

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

## **JUNE 5, 2002 MEETING SUMMARY**

### **White Salmon Library, White Salmon, WA**

Committee Members Present: Dan Harkenrider, Jane Jacobsen, Joyce Reinig, Anne Squier, Wayne Wooster.

Other Commissioners Present: Kenn Adcock.

Commission and Forest Service Staff Present: Martha Bennett, Keith Fredrickson, Brian Litt, Diana Ross.

Others Present: Dean Apostol, Dawn Baird, Kate Bowie, June Carlson, Judy Davis, Norm Haight, Michael Lang, Tim Patton, Eileen Phelan, Chuck Ruhsenberger, David Sauter, Phyllis Thiemann, Derrick Tokos, Josh Warner, Clifford Washines, Sam Wilkins, Karen Witherspoon.

The meeting began with Anne Squier suggesting one change in the summary of the May 20, 2002, meeting and two changes and one point of clarification to the “Decisions to Date and Rationales” document. Anne suggested adding the following sentence to the first paragraph on Page 3 of the minutes: “There was also consensus for applying this standard to other projects on KVAs in foregrounds, and for developing criteria that would include examining the need for and alternatives for proposed projects.” For “Decisions to Date...”, she suggested modifying the first sentence in the first decision of Meeting 1 (March 18) to read: “Additional scenic protection beyond the “compatibility” standard continues to be needed.” Anne also suggested changing the last sentence in the Rationale for that recommendation to: “These measures alone would not be sufficient to protecting scenic resources in the Scenic Area.” Third, regarding the rationale for the first decision at the May 20 meeting, Anne suggested clarifying that, for projects in KVA road prisms and foregrounds where the “harmonious” standard would apply, the projects still need to be visually subordinate from other KVAs. Brian Litt said he would revise both the minutes and “Decisions” document accordingly, and provide information at the next meeting in response to the request for clarification regarding Anne’s third point.

Brian and Diana Ross then introduced the issue: “Should the ‘siting to minimize visibility’ guideline be changed?” They reviewed applicable guidelines to the issue, and presented five options to address the issue, with pros and cons for each. Brian said the GMA guideline requiring new development to be sited to minimize its visibility from KVAs has been the most contentious part of the scenic guidelines, and the focus of several appeals and numerous comments. Options outlined included: 1) Maintain status quo; 2) Require siting to reduce visibility to meet the required standard; 3) Use Option 2, except do not apply siting guideline for the background distance zone; 4) Use Option 2, and prioritize the list of tools, starting with siting and proceeding to the others (color,

reflectivity, etc.) to attain the required standard; 5) Establish thresholds for the factors in GMA Guideline 2 (KVA Section) to determine if alternatives to the applicant's proposed site should be chosen based on scenic impacts. Staff's preliminary recommendation was for Option 4. Brian said Option 4 emphasizes the importance of siting as a tool to achieve scenic standards, while eliminating the problematic aspects of the current "minimize visibility" guideline.

Norm Haight said if the goal is to not see buildings, then the standard should be changed to retention. Friends of the Columbia Gorge representative Michael Lang distributed a letter urging the Committee to not approve the staff recommendation at this time, raising concerns that it could result in adverse cumulative scenic impacts. He said Friends is convening a panel of landscape architects to review current scenic policies and guidelines. He and another audience member, Dean Apostol, a landscape architect, requested the Committee delay adoption of the staff recommendation "so that the public and committee members may fully consider the impacts of any plan revision options." Kenn Adcock expressed support for option 4, if it eliminated the term "minimize". Dawn Baird also supported the staff recommendation. Judy Davis and David Sauter expressed interest in a matrix approach, as shown under option 5. Derrick Tokos said that "minimize" visibility was most effective in the foreground, and that in the middle-ground views, a "reduce visibility" standard could result in inconsistent application. He recommended finding a way to quantify this standard.

The Committee, during deliberations, noted that the landscape architects' study could be heard at a later date. Joyce Reinig said she like the matrix idea, but it seemed subjective and complex. The Committee reached consensus to recommend Option 4 to the Gorge Commission.

Next, Diana presented options for the issue: "Where should the retention standard be applied in the National Scenic Area?" Diana said the practicality of the retention standard has come into question, especially for projects on or close to Key Viewing Areas. Retention also creates a "patchwork" of standards in the NSA, depending on land use designation or landscape setting. Diana summarized three options: 1) Maintain status quo (A previous recommendation of highway foregrounds changed the status quo for retention foreground areas); 2) Replace retention with visual subordination; 3) Replace retention with visual subordination on private land (with a note that this option only applies currently to privately owned SMA Open Space lands, and that it would also apply to new quarries within three miles of KVA highways). Staff then recommended Option 1, noting that the Committee's recommendations at its May 20, 2002, meeting for KVA foregrounds solved the only significant problem identified with the retention standard. Staff noted that Option 1 maintains the highest level of protection for visually sensitive areas, and is practical with the changes made regarding KVA foregrounds. The Committee reached consensus on Option 1.

