



# Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan Review

The Columbia River Gorge is a natural scenic treasure and is protected as a federally designated National Scenic Area. The Columbia River Gorge Commission and the U.S. Forest Service are beginning to review Gorge protection plans to see if they need to be revised.

## Background

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act is the federal law that protects the outstanding natural, scenic, cultural and recreation resources of the Gorge and requires growth and development to be principally directed to existing towns and cities in the Gorge. This law is incorporated into state law, and the Gorge Management Plan has been acknowledged as being consistent with Oregon [statewide planning goals](#). The Gorge Commission and Forest Service are charged with reviewing the Management Plan at least every ten years to determine whether it needs to be revised to better protect scenic, natural, cultural and recreation resources. The Plan must also protect and enhance agricultural lands, forest lands and open space. It must require growth and development to occur with urban areas and in a manner consistent with resource protection.

## Talking Points

**1. Climate Change Threatens the Gorge:** Climate change due to human-caused global warming is like to impact just about everything in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Longer dry spells which could cause more frequent and severe fires, impacts to sensitive species, wildlife habitat, native plants, growing conditions, watershed impacts, recreation, salmon runs, and community development are just a few of the main areas of risk due to future climate change.

The Gorge Commission and the Forest Service are the main governing bodies in the scenic area, and their priority is to protect the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the gorge. However, there is currently no mention of climate change and global warming anywhere in the management plan. With your help we would like to change that, and ensure that the Gorge Commission and Forest Service are adequately preparing to confront the many challenges and impacts we can expect from global warming in the decades to come. A good first step would be to improve natural and scenic resource protection standards to address impacts from climate change.

**2. Eagle Creek Fire:** Ensure the natural recovery of forests impacted by the Eagle Creek fire and prohibit post-fire logging. Ensure the recovery of native plant communities by adopting a comprehensive program to combat the spread of invasive species. Ensure the agencies are following the law on all emergency responses, post-fire actions and mitigation measures for resource damage resulting from fire response activities. Consider requiring temporary closure of trails when the fire danger is extreme, as it was when the Eagle Creek fire ignited.

3. Base plan review on the **best available science** and sound resource protection policies. Updating the resource inventories, completing a simulated "build-out" of development allowed within the scenic area and reliance on the "Vital Signs Indicators" program will help ensure that plan review is data driven.
4. Amend the definition of "**cumulative effect**" to require analysis of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions.
5. Adopt guidelines addressing **fossil fuel transport** through the National Scenic Area, including oil and coal trains. For example, require analysis of worst-case oil spills from oil train derailments and prohibit coal pollution from open-topped coal cars.
6. Improve regulations on **rail expansion** to better ensure protection of communities and scenic, natural, cultural and recreation resources.
7. **Prohibit new mining**, including new open pit quarries within the scenic area.
8. **Prohibit commercial logging** on all National Forest lands in the scenic area.
9. **Scenic resources**: Limit "trophy homes" on scenic landscapes. Determine whether scenic landscapes are approaching the tipping point for overdevelopment and, if so, require additional scenic resource protection measures.
10. **Natural resources**: Expand protective buffers for fish, wildlife and rare plants to better reflect the best available science and to adapt to climate change. Require protection for native plant communities. Adopt standards to protect outstanding geologic features, such as the Bonneville Slide area that created the "Bridge of the Gods." Assess the impacts of climate change on protected species and habitat.
11. **Protect cultural resources**: Until a thorough survey of cultural resources is completed in the Gorge, require cultural resource reconnaissance surveys prior to any approval of land divisions, significant ground-disturbing activities, and new development.
12. **Support sustainable recreation**: Support policies for trail systems linking recreation sites, viewpoints and Gorge communities. Promote more dispersed recreation by supporting new recreation sites and discouraging overuse of existing sites. Support sustainable recreation through alternative transportation options. Improve river access but avoid adverse impacts to sensitive resources and treaty rights.
13. **Expand open space designations** to protect sensitive areas and newly acquired public lands.
14. **Protect high value farm land**. For example, update standards for agricultural dwellings to better protect farm land from residential sprawl. Make the standards for new farm dwellings at least as strong as Oregon's standards outside the National Scenic Area, which require proof of at least \$80,000 in gross annual farm income.
15. **Prevent urban sprawl** by strengthening protections that control expansion of urban area boundaries into the management areas of the National Scenic Area. The second purpose of the Scenic Area Act is to promote economic development that is consistent with protection of the scenic, cultural, recreation, and natural resources of the gorge. This is best accomplished by increasing urban density rather than urban sprawl.

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