

## **GORGE COMMISSION – SCENIC RESOURCES PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE**

### **DECEMBER 19, 2002, MEETING SUMMARY – DRAFT**

#### **U.S. Forest Service Conference Room, Hood River, OR**

Committee members present: Dan Harkenrider, Jane Jacobsen, Joyce Reinig, Ann Squier, Wayne Wooster:

Other Commissioners present: None.

Commission and Forest Service staff present: Keith Fredrickson, Brian Litt, Diana Ross.

Others present: Dean Apostol, Dawn Baird, Bruce Barnett, Todd Cornett, Dan Ericksen, Jurgen Hess, Patrick Johnson, Jeanette Kloos, Michael Lang, Jim and Karen Newell, Bud Quinn, Dave Sauter, Derrick Tokos, Eric Walker, Sam Wilkins, Karen Witherspoon.

The Committee reviewed the draft November 18, 2002 Meeting Summary and the Recommendations/Rationale document. Anne Squier recommended adding the following phrase to the beginning of the fourth line of the last paragraph on Page 3 of the Summary: “2) If new landscaping must be used...” She also clarified that the expected rates of growth for vegetative species by area will be included in the handbook mentioned on Page 4 of the November 18 meeting summary. Wayne Wooster noted the last name of Derrick Tokos needed inserting in the third paragraph on Page 3.

Brian Litt then summarized a draft schedule of upcoming meetings of the Committee, with topics and estimated workloads for meetings 12 (December 19, 2002), 13 and 14. He said the schedule correlates to the overall Plan Review schedule that calls for the full Gorge Commission to receive the Committee’s report in late March, 2003, followed by a public hearing in late April, and Commission deliberations and adoptions at the May 13, 2003. Anne said the agenda for Meeting 14 included substantive issues such as GMA mining and cumulative impacts, and suggested that an additional Committee meeting might be necessary. Brian said the GMA mining issue would not take a substantial amount of work, but does require coordination with Washington Department of Natural Resources, and that the Committee discussed addressing cumulative impacts after other revisions are made to the Scenic Resources chapter. Dan suggested discussing cumulative impacts at a separate meeting in February. Consensus was not reached by the Committee at that point to change the schedule presented by staff.

Brian then summarized the staff report on Topic 1: Proposed guidelines to implement the new siting policy (to replace prior guidelines requiring “siting to minimize visibility”). He reviewed the Committee’s June 5 recommendation and rationale, and noted that this has been the most challenging topic staff has dealt with to date. He outlined the proposed siting guidelines, which stated: 1) In determining conditions needed to meet the scenic standard, siting shall be analyzed first, followed by use of other applicable guidelines. The visibility of proposed siting from KVAs shall be given greater weight than other factors and shall be a primary consideration in ensuring that development meets the scenic standard; planners shall use the Visibility Matrix in the *Scenic*

*Implementation Handbook* to analyze siting and design elements of proposed developments and determine conditions to achieve the scenic standard. 2) The applicant's proposed building site shall be analyzed first in the visibility analysis; if the proposed site cannot meet the required siting threshold as defined in the Matrix, alternative sites shall be evaluated before considering other means of meeting the standard such as modifying design elements or using new landscaping. 3) The site elements shall be evaluated in the following order of descending priority: first, amount of building surfaces screened by topography; second, distance from KVAs; third, average duration of view; fourth, screening from conifer trees or existing development, and building height relative to tree canopy; fifth, screening from deciduous trees; sixth, dependable off-site screening. 4) The design elements of a proposed development shall be evaluated in the following order of descending priority: first, contrast (color); second, size (of area visible from KVAs), reflectivity, and height. 5) Landscaping to screen developments from KVAs shall be used only after visibility analysis of the proposed site and alternative sites indicates the proposed development would not meet the required standard using all other tools provided in the guidelines. Brian emphasized that the matrix would be part of the implementation handbook, and that staff was not asking approval of a specific matrix at this meeting.

A discussion on the proposed siting guidelines followed. Anne said she was concerned that the Committee (in making the recommendation to dispense the minimize-visibility standard) said topography would be the first priority, but she didn't see that reflected in the guidelines. Diana said the proposed guidelines would make topography the strongest siting tool, but that topography was not always available, and the guidelines looked at the interplay of all elements, with topography having first priority. Joyce said topography was the key element in the proposed guidelines, adding the guidelines and matrix were not subjective and could be evenly applied in all counties. Anne reiterated her concerns that the guidelines didn't give clear direction that topography should have the highest priority. Brian explained that the way the matrix is designed, its scoring gives greatest weight to topographic screening. Diana then explained how the matrix worked.

