

Columbia River Gorge Commission – Vital Signs Indicators Project
Technical Advisory Team - Natural Resources Sub-Group
January 14, 2007 Meeting Notes
USFS Scenic Area Office - Hood River, Oregon

Sub-group members present: Bill Weiler, chair, Mark Kreiter, Jeanette Burkhardt, Jurgen Hess, Robin Dobson and Chuti Fiedler.

Staff present: Diana Ross, Angie Kenney, Michele Dailey, and Jeff Tryens*, indicators consultant.

Others present: Susan Crowley and Bob Liepper* (both are members of the community advisory team).

The meeting began with a discussion of existing data inventories (layers) including deer and elk winter range, fisheries data and wetland and riparian corridors. Susan Crowley suggested to the group that they go back to the original outline format, refine the objectives and begin to build draft indicators in a list format underneath them. Jeff Tryens suggested that what the group's notes list as indicators are actually more like indicator topics. He suggested refining them into objectives and brainstorming indicators for them.

Jurgen Hess questioned why air quality was not being addressed in any of the objectives. Angie Kenney explained that due to the very large amount of work that would need to go into addressing air quality and its impacts on not only natural resources, but also to scenic, recreational, cultural and economic resources – the larger technical advisory team had decided to leave it to be evaluated at a later point – separate from the indicators project to prevent the project from being held up for several years. She also added that there are several other agencies working on the air quality issue in the Gorge and that we could potentially use their data (once it becomes available) to assess it later. The group discussed adding an additional objective to serve as a place holder for air quality – even though it might be on the “developmental” list of indicators for quite some time. It seemed logical to say that if water quality has its own objective, then air quality should be treated in a similar manner. The group added draft objective 2.4 *Protect and enhance air quality of the Gorge*.

The group continued to refine their objectives through an ongoing debate about measuring habitat versus species. A majority of the group felt that it was useless to only measure the number of animals and plants that exist due to the number of extraneous factors that could lead to population fluctuation. They felt that it was much more efficient and made a lot more sense to measure the habitat that supports the species. Robin Dobson gave the example of measuring human health. We don't count how many humans we have, we look at the quality of our environment, whether or not we have food and shelter. Bob Liepper pointed out that it was possible to have great habitat and now wildlife and that it might be important to measure them separately.

* participated in the meeting via telephone

It was decided that objectives 1 and 2 would be combined into 1. Susan suggested revising objective 2.1 to read: *protect and enhance the abundance and quality of habitats in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Habitat health includes the abundance and quality of the guilds of species it supports.* Diana Ross suggested similar language which was agreed upon by a majority of the group. As modified, **Objective 2.1 now reads: *Protect natural plant and animal communities by protecting and enhancing the habitats which support them.***

What was once Objective 2.3, water quality is now addressed in Objective 2.2 which reads: ***Protect and enhance quality of water and aquatic habitat in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.*** The group discussed the possibility of including the main stem of the Columbia River with an indicator that might serve as a placeholder so that it could be included in future studies (similar to that of the air quality issue). The group agreed that the habitat of plants and wildlife that reside in the water should be included here to reduce duplications. There is still some discussion needed to clarify this objective.

To summarize, the refined objectives as modified in this meeting, the three objectives now read:

Objective 2.1 Protect natural plant and animal communities of the Columbia River Gorge by protecting and enhancing the habitats which support them.

Objective 2.2 Protect and enhance quality of water and aquatic habitat in the Columbia River Gorge.

Objective 2.3 Protect and enhance air quality of the Columbia River Gorge

The group then began discussing what kind of time frame or baseline they should be using to measure change from. Diana explained that beginning with 1986, the passing of the Scenic Area Act, doesn't really work for measuring the health of natural resources – mostly because the resources were already altered from their natural state way before the Act was ever passed. Jeff asked whether or not the issue of determining a baseline was necessary at this point in the project – and whether or not it would change the measures they select. The group responded by agreeing that the baseline would indeed change the kinds of measures they selected. For example, the river had more of a riparian corridor before the dams were installed, and now, as a result of the dams, the habitat is similar to that of a lake. The group agreed to use a baseline of the early 1800's. Jeff advised the group to focus on the indicators – and reminded them that a matrix of factors is not an indicator.

The group listed fragmentation, patch size, connectivity, travel corridors, linkage, levels of disturbance and invasive species as possible issues to measure as indicators. Jeanette Burkhardt suggested taking a look at existing projects – more specifically- the sub-basin project by the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Authority. She explained that much of these higher level issues had been worked through in this report already. Angie said that she would post the link to the sub-basin project on the wiki and asked that everyone take a look at it.

Susan noted that the Heinz Report contains very fine detail and wondered whether or not we had the ability to use similar measures. Jeannette suggested that the group examine reports done by similar agencies and look for common ground. If we model our measurements in a similar fashion, we could create the ability to conduct an apples to apples comparison of data sets, which would significantly increase our abilities in the future.

Jeff explained that in this meeting the group had made two policy decisions: (1) to use early 1800's as a baseline for data analysis and (2) decided that the Columbia River should be addressed through a place holder indicator under Objective 2.2 (treated similarly to air quality). He suggested that the group request guidance from the Assessment Committee to determine how to move forward with both of these issues.

Bill suggested that an additional meeting between himself, Jimmy Kagan (who was absent from the meeting), and Diana be held on January 24th to straighten out some of the confusion and make some decisions about the objectives. Angie asked Bill to please invite Tom Ascher to the meeting so that he may document the conversation and decisions made for the wiki.

The next meeting will be scheduled after the community advisory team and larger technical advisory team have had a chance to make comments and provide feedback to the group on January 28, 2008. The date and time of the groups next meeting are to be determined.

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