

## **Vital Signs Indicators Project: Recreation Subgroup Meeting Notes**

Tuesday, 12 February 2008

Gorge Commission office, White Salmon, WA

### Attendees:

Rich Davis, Washington State Parks and Recreation Department, Subgroup Chair

Stan Hinatsu, US Forest Service

Jessica Metta, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Jeff Tryens, consultant for the Indicators Project

Robert Burns, West Virginia University, via phone

Alan Graefe, Penn State, via phone

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(Please see the Agenda with attached Meeting Materials for this meeting). Jessica, Rich and Jeff reviewed the comments that were received January 28 from the Community Advisory Team (CAT). It was noted that an inventory of group recreation sites would also ask what type of group is using the site (i.e. family, clubs). The group discussed how the CAT comments would fit into the existing indicators. In general, the existing indicators could address their comments as is. Footnotes were added to the existing indicators to clarify how they address the CAT comments.

Jessica explained how there has been a lot of questions about what “diversity” means, so she made an attempt to define it by asking how recreation is protected and enhanced (see the black box at the end of the meeting materials). She brainstormed that recreation is protected and enhanced by ensuring that there is equal access to it for all people (which would consider how different recreation types are distributed throughout the Gorge, whether there are enough sites -which considers participation rates, and ADA accessibility) and that the rec sites are well cared for (which considers quality, overuse, environmental protections). If “well cared for” is answered by Objective 5.2, equal access is Objective 5.1. So she made a footnote to define diversity as equal access. Robert suggested changing “equal” to “universal” which was fine with the group.

The group then launched into a discussion about whether the Commission really cares about “diversity” of recreation. If there are 84 or 47 different types of recreation opportunities in the Gorge, does that matter? If the number of recreation types decreases and user conflicts and resource degradation increases as a result, this is something we wouldn’t want. Should the Gorge Commission be concerned about the distribution of recreation in the Gorge? Or would they be concerned about the quality of recreation that finds its way here and whether it’s sustainable? Would the Gorge Commission care if there are 15 or 30 types of recreation or rather if demand is being met? This is why the Forest Service is trying to identify the Gorge’s niche – it’s to see what the Gorge can best provide in the area of recreation and then focus on that. An inventory of the recreation that is occurring here and participation rates will help determine demand. If demand is not being met, how would this impact the recreation sites and environmental resources? There is some demand we wouldn’t want to meet (i.e. OHV use). Any measure of demand would have to not look at numbers of users alone, because windsurfing is so important to the Gorge but represents a smaller total number of users. Ultimately, the group decided to change Objective 5.1 to read something like “meet the demand for resource-based recreation opportunities in an environmentally sustainable manner.”

With this change in Objective 5.1, the group looked again at the indicators under 5.1 to see how they might change:

- Indicator 5.1.a is an inventory that needs to be done –and will get done for other indicators - but this is not an indicator in itself, so it should not be on this list.
- Improving existing recreation sites (5.1.b) does not reflect whether there is a demand for those improvements –does not link supply and demand. Just improving sites without a need for it is not a positive thing. So this indicator was eliminated.
- 5.1.c answers the supply part of the demand equation that we would want to know, so this would be kept, although determining how to define the “potential recreation users” will be difficult. We would have to define the market area, work with the recreation agencies to define for each recreation type.
- 5.1.d is really addressing recreation demand and is important to keep in.
- 5.1.e should be changed to measure not perception of diversity but perception of recreation access to the activities they participate in. So the wording would be changed to “Percent of visitors and residents rating the access to recreation activity types of choice as good or better.”
- 5.1.f is important and would kept as one type of demand.
- 5.1.g still is not clear about which direction is good. Stan clarified that trails are not considered a “developed site” – only the trailheads are. If that is the case, then is this indicator measuring anything useful? What this indicator was trying to measure is the “dispersed” recreation, meaning people that are not recreating at regular trails or recreation areas. The concern is that if there is a lot of dispersed recreation, it can mean that demand is not being met and environmental resources may be damaged. If we have other indicators measuring recreation demand, maybe this will be address through those? Maybe a better indicator would be number of demand-driven interventions for site upgrades –this is more of a key performance indicator (Phase 2 of this process) and so was not added to the list. The group determined to not drop this indicator even though it had some questions about its necessity – instead they made it a low priority.

The group determined that a few of the indicators under Objective 5.2 should be under the new 5.1. This included 5.2.a and 5.2.f which measure overuse of sites and environmental degradation. These are related to meeting demand for recreation. It was noted though that measuring average capacity is not meaningful for 5.2.a because of the nature of recreation use. Measuring the number of times capacity is exceeded on peak days is how you determine there is excess demand. 5.2.b and c were fine under Objective 5.2. The group decided to change “conflicts” to “incidents” for 5.2.d. 5.2.e wasn’t providing any information that wasn’t been addressed through other indicators, so the group decided to eliminate it.

Jeff asked about the type of recreation we were talking about – i.e. paintball? Jessica said the group earlier clarified that the only recreation we were considering was “resource-based recreation” –as it’s called in the Management Plan. The group decided to clarify recreation by adding this phrase to the objectives and defining it in a footnote.

Next the group worked on filling in the prioritization worksheet. Jessica had already filled in the column “Importance to measuring the health of the resource,” but this needs to be updated with our change in Objective 5.1 and indicators. The cultural subgroup decided the CAT would fill the next column (“Understandable to the public”) and the rec subgroup followed this route. The group filled out

the three data columns and added some commentary about the data –please see the 2.13.2008 recreation indicator rating sheet for the notes there.

The meeting ended quickly with no next meeting date set. The next CAT and TAT meetings will be February 25, 2008.

Following the meeting, Subgroup Chair Rich Davis and Jessica Metta reworded the new Objective 5.1 to “*Address* the demand for resource-based recreation opportunities in an environmentally sustainable manner.”