



**TO:** Columbia River Gorge Commission

**FROM:** Jessica Gist, Natural Resources and Land Use Planner

**DATE:** March 14, 2017

**SUBJECT:** Information Item: “Gorge 2020” Management Plan Public Scoping Summary Report

**Background:** The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Management Plan was last updated in 2004. The Columbia River Gorge Commission (Commission) is required to review the Management Plan and revise it as needed no less than every ten years. The Commission approved the “Gorge 2020” Management Plan Review and Update Process at the November 2017 Commission meeting, including a roadmap, timeline, and phased approach for soliciting public, agency, local government and Treaty Tribes comments. The first step in scoping was to host Listening Sessions in January and February 2017 to kick off the “Gorge 2020” Management Plan Review and Update Process.

The Commission and the US Forest Service hosted three public listening sessions throughout the Gorge in Hood River, North Bonneville and The Dalles, respectively. These events were open to all and structured to allow input from individuals while also generating community conversations around the National Scenic Area Management Plan. We also held a public comment period through March 8, 2017 for written and email comments related to the Management Plan for those who could not attend the meetings, or who chose to provide written comments in addition to participating in the Listening Sessions.

**Methods and Participation:** Listening sessions were held from 6:00 – 8:00 PM on January 24 and 31, and on February 28, 2017. Following a brief presentation by staff about the National Scenic Area Act and highlights of the 2004 Management Plan, participants formed small groups of 8-12 and were asked to identify issues of concern as well as solutions for improvement. The first meeting, held in Hood River, OR on January 24, 2017, in the central Gorge, was attended by at least 50 members of the public (not all chose to sign in and staff were not counted). The next session in North Bonneville, WA, held on January 31, 2017, was attended by at least 75 people. The third session, held in The Dalles, OR on February 28, 2017, was attended by at least 90 people. Participants were predominantly Gorge residents or property owners, with a few participants from the metro areas of Portland, Vancouver, or beyond. Note-takers captured comments throughout the sessions and several participants provided additional written comment in person or by follow up email/website submission.

Individuals submitted written and online comments during the public scoping period which started in January 2017 and concluded on March 8, 2017. Over 300 comment letters or online submissions

were received. A full report detailing our Listening Session and comment review methods will be posted on the Commission website.

It is important to note that detailed comments were also received from organizations, agencies, and Management Plan implementers. We met with several of these groups to discuss their comments in person. Staff also attended 14 County Commission and City Council meetings to date, with three more scheduled in March and April. Comments and input from these in-person meetings will be reviewed and presented to the public and Commission at the April 11, 2017 Commission meeting.

**Results:** Overall, the listening sessions provided an important opportunity for interested members of the public to ask questions and to learn about the current Management Plan, its purpose, policies, and scope. Commission staff gained invaluable perspectives and insights about the success, shortcomings, and implementation challenges of the Plan. Exchanges were respectful, thoughtful, and constructive.

Comments ranged from general and aspirational to specific suggested policy changes and criticisms. They were notably consistent over the three sessions in terms of priority issues. One exception is that during the session in The Dalles, several break out groups mentioned the need to address growing wildfire risk. Overarching common themes from the three sessions were:

- ❖ Address the balance between the two purposes of the Act. Participants urged an increased focus on economic development in the NSA moving forward. There is strong support for a clear process to grant Urban Area boundary changes, defining major and minor changes.
- ❖ Streamline development reviews to be less burdensome by making policy changes and clarifications, reorganizing the Plan, and providing more support for landowners and County planners to interpret the Plan consistently over time and among planners.
- ❖ Address the increasing recreation-based visitation. There is interest in a regional recreation strategy, particularly for trails planning, and for consideration of the “carrying capacity” of particular sites in the Gorge and in the Gorge as a whole.
- ❖ Address fossil fuel transport by train through the Gorge. Participants urged the Commission to consider various approaches to limit rail traffic and require safety measures and/or emergency response support by railroads.

A summary of comments recorded at the public listening sessions and submitted on public comment forms follows. The order of items in no way indicates priority or frequency mentioned. Points are organized by general theme.

