

Columbia River Gorge Commission

Meeting Minutes

July 8, 2025

In person and via Zoom Webinar

The Gorge Pavilion

395 SW Portage Rd

Cascade Locks, Oregon

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT

Laura Brennan Bissell – 9:17 am

Valerie Fowler

Alex H. Johnson – via Zoom

Lach Litwer

Donna Mickley

Robert Liberty

Jerry Meninick

Carina Miller

Michael Mills

Rodger Nichols

Pah-tu Pitt – via Zoom

Nathan Reynolds – via Zoom

Amy Weissfeld

COMMISSIONER MEMBERS ABSENT

STAFF PRESENT

Mackenzie Aamodt, Land Use Planner

Connie Acker, Finance & Administration Manager

Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Action Program Manager

Sage Ebel, Natural Resource Planner

Kelly Foster, Public Records & Administrative Analyst

Bryce Guske, Senior Planner

A Hunter, Intern

Colin Jarvis, Climate Corps Fellow Intern

Jeff Litwak, Legal Counsel

Mike Schrankel, GIS Manager

Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

AUDIENCE PRESENT

Chris Barber

Stan Biles

Oregon Senator Daniel Bonham
Lynn Burditt – USDA Forest Service
Keith Cleveland – Hood River County
Regan Coordes – Three Rivers AV
Dan Corcoran
Kendra Curtis
Sheila Dooley
Jack Garvin
Karen Heinemann
Patrick Hollander
Dr. Kelly Howsley-Glover – Wasco County
Madison Kenney – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Gil Kelley – Oregon Investment Board
Jovonne Lentz
Patricia Lewis
Terra Lingley – Oregon Department of Transportation
Aaron Meier
Amanda Mills
Tyler Stone – Wasco County
Renee Tkach – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Troy Watlamet – Yakama Nation
Shane Wolfe
Rick Wolfe

Others were present during the meeting.

Call to Order and Roll (9:00 a.m.) Chair Michael Mills called the meeting to order, and Connie Acker called roll.

Approval of June 10, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes (9:02 a.m.) Commissioner Fowler asked for a review of the recording and to clarify that all presentations should be postponed, not specifically the Avarna group’s presentation, as she wanted to discuss policy and governance issues. She also asked to review the notes and see if Multnomah County was mentioned in the section about outreach to counties. Commissioner Fowler moved to adopt the June 10, 2025, meeting minutes with those amendments, and Commissioner Liberty seconded. The June 10, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes were approved by a voice vote. Commissioner Rodger Nichols and Carina Miller abstained as they did not attend the June 10, 2025, meeting.

Land Acknowledgment (9:05 a.m.) Commissioner Amy Weissfeld read the Land Acknowledgment.

Treaty Tribe Word of the Day (9:07 a.m.) Commissioner Carina Miller shared: In their language, they do not use all the letters that English uses, and they have some additional letters not found in English, such as a barred

X, a barred L, and a delta. She is trying to find phrases that use multiple of those sounds to teach her four children. She shared ayáyat ʔkw'í, meaning beautiful day, from an Ichishkiin greeting, "I'm thankful for this beautiful day."

Opportunity for Treaty Tribe Nations to Address Commission (9:08 a.m.) As part of the Government-to-Government consultation process, the Commission welcomes input from Treaty Tribe Nations on any issue on the agenda and other matters. The Treaty Tribe Nations did not offer testimony.

Public comment on items related to the National Scenic Area (NSA) not on the agenda (9:10 a.m.)

