

FIRE & ICE SCENIC LOOP MEETING
Wednesday, October 26, 2011 ~ 10:00 am
Cowlitz Regional Conference Center

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

Kim Bennett, Vancouver Tourism Office
Jeanne Bennett, Mount St Helens Institute
Dick Ford, Forest Learning Center
Steve Harvey, CWCOG
Mike Hayden, Cougar Area Trail Seekers
TJ Keiran, CWCOG
Maree Lerchan, White Pass Scenic Byway
Darcy Mitchem, Toutle Valley Community
Becky Morton, Cowlitz Indian Tribe
Paul Pearce, Skamania County
Mark Plotkin, Cowlitz Tourism Bureau
Casey Roeder, Skamania Chamber
Lisa Romano, Mt St Helens Nat'l Monument
Mary Sauer, Swift Communities Action Team
Sarah Steffen, Olympic Property Group
Susan Saul, _____
Michelle Whitten, City of Toledo

Amy Asher, CWCOG
Linda Delimbo, Three Rivers Mall
Lee Grose, Lewis County BOCC
Ken Hash, WSDOT
Tammie Howard, Woodland Chamber
Joan LeMieux, iRambl Tourism Co.
Mary McDonald, DNR Pacific Cascade Region
Mike Morgan, Vision Toledo
Mary Kay Nelson, MK Marketing
Ruth Peterson, Senator Swecker's Office
Sheila Richardson, Vision Toledo
Howard Rogers, Lone Fir Resort
Lori Sarancik, iRambl Tourism Co.
Dawn Smith, Eco Park Resort
Gary Stuart, Cowlitz-Skamania Fire District 7
Jessica Walz, Gifford Pinchot Task Force
Jennifer Keene, CWCOG

Jennifer Keene, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, welcomed everyone.

Jennifer then introduced TJ Keiran, who will be doing our GIS/mapping activities; and Amy Asher, working with the transportation piece along with Rosemary Siipola – both from CWCOG; and mentioned the organizations that are partnering with the COG in this project: WSDOT, US Forest Service and the counties of Clark, Skamania, Lewis and Cowlitz.

Jennifer gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Fire and Ice Scenic Loop proposal which began with the “Ring of Fire” committee. The COG submitted a grant application to the Federal Highway Administration to complete a corridor management plan (CMP) which would connect the White Pass and Columbia Gorge Scenic Byways called the “Fire & Ice Scenic Loop.” The grant application was approved and the COG was awarded \$199,200 in grant monies to complete the CMP. One of the main focuses of the grant application was on SR 504 and including them in the “loop” and the services that could be provided along that route.

Jennifer defined what was meant by “scenic byways” and “corridor management plan” and then continued with the presentation discussing what the Fire & Ice Scenic Loop CMP will encompass. This CMP will be a smaller version of a regular CMP. She further discussed that a Request for Proposals for a consultant or team will be published on October 31, 2011. Applications are due by November 21, 2011 and the consultant/team should be on board January 2, 2012.

Jennifer explained that we will not be creating a new scenic loop; and expressed the importance of the participation of the stakeholders who are going to benefit from the creation of this loop. It's also important to look at each community to see what businesses would want to become part of our communities; so we need take a look with a critical eye to see what we have to offer and what we need

to improve in order to be attractive to outside businesses and what kinds of growth we want to see. Goal is to link both byways by filling in the gaps between the two scenic byways.

The National Forest Service is also interested in assisting with this project since about half of the state road is within forest lands.

Jennifer talked about the scope of work. It's about tourists' needs and wants. A consultant will be hired to assist with this piece. The interview panel will include Casey Roeder from Skamania County Tourism; Lee Grose, Lewis County Commissioner; Maree Lerchan, White Pass Scenic Byway, Jim Misner, Cowlitz County Commissioner; Paul Pearce, Skamania County; Dawn Smith, Eco Park Resort; and TJ Keiran from CWCOG. Another meeting will be scheduled after the consultant is hired. An events calendar is something that we hope to develop for the entire loop, from Woodland to Stevenson to Chehalis, etc.

Jennifer shared the timeline and indicated that we have until October 2013 to complete the CMP. We hope that through this process the four counties will be cooperating together and using their combined funding to develop a tourism plan. After October 2013, the COG will no longer be involved in this project.

Jennifer asked TJ to talk about GIS information. TJ's responsibilities will be collecting, gathering and redistributing the GIS information that already exists. Also will incorporate Google GIS with asset mapping; e.g. campsites, motel/hotel sites, landmarks, etc. TJ asked for these kinds of items from the folks attending and he will start the mapping process once the consultant has been hired.

Jennifer then briefly reviewed the scope of work – first is to establish the committee which will meet approximately 6-8 times throughout the process. Information will be posted on the CWCOG website. Four public meetings will be held – this is the first one. Will try to hold one in each county. Local officials will also be consulted as they may need to sign off on certain projects.

The US Forest Service has recently released their Investment Strategy Plan and we hope to be able to work with them to assist with their plan.

Wayfinding activities will not include new signage – but incorporating the two signs that exist on the other byways. Promotion, both national and international, is also key. Partnering between the counties is also important.

Jennifer then asked for feedback from those present as to what do we need to do, and what the COG can help produce.

Need to incorporate:

- Livability section – alternate sources of transportation
- Creating a visitor loop
- Marketing tools
- Land use
- Forest service
- Governance of plan

Suggestion was also made to cut off I-5 and use Jackson Hwy instead. The STP route is also not on I-5 and might be a good alternative to using I-5. Jennifer indicated we will be looking at those areas that shoot off of I-5 as well so as not to exclude any areas that might have great tourism opportunities.

Asset mapping will include all the assets (campsites, shopping, motels, etc.) and what is available by season.

SR 503 and 504 need to be developed beyond their current ends. Yellowstone National Park is an example to look at in developing a north loop, a south loop and a large loop.

It would be advantageous to have each community develop their list of assets and have all of them be on one website. The website marketing tool is also very important and maybe it should be incorporated into the scope of work/RFP process. There are existing channels for marketing online and we need to tap into those rather than create a new one.

Question was raised that after the two years are up, who will be the keepers of the plan that is developed? Governance of the plan will also need to be incorporated into the scope of work. Sustainability is key for the plan to be successful. Funding is also important. The four counties can sign an MOU to create a mini-COG so to speak and take to all four counties with approval of the commissioners and designate how funding will be established.

It was suggested that one commissioner from each of the four counties be on this committee.

There are several barriers, including regulations, that hinder the development of new businesses. These may also need to be considered.

Jennifer thanked everyone for attending and asked everyone to send her additional suggestions for the RFP as it will be go out soon.

Meeting adjourned at 11:35 am