

Columbia River Gorge Commission
Strategic Plan for the 2007-2009 biennium
Approved on April 11, 2006

MISSION

The Columbia River Gorge Commission's mission is to protect and enhance the scenic, natural, recreational and cultural resources of the Columbia River Gorge, and to support the economy of the area by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas and allowing economic development consistent with resource protection.

STATUTORY AUTHORITY

The Columbia River Gorge Commission was authorized by Congress in the 1986 Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act (P.L. 99-663). The Act provided advance consent for an interstate compact between Washington and Oregon to create the bi-state Columbia River Gorge Commission. The Columbia River Gorge Compact (ORS 196.150 et seq., RCW 43.97.015 et seq.) enacted in 1987, created the Commission and directed it: "to perform all functions and responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of this compact and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act...[Compact Article 1(a)]."

BACKGROUND

The National Scenic Area

The National Scenic Area (NSA) consists of 292,000 acres straddling the Columbia River for 80 miles, just east of the Portland, OR and Vancouver, WA metropolitan area. It includes parts of three Oregon counties (Wasco, Hood River and Multnomah); portions of three Washington counties (Clark, Skamania and Klickitat), and 13 designated Urban Areas.

The Columbia River Gorge Commission

The Commission has thirteen appointed members; six appointed by local government (one by each of the six Gorge counties), six appointed by the states of Oregon and Washington (three appointed by each Governor), and a thirteenth ex officio member appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. The Commission employs an executive director and staff with offices in White Salmon, Washington.

Commission Funding

The Gorge Commission is funded by General Fund appropriations of the states of Oregon and Washington. The states are required to contribute equally to the Gorge Commission's joint operating budget. Commissioner expenses are also funded by Oregon and Washington through General Fund appropriations, but there is no requirement that appropriations be equal.

The Commission's Responsibilities

The Commission sets policy for land use and resource protection on non-federal lands in the Scenic Area, and is responsible for coordinated and consistent implementation of the Act, Management Plan and land use ordinances among two states, six counties, four treaty Indian tribes, the federal government, and numerous stakeholders and citizens. The Commission's program is based on the statutory responsibilities under the National Scenic Act and Columbia River Gorge Compact.

MAJOR PARTNERS

The Columbia River Gorge Commission is one of many agencies charged by Congress with implementing the National Scenic Area Act. The Commission's partners include:

The United States Forest Service. The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act charges the Forest Service with managing federal lands, which include significant recreational sites in the Columbia River Gorge, such as Multnomah Falls and many trails in both states. In addition, the Forest Service oversees management of the Special Management Areas (SMA), purchase of SMA land, and other services such as fire management. Moreover, the Forest Service has many technical resources, such as archeologists, landscape architects, botanists, and biologists who assist the Columbia River Gorge Commission and six Gorge counties with implementation of the Management Plan.

State of Oregon and State of Washington. The National Scenic Area Act assigns direct responsibilities for several issues to the states. In addition, state agencies have maintained their responsibility for other services in the Gorge, independent of the Act. Key agencies include:

- Oregon Economic and Community Development Department and Washington Community, Trade, and Economic Development. The National Scenic Area Act gives these two state agencies responsibility for planning and management of economic development funds.
- Oregon Department of Forestry and Washington Department of Natural Resources. These agencies manage forest practices in the Gorge.
- Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation and Washington Parks Commission. These agencies manage State Parks, which represent many key recreation sites in the Columbia River Gorge.
- Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation. These agencies not only manage key state highways, but also several scenic and recreation routes, and the railroads in the Columbia River Gorge.
- Oregon Fish and Wildlife and Washington Department of Natural Resources. These agencies provide expertise and guidance on natural resources issues.
- Oregon and Washington State Historic Preservation Officers. These agencies are responsible for key decisions related to cultural and historic resources in the Columbia River Gorge.

