

Values and Concerns Exercise

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 National Scenic Area. Each person shared their ideas to the full group and staff clustered these into themes.

Values appear in blue text and concerns appear in red below.

Agriculture and Economic Vitality

- Maintain right-to-farm laws
- Economic health – encouraging sustainable living wages and improve those for the future of the people
- Growing our own food locally
- Family owned working lands
- Rural nature of Wasco County
- Certainty – the ability to farm our place without neighboring conflict (noise, dogs, etc)
- Protection of our ag lands for ag uses and prevention of their conversion to residential and commercial uses
- Low density populations

Protect Agriculture Resources and Working Lands

- Protect working lands as ownership changes
- Development of viable farmland (urban sprawl)
- Increase of residences removing agricultural land from production. Where residences try to dictate agricultural practices without understanding
- Avoid regulating farm labor housing – state regulations are in effect; no double regulation
- The extensive regulations that wineries operate within are highly effective at limiting growth and production of small ag operations
- Need for long-term ag development approvals (10 years) without discrete components
- Private property rights – regulation should be sensible and minimal. Property owners should retain rights to manage their property to the best extent possible
- Access to decision-makers, navigating bureaucracy
- Cost/barriers to growing local food. Hood River County has the highest prices for ag farmland in the state
- Too much regulation, which stifles progress
- Impacts on economic viability of farm operations
- The rising costs of production and low commodity prices will be prohibitive in creating new solutions to resource issues in farming

Balanced Protection of Resources and Quality of Life

- Livability for residents (quality of life)
- Any expansion of commercial events in ag lands (noise, traffic, etc)
- Unchecked traffic, pollution, and litter
- Loss of quality of life in rural areas due to noise from commercial events
- Crowd management and peacefulness
- Unique recreation activities available in the Gorge
- Scenic beauty – the gorge is uniquely beautiful. This is enjoyable for residents and visitors
- Diversity of people and what they bring to the Gorge
- Balanced protection of resources
- Resource protection – maintain quality of life in rural Scenic Area
- Quality of living – opportunities and resources for an enjoyable life with careers and recreation
- Mixed use landscape and support of small farms, producers, and growers
- The beauty of an agricultural landscape is tough to beat!
- Non-compatible uses impact the viability of family farms
- The beauty of the mosaic of different landscapes
- Economic growth within the NSA must be a higher priority – Scenic Act part #2
- How to prioritize potentials and issues
- The mixed use landscape facilitates farm sustainability and diverse land uses. Farms abutting wild lands, and the proliferation of small farming operations is a model of sustainability
- The distinct communities that have developed in the NSA
- Abundance – micro climates allow diverse growing conditions to produce agricultural bounty
- Land Stewardship
- Air quality risks – wind behavior, forest conditions, etc contribute to poor air
- The economy of the gorge may cater to those who do not live here
- “Loving the Gorge to death” tourism run amok, over-crowding of recreation areas, especially the abuse of the Historic Highway. Unsafe for residents and first responders
- People may get priced out of living and working in the Gorge

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

- Aesthetics of farmland areas
- Mixed use landscape – forests, farms, orchards, vineyards, wild areas – with more intensive development in Urban Areas
- Scenic beauty protections
- Protect existing historical structures

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Environmental Protections and Natural Resources

- Green spaces, forested lands
- The collaborative work that has been done between landowners and resource agencies focused on conservation in Wasco County
- Keep NSA wild and scenic
- Natural beauty, wildlife, and native species
- Invasive weeds, insects, and diseases, biological extinction
- Threat of invasives, pests, disease
- Environmental health, sustainability and improvement of watershed, air quality
- Limiting pollution and county use of pesticides
- Natural environment protections
- Protection and enhancement of scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources, ag lands, forest, and open space
- Clean air
- Preserve the NSA to protect National Scenic Area resources, vistas, and rec experience
- Open space
- Change regulation that allows depleting resources in a non renewable way
- Ag uses are continuing to have negative impacts on natural resources. Current regulations are not adequate

Climate change and Disturbances

- Gorge Commission is ignoring climate change in plan review
- Climate change is creating conditions that generate large, destructive wildfires seasons in rural areas
- Extreme weather events
- Fires and their containment breaks
- Wildfire risks and strategies for prevention

Enforcement

- Total lack of enforcement by the Gorge Commission

Best Science

- Lack of security 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

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- Very locally, conversion of Underwood dryland orchards to irrigated vineyards (water!)

Permitting Burden/Barriers for Working Lands Management

- Streamline the permitting review process for conservation/good stewardship projects
- Small grants and fees for development reviews (fees reduce value of small grants)
- Fairness in development reviews
- Development review fees and streamlining
- Lack of farming expertise in permitting agencies – lack of understanding and under-staffed
- Short-term rental impacts on housing supply and ag lands
- Lack of funding for Gorge Commission staff – makes response times slow and keeps experienced staff able to continue with adequate pay
- Agencies with very little ag experience impacting how I can do my job
- Confusing or mixed messages that prevent landowners from working on their lands (ex. Thinning trees). People who are being or trying to be good stewards of the land
- Development review fees and streamlining
- Fairness in development review

Urban Area Boundaries

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