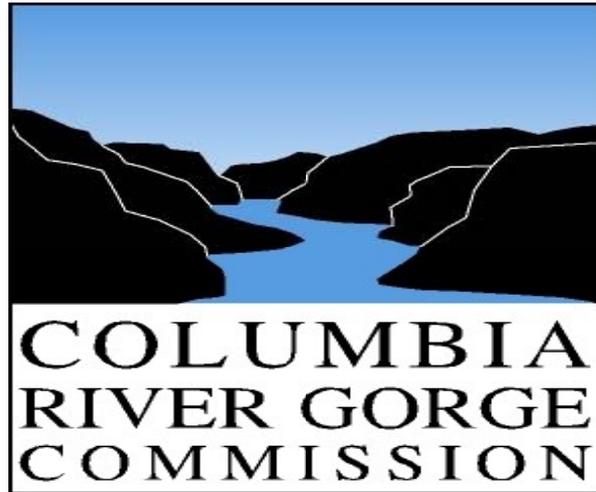
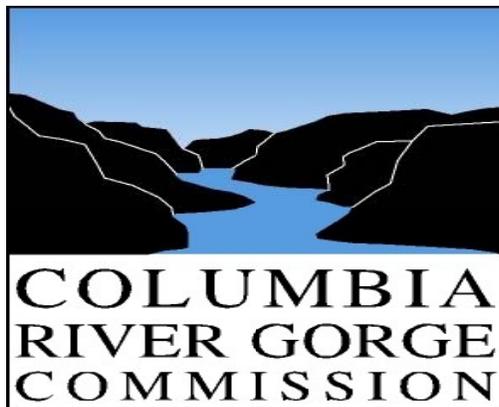


**Columbia River Gorge Commission  
Strategic Plan for the 2009-2011 Biennium**



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Approved 5-13-08

## **MISSION**

The Columbia River Gorge Commission's mission is to protect and provide for the enhancement of the scenic, natural, recreational and cultural resources of the Columbia River Gorge; and to protect and support the economy of the area by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas and by allowing future economic development that is 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)].”

## OVERVIEW

### The National Scenic Area

The National Scenic Area (NSA) consists of 292,000 acres straddling the Columbia River for 80 miles, from east of the Portland, OR and Vancouver, WA metropolitan area to the Deschutes River. 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 works with many partners in implementing the National Scenic Area Act:

*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:

- Washington Community, Trade, and Economic Development and Oregon Economic and Community Development Department. The National Scenic Area Act gives these two state agencies responsibility for planning and management of economic development funds.
- Washington Department of Natural Resources and Oregon Department of Forestry. These agencies manage forest practices in the Gorge.
- Washington Parks Commission and Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation. These agencies manage State Parks, which represent many key recreation sites in the Columbia River Gorge.
- Washington and Oregon 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.
- Washington Department of Natural Resources and Oregon Fish and Wildlife. These agencies provide expertise and guidance on natural resources issues.
- Washington and Oregon State Historic Preservation Offices. These agencies are responsible for key decisions related to cultural and historic resources in the Columbia River Gorge.
- Washington Department of Ecology, Southwest Clean Air Agency, and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. These agencies provide expertise and guidance on resource issues and the Gorge air quality monitoring and strategies.

*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. Five of the six Gorge counties have elected to administer the management plan, including 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 'treaty tribes of 1855' are specifically named in the Scenic Act, and the Commission is charged with protecting their rights. The Act states the Commission will consult with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. In addition, the tribes provide critical technical support, particularly related to protection of cultural, scenic, natural, and recreation 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 understanding and engagement in the work of the Columbia River Gorge Commission; and increase awareness and appreciation of the National Scenic Area.
4. Coordinate effective and consistent implementation of the Management Plan by county governments.
5. Utilize 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.

## **CAPITAL AND TECHNOLOGY NEEDS**

The Gorge Commission prioritized its needs to allow purchases of software and hardware without requesting more funding from the State. The Gorge Commission is committed to fund similar expenses as much as possible from our operating budgets, realizing that there are many pressing priorities for the State.

The Commission is very appreciative of the Small Agency Technology grant that we received to improve customer service and offer non-confidential GIS information online in our office.

Ongoing replenishment of computers on a regular basis remains a need for the Gorge Commission, as well as maintaining our software.

LIDAR funding is requested to join a consortium of agencies to complete LIDAR mapping of the Scenic Area from mid-Columbia River and the Washington area. The entire area would cost approximately \$155,000 to map, but with partners it might be much less.

