



Columbia River Gorge Commission

Meeting Minutes
December 16, 2025
via Zoom Webinar

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT

Laura Brennan Bissell
Valerie Fowler
Alex H. Johnson
Lach Litwer
Donna Mickley
Robert Liberty
Jerry Meninick
Carina Miller ~ 8:32 a.m.
Michael Mills
Rodger Nichols
Pah-tu Pitt ~ 9:39 a.m.
Nathan Reynolds
Amy Weissfeld

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Mackenzie Aamodt, Land Use Planner
Connie Acker, Finance & Administration Manager
Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Program Manager
Sage Ebel, Vital Sign Indicators Program Manager
Bryce Guske, Senior Planner
Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Planner
Jeff Litwak, Legal Counsel
Mike Schrankel, GIS Manager
Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

AUDIENCE PRESENT

Sean Bailey – Wasco County
Nathan Baker – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Angie Brewer – Oregon Department of Land Conservation & Development
Lynn Burditt
Aulena Carl – Yakama Nation
Lacy Carse

Chris (no last name)
Sheila Dooley
Daniel Dougherty – Wasco County
Rob Farris – Skamania County
Herman Flynn
Aiden Forsi – USDA Forest Service
Johny Haliday
Jess Harris
Scott Hege – Wasco County
Karen Heinemann
Dr. Kelly Howsley-Glover – Wasco County
Madison Kenney – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Nick Kraemer – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Asa Leckie – Skamania County
Terra Lingley – Oregon Department of Transportation
Steve McCoy – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Melissa Napoli – Wasco County
Edward “Ned” Peak
Mary Repar
Brenda Sorensen
Tyler Stone – Wasco County
Renee Tkach – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Caleb Wilmer – Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
Nathan Wilson – Gorge News
Lori Zoller – Klickitat County

Others were present during the meeting.

Call to Order and Roll (8:30 a.m.) Chair Michael Mills called the meeting to order, and Connie Acker called roll.

Approval of the November 12, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes (8:32 a.m.). Commissioner Rodger Nichols moved to adopt the November 12, 2025, meeting minutes, and Commissioner Amy Weissfeld seconded. The November 12, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes were approved by a voice vote. Commissioners Laura Brennan Bissell and Robert Liberty abstained as they did not attend the November 12, 2025, meeting.

Land Acknowledgment (8:33 a.m.) Connie Acker read the Land Acknowledgment.

Treaty Tribe Word of the Day (8:35 a.m.) Commissioner Meninick shared álxayx, which means month, as the Treaty Tribe Word of the Day. Commissioner Meninick noted that months are counted and are tied to the moon. Álxayx is how Indigenous peoples count their seasons. One way the

months were monitored was through the time ball. Certain people were assigned to care for the time ball.

Public comment on items related to the National Scenic Area (NSA) not on the agenda (8:37 a.m.)

- **Mary Repar**
 - Urged the Commission to become involved with the Cascade Renewable Transmission Project.
 - Concerned about the Goldendale Energy Storage Project and its impacts on Tribes. (Attachment A)
- **Asa Leckie, District 3 Skamania County Commissioner**
 - Response to Carina Miller’s email regarding Skamania County Commission’s comments on Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights and the proposed Plan Amendment.

Written Public Comment

- Public Comment - Sherri Irish dated 12/15/2025 (Attachment B)

Chair Mills urged Commissioners to be mindful and respectful of others during the Plan Amendment hearing. (8:48 a.m.)

Disaster Replacement Amendment Hearing* (8:49 a.m.) The Gorge Commission held a public hearing on a proposed Plan Amendment to the Management Plan addressing rebuilding in the National Scenic Area following a disaster. (Attachments C and D)

Opportunity for Treaty Tribe Nations to Address the Commission on the Plan Amendment, other items on the agenda, or any other matters (9:01 a.m.)

No Treaty Tribe representatives testified. Chair Mills asked Acker if she would monitor attendance and the Commission could return to Treaty Tribe comment later in the meeting.

Public Comment* on the Plan Amendment (9:02 a.m.)

