

Vital Signs Indicators Project: Recreation Subgroup Meeting Notes

Wednesday, 21 November 2007

US Forest Service office, Hood River, OR

Attendees:

Rich Davis, Washington State Parks and Recreation Department

Stan Hinatsu, US Forest Service

Diana Ross, US Forest Service

Jessica Metta, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Katie Crafts, Columbia Gorge Windsurfing Association

Jim Runkles, US Army Corp of Engineers

Robert Burns, West Virginia University

Rich Davis is co-chair of the Recreation Subgroup. He began the meeting by going through the materials handed out (see meeting handouts.) The group noted that as stated on the handout titled "Vital Signs Indicators Project: A Different Kind of Timeline," the deadline to create indicators is March 2008. Rich said he expects the subgroup to meet 3 or 4 times. Rich stressed that the indicators need to be understandable to the general public. Rich had also asked Kevin Price with Oregon Parks and Rec, Bill Weiler with Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife and someone from Beacon Rock State Park to attend the subgroup meetings but had not heard from them.

The group asked what the Indicators Project is trying to measure. It was clarified that we are trying to measure how well the Management Plan (Plan) is being implemented. Diana noted that recreation in the Plan is mostly handled by how recreation could affect other resources. Rich said there will be some overlap with the other resources subgroups, particularly natural resources, which is why some of the natural resource subgroup members would ideally be at the recreation subgroup meetings. The group looked at the recreation Objectives 5.1 and 5.2 on the handout titled "Goals and Objectives for the Vital Signs Indicators Project." These two objectives are what the indicators we choose are supposed to measure.

The group noted that we likely need baseline data to compare with current data to see how we're doing. Robert and Jim did a study 10 years ago. Stan has some information. Inventorying existing recreation is important. Having baseline data and current data of recreation opportunities would answer the "diversity" of recreation in Objective 5.1.

How could the group answer the "quality" of recreation in Objective 5.2? Army Corp has customer comment card data for the past few years. The Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring Study (NVUMS) in 2006 has some customer satisfaction data. Rich has some customer satisfaction data related to fees. A concern is that data from different agencies would be too different to compare. Stan commented that NVUMS could maybe become a developmental indicator.

Would the data be broken down into Special Management Area and General Management Area? Would we gather data for the Urban Areas? The group said we should include recreation projects in Urban Areas funded by Scenic Area grants such as The Dalles waterfront. We need to include Urban Areas because otherwise the results might show a deficiency in recreation use that doesn't exist because it's served by the Urban Areas. The group questioned that the Gorge might be declared deficient in a type of recreation adequately provided in adjacent areas such as Mount Hood National Forest. Jessica pointed out that the Plan focuses on resource-based recreation. The group liked the term and decided to have this be the focus of the recreation indicators.

To look at "diversity", we would measure (1) how many recreation sites are in the Scenic Area, (2) what kind of recreation they are providing, (3) where they are located spatially in the Gorge –and all of this would be compared over time to see the change. Recreation sites might already be mapped. Measurements of the number of users at each site would be measuring "quality" rather than "diversity." Rich pointed out how a list of recreation opportunities in the Gorge would be great for recreation agencies to identify recreation needs that need to be met. Vancouver Water Resources Center does research in the Gorge and might have data.

How to answer "quality"? Social carrying capacity would be good to answer "quality" –this is moderately available or needs to be developed. This would get at perception of crowdedness. A trend analysis could be done to see if we are meeting the intent of the need (i.e. are there enough kite boarding sites?). This would look at the demand for different types of recreation and how it might be changing (i.e. data that recreational use of the Gorge will increase in the future). A literature review could get recreation trend data. Do changes in demographic data need to be included – i.e. population growth in Clark County and Tri-Cities and how it will affect recreation?

Tribal influences also need to be understood. For example, 21 Army Corp recreation sites in the Gorge were converted to "in lieu" sites in 1989. It might be good to do a timeline showing the flux of recreation over time and how different actions have affected recreation (i.e. 1989 in lieu shift, construction of the Discovery Center, official opening of Doug's Beach). Katie said CGWA did a survey this year of how many days people use different beaches and what they consider good beaches. The Port of Hood River also collects data about user numbers. Jim mentioned that the Oregon State Police count fisherman on the Columbia River by airplane.

Robert went over a handout that he distributed (see Robert's handout).

Diana suggested that to answer "quality" we would ask about visitor experience, impact on the environment, and whether you met the desired condition (in the Plan or Recreation Opportunity Spectrum). To find people who have been "displaced" (don't recreate for some reason), you cannot do on-site surveys – you would need to do telephone or mail surveys.

The Forest Service and Washington State Parks uses the LAC process (limits of acceptable change) which measures social and biological change. We need to learn the reasons why people visit places. Robert has data to answer "quality." At the next meeting, we might list the steps of the LAC process with reference to quality and where we might have available data. If we ask about visitor experience, it is dependent on how the visitor defines a good experience- it's too subjective.

Robert went through presentations showing what data he has - Forest Service and Army Corp data from a one-time study. This could be a coarse baseline for the Gorge.

Indicators are social, biological, management. Regarding social, this could be quality of experience (and how well it fit with management goals), crowding, conflict between user groups. There is not much existing data for "quality" indicators.

We need to inventory existing data – collect it, organize it, identify where we need more data. We need to ask what is important to people, see how we're doing at satisfying what is important to them. First we need to identify the questions we need to answer. Then we need to see if we have existing data to answer those questions.

We need to get at what people actually want instead of what we think they want. This means expectations, looking at visitor trends. These indicators probably do not exist now; they would need to be developed.

To really answer the "quality" question, we need to do a study. Robert's data does provide some coarse, preliminary data. The next NVUMS is in 5 years but we need the data sooner, so this would not be the study to answer the "quality" question. We probably need a grant to fund the study.

The next Recreation Subgroup meeting has been scheduled for Friday, January 11, 2008, 9am, US Forest Service office in Hood River.