Six County Governments. The National Scenic Area Act provides several key incentives for county governments to implement the Management Plan. In addition both state governments fund counties that have enacted land use ordinances that implement the Management Plan. This allows counties to provide direct service to their residents. As of April 1, 2006, five of the six Gorge counties have elected to administer the management plan. Those five counties are Clark County and Skamania County in Washington and Hood River County, Multnomah County, and Wasco County in Oregon. The Columbia River Gorge Commission administers the land use ordinance in Klickitat County, Washington.

Four Tribal Nations. The National Scenic Area Act recognizes that four Northwest tribal nations have a significant interest in the Columbia River Gorge. The Act charges the Commission with working with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, the Nez Perce, and the Yakama Nation. In addition, the tribes provide critical technical support, particularly related to protection or cultural resources.

GOALS

The Columbia River Gorge Commission has five strategic goals:

1. Protect and provide for the enhancement of the scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources of the Columbia River Gorge
2. Support the economic vitality of the Gorge by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas; by allowing future economic development in a manner that is consistent with scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resource protection; and by protecting and encouraging agriculture and forestry in the Scenic Area.
3. Increase citizen participation in decision-making processes in the National Scenic Area.
4. Coordinate effective and consistent implementation of the Management Plan by county governments.
5. Take advantage of the Gorge Commission's unique position as a bi-state regional agency to provide a Gorge-wide approach to issues, make efficient use of public resources throughout the Gorge, and support interagency projects and problem solving.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND ACTIVITIES

GOAL #1: Protect and provide for the enhancement of the scenic, cultural, recreational, and natural resources of the Columbia River Gorge

Statewide Results

Objectives and strategies under this goal affect the following statewide results:

8. Improve the quality of Washington's Natural Resources.
9. Improve cultural and recreational opportunities throughout the state.

Six-Year Objectives

- Implement the updated Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge. In the next six years, the Commission will work with Gorge counties to implement the Management Plan through their land development ordinances.
- Provide current planning services in any county that does not implement the Management Plan through a land use ordinance. Hear appeals of land use decisions. Provide code compliance and enforcement services.
- Monitor the effect of development and other activities on the resources of the National Scenic Area. This objective has not been funded in past biennium, but the Commission believes that it is one of the highest priority areas for improving service. The Commission is working on a project to

develop measurable outcomes (Indicators Project). As part of this project, the Commission will be developing a research program that may require additional funding.

Two-Year Strategies

- Implement the revised Management Plan. Work with Gorge counties to implement the Plan through development of land use ordinances.
- Provide current planning services in any county that does not implement the Management Plan through a land use ordinance. Hear appeals of decisions of Gorge Commission staff when appealed (also in the place of a county decision).
- Provide code compliance and enforcement services. Provide technical assistance to county governments in their work with code compliance and enforcement.
- Continue efforts to develop and maintain data to measure the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of Management Plan implementation. Use existing data to improve the development review process throughout the National Scenic Area. As noted above, the Commission has included a work item in the 2005-2007 biennium to develop measurable outcomes and a research program to collect data for these measures (indicators). The Commission will emphasize use of existing data to the extent possible. Some original research may be required, which will require additional funding in the 2007-2009 and future biennia.
- Support the work of the Southwest Washington Clean Air Agency, Washington Department of Ecology, and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in implementing the Work Plan for Columbia River Gorge Air Quality. Provide technical assistance on Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act issues to SWCAA, DOE, and DEQ
- Create a technology management and security plan for the agency that ensures that the Columbia River Gorge Commission maintains its existing technology, makes efficient use of staff and other resources, and responds to new data and technology. This strategy is funded through Washington Incentive Funds and through any savings accrued during the budget year. It is not yet a permanent part of the agency's budget.

Activity Inventory

- Implementation of the Management Plan and National Scenic Area Act.

GOAL #2 Support the economic vitality of the Gorge by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas; by allowing future economic development in a manner that is consistent with scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resource protection; and by protecting and encouraging agriculture and forestry in the Scenic Area.

