

**TO:** Columbia River Gorge Commission

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**RE:** **Work Session\*:** Vital Sign Indicators Program: Progress Report for Draft Cultural Resource Indicators

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**Purpose**

This report provides an overview of staff’s cultural resource monitoring approach for the Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) program, including two draft cultural resource indicators for Commission consideration. Staff welcomes questions and feedback on the approach and indicators described in this report. During the May 9<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting, staff requests the Commission’s approval to move forward with this cultural resource monitoring approach, incorporating modifications as needed based on Commission and public input.

**Contents of this Report**

I. [Overview of Cultural Resource Identification and Protection in the National Scenic Area](#) ..... 1

II. [Summary of Cultural Resource Vital Sign Indicators Update Process](#) ..... 3

III. [Cultural Resource Monitoring Approach and Draft Vital Sign Indicators](#) ..... 4

IV. [Next Steps for Indicator Development and Implementation](#) ..... 5

V. [Topics for Commission Consideration](#) ..... 5

[Appendix A: Engagement with Columbia River Treaty Tribes](#) ..... 6

[Appendix B: VSI Definitions](#) ..... 7

[Appendix C: Indicator Selection Criteria](#) ..... 8

[Appendix D: Crosswalk of 2009 Cultural Resource Vital Sign Indicators and 2023 Draft Cultural Resource Vital Signs](#) ..... 9

**I. Overview of Cultural Resource Identification and Protection in the National Scenic Area**

Cultural resource protection is a foundation of the National Scenic Area Act, the Gorge Commission’s mission, and the USDA Forest Service’s commitment to Tribal interests in the lands and waters they value as part of their culture and history. The Management Plan defines cultural

resources as “the objects, features, sites, and places that have meaning and significance for specific human groups and cultures.” These resources are divided into four main types that are described in detail in the Management Plan: Archeological Resources, Historic Buildings, Traditional Cultural Properties, and Traditional Use Areas. Management Plan guidelines require that development and land use occur without adversely affecting cultural resources.

Cultural resources can include water and native plants and wildlife used for food, medicine, and ceremony, called First Foods by some Tribes. Through our Climate Change Action Plan and VSI work over the past year, we have heard from several Treaty Tribe staff and Tribal members about the importance of holistic approaches to managing and monitoring these culturally significant foods. Ecologically healthy and functional habitats support a diversity of native plant and wildlife species vital for Tribes and Indigenous people. The approach described in this report seeks to honor this understanding by integrating habitat Vital Sign Indicators within a cultural resource monitoring approach for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA).

### **Cultural Resource Surveys and Consultation with the Columbia River Treaty Tribes**

The Cultural Resource chapter of the Management Plan requires that a reconnaissance survey be conducted for proposed developments on General Management Area (GMA) lands when the project location is high probability for cultural resources, based on the CRGNSA Probability Model (Boynton 2002), within 100 ft. of a high probability area, or if it is within 500 ft. of a documented or known cultural resource. Surveys are conducted by CRGNSA Forest Service Heritage staff or professional archaeologists that meet U.S. Office of Personnel Management requirements. Reports produced discuss any known history of the property and area, survey methodology, results, and recommendations. The reports are submitted to the county planning offices to conduct project-level consultation with the four Columbia River Treaty Tribes and respective State Historic Preservation Office. Each consulting party has 30 days to review and respond. Concerns are addressed with CRGNSA Heritage staff providing technical assistance.

### **Cultural Resource Monitoring in the CRGNSA**

Forest Service Heritage staff regularly monitor Priority Heritage Assets (PHAs) that include precontact and historic archaeological sites, as well as historic buildings located on National Forest System lands within the National Scenic Area. There is currently a total of 19 PHAs. Under Forest Service direction, PHAs shall be monitored every five years. However, numerous sites, including archaeological sites on Miller Island, are monitored more frequently, often yearly.

Staff considered the suitability of PHA monitoring for the VSI program and determined this qualitative data would not work well for discrete Vital Sign Indicators. First, the small number of sites is not representative of the larger cultural landscape within the CRGNSA. Secondly, the different monitoring years for different sites makes reporting on the full list at a regular interval difficult to do through VSI. Lastly, qualitative descriptions of the condition of PHAs would need to be generalized to protect sensitive information about specific sites. A summary of PHA monitoring could be explored as part of periodic Forest Service updates to the Commission, depending on staff capacity.

