



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 and they want to hear from you.

Background

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act required the development of a Management Plan that ensures the protection and enhancement of scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources. The Management Plan must also protect agricultural lands, forest lands, and open spaces. The original Management Plan was adopted in 1991 and has been reviewed only once in 25 years, although the law requires it to be reviewed at least once every ten years. Most of the resource protection provisions of the plan are based on inventories, science, and policy that is more than 25 years old.

Many of the issues raised by the public during the last review of the plan have not been addressed, yet development on sensitive lands within the National Scenic Area continues to march forward under guidelines developed more than 25 years ago. In 2004, some regulations were weakened to allow more logging on sensitive lands in the Gorge, even on National Forest lands in Special Management Areas. New mining operations are still allowed in the Scenic Area. The outstanding geologic features of the Gorge receive no special protection and are exposed to open pit mining. Native plant communities, including Native American first foods, receive no protection despite tribal treaty rights. Land divisions take place without analysis of cumulative effects to scenic, natural, cultural, or recreation resources.

Priority Issues for the Scope of Plan Review

As the Columbia River Gorge Commission and U.S. Forest Service determine the scope of review for the Management Plan it should include the following important issues in the scope of review:

1. Base plan review on the **best available science** and sound resource protection policies. Updating the resource inventories, completing a "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.

2. Amend the definition of "**cumulative effect**" to require analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.
3. Require analysis of **climate change** impacts for major development projects.
4. 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.
5. Improve regulations on **rail expansion** to better ensure protection of communities and scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources.
6. **Prohibit new mining**, including new open pit quarries within the scenic area.
7. **Prohibit logging** on National Forest lands in the scenic area.
8. **Scenic resources**: Limit "trophy homes" on scenic landscapes. Determine if scenic landscapes are approaching the tipping point for development and, if so, require additional scenic resource protection measures.
9. **Natural resources**: Expand protective buffers for fish, wildlife and rare plants to better reflect the best available science. 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.
10. **Cultural resources**: Until a thorough survey of cultural resources is completed in the Gorge, require cultural resource reconnaissance surveys prior to the approval of land divisions, significant ground disturbing activities, and development. Support tribal efforts to protect Native American "first foods."
11. **Recreation resources**: 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.
12. **Expand open space designations** to protect sensitive areas and newly acquired public lands.
13. **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, which require proof of at least \$80,000 in gross annual farm income.