sky Quality Meters across the Scenic Area, making it possible to track changes in night sky brightness over time.
- ❖ **Building a Centralized Data Platform:** Designed an online reporting system to house and share datasets, making information more accessible for managers and the public.





# Climate Change Action Plan

## OVERALL PRIORITIES



### Inclusive Climate Action

Engaging with diverse communities and partners across the Gorge



### High Climate Resilience Areas

Identifying and conserving areas expected to support species in a changing climate

## ADAPTATION



### Cold Water Refuge Streams

Protecting water temperature and flow for fish



### Wetlands

Improving wetland habitat for associated plants and wildlife



### Tribal Treaty Rights

Supporting Tribes to ensure ecosystems and land use promote accessible, thriving First Foods



### Oak Woodlands

Improving oak woodland habitat and corridors

## MITIGATION



### Regional Transportation

Reducing single-passenger vehicle travel and promoting regional transit



### Electric Vehicle Infrastructure

Increasing charging stations and collaborative electrification planning



### Carbon Sequestration

Enhancing land-based carbon sequestration in habitats and working lands



### Fire Risk

Supporting resilient forests and fire-adapted communities



# Climate Change Action Plan: Notable Accomplishments



## Climate Stewards Program

- 16 students from 5 Gorge communities completed 14 projects in first community training course in the Gorge. Partnership with OSU Extension Service, Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, and University of California.

## First Foods Protection

- Ongoing coordination with Columbia River Treaty Tribes to strengthen First Foods protection and access in National Scenic Area.
- Tribal Treaty Rights and First Foods education workshops for land managers and planners.
- Partnership with Yakama Nation to conduct First Foods outreach and cold water refuge monitoring as part of EPA Government-to Government Environmental Justice grant.

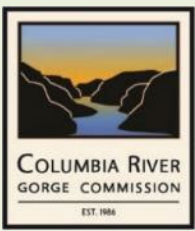


Cayuse – Umatilla – Walla Walla  
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation



## Wildfire Risk Reduction

- 2,185 acres of fuels reduction and prescribed burning on National Forest System lands.
- Inventory and map of current wildfire risk reduction efforts in the National Scenic Area.
- Interagency collaboration to improve wildfire resilience, including Hood River All Lands Partnership.



# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

## Purpose:

To address systemic inequities identified in the Commission's work and policies.

## Vision:

The Commission reflects the unique demographics of the people who live and work in the NSA and leads as a pro-equity, anti-racist agency through our practices and policies.

## Strategies:

**Trainings and Workshops:** Ongoing training for staff and Commissioners, including online DEI training required for staff by the State of WA, participate in other equity trainings and workshops as funding allows.

**Management Plan Equity Audit:** Contracting with ECONorthwest to conduct equity audit of Management Plan. Will inform our preparation for the next Management Plan review process.

**Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Team:** Conversations with community members to provide the Commission with guidance on implementing the Commission's Draft DEI Strategic Plan while building trust and strengthening relationships with community groups. PEAR Team advises Commission staff by helping to define specific goals, strategies, and actions.



Photo credit: [confluenceproject.org](http://confluenceproject.org)

# DEI: Notable Accomplishments

- ❖ **2024 Climate Equity Intern:** 12-week climate equity internship focused on climate justice and DEI goals. Her work included studying the CCAP and DEI Strategic Plan, researching toolkits, resources, and guides for environmental justice and DEI work. Provided recommendations based on research to help inform the Plans and the Commission's work.
- ❖ **Organizational Equity Training:** In response to the recommendation from PEAR Team that the Commission focus on internal DEI training, staff contracted with Center for Diversity and the Environment (CDE) to lead an organizational equity training for staff. Review and re-engage with DEI efforts including the organizational "why".
- ❖ **Confluence Field School:** Commission sponsored a cohort of the Field School in February 2025. Four-week series of story-driven, virtual meetings designed to elevate Indigenous voices in participants' understanding of the Columbia River system.





