

Goal 5

Protect and enhance recreation resources

With its breathtaking panoramic views, awesome waterfalls, towering cliffs, multitude of aquatic resources, historic highways and dramatically diverse terrain, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area has provided outdoor recreation opportunities for many decades. In more recent years, the recreation identity of the gorge has expanded from driving, hiking and boating to include windsurfing, kiteboarding, kayaking, rafting, and mountain and road biking. With an increase in recreation types and in general, more users, overcrowding of sites and environmental degradation have become larger issues. A key question facing the gorge today is: how can we all share in the experience, without loving the gorge to death? The objectives and measures have been written to address this question.

Objectives:

5.1 ADDRESS THE DEMAND FOR RESOURCE-BASED RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE MANNER

Assessing the impacts of existing resource-based recreation on the natural environment as well as the demand for additional sites to improve user access.

5.2 PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF RECREATION EXPERIENCES

Documenting the overall quality of the gorge recreation experience as reported by both visitors and residents.

Objective: Address the Demand for Resource-based Recreation Activities in an Environmentally Sustainable Manner

Vital Sign Number: 5.1.a

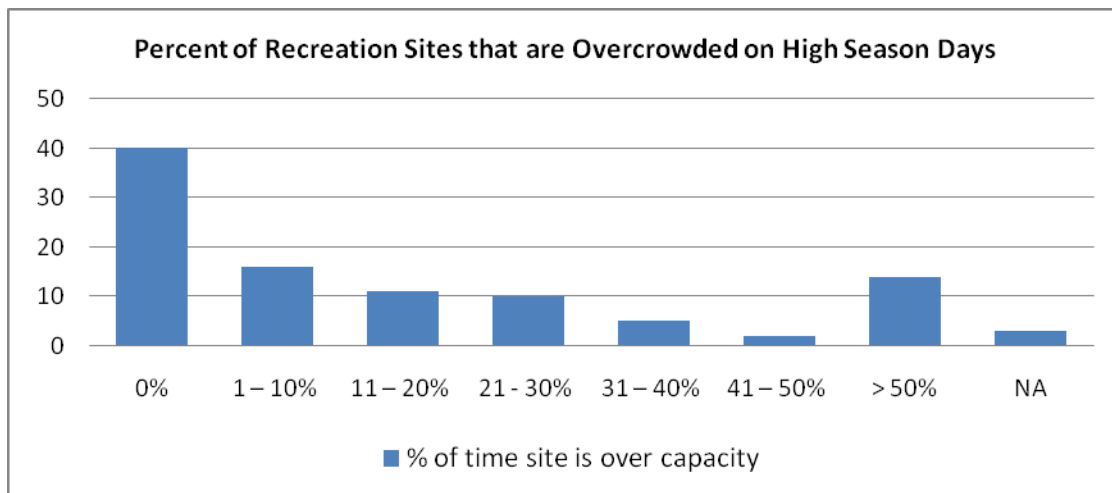
Vital Sign Title: Recreation Demand

Vital Sign Measure: Percent of recreation sites at or above capacity more than X percent of the time on high season days - total and by recreation activity type.

Proxy Measure: Percent of surveyed recreation sites above capacity more than 30 percent of the time on high season days.

What We Know:

Twenty-one percent of sites were at or above capacity more than 30% of the time during the high season in 2008.



Assessment:

In late 2008 managers of approximately 180 recreation sites in and near the NSA responded to an online survey requesting information on site use. The Commission has not agreed on a figure that would represent an overused site. The definition of overcrowded for this analysis is “above capacity 30% of the time” on high season days. Three sites related to water sports were assessed to be at or above capacity 80% of the time on high season days. An additional nine percent said their sites were at or above capacity 20% of the time. Conversely, 40% of all sites were not ever at or above capacity. See the endnote for more information.

Objective: Address the Demand for Resource-based Recreation Activities in an Environmentally Sustainable Manner

Vital Sign Number: 5.1.b

Vital Sign Title: Environmentally Sustainable Recreation

Vital Sign Measure: Percent of recreation sites that are environmentally degraded - total and by recreation activity type and specified as improving or not improving.

Proxy Measure:

1) Percent of each surveyed recreation site that is more than 10% environmentally degraded as a result of human activity and 2) percent that are a) improving, b) not changing, and c) worsening.

What We Know:

Regarding measure 1) - the percent of sites degraded, the chart below shows that, according to survey respondents, 21% of all sites are more than 10% degraded as a result of human activity.