## ASSESSMENT OF EXTERNAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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

1. Continued population growth and changing employment environment of the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan and mid-Columbia region. Pressures identified due to these circumstances include:
  - Demand for increased residential development in the Gorge. The Portland/Vancouver area is within easy commuting distance for many Gorge communities. The employment environment is continuing to change due to 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 adversely affect valuable resources if not appropriately managed. Also, improved infrastructure in several state parks is needed to accommodate park visitors.
  - Decline in affordable housing as more communities attract retirees and seasonal residents.
  - With increased population in the Gorge and increasing tourism in the area, there is a greater possibility of water quality degradation; air quality pollution; degradation of natural resources in unsupervised sporting sites (e.g. off-road biking, unauthorized hiking trails).
  - 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:
  - The mortgage crisis is affecting the Gorge in numerous negative ways. Foreclosures and job losses due to this downturn will directly impact the region.
  - Threat of recession impacts the area and can create further downward economic activity.
  - Annual declines in the Forest Service federal funding affect the Gorge Commission because that agency is our main partner in the Scenic Area. The USFS Scenic Area office has not been able to replace employees who leave or retire; there is increased pressure to discontinue two important air quality monitoring stations in the Gorge; there are fewer resources for environmental research; and less funding is available for the GIS employee that is shared with the Gorge Commission.
  - 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 state they prefer locating in 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.
- Regional events and ongoing work to provide broader planning and issue resolution in the Gorge. Workforce Housing Summit in Hood River in April 2007; Columbia Gorge Future Forum in The Dalles in October, 2007; Future Forum Community Meetings throughout the Gorge from February through April 2008; Government to Government Summit with 4 treaty tribes and Gorge Commission tentatively in Pendleton in September 2008.

## **OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND TARGETS LINKED TO GOALS**

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

### High Priority Goals and Success Indicators

Objectives, strategies, performance measures and targets under this goal affect the following statewide high priority goals and success indicators:

#### Environment

- Improve the quality of Washington’s Natural Resources.
- Improve cultural and recreational opportunities throughout the state.

### Ten-Year Objectives

- Monitor the effect of development and other activities on the resources of the National Scenic Area. The Commission is working on a project to develop measurable outcomes (Vital Signs Indicators Project). This project was only partially funded in the past biennium but the Commission believes that it is one of the highest priority areas for improving service and a necessary component in the upcoming Management Plan Review. As part of this project, the Commission staff will be gathering and evaluating data for the indicators program that may require additional funding.

- Engage in the review of the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge. The Commission will work with Gorge counties, stakeholder groups and the public in a comprehensive review of the Management Plan.
- 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.

### Two-Year Strategies

- 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 included a work item in the 2007-2009 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 2009-2011.
- 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

### Performance Measures and Targets

- Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 18 presentations

- Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Gorge Commission staff.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 95%

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**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.

#### High Priority Goals and Success Indicators

Objectives, strategies, performance measures and targets under this goal affect the following statewide high priority goals and success indicators:

##### Environment

-Improve the quality of Washington's Natural Resources.

##### Economy

-Improve the economic vitality of businesses and individuals.

#### Ten-Year Objectives

- Continue to monitor policies and regulations that promote agricultural and forest activities in the National Scenic Area. Continue to monitor policies that discourage replacement of existing agricultural and forest uses with other types of uses that displace farming and forestry.
- Continue to 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 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.

#### Performance Measures and Targets

- Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 18 presentations
- Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Gorge Commission staff.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 95%

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**GOAL #3:** Increase citizen understanding and participation in decision-making processes in the National Scenic Area.

#### High Priority Goals and Success Indicators

Objectives, strategies, performance measures and targets under this goal affect the following statewide high priority goals and success indicators:

##### Environment

-Improve the quality of Washington’s Natural Resources.

##### Accountability

-Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

#### Ten-Year Objectives

- Ensure that Gorge Commission decision-making processes are easy to understand, open and accessible.
- Participate regularly in civic and community efforts in the National Scenic Area (NSA). Provide regular and consistent information about the Commission’s role in implementing the NSA through presentations about the Commission, Scenic Area, and current challenges.

- 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. Outreach tools include a redesigned agency website, a designated public computer workstation at the Commission office for information and research and digitalization of agency records for enhanced public access.

### Two-Year Strategies

- Create technical and community groups to respond to issues concerning the Gorge Commission. These groups will increase public awareness and understanding of the work of the Commission.
- 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. Train staff and Commissioners to increase citizen awareness and understanding of the National Scenic Area which in turn 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. Enhance 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.
- 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.
- Offer and encourage alternative dispute resolution methods to parties involved in appeals, enforcement and litigation in the National Scenic Area.
- Engage organizations to support the National Scenic Area Act objectives.