## II. Summary of Cultural Resource Vital Sign Indicators Update Process

The Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) program evaluates the long-term health of scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources, and local economies, of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Vital Sign Indicators are measures of trends and conditions that assess how well we are meeting Management Plan resource protection goals. Building on the original 2009 VSI effort, the Commission and USDA Forest Service initiated work on a comprehensive VSI update in 2021. See [Appendix B](#) for VSI monitoring definitions used in this report.

Below are key milestones in this update process:

- **Framework for Updating Vital Sign Indicators:** In February 2021, staff presented the VSI Assessment to the Commission, a comprehensive summary of key themes from informational interviews with Forest Service and Commission staff involved in the original VSI effort, as well as various agencies, organizations, and other specialists involved in monitoring across the region. See pages 17-19 in the [VSI Assessment](#) for discussion of cultural resources.
- **Cultural Resource Vital Sign Topics:** During October 2021–May 2022, Gorge Commission and USDA Forest Service staff held several joint work sessions to discuss management questions, priority Vital Sign topics for indicator development, and suitability of current cultural resource monitoring data for landscape-scale indicators. Staff identified Archeological Resources, Historic Resources, and First Foods/Culturally Important Species as three topics to explore with the Columbia River Treaty Tribes through staff-to-staff meetings. These cultural resource topics were selected for further discussion based on these main considerations used throughout the VSI update process: connection to Management Plan, Forest Service and Gorge Commission opportunity to affect resource condition, equity outcomes, and stressors to protected resources.
- **Themes from Staff-to-Staff Meetings with Treaty Tribes:** From June–August 2022, Commission staff convened individual meetings with cultural resource staff from Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to discuss priorities for the Climate Change Action Plan and VSI monitoring program. Staff are reaching out to Nez Perce staff to coordinate a meeting later this year. (See [Appendix A](#) for more details on engagement with Treaty Tribes to date.) Below are key themes from these conversations with Treaty Tribe staff:
  - Encourage holistic management and monitoring approaches, acknowledging that all native plants and wildlife contribute to healthy lands and waters and are important to Tribal cultures.
  - Address most pressing threats to native species, especially invasive species.
  - Concerned about health effects of herbicide use and environmental toxins on Tribal members, particularly when applied to plants that are collected and consumed.
  - Need to respect confidentiality of cultural information and understand that each Tribe has different approaches to protect sensitive information.
  - Protect fishing sites from increasing non-Tribal uses and support access to all areas for exercising Treaty Rights undisturbed.

### III. Cultural Resource Monitoring Approach and Draft Vital Sign Indicators

Based on feedback from the Treaty Tribes we spoke with and considering other draft Vital Sign Indicators shared with the Commission to date, staff suggests the following approach to monitoring cultural resources as part of the VSI program:

- In the first phrase of VSI implementation in 2024, focus on culturally important plants and wildlife through the habitats that support them. Monitor temperature and flow on cold water refuge streams essential for salmon, steelhead, and other cold water fish species. Track extent, distribution, and land use change for these priority habitats in the CRGNSA that sustain myriad native plant and animal species: wetlands, grasslands, oak woodlands, and coniferous forests.
- For two types of protected cultural resources in the CRGNSA, archeological resources and historic structures, track the number of new resources identified each year. The draft indicators below are updated versions of these 2009 cultural resource indicators: 4.1.d Number of new significant archeological resources identified each year and 4.2.d Number of new significant historic resources identified each year.
- Emphasize the interconnected nature of “cultural” and “natural” resources in descriptions of Vital Sign Indicators and future reporting. Through partnerships with the Tribes and others, build public awareness of the value of native species, their most pressing threats, and ways private landowners can protect and restore native species.

#### **Draft Cultural Resource Indicators: Summary Table**

Staff reviewed potential cultural resource indicators to determine whether each met Commission-approved indicator selection criteria listed in [Appendix C](#). Both indicators in the table below are considered “high” feasibility indicators (met 6-7 criteria) and have data available to begin implementation in 2024.

Management Plan Goal	Vital Sign	Draft Indicators	Description and Status
Protect and enhance cultural resources.	<b>Archeological Resources</b>	Archeological Resources Identified Annually	This indicator tracks the number of new archeological resources identified in the CRGNSA each year. Tracking will include National Register of Historic Places status: unevaluated (most common), not eligible, eligible, and listed (least common).
	<b>Historic Structures</b>	Historic Structures Identified Annually	This indicator tracks the number of historic buildings and structures identified in the CRGNSA each year. Tracking will include National Register of Historic Places status: unevaluated, not eligible (most common), eligible, and listed (least common).