# Access Database Replacement Phase 2 Implementation



- ❖ **WA CIO & OR EIS** joint oversight and approval
- ❖ Selected vendors:
  - **Environmental Science Associates:** Project Management
  - **Tyler Technologies:** *Environmental Permitting and Licensing (EP&L)* for our database replacement and *Civic Access* for our public-facing portal
  - **Bluecrane Inc:** Quality Assurance
- ❖ Phases 1 and 2 always remained within the planned **scope, schedule, budget, and deliverables**

# Quality Assurance

## ❖ Bluecrane, Inc. provided CRGC with:

- A Quality Assurance (QA) assessment of its ADR Feasibility Study
- A Readiness Assessment in compliance with the State of Washington's Minimum QA Activities – Readiness Assessment 132.20 Policy

## ❖ Bluecrane provided monthly assessment reports for the ADR Project. Our project consistently maintained a Low (Green) Risk Level:

- Triangle categories (Leadership/Sponsorship, Project Management, Change Management, and Success of the Project) were very low risk
- Exercised good project management practices
- Had the characteristics of a well-managed, healthy, and highly supported project



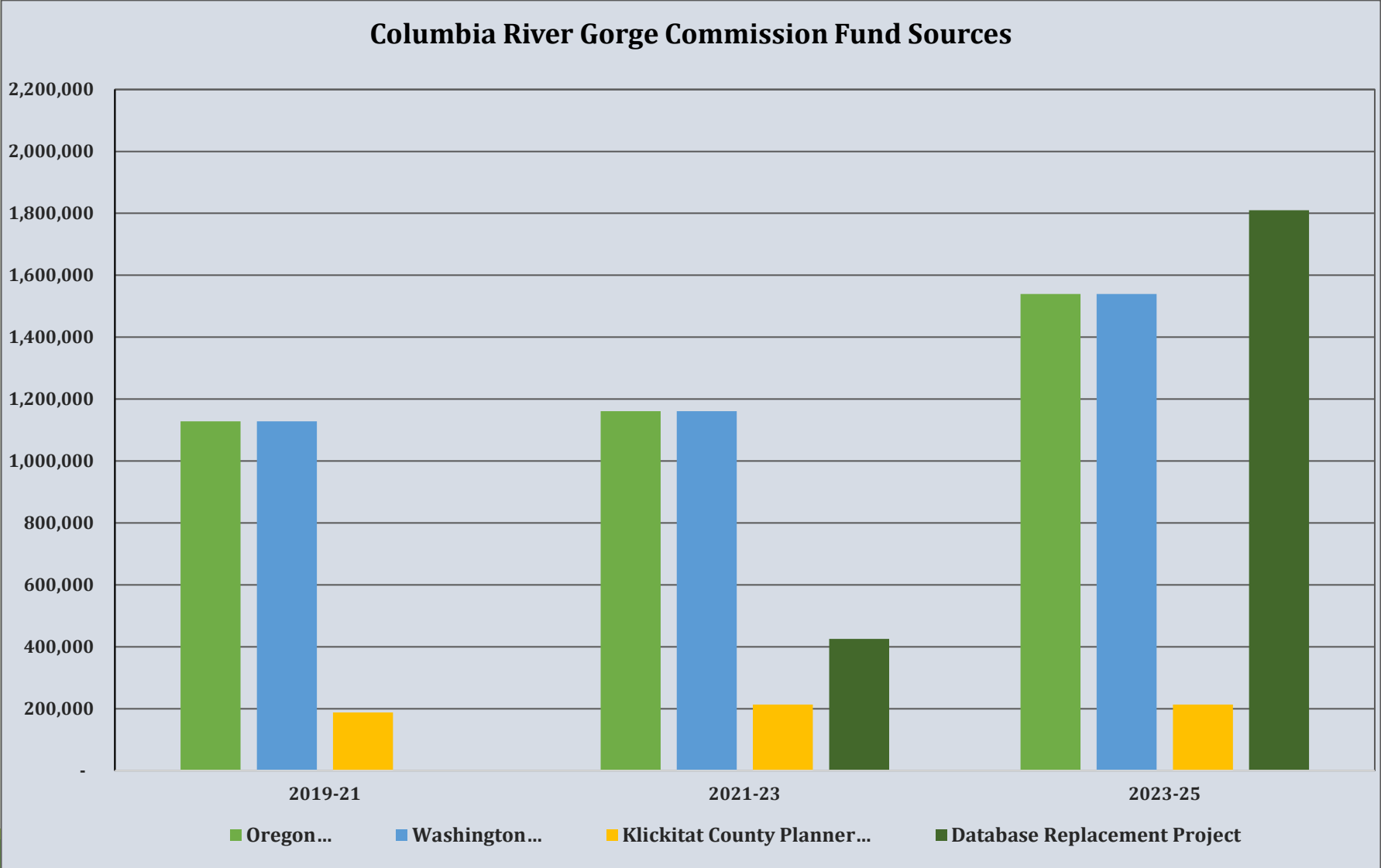
# Bluecrane Recommendations



- ❖ **Continue** investment in technology modernization and organizational change
- ❖ **Complete** implementation of additional functionality to gain full benefits
- ❖ **Implement** role-specific training and establish a continuous learning path
- ❖ **Introduce** a peer mentoring system and maintain transparent communication
- ❖ **Create** a structured feedback mechanism for ongoing system input

# Columbia River Gorge Commission

## Comparison of Funds Over Biennia





# Columbia River Gorge Commission



# Columbia River Gorge Commission

## **Financial Statement Audit Results**

FY 2023 and FY 2024

