

Community Conversation: Working Lands in the National Scenic Area
Gorge2020 Stakeholder Meeting
Thursday, October 3, 2019 | 1:00pm - 4:30pm
Hood River Library

Meeting Summary

Participants: See last page

Overview

As part of the Gorge 2020 Management Plan update process, the Gorge Commission and US Forest are seeking input from the public about emerging land uses and policies in the Management Plan that may need to be clarified or changed to improve the permitting process.

Values and Concerns

Participants were asked to share two things they value about the National Scenic Area and two concerns for their agricultural operation or the resources of the NSA. Each person shared ideas to the full group and staff clustered these into themes, described below. Complete notes from the exercise are available on our [Gorge2020 website](#).

Maintain Rural Communities and Support Economic Vitality

- Maintain the right to farm, family-owned working lands, local food production
- Economic health, sustainable living wages
- Rural communities and low population densities

Protect Agriculture Resources and Working Lands

- Land conversion or conflicts with other land uses
- Regulation should be sensible and minimal; some ag uses are highly regulated
- The rising costs of production and low commodity prices; rising cost of living/land

Balanced Protection of Resources and Quality of Life

- Livability for residents (quality of life), minimizing conflicts (noise, traffic)
- The gorge offers scenic beauty, recreation, a diversity of people, balance of resources
- Farms abutting wild lands, and proliferation of small farms is a model of sustainability

Scenic Agricultural Character (Related to Balanced Resource Protection and Quality of Life)

- Mixed use landscape – forests, farms, orchards, vineyards, wild areas, historic structures – with more intensive development in Urban Areas

Environmental Protections and Natural Resources

- Green spaces, forested lands, open space, watershed health, collaborative conservation
- Natural beauty, wildlife, native species; concern about invasives, disease, pests
- Limiting pollution, pesticides and promote sustainability

Climate Change and Disturbances

- Climate change is creating conditions that generate large, destructive wildfires seasons in rural areas and extreme weather events

Enforcement

- Total lack of enforcement by the Gorge Commission

Science-based policies

- Lack of undisturbed habitat for wildlife
- Protections may no longer be backed by current data

Water

- Control of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and other contaminants
- Lowering water tables – result in more pumping; water use for agriculture

Permitting Burden/Barriers for Working Lands Management

- Streamline permitting, especially for conservation/good stewardship projects
- Fairness in development reviews; lack of farming expertise in permitting agencies
- Short-term rental impacts on housing supply and ag lands
- Lack of funding for Gorge Commission staff – slow response times and turnover

Urban Area Boundaries

- The Management of the Scenic Area is not responding effectively (yet) to the need for communities to grow within the NSA

Breakout Discussions

Staff facilitated small group discussions around three of the topics identified by the participants as values and concerns:

Ag-Related Tourism and Emerging Trends Impacting Quality of Life and Rural Character

The groups discussed several issues and questions including the definition of “event” and “commercial activities”, the lack of compliance/enforcement capacity to implement the

rules, the idea that a few bad apples are threatening the allowances for commercial events, the effects of events (traffic, noise, disturbance to communities and to wildlife).

Environmental Protections, Conservation, and Impacts to Natural Resources

The groups discussed and provided ideas to address grazing, stream buffers, natural resource enhancement projects, human disturbance to wildlife (especially from recreation), conversion of forest lands to agriculture, permitting redundancies and costs, no net loss strategies for wildlife habitats, water quality, coal dust pollution from railroads, data and monitoring needs, climate change impacts, wildfire risk reduction.

Permitting Process Improvements

The group identified issues with current permitting and suggested improvements including checklists and allowed uses published publicly, extending the time periods for discontinued uses (generally and for emergencies), aligning policies with state and federal regulations, permitting disturbance envelopes, creating standards to support planning ahead, providing more pre-application planning assistance, increasing staff and diversifying expertise, expediting agriculture structures where appropriate.

Suggested Solutions

- Streamline resource improvement and conservation projects, such as stream restoration and forest thinning
- Reduce fees/permitting requirements for grant-funded projects where possible
- Help clarify the permitting process and policies for those who wish to apply
- Connect with universities and invite graduate students to research resources and land use in the National Scenic Area

Next Steps

Staff compiled a contact list of all the resources suggested by participants, to assist landowners with sustainable agriculture in the NSA. That list is attached and has been provided to county planning departments.

List of Participants

Cole Provence, WA Dept of Ecology
Amy Kaser, wheat and cattle farmer east of The Dalles
Ken Bailey, cherry grower
Mike Doke, Columbia gorge fruit growers
Alan Peters, Skamania County
Garrett Duyck, USDA NRCS
Peter Cornelison, Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Eric Walker, Hood River County
Becky Bell, Cathedral Ridge
Sally Newell, Underwood landowner
Mark Johnson, One Gorge
Katherine McDevitt, vineyard owner
Thomas Lumpkin, vineyard owner
James Mantone, Syncline Winery, Columbia Gorge Winegrowers
Luke Bradford, COR Cellars
Don McDermott, vineyard owner, Columbia Gorge Winegrowers
Katie Pierson, ODFW
Michael Lang, Friends of the Columbia Gorge
Larry Keister, resident in NSA
Sherri Irish, resident in Washougal
Leslie Henson, small farm near Bridal Veil, pizzeria owner
Luke Bates, small farm near Bridal Veil, pizzeria owner
Robin Dobson, farmer, retired Forest Service
Hannah Ladwig, Gorge Grown Food Network
Lynn Burditt, Forest Service
Bryce Guske, Gorge Commission
Jan Thomas, Underwood Conservation District
Aiden Forsi, Gorge Commission
Rich Kortge, wheat and cherry grower in Wasco
Amanda Hoey, MCEDD
Krystyna Wolniakowski, Gorge Commission
Casey Gatz, Forest Service
Angie Brewer, Wasco County
Lorrie DeKay, Gorge Commission
Joanna Kaiserman, Gorge Commission
Jessica Olson, Gorge Commission
Rachel Pawlitz, Forest Service
Bridget Bailey, Gorge Commission
Ryan Rittenhouse, Friends of the Gorge