- **Lori Zoller, District 2 Klickitat County Commissioner**
 - Outlined the recent meeting with Senator Curtis King at Commissioner Fowler’s residence.
 - Urged the Forest Service to prioritize consultation with the Treaty Tribes so that the USDA Secretary of Agriculture could approve the amendments to support the residents in the Special Management Area.

- Stated that Klickitat County sees the proposed amendments as an opportunity to support those suffering from disasters and as a positive indicator of the future relationship with the Gorge Commission.
- **Kelly Howsley-Glover, Wasco County Community Development Director**
 - Thanked the partnership of the Gorge Commission staff, US Forest Service staff, and the Gorge Commission for considering an amendment to modernize the disaster recovery portion of the Management Plan.
 - Stated that the Management Plan needs language to support communities expeditiously through the difficult recovery process, including temporary storage and housing, allowing people to remain within their community.
- **Mary Repar**
 - Asked if there are barriers to reconstruction.
 - Concerned about the use of the word "streamlining."
 - Concerned about Tribal cultural resources.
 - Urged the Commission to adhere to treaty rights.
- **Renee Tkach, Conservation Director, Friends of the Columbia Gorge**
 - Friends generally supports the Plan Amendment direction and offers a few changes:
 - Tribal treaty rights should not be bypassed.
 - Temporary structures need more clarity.
 - Counties should not be allowed to apply new Management Plan language that is not currently in county code.
- **Steve McCoy, Staff Attorney, Friends of the Columbia Gorge**
 - Friends generally supports the Plan Amendment and offers additional suggestions:
 - Truncated review of disaster replacements in the proposal sidesteps treaty rights.
 - The Plan Amendment should have a mechanism for the permitting authority to revert to full review if Tribal treaty rights are asserted per the normal expedited review process.
 - Review of temporary structures is insufficient.
- **Nick Kraemer, Senior Planner, Friends of the Columbia Gorge**
 - Significant change of conditions in the Gorge needs more discussion.
 - Friends recommends avoiding potential problems by adding more information to the final order or a future staff report, directly addressing each criterion and showing what the significant changes are in the Gorge and that nexus to what is being proposed in the Plan Amendment.
- **Nathan Baker, Senior Staff Attorney, Friends of the Columbia Gorge**

- Expressed concern that the Gorge Commission staff only addressed two of the six items in Friends' December 9, 2025, letter in its most recent staff report.
- Asked that Commission staff address the remaining items in Friends' letter and then present them to the full Commission.
- **Scott Hege, Position 1, Wasco County Commissioner**
 - Urged the Commission to consider moving forward with allowing temporary living in recreational vehicles and with allowing temporary structures for storage of personal property and building materials.
 - Stated that delays for immediate needs would further traumatize victims. Urged the Commission to do something, if not everything.

Written Public Comment

- Kelly Howsley-Glover, PhD, Wasco County Community Development Director, 12/2/2025 (Attachment E)
- Oregon Department of Land Conservation & Development, 12/3/2025 (Attachment F)
- Dunn Carney on behalf of Wasco County, 12/4/2025 (Attachment G)
- Friends of the Columbia Gorge, 12/9/2025 (Attachment H)
- Klickitat County Board of County Commissioners, 12/11/2025 (Attachment I)
- Skamania County Board of Commissioners, 12/12/2025 (Attachment J)

BREAK – 9:30 a.m.–9:50 a.m.

Commissioner Deliberation on Plan Amendment

Commissioner Donna Mickley stated that Tribal consultation continues. Forest Service and Commission staff continue to work to improve the amendment in response to Tribal comments.

Various Commissioners asked for clarification and commented on numerous items, including:

- Tribal consultation process and obligations
- USDA Secretary of Agriculture concurrence
- Whether the Plan Amendment addresses treaty rights
- Temporary structures
- Temporary RVs
- Significant change in the Gorge to justify the Plan Amendment
- Two-year time limit to apply and build
- Commission authority to require counties to implement the Plan Amendment before enacting their NSA ordinance
- Impacts of separating GMA and SMA provisions
- Special Commission meetings

- Canceling Commission meetings
- Language proposed by staff in response to issues discussed with The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. (Attachment K)

Moved by Commissioner Fowler:

Motion: Move that the Gorge Commission pass the Management Plan Amendments as described.