Percent of Sites at Different Environmental Degradation Levels	
Percent of a site that is environmentally degraded by human activity	Percent of sites at each degradation level
0 % degraded	27
1 – 10% degraded	50
11 – 20% degraded	11
21 – 30% degraded	6
31 – 40% degraded	0
41 – 50% degraded	1
Greater than 50% degraded	3
Not Applicable	1

Regarding measure 2) - the percent of sites improving, worsening and not changing, the chart below shows that seven percent of sites are improving, 76% of sites are not changing and 17% of sites are worsening.

Degradation Trend for Recreation Sites	
Surveyed recreation sites that are:	Percent
a) improving	7
b) not changing	76
c) worsening	17

Assessment:

In late 2008 managers of approximately 180 recreation sites in and near the NSA responded to an on-line survey requesting information on site use. One hundred twenty-nine responded to this question. The Commission has not yet agreed on a figure that would represent significant degradation. The standard for significant degradation for this analysis is 10%. Clearly, the large majority of sites are in good and stable condition with less than five percent at what might be considered a highly degraded level.

Litter, trail erosion, soil compaction and devegetation led the list of types of degradation. Some respondents also noted that weeds and Columbia River-caused erosion were indirect forms of human-caused degradation.

Objective: Address the Demand for Resource-based Recreation Activities in an Environmentally Sustainable Manner

Vital Sign Number: 5.1.d

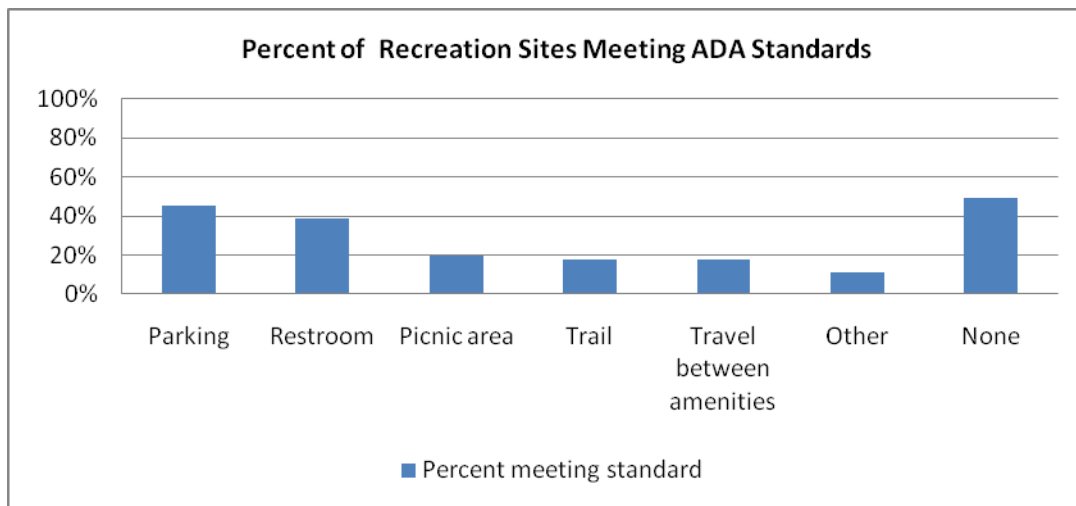
Vital Sign Title: ADA Accessibility

Vital Sign Measure: Percent of recreation sites that meet ADA standards - total and by recreation activity type.

Proxy Measure: Percent of surveyed recreation sites that meet one or more ADA accessibility standards.

What We Know:

Nearly half of the surveyed recreation sites met ADA standards.



Assessment:

In late 2008 managers of approximately 180 recreation sites in and near the NSA responded to an on line survey requesting information on site use. All respondents answered this question. For the most basic accessibility issue – parking – nearly half of all the sites meet ADA standards. We also know that 39% of all sites (or 70) have an accessible restroom. About 20% of sites (or 35) have accessible picnic areas and trails. And about 20% of the sites are constructed in such a way that individuals with disabilities can travel between amenities. Other amenities listed include access to: campsites, viewpoints, a petroglyph interpretive display, drinking fountains, covered kitchen and fishing area. Conversely, one-half of all sites have no ADA amenities. Since the survey did not establish a baseline for the total number of restrooms, trails and picnic areas, it cannot tell us what percent of each type of amenity in the gorge is accessible. See the endnote for more information.

