



## **Columbia River Gorge Commission**

Meeting Minutes  
March 10, 2026  
via Zoom Webinar

### **COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT**

Casey Gatz – CRGNSA Acting Forest Supervisor  
Steve Hochman  
Alex H. Johnson  
Lach Litwer  
Jerry Meninick ~ 8:38 a.m.  
Carina Miller  
Nathan Reynolds  
Amy Weissfeld  
Rodger Nichols ~ 9:15 a.m.

### **COMMISSIONER MEMBERS ABSENT**

Laura Brennan Bissell  
Valerie Fowler  
Pah-tu Pitt

\*Commissioner Robert Liberty resigned from the Gorge Commission in January 2026. As of the date of this meeting, Multnomah County had not appointed a new Gorge Commissioner.

### **STAFF PRESENT**

Mackenzie Aamodt, Land Use Planner  
Connie Acker, Finance & Administration Manager  
Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Action Program Manager  
Sage Ebel, Vital Signs 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**

Lynn Burditt  
D'na Walela Chase  
Keith Cleveland – Hood River County

Sheila Dooley  
Laura Gephart – Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Elaine Harvey – Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Karen Heinemann  
Ubaldo Hernandez – Comunidades  
Dr. Kelly Howsley-Glover – Wasco County  
Buck Jones - Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Madison Kenney – Friends of the Columbia Gorge  
Dawn LeMieux – Next Door, Inc.  
Terra Lingley – Oregon Department of Transportation  
Steve McCoy – Friends of the Columbia Gorge  
Lisa Muñoz – Columbia Riverkeeper  
Jason O’Brien – Oregon State University Extension Service  
Michael Sallis – Clark County  
Colleen Sanders - Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission  
Renee Tkach – Friends of the Columbia Gorge  
Janet Wainwright - Friends of the Columbia Gorge  
Debra Whitefoot – Nch’i Wana Housing

Others were present during the meeting.

**Call to Order and Roll** (8:37 a.m.) Chair Carina Miller called the meeting to order, and Connie Acker called roll.

**Approval of December 16, 2025, Commission Meeting Minutes** (8:38)  
Commissioner Weissfeld moved to adopt the January 13, 2026, meeting minutes, and Commissioner Johnson seconded. The January 13, 2026, Commission Meeting Minutes were approved by a voice vote. Commissioner Steve Hochman abstained as he was not a Commissioner on December 16, 2025.

**Land Acknowledgment** (8:39) Joanna Kaiserman read the Land Acknowledgment.

**Treaty Tribe Word of the Day** (8:41) Commissioner Jerry Meninick shared that the everyday word for the number seven is túskaas, and uynáapt is used when the number is part of ceremonies. The number five is considered sacred, and uynáapt means five plus two. During ceremonies, counting is based on five. The numbers six, seven, and eight are uylíx (six), uynáapt (seven), and uymítaat (eight).

**Commission Meeting Agreement** (8:43 a.m.) Commissioner Alex Johnson read the Code of Commissioner Conduct. (Attachment A)

**Commissioner Comments**

- Commissioner Litwer asked whether the code of conduct suggests public comment should occur before Commission deliberation.
  - Counsel Litwak advised Commissioners to ensure that when asking questions of staff, the questions do not turn into deliberation before the public has a chance to provide comment.

**Opportunity for Treaty Tribe Nations to Address the Commission** (8:51 a.m.) As part of the Government-to-Government consultation process, the Commission welcomes input from Treaty Tribe Nations on any agenda items 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** (8:52 a.m.)

- No public comment was offered.

### **Written Public Comment**

- Kevin Waters dated 1/14/2026 (Attachment B)

**USDA Forest Service Report** (8:55 a.m.) Casey Gatz, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Acting Forest Supervisor, provided an update on USDA Forest Service activities in the National Scenic Area.

- Donna Mickley retired after 37 years with the Forest Service.
- Acting Forest Supervisor Gatz will be serving through June and will be supported by Lorelei Haukness as Deputy Forest Supervisor until Nicolas Granum returns from the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.
- Received concurrence from the USDA Secretary of Agriculture on the disaster amendment. Offered that the US Forest Service is prepared to provide support to counties regarding any questions about implementation.
- Fuels reduction projects across the Gorge will be supported by a Student Conservation Association Youth Team.
- Working with The Next Door, Inc., on a youth program to do seed collection, fence construction, brush clearing, and other activities.
- Forest Service is moving forward with seasonal hiring to fill 12 positions primarily in recreation.
- After the December weather events, the Eagle Creek and Wahclella Falls will continue to be closed for some time. Staff are slowly making progress on opening those trails.
- Seasonally closed recreation sites open May 1, 2026.
- Dog Mountain shuttle and ticketing system opens March 15, 2026. The ticketing system will run from April 11 through June 7, 2026. The program, in partnership with Skamania County, helps reduce congestion along SR-14 and provides safe access to the Dog Mountain Trail.