- Written Public Comment – Wasco County re: Rowena Fire dated July 7, 2025 (Attachment A)
- Theresa "Reese" Mugerditchian and her husband Mark Mugerditchian
 - Shared that they are from Illinois and have an 18-acre tree farm in Skamania County.
 - Asked that the Commission consider revising short-term rental/overnight accommodation rules, understanding that the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area must carefully balance aesthetic preservation and access management.
 - Noted that accessing scenic beauty is different for each visitor and provided examples of different needs for recreation access:
 - Kiteboarders and adventure seekers recreate different from some people, like her older family members.
 - Short-term rentals offer a unique experience that hotels, motels, and resorts do not.
 - Home environments may reduce barriers to access for those with mobility differences or families with small children or pets.
 - Stated that taxes and fees generated from overnight accommodations on private property could become a revenue stream for state and local budgets. Suggested usage fees as a possible revenue stream and shared some examples of economic benefits:
 - Noted that their home generated \$9,086 in state and local taxes in 2022.
 - One rental paying a \$10 nightly fee for 183 nights would generate \$1,830 in revenue that could go back to the Scenic Area.
 - Stated that affordable housing in urban centers is a big problem and that forcing overnight accommodations into urban centers is not healthy and that finding balance where all land types share will help urban centers with affordable housing.

- Noted that they proposed some draft revisions in hard copies and digitally distributed to the commissioners.
- (Attachment B - written public comment)
- Kendra Curtis
 - Introduced herself as a resident of The Dalles, living in the area near Rowena devastated by the recent wildfire. She shared that her house is still standing but many neighbors' houses are not. She shared that this traumatic event has shaken her resolve to live here.
 - Expressed that while she appreciates what the Gorge Commission is trying to do, she believes it has missed the mark for people who live here through strict regulations that have limited homeowners' ability to protect their interests in the event of wildfire.
 - Shared her experience as a homeowner within the Scenic Area:
 - Eight years ago, they found a house they liked in the Scenic Area and chose to remodel.
 - Stated they were told they could not have a metal roof and when they asked repeatedly, were told the roof would create shine for cars driving on I-84. She stated the house is not visible to eastbound traffic and would only be visible to westbound traffic if really paying attention for about five seconds.
 - Stated metal roofs are one of the safest materials you can have in a wildfire-prone area.
 - Stated that the Gorge Commission stipulated planning a certain number of trees that they could not cut down other trees without approval.
 - Stated that the Gorge Commission has a responsibility to ensure that residents can take necessary precautions to protect houses and property from wildfire, and a responsibility to protect the people who live here, and not just land use monitoring.
 - Expressed that if the Gorge Commission wants to protect the beauty of this area, burned houses are not the way to do it.
 - Raised several questions for the Commission including:
 - Whether the Gorge Commission is considering what is best for homeowners in the event of wildfire, or if the Commission is only concerned with beautification of the area.
 - Whether the Commission had toured the fire area and whether any policies are going to change, as she noted this topic was not on today's agenda.
 - Whether the Gorge Commission has any jurisdiction over railroads that come through and what the Gorge Commission can do about their involvement in fires; she stated there have been repeated oil spills and wildfires caused by railroads.

- Why the Gorge Commission has strict rules for residents but does not take action over entities like the railroads.
 - Why railroads are allowed to have mile-long, shiny railroad cars coming through the area.
 - Stated that the village of Rowena and Highway 30 residents want to protect their property as they see fit. Stated they are private people and what every homeowner should have: the right to decide what happens on their own property.
 - Noted they bought it and the Gorge Commission did not; they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy their home and want to protect it.
 - Expressed that the Gorge Commission's interests are in opposition to homeowners' interests.
 - Requested that moving forward, some stipulations be relaxed for homeowners rebuilding after this devastating wildfire.
 - (Attachment C - written public comment)
- Chair Mills: Thanked Kendra Curtis for the comments and noted that staff and the Executive Director have been meeting with Wasco County and reviewing regulations to see where changes could assist people in rebuilding.
- Commissioner Liberty: Asked staff to clarify whether the existing management plan prohibits metal roofs.
 - Wolniakowski: Explained that metal roofs are not prohibited and noted staff have been working on defensible space guidelines and handouts. Emphasized that the Commission wants resilient homes in the Scenic Area.
- Commissioner Weissfeld: Thanked Ms. Curtis and reminded the public that the Management Plan is available online at <https://www.gorgecommission.org/management-plan/plan/>. Noted that page 187 details that roofing materials must be fire-resistant, such as metal, fiberglass, or asphalt shingles, or tile.
- Commissioner Brennan Bissel:
 - Thanked the speakers for their comments and expressed that the Commission's hearts are with the fire victims.
 - Stated that several community members and commissioners have brought metal roofs to the agency's attention.
 - Stated that while metal roofs are theoretically allowed, color stipulations may dramatically increase the cost.
- Kendra Curtis:
 - Stated that she was told multiple times eight years ago that she could not have a metal roof, before finally being told they could