Statewide Results

Objectives and strategies under this goal affect the following statewide results:

5. Improve the economic vitality of businesses and individuals.
8. Improve the quality of Washington's natural resources.

Six-Year Objectives

- Continue and monitor policies and regulation that promote agricultural and forest activities in the National Scenic Area. Continue and monitor policies that discourage replacement of existing agricultural and forest uses with other types of uses that displace farming and forestry.
- Continue and monitor policies and regulations that encourage industrial and heavy commercial activities to locate in urban areas.
- Support the State of Washington and State of Oregon economic development agencies in planning that supports the grant and loan program created by the National Scenic Area Act. Assist the Bi-State Advisory Council and the Washington and Oregon Investment Boards in identifying major economic opportunities for Gorge Communities.

Two-Year Strategies

- Coordinate with the Oregon Investment Board and Washington Investment Board to support their grant and loan programs. Process requests for certification of grants and loans for applications.
- Support efforts to increase grant funds that support economic development activity in the Columbia River Gorge. This strategy largely consists of coordinating an annual appropriations request and public information effort to secure federal funds that were authorized by the National Scenic Area Act but have not yet been appropriated. This is outlined further in the objectives and strategies under Goal #5.
- Protect agricultural and forest land and promote industrial and commercial activities inside urban areas. Seek to understand agriculture and forestry market forces and land management practices. Evaluate the consequences of Management Plan practices on agriculture and forestry, and create a regulatory structure that allows those industries to respond to larger market forces. This strategy relates to the objectives and strategies described under "Goal #1" to assess the success of the Management Plan in meeting the goals and standards of the Scenic Area Act.

Activity Inventory

- Implementation of the Management Plan and National Scenic Area Act.
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GOAL #3: Increase citizen understanding and participation in decision-making processes in the National Scenic Area.

Statewide Results

Objectives and strategies under this goal affect the following statewide result:

8. Improve the quality of Washington's natural resources.
10. Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

Six-Year Objectives

- Ensure that Gorge Commission decision-making processes are easy to understand, open and accessible.
- Participate in civic and community efforts in the National Scenic Area. Provide regular and consistent information about the Commission's role in implementing the NSA. Train Gorge Commission volunteers to give presentations about the Commission, Scenic Area, and current challenges. This objective is partially funded. Improving agency performance in this area is a high priority for the 2007-2009 biennium.
- Use outreach to expand participation of the general public in Commission decision-making. Use outreach tools to gather public input on issues before the Commission. This objective is partially funded. Improving agency performance in this area is a high priority for the 2007-2009 biennium.

Two-Year Strategies

- Review the Commission's administrative policies at the conclusion of the sessions of the Oregon and Washington Legislatures. Revise administrative policies to ensure that the Commission's public meetings, public records, and procedural policies comply with the directive of the National Scenic Area Act to adopt the more restrictive of the two states' policies.
- Develop materials in a variety of media (print, video, website, workshops) to provide consistent information across all six Gorge Counties about the Act and Management Plan for people involved in purchase and development of private property in the Gorge. This strategy is partially funded. Improving agency performance in this area is a high priority for the 2007-2009 biennium because increasing citizen awareness and understanding of the Scenic Area increases compliance and improves the agency's ability to protect vital Gorge resources..

- Provide public information that informs the general public of the Commission's activities. Develop a working relationship with media that cover the Columbia River Gorge. Update the Commission's website to make it useful as a public information and public service tool. Use public meetings and forums, surveys, and other tools to gather information about citizen and customer satisfaction. As with our public education program, improve the ability of citizens to learn about and use Commission services by providing information and access in a variety of mediums increases understanding, compliance and protection of Gorge resources. This strategy is partially funded. Improving agency performance in this area is a high priority for the 2007-2009 biennium.
- Implement electronic imaging and archiving of the Commission's records to improve public access to records and to reduce the cost of maintaining the Commission's archive. This strategy is currently not funded, and will require purchase of new technology.
- Offer Alternative Dispute Resolution to parties involved in appeals, enforcement and litigation in the National Scenic Area.

