Columbia River Gorge Commission

Executive Committee

Meeting Summary

August 19, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Alex Johnson called the meeting to order at approximately 9:01 a.m., following confirmation that the meeting was being recorded.

Committee Members Present:

- Valerie Fowler
- Nicolas Granum, USDA Forest Service
- Alex Johnson
- Marin Palmer, USDA Forest Service
- Nathan Reynolds

Committee Members Absent:

- Carina Miller

Staff Members Present:

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

Executive Summary

2027–2029 Budget:

- The Oregon Agency Request Budget was submitted on time and included one policy option package for the Access Database Replacement Project Final Phase-Civic Access.
- Washington's budget is nearing submission and will also include the IT funding decision package.
- Both states are operating under restrictive budget conditions, making additional funding unlikely.
- Staff noted a limited opportunity to submit an Oregon-only concept related to Executive Order 25-26 on landscape resilience. Staff will explore the implications of pursuing Oregon-specific funding and whether the Compact creates any relevant precedent.

Legislative Outreach:

- Staff plans to begin contacting legislators in both states once the budgets are submitted, targeting the middle to end of September for Zoom or in-person meetings. More formal budget-related outreach can occur after governors issue their recommended budgets, expected around December.
- Commissioners emphasized that legislative engagement should not be limited to budget advocacy. Newly elected officials and staff will need broader education about the Commission, its role, and its value. The 40th Anniversary provides a positive opportunity to communicate the Commission's history and accomplishments outside the budget cycle.
- A legislative Gorge tour was discussed as a particularly effective engagement tool. The group generally favored allowing time after the November elections for new legislators and their staff to establish themselves, with late January or February emerging as a potentially more effective timing.

40th Anniversary:

- The National Scenic Area's 40th Anniversary begins in November and provides an opportunity for public, partner, and legislative outreach.
- The committee supported keeping the November Commission meeting as an in-person meeting.
- Staff and the Forest Service will explore a joint event, potentially incorporating a reception or featured speaker. The Forest Service offered its larger Hood River conference room as a no-cost option and indicated interest in low- or no-budget joint events.
- Potential outdoor or covered locations discussed included Eagle Creek and Mitchell Tunnel. The group favored a joint Commission/Forest Service event rather than separate events, while recognizing the need for weather contingencies. Staff were directed to develop options for presentation to the full Commission.
- The committee was reminded that public funds may be used for a public meeting and to feed commissioners and staff, but not to provide food for the public at a celebration. Any reception or public celebration involving food would therefore require private funding.

Commission Meeting Schedule:

- A multi-meeting calendar through July 2027 was reviewed. November is planned as an in-person meeting, while most other meetings are expected to remain virtual unless additional funding becomes available.
- The September meeting will include a focused update on the Commission's response and recovery efforts following the Rowena and Burdoin fires, including use of streamlined permitting and other temporary measures.

- A broader Forest Service fire-season update was considered better suited to November or January, after the fire season is substantially complete.
- Prescribed fire was identified as a particularly important communication issue in the Gorge. The Forest Service committed to advance communication with communities about prescribed-fire plans and timing, while clarifying that community outreach would occur separately from the Commission meeting.

Management Plan / Gorge 2030

- The committee discussed beginning strategic work on the next Management Plan review before the formal revision process begins in 2027–28. Chair Johnson proposed a commissioner discussion of priorities and strategy, potentially beginning in September or November, without requiring additional staff preparation. The goal is to focus committee work on specific outputs that can inform the Management Plan.
- Committee members emphasized that the Management Plan should receive regular attention at Commission meetings and that public input will be important as the revision process develops. The 40th Anniversary can also provide an opportunity to connect the Commission's first 40 years with its vision for the next several decades.
- Staff's immediate priority is meeting with county planning departments to understand implementation issues and unresolved concerns from the previous plan review. Staff have completed meetings with Multnomah, Hood River, and Wasco counties, with Skamania and Clark counties scheduled. Staff will compile the feedback to inform the next phase of the process.
- The committee also discussed the need to broaden outreach beyond planning departments. Future engagement is expected to include county commissioners, city councils, planning commissions, tribes, and other stakeholders. Commissioners emphasized that economic vitality should be considered alongside the Commission's land-use and regulatory responsibilities.
- The Forest Service recommended incorporating early staff-to-staff discussions with Treaty Tribes and other tribes into the process.

Committee Vacancies

- Roger Nichols' appointment as a Wasco County Commissioner created a vacancy on the Executive Committee. The Wasco County vacancy and whether an interim commissioner will be appointed remain unresolved.
- The committee agreed that vacancies and commissioner interests could be discussed at the September meeting, potentially in connection with a broader discussion of Management Plan priorities. Committee assignments may be reshuffled early next year with the election of a new chair.

Other Business

- Landscape Resilience: Staff will bring the Executive Order 25-26 landscape-resilience work plan to the Commission in November.

Public Comment: No public comments were offered.

Next Commission Meeting: September 10, 2026.

Action Items

#	Action	Lead	Timing
1	Investigate whether Oregon-specific funding under Executive Order 25-26 can be accepted/spent without additional Washington authorization under the Compact.	Wolniakowski	As soon as practicable
2	Begin legislative outreach in Oregon and Washington and seek meetings with legislators.	Wolniakowski / Staff	Mid–late September 2026
3	Develop a broader legislative education/outreach strategy beyond budget advocacy.	Staff / Executive Committee	Fall 2026
4	Coordinate with the Forest Service on potential November 40th-anniversary event concepts and venues.	Wolniakowski / Staff / Forest Service	Before September Commission meeting
5	Identify weather-resilient, accessible, and low/no-cost venues for the November event, including Forest Service facilities.	Staff / Forest Service	Before September Commission meeting
6	Continue pursuing Cascade Locks pavilion availability for the November meeting.	Connie	Near term
7	Prepare a September fire-response update covering Commission actions following the Rowena and Burdoin fires.	Staff	September 8 meeting
8	Coordinate fall prescribed-fire plans and anticipated public-outreach timing.	Forest Service / Staff	Fall 2026
9	Complete county planning-department outreach and compile feedback for Commission review.	Staff	By January 2027

#	Action	Lead	Timing
10	Expand management-plan outreach planning to include county commissioners, economic-development interests, cities/planning commissions, tribes, and other stakeholders.	Staff / Commission	Following initial staff outreach
11	Add a commissioner discussion of strategic priorities for the next management plan revision to the September agenda, if time permits.	Chair / Staff	September 8 meeting
12	Consider committee vacancies alongside commissioners' Management Plan review priorities and capacity.	Chair / Executive Committee	September 8 meeting
13	Prepare the Executive Order 25-26 landscape-resilience work plan for Commission presentation.	Staff	November 2026
14	Develop a legislative tour concept and timing, with consideration for newly elected officials and their key staff.	Staff / Executive Committee	Late 2026; target Jan.–Feb. 2027
15	Continue coordination with the Forest Service and tribes as part of Management Plan review process.		

Approved – October 1, 2026