

Columbia River Gorge Commission
Assessment Committee Meeting Notes
August 5, 2008 – 1:00pm
White Salmon, Washington

Commissioners Present: Dan Harkenrider, chair, Walt Loehrke, Carl McNew, and Jim Middaugh (by phone).

CRGC / USFS Staff: Jill Arens, Angie Kenney, Diana Ross, Tom Ascher, Jessica Metta, Michele Dailey, Aaron Ferguson and Jeff Tryens, Indicators Consultant to staff

Other Attendees: North Cheatham and Michael Lang

The meeting began with introductions and overview of the updated work plans created by staff (attached). Jeff Tryens reminded the Committee of the four categories of data availability shown on the workplans, which include: 1. data available, 2. data expected, 3. progress expected and 4. next phase. Jeff said that although staff is doing well on the research, there are a few indicators we had anticipated having data available for, and through research, have discovered that it is not available.

Commissioner Middaugh asked how the indicators were prioritized for the work plans. Jeff explained that a triage had been done with the advisory teams based on the availability of the data and the importance of the measure to the public. He added that they were not prioritized by relationships with agency policy concerns.

Jill Arens informed the Committee of Michele Dailey's new title. Michele's role as Lead Spatial Analyst will include co-leading the development of indicators that require spatial analysis and other methodologies using GIS.

Michael Lang questioned staff when the "next phase" category could be expected to occur. Jeff explained that "next phase" really meant that those indicators would be developed and included in the second report, which should be issued in 2011. He added that the first report should be out by April of 2009.

Chair Harkenrider mentioned that indicator 1.1.a had a different tone than the other scenic measures. Jeff reminded everyone that there are three kinds of indicators: 1. Condition measures, 2. Intervention measures, and 3. Perception measures. He said that if the Committee wanted to revisit the language of any indicators, then they should have the ability to do so. Angie Kenney explained the need for indicator 1.1.a and continued to go through the work plans for the rest of the scenic resource indicators.

Michele explained the spatial analysis methodologies that will be needed for 1.1.b and c. Michele also described a set of parameters she has developed to ensure that the next set of visual monitoring photographs are taken in the exact same location and under the same environmental conditions in the future. She added that the Forest Service will be taking a new set of photos in the near future and that they have been coordinating with a photographer.

It was decided by the Committee that 1.1.b should be changed to read: *percent of seen area as viewed from public vantage points containing development that highly contrasts...* The

Committee also agreed that the indicator should have a footnote for the word “seen” to clarify that the viewshed to be evaluated are those seen from the public vantage points – not the vantage points themselves. Michele noted that indicator 1.1.c is based on current and future source data. The Committee discussed that the phrase “individual development” is problematic because it is not defined and will really be more of an approximation. Commissioner Loehrke suggested that the US Marine Corps has already done this kind of methodology development for the creation of camouflage. He suggested to staff that existing camouflage methodologies be explored. Staff suggested changing “individual development” to “number of development areas” but before making any changes, would discuss the change and bring a proposal back to the next Assessment Committee meeting.

Chair Harkenrider questioned the differences between indicators 1.1.b and c. For the sake of being efficient, he asked if there was value in keeping two measure that use the same data and measure very similar things. Staff explained that although they use the same data, it would require different methodologies. Indicator (b) provides a measure of the affected area, while (c) provides the number of sites. Michele added that (c) could potentially give us an idea of cumulative impacts if we counted by size classes. Staff also said that 1.1.b is more useful for staff, but (c) is more easily understood by the public. Jeff reminded everyone that these two indicators used to have supplemental indicators that counted *all* development, not just the highly contrasting development – and that it was already telling us the bare minimum of what the community advisory team wanted us to measure.