- Seasonal fire hiring continues and the Forest Service anticipates a full fire staff this summer.
- Construction at Multnomah Falls started approximately two weeks ago, which includes work on the trash enclosure, restroom, and visitor center.
- Working with ODOT and Oregon Parks and Recreation to help manage the slide in the Old Historic Highway.
- Shared memorial information for Art Carroll, who concluded his career with the Forest Service as the Area Manager for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Mr. Carroll passed away on February 28, 2026.

### **Commissioner Comments**

- Asked for clarification on the timeline for opening Eagle Creek and Wahclella Falls trails.
  - Gatz: Wahkeena Falls day-use site is seasonally closed and opens May 1. Eagle Creek has a May target for opening, but there is no anticipated date for Wahclella Falls.
- Asked about economic development numbers connected to the Dog Mountain shuttle and whether there is data that shows how that service may lead to increased spending in Skamania County. Suggested promoting the service and encouraging those taking the shuttle to spend more time and money in the county.
  - Gatz: Does not believe he has those numbers, but he can reach out to Skamania County.

### **Information Item:\* 2025 Annual Report for the Climate Change**

**Action Plan** (9:08 a.m.) Chair Miller introduced the presentation and provided background on the Commission's Pro-Equity, Anti-Racism (PEAR) Team's history. Lisa Naas Cook, Climate Program Manager, and Joanna Kaiserman, Senior Land Use Planner, provided an overview of climate action efforts in 2025, including status updates for the 2025 goals in the Climate Change Action Plan. Community members from the Commission's Pro-Equity, Anti-Racism (PEAR) Team joined staff to present climate equity recommendations for Commission consideration as part of this report. Debra Whitefoot, Nch'i Wana Housing Executive Director and lifelong traditional food gatherer, shared highlights from First Foods workshops for tribal members hosted in partnership with the Gorge Commission. (Attachments C - E)

### **Commissioner Comments**

- Expressed gratitude to the presenters for their time and for sharing the information.
- Suggested exploring additional inlieu sites and perhaps changing their designations to urban areas.

- Expressed feeling that the work done is important to the Commission's commitment to the Act.
- Expressed appreciation for hearing from different communities that do not always have a voice on the Commission.
- Encouraged Washington resident participation in the Climate Stewards program.
- Requested the opportunity to join the field tour for defensible space.
- Requested concrete suggestions regarding affordable housing and what actions allies can take to support.
- Asked for a project management schedule for the next Management Plan review.
  - Lisa Naas Cook explained that the Climate Stewards program is Gorge-wide and open to both Oregon and Washington residents. Also previewed that upcoming climate work will involve policy review and development to inform the next Management Plan update.

## **Public Comment**

- Jason O'Brien, Oregon State University Extension Service
  - Thanked Commission staff, and especially Krystyna Wolniakowski, for supporting the licensure process to share the program more widely and ensure that it remains active and possible in the Columbia Gorge.
  - Climate Stewards program is driven by partners' interest in hosting the training. By no means a single partner initiative. OSU Extension welcomes conversations with new partners.
  - Washington State University has been working with the University of California on the Climate Stewards license and expansion in the state of Washington.

**Break** – 10:54 a.m. – 11:04 a.m.

**Action Item: Rulemaking\*** (11:04 a.m.) Legal Counsel, Jeff Litwak, provided a staff report on initiating rulemaking to incorporate the disaster replacement plan amendment into the Gorge Commission's land use ordinance and to update the Gorge Commission's rules for open meetings, public records, conflicts of interest, and administrative procedure. Counsel Litwak stated that if the Gorge Commission agreed the draft rules are ready to proceed to rulemaking, staff will prepare notices of proposed rulemaking for future rulemaking hearings, most likely in the summer. (Attachments F - M)

## **Commissioner Comments**

- Commissioner Hochman asked for the comments and recommendations of the Rules committee.
  - Counsel Litwak described the work of the committee and said that the work is ready for the Rulemaking process to begin.
- Commissioner Weissfeld asked if former Commissioners Albrich and Liberty had made any comments.
  - Counsel Litwak noted that Albrich resigned before the work had begun, but she provided comments that staff had already addressed. Commissioner Liberty was a member of the Rules Committee and recommended that the open meetings, public records, conflicts of interest, and administrative procedure rules were ready to start rulemaking.