- have a metal roof with a protective coating that put it out of their price range.
 - Expressed that homeowners want to be able to cut down trees close to their house, regardless of how big they are or how beautiful they look from the highway.
- Chair Mills: Invited staff to comment or clarify the requirements.
 - Wolniakowski: Described the visual subordination standards and requirements for screening trees and explained that staff have been working with fire-resistant community resources to identify designs that may keep homes safe in fire zones.
- Jack Garvin:
 - Introduced himself as a resident of Rowena whose house did not burn and has many neighbors who are suffering terribly.
 - Expressed that community experiences with real life implementation can be different from what is in the National Scenic Act and the Management Plan.
 - Stated there are experiences from the community where metal roofs were not approved due to reflectivity and it is a point of contention.
 - Regarding trees, expressed that the legislation, standards, and execution are great, but sometimes someone just needs to cut a tree down.
 - Stated that the disaster and emergency sections of the Plan allow rebuilding in the exact footprint/location. Expressed concerns that owners of smaller homes or mobile homes may not be able to build on the same footprint and meet building standards.
 - Expressed that many of the community do understand and appreciate execution on the National Scenic Area Act, but that residents need a break from a wall of requirements.
 - Stated that Wasco County charges \$3,800 because Scenic Area reviews are complex and require staff time. Suggested that many Rowena residents do not have \$3,800, and many didn't have insurance.
 - Expressed that affordable housing in Rowena needs to be replaced with higher-quality housing, and the process cannot take two years.
- Commissioner Fowler:
 - Thanked Garvin for his comments and was glad to see representatives from Wasco County present in the meeting.
 - Reassured that the Gorge Commission appreciates that conditions have not been static since 1986. Stated there are provisions to open up amendments due to changed conditions, and there is

- active conversation about ADU issues, affordable housing, and the Rowena Fire.
 - Noted that 56 applications at once for Wasco County staff was not something anyone anticipated, and the Gorge Commission is eager to assist.
- Garvin: Pointed out that there may be 100 permits or more filed for all structures.
 - Fowler: Agreed that at least 91 structures were destroyed. Stated that Wasco County is working to support applicants, and the Gorge Commission staff will have a role. Stated that the Gorge Commission itself will have a role in appreciating changed conditions.
 - Noted that the County planning office makes many decisions, and the Gorge Commission only does planning review for Klickitat County, and the other counties' reviews only come to the Gorge Commission if there is an appeal.
- Commissioner Brennan Bissell:
 - Stated that counties are in frequent communication with the Gorge Commission and that there is friction and debate as to whether things are allowed. Expressed concern that there is a lot of blockage and surveys that need to happen.
 - Stated that Wasco County has a homelessness crisis and asked if representatives from Wasco County know the median household income and median rent for a single-family home or 2–3-bedroom apartment.
- Commissioner Liberty:
 - Expressed sorrow and stated he cannot imagine what it must be like to lose a home. Noted, it is not just material loss, but all the community's memories.
 - Expressed the importance of manufactured homes and mobile home parks in providing affordable housing. Stated that footprint requirements should be reviewed in that context.
 - Noted that since drafting of the Management Plan there have been new modular home types developed. Stated there are intersections with building codes and fire safety.
 - Noted that it may be beyond the Commission's scope, but that Oregon has opportunities for residents to buy their own parks by forming ROCs (resident-owned communities).
 - Suggested creative thinking and approaches to the tragedy.
- Commissioner Nichols:
 - Offered a report on Wasco County conditions to provide context for the Commission, and thanked Dr. Howsley-Glover for her research.

