Columbia River Gorge Commission
Information Technology Strategic Plan
(ITSP) 2027-2029

The Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC) Information Technology (IT) Strategic Plan reflects the Agency's commitment to optimizing and maintaining CRGC's IT infrastructure, identifying opportunities for IT efficiency and innovation, and investing in the IT workforce. CRGC recognizes that IT is a critical component supporting CRGC's mission. The IT Strategic Plan directly aligns with the goals of CRGC's Strategic Plan.

Background on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and the Gorge Commission

The spectacular Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area stretches 85 miles along the Columbia River and encompasses 292,500 acres across portions of three Oregon and three Washington counties. Formed by ancient lava flows and sculpted by the Missoula floods, the Columbia River Gorge carves an impressive corridor through the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington as the Columbia River flows to the Pacific Ocean. As the only sea-level route from the Great Basin to the Pacific Ocean, the Columbia River Gorge is a land of contrasts. The western Gorge, with an average annual rainfall of 75 inches, is a place of misty mountains, rich forests, and more waterfalls than any other area in the country. The eastern Gorge, with less than 15 inches of annual rainfall, is a place of rim-rock bluffs, rolling hills, farms, and ranchlands.

The Columbia River Gorge is renowned for its cultural resources and geologic history. Cultural resources, epitomized by the Indian petroglyph "She Who Watches," trace a human history in the Gorge that spans more than 10,000 years. They include prehistoric sites and historic structures. Natural resources include wildlife, plants, streams, lakes, wetlands, and riparian corridors, all abundant throughout the National Scenic Area. The National Scenic Area is known worldwide for the variety and quality of recreational opportunities: windsurfing, hiking, fishing, mountain biking, kayaking, kiteboarding, and rafting on the two Wild and Scenic Rivers – Klickitat and White Salmon Rivers in Washington. The Gorge's scenic resources span a diverse array of landscapes, including rainforests, rolling farmlands, and semi-arid grasslands.

National Scenic Area Act

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act (16 U.S.C. §§ 544–544p) was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on November 17, 1986. The Act mandates the protection and enhancement of scenic, cultural, natural, and

recreation resources, and the protection and support of the Gorge economy. A total of 292,500 acres were designated for special protection on both sides of the Columbia, from the outskirts of Portland-Vancouver in the west to the semi-arid regions of Wasco and Klickitat counties in the east.

The Act created the National Scenic Area, authorized the states to enter into a compact creating the Columbia River Gorge Commission (CRGC), required the CRGC and the USDA Forest Service to adopt a regional management plan, and required counties to adopt land use ordinances consistent with that plan.

Columbia River Gorge Compact

The Columbia River Gorge Compact is the agreement between Oregon and Washington that established the CRGC. It is codified as RCW 43.97.015 and ORS 196.150. The governors of Washington and Oregon each appoint three commissioners; one of those three must be a resident of the National Scenic Area. The six gorge counties each appoint one commissioner. The Area Manager for the USDA Forest Service National Scenic Area office serves as a nonvoting member. This structure creates an even balance between state and local appointees and between Washington and Oregon appointees. The compact also specifies how the states fund CRGC and other specific CRGC authorizations. CRGC's authority derives from the compact, which incorporates the Act by reference. References to CRGC's authority typically cite the Act directly, "to perform all functions and responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of this compact and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act" [Compact Article 1(a)].

Commission's Responsibilities

CRGC acts as the primary regional planning agency and one of the chief stewards of a national treasure – the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Among its many roles, CRGC develops and implements policies for land use and resource protection on non-federal lands. CRGC is responsible for the coordinated, consistent implementation of the National Scenic Area Management Plan and land use ordinances. To effectively protect resources and support the regional economy, CRGC coordinates and facilitates the efforts of two states, six counties, four Columbia River Treaty Tribes, several federal agencies, residents, and citizens.

CRGC is also responsible for hearing and resolving appeals of land-use decisions within the National Scenic Area. CRGC's programs are based on its federal statutory responsibilities set forth in the National Scenic Act and the bi-state Columbia River Gorge Compact.

