

White Salmon, Washington, built terraces on a wide south-facing slope on the bluff above Bingen, Washington. They planted American vines that they had brought with them from Illinois. The petitioner also refers to two other pioneer families who brought grape cuttings to the Columbia Gorge. John Balfour, the youngest son of English Lord Balfour, planted and raised a quantity of grapes in the early 1900s near the current location of Lyle, Washington. Leonis and Eliza Meress brought grape cuttings to the area from their native Adele Nord, a village in one of France's coldest regions. Some of the vinifera vines they planted are still alive today and have withstood temperatures well below zero.

Interest in grape growing in the Columbia Gorge was renewed in the early 1960s when experimental plots were planted in White Salmon, Washington. Later, commercial plots were planted under the direction of Washington State University. Today the Columbia River Gorge Wine Growers Association is comprised of 24 growers and 4 wineries. There are 284 acres currently planted to wine grapes in the proposed Columbia Gorge viticultural area with more being planted each year.

Evidence That the Name of the Area Is Locally or Nationally Known

The petitioner indicates that local residents know this narrow, winding valley, with its steeply rising bluffs as "the Gorge," "Columbia Gorge," and "Columbia River Gorge." The petitioner notes that there was some debate as to whether the proposed area's name should be "Columbia Gorge" or "Columbia River Gorge" since both terms are utilized. The term "Columbia River Gorge" often appears as a more formal title, such as the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and the Columbia River Gorge National Fish Hatcheries.

The petitioner contends, however, that "Columbia Gorge" is the most common usage and involves and connotes an area smaller in size than the boundaries of the Federally designated scenic area. Examples of this usage include the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center of the Skamania County Historical Society, the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center of the Wasco County Historical Museum, and various businesses and tourist attractions. Promotional groups such as the Skamania County Chamber of Commerce, Cascade Locks, use maps titled "Experience the Columbia Gorge" and "Heart of the Columbia Gorge."

Evidence That Supports the Proposed Boundaries

The petitioner states that the proposed Columbia Gorge viticultural area's boundaries are based on a combination of topographic, soil, and climatic factors that contrast with the nearby Columbia Valley and Willamette Valley viticultural areas. The petitioner uses the 2000-foot elevation line for much of the proposed boundary because it includes lower, flatter, loamy soil and agricultural areas, while excluding higher-elevation lands more suitable for timber due to their steeper, gravelly soil.

Evidence of Distinctive Geographic Features

The petitioner provided the following evidence that the proposed Columbia Gorge viticultural area is a unique grape-growing region distinguished by its topography, soils, and climate:

Topography

The Columbia River carved the Columbia Gorge, and its sides become steep cliffs as the river twists and turns in its westbound course. The sides of the gorge range from sheer rock faces comprised of volcanic outcroppings of igneous and metamorphic rock to gentle stair-step benchlands, which reflect prehistoric lava flow. These benchlands are the most desirable for vineyards, with deep soil and good sun exposure.

The gorge acts as a funnel that works the moist marine air masses to its west and the drier air to its east back and forth. The proposed Columbia Gorge viticultural area benefits from these prevailing winds, which originate over the Pacific ocean and moderate temperatures that otherwise might be warmer in the summer and cooler in the winter.

Soils

The petitioner states that, in general, soil types within the boundaries of the proposed Columbia Gorge viticultural area are silty loams, as opposed to the more gravelly soils found outside the area. As the valleys on both the Washington and Oregon sides of the proposed area slope up to the surrounding hills, the terrain becomes much steeper, and the soil types change noticeably.

Permeability of the silty loams found within the proposed area is slow to moderate, and available water capacity is high. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Soils present within the proposed area include Chemawa, Underwood Loam, McGowen, Wyest Silt Loam, Van Horn, Parkdale Loam, and Oak Grove Loam series.

By contrast, the areas immediately surrounding the proposed area, both above the 2,000-foot elevation line and east to the Columbia Valley, are generally comprised of gravelly, higher permeability soils. These soils typically support sloped timber areas at more than 2,000 feet above sea level. Examples of soils outside the proposed area are Steeper McElroy, Undusk Gravelly Loam, Husum Gravelly Loam, Rock Outcrop, Bins-Bindle, Yallani, and Hesslan-Skyline series.

Rainfall

The petition states that yearly rainfall totals determined the eastern and western borders of the proposed area. The lands west of the proposed area have more rainfall, cloud cover, and vegetative growth. These factors result in benchlands unsuitable for viticulture. The terrain east of the proposed area is much more arid.

Annual rainfall within the proposed area ranges from 30 inches in the Hood River, Oregon, area at the western end to 18 inches near its eastern end at Lyle, Washington. By comparison, Bonneville Dam and Skamania, Washington, two places west of the proposed area, average 77.54 and 85.49 inches of annual rainfall, respectively. Two towns east of the proposed area, The Dalles, Oregon, and Yakima, Washington, respectively average 14.52 and 8.21 inches of rainfall annually.

Temperature

The average growing temperatures within the proposed area range from 62 degrees (Appleton and Wind River, Washington) to 65 degrees (Hood River, Oregon) as compared to 61 degrees in Skamania and 71.6 degrees in The Dalles. In general, grapes grown in the proposed Columbia Gorge appellation region are early varieties, such as Pinot Noir and Gewurztraminer, which require less high temperature days. By contrast, the Columbia Valley area is able to grow much later varieties, e.g., Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, due to significantly higher degree growing days.

Proposed Boundaries

See the narrative boundary description and the listing of maps for the petitioned viticultural area in the proposed regulation published at the end of this notice.

Public Participation

Comments Sought

We request comments from anyone concerned and are particularly interested in comments on whether the name "Columbia River Gorge" is