No deficiencies in internal control considered a material weakness were identified.

*Office of the Washington State Auditor*

## **Accountability Audit Results**

FY 2019 – FY 2023

Land Use Monitoring

Professional service contracts

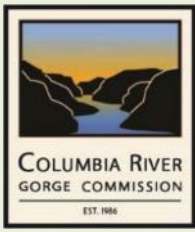
Compliance with general fund state appropriation

Accounts payable – general disbursements



In those selected areas, Commission operations complied, in all material respects, with applicable state laws, regulations, and its own policies and provided adequate controls over the safeguarding of public resources.

*Office of the Washington State Auditor*



# Commission Priorities 2025-27 Biennium



- ❖ Lead Gorge response to continuing **Climate Change** pressures
- ❖ Lead interagency efforts to monitor *Vital Sign Indicators*
- ❖ Convene the Pro-Equity, Anti-Racism (PEAR) Advisory Team and coordinate community action to implement the *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan*
- ❖ Finalize the transition to *Enterprise Permitting & Licensing System* for tracking data and online permitting
- ❖ Address backlog of *agency records* – catalog, index, and implement retention schedules to comply with state laws

# 2025-27 Governor's Budget

## General Fund

### COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE COMMISSION

#### 2025-27 Governor's Budget FTE and Program Costs - General Fund

Program	OR FTE	Personal Services	Services & Supplies	Total
<b>Joint Account - 2025-27 Current Service Level</b>			1,672,827	1,672,827
Package 093 - Statewide Adjustment DAS Charges			(3,026)	(3,026)
Policy Option Package 100 - Oregon Share			350,000	350,000
<b>Joint Account - 2025-27 Governor's Budget</b>			<b>2,019,801</b>	<b>2,019,801</b>
<b>Oregon Commissioner Account - 2025-27 Governor's Budget</b>		37,257	19,603	56,860
<b>Total Oregon Share</b>		<b>37,257</b>	<b>2,039,404</b>	<b>2,076,661</b>