Mission

CRGC's mission is to establish, implement, and enforce policies and programs that

protect and enhance the Columbia River Gorge's scenic, natural, recreation, and cultural resources, and to support the area's economy by encouraging growth to occur in existing urban areas and allowing economic development consistent with resource protection.

Administrative Rules

CRGC has adopted administrative rules covering open meetings, public records disclosure, financial disclosure, conflicts of interest, public contracts, and administrative procedures. The Act requires that these rules be consistent with the more restrictive of the two states' statutes on these subjects. CRGC reviews its rules after each legislative session to ensure continued compliance with that requirement. CRGC also maintains specific rules for appeals, enforcement, and other actions it handles regularly.

CRGC files its rules with the Oregon Secretary of State and Washington Code Reviser, but the rules are not technically part of the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) or the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) because they are not state agency rules. Oregon includes CRGC's rules in its printed and online versions of the OAR compilation, but Washington does not include them in the WAC compilation.

Management Plan

Congress called for the preparation of the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area to ensure that land within the National Scenic Area is used consistently with the purposes and standards of the National Scenic Area Act. CRGC and the USDA Forest Service must revise the Management Plan at least once every ten years to ensure it reflects the best science and addresses new challenges, such as climate change. CRGC and the USDA Forest Service adopted the Management Plan in 1991, with input from four Columbia River Treaty Tribe governments, county and city governments, state and federal agencies, citizens, and non-governmental organizations. In 2004, the agencies completed the first 10-year revision. CRGC may amend the Management Plan between revisions if it finds that conditions in the National Scenic Area have changed significantly. The USDA Secretary of Agriculture must concur with revisions and amendments to the Management Plan. In 2016, the Gorge Commission again reviewed the Management Plan. After four years of technical and public meetings, the Commission adopted a new plan in October 2020, with concurrence from the USDA Secretary of Agriculture in January 2021.

The Management Plan includes land use and resource protection standards, non-regulatory programs, and projects to protect and enhance Columbia River Gorge resources, along with a description of the roles and relationships among governments and agencies responsible for implementing the National Scenic Area Act. The USDA Forest Service develops land use regulations for federal land and land within the

"Special Management Areas." CRGC develops land use regulations for the General Management Area. The Management Plan does not directly apply to the 13 urban areas.

Information Technology at CRGC

As a small bi-state land use planning and regulatory agency, CRGC has only 10 planning and administrative staff and no IT staff. FTEs were recently reduced to 8.7, with funding covering CRGC's ten staff positions. CRGC contracts with Radcomp Technologies, a local company in White Salmon, Washington, for IT and computer maintenance services. Funding from the Oregon and Washington legislatures has not been available to support dedicated IT staff. In addition, CRGC has been operating with an outdated Access database that requires manual entry and retrieval of information, is not indexed or searchable, and is not linked to the agency's GIS system. Retrieval and analysis of information and data have been cumbersome and inconsistent.

To fulfill the CRGC's mission and responsibilities, IT systems need to improve security, effectiveness, efficiency, transparency, accountability, and capacity to better serve the National Scenic Area. Challenges CRGC faces in the 2027-2029 biennium include:

- **There is increasing demand to use new technology, but we are facing reduced resources** – demands for new capabilities continue to grow while the current budget environment requires CRGC to plan for potential reductions in the biennial operating budget.
- **Rapid development of new technology** – an ever-changing technology landscape has led to an increase in the use of mobile devices, data storage capacity, and telecommunications sophistication, but CRGC cannot keep up with those advances nor take advantage of new technology tools that would help the work of the Commission.
- **Emphasis on Information Security** – increasing legislative and public attention on better access to information while reducing security risks can only be possible if resources are available to design new, more secure information management systems that are cloud-based and disaster-proof, which the current paper file system is not.

Access Database Replacement Project

Phase 1: With legislatively approved funding for 2021-2023, CRGC conducted Phase 1 of the Access Database Replacement Project.

