

Columbia River Gorge Commission
Vital Signs Indicators Project
Scenic Resources Sub-Group
Meeting Notes
January 9, 2008 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am
White Salmon, Washington

Scenic Sub-Group Members Present: Todd Cornett, Brian Biannson, Diana Ross, Mike Benedict, Michael Lang, Mark Mazeski, Jurgen Hess, Jeremy Fivecrows, Dean Apostle, and Ken Born.

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

Other Attendees: Bob Liepper

Todd Cornett, co-chair for the scenic sub-group began the meeting by re-capping the last meeting and suggesting that the group begin by finalizing the objectives. Brian Bainson (Brian B.) recalled from the last meeting that the group was uncomfortable using the words "diversity" and "existing" within the objectives. Angie Kenney noted that the revised language that removed those key words had been posted on the wiki after the previous scenic sub-group meeting. The group agreed to work off of the modified language as it had been posted on the wiki. They are:

Objective 1.1 Protect and enhance the scenic quality of the Columbia River Gorge visible from public vantage points.

Objective 1.2 Protect the visual character and diverse landscapes of the Gorge.

Mike Benedict asked a clarifying question about the future use of information obtained from the indicators project. Angie confirmed for Mike that one of the long term goals for the project is to provide baseline information and guidance for future policy decisions and plan review sessions. Mike also reminded everyone that the Act requests that a scenic inventory be compiled and used to ensure the protection of scenic resources. Brian Litt (Brian L) and Diana Ross explained that the inventory had been done, but was never formally adopted by the Gorge Commission. This means you won't find a bound copy of it with its correct title, you'll only find the inventory. Brian L. explained that the inventory was created in 1988 and 1989 and is comprised of six layers. They include (1) landscape attributes, (2) landscape diversity, (3) seen areas (view sheds from key viewing areas), (4) landscape/visual significance, (5) visual absorption capacity, and (6) scenic sensitivity – a composite of the other five layers. He added that the seen areas layer is the only one that had been updated recently (from a 30M grid to a 10M grid). They explained that the technology used pales in comparison to what we are capable of today, but that the inventory was done as directed by the Act and was used to help write the Management Plan.

Jurgen Hess questioned whether or not we should be using the public vantage points (Key Viewing Areas) or any other scenic resources identified in the Management Plan as our baseline due to the chance that the original inventory could be inaccurate. Jimmy Kagan interjected with a reminder to everyone that there are really two kinds of indicators: (1) where we're going and (2) where we're supposed to be. Angie added that we are not yet at the point where we should be focusing on how well the Management Plan is being implemented or how well it is working, we are simply trying to identify key conditions in the health of the Gorge. The sub-groups and advisory teams should be selecting the most important topics and identifying any existing or potential data sources that can tell us how they are doing – not how the Act is doing. The evaluation piece will come later in the indicators project, and will not be done by the advisory teams. Todd reminded everyone of the tight time frame the group has in which to get their work done. He advised that in order to successfully accomplish their tasks, they must stay at a higher level and not get too tangled up in the evaluation piece. Michael Lang suggested that we keep the evaluation piece in mind while creating the indicators, but that it shouldn't actually be done until much later in the process.

Brian B. asked the group to go back to objective 1.1 and decide whether or not further revisions were necessary. Angie provided the group with some feedback about this objective received at the January 7th community advisory team meeting. She explained that several members of the community team had expressed concern with the removal of "(KVAs)" from the end. The group discussed that they had removed it in the last meeting in an attempt to keep things flexible. Mike added that KVAs is a term used in the Management Plan, not the Act, so it should not be used in the objectives. Jurgen suggested that the cleanest way might be to change the objective to read: protect and enhance the scenic quality of the Gorge. Jeff Tryens suggested that we keep the "visible from" and "scenery of the Gorge" portions of the objective to differentiate it from Objective 1.2, which is meant to cover all scenic resources that are not visible from public vantage points. The group agreed to revise objective 1.1 to now read as: protect and enhance the scenic quality of the Columbia River Gorge visible from particular vantage points.

The group then discussed Objective 1.2. Mike began the discussion by asking whether or not it was really necessary. He explained that it might just be considered a subset of Objective 1.1. Todd agreed that it could be viewed in that way, but that it was important enough on its own to deserve a separate objective. The group agreed to replace "and" with "of the" in Objective 1.2. The revised objective now reads: protect the visual character of the diverse landscapes of the Gorge.