### Activity Inventory

- Policy Making and Hearing Citizen Appeals

### Performance Measures and Targets

- Percentage of appeals resolved by alternative dispute resolution methods.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 60%
  
- Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 18 presentations
  
- Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Gorge Commission staff.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 95%

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**GOAL #4:** Coordinate effective and consistent implementation of the Management Plan by county governments.

### High Priority Goals and Success Indicators

Objectives, strategies, performance measures and targets under this goal affect the following statewide high priority goals and success indicators:

#### Environment

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

#### Accountability

- Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

### Ten-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, four Treaty Tribes and six Gorge counties. Facilitate communication among all Treaty Tribes and Gorge counties.

### Two-Year Strategies

- Provide technical assistance to county planning departments in implementing county ordinances that enact the Management Plan.

- Convene Tribal representatives, county policy makers, administrators and technical staff to permit collaboration on issues of mutual concern. Meet regularly with Tribal representatives, 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, tribal 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.

#### Performance Measures and Targets

- Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 18 presentations
- Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Gorge Commission staff.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 95%

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**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.

#### High Priority Goals and Success Indicators

Objectives, strategies, performance measures and targets under this goal affect the following statewide high priority goals and success indicators:

##### Environment

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

##### Accountability

- Improve the ability of state government to achieve results efficiently and effectively.

### Ten-Year Objectives

- Convene and participate actively in problem-solving groups to tackle issues that cross jurisdictional or operational boundaries. Support other National Scenic Area 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, Tribal, State, Local, and private interests to implement the Management Plan.

### Two-Year Strategies

- Collaborate and coordinate with the US Forest Service National Scenic 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 responses with all other federal, tribal, state, and local government agencies that share responsibility for aspects of the NSA implementation.
- Coordinate annual Federal Appropriations requests to implement the National Scenic Area Act.
- Update the Commission's Strategic Plan and development projects.

### Activity Inventory

- Public Outreach and Technical Assistance to counties.
- Implementation of the Management Plan and National Scenic Area Act.

### Performance Measures and Targets

- Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 18 presentations
- Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Gorge Commission staff.
- Performance Measure Target for 2009-2011: 95%

## **PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

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

Improve the quality of Washington's natural resources.  
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

Year	2006	2007
Target	13	13
Actual	17	21

Commission performance on Measure #1 met or exceeded our targets. However, as noted earlier in the Strategic Plan, the Commission strongly believes improving citizen understanding and participation in the Scenic Area is critical to meeting the agency's mission. In the current biennium, the Commission is actively working to increase public access and information. As part of the 2009-2011 budget request, the Commission will request resources to improve 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

Year	2006	2007
Target	60%	60%
Actual	100%	100%

Agency performance on Measure #2 exceeded performance targets. The outstanding results in this area are due to having an adequate number of land use planning staff that are sufficiently experienced and knowledgeable of the Management Plan. This measure is critical in evaluating both how the agency protects Gorge resources and in measuring agency success resolving disputes before resulting in appeals or litigation.

**Performance Measure #3**

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

**Measure:** Percentage of appeals resolved by alternative dispute mediation methods.

Year	2006	2007
Target	60%	60%
Actual	NA	NA

Agency performance on Measure #3 is not conclusive as there were no appeals in 2006 and 2007. This measure does not address the informal efforts by staff to prevent appeals before they are filed, and to work with the affected parties after an

appeal has been submitted, to ensure compliance before alternative dispute resolution is required.

## **TRENDS IN CUSTOMER CHARACTERISTICS**

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

- The public increasingly expects and demands rapid and efficient responses to their inquiries.
- The public is more aware of and critical of issues outside the National Scenic Area, but which impact the NSA. Several of these include the PGE Boardman coal plant, wind turbines that can be seen from vantage points in the NSA, and concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).
- Population growth and demand to develop in the National Scenic Area has created heavy workloads 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 to gather and analyze information and also to provide public information and service.
- Members of the public have high interests in preservation of individual rights and services. 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 encompasses approximately 300,000 acres in an 85-mile stretch 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 small staff.

In 2005-2007 biennium, the Commission added 1.5 FTE to 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. The additional planning 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. The additional staff have enabled the Commission to decrease permitting times and to increase coordination with Gorge economic development entities. Last but not least, additional staff improve coordination among agencies that seek federal funds to implement the Scenic Area Act. 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 a significant area of importance to the public and to the agency is understaffed. 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 this performance area, which is a mandate.