Phase 1 Accomplishments: 2021-2023 Biennium

CRGC hired Environmental Science Associates (ESA) to provide project management and to conduct a feasibility analysis, a needs assessment, and a gap analysis of the current Access system. This work produced a list of alternatives and a recommended solution. CRGC subsequently issued a Request for Proposals (RFP)

inviting vendors to provide a cloud-based online data management system to support CRGC's daily work.

At the completion of Phase 1, CRGC issued a competitive RFP to solicit a vendor to provide the desired solution to replace the current Microsoft Access database. This process resulted in CRGC selecting Tyler Technologies, Inc. (Tyler) as the Phase 2 Implementation Vendor. Tyler's end-to-end solutions are widely used by public sector entities, including local, state, provincial, and federal governments. Tyler's Enterprise Permitting & Licensing Software (EP&L) will enable CRGC to operate more efficiently and connect more transparently with its partners and internally.

Phase 1: 2021-2023 Biennium – Completed June 2023

CRGC issued an RFP to procure a vendor to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how CRGC uses the Microsoft Access database in our daily work and to identify the limitations and gaps between the current and desired workflows.

1. Based on the results of the full assessment, CRGC issued a Request for Proposals to procure a vendor to provide a new cloud-based data management system that would meet our needs as a land-use regulatory agency.
2. Engaged a Quality Assurance specialist at each step of the process.
3. Established a bi-state Executive Steering Committee to ensure effective communication among Commissioners, staff, and vendors.
4. Completed Phase 1 on time, within scope and budget.

Phase 2: With legislatively approved funding for 2023-2025, CRGC conducted Phase 2 of the Access Database Replacement Project.

Phase 2 Accomplishments: 2023-2025 Biennium

ADR Phase 2 was funded during the 2023-2025 biennium through General Fund appropriations from both Oregon and Washington. Following the RFP issued at the end of Phase 1, CRGC contracted with Tyler Technologies to begin configuring the new database and permit management system. In early 2024, Tyler Technologies began working with CRGC and ESA to gain insight into CRGC's business processes and workflows, taking into account that the new database and document management system needs to address and incorporate the specific functionality critical to CRGC's day-to-day work into its design.

Throughout Phase 2, CRGC held weekly meetings with ESA (which included Tyler Tech staff) and monthly bi-state Executive Steering Committee meetings. Bluecrane Inc. remained under contract to provide quality assurance and oversight. CRGC coordinated with ESA and Bluecrane to develop an Organizational Change

Management plan to ensure that all users of the new database have the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to begin using the platform on the go-live date.

Phase 2: 2023-2025 Biennium – Completed June 2025

1. Identified project managers from ESA and Tyler to oversee the development, configuration, and training of CRGC staff for the EP&L platform.
2. Reconvened the Executive Steering Committee with oversight representation from both states, project vendors, and CRGC's Commission.
3. Began migrating CRGC's data from the Microsoft Access database into EP&L.
4. CRGC's Public Records and Administrative Analyst began inventorying CRGC's large library of scanned documents to identify which should be linked to a corresponding land use review record in the database.
5. Retained the services of the Phase 1 Quality Assurance vendor, Bluecrane Inc., to ensure external review of each step and to provide monthly QA reports.
6. Worked with ESA to develop an organizational change management plan to ensure that staff, residents, county planners, and other stakeholders have the knowledge and tools needed to begin using the new database.
7. CRGC used the remaining ADR Phase 2 funds to create an updated, modernized agency website that increased capacity and public access to information about CRGC. CRGC's current website was over a decade old.
8. Completed Phase 2 on time, within scope and budget.

Phase 2A: 2025-2027 Biennium

CRGC received $75,000 from Oregon and $75,000 from Washington in the 2026 legislative session to fund the following:

Annual software maintenance, license, and support fees for FY 2026 and FY 2027 for Enterprise Permitting and Licensing (EP&L) and Tyler Content Manager (TCM): To maintain full utilization of the new database, CRGC needed to pay annual fees for the software platforms required to keep them operational. This is a standard expense covered under the 2027-2029 current service level.