- Stated that 56 homes, 91 structures, and over 100 vehicles were destroyed in the fire.
 - Explained that Rowena was a community service center, an unincorporated community, since before the Scenic Area Act was passed. Tooley Terrace was planned as a subdivision in 1954, and a mobile home park, Rowena Crest Manor, was planned in the 1960s. Stated that most development along Highway 30 is equally historic.
 - Stated that the community has high density with low- and middle-class families and includes members of the Latinx community.
 - Stated that census data shows 59.4% of the community is in poverty, with a 32% unemployment rate.
 - Median gross rent is \$961/month, compared to the median gross rent in Oregon of \$1,481 month.
 - Stated that for rural residential zones outside the Scenic Area, staff time to permit a replacement dwelling is two weeks. Noted, this is a clear and objective standard, as well as a long-term goal.
 - Noted the County's desire to implement a recent state law that allows disaster victims to live in an RV for up to five years, and to permit the RV park on county-owned property next to The Dalles' Urban Growth Boundary as a staging area.
 - Requested the Commission to think about mercy as well as justice.
- Commissioner Brennan Bissell:
 - Asked if vehicles that people were living in are counted as homes. Noted that when she hears vehicles being burned down, she thinks about people or families living in pickup trucks.
 - Requested consideration of the expense of remediation of toxic soils and lands after structures burn. Emphasized the need to ensure people have clean spaces to live.
- Commissioner Nichols:
 - Stated that his personal experience is that people living in vehicles tend to live in urban areas to be closer to access services.
 - Also noted that several residents lost septic systems and may need to rebuild in a new location to realign septic. Requested a careful look at making sure those people can rebuild without roadblocks.
- Rick Wolfe:
 - Questioned how many commissioners are familiar with the railroad swath of 50 feet of noncombustible area required by Oregon Revised Statutes.
 - Stated his belief that Wasco County, the Forest Department, the railroad, and the Gorge Commission are partially responsible for the lack of maintenance.
 - Suggested looking at this situation instead of the tone of roofs.

- Drew attention to where the fire started and stated his belief that people are not safe right now. Stated that it takes eight hours to walk the path he was videotaping, and it could be cleared in one day.
- Expressed that everybody should follow the law along the railroad track, including people throwing cigarette butts or trains dragging chains, or broken glass bottles that reflect and work as a magnifying glass.
- Daniel Bonham:
 - Introduced himself as an Oregon State Senator for the section of Oregon from Canby up to Mount Hood and out the Gorge into The Dalles.
 - Stated that the people the Commission has heard from are his constituents. Thanked them for voicing concerns about historic issues, fire resiliency, flammable materials, and their rights to upgrade and fireproof homes.
 - Expressed appreciation for the conversations about roof materials and stated that the back and forth showcased what some constituents have experienced with this Commission.
 - Stated his primary concern is process and timeliness. Explained that at one time he looked at property in The Dalles within the National Scenic Area, and Wasco County stated to expect a 6–8-month review process for any plans.
 - Expressed that the process needs to be expedited.
 - Expressed willingness to help if there is anything the legislation can do to facilitate.
 - Stated he will look into ORS and federal guidelines for defensible space and flammable material around the railway rights of way. Noted that the state needs to take it seriously and is already talking to power companies about their rights-of-way and clearing power lines. Stated that trains and highways are no different and that high grass and hot cars can have the same impact.
 - Reiterated that his number one concern is that people can rebuild and asked the Gorge Commission to expedite the process.
- Shane Wolfe:
 - Introduced himself as the son of Richard Wolfe, who provided video comment earlier.
 - Stated he does not live in the city but is helping his dad.
 - Expressed that he sees an entire community with all different parts of their life directly affected, and everyone trying to get back into their property as fast as possible.
 - Noted that Mr. Bonham brought up ORS 477.695 and stated there is a homeless camp in the Dalles down by the train tracks, and