Activity Inventory

- Policy Making and Hearing Citizen Appeals
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GOAL #4: Coordinate effective and consistent implementation of the Management Plan by county governments.

Statewide Results

Objectives and strategies under this goal affect the following statewide results:

8. Improve the quality of Washington's natural resources.
9. Improve cultural and recreational opportunities throughout the state.
10. Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

Six-Year Objectives

- Foster consistent implementation of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act and Management Plan throughout the Gorge. Support Gorge-wide problem solving and policy discussion.
- Ensure effective implementation of the federal-regional-state-local partnerships established by the National Scenic Area Act. Provide for effective support for the national values of the Columbia River Gorge and also for local control of implementation.

- Strengthen working relationships between the Columbia River Gorge Commission and all six Gorge counties. Facilitate communication among counties.

Two-Year Strategies

- Provide technical assistance to county planning departments in implementing county ordinances that enact the Management Plan.
- Convene county policy makers, administrators and technical staff to permit collaboration on issues of mutual concern. Meet regularly with planning directors and planning staff.
- Monitor current planning decisions of counties under their land use ordinances that implement the Management Plan. Strive to prevent potential conflicts, appeals, and enforcement cases by reviewing the development applications that have the potential to have the most significant impact on Gorge resources.
- Hear appeals of county development decisions.
- Provide training to Commission and county staff on the technical aspects of the Management Plan.

Activity Inventory

- Public Outreach and Technical Assistance to counties.
- Implementation of the Management Plan and National Scenic Area Act.
- Policy Making and Hearing Citizen Appeals.

GOAL #5: Take advantage of the Gorge Commission's unique position as a bi-state regional agency to provide a Gorge-wide approach to issues, make efficient use of public resources throughout the Gorge, and support interagency projects and problem solving.

Statewide Results

Objectives and strategies under this goal affect the following statewide results:

8. Improve the quality of Washington's natural resources.
9. Improve cultural and recreational opportunities throughout the state.
10. Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

Six-Year Objectives

- Convene and participate actively in problem-solving groups to tackle issue that cross jurisdictional or operational boundaries. Support other NSA governments in collaborating with other agencies and interests in implementing cross-disciplinary projects.
- Assist in securing funding, including Congressional appropriations, for projects that implement the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act and the enhancements section of the Management Plan.
- Collaborate with Federal, State, Local, and private interests to implement the Management Plan.

Two-Year Strategies

- Coordinate an annual Federal Appropriations request to implement the National Scenic Area Act.
- Collaborate and coordinate with the USFS Area Office. Work with the Forest Service to support and provide information for activities that implement the National Scenic Area Act, including budget requests and other key projects.
- Coordinate services and response with all other federal, state, and local government agencies that share responsibility for aspects of the NSA implementation.
- Update Commission Strategic Plan and initiate Commission development projects.

Activity Inventory

- Implementation of the Management Plan and National Scenic Area Act.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The Columbia River Gorge Commission has two adopted measures in Washington to assist in evaluating the agency performance. These measures evaluate the effectiveness of the Commission in achieving two statewide results:

8. Improve the quality of Washington's natural resources.
9. Improve cultural and recreational opportunities throughout the state.

Performance Measure #1.

Goal : Increase citizen understanding and participation in decision-making processes in the National Scenic Area

Measure: Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year

Estimate	10	10
Actual	12	10
Date Measured	6/30/2004	6/30/2005

Commission performance on Measure #1 met or exceeded our targets for the 2003-2005 biennium. However, as noted above in the Plan, the Commission feels that improving citizen understanding and participation in the Scenic Area is critical to meeting our mission. In the current biennium, the Commission is actively working to first increase its public information and media work. As part of the 2007-2009 budget request, the Commission will be requesting resources to improve our active public engagement efforts.

