

The Columbia Gorge Scenic Area (Oregon / Washington, United States): a Geopark by any other name

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It is common knowledge that the United States has no Geoparks. With a vast array of unique geological settings, from the Grand Canyon to the many volcanoes in the western US, to special geological settings, such as the John Day Fossil Beds, in Oregon, or the Needles National Forest setting, in South Dakota, the US clearly possesses areas that would be appropriate for Geopark status. The Columbia River Gorge (CRG), located near Portland, Oregon, has been acknowledged as one of the most significant natural landscapes in the nation. In 1986, the CRG was designated as the first National Scenic Area (NSA), with the purpose of protecting and enhancing its unique cultural, natural, recreation, and scenic resources. Today millions of visitors enjoy the impressive scenery and variety of recreation opportunities that the CRG offers. Within the CRG lie several cities, with the largest being Hood River/The Dalles (pop. 100,000). Management agencies in the CRG work collaboratively and engage recreation stakeholders to develop a recreation strategy to help land managers make decisions that address the needs and demands of their agency in a politically charged environment while balancing recreation, natural/cultural resources, and the economy. The strategy would be a mechanism to leverage skills, facilities, and/or assets to maximize each agency's effectiveness as recreation providers while protecting the CRG's values. We will discuss the similarities between a Geopark and the CRG, making use of the self-evaluation document used by all Geoparks that wants to join the Global Network under the auspices of UNESCO. Our results show that the CRG fits nearly all of the criteria, suggesting the CRG would easily qualify as a Geopark.

Presented in Theme 2