

GORGE COMMISSION - SCENIC RESOURCES PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

March 18, 2002

Dolce Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, 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: Judy Davis, Michael Lang, Heather O'Donnell, Bud Quinn, David Sauter, Karen Witherspoon.

The first meeting of the Scenic Resources Plan Review Committee began with Anne Squier asking Brian Litt to summarize the Committee's purpose. Brian responded that the Committee is designed to be the primary forum for reviewing the scenic resources provisions of the Management Plan and develop recommended plan revisions. Kenn Adcock asked how the Committee would relate to the full Gorge Commission. Anne indicated the Committee would operate like any other committee of the Commission: working at greater depth and devoting more time to the issue, briefing the Commission regularly on its progress, and forwarding recommendations to the full Commission. Kenn then asked if the Committee would be keeping minutes of each meeting. Anne responded that no formal transcript will be kept, but meeting notes capturing what happens will be taken.

Brian summarized the policies in the scope of review approved by the Commission at its February 26, 2002 meeting. He noted that a goal statement on page I-6 of the Management Plan captures the essence of the three GMA policies in the scope, and that the policies flow from that goal. He also noted the direction in the SMA provisions was similar. The goal states: "Emphasize protection and enhancement of Gorge landscapes from key viewing areas."

Diana Ross provided a map showing which scenic protection standards apply where. The map showed areas not seen from key viewing areas, and exception areas, the standard for both of which is compatibility with the setting. The map also showed which lands seen from key viewing areas are subject to "partial retention" (i.e., visual subordination), and which are subject to the stricter "retention" standard. This latter standard applies only in parts of the Special Management Area.

Kenn asked how the original key viewing areas (KVA's) were arrived at. Brian explained how they were discussed during the development and adoption of the Management Plan.

Most of the KVA's in the Plan originated from the list of KVA's used under the Final Interim Guidelines. There was some discussion about how distance factors in to the KVA's. Brian noted staff is working on maps that would show what areas are visible from each KVA. Anne asked staff to give the Committee a status report at the next meeting on what maps will be available for the Committee's use.

The Committee briefly reviewed the "compatibility with the landscape setting" policy, and how it is implemented. Brian summarized that it is implemented through guidelines addressing scale of new development, minimum lot sizes, and design guidelines.

Committee members were then asked to discuss their assumptions and goals for scenic plan review. Joyce Reining emphasized the need to fix those items that have been problematic and need to be clarified. Jane Jacobsen and Wayne Wooster echoed Joyce's view that clarification is critical. Wayne also mentioned the need to resolve conflicts between issues, such as screening trees and fire hazard. Anne said she felt the basic policy direction and level of protection is sound, and that the bulk of the work will involve clarifying the guidelines.

The Committee then began discussing key policy questions provided by staff. The first question involved whether there should be a level of protection beyond the standard of "compatibility with the landscape setting" and, if so, where should that additional protection be applied. Anne felt that compatibility alone didn't provide sufficient protection. Others agreed that something beyond compatibility (such as visual subordination) is needed. Jane expressed concerns about long-term effects of development. Kenn felt that development should be made visually subordinate everywhere in the Scenic Area, not just on lands seen from KVA's. The group discussed whether the current KVA system is the right approach. Judy Davis noted that some developments may not be visually subordinate, but could be made to be harmonious.

The second policy question, regarding what visual management system should be used, was then discussed. Diana described the scenic management system used at Lake Tahoe, and how it differs from the system employed in the Scenic Area. She noted that distinct landscape units are identified and numerically rated for their scenic values. Thresholds are then created for each landscape unit, to measure and keep the existing visual quality and gauge cumulative scenic impacts. Lastly, design standards have been developed for individual projects.

Joyce felt that the Tahoe system has not been very effective in protection visual quality. The way in which they assess cumulative impacts was acknowledged as valuable. A discussion ensued about how cumulative impacts can be measured. Dan Harkenrider asked what the differences were between such analyses and a build out analysis. A build out analysis would not address resource impacts, but would give quantitative information about how much development could be allowed under current zoning. Joyce noted that prior build out work by staff didn't account for the number of accessory buildings that could be built, just houses. Bud Quinn indicated that Skamania County is working on a build out analysis at the County's west end. It was stated that a build out report is

important, but would not be done as part of plan review. There was general consensus, however, that cumulative impacts should be addressed to the extent it can be within the plan review process.

Anne then asked if anyone felt we should go to more of a “cookbook” approach, as at Tahoe, or stick with the basic system in place and work on the dynamics. No one voiced a desire to drop the current approach and adopt a Tahoe-like visual management system. Karen Witherspoon asked the Committee to give implementing agencies tools to objectively implement the Management Plan.

The Committee then discussed several business matters. It was decided the next meeting would be on Monday, April 1, between 4:00 and 7:00 p.m. Staff agreed to look into several meeting spaces in the central Gorge for the next meeting.

Brian then handed out disposable cameras to Committee members, and asked each member to take photos of three things: 1) development that exemplifies qualities we should strive towards; 2) development that exemplifies qualities we should not strive towards; and 3) examples of visually subordinate development. He asked Committee members to bring the photos to the next meeting, and discuss why they selected the developments they photographed. The meeting then adjourned.