Columbia River Gorge Commission

Communications Committee

Meeting Summary

September 24, 2026

Meeting format

Virtual

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Amy Weissfeld called the meeting to order at approximately 9:02 a.m., after confirming that the meeting was being recorded. A quorum was present.

Committee Members Present:

- Commissioner Alex Johnson
- Commissioner Lach Litwer
- Committee Chair Amy Weissfeld

Committee Members Absent:

- Commissioner Steve Hochman

Staff Members Present:

- Krystyna U. Wolniakowski
- Connie L. Acker
- Lisa Naas Cook

Others Present:

- Elizabeth Kennedy, USDA Forest Service

Approval of August 13, 2026, Meeting Summary

The Committee reviewed the August 13, 2026, meeting summary. Krystyna noted that Commissioner Hochman had reviewed the document and provided his proxy, indicating it looked fine. Commissioner Johnson also reviewed the summary and moved to approve it. Commissioner Litwer seconded the motion.

Newsletter Development, Purpose, and Audience

The Committee continued discussing the development of a Commission newsletter. Staff and Committee members are considering the appropriate length, frequency, content, and audience.

The anticipated audience includes people already subscribed to the Commission's email list, as well as partner organizations and agency contacts. Lisa Naas Cook emphasized the need to recognize the diverse audiences within the approximately 600-person email list and to develop a format that remains broadly useful and informative.

Content and Staff Capacity

Commissioner Johnson emphasized that the newsletter should not impose a significant additional workload on an already capacity-constrained agency. He noted that substantial content already exists through Commission meetings, committee work, the bi-state compact, news coverage, partnerships, and website content.

The Committee discussed using a light-touch monthly email to highlight existing content and link readers to longer material on the Commission website.

Chair Weissfeld noted that the newsletter is a new communications channel, not a new messaging strategy. She recommended a flexible format that can address different audiences, including legislators, partners, and Gorge residents, without requiring separate newsletters.

The Committee also discussed keeping newsletter content concise by using brief introductions with links to longer articles or website information. Krystyna will circulate Commissioner Hochman's newsletter strategy document and template to the Committee for review.

Commissioner Op-Eds and Guest Essays

The Committee discussed Chair Miller's guest essay and the best way to distribute it. The Committee agreed that the essay should first be submitted to a local or regional news outlet. After publication, the Commission can link to the article in its newsletter and on its website. This approach would also allow the Commission to cross-link external media coverage.

Commissioner Johnson also suggested that interested Commissioners write op-eds and submit them to local, regional, or state news outlets. The Committee identified the 40th Anniversary as a timely opportunity for additional Commissioner-authored content.

The Committee agreed that a broader discussion of Commissioner op-eds need not be elevated to a separate Executive Committee agenda item. Instead, the topic will be included in the Communications Committee report at the November meeting. The Committee also discussed the potential value of op-eds related to the

upcoming legislative session and state budget recommendations, including incorporating published pieces into the Commission's legislative packet.

40th National Scenic Area Anniversary Logo

The Committee reviewed a draft 40th-Anniversary logo developed by Connie Acker. The intended uses include a tablecloth for Commission and community events, as well as stickers and other outreach materials. The design incorporates Gorge-related elements, including the pika, salmon, bald eagle, and wildflowers.

Members responded positively to the overall design. Naas Cook recommended removing the black background around the Forest Service logo and using a cleaner or transparent version. Commissioner Johnson supported the design and agreed that the Forest Service logo should be sharpened without the black box.

USDA Forest Service's Beth Kennedy expressed support for the design and said she would take it to the Forest Service regional office for review because it includes the Forest Service logo.

Chair Weissfeld recommended a final review to ensure the logo adequately represents the Gorge Commission's mandate without making the design overly busy. The Committee discussed whether the elements of cultural, recreational, and economic vitality were sufficiently represented. Members suggested that a subtle recreational element, such as a windsurfer, could help address tourism and recreation.

Action: Wolniakowski and Acker will consider minor refinements and explore adding a recreational element while preserving the overall design. Kennedy will seek Forest Service review once the design is finalized.

40th National Scenic Area Anniversary Activities and Events

The Committee discussed several potential anniversary activities.

The Forest Service is considering an outdoor event, possibly at Wyeth or Eagle Creek, with the Commission serving as a partner. The Commission is also considering an evening community event at the Hegewald Center or Cascade Locks Pavilion, potentially structured as a 5–7 p.m. reception featuring a speaker.