Plan Review process and approach:

- Recognize 2004 revisions that were deferred
- Ensure each change is discussed and voted on, rather than wholesale approval of revisions
- Compare Gorge economy to similar areas
- Use policies where appropriate to drive winners and losers (e.g. solar versus reflectivity)
- Focus on what the Commission can actually do - increase effectiveness
- Focus on public education and engagement

### Plan Review process and approach cont'd:

- What is our vision for 30 years from now?
- Use best available science, VSI to inform and guide
- Identify what has changed in the Gorge between 1986 and now and 2003 and now
- Update resource inventories/assessments – what is the state of the scenic, natural, cultural, recreation resources we are protecting? Inventory commercial and industrial lands
- For next phase, solicit more public input, publicize better in papers and on our website
- The Gorge Commission and Counties are underfunded
- Explain how Gorge2020 relates to other plans; tie dynamically to regional economic development plans and others
- What does “enhance” mean in the Act? It can mean ecological restoration, but what about scenic enhancement? Recreation?
- Ensure listening sessions with each individual tribe
- Complete a “buildout” analysis of full development in SMA & GMA
- Form a citizen advisory committee to assist the Commission with Gorge 2020

### Increase engagement from and support of tribes and treaty rights

- Incorporate tribal perspectives in Plan content
- Protect Tribal fishing access in areas of high recreation use
- Educate about history and treaty rights
- Support tribal housing solutions
- Celilo needs a voice, as do tribal members at in lieu sites
- Tribal treaty rights consultation process should be government-to-government

### Address recreation use and related issues, and consider recreation planning that serves urban areas

- Increase and provide ped, bike, bus access to recreation areas
- Relieve traffic congestion issues
- Parking areas and roadside parking full (Larch, Mult Falls, Cath Creek)
- Expand access to further out recreation sites, WA side; disperse use
- Enhance synergy between local business community and recreation; locate trailheads and parking near stores and eateries
- Accommodate various rec users and provide for various experiences, including equestrian trails on public lands and safe biking
- Emergency services providers do not have adequate resources; search and rescue, law enforcement demands on EMS and fire departments are not funded
- Interest in the idea of a Gorge-wide loop trail that connects communities
- Impacts of recreation: growth and tradeoffs, risk of loving the Gorge to death, distribution of benefits
- Update or remove the 1980s project list
- Plan vision needs updating, then new implementation plan
- River access points, parking (Klickitat, While Salmon)
- Consider control strategies (permits, shuttles, gorge pass, Gorge tow truck, railroads as people-movers?)
- Support Towns to Trails and HCRH projects
- Day users don't necessarily spend in communities
- Locals avoid trails because of crowding; opportunity adds to quality of life
- Provide alternate/lesser known trail info, real time “Plan B info” or kiosks

- Consider “safety corridors” in population recreation areas
- Need more trash disposal and bathroom facilities
- Revisit strategies that didn’t work in the past, given increased use today

#### Protect forest and forestry resources

- Protect and promote old growth
- Increase resiliency to fires and reduce fire risk
- Limit or eliminate logging/clear cuts
- Promote thinning (selective logging, uneven-aged harvest) on public lands to improve habitat and generate revenue
- Reduce fire danger with thinning on all lands – could be economic benefit
- Protect OR white oak habitat
- How do timber land swaps/forestry/economic development/recreation interact?

#### Cultural Resources

- Broader than Tribal – should include agronomy, community histories
- Protect high value farmland
- Incorporate Native American views of cultural resources (i.e. the landscape is a pharmacy and medicines can be damaged)
- Recognize historical tribes (like the Cascade Chinook) and address tribes in addition to four Treaty tribes
- First food protections and plant gathering places
- Until a thorough survey is completed, require cultural resource reconnaissance surveys prior to approval of land divisions, ground disturbing activities, and development