The Committee then discussed the issue: "Should changes be made to policies providing exceptions to visual subordination?" This issue contained three sub-issues. Sub-issue A was "What standards should apply in developed settings?" Brian explained that the Plan

currently exempts some developed settings (in areas not considered visually sensitive) from visual subordination, such as the west side of Hood River. New development in other developed settings, such as Skamania Landing, must be visually subordinate from KVAs. Brian then outlined four options for standards in developed settings: 1) Maintain the status quo; 2) Exempt all developed settings from the visual subordination standard and replace with the “harmonious” standard (specific areas would be identified); 3) Maintain the status quo but add language clarifying how to achieve visual subordination in developed settings; 4) Apply visual subordination to all developed settings. Staff recommended Option 3, noting it would maintain the long-term scenic enhancement function associated with the current approach, and higher scenic standards in developed areas with important scenic resources. It also could ostensibly improve implementation through additional clarifying language. Joyce Reinig cited the importance of developing precise “clarifying language” to explain how visual subordination can be achieved in developed settings. Anne Squier noted that the subject of whether adjustments were needed in the exempted areas would be addressed later when the Committee revisits the compatibility standard. The Committee then reached consensus on recommending Option 3 to the full Commission.

Brian then presented a summary of Sub-Issue B, “What standards should apply to rehabilitation of/modifications to historic structures?” He explained the Plan current exempts rehabilitation of, or modifications to, historically significant structures from visual subordination or retention standards. These projects, instead, must meet the Secretary of Interior’s standards for restoration/rehabilitation of historic properties. Brian noted that some comments received during Plan Review suggested these projects should be subject to the same standards on those on non-historic properties in the same area. He presented two options to resolve the issue: 1) Maintain the status quo; 2) require rehabilitation of, or modifications to, historic structures to meet visual subordination or retention, depending on the area where a project is located. Staff recommended Option 1, noting the current standard for historic structures prioritizes the preservation of those features that contribute to a property’s historic significance. While the results may not always be visually subordinate, such projects have aesthetic values associated with their historic integrity. Staff noted that Option 2 could possibly create a conflict between two sets of federal laws – those pertaining to historic preservation and the Scenic Area Act. Audience member Derrick Tokos, representing Multnomah County’s Planning Department, reported his agency has experienced no problems implementing the current standard. The Committee by consensus recommended Option 1.

Staff then presented Sub-Issue C: “Should GMA Policy 3, KVA section be changed (requires utility, communications, transport facilities to be “visually subordinate to the maximum extent practicable”). Three options were outlined to the Committee: 1) Keep policy in place; develop a full set of implementing guidelines; 2) Delete policy; require these uses to be visually subordinate from KVAs, unless new foreground policies apply; 3) Modify policy to require listed categories of uses to meet “harmonious” standard. Staff recommended Option 2. Brian said the new policy for KVA foregrounds should address circumstances where projected in the listed categories may not be able to meet visual subordination, and that experience indicates projects outside of KVAs can be made

visually subordinate. He noted that co-location requirements for telecommunications facilities, along with evolving technology and materials, have allowed several of these facilities to be approved with conditions making them visually subordinate. The Committee supported the staff recommendation and adopted Option 2.

Diana then summarized Sub-Issue D: “Should the color exception for structures in SMA pastoral settings be retained or eliminated?” She told the Committee that SMA Scenic Guideline 3.A (4) [Management Plan, page I-42] allows new structures in the Mt. Pleasant and Dodson-Warrendale areas to be white where other white structures occur in the setting. The intent, she said, was presumably related to the scenic qualities of some older white farm-related buildings in these areas, and pastoral settings in general. Similar color exceptions are not made in other NSA pastoral settings, however, nor does this guideline implement any policy. Two options were presented: 1) Retain SMA Scenic Guideline 3.A(4); 2) Delete this exception; apply the same color requirements to new structures in these areas as applied in other pastoral settings. Staff recommended Option 2. Derrick noted that in the Dodson-Warrendale area, Option 2 could possibly create problems in matching new accessory buildings with existing historic farm structures that are white. The Committee decided to defer a recommendation on the issue until staff obtains more information from Multnomah and Clark counties concerning the matter raised by Derrick.

The Committee then discussed topics for future meetings. There was recognition among Committee members that much work remains on guidelines, including developing guidelines for policy recommendations they have made. There was agreement to launch into the guidelines as soon as possible, and at the next meeting to cover the topics listed in a table Brian handed out regarding future meeting topics (standards for replacements, reflectivity, and compatibility). A public meeting to inform citizens and receive their comments about the Scenic Resources review was also discussed. It was generally agreed a public open house would be beneficial, and that such a meeting should be held in September – perhaps in conjunction with the General Land Use issue. Dates for the next two Committee meetings were set; the first will be from 3 to 7 p.m. on June 25 (at the Rock Creek Center in Stevenson); the second will be July 30, also from 3 to 7 p.m., at a location to be announced.

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