- there is overgrowth. Stated that there is a hazard today that this could happen again.
- Expressed concern for how long it will take for his dad to have a home and stated he is ready to put a tent there.
- Tyler Stone, Administrative Officer for Wasco County:
 - Noted that many people across the state are working on recovery efforts.
 - Stated that the first priority is safety for those in the fire zone, and they are gearing up for HAZMAT response; DEQ is doing HAZMAT cleanup for this incident, and starting with air quality monitoring and soil testing.
 - DEQ has contractors who have gone through the contracting process, and one of them will be on-site this week to start hazmat cleanup. As soon as that is completed, there will be a brief window for folks to get back into their sites to look for things. Then they will roll into formal debris cleanup coordinated by DEQ.
 - Explained that the area has two public water systems and many private wells. Stated that the North Central Public Health District is doing water testing to get back up and running with potable water. Noted that one public water system was severely damaged at Rowena Crest and that Tooley Terrace has water pressure, but is not potable water at this point.
 - Explained they are hosting Multi Agency Resource Center (MARC) meetings, bringing all agencies that respond into one room where folks can ask questions. The first meetings focused on immediate needs response and safety by providing Tyvek suits and respirators to enable people to re-enter the fire area.
 - Now meetings are transitioning more into recovery approaches and will be dialed into specific aspects of recovery. For example, one of those will cover planning and building codes.
 - As incident command, he formally invited the Gorge Commission to tour the site and look for themselves, and is coordinating with the Executive Director on a date. Stated that until you've been there, you don't understand what really happened, and encouraged commissioners to take a hard look at the challenges residents are experiencing as they try to rebuild.
 - Commissioner Liberty: Asked if there are any theories on how the fire started, and asked where it started.
 - Stone: Stated that it is under investigation. Stated his belief that it started approximately near milepost 76 along I-84.
 - Commissioner Nichols: Asked about subsidiary effects on water districts and explained concern that, with homes gone, will water bills be paid?

Noted that the water district may not be sustainable if it cannot afford to stay in business without homes.

- Commissioner Brennan Bissell: Asked if there were any burn backs in this fire and if it is known what direction they went?
 - Stone: Asked for clarification if the question is about prescribed burns to stop fire activity.
 - Commissioner Mickley: Initially stated that, to her knowledge, there were no burn-offs. She later corrected this, noting that on the southwest corner of the fire, there was a pocket that did not extend all the way out to the line, and there were isolated burn-offs aimed at creating 300 feet of black to hold the fire.
- Executive Director Wolniakowski:
 - Thanked Stone and noted they met a week ago to talk about what the Gorge Commission could do together with Wasco County. Noted that we all have broken hearts due to people losing their homes, not just structures, but also all their possessions. Noted, there are emergency management provisions, but staff are trying to be creative in how they can help, including accelerated timelines and responsiveness.
 - Noted they discussed a tour for the end of July and need to figure out a date and see how many can attend.
 - Noted she met with DEQ during the Governor's Cabinet meeting and is in touch with Oregon Emergency Management Services to be in touch with their discussions.

USDA Forest Service Report (10:08 a.m.) Donna Mickley, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Forest Supervisor, and Nicolas Granum, Deputy Forest Supervisor, provided updates on Forest Service activities in the National Scenic Area:

- Described excellent response to the Wyeth Fire from partners, including the Oregon Department of Forestry and local fire stations.
- Stated that so far, there have been 32 responses to fires in the Gorge, including the devastating Rowena fire. Stated they are heavily staffed and have the ability to get severity funding and pre-position additional resources. Expressed gratitude for the resources they have and any partners who respond, regardless of jurisdiction.
- Stated that statistically, they suppress 98% of fires on Forest Service land within initial attack, and 2-3% turn into large wildland fires.
- Described the fire season situation nationally.
- Noted there will soon be a scoping letter on a forest health and resilience project, with the first area to cover from Mitchell Point eastward.

