



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission

FROM: Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Program Manager, Columbia River Gorge Commission
Sage Ebel, VSI & Natural Resources Planner, Columbia River Gorge Commission

DATE: March 11, 2025

RE: **Guest Presentation*:** Introduction to East Cascades Oak Partnership Presentation at March 11, 2025, Commission Meeting

Background

Oregon white oak woodlands are important for wildlife, human ways of life including Indigenous cultural practices, recreation, local economies, and the scenic landscape character of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. These habitats are some of the most biodiverse and climate-resilient ecosystems in the Gorge, providing a home for hundreds of plant and wildlife species. At the same time, oak systems continue to face the potential for development impacts and land use change. Oregon white oak's native range extends from southern British Columbia to northern California on the west side of the Cascades and into the Columbia River Gorge and East Cascades region. This species' extent has declined significantly from its historic range due to land conversion, fire suppression, and competition from other trees.

Oregon White Oak Woodlands: A Gorge Commission Priority

Protecting Oregon white oak habitat is a priority across the Commission's work. Oregon white oak woodlands are an adaptation priority in the Climate Change Action Plan and a priority habitat in General Management Area (GMA) and Special Management Areas (SMA) provisions in the Management Plan. Oak habitats comprise many of the areas that Oregon and Washington wildlife agencies identify as important deer winter range and therefore receive special provisions in the Management Plan. Supporting Tribal Treaty Rights, specifically strengthening First Foods protection and access in habitats such as oak, is a Commission priority. To help assess how well we are protecting oak habitats and what land use changes are impacting them over time, Oregon white oak woodlands are also a part of the Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) monitoring program.

East Cascades Oak Partnership

The East Cascades Oak Partnership (ECOP) includes tribes, agencies, non-governmental organizations, local businesses, and residents working together to conserve Oregon white oak systems and encourage sustainable human interactions across the East Cascades ecoregion

including the Columbia River Gorge. The Commission is a core member of ECOP and has participated in the partnership's strategic plan development, oak monitoring committee, and ongoing efforts to share informational resources with residents, planning staff, and the broader public. As a leader in oak science and conservation in the National Scenic Area, ECOP has provided valuable data products and technical advisory capacity to the Commission and will continue to play a vital role in helping staff assess oak habitats through the VSI monitoring program.

In this presentation, Lindsay Cornelius, East Cascades Oak Partnership (ECOP) Manager, will provide an overview of the importance of oak habitats and highlight restoration and monitoring efforts in the Gorge. This presentation is intended to provide helpful background information for Commissioners and the public to set the stage for future discussion of a staff assessment of oak planning needs and issues to be scheduled later this spring.

About the Presenter

Lindsay Cornelius has been observing and managing oak habitats in the Columbia River Gorge and East Cascades for more than 20 years as a natural area manager for Columbia Land Trust and most recently as the manager of the East Cascades Oak Partnership. In addition to her work in oak habitats, Lindsay has led a wide array of restoration and land management projects in the East Cascades, including the removal of eight miles of road from the Klickitat River floodplain. She earned a bachelor's degree in environmental science from Western Washington University, but the applied learning she's done over the last two decades restoring, enhancing, and making mistakes in oak woodlands has earned her a PhD in curiosity.

To learn more about **East Cascades Oak Partnership**, see <https://www.columbialandtrust.org/our-work/east-cascades/east-cascades-oak-partnership/>