

11 July 2021

To: Gorge Commission

From: Mary Repar

Subj: Comments on Baselines for the Vital Indicators Project (VIP) and the GC Planning Department status, plus GC Jurisdiction Assertion

Dear Gorge Commissioners, Director, and Staff,

At the last meeting I commented on the essential need to establish baselines for the Vital Indicators that are in the Vital Signs Indicator project that Ms. Lisa Naas-Cook is leading. I was very encouraged to see that the GC is reaching out to partner agencies and entities—there is no need to reinvent the wheel! There is much more work to be done, I'm sure, in this area because there are a lot of agencies and entities working on climate change and resilience, and the NSA and its environs are and can be part of the regional overlook. I think it would be prudent for the GC to form a Community Advisory Team (CAT) so there is a continuous community aspect to the VIP's progress. I believe some Technical Advisory Teams (TATs) have been formed. TATS and CATS are the lubrication for ongoing projects, especially one so important as VIP.

In 2007, when, after 18 months of work by the organized TATs and CATS at the time, the VIP indicators were finalized no one could foresee that it would be another 13 years until the project gained momentum. That momentum must be sustained because we are heading into a century of uncertainty and dangerous changes to our climate and our ecosystems, changes that will affect the survival of humans, wildlife, and our natural resources. Climate change is with us. How we deal with it and its cumulative effects and impacts will be the trick. Will we deal with it by depending on quick fixes (that probably won't work) to get us out of trouble or will we humans expand our view and look not generationally but in a 100 year, a 500 year planning view? In order to look forward, we have to look back.

Baselines and their determination will be essential to moving forward on VIP. I urge the GC to use the TATs and CAT to finalize the work of deciding the baselines now with a deadline of December 31, 2021. Some baselines will be easier to figure out than others. But we can no longer delay this process because it is hard and could be divisive. Procrastination is the bane of progress.

In order to do this, I believe that the GC Planning staff needs to be increased to its full implement which, if I recall, is 12 planners. Yes, budgets and money matter but so does the NSA and if the GC and all of us who support the continued existence of our National Scenic Area don't work to strengthen and expand the planning staff, the NSA will be overtaken by the development push and population increases that are occurring and the pressures that these two things put on natural resources. We will all have to work together to get the Washington and Oregon Legislatures to come to a clearer understanding of the importance of VIP and its criticality to the preservation and enhancement of the NSA and its environs. What's good for the NSA is good for the entire region. More funding will be needed and we can all work together, citizens, agencies, and other entities to propone for that funding.

The VIP is the GC's most important program. Climate change and cumulative impacts are our 21st century ecological drivers. If we don't survive climate change there is no point to a NSA. In order to get the job done, I think the GC needs to have a long talk with itself on how far and how much it will exert jurisdictional over our region. Will the GC expand jurisdiction to the Columbia River so that we can work on the baseline for the Columbia River which provides water to so many communities and is the lifeblood of this region and so many more? Will the GC exert jurisdictional over its regional air shed so that we establish a baseline for clean air in the NSA? These types of discussions are difficult and they can make our brains hurt, but this discussion is essential to protecting and enhancing the NSA for all of us and the wildlife that lives here so that we can all have a future.

The VIP and the Vital Indicators will provide a road map for a sustainable and attainable future as we all figure out how to build up our resiliences as our climate changes. We won't stop all climate change but we can learn to survive it. The indicators and the baselines are a starting point.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions. I will be happy to help with this project in any way I can. Thank you.

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