- Explained they have a budget and funding and are spending as quickly as possible before the cutoff of September 15th to have money spent and contracts awarded.
- Provided an update on the Dog Mountain shuttle system that saw an increase in shuttle rides by over 500 people. Noted that grant funding for the next two seasons was not awarded, and they are regrouping with Columbia Area Transit and Skamania County to see how that will look in the future.
- Described work at the Klickitat Mile One day-use area to restore it as a great place to access the river by putting a life jacket loaner station there to encourage safe recreation.
- Noted the Forest Service is gathering a group to plan for sustainable trails across federal land, and with interconnected trails.
- Described some upcoming updates to the Hut at Eagle Creek and engineering at Multnomah Falls.

Commissioner Comments and Questions

- Commissioner Brennan Bissel: Asked if Nicolas Granum would be joining and if he is permanently staying in the Scenic Area.
 - Commissioner Mickley: Confirmed he is permanent and explained he is on his way to the Olympic National Forest fire, so he would not be able to join.

BREAK – 10:15-10:29 a.m.

Work Session:* Developing the 2025-2027 CRGC Work Plan (10:29 a.m.) Krystyna U. Wolniakowski provided an overview of a draft work plan for discussion, based on the Commission’s priorities, administrative requirements for managing the agency, and the available staff and budget resources. (Attachment D)

Commissioner Comments and Questions

- Commissioners discussed various items in the draft work plan, including:
 - ADR Phase 3, and whether the work from prior phases would be lost, and how it might impact the availability of public records.
 - Whether the Commissioner Fund covered salaries.
 - Connie Acker: Explained that the Commissioner Fund covers stipends that vary by state, per diem, business cards, and risk pool fees.
 - How staff can stay within the reduced hours, and how reductions might impact timelines for rebuilding work.
 - Commissioners expressed interest in engaging with legislators to restore funding and discussed how to present budget impacts to

the public and how to communicate effectively about the work staff does.

- How much staff time goes towards upholding the economic purpose of the National Scenic Area Act, and ways to support economic development.
- Reducing the number of full Commission meetings, given the decrease in staff resources and the increased number of Committee meetings.
- Whether to pursue Plan amendments or Management Plan review, with considerations including:
 - Constrained resources at the Gorge Commission staff and resource needs of the five Counties. Commissioners requested more information comparing the time and effort required for each option at the next meeting.
 - Potential topics raised included changing conditions around housing and review of uses like ADUs, STRs, and
 - Changing conditions around large- and small-scale agriculture and the Agricultural Income Test.
- Commissioners discussed ways to accomplish targeted fire relief efforts, whether through a Plan Amendment or some other approach.

Public Comment on the 2025-2027 CRGC Work Plan

- No public comment was offered.

Moved by Commissioner Liberty and seconded by Commissioner Johnson:
Motion to endorse staff recommendations regarding the 2025-27 work plan, subject to discussion of the relative merits of plan updates as opposed to amendments.

The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

LUNCH BREAK - 12:18 – 12:52 p.m.

Statement from the Chair (12:52 p.m.) Chair Mills shared reflections on the recent Economic Vitality Committee meeting and his response to Commissioner Brennan Bissell’s nomination as chair of the committee. He expressed his hope to foster a respectful and constructive environment as the Commission Chair. Commissioners discussed concerns about tone and tenor, misogyny, power dynamics, and sexism, and expressed desires to move forward with compassion, grace, and openness.

Committee Reports (1:11 p.m.)