As revised by the group at today's meeting, the following objectives will be provided to the Community Advisory Team for their feedback:

Objective 1.1 Protect and enhance the scenic quality of the Columbia River Gorge visible from particular vantage points.

Objective 1.2 Protect and enhance the visual character of the diverse landscapes of the Gorge.

The chairs then asked the group to shift their attention to draft indicators. Todd described the selection criteria and usability categories to keep in mind (attached). He also reminded the group that the indicators should be easy to understand for the public. The chairs explained that we are looking at the what – not the why. They asked the group: what has been changing in the scenic resources of the Gorge. How can we measure that? They suggested to the group that they create a large list of possible indicators and sort them out using the selection criteria and usability categories later. The group then discussed the list of draft indicators that had been prepared by Todd and Brian B (attached).

Looking at the list, Jeff commented that “indicators” 1 and 5, 4 and 6, and 7 and 3 were all very similar. He suggested only looking at 1 through 4 and then closing any gaps afterwards. He also pointed out in the document that what is listed as indicators, are actually more like indicator topics. He said that the bullets under the topics were the indicators.

Jurgen began discussing thresholds – and whether or not we need to begin with them. Todd reminded him that we are not focusing on the evaluation piece of the project yet. Angie and Jurgen agreed to discuss the different phases of the project after the meeting. Jeff did agree that we will need to be able to see change – and for that you need a baseline (addressing the “change from what?” question).

Mike suggested the removal of draft indicator number two. He explained that “discordant” is a value statement and that it might be impossible to measure. He also said that the bullets underneath number 2 could really be added to or included in the list under numbers one and four. Brian L. explained that a discordant features inventory had been done a while back. He agreed that it would be better however, as part of one and four. Brian defined a discordant feature as something that highly contrasts with the surrounding setting or landscape.

Dean Apostle warned everyone about the differences between landscape health and landscape aesthetics. He explained that a healthy forest can often look too thin to some passersby and while a dense forest may be aesthetically pleasing, it is actually very bad for the health of the forest and its inhabitants. He also discussed the changing perspective on forest and grassland fires. He asked everyone to be very careful about differentiating between health and beauty. Diana explained that the landscape settings inventory does discuss this very issue. She said that invasive species sometimes come into question here. For example, sunflowers are beautiful, but are actually invasive to the area. She advised that we keep it simple and just stick with our existing inventories. The group agreed that there will be many overlaps between natural and scenic resources.

The group discussed the need to measure the indicators on a temporal basis – taking measurements every 2 to 5 years or as they become available. We shouldn’t just react to change, we should monitor it regularly.

Brian B. asked for clarification between the natural environment and the built environment. For example, an increase in the diversity of the landscape may be due to a change in agriculture or development. He asked what objective this kind of change would fall under given that it could apply to both. Angie suggested that the bullets under indicator number

four be added to both indicator numbers one and three. The group agreed that it was alright to have it fit within both objectives -and that overlap would actually be beneficial in terms of data gathering and analysis to be done later.

Diana suggested that we create a large list of indicators that can be sorted and assigned to objectives later. Jurgen suggested categorizing the large list by built environment indicators and natural environment indicators (his notes are attached). Diana suggested that the draft indicators prepared by Todd and Brian is a mix of indicators and sources of available data. She explained that she did not want to lose the work that has already been done.

Jeff provided additional feedback from the January 7th community advisory team meeting. He explained that many of these team members had been thinking about scenic resources on a completely different level. For example, the garbage along the side of the roads, the growing in of vantage points (landscaping neglect along key viewing areas) and other transient issues like the number of semi trucks on the road. Diana said that she thinks this might be captured in the change in vegetation indicator. Jeff reminded everyone not to feel limited by our regulatory scope. We do have the ability to form relationships or influence other agencies that might have control over things such as roadside garbage.

Brian L. and Jurgen explained that an inventory had been created in 1990 of the views as seen from public roads in the Gorge. This would allow us to see how much the view points have grown in. The group decided that the “growing in” discussion should be continued on the wiki to allow the community team members to be involved.

Todd and Brian B. requested a few days to compile the changes made to the objectives and list of indicators. They said they would be sending out (and posting on the wiki) a more finished document for group members to review in the next few days.

The next meeting has been scheduled for January 22, 2008 at 1:00pm at the Commission office in White Salmon. Please let Angie know early on if you like to call in.

Meeting adjourned.

Attachments

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