Commissioner Nichols seconded the motion.

A friendly amendment was agreed upon by Commissioners Fowler and Nichols to include language proposed by staff in response to issues discussed with The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. (Attachment K)

Commissioners continued with deliberation, comments, and questions regarding these topics:

- Expedited versus full review process relating to Tribal concerns
- Renewable temporary residence timelines
- Maintaining Tribal relationships developed over recent years
- Discretion on enforcement and complaint-based enforcement
- Appreciative of Commissioners advocating for their constituents
- Consultation requirements of Gorge Commission versus federal government

Chair Mills requested that the Commission return to comment from Treaty Tribe members in attendance.

- **Aulena Carl, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation**
 - Outlined the legal requirements for Tribal consultation after contacting Tribal legal counsel.
 - Shared a story about discovery of cultural resources on a piece of property in Klickitat County during rebuilding, not related to the Burdoin fire.

BREAK – 11:44 a.m.–11:54 a.m.

Commissioners continued with deliberation, comments, and questions regarding these topics:

- Difference between Rowena and Burdoin fires related to cultural resources
- Tribal consultation and comments regarding temporary residences and structures
- Immediate need for temporary shelter or structures versus immediate need to rebuild
- Possibility of bifurcating the proposed Plan Amendment to separate temporary shelter and structures from the expedited permitting process

- Bifurcation may cause additional delays by requiring two separate concurrence requests and decisions by the USDA Secretary of Agriculture

After Commission deliberation and consultation with Counsel Litwak, Commissioner Fowler stated that she would like to remain the maker of the motion and not withdraw it, but to hold it for discussion at the meeting scheduled for January 13, 2026. Commission Nichols concurred.

The Commission unanimously agreed by a voice vote to continue the Plan Amendment hearing until the January 13, 2026, Commission meeting.

Other Business (12:45 p.m.)

- 2026 Commission Meeting Schedule
 - Commission meetings will be scheduled every other month starting with the January 13, 2026, meeting.
- Resolution of Appreciation for Joyce Reinig. (Attachment L)
- Commissioner Brennan Bissell voiced concerns about serial meetings and requested training for Commissioners.
- Commissioner Litwer requested that the Rules Committee discuss policy related to canceling Commission meetings.
- Various commissioners thanked Chair Mills for his service to the Commission.
- Commissioner Weissfeld requested education on how the Commission should or could work more effectively with Tribal partners.
- Commissioner Fowler requested an update on the Avarna report and how it will be shared.
- Counsel Litwak:
 - Announced that all draft procedural rules have been reviewed, and the committee has given him authority to bring proposed rules to the full Commission for consideration.
 - Agreed to provide serial meetings training to the Commission and would start with the material provided to the Commission earlier in 2025.
- Wolniakowski announced that the Avarna report was deferred due to the urgent policy Plan Amendment work, and it will be addressed in 2026.

Adjourn – 1:12 p.m.

Meeting Attachments:

- Attachment A – Public comment – Mary Repar, 12/15/2025
- Attachment B – Public comment – Sherri Irish, 12/15/2025
- Attachment C – Staff Memo and Report – Management Plan Amendment for Disaster Recovery, 12/16/2025
- Attachment D – Staff Presentation – Plan Amendment Timeline, 12/16/2025
- Attachment E – Kelly Howsley-Glover, PhD, Wasco County Community Development Director, 12/2/2025
- Attachment F – Oregon Department of Land Conservation & Development, 12/3/2025
- Attachment G – Dunn Carney on behalf of Wasco County, 12/4/2025
- Attachment H – Friends of the Columbia Gorge, 12/9/2025
- Attachment I – Klickitat County Board of County Commissioners, 12/11/2025
- Attachment J – Skamania County Board of Commissioners, 12/12/2025
- Attachment K – Slide with additional language proposed by Commission staff
- Attachment L – Resolution of Appreciation for Joyce Reinig

Approved – January 13, 2026