

Memo

To: Columbia River Gorge Commissioners
Columbia River Gorge Commission Staff
U.S. Forest Service Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Staff

From: Angie Brewer, Planning Director for Wasco County
John Roberts, Community Development Director for Hood River County
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Date: October 9, 2017 for the October 12, 2017 Gorge Commission Meeting

Subject: The Management Plan and Acknowledgement of Local Visions

Thank you for providing time on your agenda for the Scenic Area county planning departments to share what the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (Management Plan) means to us, how it affects our communities, and how including us in your process is not only specified in the existing Management Plan, but will ensure the outcome is successful for our residents, resources, and visitors. The Commission staff has been working hard, but is limited in capacity and still has a heavy lift ahead. We are a necessary partner for you this important process and are here to ask that you support Commission staff's plan to include the counties more directly in their ongoing work.

Achieving success

We fully recognize the opportunities and unique privileges afforded by the Act and bi-state compact. We also recognize that the National Scenic Area is protected largely for the national and international community to enjoy. However, in order for this national plan to successfully protect resources for visitors on any scale, it must first work for the residents who live, work and play here. To develop rules not feasible for implementation breeds an environment of non-compliance and failure to protect. To develop rules that don't support local residents' vision for vibrant communities, results in stagnant and suffering communities that cannot accommodate visitors' needs or worse, deter visitors entirely. In order to prioritize national protection, you must also prioritize local needs.

What the rules mean to us

The National Scenic Area rules and regulations have affected our residents, resources, staff and politics since the latter half of the 1980's. They have been a part of our regulatory role and responsibilities since the early 1990's. As you'll recall, these rules were extremely contentious to adopt; they continue to be contentious (and expensive) to implement. Our programs are the front line for development and resource protection in the National Scenic Area. *Our local resources are expended implementing the national plan.* Scenic Area grants from our respective states do not cover the costs associated with implementation. Local implementation brings opportunity and risk. For the success of this plan, not only for our residents but also for our resources and visitors – the local governments need to be co-authors of any significant changes. The original authors of the Act and existing Management Plan understood this and set that expectation with us as their partners. The Management Plan states:

“A Vision of the Columbia Gorge...To achieve this vision the Columbia River Gorge Commission will provide: Stewardship of this legacy and trust, Leadership for implementation of the National Scenic Area Act and the Management Plan, Partnership with communities, tribal governments, and agencies, and A (sic) vision of the Gorge as a region and the river as a bond...” (MP Introduction, Page 3)

“The Management Plan for the Scenic Area is based upon a vision created by Congress, the Gorge Commission, the U.S. Forest Service, county and city governments, state and federal agencies, Indian tribal governments, concerned citizens, and interest groups. The vision provides a sense about the future of the Gorge 20, 50, or 100 years from now. It supplies the adhesive that binds the plan.” (MP Introduction, Page 3)

How it affects our communities

We recognize the Columbia River Gorge Commission is the regional planning body for the National Scenic Area and the value of that role. As professional planners we are duty bound to ensure any plans we implement are fair and functional. The American Planning Association¹ provides a response to the question, “what is planning?” It states:

“Planning Provides a Vision for the Community Today — and What We Want Our Community to Be in the Future. The goal of planning is to maximize the health, safety, and economic well-being for all residents. This involves thinking about how we can move around our community, the businesses and attractions in our community, where we want to live, and opportunities for recreation. Most of all, planning helps create communities of lasting value.”

Where they apply, the Scenic Area rules replace or modify local plans. To highlight just a few impacts, it affects where our schools, fire halls, and parks are built; it affects how we plan for agriculture and recreation related tourism; and it affects how we farm and forest. Right now, our communities are struggling to address the needs of their emergency services and improvements to school properties outside of the urban areas. We struggle to support agriculture related tourism because the rules do not allow us to. We have no tools to encourage new farm uses, and the forestry rules remain to be clarified. There is great opportunity to make changes that will benefit everyone.

To address the local planning needs captured by the quote above, the local concerns need to be considered. By law, we are your only partners for implementation of the rules on private and non-federal public lands. We want to create a regional community of lasting value for our residents, resources and visitors; no one knows our communities better than us. Our 30 years of lessons learned implementing the existing rules are in direct response to balancing resource protection with the support of vibrant and sustainable communities, including our rural residents outside of the urban areas. We are your ally in this planning process and are here to help you develop a successful regional plan.

In 2009, *National Geographic Traveler Magazine* identified the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area as the sixth best travel destination in the world. The article notes how well the communities and resources have handled the pressures of tourism and development. The assessment focused on authenticity and stewardship, evaluating the qualities that make a destination unique and measuring its

¹ Source: <https://www.planning.org/aboutplanning/>

integrity of place. National Geographic used six criteria weighted according to importance: environmental and ecological quality; social and cultural integrity; condition of historic building and archaeological sites; aesthetic appeal; quality of tourism management; and outlook for the future². National Geographic's recognition of the Gorge was in part due to the protection of resources afforded by the Act, but it was also recognition of the integrity of our communities and our local visions for the future.

