

Columbia River Gorge Commission  
Vital Signs Indicators Project  
**Scenic Resources Sub-Group**  
**Meeting Notes**  
**December 13, 2007 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.**  
White Salmon, Washington

Scenic Sub-Group Members Present: Todd Cornett, Brian Biannson, Diana Ross, Mike Benedict, Michael Lang\*, Karen Witherspoon, Jurgen Hess, and Ken Born\*.

Staff: Brian Litt, Angie Kenney, Michele Dailey, Jeff Tryens, indicators consultant and Jimmy Kagan, technical advisor to the sub-groups

Other Attendees: Bob Liepper

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Brian Bainnson (Brian B.) began the meeting by discussing the structure of the sub-group. Brian Litt (Brian L.) provided some background of the indicators project to the group. He explained that the purpose of the advisory teams, sub-groups, consultants and advisors is to provide the commission with an independent audit of the health of the Gorge. He explained Angie Kenney's role as the lead planner of the entire project as well as the staff person assigned to assist the scenic sub-group with meeting notes and other staff support. Brian L. discussed the larger goals of the indicators project and explained that the information derived from this project will inform us about the state of the Gorge and its resources; enable the Commission to use adaptive management; and guide future policy changes.

Brian L, explained that the project will happen in several phases. The first phase of the project will include the work of the advisory teams. We are looking towards the advisory teams to create a set of indicators that will be able to tell us what gorge resources are important – what should be measured. The second phase of the project will involve Commission and other partner agency staff conducting an analysis on the indicators recommended by the advisory teams. This analysis will result in the creation of agency level performance indicators to determine how well we are carrying out the Act. We are not asking the advisory teams to determine why conditions of the Gorge are where they are – we are only asking what conditions or resources matter at a very high level.

Angie went over a few handouts, including one that showed the phases of the project Brian L. had previously discussed (attached). She reminded everyone to keep things simple and on a very high level. We don't want to get too wrapped up in the details at this point of the project.

Todd Cornett discussed the outline of goals and draft objectives prepared by staff last summer. He explained that the goals are set, but that the objectives could still be modified as the advisory teams saw fit. Mike Benedict clarified that as we go through the process, we should really only be looking to the Act, and not fee limited by the Management Plan.

That way, information used to guide the next plan review will come straight from the Act and not from the plan itself.

The group began running through the objectives. Jimmy Kagan questioned whether or not the '(Key Viewing Areas)' was really needed at the end of objective 1.1. Diana Ross suggested that most areas in the Scenic Area are visible from KVAs anyways, so that it might not be necessary to include KVAs in parentheses at the end. Brian L. also noted that the Act does not explicitly mention the phrases key viewing area or landscape settings. He explained that the first priority or objective in scenic protection should be to protect priority view sheds and that the second should be to protect the diversity of the existing landscape. Mike and Michael Lang suggested that we look only to the Act for guidance.

Brian B. suggested that we might want to change objective 1.2. He explained that there are eyesores in the Gorge that we might not want to keep, and that the word 'existing' could be problematic if left in the objective. Brian L. explained that maintaining the existing landscape has always been a priority due to the very high level diversity contained just within the Gorge – not a very large area. Diana explained that indicators that have been traditionally used for scenic resources include unity, vividness, variety, and intactness. She explained that using the word diversity is often times too problematic to use. Jimmy suggested that we could use the word diversity – as long as it was defined somewhere in the report. Brian L. suggested revising objective 1.2 to read: Protect the visual character of diverse gorge landscapes. Mike asked whether we were limited to the natural landscape and questioned how the agricultural areas would fall into the mix. Diana commented that agricultural is not a natural landscape. Brian B. added that the agricultural landscape is a managed landscape. Brian L. agreed and added that land owned by the parks department is also managed in a similar way.

Brian B. suggested that they continue this discussion and similar ones on the wiki. Michele Dailey was introduced as the indicators technical support person and gave a presentation about the wiki site and how to use it. She also asked that any GIS or spatial analysis work be given to her for future analysis. Brian B. encouraged everyone to use the site to allow us to meet the tight time frame and deadlines. He added that we should be coming up with a list of draft indicators for the next meeting (early January).

Todd clarified that we are really only looking for the '*what*' is important not the '*why*' it is important. Another way of looking at it is looking at *what* has changed – not *why* or *how much* it's changed. He explained that the indicators should be measurable, reproducible, and auditable and should be able to meet additional criteria outlined in the indicators criteria handout as well (attached). Mike clarified that we are not measuring whether or not the Management Plan is protecting the vital signs – we are measuring whether or not the Management Plan is carrying out the Act.

Todd then went over the ground rules set for the group (attached) to keep the timelines in check. He explained that the role and function of the groups are driven by the tight timeline. Diana stated that this project relies heavily on the collaborative process and that everyone should take the time to understand other people's perspectives and concerns. She did not want the group to assume that one person's opinion could be dropped for the

sake of meeting a deadline. Todd agreed and said that we should treat everyone with respect, but that we need to be mindful of the project's time constraints.