IT Vision

Stakeholders, CRGC staff, Gorge Commissioners, agencies, counties, and the public have access to the information and online tools needed for protecting resources in the National Scenic Area in a secure, open, transparent, mobile, and modern environment.

IT Mission and Priorities

CRGC will ensure staff, commissioners, and partner agencies have the IT tools needed to efficiently implement the National Scenic Area Act and Management Plan.

1. Evaluate, understand, recommend, design, purchase, and implement new hardware,

software, applications, data, and services with consideration of emerging, maturing, and aging technologies and business needs.
2. Secure and protect current and future CRGC data and applications.
3. Enhance CRGC's ability to meet statutory responsibilities under the National Scenic Area Act while improving service delivery to residents, local governments, Tribal governments, and partner agencies.
4. Ensure CRGC data and applications are available to staff, partners, stakeholders, and the public
5. Provide resources to secure technical support for mission-critical CRGC systems and training for staff.
6. Improve procedures, leadership, management, and trained staff.
7. Develop and follow IT strategic, budget, investment portfolio, continuity of operations, incident response, disaster recovery, and security plans.
8. Help maintain IT-related agency policies, procedures, standards, and forms.
9. Create an IT Governance Committee with Commissioners, senior staff, and quality assurance consultants to ensure data management is up-to-date, transparent, and available to the public.

IT Values

CRGC is a small bi-state agency with ten staff positions (FTEs, recently reduced to 8.7, with funding to cover CRGC's ten staff positions) and 13 Commissioners who oversee and manage the policies and guidelines for implementing the National Scenic Area Act. As stewards of the largest national scenic area in the United States, CRGC upholds values that reflect a deep commitment to the public. Because secure IT is one way to provide service to the public through better agency management and access to information, CRGC is committed to the following values:

- **Teamwork** – CRGC's small team works well with each other and the public to collaborate and problem solve through sharing information;
- **Leadership** – CRGC is a leader in the Gorge demonstrating excellence in public service through the protection of resources and transparency of operations;
- **Communication** – CRGC updates its website and is always communicating with agencies, stakeholders, the public, legislators, and Governors, as well as universities;
- **Customer Service** - CRGC strives to provide assistance to anyone who is interested in CRGC's work or who needs assistance with a land use issue;
- **Integrity** – CRGC operates in a transparent, fair, and accountable way;
- **Agency/ Program/ Project/ Individual Perspective** – CRGC respects the thinking and ingenuity of each staff person while creating teams to implement projects and programs that benefit the public and NSA resources;
- **Innovation and Problem Solving** – CRGC does not have many resources, so

it is always “thinking outside the box” for innovative ways to solve problems and sometimes reaches out to others to find solutions without recreating the wheel. Solving development review problems is what CRGC does every day.

- **Continuing Technical Professional Development** – CRGC believes in staff training to develop the professional capacity to be able to implement CRGC’s mission and goals.

IT Strategies

1. Modernize the agency's permitting and records management system;
2. Improve access to 40 years of information by completing scanning, consolidating, organizing, and centralizing CRGC and NSA county paper and digital documents, data, and information.
3. Support data-driven management of NSA resources; and
4. Strengthen coordination with six NSA counties;

