



TO: Columbia River Gorge Commission
FROM: Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director
DATE: November 12, 2025
SUBJECT: **Information Item:** Status Update for 2025-2027 Work Plan Priorities

Summary

At the July 8, 2025, Gorge Commission meeting, the Gorge Commission reviewed the workplan priorities for the 2025-2027 biennium given the 25% budget reductions. A detailed workplan was presented and approved.

Even with a reduction from the Gorge Commission's original budget request, staff is continuing to move forward by implementing the mandatory non-discretionary responsibilities of our agency and those specifically funded by the legislatures. Funding approved from both states for the 2025-2027 biennium includes fixed operational and administrative costs, Commissioner expenses, and climate program work. As you may recall, the states did not provide the dedicated funding for Klickitat County Planning, Phase 3 Access Database Replacement, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work which were previously funded. Staff submitted additional funding requests in September for Washington's 2026 supplemental legislative session and will be submitting the same in Oregon in late November. Both state Governor offices are aware and supportive of our supplemental funding requests. The revenue forecasts are not finalized yet so it is unclear how much of our request can be funded.

To meet the budget limitations to cover both staff and operations, staff members reduced their work hours to a four-day work week, and our office is now closed on Fridays. *We have the equivalent of 8.25 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) funding to cover the Commission's 10 staff positions.* There were no layoffs, which prevented loss of staff expertise, institutional knowledge, and years of experience. Reducing staff hours allowed our agency to continue working on and completing our agency's main responsibilities. However, our tasks are stretched out over more time and are taking longer to complete. Some discretionary work that was envisioned to begin in the 2025-2027 will need to be postponed until the 2027-2029 biennium, or later when more resources will become available.

Update on Commission Work Plan Priorities - 2025-2027

The National Scenic Area Act, Bi-State Compact, and Commission Bylaws specify and imply many functions and tasks for the Commission. Given day-to-day administrative work, specific requirements from both states, day-to-day planning, and legal work, maintaining our technology, and other non-discretionary work, we identified the following five categories of our work. The proposed Work Plan details the following allocation of staff time. As a guide, 1 FTE = approximately 2,000 hours per year.

These FTE have been consistent for the past five months since July 2025:

Administration:	2.60
Planning:	2.10
Decision Support (Legal, GIS):	1.25
Outreach:	0.50
Commission Program Initiatives:	1.80

The FTE allocations for each category reflect that staff operate within multiple categories. For example, the 2.1 FTE for “planning” reflects that the planners also assist with Climate Change, VSI, Commission Initiatives, Legal, Commission meetings, etc.

Are we achieving the critical tasks for 2025-2027?

Administration, Legal, and Planning are the Work Plan categories of day-to-day required tasks. In addition to these, we are focusing our work on the following Outreach and Commission Program Initiatives:

- ✓ Increase strategic outreach, information materials, conversations with counties, legislatures and the public through articles, public meetings, and in-person dialogues, work with Commissioners on social media protocol and content: *Status – staff have been making progress on these with the assistance of the Communications Committee.*
- ✓ Climate Change and Vital Signs Indicators: *Status: staff have been on schedule with these programs.*
- ✓ Policy issues that the Commission has identified for research and counties have identified as critical, including (1) the Management Plan’s one year rule for replacement structures damaged or destroyed by fire, which past large disasters have shown may be too short. *Status: All staff have been working on Plan Amendment language in response to the Burdoin and Rowena Fires that are outlined in a separate staff report.*
- ✓ Economic Vitality Committee: (2) agriculture income test for new dwellings on large-scale agriculture; and (3) ADUs in certain land use designations. *Status: Staff have worked with the Economic Vitality Committee to conduct background research and will be discussing these two topics at the December 2, 2025, committee meeting.*
- ✓ The Commission agreed to decrease the number of Commission meetings and staff attending Commission meetings, and have staff focus on working with the four Commission Committees (Rules, Executive, Communications and Economic Vitality) to reflect a reduced number of Commission meetings. *Status: Commission meetings have been scheduled for every other month, and the Executive, Communications, and Economic Vitality committees are generally meeting monthly.*

What will be put on hold or reduced?

- ✓ Continue to do, but reduce time for, Klickitat County permitting to avoid backlogs and delays, even without specific state or county funding. *Status: NOT ON HOLD -With the Burdoin and Rowena Fires in June and July, there is already a backlog in Klickitat County permits since there is no funding for a dedicated Klickitat County Planner. Staff and Klickitat County Commissioners are working extensively to secure the funding to reinstate the Klickitat County Planner position in the supplemental 2026 legislative session.*
- ✓ Postpone the design for the next Management Plan review process until the 2027-2029 biennium.
- ✓ Reduce the number of Commission meetings from 11 meetings per year to 6 or 7 meetings per year and limit staff attendance at Commission meetings to reduce staff workload and time commitments.
- ✓ Reduce the work related to the number of Vital Sign Indicator data collection, analyses, and

collaboration with agencies to half-time.

- ✓ Put on hold Phase 3 of the Access Database Replacement project until funds are available (Phase 3 is conversion and migration of data to the new Enterprise Permitting & Licensing system).
- ✓ Reduce the number of PEAR meetings and other Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives until more funds are available to support the planning, policy development, and outreach work needed.