It was then discussed that the group could have these larger discussions with everyone's ideas and opinions on the wiki. While on the wiki members can discuss each indicator or issue individually. The changes will be tracked along with a discussion as to why they may have been kept or dropped. Todd and Diana agreed that this process would allow members to join different thoughts and track an evolution of ideas.

Todd handed out a preliminary list of existing data sources that may be of assistance while creating indicators (attached). One of these sources includes the scenic monitoring report published in 2000. Brian L. discussed the intent of these reports and some of the original goals that were not reached. He explained that the reports were conducted to provide guidance during plan review, outcomes, but ended up producing agency performance information, or outputs. He said that there are a lot of questions that went unanswered and what started out asking "how well is the plan working?" turned into "how well has the plan been implemented?" Todd explained that we should all be aware of the data that has already been compiled and begin a list of potential indicators from there. He stated that he would prefer the existing data to drive the indicators, not the other way around.

Jeff Tryens asked the group how cumulative impacts might be measured and noted that Michael had raised a similar question earlier. The group discussed the existing methodologies employed to ensure visual subordination including the review of color, line, form, size and textures. Todd added that part of the report is to find out what we're not doing, but some of the existing methodologies may be useful. Diana suggested the use of USFS scenic inventory photographs taken in 1988 and 2003. She added that the 1988 photograph could serve as the baseline set of data. She noted that the photos are not necessarily taken from KVAs (most are), but good vantage points. She said that a third set will eventually be taken, but probably not for a few years. Michele added that our GIS might be able to provide information. The current GIS system evaluates sensitivity which includes landscape diversity, visibility from KVAs, and visual absorption capability. Diana mentioned that the forest service also has vegetation layer. The group then discussed the use (and benefits) of LIDAR to gather information.

Diana discussed a visual absorption capability study that was done before the Management Plan even existed. It included an inventory of stratified landscape elements that are not expected to change as well as an evaluation of the landscape at a much more detailed level. She explained that there was no need at this point to re-do the study, and that for the purpose of this project, we should only be looking to the intactness of the landscape today. She noted that other existing inventories include landscape attributes, diversity, visibility from KVAs, significance of landscape, absorption (how forgiving a landscape is to new development), and sensitivity (a combination of all of these layers). Diana reminded everyone that the only thing that should matter is the topography – we shouldn't get too involved in trying to obtain more detailed photographs or studies. If something is topographically visible, then it's visible – regardless of vegetation or design. She explained that she would rather lean towards evaluating the *intactness* of the landscape than re-do any of the inventories or photographs.

Michael explained that the Friends of the Gorge have a GIS system with tax lot layers and corresponding development review database. They also have a buildable lands inventory with a partial build out analysis for the Underwood area.

Mike and Todd explained that their counties have aerial photographs and GIS similar to that of the Commission's. Ken Born stated that Multnomah County has similar information and has been increasing their use of LIDAR. They have been working to combine the newer, more detailed LIDAR inventories with the seen areas layer to verify its accuracy. He said that the county had concluded that more land is visible from KVAs than originally expected. He explained that with the ability to view the actual vegetation and its relative density, the county is able to determine just how visible a proposed development might be with greater accuracy.

Jimmy reminded everyone that we don't need to determine what kind of data will be used at this point in the project – and that we should be focusing on what we care about. It is more relevant at this point to say “we care about the view and we want the best data available to evaluate it”.

Brian B. discussed the policies in place for scenic resource protection in Lake Tahoe. He explained that Tahoe Regional Planning Association (TRPA) has goals that are very similar to that of the Scenic Area Act. The only difference, he explained, is that they quantify resources in measurable terms and have a rating system in place to measure trends and impacts. He suggested that we look to TRPA as an example. Diana questioned how well they were able to monitor change and how well they are implementing their own rules. TRPA has an inventory for quality and use thresholds with a corresponding point system. They have a defined viewshed, segments of viewsheds and vantage points and an actual human inventory. Brian B. clarified that TRPA sends people out to assess or rate the view from defined areas. The changes are analyzed in a secondary phase, where analysis of change identifies trends and impacts and can effectively tell the story.

Jurgen Hess said that we have a visual monitoring system – and that change is measurable using those existing data sets. He explained that ASLA had offered to help with this a few years back and even came up with a list of indicators and viewsheds. He added that many people got hung up determining cumulative effects.

Todd again reminded everyone that we are only looking for the “what” not the “why”. He added that we should look to existing studies that have already been done, including the Management Plan. He said that the group should not feel limited by its parameters, but should not ignore the work that went into its development.

