



PO Box 730 • #1 Town & Country Square • White Salmon, Washington 98672 • 509-493-3323 • fax 509-493-2229
www.gorgecommission.org

Date: 07.06.2010
To: Assessment Committee
From: Michele Dailey, VSI Program Manager
Subject: Vital Signs Quarterly Report

Introduction

This is the first of regular quarterly reports addressing the progress and issues of the Vital Signs Indicators project (VSI). The preliminary format includes a brief narrative on each VSI and a spreadsheet tracking actionable items and issues for each VSI – essentially a very informal work breakdown structure (WBS). I've also included a work flow diagram illustrating the process for many of the VSI. As progress continues, work plans for each VSI will be created and include more formal WBSs and tailored work flows. While this level of detail may not be necessary for the Assessment Committee it is necessary for producing a well documented and repeatable process and will be the basis for formal and public VSI reporting in the future. In addition, I hope that it serves as an improved communication tool between staff and the Assessment Committee. On that note, I welcome your questions and comments at any time.

General Progress Notes

Survey: The Visitor survey will provide information for nine VSI in the Scenic, Economic, Cultural, and Recreation categories.

The final survey instrument was delivered by Dr. Robert Burns in March, 2010.

The request for qualifications and quotes for the data collection contract was completed through the Washington State contracting process. Dr. Robert Burns was also awarded this contract and began data collection in June. Depending on weather and visitor numbers data collection is expected to be complete in September or October 2010.

The survey numbers and analysis report will be delivered by Dr. Burns spring 2011. In addition, Dr. Burns will be conducting a meta-analysis of several studies including ours as part of an independent project that will provide a larger picture of recreation in the NSA including trend information.

Due to a freeze on personal service contracts in Washington State and limited funding, we are unable to conduct stakeholder focus groups at this time.

Cultural:

Three of the Cultural VSI are part of the visitor survey effort and will be reported spring 2011. Three related to stakeholder awareness have been put on hold until we have funding and the personal service contract freeze is over as described previously.

The inventory of new and significant archaeological and historic resources is conducted yearly. The 2009 figures are being compiled now and will be reported late summer 2010. The 2010 data should be available as early as October 2010.

Methodologies to monitor conditions of archaeological and historic sites were presented to the Assessment Committee in a staff report written by Marge Dryden and Jennifer Kaden. With no issues presented, Marge Dryden has begun conducting monitoring. At this time, it is expected that the data will be collected during a two year cycle and projected to be reported in the late fall of 2011.

There is no inventory of traditional cultural properties (TCPs); none have been formally nominated or listed in the National Register. Several issues arise when considering inventorying and monitoring these resources:

- The identification of cultural resources is a sensitive issue
- Some tribal governments define TCPs differently from the National Register
- The tribes have not yet pursued submitting their criteria for TCPs to the Gorge Commission
- The National Register methods are nationally accepted but not widely used
- Some potential TCPs are already monitored as other types of resources (e.g. salmon)

Staff recommends the following options:

- Investigate working with the Cultural Advisory Committee or directly with the Tribes' cultural committees to develop criteria for designating TCPs. This would be very time intensive and not feasible at current staffing levels. Hold off until both FS and Commission staffing levels and priorities make it possible.
- Follow the lead of other federal agencies who are investigating how to identify, document, and nominate TCPs. However, the timeline of this process and outcomes are unknown and when completed will still require significant staff resources to adopt and execute.
- Dropping TCPs from the Cultural Resource indicators but not without tribal consultation.

Scenic:

One scenic VSI is part of the visitor survey that is currently being executed and will be reported spring 2011.

The two "highly-contrasting development" VSI are in development at this time. The first draft of the methods has been completed and is expected to be in final draft format by July 30 with a pilot test taking place in early August and a report to the Assessment Committee at the end of August.

The vantage point VSI depends on Google updating their photos which is expected to take place in 2011.

The night light VSI uses data from the yearly community night sky project that occurs in October.

The two VSI that rely on classifying development by landscape type are in the raw data (imagery etc) compilation phase and will require remote sensing analysis and other parameter and methodology development. Progress is expected in 2011 but reportable information will probably not be available until 2012.

Visibility related to air quality should be reportable fall 2010 based on work done by Rick Graw.

The litter and graffiti impacts VSI is very low priority due to a lack of data from the OR and WA DOTs and limited staff resources to conduct field work.

Natural:

The impact of air quality on natural resources will be addressed by looking at lichen studies throughout the gorge. This approach was developed with the help of Linda Geiser of the USFS. A preliminary report is expected fall/winter 2010/2011.

The remaining 9 natural resource VSI are in a stage of data compilation. Those related to surface water quality and in-stream habitat are being addressed by the USFS watershed action plan process which is in the nascent stage of methods development.

The species and upland habitat VSI will be addressed as part of a collaboration with Oregon and Washington natural resource agencies. We have been working especially closely with WDFW who have provided a great deal of support and commitment to the VSI project.

Assessment Committee Chair Harkenrider, Jill Arens, Michele Dailey, and Lynn Oliver will be meeting July 26th to strategize and plan for potential natural resource VSI related funding.

Economic:

The land base in agriculture and forestry VSI will be refined using current satellite imagery as part of other natural and scenic related VSI land use classifications. Data compilation is in process and classification is expected to start in 2010 and be reportable in 2011. Staff recommends tying this VSI more closely to the economic sectors rather than simple land cover.

The Assessment Committee instructed staff to develop a new set of economic VSI based on consultations and research. A handful of meetings and phone conversations with economists have taken place but further development has been limited by scarce staff time. More reportable progress expected 2011. (Dr. Sheila Martin of PSU, Dr. Michael Taylor of Cascade Economic, and Amanda Remington of MCEDD have been contacted.)

The visitor survey includes an array of spending related questions that will elucidate how tourism dollars are spent in the gorge. This will provide data for an as yet unwritten VSI in the spring of 2011.

Recreation:

Three recreation VSI involve conducting a recreation provider survey. Angie Brewer has met with Stan Hinatsu to review the questions asked in the previous 2008 on-line survey and will revise those questions summer 2010. Angie will also poll the recreation providers regarding their preferred method of being surveyed. There were some issues with the on-line survey that we hope to improve. A new provider survey is expected to occur late fall/early winter 2010/2011.

The remaining four recreation VSI are part of the visitor survey that is currently being executed and will be reported spring 2011.