Wayne then opened up the discussion to audience members. Todd Cornett cited an example where a home located in the distant background view of a KVA that lacked topographical screening might be visually subordinate without topographic screening, but might not achieve an acceptable score on the matrix. Anne noted that using topographical features as the first priority does not mean a house has to be invisible, but that topography has to be used to achieve visual subordination in most cases, and planners would not be relying on vegetative screening to meet the standard. She said it was not a question of going back to the minimize-visibility standard, but using topography first to achieve visual subordination. Todd said that if topography is primarily used, the guidelines could inadvertently result in the minimize-visibility standard being applied. Michael Lang said that the Oregon Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects was concerned that cumulative impacts need to be addressed. He summarized a 4-page memo from Friends of the Columbia River Gorge that said if the guidelines are implemented as proposed, scenic resource protection would be weakened, as the importance of siting would be diminished. He went on to say that alternative sites should be included at the start of any siting analysis, to meet the intent of new siting policy. Dean Apostol said he was concerned the proposed guidelines were not consistent with the Committee's policy recommendation. Derrick Tokos said he had concerns about Guidelines 1 and 2, and that a matrix should be a tool but not

part of mandatory guidelines. He said the matrix appeared to be fairly complicated, and didn't understand where it would fit into the process. Derrick also voiced concern about relying on off-site screening to achieve the standard. Karen Witherspoon said she agreed with Todd, and that other tools should be used to achieve visual subordination if siting is not available. David Sauter said he agreed with Wasco and Skamania counties, and that if only siting is used, the standard would go beyond visual subordination.

Jurgen Hess said the Committee should be dealing with cumulative impacts now, using Underwood as an example of an area that he felt is currently over the visual subordination threshold. He also was critical of the proposed matrix, questioned how a threshold will be decided, and felt that off-site vegetation should not be used to achieve a visual standard. Dean said if a matrix is used, it should be subject to peer review. He then offered ideas on a matrix where the threshold would not require a building to be "invisible," and that if two sites meet the threshold, an applicant could use either site. He added that viewing distance, unless in foreground situations, was not of primary importance; a site would be selected first, with topography having first priority, then planners would consider other design elements. Joyce noted that county planners in a previous meeting said they favored a matrix. She added that the public has demanded the Commission fix the minimize-visibility standard in a fair, even manner. Dan Harkenrider noted that one difficulty the Committee faces is taking a "risk" on design elements that may not be permanent. Anne said Dan's concern was well taken, adding it was not clear that when topography was used to the extent needed to achieve visual subordination, other tools were being used at the same time.

Wayne said the matrix was ultimately a tool and a good start. He said from a policy standpoint, topography could be used when appropriate, with other elements employed when topography is of lesser importance. Anne said the policy should be achieved using "existing topography to the extent needed." Brian responded that "to the extent needed" was a critical phrase, providing for flexibility in situations (such as sites in the background from KVAs) where it might not be needed to meet visual subordination. Dean suggested that the guideline should require applicants to screen development to meet visual subordination "as needed," with topographical screening as the primary tool. He said the guideline should also address cumulative impacts. Brian said he didn't see how cumulative impacts would be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Jurgen stated the Committee needs to address cumulative impacts now, and that if it doesn't, in five to ten years all developments may have to be "invisible." Brian said cumulative impacts needs a comprehensive analysis, where a threshold is established and development is systematically monitored over time. He noted the Commission currently does not have such a system. After additional discussion, Anne said the Committee didn't have sufficient information to act on cumulative impacts at the current meeting, and returned the discussion to the policy guidelines. She suggested Guideline 1 should read as follows: "In determining conditions needed to meet the required scenic standard, siting should use existing topography to the extent necessary to meet the required standard." She added the guidelines should assume compliance with color and reflectivity, and where topography was not available, other tools should be used. After some additional discussion, Anne recommended the Committee suspend the discussion on the siting guidelines until the next meeting. The Committee agreed to move on to the other topics and come back to siting guidelines at the next meeting. Staff agreed to revised the proposed guidelines for the next meeting, incorporating input from this meeting.

The discussion then moved to Topic 2: Clarifying if KVA guidelines apply to sites based on topography only or topography and vegetation. Brian summarized the issue, and then listed two options: 1) Apply the KVA guidelines based solely on whether a site is topographically visible from KVAs; 2) Apply the KVA guidelines based on whether a site is visible from KVAs, considering topography and vegetation. Staff recommended Option 1, noting it would improve consistency of implementation and strengthen scenic protection. Todd and Derrick said they had no problems with the staff recommendation, and stressed the importance of KVA “Seen Areas” maps for implementation. The Committee unanimously approved Option 1.

Brian then introduced Topic 3: Proposed guidelines to implement visual subordination where applicable in developed settings. After reviewing the Committee’s previous recommendation and rationale, Brian listed the proposed new guideline language: “1) In developed settings subject to visual subordination, new development shall be visually subordinate to the character of the rural landscape setting in which it is located, rather than to existing developing. Color, form, line and texture of new development shall blend with and borrow from those elements in the surrounding rural landscape setting; 2) The Management Plan’s ‘Landscape Settings’ map shall be used to determine which landscape setting should be used pursuant to Guideline 1. Depending on the location of the developed setting, the surrounding landscape will be determined to be one of the following: Coniferous Woodlands, river bottoms, Pastoral, Oak Woodlands, or Grasslands.” Todd said he could support the recommendation, if the Landscape Settings map reflected the specific surrounding Landscape Setting that would apply in the developed settings. Brian agreed this could be done. Anne suggested that Brian and Todd work together to clarify the details, and the Committee reached consensus on the proposed new guideline language.

The Committee then decided the next Scenic Resources Committee meeting will be held from 3 to 7 p.m. on either January 27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup>, at a location to be determined.