Performance Measure #2

Goal: Coordinate effective and consistent implementation of the Management Plan by county governments

Measure: Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Gorge Commission staff

	Fiscal Year 2004	Fiscal Year 2005
Estimate	55%	55%
Actual	41%	75%
Date Measured	6/30/2004	6/30/2005

Agency performance on Measure #2 was below our expectations in the first fiscal year of the 2003-2005 biennium. We changed one critical internal process during the second fiscal year to address this issue, and our performance greatly exceeded our targets in that year. This measure is critical in evaluating both how we protect Gorge resources and in measuring our success in resolving disputes before they result in appeals or litigation.

APPRAISAL of EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Key factors affecting the Columbia River Gorge Commission in implementation of the strategic plan:

- Continued population and changing employment environment of the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area. This creates several key pressures including:
 - Demand for increased residential development in the Gorge. The Portland/ Vancouver area is within an easy commuting distance, relative to other metropolitan areas in the United States, of many Gorge communities. The employment environment is continuing to change with the advent of telecommuting and flexible scheduling, making Gorge communities increasingly viable for residential use.
 - Increased recreational demand in the Gorge. This is both positive and negative. Increased recreational visits support the tourism economy and promote the area as a destination overall. At the same time, recreation also can harm valuable resources if it is not appropriately managed.
 - Decline in affordable housing as more communities attract retirees and seasonal residents.
 - Pressure to convert agricultural and forest resource lands to residential uses.

- Increasing pressure and demand on public infrastructure, such as roads for fire suppression and emergency services.
2. Larger economic forces that affect the sustainability of the Gorge economy:
- Continued decline in the timber and forest industry. This directly impacts the ability of the Columbia River Gorge Commission and other partners under the National Scenic Area Act to achieve the second purpose of the Act.
 - Shifts in the markets for agricultural production. Many of the traditional agricultural products of the Columbia River Gorge, including fruit, are affected by offshore agricultural competition. At the same time, new agricultural products, especially vineyards and wineries, are emerging.
 - Decisions by several high-technology businesses to locate in Gorge Communities. These businesses have decided to move to the Gorge because of the high quality of life, the availability of technology infrastructure (high-speed connections), and proximity to the Portland metropolitan area. These businesses in general have imported workers from outside of the Gorge, although some are “homegrown.”
 - Vulnerability of tourism-based businesses to recession.
 - Changing recreational uses and demographics of users.

TRENDS IN CUSTOMER CHARACTERISTICS

Key changes for the Columbia River Gorge Commission in customer characteristics include:

- The public is increasingly expecting and demanding rapid and efficient responses to their inquiries.
- Population growth and demand to construct in the National Scenic Area has created heavy workload demands in counties with significant amounts of private land. This, in turn, puts significant demands on Commission staff to monitor county decisions and provide technical support.
- The public increasingly expects to be able to obtain information and services 24 hours each day. This puts increased demand on the Commission and county partners to make efficient use of technology both as ways to gather and analyze information and also as a way to provide public information and service.
- Members of the public have much higher interests in preservation of individual rights and services than was generally true in the early days of the commission. Initiatives that describe the effect of regulation as a short-term economic loss, such as Oregon’s Ballot Measures 37, affect public perception and expectations about the Commission and its work.

ASSESSMENT of INTERNAL CAPACITY and FINANCIAL HEALTH

Staffing/Organizational Capacity:

The Commission serves a very large geographic area, and limited financial and staff resources are spread thin. The National Scenic Area covers roughly 80 miles, from the Sandy River on the west to the Deschutes River on the east. Many of the Commission’s key services require extensive travel, which can be difficult because the Commission has only 8.75 FTE.

In 2005-2007 biennium, the Commission added 1.5 additional FTE to its planning staff to address mandates of the National Scenic Area Act, the interstate compact between Oregon and Washington, and the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge. These staff have improved the Commission's responsiveness and capacity to handle citizen requests, have allowed the Commission to handle several complex policy issues, and have allowed the Commission to improve its code compliance and enforcement process. These additional staff have also enabled the Commission to decrease permitting times and to increase coordination with Gorge economic development entities. Last but not least, the additional staff have been used to improve coordination among agencies that seek federal funds to implement the Scenic Area Act. Most recently, for example, Commission staff have helped forge a coalition of recreation groups and create an updated list of recreation projects eligible for federal funds authorized in the National Scenic Area Act.

