



GORGE
& OUTDOOR REC
TOURISM
SUMMIT

Main Themes from Rec Summit

Throughout the Summit, participants were asked to contribute their comments, questions and concerns in the chat. This is document captures these feedback.

Overall Take-aways from the Summit

- Address over-demand of rec resources and plan accordingly
- Discuss transportation solutions
- Ground our recreation work in equity
- Address lack of affordable housing and explore future options
- Figure out ways to spread economic impact from tourism funds
- Create education paths/information pipelines for visitors/locals

In Order of Most Mentioned:

- Trail/ Rec System Use/Overuse
- Transportation/ Parking
- Equity/ Inclusion
- Safety
- Housing
- Economic Impact

Potential Worst Case Scenario for the Gorge

We asked participants to brainstorm what the Gorge could look like at its worst:

Cars, cars, cars!

Vehicular traffic is rampant! People don't understand where to go, how to park, what to do.

Level of visitation to Multnomah Falls will just keep increasing

The social impact on the environment, people negatively impacting the flora, fauna, and water

Trails overrun with people causing negative impacts; may see more trails like the Oneonta Gorge where they must get closed down entirely

Could also see more hazardous activity like the fire that was started

Cost of housing is going through the roof and it will continue to rise

Lack of affordable housing and the expense of homes increase, increase in vacation homes exasperating the housing crisis

The Gorge becomes an area that becomes elitist and cater to the high income white population

Down home parts of Hood river may go away and be pushed aside by all the Dwell magazine homes

The increased traffic creates inaccessibility for older and disabled community members

Increase in tourism puts pressure on small businesses as large corporations/chain stores move into the area

The Gorge prioritizing the needs of tourist populations over low income/BIPOC local populations

Trespassing on Private Property. Illegal parking on Private Property

Lack of resources for tourist education because need for enforcement is so high

Strain on local EMS


Conflict between local and visitor

Traffic conflict, safety like Dog Mt.

Crowded urban areas preventing local movement

Increased visitation, but not increased funding for state/federal lands to accommodate the increased traffic.

“Trash on trails, in public land areas. We want people to experience the Gorge but in a responsible manner. We do not want to be a Venice or Park City. Places with No Plan end up with biggest mess. National Scenic Area protections do provide parameters but comes with own pros and cons. Home issues are worldwide, but where do the locals live? Affordable housing in a high demand location needs a template. Instagram culture has shown all the secret places to the world -do not tag places! Where do the visitor centers SEND the visitors? How can we be more proactive in providing guidance to these boots on the ground visitor interactions? Local tour company promotes responsible recreation by taking a van load of people in one vehicle but it is so crowded everywhere in the Gorge that they cannot do their job - it is very difficult to access any of the destinations. How do we ensure visitors are getting the message? People arrive here expecting a Grand Canyon-esqe Gorge. They really have no understanding of place?”



Top Themes: Trail Recreation and Overuse

Participants are already seeing increased visitation in the Gorge, much due to the pandemic. Spreading visitors out is seen by many as a good way to lessen impact at high use areas but others pointed out the negative effects of high use at previously undiscovered spots. Many called for a focus on design and infrastructure improvements, without over-building.

THOUGHTS ON CURRENT USE

- *As a Portland-based tour operator, we can't get even access Multnomah Falls on weekdays from May to Oct in a "normal" year. Have had to do it as a drive-by because parking has become impossible, and there aren't enough spots for designated tour vehicles.*
- *Cultural shift from COVID for people to be more inclined to want to go to the outdoors.*
- *Outside is safer, visitors more inclined to road trips to rural areas*
- *It is a challenge all over the world,,another place experiencing this is Iceland. and many many more like the Gorge are challenged by this issue. Getting the word out to explore other areas besides the west end (waterfalls etc) and explore more of Washington, (Mt Adams area) etc. .. spread the love and hold on to your hats , we may see a VERY busy summer with the pandemic a bit more under control. Hike early , hike midweek, car pool ... etc*

Top Themes: Trail Recreation and Overuse

THOUGHTS ON SPREADING THE LOVE (DISPERSING VISITORS)