Objective: Protect and Enhance the Quality of Recreation Experiences

Vital Sign Number: 5.2.b

Vital Sign Title: Recreation Site Quality

Vital Sign Measure: Percent of site users rating their overall experience as good or better – total and by recreation site.

What We Know:

In general, the number of recreation users who would rate their experience as good or better has increased.

Users Rating Their Overall Recreation Experience as Good or Better					
Recreation Site	1997	2001	2005	2006	Percentage Point Change
The Dalles Lock and Dam – Celilo Lake			97%	89%	- 8

Average User Rating for Overall Recreation Experience					
Recreation Site	1997	2001	2005	2006	Change
US Forest Service Facilities, Overall (Reported as the median score averaged (scale of 1 – 5) over all survey questions.)		4.2		4.5	0.3
Bonneville Lock and Dam (Reported as overall average percent satisfaction.)	74%				
Overall	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

Assessment:

There is a lack of information available on site-user satisfaction across the broad range of recreation providers in the gorge. Although no neutral or general gorge recreation user information currently exists, survey data from two providers were found. Fortunately the largest gorge recreation provider by far - the U.S. Forest Service - has the most complete and up-to-date information on user satisfaction. Rankings for Forest Service site users were obtained in 2001 and 2006. The average ranking for all services (the survey did not ask an overall quality question) improved significantly between 2001 and 2006. Areas with the largest gains included facility quality, employee helpfulness, trail conditions, feeling of safety, restroom cleanliness and road condition.

Using information provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, another large recreation provider in the gorge, The Dalles Dam received high rankings for individual characteristics, yet its overall ranking dropped significantly between 2005 and 2006. The overall ranking for Bonneville, last reported in 1997, shows an average ranking of 74%. However, the scale for this survey uses “very satisfied” and

“extremely satisfied” which could be considered more demanding than the “good or better” used for this Vital Signs Indicator.

The Forest Service data provides the most complete information on overall quality. With an average ranking for quality of 4.5 out of 5.0, the survey reveals a substantially positive recreation experience and shows an improving trend. The quality of scenery, received a near-perfect ranking. See the endnote for more information.

The existing surveys used to make this assessment differed significantly from one another. Some were scientific surveys conducted by interviews while others were compilations of self-reported user comment cards. Most reported average or median user scores. Only one site, The Dalles Dam, reported the actual percentages of user responses by level of satisfaction. All used a five-point scale for satisfaction making rough comparisons possible.



Joanna Grammon

Recreation Chapter Endnotes:

5.1.a Recreation Demand

Source: Gorge Commission survey of recreation providers.

Gorge Commission staff attempted to identify every gorge area recreation site, both public and private – 231 in all. Not all providers were inside the NSA. The 78% response rate was above staff expectations. Managers of those sites were asked to take a brief survey regarding demand, degradation and handicapped accessibility. Results can be viewed at:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=vvE2d9WCvuVO7erjufFWESmhEYIGqZ6RKePunsZUzkE_3d

Due to survey limitations, the sites are not categorized by recreation type.

5.1.b Environmentally Sustainable Demand

See 5.1.a: Recreation Demand endnote above.

5.1.d ADA Accessibility

See 5.1.a: Recreation Demand endnote above.

5.2.b Recreation Site Quality

Sources:

Recreationists in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area: A Survey of User Characteristics, Behaviors and Attitudes, Prepared by Alan R. Graefe, Robert C. Burns and Karen Robinson for the U.S. Forest Service in 2001

National Visitor Use Monitoring Results for Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, data was collected by the U.S. Forest Service in 2006

National Visitor Use Monitoring Results: September 2001, USDA Forest Service, Region 6, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, U.S. Forest Service in 2001

US Army Corps of Engineers Recreational Customer Satisfaction Survey; Volume 3: Bonneville Lock and Dam, Alan R. Graefe, Robert C. Burns, John Titre, and James Absher, 1999.

Comment Card Submissions from The Dalles Lock and Dam – Lake Celilo (2004 – 2008), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Commission staff attempted to contact all known recreation providers to determine if they had user survey information. The three providers cited in this report were the only ones responding positively. A summary of the survey results can be found at:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=vvE2d9WCvuVO7erjufFWESmhEYIGqZ6RKePunsZUzkE_3d.

More information on the surveys including breakdowns regarding particular types of services will be made available on the Vital Signs Indicators web page at www.gorgevitalsigns.org.



Skamania Lodge