In updating the strategic plan, the Commission finds that two areas of importance to the Gorge and to the agency are understaffed. First, the Commission needs additional staff support for its work to monitor the resources that it is charged with protecting under the National Scenic Area Act. Second, the Commission needs to resume efforts to improve its public outreach, media, and public involvement efforts. The Commission will request 1 additional FTE to address both of these performance areas, which are mandates.

Budget:

The Commission's budget in FY 2005-2007 is 28.5% higher than in the 2003-2005 biennium. This increase has allowed the Commission to address the staffing issues outlined above and to restore services that were initially cut in the 2001-2003 biennium and further reduced in 2003-2005. For example, the Commission has resumed efforts to complete its parcel-based data system (part of its GIS work) and to update several resource data layers used by the Commission, USDA Forest Service, and Gorge Counties in fulfilling their responsibilities under the Management Plan.

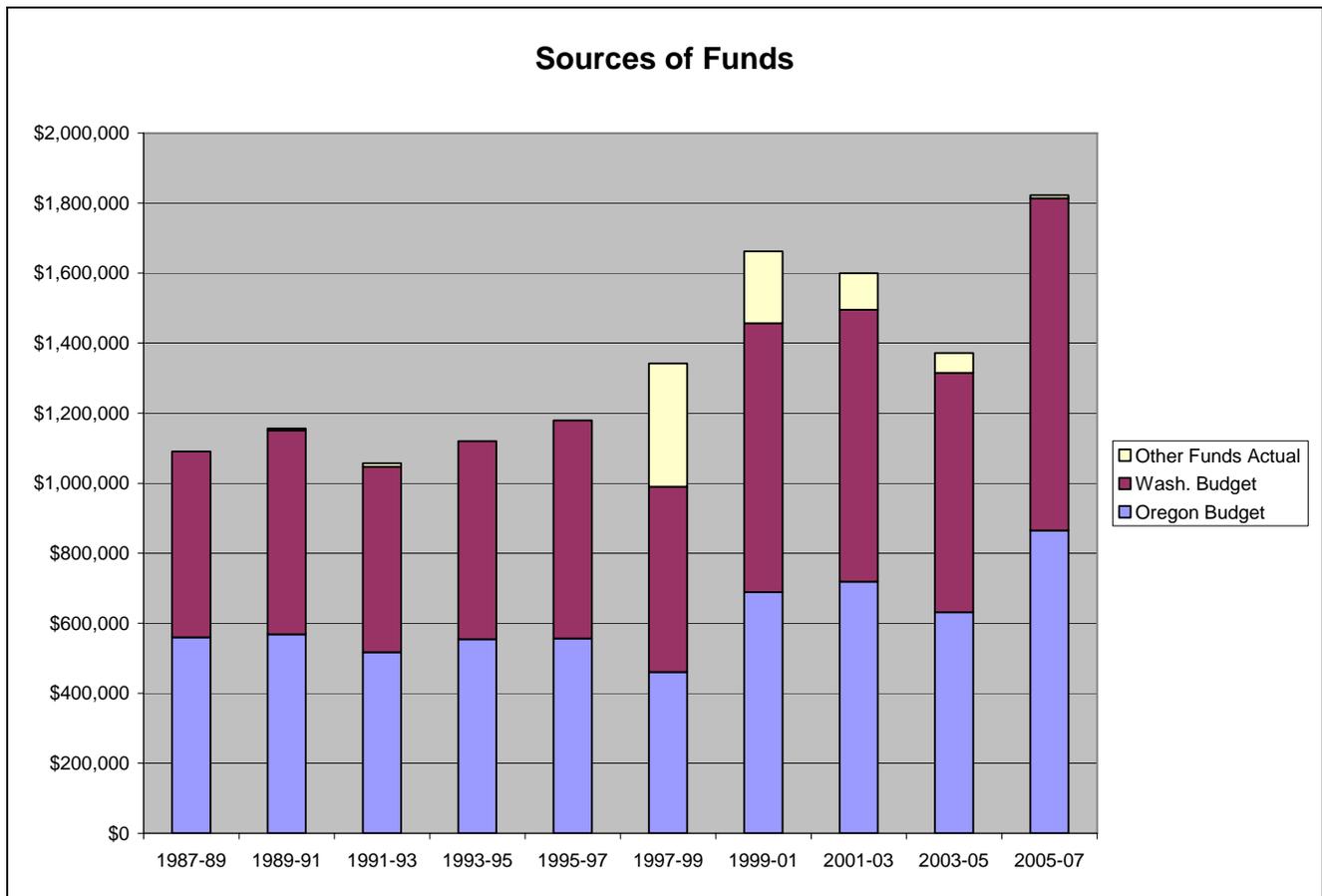
As with past biennia, the majority of the Commission's budget is spent on staff and fixed costs such as rent and administrative charges. The current budget does not allow the Commission to complete special projects, and it is critical that future budgets enable the Commission to address these needs. For example, in the current biennium, the Commission completed a guide to assist landowners in developing projects that meet the Scenic Areas regulations for scenery. The budget enabled the Commission to comply with mandated timelines in the Management Plan. Moreover, the current budget enabled the Commission to hire outside legal Council when required to address a request of a landowner when the Commission's own legal staff could not work on the issue.

