Communications Committee
Meeting Highlights
March 12, 2026

Commissioners Present:
Amy Weissfeld, Chair
Lach Litwer
Alex Johnson
Steve Hochman (absent)
Pah-tu Pitt (absent)

Staff Present:
Krystyna Wolniakowski
Connie Acker

Review of Meeting Summary
After roll call, the February 9, 2026, Communication Committee summary was approved by a voice vote.

New Website Launch
The new Gorge Commission website is now live. Staff thanked Chair Weissfeld for her detailed review and assistance in corrections needed. Chair Weissfeld requested staff to present any analytics about the website use at the April Communications Committee meeting. Staff will issue a press release announcing the new website. The existing website had been up for ten years. Chair Weissfeld asked how the Forest Service let people know about their latest news and Beth Kennedy, Public Affairs Officer for the Forest Service, said they usually post on Facebook or issue a press release. Commissioner Johnson asked about time commitment to prepare press releases and volunteered to prepare one. Krystyna also prepared the Plan Amendment press release together with the FS.

Chair Weissfeld also brought up preparing a press release related to funding the licenses in order to go live with a public portal to apply for land use permits online with the Gorge Commission in Klickitat County.

Update on Social Media Efforts
Krystyna reviewed the list of topics suggested by staff (draft list at the end of summary).

Chair Weissfeld suggested we consider clipping content from commission meetings and uploading them if it is not too much work. She asked if there is time on staff meeting agendas to keep list updated and provide updates in a timely way. The committee can review them and upload them into social media posts. Alex suggested that at this point a staff member may be able to take this over from him. He mentioned that he has hopes that social

media will be a venue for information and will continue but would like staff to take over soon given the number of topics already identified. However, staff does not have the capacity with the current workload to take this on, so Chair Weissfeld offered to help Commissioner Johnson for now.

For the new website press release, Chair Weissfeld mentioned that we should add a connection with Facebook and Linked In – and explain why we do not take comment on social media posts. The posts should be on topics that encourage legislators and their staffers to follow us on social media. She also mentioned that we should track the analytics on Facebook and LinkedIn. Commissioner Johnson prepared a draft press release for the new website during the meeting.

Krystyna mentioned that Mike Schrankel will add FB and LinkedIn on the landing page of the new website.

Supplemental Budget and Legislative Outreach

The last day of the legislative session will be March 13, and the Governor will sign the budget on April 2. The WA conference committee report showed that CRGC will receive the funding for the new EP&L licenses, and it was already matched by Oregon during their session. WA did not eliminate our climate funds so the climate program will continue.

Chair Weissfeld suggested we prepare a draft letter that will describe the funding needs for the next legislative session. Krystyna mentioned that the "2 pager" that the Communications Committee helped prepare a few months ago was used for all the outreach meetings and calls with legislators during the short session. Chair Weissfeld said it was more of a fact sheet, and it was important, but she also wants a letter about the impact of our work, the problems, and the solutions and how the budget relates to those. She suggested that we prepare a more comprehensive set of documents that could be updated for legislative sessions such as a "media kit" and tailor it for each state. Krystyna said that the fact sheets she used were targeted towards each specific state and we did send letters to each legislator in the WA House and Senate and provided the fact sheets during the zoom calls and meetings with legislators. Chair Weissfeld encouraged commissioners to be engaged early in the legislative process.

Best Practices for Responding to Media Inquiries

Commissioner Johnson prepared a Best Practices document and distributed it just before the meeting. The committee can review it and provide edits/comments to Krystyna to compile and discuss at the next meeting. The committee thanked Commissioner Johnson for his efforts. Krystyna highlighted that the Gorge Commission has not had much media attention in the past 10 years until last year when the budget cuts happened. Due to

several factors, more articles were published recently about the Gorge Commission.

Gorge Community Foundation/Donations

Krystyna mentioned that she established a National Scenic Area Fund as an individual, not a Gorge Commission employee, with initial donations from herself and friends. The purpose was to have a vehicle to accept any kind of donations – individual donations, estate funds, trusts, legacy funds, and foundation grants who would not normally provide funds to a public agency. The Gorge Community Foundation could serve as a fiscal agent to accept these donations. Donations received could then fund projects that would be supporting the goals of the National Scenic Area Act to protect Gorge resources, and the projects would be implemented by local partners. The funding would not support the Gorge Commission but would support the projects important to the NSA.

Public Comment

Renee Tkach, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, stated that she is appreciative of commissioners doing additional work on committees. She supported Commissioner Nichols idea about having a Gorge Commission YouTube channel. She also suggested that county commissions should submit letters of support for the Gorge Commissions budget requests.

Final Comments and Follow-up Actions

Connie mentioned that we will post one year of videos on our website and see what the costs will be. Commissioner Johnson asked for bullets about our short session funds for a press release. Commissioner Litwer asked for names of legislators that supported our budget request so that we could thank them.

Action items:

- Press release on the Plan Amendment
- Press release on the new website
- Bullets on the budget for the press release after the Governor signs the budget early April
- Send the Best Practices for the Media Inquiries to committee members for editing/comment
- Identify analytics from the new website use (if available)

Some Initial Social Media Post Ideas

- "Did you know?": History of the Broughton Mill Plume
- "Did you know?": Ice Age Floods and how they shaped the Gorge today
- Climate funding restored!
- Summary of the 3rd annual report and climate equity panel who presented on March 10 – link to the report?
- Skamania County Sheriff Office – Safe Hiking: Share Facebook post to share/promote/like on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/SkamaniaSheriff/posts/please-join-the-skamania-county-sheriffs-office-search-and-rescue-team-at-the-st/1314436420716699/
  Possible post language: *Experience the Gorge safely! Volunteers from the Skamania County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue are presenting hiking preparation tips at Stevenson Community Library on Saturday, March 21 from 2:00pm-4:00pm. Register on the library website for online access: https://fvrlibraries.bibliocommons.com/v2/events/697d4bd74dacf581ff78047b*
- Post the Defensible Space Brochure
- Post about the new website launch and easy to find application process: *We have worked hard to create a site that serves our community better. Whether you are looking for meeting dates, information about submitting a development application, or need to access our updated online mapping tools and spatial data downloads, everything is now just a few clicks away. Take a look around and let us know what you think! GorgeCommission.org*
- Vital Sign Indicators Portal description
- Announce the new Plan Amendment and building after a disaster
- 40th anniversary theme – interesting historical facts
- On March 4-6, two Gorge Commission staff members, Mackenzie Aamodt (Land Use Planner) and Lisa Naas Cook (Climate Programs Manager), participated in the Adapting Together 2026 National Workshop at Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, WA. Hosted by Oregon State University, the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, and the Northwest Fire Science Consortium, the workshop aimed to provide collaborative learning opportunities for organizations in the Northwest focused on creating more fire adapted communities. Workshops focused on implementation strategies to make rural communities more fire-ready and resilient. Mackenzie and Lisa both participate as members of the West Klickitat County Fire Adapted Communities Network for the Gorge Commission on a monthly basis.

Approved: April 9, 2026