# 2025-27 Budget Comparison WA and OR Governor's Budgets

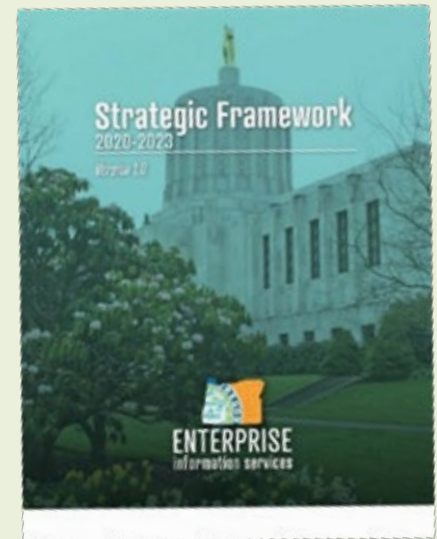
	WA Governor's Budget		OR Governor's Budget	
	Washington	Oregon		
<b>Joint Operating Budget</b>				
<b>Current Service/Carryforward Level</b>	<b>1,560,000</b>	<b>1,569,000</b>	<b>1,672,827</b>	
DES Central Services	4,000	4,000		
OFM Central Services	8,000	8,000		
Updated PEBB Rate	(1,000)	(2,000)		
Pension Benefit Amortization	(4,000)	(2,000)		
Non Rep GWI	53,000	43,000		
			(3,026)	Statewide DAS Charges
<b>Misc Adjustments</b>	<b>60,000</b>	<b>51,000</b>	<b>(3,026)</b>	
POP/DP #1 - ADRP 3	350,000	350,000	350,000	Recommended
WA DP #2 - PR & Admin Analyst	108,000	-	-	
WA DP #3 - DEI Outreach	50,000	50,000	-	Included in Maintenance
	<b>508,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>	<b>350,000</b>	
<b>2025-27 Total Joint Budget</b>	<b>2,128,000</b>	<b>2,020,000</b>	<b>2,019,801</b>	
	(108,000)	-	-	
<b>2025-27 Total Joint Budget Match</b>	<b>2,020,000</b>	<b>2,020,000</b>	<b>2,019,801</b>	

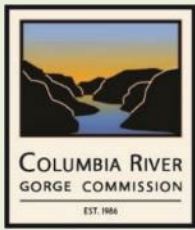
# POP 101: Access Database Replacement – Phase 3

## Oregon Share: \$350,000

### Finalizing Our Digital Transformation

New Enterprise Permitting & Licensing Information Management System will improve CRGC workflow, transparency, accountability, and public access to critical past and present information in the National Scenic Area



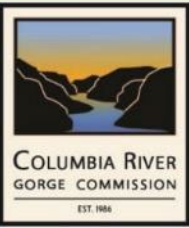


# Benefits from POP 101 Access Database Replacement - Phase 3 Increasing Efficiency

- ❖ **Improved service levels** to landowners, provide easy electronic online applications and website downloads
- ❖ **Easier collaboration** with counties to quickly exchange information for critical decisions
- ❖ **Seamless GIS integration**
- ❖ **Improved accuracy and response times** to our public records requests
- ❖ Categorize **institutional knowledge**
- ❖ **Fast, concise data searches**
- ❖ **Data links** between applications, appeals, and court decisions to track all decisions and promote transparency

# Public Records & Administrative Analyst

included in Washington Governor's Budget



- ❖ CRGC has operated without a permanent staff person responsible for public records management
- ❖ Due to the lack of staff capacity, CRGC has no updated retention schedules and possesses a backlog of records to be indexed, organized, and digitized or archived
- ❖ CRGC has been unable to respond to public requests timely manner
- ❖ This position would be responsible for public records management and records request responses and administration to bring CRGC into compliance with public records and retention rules



# 2025-27 Governor's Budget 10% Reduction Options

**All reductions will result in matching reduction of Washington Funds**

**10% Reduction Detail  
\$172,969**



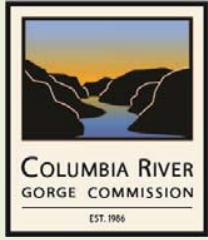
- **Staff Furloughs & Reduction**
- **Goods & Services**
- **Travel**
- **Eliminate Agency Vehicle/Insurance**
- **Training & Dues**
- **Facilities/Service/Rental**
- **Janitorial**
- **IT Support Services**
- **Commissioners' Fund**

**Equal WA Reduction Required:  
\$345,938**



**“The fantastic beauty of the Columbia River Gorge has beckoned mankind for over 11,000 years . . . In ancient times Chinookan and Sahaptan Indians hunted its mountains and fished along the rivers edge . . .”**

*~Senator Evans, 1986*



# Columbia River Gorge Commission Questions?

**Michael Mills, Commission Chair**

**Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director**

**Connie L. Acker, Finance & Admin Manager**

**Mike Schrankel, GIS Manager & ADR Project Coordinator**



**Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area: Stewards of the future since 1986**