CRGC Work Plan Priorities for IT

1. Work in collaboration with WA OCIO and OR EIS to replace the old Access Database with a cloud-based system. Funding was received in the 2021-23 biennial budget to begin the first phase of the project. (Completed)
2. Work in collaboration with WA OCIO and OR EIS to replace the old Access Database with a cloud-based system. Funding was received in the 2023-25 biennial budget to begin the second phase of the project. (Completed)
3. Work to complete data digitization of CRGC and county NSA development review records. (When funding becomes available)
4. Maintain a stable working environment for staff with the current Access database. (Completed)
5. Improve results by focusing on training staff on Access until a new information management system can be implemented (Completed)
6. Upgrade ArcGIS applications for permits and land use evaluations. (When funding becomes available)
7. Replace aging servers (Completed)
8. Replace aging hardware and software with the newest technology for a five-year life span (Completed)
9. Scan and migrate paper files, data, and information into the new cloud-based information management system (Ongoing)
10. Support staff transition to Microsoft 365. (Completed)
11. Implement MDM software on cellular devices. (Completed)
12. Migrated from Windows 10 to Windows 11. (Completed)
13. Continued to work with external IT contractor Radcomp Technologies for IT maintenance and security. (Ongoing)
14. Implement new CRGC website. (Completed)
15. Administer, maintain, support, and further develop the CRGC website to allow

linkage with data that the public needs to know. [Ongoing]

16. Test website and applications for accessibility, prioritize, and resolve issues. (Ongoing)
17. Update the cyber-security plan (Ongoing)

CRGC SWOT Table

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Dedicated staff • Executive Director support • Gorge Commissioners support • Public support • External technical knowledge, skills, and experience through contractor (Radcomp Technologies) • CRGC staff can proceed with ADRP Final Phase-Civic Access	• No internally trained IT staff • No internal developer staff • No time or funding for technical training • Security risk with server failure or if a disaster such as fire occurs
Threats	**Opportunities**
• Time-consuming public record requests • Changing and proliferating technologies – hardware, network, security, software without the platform to use them • Increasing security threats with AI • Increasing complexity of need for data to answer questions in land use • Increasing IT laws, policies, and procedures	• New/improved technologies exist– Microsoft 365, MDM, Cloud, ArcGIS Online • WaTech oversight consulting • WaTech security consulting and services • WaTech Enterprise Services support • OR EIS oversight consulting • Funding from Legislatures to complete ADRP Final Phase-Civic Access

Performance Analysis

1. The new EP&L platform will not be accessible if licenses are not paid.

IT Goals & Objectives

1. Secure funding to complete ADRP Final Phase-Civic Access, replacing outdated manual processes with a modern, cloud-based permitting and document management system that improves customer service, increases operational efficiency, and expands public access to government information.
2. Make 40 years of National Scenic Area lane-use decisions available through the Civic Access public portal by scanning, performing optical

character recognition, indexing and cataloging, redacting confidential information where necessary, and migrating records to the EP&L and TCM.

3. Improve transparency, reduce barriers to obtaining public records, and provide residents, local and Tribal governments, and other stakeholders with easier access to the information needed to participate in land-use decisions affecting the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.
4. Enhance CRGC's ability to fulfill statutory responsibilities under the National Scenic Area Act while improving service delivery for residents, local governments, Tribal governments, and partner agencies.
5. Continue linking data to GIS for geospatial referencing within the National Scenic Area to better identify tax lots, parcels, land-use designations, protected areas, and land ownership patterns.
6. Improve customer service by fully implementing EP&L Civic Access and TCM, enabling the public, CRGC partners, and other interested parties to conduct thorough, streamlined online searches by address or parcel.

IT Performance Measures – integrated with existing Key Performance Measures

1. **Improve customer service:** The online permit system will accelerate the review of important information from landowners and enable faster decisions on permit approvals, thereby increasing customer satisfaction scores. Public record requests will be more timely, as the data will be indexed and more accessible. With the EP&L platform integrated with GIS, Gorge Commissioners and the public will find it easier to retrieve and analyze questions about development patterns and risks to resources.
2. **Reduce permit processing time with the EP&L platform:** The 72-day timeline for reviewing and approving permits will be met more frequently with a reduced processing and evaluation period.
3. **Improve the public's knowledge of the National Scenic Area:** With additional IT capability, updated licenses, new ArcGIS integration, and the most recent information about the National Scenic Area available, residents, visitors, and agencies who need information will have greater knowledge and awareness of the National Scenic Area and its resources.
4. **Improve IT security:** With better and updated IT tools and technology, there will be fewer security risks and fewer data breaches.