- Communications Committee Meeting on June 29, 2025 – Committee Chair Amy Weissfeld reported:

- The Committee received an in-depth presentation on social media, and the bottom line was that as a public agency, the Gorge Commission has responsibilities, and they may be onerous around public records.
 - The Committee's suggestion is to turn public comments off. Commissioner Alex Johnson generously offered to create content for social media posts, allowing the Gorge Commission to establish a brand and respond more quickly to events within the Scenic Area.
 - The Committee discussed the overall communications strategy, updating the website, and additional outreach to various audiences, including legislators and county partners.
- Economic Vitality Committee Meeting on June 29, 2025 – Committee Chair Litwer reported:
 - Commissioner Brennan Bissel and Commissioner Litwer will co-lead the Committee. There will be a one-hour meeting following the Executive Committee meeting.
 - There is a draft scope of work to review as co-leads; once it is finished, the committee will share that information.
 - Shared that the Executive Director can share more background on the Economic Vitality Committee upon request, but in the interest of time, did not expand on that in this meeting.
- Jeff Litwak shared that he emailed commissioners guidance around communications within Committees and outside Committees, and hopes it offers clarity for commissioners about how they can accomplish tasks collaboratively.
- Commissioners discussed social media use, including:
 - Alternatives to turning off comments, like allowing comments, screenshotting them daily, but not devoting time to responding to comments.
 - Resources other agencies devote to social media and exploring partnerships with other agencies to use their software.
 - How much staff time might be needed to operate social media accounts.
 - Commissioners agreed to finalize the plan in the Committee meeting.
- Executive Committee Meeting on June 29, 2025
 - Commissioner Fowler:
 - Stated her belief that the evolution of the committee has become approving the agenda for the coming meeting.
 - Stated that, in her experience, executive committees are involved in policy and governance, and they prepare those for decisions by the full Commission. Added that she would like to

see the Executive Committee play a more robust role in policy and governance.

- Wolniakowski: Shared some history of the executive committee and that in the past, substantive discussions during Executive Committee meetings led to some commissioners feeling left out of important discussions, while other commissioners felt that discussions were repetitive between the Executive Committee and the full Commission.
- Commissioner Fowler: Stated that the Management Plan had an expanded role for the executive committee and stated that there is a new commission, and decisions made in the past may or may not be embraced.

Information Item:* New Vital Sign Indicators Portal (1:31 p.m.) Sage Ebel, Vital Sign Indicators Planner, presented the Vital Signs Data Hub to the Commission, along with the first Vital Signs Annual Report. The Commission was invited to review the data hub after the meeting during a two-week preview period. The report also included a brief presentation from A Hunter, VSI Research Intern, on his work on recreation equity in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. (Attachment E)

Commissioner Comments and Questions

- Commissioners offered suggestions and comments on the data hub, including:
 - That the data hub could show how the Commission is supposed to react by showing desired safety or undesired risk levels.
 - A reminder of the purpose of the data, which is to monitor conditions over time with an eventual goal of being able to assess impacts on the Scenic Area and guide policy making.
 - Suggestions to tie policies more directly to the data collected; for example, focus on policies that directly impact water temperatures.
 - Discussion of the history of the VSI program and a reminder that indicator selection focused on indicators that the Gorge Commission could have some direct authority on through policy making.
 - Emphasizing the importance of measures of performance to assess whether actions were effective and measures of effects to assess whether the predicted effect was actually achieved.

Public Comment on the Vital Sign Indicators Portal

- Chris Barber:

- Introduced himself as a Cascade Locks resident and lifelong resident of Hood River County.
- Expressed concern that wildlife, other than Pika, has not been discussed and questioned why wildlife counts are not part of the VSI data, and what can be done to get data on ungulates, mountain lions, bears, etc.
 - Lisa Naas Cook: Explained that staff selected indicators based on the availability of data and that studies on wildlife populations are often state- or agency-specific, so it is difficult to view across the National Scenic Area. Explained that one goal is to get a handle on extent of habitat as a proxy for condition.
 - Commissioner Donna Mickley: Added that both states have agencies responsible for monitoring populations, and the Forest Service works in concert with those agencies and focuses on the habitats that they need.
 - Commissioner Weissfeld: Thanked Barber for raising the issue of trail construction impacting wildlife and stated that it is a perfect example of the balance between economic development, recreation, and conservation.
- Aaron Meier: Stated he had a question about Airbnbs and restrictions on having people stay in Airbnbs in the Gorge.
 - Connie Acker: Let him know that the public comment portion for general comments was earlier in the meeting and invited Meier to contact the Commission with comments or questions.