Including the counties is anticipated by the Management Plan

We would like to call your attention to language included in the existing Management Plan regarding local visions and inclusion of local communities. This information is included in an easily overlooked, but critically important, introductory chapter of the Management Plan. Statements from the existing plan illustrate the intent of the Act and how the rules were to be developed and implemented in partnership. These statements include the following:

"A Vision of the Columbia Gorge...To achieve this vision the Columbia River Gorge Commission will provide: Stewardship of this legacy and trust, Leadership for implementation of the National Scenic Area Act and the Management Plan, Partnership with communities, tribal governments, and agencies, and A (sic) vision of the Gorge as a region and the river as a bond..." (MP Introduction, Page 3)

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"The Scenic Area Act recognizes the human presence amidst a spectacular landscape with remarkable natural resources and presents a model for reconciliation between them." (MP Introduction, Page 4)

"The vision calls for prosperous cities and towns in the Gorge...." (MP Introduction, Page 4)

"Urban Areas are eligible for federal funds under the Scenic Area Act. They may expand over time, even at some cost to scenic, cultural, natural, or recreation resources. However, they must grow efficiently to minimize costs of growth and to function as providers of services." (MP Introduction, Page 4)

"Outside Urban Areas, new commercial development is limited to those areas where commercial development is already occurring and other areas uniquely suited to commercial use in conjunction with resource-based recreation." (MP Introduction, Page 4)

"Standards in the Scenic Area Act require protection and enhancement of scenic, cultural, natural, and recreation resources. Development is welcome, but it must not adversely affect these resources or interfere with the prosperity of the Urban Areas... This vision paints a picture far from devoid of human enterprise outside of Urban Areas. It embraces agriculture and forestry and accords a special role to recreation." (MP Introduction, Page 4)

² Source: Page 19 of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Interagency Recreation Strategy Report, 2014.

“New vistas, small-scale travelers' accommodations, campgrounds, river access points, trails and other forms of resource-based recreation, both publicly owned and privately owned, will be created in rural areas throughout the Scenic Area...New facilities will not locate on the Gorge's most valuable agricultural land. Recreation growth will respond to demand within resource constraints and will be carefully planned so it does not overwhelm the Gorge and the ability of Gorge communities to support it.” (MP Introduction, Page 5)

“As the number of tourists and recreationists grows and generates adequate demand, alternative modes of transportation-- boat, rail and bus--will become a form of recreation. A network of connected and coordinated trails will develop, including riverfront trails and trails linked to Urban Areas. New recreation facilities, such as The Gorge Discovery Center, will entice visitors to the east end of the Gorge. This will help spread the economic benefits of tourism and relieve some of the pressure on recreation sites in the west end of the Gorge.” (MP Introduction, Page 5)

“Recreation planning will reach new levels of coordination among landowners, recreation purveyors, and providers of emergency, public safety, and other kinds of services. Agencies will develop a system of recreation user fees to support services.” (MP Introduction, Page 5)

“The main responsibility for economic development is reserved for the two states and is largely set forth in other documents.” (MP Introduction, Page 6)

“...Issues and goals were identified in two rounds of meetings in each county with what came to be called "key community contacts" made up of volunteer citizens and community leaders. The first round focused on issues and goals, and the second round on policy alternatives and on standards for carrying out policies. Each round of meetings was followed by wide circulation of newssheet mailers and by open houses to reach residents at large. In addition, a series of workshops to gather public input on recreation issues was held. Finally, two different drafts of the Management Plan were broadly circulated, culminating in three public hearings for each draft. As drafts of the Management Plan were discussed, special attention was given to informing residents how their property was affected by land use designations and guidelines...” (MP Introduction, Page 6)

Our request

We are requesting that you allow your staff to bring us to the table to help you work through the necessary changes. What does “bringing us to the table” look like? It looks like monthly staff-to-staff meetings to discuss changes and review draft language before it presented publically for review and feedback. Quarterly meetings to obtain our feedback on what has already been determined does not meet this request.

Including us expand what information is available for Commission’s consideration. The information managed by our programs is the best predictor of future development and resource impacts, including illegal and unpermitted uses. We have 20+ years of data on land use activity, resource protection and a working knowledge of our community goals. We have professional planning staff well versed in Scenic Area context, and in some cases data analysts, available to assist in this work.

Ultimately, whatever revisions you decide to make will directly impact our communities. We desire nothing but success for this rare opportunity to evaluate and improve Scenic Area regulations. Please let us help you arrive at a successful outcome for our residents, resources, and visitors.