Tom Ascher provided the Committee with an overview of the natural resources work plan. He explained that habitat, species, water, and air all require very different kinds of research and work. He said that surface water quality data could be difficult to get and that we may need to look at alternative measures. Chair Harkenrider commented that most watersheds are located outside the NSA and that we should focus our research efforts on those resources located inside the Scenic Area. Commissioner Loehrke suggested that USGS should be contacted for water related data. Tom suggested that we may need to become more specific with the measures. He said that for example, it would be much easier to measure the temperature or the fecal matter than the overall quality. Chair Harkenrider noted that all streams on the 303d list [within the NSA] should be evaluated. He added that just knowing why the stream is listed would be an improvement (progress). The Committee discussed the difficulties in gathering water quality information and suggested that more work needed to be done.

Chair Harkenrider moved on to discuss habitat quality and how it relates to the Scenic Area Act. He said that it still wasn't clear to him why we were taking on measures related to groundwater when they are not specifically addressed in the Act. Staff reminded the Committee that groundwater was very important to the advisory teams and that it does relate to habitat quality (among other measures) as well. Commissioner Middaugh suggested contacting Department of Environmental Quality and Fish and Wildlife agencies for ibi data (index of biological integrity) to help answer this question.

The Committee moved on to discuss air quality. Chair Harkenrider stated that he did not want to over promise air quality information to the general public. Michael commented that air quality affects all resources and added that the Yakama Nation has a report about its effects on rock art. Jill explained that we had originally intended to have a special air quality group of

experts to look at all of the overlapping impacts to Gorge resources, but for now have placeholders in the scenic and natural sections for future indicators.

Michele moved on to describe the methodologies developed for several of the natural resource indicators (see attachment). She explained that in order to work on these measures, it will take a very large commitment on the part of the staff and Commission to ensure proper methodologies and credibility.

Chair Harkenrider questioned the need to measure habitat health in relation to historic conditions. He explained that it might be unfair to landowners and unrealistic to expect the habitat on their land to be as good as it was in historic times – before European settlement.

Tom expressed that the data was more difficult to acquire than originally anticipated for indicators 2.1.c and (d). The Committee agreed to change the status for both indicators from “data available” to “data expected”.

Tom then discussed the progress made on economic indicators. He explained that Aaron had been working most closely on these and that there are a lot of parallel measures between the objectives. He added that it has been difficult to acquire information that is Urban Area or Scenic Area specific and that data is usually organized by county. Aaron explained that some census block data was available and that he had utilized it for several measures.

Chair Harkenrider questioned the need to view the Urban Areas separate from the non-Urban Areas. Jeff explained that the Community Advisory Team had two very strong opinions about economic growth in the Scenic Area. Some of the team felt that the land outside Urban Areas was too limited in terms of economic growth opportunities, while others felt that *all* economic activities should be contained within the Urban Areas. North Cheatham added that Corbett and Skamania feel as though they should be recognized as Urban Areas. The indicators address both perspectives of this matter and will provide useful trend information.

It was noted that building permits, as called out by indicators 3.1.c and 3.3.c were more difficult to obtain than land use decisions. Tom explained that although land use decisions can tell you what has been approved, building permits are the only way to see what has actually been built. Michael suggested that land use decisions would still provide useful trend information. Commissioner Loehrke said that a new system should be developed so that all permits and decisions were stored in one easily accessed place. The Committee agreed that land use decisions could be used as a proxy for building permit data to ensure progress on this indicator.

Aaron moved on to indicator 3.1.e and discussed information available for housing affordability. He explained that Washington has an affordability calculator that can be used at the county level – but that it can only be used after each census. Commissioner Loehrke suggested that local companies (e.g. banks, title companies and real estate offices) already have this kind of information. Commissioner McNew thought that it might be more difficult to obtain than you might think. Commissioner Middaugh suggested that we look at the need for housing at different income levels to see if community needs are being met.

Indicator 3.2.d measures the land base devoted to local agricultural and forestry economies. Commission staff explained that in order to measure meaningful information the measure should be modified to include the word “uses” after agriculture and forest. The Committee agreed to this change.