Work Session: * Staff Assessment of Oak Policy Issues (2:39 p.m.) Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Program Manager, and Bryce Guske, Senior Land Use Planner, provided an overview of a staff assessment of oak policy needs and issues that planners encounter in the National Scenic Area. The session focused on key themes identified and included Commission discussion. (Attachment F)

Commissioner Comments and Questions

- Several commissioners expressed concern about the step within the development review process when a project site occurs within 1000 feet of Oregon white oak habitat.
 - Concern that this means nothing can be built within 1,000 feet of a single Oregon white oak tree, which would prevent building on significant acreage.
 - Staff clarified that the presence of oak within 1,000 feet of a project site is a condition within the development review

process, and it is not the same as a no development buffer. The occurrence of oak within 1,000 feet of a proposed project is intended to alert the planner to consider oak habitat and does not, on its own, preclude development or trigger mitigation. Staff explained that maps have margins of error, and distances from specific habitats, such as oak, are used in the review process to help planners take a closer look at what is present on the site.

- Concern that this would prevent landowners from planting oak.
 - Questions about the age at which an oak tree is protected.
 - Staff clarified that the Management Plan does not include a specific age and that protection is based on technical guidance from state wildlife agencies, including tree diameter and extent of oak coverage across a site.
 - Concern about other factors that may damage oaks, like neighboring livestock grazing on young oaks in dry periods.
 - Discussion about why oak habitat is more valuable than other habitats, including its importance for climate mitigation.
 - Concern that oak habitat conversion to vineyards was specifically highlighted over other causes of conversion, and suggestions that oak habitat is not a good location for vineyards due to nematodes.
 - Staff clarified that agricultural land use trends have changed over time, and that data showed orchards and vineyards as agricultural uses with increases in the National Scenic Area.
- Colin Jarvis shared a brief update on the 2025 Climate Stewards community training course. Staff and Commissioners thanked Colin for his service over his 10-month Climate Corps Fellowship.

Public Comment on Staff Assessment of Oak Policy Issues

- Written public comment from Wasco County dated July 7, 2025, regarding Oregon White Oak Woodlands: Additional Data Analysis (Attachment G)

Other Business (3:29 p.m.)

- Wolniakowski announced:
 - Staff presentations are part of the work plan.
 - Joanna Kaiserman had a baby girl, and she would be on leave for the next few months.
- Litwak:
 - Reminded the Commission that there is an appeal hearing scheduled for the September 9, 2025, Commission Meeting, and

he will prepare the packet in mid-late August. The appeal is regarding a cell tower in Skamania County.

- Would be sending out a doodle poll to schedule the next Rules Committee meetings.
- Chair Mills:
 - Asked about the date for the next in-person meeting.
 - Wolniakowski: Responded that the next in-person meeting would likely be next spring, depending on the final number of meetings.
- Commissioner Miller: Requested a summit of all county commissioners and the Gorge Commission in one room.

Adjourn – 3:37 p.m.

Meeting Attachments:

- Attachment A – Written public comment dated July 7, 2025, from Wasco County re: Rowena Fire
- Attachment B - Written public comment from Theresa “Reese” Mugerditchian and Mark Mugerditchian re: short-term rental/overnight accommodations
- Attachment C – Written public comment from Kendra Curtis and Michael Jesch re: Rowena fire
- Attachment D – 2025-2027 Commission Work Plan Priorities
- Attachment E – Staff Report - Vital Sign Indicators Portal
- Attachment F – Staff Report – Staff Assessment of Oak Policy Issues in the CRGNSA
- Attachment G - Written public comment dated July 7, 2025, from Wasco County re: Oregon White Oak Woodlands

Approved – September 9, 2025