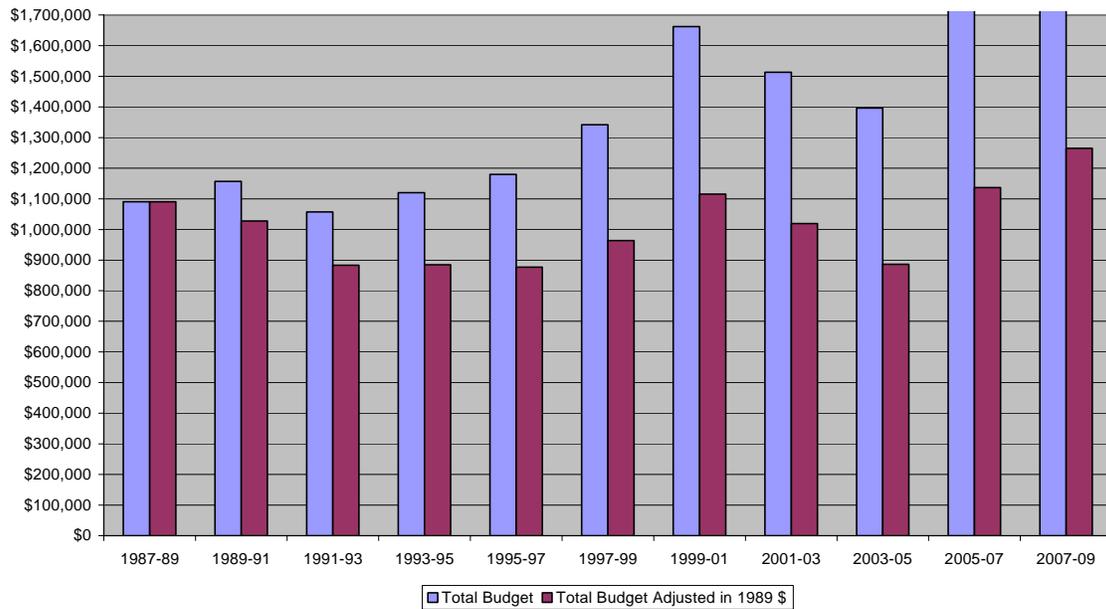
Budget:

The Gorge Commission received approval for an additional 1.0 FTE beginning the 2007-2009 biennium. This increase has allowed the Commission to begin the work necessary to measure the health of the Gorge using relevant and objective indicators. With the development of Gorge-level and agency-level indicators through the Vital Signs Indicators Project, the Commission will be able to measure and assess not only its own implementation efforts in relation to the purposes and standards of the Act, but also the health of the Gorge as a whole. This assessment will provide insight into changes to important conditions that are relevant for Gorge-wide policy decisions affecting the Scenic Area's future. Work is currently in progress to develop these indicators and will reflect and rely on community and technical input throughout the process.

There were also revisions made to the 2007-2009 budget which resulted in a match with the Commission's Washington base budget. Overall, the Commission's budget in FY 2007-2009 is 13.6% higher than in the 2005-2007 biennium for these reasons. However, it is apparent that the Commission budget level has grown minimally in the last twenty years when adjusted to 1989 dollars. The chart below shows the budgeted amounts and 1989-adjusted amounts for two decades.

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. The Commission started work to digitize records and increase accessibility and transparency of all work, with a renewed emphasis on customer service.

**Columbia River Gorge Commission  
Total Budget Over Time**



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 constrains the Commission in completing special projects, and it is critical that future budgets enable the Commission to address these needs.

Although the budget has improved, the demands on the Commission continue to grow as development pressure continues to impact the National Scenic Area. The agency is preparing for Management Plan Review which is mandated by the National Scenic Area Act.

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. For example, in the 2005-2007 biennium, the State of Washington provided nearly \$50,000 that was “unmatched” by funds from Oregon and in the 2007-2009 biennium the State of Oregon provided nearly \$6,000 that was “unmatched” by funds from Washington.

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). The Commission occasionally receives donations, but they are received sporadically and are insignificant.

Discrepancies between the States of Washington and Oregon 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.

The Commission has identified the following services as underfunded:

- Vital Sign Indicators Project-monitoring of the long-term effects of the Management Plan on Columbia River Gorge resources
- Management Plan review
- Code compliance and enforcement
- Public information program
- Technological systems to ensure high quality records management and archiving

The Commission's internal capacity and financial health improved in this 2007-2009 biennium and resulted in greatly improved customer service, improved monitoring of Gorge county land use decisions and initiation of the Vital Signs Indicators Project which will serve as a basis for the upcoming Management Plan Review. The Commission will request sufficient funding to maintain existing service levels and develop web master and communications specialist capacity.