The Committee agreed that the event should be community-oriented and relatively inexpensive. The Committee considered a reception at a venue with catering but deemed it too costly, given the catering costs and uncertainty about attendance. The Committee identified bringing food to a less formal community venue as a more affordable option.

The Committee also discussed using the anniversary as a theme across existing community events rather than organizing each event independently. Partner organizations could use the anniversary logo in their activities, with the Commission and Forest Service participating where appropriate.

Gorge-ous Nights Out

Krystyna proposed exploring a possible Gorge-focused event at the state capitols during the February legislative sessions, modeled after previous "Gorge-ous Nights Out" events. She noted that the concept would require substantial logistical coordination and that she would contact a former coordinator to determine whether the event could be organized again.

Website and Google Analytics

Acker presented the monthly Google Analytics report for August 22 through September 18. She explained the distinction between active users, new users, engagement time, events, and bounce rates.

The Committee discussed data limitations, including that staff website activity is included in the user counts and may affect the numbers. Acker also explained that a high bounce rate does not necessarily indicate a problem, as visitors may find the information they need quickly and leave.

The report also showed a relatively high number of "page not found" results. Connie explained that some of these may result from URL changes and from existing links appearing in search results. She indicated that she would continue looking into the issue.

Chair Weissfeld recommended using redirects when website URLs change to ensure older links continue to direct users to the appropriate information. She also requested additional analytics on device types, popular pages, traffic sources, and longer-term trends. Connie noted that some of this information was available but that she had difficulty accessing Google Analytics during the meeting.

Community and Youth Engagement

Naas Cook discussed opportunities to incorporate youth- and community-led activities into the 40th Anniversary. She proposed connecting with existing Forest Service youth programs, local schools, and community partners rather than creating entirely new programs.

Naas Cook also proposed discussing the anniversary with the Impact Team and exploring opportunities for community-led events in partnership with organizations already working throughout the Gorge. Beth expressed interest in continuing the conversation about Forest Service youth engagement programs and partnerships.

Other Business

No additional business was raised.

Public Comment

The Chair opened the meeting for public comment. No members of the public requested an opportunity to comment.

Key Decisions/Actions/Owners

#	Action	Owner	Timing
1	Circulate Commissioner Hochman's newsletter strategy/template to the Committee	Wolniakowski	After meeting
2	Continue developing the newsletter, including audience, length, content, and recurring features	Wolniakowski, staff, Communications Committee	For November Commission meeting
3	Develop a newsletter format that can address different audiences while remaining concise and linking to longer website content	Staff/Communications Committee	Ongoing
4	Submit Chair Miller's guest essay to an appropriate local/regional news outlet before promoting it through Commission channels	Staff / Chair Miller	As soon as practicable
5	Include the published guest essay in the newsletter and link to the external publication from the website	Staff	Following publication
6	Include a discussion/report on Commissioner op-eds in the Communications Committee report at the November Commission meeting	Chair Weissfeld / Communications Committee	November
7	Refine the 40th Anniversary logo, including the Forest Service logo treatment and	Wolniakowski and Acker	Before finalization

	consideration of a recreational element		
8	Obtain Forest Service review/approval of use of its logo	Beth Kennedy	Following meeting
9	Prepare a high-resolution version of the final 40th Anniversary logo	Staff	Following approval
10	Explore an affordable evening 40th Anniversary community event at the Hegewald Center or Cascade Locks Pavilion	Wolniakowski and Acker	Next several months
11	Coordinate with the Forest Service regarding an outdoor 40th Anniversary event	Staff / Forest Service	Upcoming months
12	Explore opportunities for the 40th Anniversary logo to be used by partner organizations and at existing community events	Staff / Forest Service partners	Ongoing
13	Explore the possibility of a February “Gorge Nights Out” event during the legislative sessions	Wolniakowski	Contact former coordinator and assess feasibility
14	Continue monthly Google Analytics reporting and investigate additional metrics	Acker	Ongoing
15	Explore website redirects when existing URLs are changed or removed	Staff	Ongoing
16	Provide additional website analytics, including device type, popular pages, and other available metrics	Acker	Future reports
17	Connect with Forest Service staff regarding youth engagement opportunities	Naas Cook / Kennedy	Follow-up discussion

18	Discuss 40th Anniversary community-led activities with the Impact Team	Naas Cook	Upcoming fall meeting

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:50 a.m. after the agenda was completed.

Approved

October 20, 2026