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Memo

To: Council members and interested parties

From: The Columbia River Gorge Commission

Date: May 29, 2009

Subject: Vital Signs Indicators Project and the State of the Gorge – 2009 Report

Over the last two years, the Columbia River Gorge Commission has devoted a significant amount of energy and staff time towards the Vital Signs Indicators Project. As the Commission's highest priority project, we are pleased to announce that the first report, *State of the Gorge 2009*, is now available. Please visit our website at www.gorgecommission.org to view a PDF of the report.

The Vital Signs Indicators Project has several goals, including:

1. Develop a set of high level measures to assess the conditions of gorge resources;
2. Inform future plan review sessions, and guide adaptive management;
3. Build new and strengthen existing relationships with our partner agencies and gorge communities; and
4. Share information through community presentations and a dedicated website.

The 2009 report contains the high level measures of gorge health described in goal one above. A total of fifty-one measures were created through an open and transparent public process, using a community advisory team as well as a technical advisory team. The teams were comprised of gorge citizens, partner agencies, universities, tribal members and leading technical experts. The Institute for Natural Resources of Oregon State University served as neutral oversight.

During the six month long advisory team process, we asked the teams to help create a set of measures that would enable us to track the conditions of gorge resources (scenic, natural, economic, cultural and recreation). To ensure the success of the project, we agreed that the measures needed to not only be grounded in the best available science, but that they were easily understood and embraced by members of the public.

This report is the first comprehensive effort to measure conditions within the boundaries of the Scenic Area. Information will continue to be collected so that as results become available, future reporting will be accessible online. Over time trends will become apparent, and evaluation of the information will assist the Gorge Commission in future decision-making. Cumulative impacts will be evaluated. Gorge Commission staff are currently working on the development of a new website, www.gorgevitalsigns.org, that will be devoted entirely to the Vital Signs Indicators Project. This site will provide the most current available information to those who are interested in gorge resources. It is our hope that by sharing this information, we can become a catalyst for new projects in other agencies and communities and work together as a region to better protect the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Thank you for your interest in this project. Please contact Angie Kenney, Lead Planner for the Vital Signs Indicators Project, for additional information and for your comments and suggestions to improve future reporting. She can be reached at (509) 493-3323 extension 232 or by email at kenney@gorgecommission.org.