## Public Comment

- No public comment was offered.

Moved by Commissioner Johnson

**Motion: Move that the rule-making process proceed.**

Commissioner Litwer seconded.

The motion was approved by unanimous voice vote with no abstentions.

**Executive Director's Report** (11:29 a.m.) Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director, and staff provided updates on Plan Amendment concurrence, the Commission's Annual Best Practices Survey for CY 2025, the 2026 Supplemental Budgets, and the Commission's new website. (Attachment N)

## Commissioner Comments

- Asked if the Washington Gorge Commissioners had sent support letters to the Washington legislature.
  - Wolniakowski confirmed that letters were sent by staff and the Yakama Nation. Wolniakowski also testified several times in support of the Commission's budget.
- Suggested the Commission continue seeking additional funds outside of the state legislatures.
- Asked to see the Vital Sign Indicators (VSI) webpage and suggested promoting that page.
- Asked about mapping in-lieu sites.

Sage Ebel shared that the VSI Annual Report will be presented at the May Commission meeting.

**Committee Reports** (12:08 p.m.)

- Economic Vitality Committee Chair Litwer
  - Described the economic issues Skamania County has experienced due to decreasing timber harvests and other factors presented by Skamania County Commission Asa Leckie at the March 4, 2026, Economic Vitality Committee meeting.
  - Expressed that it is difficult to parse the impacts of the National Scenic Area vs. the US Forest Service vs. private land actions in Skamania County.
  - Explained that public lands fall out of the county's tax base.
  - Noted that Skamania County estimated the annual impact at \$4 million.
  - Suggested meeting with the Forest Service to discuss the matter.
  - Briefly explained the Secure Rural Schools Act.
  - Suggested Commissioners reach out to him if they wish to be involved in offering support.
  - Quorum was not present to decide whether and how to proceed with ADUs during the next Plan review.

### **Commissioner Comments**

- Land trusts purchasing timber continue to pay taxes while they hold the property.
- The Secure Rural Schools Act was intended to sunset in 2006.
- Skamania County's continued reliance on timber and the Secure Rural Schools Act reflects its need for economic vitality.
- The committee should speak to former Skamania County Commissioners.
- Affordable housing needs to be discussed further.
- Casey Gatz stressed that this issue is extremely complicated. The Forest Service continues to meet with Skamania County to seek solutions. Stated that the Forest Service provides 1% of the value of the land for eight years after acquisition. This is unique and specific to the Scenic Area.
- Communications Chair Amy Weissfeld
  - Noted that follower counts on Facebook and LinkedIn are low, and the committee hopes to increase counts.
  - Staff are working on existing content ideas that can be shared on social media.
  - The committee wants to improve emergency communications.

### **Commissioner Comments**

- Suggested using YouTube for meeting videos.

## **Other Business (12:34 p.m.)**

- Wolniakowski reminded everyone that the next full Commission meeting is in May, and there is no Commission meeting in April.
- Acker reminded Commissioners to complete the Executive Director Evaluation and Best Practices survey.

**Adjourn** – 12:34 p.m.

## **Meeting Attachments:**

- Attachment A – Columbia River Gorge Commission Code of Conduct
- Attachment B – Public Comment – Kevin Waters – 1/14/2026
- Attachment C – Staff Report – 2025 Climate Action Annual Report
- Attachment D – Staff Presentation - 2025 Climate Action Annual Report Overview and PEAR Climate Equity
- Attachment E – Staff Report – Climate Equity Recommendations
- Attachment F – Staff Report – Rules Committee Recommendations to Begin Rulemaking (divs 11, 12, 14, 16)
- Attachment G – Report in Support of Divisions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
- Attachment H – Commission Rule 350-011 (2026 Draft)
- Attachment I – Commission Rule 350-012 (2026 Draft)
- Attachment J – Commission Rule 350-014 (2026 Draft)
- Attachment K – Commission Rule 350-016 (2026 Draft)
- Attachment L – Organizing Discussion of Draft Rules (Final)
- Attachment M – Staff Report – Rules Committee Recommendation to Begin Rulemaking (div 82)
- Attachment N – Staff Report – Annual Best Practices Survey of the Commission for CY 2025

**Approved – May 12, 2026**