#### Ensure laws and policies are upheld

- Monitor and enforce approvals, conditions
- Need measures of objectives spelled out in the plan
- Requirements should be objectively measurable
- Cumulative impacts not addressed – require analysis of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions (i.e. Underwood developments, what would build out look like?)
- Planners allegedly not checking that applicants are being truthful
- Address illegal camping, trail building
- LUDs should have teeth (Open Space)
- Fair and consistent implementation (approvals)
- Hardship dwellings being abused?
- Review discontinued use – does this category work as intended?
- Enforce parking and recreation limits

#### Increase meaningful and diverse engagement, especially with Tribes

- All age groups, minorities, Tribes, stakeholders, CRITFC
- Offer environmental interpretation effective for broad audience
- Reorganize content (Tribes are addressed at the end of Plan)
- Tribal affordable housing
- Create a formal communication plan to connect commissioners, tribes, counties, cities, citizens

### Land Use Designations & Parcel-level amendments

- Management Plan should provide rezoning guidance and criteria
- Open Space – is protection in GMA viable and enforceable? Do acquired public lands need more OS protection?
- Reassess SMA boundaries using best available spatial data and tools
- Why cannot parcels be divided in the NSA?
- Urban Areas – should they be expanded? Can communities increase density instead? They prevent sprawl
- Create clear process and criteria for changing boundaries. Consider OR model
- Update Recreation Intensity Classes (e.g. Drano Lake)
- Work with private landowners for easements to improve connectivity (i.e. Lacamas Lake)
- Part of the Pacific Crest Trail is in private ownership
- Grandfathered uses – make it easier to repurpose abandoned buildings (old mill in Skamania County, abandoned commercial buildings)
- Address SMA federal acquisition of private lands, esp in Skamania County; Counties should be compensated for lost tax base, coordinate during applications
- Public facilities, including emergency response facilities and water storage (fire response) outside the UAs
- Address split lot zoning
- Port of The Dalles running out of developable land
- Extend expiration date on permits

### Streamline ordinance implementation with clarification, updates

- How do we measure visual subordination?
- Compatibility is not well defined or consistently applied
- Address new economic uses including value-added ag, cideries, commercial events
- Less, but more effective regulation
- Some things not addressed or clear
- Colors are difficult to adhere to – why do specific design specs matter?
- What is considered a major development?
- WA environmental laws have improved – there is redundancy and overlap now
- Expand the list of uses allowed outright or by expedited review (e.g. utilities, retaining walls, replacements and repairs, public facilities, some in-home business uses, etc)
- Reorganize the plan to be more user-friendly (e.g. all uses allowed outright in one place)
- Consider simpler conditional use process
- Address solar panels
- Allow accessory dwellings, larger accessory and agricultural buildings, and larger Bed & Breakfasts
- Review home business guidelines and review requirements
- Review cluster and planned development policies – they don't seem to be working
- Pre-approved paint colors, materials, design elements “Gorge-friendly” products at local stores
- Reduce subjectivity – improve consistency in interpretation; too much staff turnover exacerbates the problem
- Plan should provide more guidance than regulation (fewer “shalls”)
- Create a “limited review” zone

### Public engagement and increasing understanding of NSA

- Protect living cultures and tribal treaty rights
- Tribal cultural awareness
- Scenic resources are a multisensory experience not just a visual experience
- Consider creative funding sources to sustain the Commission (License plate fund?)
- Work with schools, citizen groups, monitoring networks
- Build partnerships to increase awareness and gain information
- Highlight geologic history including the Ice Age floods
- Develop new ways to tell old stories – new media
- Highlight successes – people wouldn't think places like this still exist
- Developers don't know NSA rules don't apply in Cities (Urban Areas)
- Public education to reduce search and rescue incidents
- Educate realtors
- Improve website to assist landowners and describe requirements for their projects
- Form volunteer groups to look for grants and support monitoring
- Partner with local businesses to provide "Gorge-approved" services and products
- Work with industry and business experts to better help landowners
- Utilize volunteers with existing knowledge base to assist with planning
- Consider tourist draw of cultural resources and provide interpretation
- Leave No Trace principles. Use recreation permits as an opportunity to educate visitors
- Clarify roles and responsibilities; describe how the Plan relates to existing plans