As noted above, the budget remains insufficient to allow the Commission to fulfill all of its mandated responsibilities, and the Commission estimates that it will request an increase of approximately \$100,000 from each state for the 2007-2009 biennium.

Lastly, the provisions of the Bi-State Compact between Oregon and Washington constrain the agency's use of resources. The Compact requires that the commission's proposed budget and expenditures be apportioned equally between the states. A reduction in budget authority in one state reduces the Commission's overall spending authority in the other state. In the past, this has been a significant limitation on the agency. In the 2005-2007 biennium, the State of Washington provided nearly \$50,000 that was "unmatched" by funds from Oregon.

FINANCIAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

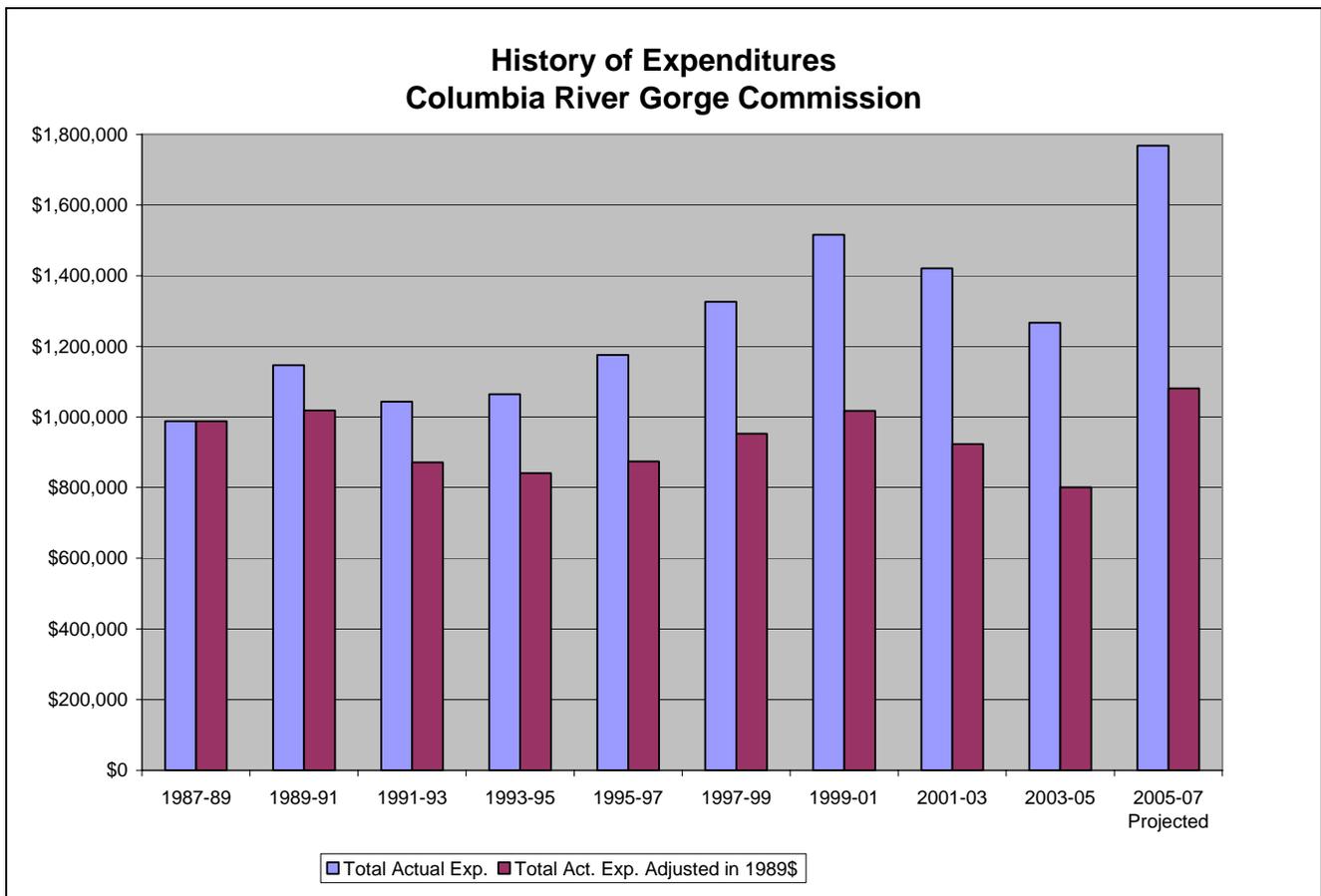
The Commission is dependent on the financial health of the general funds of Oregon and Washington. The Commission is funded 50% by the State of Washington (General Fund) and 50% by the State of Oregon (General Fund). As outlined in the graph below, the Commission has received small infusions of federal funds (the largest in 1997-1999, carrying over until December 31, 2001), but primarily relies on state funds for operations. The Commission has no independent sources of funds (fees or charges), although it has received about \$10,000 in unsolicited donations over the past few years. These donations assist in areas such as legal fees and employee training, but they are received sporadically. Donations are not a significant or steady source of operating dollars.



This graph reflects total funds that were appropriated for the Commission. Because of differences in budgeting in Oregon and Washington and because of the terms of the Bi-State compact, actual funds available to the Agency were less than this total amount.

Discrepancies between the States of Oregon and Washington in budgeting and accounting create financial management issues for the Commission. Oregon’s budget is managed on a biennial basis, but

Washington's is managed on an annual basis. This severely restricts the use of funds during the course of the biennium. Additionally, Oregon and Washington "allot" funds for use by the agency in a different manner, which affects how the Commission can spend funds. All of these administrative factors limit Commission operations and management. Actual expenditures are always substantially less than budget.



The Commission has identified the following services as either underfunded or unfunded:

- Implementation of the Management Plan
- Code compliance and enforcement
- Coordination and promotion of interagency projects
- Monitoring of the long-term effects of the Management Plan on Columbia River Gorge resources
- Public information program
- Public information tools project for landowners, realtors, and other participants
- Equipment replacement and technology planning and security
- Technological systems to ensure high quality records management and archiving
- Training and professional development for Commission staff