#### **IV. Next Steps for Indicator Development and Implementation**

- In connection with climate action work, staff will coordinate meetings with Treaty Tribe staff to discuss and determine the role of VSI monitoring to support First Foods protection and access in the CRGNSA. Staff will also explore if there is interest from Tribes in pursuing additional monitoring of the cultural resource review process.
- Staff will be incorporating First Foods in the description of habitat Vital Sign Indicators as part of their work to develop an indicator list to share with the Commission in summer 2023.

#### **V. Topics for Commission Consideration**

Does the Commission support moving forward with the VSI cultural resource monitoring approach and two draft indicators described in this report?

## **Appendix A: Engagement with Columbia River Treaty Tribes**

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Below is a summary of Commission staff's initial steps to engage more deeply with Tribes on VSI monitoring and climate change action. This work to learn from each Tribe and become better stewards of the lands and waters they have taken care of since time immemorial is ongoing and important for all aspects of our agency's work. We are grateful for opportunities to discuss priorities with Tribes and look forward to continuing our work together over time.

### *Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation*

- Staff from the Gorge Commission met with Yakama Nation Climate Action Plan lead to discuss respective 2023 climate action priorities in February 2023. Gorge Commission is partnering with Yakama Nation Fisheries Program to implement cold water refuge monitoring and First Foods education efforts in their Environmental Justice Government-to-Government grant proposal focused on First Foods and climate resilience in Yakama Nation ceded territories (YN Fisheries submitted proposal in April 2023; status of funding unknown at time of this report).
- Staff from the Gorge Commission and Forest Service met with Yakama Nation cultural resources staff in June 2022.
- Staff from Yakama Nation Fisheries participated in the VSI Natural Resources and Climate Change Work Group from March 2021–November 2021 and the Climate Change Action Plan Review Committee from March 2021–April 2022.

### *Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs*

- Staff from the Gorge Commission and Forest Service met with Warm Springs cultural resources staff in July 2022.

### *Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation*

- Staff from the Gorge Commission met with Umatilla Climate Adaptation Planner to discuss respective 2023 climate action priorities in February 2023.
- Staff from the Gorge Commission and Forest Service met with Umatilla cultural resources staff in August 2022.
- Staff from Umatilla participated in the Climate Change Action Plan Review Committee that met between March 2021–April 2022.

### *Nez Perce Tribe*

- Staff from the Gorge Commission is currently coordinating with Nez Perce cultural resources staff and Forest Service staff on a meeting for summer or fall 2023.

## Appendix B: VSI Monitoring Definitions

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**Management Plan Goal:** A goal included in the text of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan.

**Desired Condition:** *To be developed.* (Example: Often a statement of aspiration that describes resource conditions the USDA Forest Service and Gorge Commission strive to achieve and maintain to meet Management Plan goals.)

**Management Question:** A priority question or information need identified by the Gorge Commission and USDA Forest Service to support implementing the Management Plan.

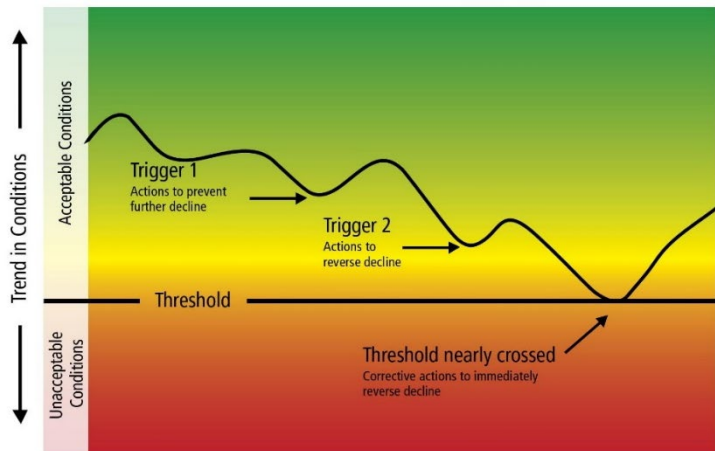
**Vital Sign:** The topic for a high-level indicator. Represents important attributes or components of protected resources that guide assessment of progress toward Management Plan goals and desired conditions (e.g., Archeological Resources). Each Vital Sign is represented by one or more indicators.

**Indicator:** A brief description of what is being measured (e.g., number of new archeological resources identified each year).