- *'Undiscovered' sites further away from the river are now discovered. Any thoughts on the expansion of visitation to 'shoulder' areas around the gorge?*
- *Maintaining the solitude of the Gorge by highlighting the less visited areas. Frame the Gorge as a whole.*
- *Locals do NOT want to see the "undiscovered sites" discovered!! Some things/sites need to be kept sacred. Stop advertising the smaller sites to "spread people around"*
- *Spread the Love is the type of campaigning is what is destroying the smaller sites that locals love.*
- *Does spreading tourism to other natural resource destinations for hiking/recreation 'protect natural resources' or just continue the overload and degradation further? As a local to the Gorge, I am many ways am ok with tourism being concentrated to a few areas-Dog Mountain, Katherine Creek, Multnomah Falls rather than the hikes that my family for three generations have cherished and don't want to be overloaded by discovery.*
- *One thing to keep in mind is the public lands are public and they should made available for all, even if that means your favorite, "secret" spots.*
- *Increase outdoor recreation opportunities in Urban areas or closer to them.*

Top Themes: Trail Recreation and Overuse

THOUGHTS ON INFRASTRUCTURE

- *I'm wondering about best practices/case studies of trail systems that are resilient - i.e. absorb temporal surge in visitation w/minimal impact on environment/user experience. Would these principles also help trail systems absorb trend in increase use?*
- *Attention to design can bring out and highlight the best qualities of a place while unconsciously nudging visitors to the most responsible behaviors. I think some well designed playgrounds and parks are good examples that we as trail system designers should study and learn from.*
- *This is so true and I've seen this in European trail-town communities such as Rota de Vinciente in Portugal*
- *Discussion about simultaneously focusing on infrastructure improvements and allowing for more access, alternative access.*
- *Permits for Dog Mt and Lewis River – pick the really busy places and create permit systems for our busiest locations. (People are familiar with this and seems smart to restrict access and encourage people to use shuttles/guides.)*
- *Need to increase recreation infrastructure to address demand and increase access, not reduce it. Look to New Zealand for a hybrid of increased infrastructure & transportation solutions*
- *Pressure to build more recreation facilities. Do we want some sort of rec facility on every acre of land?*



Top Themes: Transportation Issues

Participants highlighted issues around congestion and parking. Suggested solutions included one way loops, permits and a focus on car-free transit options.

THOUGHTS ON CURRENT USE

- *We are at a tipping point of recreation use now and must implement actions to manage access/parking/transportation*
- *Sasquatch shuttle is an option but there are still traffic issues to the mix. Passes and scheduling*

THOUGHTS ON TRAFFIC CONTROL

- *Have you done any studies on limiting parking. How it impacts visitors and people's use of other options to access recreation?*
- *As someone who has witnessed the blatant disregard of state highway workers and their road closed signs/traffic control measures by bicyclists, hikers and other visitors to the gorge - specifically along the historic highway, I'm not convinced adding an access control point for local traffic only will work*
- *What about making that section of Hwy 30 one way?*
- *Yes one way loops!*

Top Themes: Transportation Issues

THOUGHTS ON CAR FREE OPTIONS

- *We need to promote carfree. Alternative transportation programs. Buses, shuttles, bicycle sharing, car sharing, trailhead shuttles and partnerships with airports. Maybe even a rental car mitigation fund like what Lake Tahoe has.*
- *Recall a historic discussion about creating a connected 'trail' system from one end of gorge to other, with shuttles to hubs, bike/walking between hubs w/lodging available as well.*
- *I think Transit Oriented design for recreation infrastructure is a great idea. When I lived in Eugene I used the Lane County line to go up the McKenzie all time time.*
- *Continuing to encourage carpooling and shuttle options so people can leave their car behind.*
- *We talked about integration of shuttle services with trail system design including universal design principles that improve access for everyone*
- *We discussed issues around local people who don't have ability to plan ahead by days, if permit needed days ahead. Also, talked about incentives to get people out of their cars by involving some program with restaurants, museums and other local businesses.*
- *Also transit shuttle service for trail volunteer crews would eliminate a large barrier for my program.*



Top Themes: Equity and Inclusion

Many called out the importance of bringing more people into the conversation about tourism in the Gorge, particularly the local tribes.

