



OPRD: Integrated Park Services Division

Meeting Notes, January 2014

Columbia River Gorge Plan Presentation: II Assessments

OPRD Park Manager West Gorge Management, Mark Stevenson, began the meeting with introductions of all OPRD representatives, and then opened the room for introductions of all meeting attendees. Jaime English, OPRD Senior Park Planner and OPRD landscape design and planning coordinator, Ben Hedstrom, then began the OPRD Gorge Comprehensive Plan presentation. Ms. English began by outlining the schedule of the planning process, highlighting that the January meeting is focused on sharing the existing conditions inventories and establishing guiding values for the planning process in the Oregon State Parks in the Gorge.

Ms. English continued by recognizing the agencies and stakeholders in the Columbia River Gorge Comprehensive Plan. She described the role of Oregon State Parks, and their concentration on the categories of recreation, significant properties, and interpretation & programs.

In moving forward with the plan, OPRD is working with existing management plans to produce an updated document that will be a valuable tool for park managers and best serve the Columbia River Gorge. Addressed factors in the updated plan will include HCRH trail development, increased visitation, desire for increased access in parks, maintenance, changing demographics and technological advancements.

Ms. English then gave an overview of the context of the Columbia River Gorge. She explained OPRD's regional diagram of the gorge that graphically delineates the Columbia River, Interstate 84, the railroad, the Historic Columbia River Highway and Trail, Oregon state parks, cities, and other agency parks.

Existing conditions of the Columbia Gorge continued to be explained with a National Scenic Area Management Plan Land Use Overlay. The overlay contained several sets of data including Landscape Settings, Land Use Designations, and Recreation Intensity Classes. OPRD shared that this graphic shows how OPRD is cross referencing information, and understanding it in the context of the other recreation facilities in the gorge.

Mr. Hedstrom then elaborated on the natural resources analysis. OPRD has been gathering natural resource analysis for two years, with a combination of ground work and aerial photography. Habitat analysis was provided and including maps of habitat distribution throughout the gorge and percentages of land ownership of each habitat area. Oregon State priority habitats include riparian forest, emergent wetland, late-seral forest, Oregon oak, ponderosa pine, riparian shrub/willow, and semi-native grasslands. Two significant gorge habitats were also analyzed: cliff, rock & scree, and waterfalls.

OPRD also recognized the cultural resources in the Columbia River Gorge, and that many of the experiences people have along their journey through the gorge happen in state parks. The theme of movement is relative to the history of the gorge, beginning with the Missoula Floods, the movement of the salmon and the Native cultures that followed the species, and later

transportation and the movement of goods, which brought explorers, the railroad and the highway. Projects like the Historic Columbia Highway, and the Civilian Conservation Corps have also shaped the history of state parks in the gorge. OPRD also presented a regional diagram that correlated the cultural resources with locations throughout the gorge, showing points of cultural resources and how they overlap.

Ms. English continued with an overview of visitor experience information, and described the management plan land use overlay chart in more detail. The chart helps describe the kind of varied landscape settings a visitor experiences throughout the gorge. A landscape settings and sub-settings graph elaborated on the type of landscape experience a visitor has in the gorge. OPRD explained that the National Scenic Area has landscape settings, and that OPRD has created sub-settings that inform at a finer scale what a visitor experiences within the parks. In addition to the chart, OPRD sub-settings are shown with a collection of example photographs.

Showing Rooster Rock State Park as an example, OPRD illustrated how landscape settings and sub-settings influence a visitor experience. Ms. English explained how the landscape of mostly wet lowlands, river and shorelands, and riparian forest when paired with primary activities, such as hiking and walking, picnicking, and swimming, make a visit to Rooster Rock different than another state park in the gorge.

The visitor experience analysis also describes what kinds of activities visitors enjoy in each landscape setting. Available facilities at the different parks were then addressed, showing

whether day use or overnight facilities were available. Sites with universal accessibility, trailheads, boat ramps, food, lodging, and park fees were also included in OPRD's analysis.

OPRD conducted visitor surveys that questioned state park visitors about their experience.

OPRD reviewed the surveys which included annual park attendance from 2012, average miles a visitor travelled to visit a state park, percentage of visitors that made return visits to state parks, perceived overcrowding, and the average amount a visitor spent during their stay in the gorge.

Mr. Hedstrom also noted that the data only reflects the parks that were surveyed with in-person surveys. Mr. Hedstrom then elaborated on the data regarding the average amount a visitor spent by stating that most of it was spent on groceries and gas.

All of the existing conditions information as well as the public input from surveys and public meetings informed the draft Guiding Values that OPRD presented next. Scenic beauty was one value presented by OPRD, its definition being source of inspiration that comes from the aesthetic grandeur of the Columbia River Gorge. The next value was natural resources, which was defined as valuing the protection of the uniquely assembled habitats, characteristic of the Columbia Gorge landscape that support a diverse range of species. Heritage was also included as a value, and represents the value of generations of people who were drawn to the gorge, and their stories and cultures which have shaped the land we know today. Recreation was also an additional value that expressed how the gorge is a valuable outdoor place to explore, play and recharge through a variety of activities. Finally, connectivity is a strong value that is a constant

throughout the gorge. OPRD upholds the importance of community in the gorge, and values being a part of the connectivity that the gorge provides to communities that interact along a shared path.

Ms. English then moved onto the various recreation activities that occur in the gorge. A visitor experience by recreation type chart illustrated several networks that exist along the state parks in the gorge. Hiking, bicycle, water recreation, and overnight & automobile were included in the analysis. The diagram analysis shows the trail connections between each park for both hiking and cycling. Access for water recreation spots were highlighted, as well as connections to camping sites in the various parks.

The OPRD presentation concluded with Ms. English sharing information as to where to send additional comments and questions to the Oregon Parks & Recreation Department. A discussion followed each meeting. Discussion notes can be found at www.gorgeparksplan.com.