Jurgen questioned whether or not the group should be looking at air quality as a scenic issue. Brian L. said that air quality cuts across almost all of the SNECRs and that we should recognize the fact that several agencies are already trying to tackle this issue. He said that he did not feel it was appropriate to have just one sub-group assess air quality issues and that it might be more fitting to have a separate group form at a later date (not as part of the indicators project) to effectively assess air quality in the Gorge and its affect on all of the SNECRs. Jurgen noted that a lot of data already exists for the air quality in the Gorge, and that it might not be as difficult as everyone assumes. Mike said that he agreed

with Brian L., that air quality was an important issue, but for the sake of this project and meeting tight deadlines, that it should be handled at a later date by its own team. He does not want to see the entire indicators project bogged down by air quality when there are already other projects in the area devoted to it. Todd agreed that air quality is an important issue that has a direct impact on all of the SNECRs, and that it could be discussed again at a later time. Jimmy suggested discussing it on the wiki.

Todd then suggested that everyone take a look at other scenic protection plans in the area for the high level issues they care about. For example, the Department of Transportation has developed scenic travel corridor strategies that might contain indicators we care about too.

Todd asked the group to start thinking about indicators for the next meeting. Brian B. suggested putting the staff ideas on the wiki to spur discussion between members and possible work on refining them. Michele asked the team to send her links and copies data sets to post to the wiki and make available for future use. Jeff asked everyone to keep thinking about the objectives – because the indicators will stem from them. He added that we should be looking for the change, not the value. Todd suggested that at the next meeting the group should revisit the objectives and then get into indicators.

Meeting adjourned.

Attachments

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**NSA INDICATORS PROJECT  
SCENIC RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE  
SUBGROUP MEETING 1**

**Date:** 13 December 2007

**Location:** Gorge Commission Conference Room, White Salmon

**AGENDA**

- 10:00 a.m. Introductions - Brian B. & Todd**
- 10:05 a.m. Description of NSA Indicators Project & Desired Outcome of Scenic Resources Subcommittee - Angie & Brian L.**
- 10:30 a.m. Outline of Process and Role of Subgroup - Brian B. & Todd**
- 11:30 a.m. Identification & Discussion of Available Resources to Help Establish Indicators - Everyone**
- Scenic Monitoring Report 2000
  - Photos
  - GIS
  - Viewshed Analysis
  - Lake Tahoe Association
  - Management Plan
  - Other
- 12:20 p.m. Next Meeting Date and Location - Everyone**
- 12:30 Adjourn**

## **Scenic Resources Subgroup Outline of Process and Role of Subgroup**

**Goal:** Protect and Enhance scenic resources of the Scenic Area (Management Plan – Page I-1-2)

**Objectives:** Adopted by the Gorge Commission (Draft)

1. Protect and enhance the scenic quality of the Columbia River Gorge visible from public vantage points (Key Viewing Areas).
2. Protect the diversity and visual character of the existing landscape.

**Indicators:**

-They must meet either of the two objectives above.

-They must be measurable, reproducible and auditable.

-Indicator Categories:

-Ready-to-use: These can be monitored immediately.

-Within reach: These will require some moderate process or system to be created.

-Developmental: These will require a substantial process or system to be created.

-This is the value neutral, foundational phase (the what phase). We are looking to objectively monitor changes occurring to visual resources. Consistency with specific Management Plan or Ordinance requirements, or causality (the why phase) will come later.

**Process:**

-3 Subgroup Meetings

Subgroup Meeting #1: This meeting

Subgroup Meeting #2: Look at Resources and Propose & Review 3 categories of Draft Indicators.

Subgroup Meeting #3: Review Draft Indicators

-Brian and Todd Telephone Meetings

-Technical Committee Meetings

-Draft Indicators due at the end of January

**Role of this group:** To provide technical assistance to Brian B. and Todd. We will try to reach consensus. However, due to the complexity of the issue and the limited amount of time, if consensus cannot be readily reached, Brian B. and Todd will make final recommendations on indicators.

**SCENIC RESOURCES SUBGROUP  
GROUND RULES**

- Stick to agenda
- Stay on topic
- Start and end on time
- Listen attentively
- One person speak at a time
- Avoid side conversation
- Let everyone speak
- Long talkers will be cut off
- Feel free to share ideas
- Treat others with respect
- If cell phone rings leave the meeting room quickly

**Scenic Resources Subgroup  
Available Resources**

**Scenic Monitoring Report 2000** - Brian L.

**Photos**

-Forest Service - Diana Ross

**GIS - Everyone**

-Gorge Commission  
-Forest Service  
-Friends of The Gorge  
-County

**Viewshed Analysis**

-Current GIS Theme - Visible from Key Viewing Areas - Diana  
-LIDAR- Sauvie Island Project - Ken Born

**Lake Tahoe Association** - Brian B. & Diana

**Management Plan** - Todd

-Incentive Programs to implement scenic resources  
-Scenic Enhancement Programs to prioritize enhancement of lands seen from KVA's  
-Program to phase out existing quarries

**Other**

-I-84 Corridor Strategy Design Objective: Page 43 - Create new and restore important scenic views to the river and other scenic features where appropriate to the ecological function of the plant community, while maintaining screening.

-SR 14: Same as above

*West Hills  
Viewshed Methodology*

**March 2007**