**Metric:** The specific measurement method or unit of measurement for an indicator.

**Threshold:** *To be developed.*  
(Example: A minimally acceptable condition associated with each indicator, typically based on physical, biological, or social conditions.)

**Trigger:** *To be developed.* (Example: A condition of concern for an indicator that is enough to prompt a management response to ensure that desired conditions continue to be maintained before the threshold is crossed.)



## Appendix C: Indicator Selection Criteria

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In February 2021, the Commission approved the following criteria to guide selection of updated indicators across all VSI topic areas including climate change, natural resources, scenic resources, cultural resources, recreation, and economic vitality.

1. **Measurable:** Indicators should be directly measurable through repeatable quantitative or qualitative methods.
2. **Relevant to management actions:** Indicators should provide information on the condition of protected resources related to specific Management Plan provisions.
3. **Clear:** Indicators should be understandable by the public and policymakers.
4. **Consistently available:** Indicator data should be reliably available over time to track long-term status and trends.
5. **Obtainable:** Indicator data should be available through existing monitoring programs whenever possible.
6. **Cost-effective:** Indicator data acquisition, analysis, and reporting should make efficient use of limited financial and staff resources.
7. **Additional Consideration:** While criteria 1-6 should be the primary criteria for selecting indicators, the ability of indicators to tell a *compelling story* that calls attention to the status of scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources, and economies, of the National Scenic Area, should also be considered.

## Appendix D: Crosswalk of 2009 Cultural Resource Vital Sign Indicators and 2023 Draft Cultural Resource Vital Signs

This chart describes how the 2023 Draft Cultural Resource Vital Signs highlighted in this report build upon the 2009 Cultural Resource Vital Sign Indicators.

2009 Cultural Resource Vital Sign Indicators								2023 Cultural Resource Vital Signs
Objective	Vital Sign Number	Title	Measure	Proxy Measure	Year Reported	Connects to Management Plan Provision? YES/NO/UNCLEAR	Management Plan Reference and Notes	
4.1 Protect and Enhance Significant Archaeological Resources	4.1.a	Condition	Percent of all monitored archaeological sites in good condition	Percent of assessments of effect* per year resulting in an adverse effect finding (*Number of assessments of effect conducted each year is driven by new project applications. The number and type of applications can vary widely from year to year.)	2009	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources. Ensure that proposed development and uses do not have adverse effects on significant cultural resources.	
	4.1.b	Awareness	Percent of stakeholders with understanding of the archaeological resource protection process		2011	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.1.c	Awareness	Percent of residents of and visitors to the gorge with understanding of the importance of archaeological		2011	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.1.d	Inventory	Number of new significant archaeological resources identified each year		2009	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
4.2 Protect and Enhance Significant Historic Resources	4.2.a	Condition	Percent of all monitored historic resources in good condition	Percent of assessments of effect per year resulting in an adverse effect finding	2009	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources. Ensure that proposed development and uses do not have adverse effects on significant cultural resources.	
	4.2.b	Awareness	Percent of stakeholders with understanding of the historic resource protection process		2011	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.2.c	Awareness	Percent of residents of and visitors to the gorge with understanding of the importance of historic		2011	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.2.d	Inventory	Number of new significant historic resources identified each year		2009	YES--Vital Sign topic connects with MP resource protection goals; Review of measure needed	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
4.3 Protect and Enhance Significant Traditional Cultural Properties	4.3.a	Condition	Percent of all monitored traditional cultural properties in good condition		2011	YES--connects to MP, though not appropriate as Vital Sign based on confidential nature of these sites--see VSI assessment for details	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.3.b	Awareness	Percent of stakeholders with understanding of the traditional cultural properties protection process		2011	YES--connects to MP, though not appropriate as Vital Sign based on confidential nature of these sites--see VSI assessment for details	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.3.c	Awareness	Percent of residents of and visitors to the gorge understanding the importance of traditional cultural properties		2011	YES--connects to MP, though not appropriate as Vital Sign based on confidential nature of these sites--see VSI assessment for details	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	
	4.3.d	Inventory	Number of new significant traditional cultural properties identified each year		2011	YES--connects to MP, though not appropriate as Vital Sign based on confidential nature of these sites--see VSI assessment for details	Protect and enhance cultural resources.	

Archeological Resources

Historic Structures

Focus on First Foods/Culturally Important Plants and Wildlife through Habitat Vital Signs (Cold Water Refuge Streams, Wetlands, Grasslands, Oak Woodlands, and Coniferous Forests)