

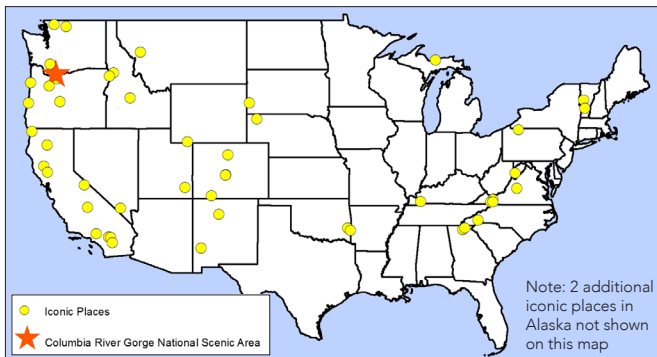


ICONIC PLACES OF THE US FOREST SERVICE

THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

FACT SHEET 14 • SPRING 2018

The U.S. Forest Service manages specially-designated areas and national monuments, protected either by Congress through legislation or by the President via proclamation under the authority of the Antiquities Act. These areas have been designated for their special characteristics and the unique opportunities they offer. They were protected in perpetuity for a range of ecological and social benefits such as scenic beauty, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection, and the intent and management objectives for each are distinct and unique. This fact sheet provides an overview of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, based on interviews with USFS personnel and partnership organizations that work together to manage the area.



BACKGROUND

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area was created through the dedication of local environmental champions. It is one of the most unique National Scenic Areas in the country in both its physical attributes and its planning and management. For over 100 years various efforts were made to protect the Columbia River Gorge. The completion of the highway through the Columbia River Gorge increased recreation in the area, but also attracted development and resource extraction. Influential individuals, such as John Yeon, pushed for a National Park. The inherent complications of protecting an area that included two states took time to resolve. Because land-use planning standards were not present on both sides of the river, supporters of protecting the area agreed that federal protection on both sides of the Columbia River would be required. The risk of urban sprawl into the Gorge was the impetus for the formation of the Friends of the Columbia Gorge who were proponents for the National Scenic Area designation. On November 17th, 1986 the Columbia River Gorge NSA was signed into law by President Reagan. The purpose of the designation was two-fold: to protect and enhance the Scenic, Natural, Cultural, and Recreational Resources (SNCRRs) and to promote economies in a way that protects and enhances the SNCRRs.

Columbia River Gorge NSA at a glance

Designation: Congressional Designation, November 1986

Location: Oregon and Washington states

Nearest Major City: Portland, OR

Population within 25 miles: 2,046,157

Population within 100 miles: 4,548,423

Part of a national forest: No, independent unit

Total acres: 292,610: 82,790 USFS and 209,820 non-USFS acres.

Reasons designated: Scenic Values, Unique recreation opportunities, Unique biophysical attributes, Area History, Uniqueness of recreation setting. Protect and enhance the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources. Enhance economies while protecting resources.

MANAGEMENT

The Columbia River Gorge NSA is overseen by a bi-state Columbia River Gorge Commission and the Forest Service. The management plan was written in collaboration of the two agencies. There are three zones within the NSA: the



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special management areas, the general management areas, and the urban areas. The Forest Service is responsible for the special management areas, lands deemed most critical for protection because they have higher levels of scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources. Five of the six counties adopted the NSA management plan into their county ordinances. Land-use activities for the sixth county are overseen by the Gorge Commission. The Forest Service assists the Gorge Commission and the counties in conducting cultural resource surveys.

Forest Service management in the NSA is different from the management of Mt. Hood or Gifford Pinchot National Forests because of the specific need to protect and enhance both economies in the area and the SNCRRs. It creates a unique case in which the Forest Service has oversight of non-public lands. It also presents a successful case of collaborative management with nonprofits and state agencies, such as the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

RECREATION

The Gorge is a very popular recreation destination and was listed in the National Geographic Traveler Magazine as the world's sixth-best sustainable tourism destination.¹ Managers estimate that 25% of visitors come from within 25 miles and 50% come from within 50-75 miles, making it a popular destination for locals. Its proximity to the Portland Metro area has made it 'Portland's backyard.' As one official involved in area management noted: "You can wake up, decide you want to go on a hike, and be in the NSA within 30 minutes." The most popular attraction within the Gorge is Multnomah Falls, but hiking throughout the Gorge has been popular, especially for destinations near to Portland, like the Sandy River Delta or Cape Horn Overlook. ODOT has been assisting expanding economic development to smaller communities along the NSA through recreation opportunities. One project has been creating a cycling destination along the Historic Highway State Trail. A second project has been the introduction of the Columbia Gorge Express bus, which will expand service to Hood River and Cascade Locks.

CHALLENGES

The SNCRRs are at threat due to human-made hazards, development, and the lack of agency capacity. Those involved in managing the area say that biggest challenge in the Columbia River Gorge NSA is managing people. The amount of recreation in the area and proximity to Portland has started to create safety concerns, such as highway congestion along I-84 near Multnomah Falls and unauthorized parking along the highway. Natural hazards, such as the Eagle Creek Fire of 2017 and the Mosier Oil Spill, threaten the scenic values and unique biophysical attributes of the

NSA and can also reduce recreation opportunities in the area. Increased dispersed development is also a threat to the scenic beauty of the Gorge, as woodlands are replaced with large-acre estates throughout developable sites. The Friends of Columbia Gorge (FOCG) also identified the management of cultural resources to be a concern. Because a full archaeological assessment of cultural resources throughout the NSA had not been conducted, many unknown features were left at risk to development. This led to the increased oversight of the Forest Service on cultural resources during development review.

PARTNERSHIPS

The management and maintenance of the Columbia River Gorge NSA has benefits from the bi-state oversight committee and the deep involvement of the Friends of the Columbia Gorge, which also has a land trust. Over 100 partners to work together for the betterment of the NSA. The partnerships with Travel Oregon, ODOT, FOCG and the FOCG Land Trust have been invaluable to cohesive management of the area, making the CRGNSA one of the most sustainable tourism destinations. The Land Trust has helped improve the biogeography of the forest ecosystem through enabling corridors between different areas of the NSA; ODOT has assisted in the development of economies in the NSA, and Travel Oregon has assisted in collaboration with ODOT and the Gorge Commission with disseminating important information about the Gorge to visitors.

LESSONS LEARNED

Collaborative partnerships and innovative solutions to managing visitors has started to improve the sustainability of the Gorge. Stewardship education remains important in aiding with the safety of visitors and ensuring the protection of the SNCRRs.



LEARN MORE

For more information about the project and additional publications go to:

ewp.uoregon.edu/IconicPlaces

Contact: autumne@uoregon.edu

¹ "The Wonders of the Columbia Gorge | Friends of the Columbia Gorge," n.d. http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r3/workingtogether/grants/?cid=fsbdev3_022022.

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