### Regional and landscape planning

- Protect landscape features and consider whether protection buffers are sufficient
- Consider how railroads act as barriers for both humans and wildlife, separating the rest of the landscape from the waterfront; Connections to the River are cut off by RRs and highways
- In general, consider how to improve connectivity for humans and wildlife, but the access to water habitat in particular is an issue
- Consider how the plan can support green design and less environmental impacts within the urban areas
- Collaboration amongst agency partners to work together on regional issues
- Mitigate climate change and impacts of fossil fuel transport
- Increase resiliency in the face of natural and manmade disasters
- Address population increases, growing transportation, housing, and visitor needs
- NSA should provide regional leadership in climate change issues
- Support mutual aid arrangements for OR/WA EMS services, esp to Counties
- Private partnerships to maintain trails and structures
- Is transfer of development rights a possible strategy in the NSA?
- Need to consider cumulative impacts – quantify and monitor these through Vital Signs Indicators Program

### Scenic Resources concerns and suggestions

- Restoring views/ vegetation management
- Improve way-finding and signage
- Parking areas should be designed to look nice, natural aesthetics
- There should be a distinction in setting between residential and agriculture – cumulative impacts of rural development in ag and forest LUDs
- No big box stores! It's a good thing billboards are not allowed
- Protect dark skies and minimize light pollution
- Address timber harvest and risk of fires
- High privacy fences blocking views
- Cell towers should blend better into the landscape (e.g. look like trees?)
- Haze from diesel locomotives, trucks, ships, wood stoves

### Proactive planning tools and resources

- Support design elements that enhance resources and the user experience – smart development
- Certification program or educational program for designers, architects, planners, realtors, landowners to be experts in NSA development
- Tools and expertise to assist landowners
- Better explain design requirements
- Look ahead to what's coming (i.e. e-bikes, drones, LED lighting)

### Natural Resources concerns

- Prohibit wind turbines
- Address renewable energy (small scale hydro, wind, solar)
- Protect air quality and dark skies; light pollution is not monitored
- Protect biodiversity and native plant communities
- Protect water quality, especially in the Columbia River – water quality policies? Consider impacts from wineries and breweries
- Trains and coal: pollution, traffic, fire danger, dust
- White Salmon River protections
- Prohibit open pit and other mining activities
- Provide opportunities for people to connect to nature and wild areas
- Noxious weeds – treat, remove, manage spread (i.e. boot brushes at trail heads)
- Assess climate change impacts (e.g. increasing water temps and fish mortality)
- Increase opportunities for sport fishing and supporting salmon fisheries
- How are endangered species treated in the Management Plan? Mechanism for species status updates using best available science?
- Are riparian zones adequately protected?
- Culverts are barriers to salmon migration
- Trains and highways block access to river for wildlife
- Manage fire risk: keep in mind that large, intense fires impact the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources as well as economies
- Limit recreation access and use in sensitive areas
- Expand protective buffers for streams and sensitive sites

## Supporting community economic development

- Housing attainability and security, affordable housing - \*2/3 WA County population outside the UA; talk to MCHA
- Sound process for urban area expansion; define a minor revision
- Enhance local control
- Funding! Consider expanding funding assistance to areas outside NSA
- Support long-range planning and visioning for smaller communities
- Gorge Commission certification to showcase successful projects and encourage compliance
- Protect residents' interests as well as visitors
- How is economic development measured? What metrics and are we meeting them?
- There is economic disparity between Hood River/Bingen and the rest of the Gorge
- Economic diversity – what does it look like now versus 50 years ago? How do we promote diversity? Can we incentivize and attract new and diverse companies?
- Where does the workforce live?
- Promised economic development funds (1.4 million) that was never delivered. How should the remaining be spent?
- More funding should go to sustaining local businesses
- Recreation improves quality of life and access increases prop values
- Tourism does not equal family-wage jobs or keep money local
- Tourism is a driver for community economies
- Highlight Skamania Lodge and other gems throughout the Gorge
- Commercial events, weddings bring revenue
- Rural/ag grants
- Create opportunities for transition from timber industry, diversify income
- Farm labor housing needs
- Give Commission carrots to offer as well as sticks (e.g. design help)
- Commission could pay added development cost paid by landowners to protect resources. DLCD funds help.
- Promote selective logging for firewising, income
- How can CRGC advocate for federal funding/support of econ develop. projects?

