



Columbia River Gorge Commission

Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2026
via Zoom Webinar

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT

Laura Brennan Bissell ~ 9:43 a.m.
Valerie Fowler
Casey Gatz – CRGNSA Deputy Forest Supervisor
Steve Hochman
Alex H. Johnson
Lach Litwer
Jerry Meninick ~ 8:44 a.m.
Carina Miller
Rodger Nichols
Pah-tu Pitt
Nathan Reynolds
Amy Weissfeld

COMMISSIONER MEMBERS ABSENT

Donna Mickley

STAFF PRESENT

Mackenzie Aamodt, Land Use Planner
Connie Acker, Finance & Administration Manager
Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Action Program Manager
Sage Ebel, VIS Program Manager
Kelly Foster, Public Records & Administrative Analyst
Bryce Guske, Senior Planner
Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Planner
Jeff Litwak, Legal Counsel
Mike Schrankel, GIS Manager
Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

AUDIENCE PRESENT

Mark Bailey
Nathan Baker – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Chris Barber
Angie Brewer – Oregon Department of Land Conservation & Development
Lynn Burditt
Caleb Wilmer – The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation

Aulena Carl – Yakama Nation
Keith Cleveland – Hood River County
Daniel Corcoran
Don (no last name)
Aiden Forsi – USDA Forest Service
Jess Harris
Karen Heinemann
Alexandra Howard – Multnomah County
Dr. Kelly Howsley-Glover – Wasco County
Madison Kenney – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Andrea Klaas – Port of The Dalles
Nick Kraemer – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Ilene Le Vee
Terra Lingley – Oregon Department of Transportation
Steve McCoy – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Natalie Oliver – Multnomah County
Kristy P (no last name)
Beatriz Parga
Edward “Ned” Peak
Elizabeth Peak
Lucas Rhyan – Multnomah County
Michael Sallis – Clark County
Andrew Smith
Lawrence Squiemphen III – Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, The
Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
Tyler Stone – Wasco County
Keri Tallorin – Multnomah County
Renee Tkach – Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Eric Walker – Hood River County
Troy Watlamet – Yakama Nation
Nathan Wilson – Gorge News

Others were present during the meeting.

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

Chair and Executive Director Comments (8:32 a.m.) Chair Miller shared her hopes for a productive year and reminded Commissioners of the Code of Conduct. Executive Director Wolniakowski provided guidance on public meetings and public records compliance.

Approval of December 16, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes (8:37 a.m.) Commissioner Fowler requested that Lori Zoller be added to the attendance record. Commissioner Weissfeld moved to adopt the December 16, 2025, meeting minutes, with the requested amendment, and

Commissioner Reynolds seconded. The December 16, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes, with the requested amendment, were approved by voice vote. Commissioner Steve Hochman abstained as he was not a Commissioner on December 16, 2025.

Land Acknowledgment (8:40 a.m.) Krystyna Wolniakowski read the Land Acknowledgment.

Treaty Tribe Word of the Day (8:41 a.m.) Commissioner Pitt shared ichaba/ íčaba (phonetic spelling), which means ice.

Public comment on items related to the National Scenic Area (NSA) not on the agenda (8:45 a.m.)

- **Beatriz Parga**
 - Expressed concern about landslide damage to various trails and requested that the Forest Service address concerns
 - Requested that the Forest Service also address concerns related to Sasquatch Shuttle parking lot at Multnomah Falls and provide an update regarding removal of ODOT emergency barriers

Written Public Comment

- Public Comment – Beatriz Parga dated 1/13/2026 (Attachment A)

Welcome new Gorge Commissioner Steve Hochman (8:48 a.m.) Commissioner Hochman was appointed by Hood River County, effective January 1, 2026, to the Gorge Commission, and he shared a summary of his background. (Attachment B)

Disaster Replacement Amendment Hearing* (8:52 a.m.). The Gorge Commission held a public hearing and voted on the proposed Plan Amendment to the Management Plan, which addresses rebuilding in the National Scenic Area after a disaster. (Attachments C and D)

Counsel Jeff Litwak described the Tribal Consultation process and outlined procedures for voting on the Plan Amendment.

Commissioner Litwer requested clarification on the cultural resource requirements in Special Management Areas when the footprint remains unchanged. Litwak clarified that it would apply in all cases per the Forest Service. Litwer asked about treaty rights; Litwak explained the process for addressing treaty rights concerns and confirmed that the effect is to move a review from expedited to full review.