- *Importance of grounding the work in equity.*
- *Focus on specific minority groups to educate and invite them to enjoy the Gorge*
- *I feel it is important to extend an invitation for underserved populations within the Gorge*
- *Indigenous population - conversation should be on the table - these folks should be included. How to redistribute some of the tourism money back to native population groups. These communities should be helped to apply for grants, help them along to apply for funding.*
- *We surfaced the value and need to engage additional voices - tribal partners, families that are diverse, generational representation, and more.*
- *Increased outreach with native tribes to make sure our education is inline with their thoughts of the area.*
- *Where I come from, there isn't really any opportunities for residents to engage in tourism management conversations. From what I've seen with CGTA, Travel Oregon, and other regional tourism organizations, they encourage local feedback and participation in these conversations. If you haven't already, reach out to them and ask about their Listening Sessions or other events where they encourage resident participation.*
- *We haven't developed our position on the new permit systems, but we would ask that agencies give the public an opportunity to engage in the process.*



Top Themes: Safety

Safety concerns centered around educating people how to take care of themselves and the land as they recreate.

THOUGHTS ON SAFETY

- *Worries about possible fires like Eagle Creek with uneducated visitors*
- *We need to address lack of law enforcement & demand for Search & Rescue.*
- *When you grow up here you are raised to learn how to keep ourselves safe in the outdoors and keep our environment safe. Stewardship values may not always be passed along*
- *How do we balance safety with the 'happiness' of people thinking that congestion is 'okay?'*



Top Themes: Housing

Participants are concerned about the lack of available housing due to a shift to short term rentals for visitors. And the lack of affordable housing, particularly for local workers.

THOUGHTS ON HOUSING

- *As we increase tourism in the The Gorge, how do we create affordable housing for local workers?*
- *Lack of affordable housing and the expense of homes increase, increase in vacation homes exasperating the housing crisis*
- *Air BnB impact to available long term rental.*
- *Locals being priced out of housing as people who visit are moving or buying places to create Airbnb style residential..*



Top Themes: Economic Impact

Participants also pointed out the benefits of spreading out the economic support. And the importance of supporting small businesses.

THOUGHTS ON ECONOMIC IMPACT

- *Smoothing the distribution to less popular areas is not just about reducing traffic at popular areas but also spreading the dollars spent and contributing to the economies of less well-known towns and communities. If extensive educational campaigns are implemented alongside the Spread the Love campaign, this can help offset the negative impacts of increased visitation to other sites treasured by locals.*
- *Increase in tourism can put pressure on small businesses as large corporations/chain stores move into the area*
- *We discussed that there could be value in doing a study of those who have stopped recreating in the gorge and getting their satisfaction levels*
- *Spread the love campaign - adjust parameters. Friction between tourists and residents.*



Top Themes: Education

Education was seen as a key strategy for visitor management - including messaging, ambassador programs and tour guides.

- *We need to continue to focus on education and less on new rules*
- *Reach out to new audiences who may not have recreated outdoors before to increase education and awareness...Education campaign to recreate responsibly (show the impact on the environment and ways to decrease impact)...*
- *What is the education path? What is the information pipeline? How do visitors get the information they need regarding natural resource protections, how to visit with lower impacts. Expanding and leaning into education. Pre-marketing before folks come to the Gorge.*
- *As far as protecting natural resources, the Trail Ambassadors Program is a great example of such an educational campaign that can encourage responsible visitor behavior. Same with Ready, Set, GORge! And focusing on attracting those markets that value sustainability would mean visitors are more likely to recreate responsibly and want to protect the places they visit. Data collection is also crucial to understand where the impacts are heaviest and to identify worrying trends early on.*
- *More tour focused - help people get out and about, maybe small shuttles to off the beaten path locations like DufurTours / guides can help instill stewardship values Thoughtful design to guide people once they're on site even if they're not with a guide so that they can understand local values. Local practices and know what to do / where to go*