## Railroads

- Improve regulations on rail expansion to better ensure protection of communities and Gorge-related resources - limit train numbers, amount of material, dust, and impacts to air and water
- Mitigate climate change and impacts of fossil fuel transport
- Adopt guidelines addressing fossil fuel transport through the NSA, require worst-case analysis of oil spills and prohibit coal pollution
- Refusal of more oil trains through the Gorge without large insurance policies, monies provided to all communities that would be affected, safety records and policies for all Gorge railroads
- Ban trains with illegally dangerous loads
- Rail traffic through all towns and parks must not exceed 10 mph for safety
  - Require industry studies by the railroads and earthquake risk studies
- Consider charging RRs for miles traveled in each state (e.g. Spokane)

### Other NSA issues of concern

- Review Management Plan statement re: inapplicability of state vested rights doctrine
- Gorge Commissioners should be required to live in the NSA to experience being subject to the rules
- Better public transportation across bridges/new Hood River bridge
- Dark roof requirement adds to labor housing cooling costs for ag producers
- Explore opportunities for Good Neighbor Authority
- Remove old barbed wire from public lands
- Hazard mitigation planning
- Strengthen standards for agricultural housing to be at least as strong as OR's
- Consider ways to crowd source revenue
- How do we plan around climate change?
- High density UA development can create undesirable aesthetic; sprawl is undesirable
- Drones – airspace controls? Can be a nuisance and useful for search and rescue, etc
- Cumulative impacts of coal and oil trains is not addressed
- Create a long-range transportation plan
- Volunteers could adopt trail segments like they do highways
- Visual impacts of wind farms
- Fossil fuel development and infrastructure
- Commission should include more members with expertise in agriculture, business, recreation, etc with subcommittees to work with citizen groups
- Review small-scale fishing support and fish processing operations –particularly guidelines limiting outside employees (allow family members) and rules regarding use of existing or accessory buildings
- Transportation and traffic – conflicting uses, aging infrastructure, rock slides, traffic

**Next Steps:** Commission staff are simultaneously collecting detailed comments from county planning departments, state and federal agencies, and others with specific suggestions for improving the Management Plan. These detailed comments, where they relate to issues that can be addressed by the Commission through the Gorge 2020 process, will be reflected in the next scoping summary provided to the Commission.

During the next month, Commission staff will review all the comments we received in written form, and organize them into three categories for the Commission to consider. The categories are:

- 1) Comments that are directly related to sections of the current Management Plan, that identify a problem that needs to be addressed, that suggest a change to an existing section, or that identifies a gap that should be addressed in the 2020 Management Plan;
- 2) Comments that are not directly related to the Management Plan but address the Commission's operations, public or agency outreach process, and/or communications; or
- 3) Comments that are not directly or indirectly related to the Management Plan or the Commission's authority, and cannot be addressed in the Gorge 2020 Management Plan.

We will present categorized comments to the Commission at the April 11, 2017 meeting and invite additional public comment. The Commission may choose to request additional information from staff at that time. Staff will continue compiling the lists and refining our categories with additional input from agencies and county planners, as well as the four Treaty Tribes. Staff will prepare for a more

thorough discussion of the issues at the May 9, 2017 Commission meeting. The Commission may choose to hold a public workshop to discuss a prioritization process, recognizing staff has neither the capacity nor breadth of expertise needed to address all the issues that will be raised in category 1.

Staff will request clear direction from the Commission on a final list of priority issues to be addressed in the Gorge 2020 Management Plan by the June 2017 Commission meeting. This will allow us to research the issues in detail, and gather data to inform the revision process through June 2019.