Angie and Aaron presented an update for the cultural resource indicators. Aaron and Michele have been working with Marge Dryden, Heritage Program for the US Forest Service on the creation of a database to establish the baseline for cultural resource information. Marge provided a presentation of the indicators project to the tribes and other cultural resource information holders at a monthly meeting known as Wana Pa Koot Koot. She was able to obtain a list of cultural resource contacts and ensure that the tribes were aware of their opportunities to get involved.

A few problematic issues related to the cultural resource indicators include an ever changing baseline (number of sites), the baseline does not contain everything (more like a subset or information), and new monitoring events are only triggered in the Scenic Area rules by a new application. It was suggested that a possible agency performance measure for cultural could be: the number of new sites identified on site visits for new land use applications. No changes were made to the cultural indicators.

Jessica Metta presented an update for the recreation indicators. She explained that an inventory had been created and that she had been working on gathering data from the many recreation providers in the Gorge. She noted that she is collecting information on all resource based recreation in the Gorge – including sites inside Urban Areas (not counting non-resource based recreation such as tennis courts and swimming pools). Jessica explained that the recreation experts consulted throughout much of this project have been unavailable to meet since May because of schedule conflicts. It is the peak of the recreation and fire season, which has pulled them away from any extra commitments, including the indicators project.

Jessica identified a problem with the language of indicator 5.1.a. She said that after calling many recreation providers, she has discovered that no daily data is available as the indicator requests. She added that some monthly information had been found, but that it is not consistent amongst providers. Providers that charge fees for their sites have better data than those who do not, but again, it is not consistent. Jessica is still waiting on additional information to arrive before she can fully understand what may need to be changed with the language of this indicator.

Chair Harkenrider asked whether or not a survey would be conducted for indicator 5.1.c. Jessica explained that a survey would be necessary, and that it would be very similar to and maybe combined with the scenic resources survey.

Jessica discussed the use of SCORP data as the recreation experts and advisory teams had suggested. She said that she has found the scale and scope of the information to be too large for the project. Similar to the problems found in gather economic data, SCORP recreation data is not Gorge specific and encompass an area much too large to be meaningful for this project. Michael suggested that Jessica contact WA CTED (Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development) for county level recreation data.

Indicator 5.1.b addresses environmental impacts of recreation. Jessica explained that a set of criteria needs to be developed to address degradation and that we'd be most interested in the human caused degradation (something that can be addressed and altered if a negative trend becomes apparent). There were also questions about ADA accessibility: who is required to be ADA certified, and how many sites are there?

Indicator 5.2.c addresses recreation related conflicts. Jessica stated that local law enforcement agencies will be the largest source of information for this measure. Commissioner McNew said that the Columbia River Gorge Windsurfing Association will be meeting soon to discuss conflicts with the Kite Boarding Association.

Jill wrapped up the meeting by summarizing the progress made by staff. She said that although a lot of work has been done, there is a lot more to do, and we still have a lot of questions. She explained that she would like to maintain the project's transparent process. Jill stated that she will need to present a summary of the project to the Oregon Legislature this winter and would like to issue a final report of the project to the public in April of 2009.

Angie provided an update about the recently conducted advisory team survey. She explained that Sally Duncan of OSU Institute of Natural Resources would be providing an analysis of the survey results that will eventually be added to her larger process report. Once Sally's analysis is complete, her process report will also be complete – and will be posted for public review.

Chair Harkenrider noted that we won't be able to get all of what is desired for this project and that when we present the information to the legislature, we should under promise and over deliver. The Committee agreed that it will be very important to present this information in the right way to ensure future project funding and assistance. Jeff reminded everyone that this is the hard part of the project. These first data points will probably be the most difficult to obtain and once the data source and methodology are determined, the second and third data points will be much easier to get. Progress will be incremental, but steady.

Meeting adjourned.

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Enclosures:

- Agenda
- Work plans
- Spatial analysis methodologies