

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

Friday, 11 January 2008

US Forest Service office, Hood River, OR

### Attendees:

Rich Davis, Washington State Parks and Recreation Department

Stan Hinatsu, US Forest Service

Chuck Frayer, US Forest Service

Jessica Metta, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Brian Litt, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Terry Bergerson, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

Robert Burns, West Virginia University

Alan Graefe, Penn State

Cheri Anderson, US Fish and Wildlife Service

Jeff Tryens, consultant for the Indicators Project

Kevin Gorman, Friends of the Columbia Gorge

North Cheatham, chair of the Community Advisory Team

Phyllis Thiemann, member of the Community Advisory Team, via phone

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After introductions, the Indicators Project and the task of the Recreation Subgroup were explained to the group as this was the first meeting for many of the attendees. The group then looked at the two recreation Objectives that had been suggested by Gorge Commission staff. Kevin Gorman asked where quantity fit into the two Objectives which focused on diversity and quality. At the last meeting, the group had put quantity as an indicator under 'diversity' but not as its own Objective. Kevin was comfortable with this and asked whether one indicator would be how the Gorge Commission has done at completing the projects on the Recreation Plan in the Management Plan. The Recreation Subgroup task is to focus on high level indicators of the well being of recreation in the Gorge. Kevin's suggestion would fall under the key performance indicators (the second phase of this process) that would measure the work of the Gorge Commission.

In the Act, recreation is addressed in a few places: one is to protect and enhance recreation resources, two is to increase river access, three is to prepare a recreation inventory. The third was completed in preparation of the Management Plan.

Jessica Metta reported that the Community Advisory Team was concerned that the "quality" indicators need to be objective measures, not subjective. The CAT would like "quality" to be better defined. This is something the group struggled with at the last meeting – how to choose indicators for the quality of recreation.

The public is very concerned about the quality of recreation. If overuse is a problem in an area, the public needs information about similar sites they could visit. We should focus on what we can provide here in the Gorge in regards to recreation – our niche- rather than what we can't provide (i.e. backcountry backpacking). The group kept discussing goals or targets for recreation. What we need to do is figure out how to measure recreation in order to inform a conversation about goals. Kevin Gorman pointed out that there is a big difference between the quality a person experiences the first time they visit site and later visits (re: poor quality is not noticed as much the first time if the location is stunning).

Supply side diversity indicators could address distribution of recreation sites by recreation type. Somehow we would also need to measure dispersed recreation – i.e. at Rowena/ Memaloose there are no designated trails but still people walk there, so how to measure that? The demand side

diversity indicators could be something like percentage of gorge visitors participating in different recreation types. There needs to be some kind of inventory measure of recreation opportunities in the Gorge, and then usage per inventory measure. Percentage occupancy per site might get at this, although this might be a quality indicator. Maybe if we can't survey occupancy of each site in the Gorge, we could instead pick a sample of representative sites.

Maybe we should look at the relationship between recreation opportunities and distance to population centers. An indicator might be the ratio of recreation opportunities per capita. Would this be for tourists or residents? Maybe we wouldn't have to separate out the two groups if we just look at participation rates and changes to that over time.

Should we be discussing what diversity we provide? For example, we probably wouldn't want to provide some types of recreation in the Gorge that aren't suited for this area. Do we try to be everything to everyone or do we focus on our niche? This process doesn't need to identify our niche, however. Value laden judgments will be made later on – this is just to identify measurements that can inform that conversation.

A problem with looking at numbers of users in different recreation types is that some very important recreation uses won't look that important if you look at the data quickly – i.e. windsurfer numbers aren't anywhere close to numbers of hikers, but windsurfing is very important in the Gorge. This is also true for fishing, kite boarding, and now windsurfing viewing. So we need to be careful when evaluating numbers of different recreation users.

There was a discussion about how diversity is being defined. Is it the range of activities provided? Or is it a range within the activities provided (meaning easy and hard hiking trails)? It's probably both of these categories. Brian Litt proposed a definition of diversity that could also be turned into an indicator that the group liked: "how much of what activity is being provided where and what are participation rates." Jeff Tryens brought up as an indicator percentage of significant recreation types in the Gorge that are meeting projected demand.

The question came up whether we're looking at recreation activities occurring within Urban Areas. The group decided we're focusing on resource-based recreation, whether that occurs within an Urban Area or the Scenic Area. This is important because several recreation projects funded by the Act have occurred within Urban Areas. Kevin Gorman asked if one indicator would be how the recreation funds spent have done at improving recreation within the Scenic Area. This is a good example of a key performance indicator (a later phase of this project rather than the task of the Recreation Subgroup).

The group struggled with how to define "diversity" and "quality" and whether this is something the group should be doing. It was decided that the Recreation Subgroup would not do the defining – rather, the Rec Subgroup would suggest measures that indirectly define diversity and the Technical and Community Advisory Teams will decide if they agree with those definitions.

Stan Hinatsu pointed out that while we want high quality recreation, we don't necessarily want high diversity of recreation (this gets back to the "niche" discussion, not being all things to all people). An infinite increase in recreation is not the target, but what is?

It was decided that the chairs would refine a list of indicators and send them to the group who would discuss them at the next meeting.

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**The next Recreation Subgroup meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, January 22, 2008, 3:15pm, Gorge Commission office in White Salmon.**