Opportunity for Treaty Tribe Nations to Address the Commission on the Plan Amendment, other items on the agenda, or any other matters (9:05 a.m.)

- **Lawrence Squiemphen III, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs**
 - Noted that the lands hold cultural and spiritual significance because Tribal ancestors lived on, cared for, and relied upon the lands since time immemorial. These lands contain natural and cultural resources that Tribes continue to depend upon.
 - Replacement structures that do not meet the standards outlined in this proposal should not be reviewed under the expedited process
 - An expedited process is proposed for post-disaster replacements that meet specific standards. The Tribe asserts that the expedited process should not be available for post-disaster structures that differ in size or location from the original structure.
 - The Tribe asserts that expedited review should not be available for relocating septic systems. The Tribe asserts that a full review is necessary to ensure appropriate management of known and unknown cultural resources. The Tribe does not support changes that would allow expedited review for underground septic systems or for replacements that do not meet the proposal's standards.

Public Comment on the Plan Amendment (9:10 a.m.)

- No public comment was offered in the meeting.

Written Public Comment

- Kelly Howsley Glover, PhD, Wasco County Community Development Managing Director, dated 1/8/2026 (Attachment E)

Commissioner deliberation and vote on Plan Amendment (9:11 a.m.)

- Commissioners were reminded of the tabled motion from the December 16, 2025, Commission meeting.
- As the maker of the tabled motion, Commissioner Fowler asked that the motion be replaced with the motion referenced in the staff report.

Moved by Commissioner Fowler

Motion: Adopt the proposed plan amendment in Appendix A with the text changes to expedited review guideline 1.W and direct each county and the Gorge Commission to amend its National Scenic Area land use ordinance to adopt the plan amendment and to the extent possible, directly apply the plan amendment immediately after the Secretary of Agriculture concurs with the plan amendment and after

submitting its notice of intent to amend its land use ordinance in accordance with the National Scenic Area Act.

Commissioner Nichols seconded the motion.

Commissioner questions, comments, and discussion

- Commissioner Weissfeld: Asked whether there is an inventory of structures so that staff will know what the actual structures looked like at the time of the disasters, if rebuilding takes place ten years later.
 - Wolniakowski confirmed that there is an inventory of destroyed and damaged structures from these disasters.
- Commissioner Litwer: Asked whether the Treaty rights provision was part of the Plan Amendment.
 - Counsel Litwak confirmed that the provision was added.
- Commissioner Nichols: Read a prepared statement regarding the Rowena fire and the impact on residents and urged the Commission to pass the Plan Amendment today.
- Commissioner Johnson: Stated that the Commission's process does not feel nimble but noted that we cannot sidestep the process in place. Noted that many agencies and jurisdictions are involved. Encouraged innovative thinking about how to bring more resources, not just increased speed and flexibility.
- Commissioner Fowler:
 - Asked whether the Forest Service was prepared to recommend approval to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.
 - Asked the Forest Service to confirm that applications affected by this amendment will be prioritized by the archaeologists.
 - ▪ Natural Resources Staff Officer Casey Gatz confirmed that the Forest Service can recommend concurrence. Gatz also said he has personally instructed staff to prioritize these disaster replacements and that the Forest Service will do so.
 - Read a prepared statement describing how the Plan Amendment supports and benefits the second purpose of the Act, and urged the Commission to pass the Plan Amendment.
- Commissioner Pitt: Expressed appreciation for the Commission's swift response while also respecting the rights of Tribal Nations.

Roll Call Vote

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Motion 2	
Motion	Fowler
Seconded	Nichols
Adopt the proposed plan amendment in Appendix A with the text changes to expedited review guideline 1.W and direct each county and the Gorge Commission to amend its National Scenic Area land use ordinance to adopt the plan amendment and to the extent possible, directly apply the plan amendment immediately after the Secretary of Agriculture concurs with the plan amendment and after submitting its notice of intent to amend its land use ordinance in accordance with the National Scenic Area Act.	

	Yes	No	Abstain
Brennan Bissell	x		
Fowler	x		
Hochman	x		
Johnson	x		
Litwer	x		
Meninick	x		
Nichols	x		
Pitt	x		
Reynolds	x		
Weissfeld	x		
Miller - Chair	x		
Total	11	0	0

Break – (9:48 a.m. – 10:03 a.m.)

Executive Director’s Annual Evaluation Criteria* (10:03 a.m.)

Wolniakowski explained the Annual Executive Director Evaluation process. (Attachments F and G)

Public Comment*

- No public comment was offered.

Commissioners:

- Suggested Commissioners do not evaluate staff management as they do not have direct knowledge of day-to-day interactions with staff.
- Suggested adding a section related to the many committees, including attending and managing meetings, committee support, and liaison between the committees and the full Commission.
- Suggested a liaison between staff and the Commission.
- Reminded all Commissioners of the importance of completing this feedback.
- Questioned the desired level of interaction between Commissioners and staff.
- Suggested that staff know the work in more detail and may know better how to prioritize. Expressed concern about workload and prioritization for staff work.

The existing Executive Director Annual Performance Criteria were approved unanimously by voice vote.

Committee Assignments (10:21 a.m.)

Wolniakowski explained that the maximum number of commissioners on any committee is six; otherwise, the meeting must be noticed as a full commission meeting.

Counsel Litwak shared information about the Rules Committee's upcoming work plan to review the Bylaws and Code of Conduct and to complete updates to rules on open meetings, public records, administrative procedure, and conflicts.

Commissioners volunteered for the following committees:

Executive Committee

- Fowler
- Johnson
- Mickley/Gatz
- Miller
- Nichols
- Reynolds

Communications Committee

- Hochman
- Johnson
- Litwer
- Pitt
- Weissfeld

Economic Vitality Committee

- Brennan Bissell
- Hochman
- Johnson
- Litwer
- Pitt

Rules Committee

- Brennan Bissell
- Fowler
- Nichols
- Pitt

Oregon Investment Board

- Litwer

Washington Investment Board

- Meninick
- Reynolds – alternate if needed

The committee assignments outlined above were unanimously approved by voice vote.

USDA Forest Service Report (10:50 a.m.) Natural Resources Staff Officer Casey Gatz provided the following update:

- Commissioner Mickley apologized for not attending; she is in Washington, D.C., with all Forest Supervisors.
- Nicolas Granum, Deputy Forest Supervisor, is on assignment in the Gifford Pinchot as its Deputy Forest Supervisor until May 2026.
- The Forest Service is aware and is reviewing the Multnomah Falls parking issue on Highway 30 with legal counsel.
- The Forest Service is working with the Oregon Department of Transportation to remove temporary barriers when appropriate.
- The Forest Service is monitoring and coordinating with staff across the organization to reopen damaged trails as much as possible. There have been 15-20 trail work parties, either internally or with partners, to move 100s of trees. Some trails remain closed due to extensive damage, while others remain open while storm-damage repairs continue.

Other Business (10:57 a.m.)

2026 Supplemental Budget Update – Wolniakowski explained that staff prepared supplemental budget requests for licensing costs, DES administrative costs from the state, funding for the Klickitat County planning position, and funding to restore staff to full-time status. The Washington legislature did not recommend funding the Klickitat County planning position or restoring staff to full-time status, so those requests will be removed from the Oregon budget request package. Wolniakowski addressed the full House Appropriations Committee in Olympia and urged the committee to reconsider the Klickitat County planner position.

Commissioner Nichols: Asked for a timeline for the Plan Amendment and its submission to the USDA Secretary of Agriculture for concurrence.

- Counsel Litwak: Stated that he will prepare the final order for signature by the Chair, and Wolniakowski is preparing the transmittal letter to the Secretary of Agriculture. Both should be completed in the next couple of days.

Adjourn – 11:06 a.m.

Meeting Attachments:

- Attachment A – Public Comment – Beatriz Parga dated 1/13/2026
- Attachment B – Commissioner Stephen Hochman – Letter to Hood River County and Resume
- Attachment C – Staff Report and Text – Management Plan Amendment to Clarify and Address Landowners’ Needs for Disaster Recovery
- Attachment D – Plan Amendment Text Addition
- Attachment E – Public Comment – Kelly Howsley Glover, PhD, Wasco County Community Development Managing Director, dated 1/8/2026
- Attachment F – Executive Director Position Description
- Attachment G – Executive Director Annual Evaluation Criteria

Approved – March 10, 2026