



Sunset over the Pacific Ocean

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Public Involvement

INTRODUCTION

The planning effort for the proposed Columbia-Pacific National Heritage Area has involved residents, business professionals, nonprofit organizations, and local and state government officials at every step in the process. (Representative groups attending these public and stakeholder meetings are included as Appendix J.)

GRASS ROOTS SUPPORT

In 2006, local leaders Bob Andrew, the future mayor of Long Beach, Washington and Pat Roberts, Clatsop County Oregon Commissioner, formed a non-profit organization called Destination: The Pacific (DTP) to promote the designation of the mouth of the Columbia River as an NHA. As a result of their efforts, the Oregon and Washington congressional delegation received almost 100 letters of support from local governments, businesses, trade associations, chambers of commerce and ports, supporting a study. In May, 2006, the delegation introduced study bills in the House and Senate. Starting in March, 2007, DTP began raising funds to support an NPS feasibility study. They raised \$50,000 from funders including the states of Washington and Oregon and several incorporated local governments.

MARCH 2007 GATEWAY COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP SERIES

In anticipation of a study bill, DTP held a workshop series in March, 2007. The three-day series was sponsored by the City of Astoria, the City of Gearhart,

Bank of the Pacific, and the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, among others, and became known as the Gateway Communities Workshop. It included eleven teams of participants: ten teams focused on incorporated governments in the study area and one team composed of state and federal officials. While NHA designation was a topic of the workshop, its greater purpose was to engage participants in a discussion about how they could preserve heritage, promote economic development, and collaborate across jurisdictional lines.

The workshops were transformational for many of the city and county leaders present. One participant remarked, “This was the first time that citizens from around our region have met in one room.” Each team chose a project to pursue. Some teams were extremely successful in generating support and funding for their projects after the workshop. Astoria received a large grant from the Ford Foundation to plan for the future of its waterfront. In a second project, Warrenton’s trail system has since become part of the city’s master plan.

MARCH 2008 PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

In March, 2008, using the funds raised, DTP and other NHA stakeholders held a series of seventeen public scoping meetings. Participants commented on purpose and objectives for the NHA, assets and resources to be documented, heritage area themes and stories, the proposed boundaries, and the proposed organizational structure for the NHA, all of which helped to shape the NHA feasibility study.

Overall, participants were extremely supportive of the proposed designation.

“Creating a national heritage area will even further facilitate our ability to work together as a region – across geography, across state lines, across the river – we can come together as one region and honor our common heritage together.”

Most participants also supported the designation of a non-profit organization to lead the NHA with technical support from the NPS and other partners.

“...a non-profit in the lead is the best model, and appears to be the most successful approach taken by other NHAs across the country.”

There were many insightful comments provided related to potential themes and stories.

“The themes need to broadly encompass activities throughout time...emphasize the importance of Native American trade in the earliest days of commerce and exchange on the river, and recognize that Columbia River based trade and commerce have always had national and international importance.”

ONGOING STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

In May, 2008, the Columbia-Pacific NHA study bill became law and the responsibility for completing the study passed to the NPS. DTP’s intent was to serve as a catalyst and promoter for NHA designation

but not to serve as the coordinating entity for the proposed NHA. In December, 2008 the DTP Board voted unanimously to endorse the non-profit SBEC as the proposed coordinating entity. DTP transferred all of its assets to SBEC and made plans to dissolve, although some members continue to play an active role in the NHA effort.

Since December, 2008, SBEC and NPS have taken joint responsibility for outreach and engagement. They have met and consulted with every incorporated government in the project area as well as with state legislators and the Congressional staff. SBEC has also met with stakeholders and potential partners, including port commissions, local government staff, museums and preservation groups, trade groups, and others in over 40 additional face-to-face meetings across the region.

During these ongoing stakeholder meetings, SBEC facilitated a frank discussion of the level of public commitment and collaboration necessary to make the effort a success. Participants discussed opportunities for collaboration, proposed boundaries, and governance structure for the NHA, among other topics. The NPS has provided technical assistance and has answered questions about program requirements but has remained an objective participant in meetings and workshops.

During meetings with state and local governments and non-profit organizations, SBEC developed the conceptual financial plan described in Chapter 5.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED NHA MANAGEMENT APPROACH

All stakeholder participants have shown great enthusiasm for the approach proposed in Chapters 4 and 5 and have helped to develop several promising collaborations. Clatsop Community College has developed a track in historic preservation. Architects and trades people have assembled a historic preservation cluster to explore opportunities to work together. Timber interests in Wahkiakum County have proposed a scheme to manage forests as county

community forests. Private businesses along Astoria's waterfront have explored ways to collaborate to interpret the region's commercial fishing industry.

While entertaining all ideas, SBEC has been careful to encourage partners to wait until designation is considered by Congress before associating endeavors with an NHA. If the area is designated, SBEC plans to enter into a collaborative and deliberative planning process to explore proposed endeavors, partnerships, and funding strategies in more detail.

OUTREACH THROUGH LOCAL MEDIA

In addition to face-to-face meetings, both SBEC and the NPS have given interviews to newspaper and radio journalists in the study area in an effort to educate the public about the proposal and invite them to participate. (A comprehensive list of articles printed and radio programs broadcast is included as Appendix L.)

BOUNDARY CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO PUBLIC INPUT

There is an organized group within the study area, including some members within the proposed

boundary that have expressed concerns about how the NHA designation might affect property rights. SBEC has engaged this group in dialogue to make certain that their concerns are heard and addressed. This group has proposed a smaller boundary in Washington, one that would only include part of the Long Beach Peninsula and the town of Ilwaco. While this proposal was considered, it did not have much public support among the residents in those areas excluded. Residents in the north portion of the Long Beach Peninsula, southeastern Pacific County, and Wahkiakum County overwhelmingly preferred the boundary described and depicted in Chapter 2.

CONCLUSION

The NPS has concluded that all appropriate public entities and community stakeholders have been involved in the planning process and that the proposed coordinating entity has developed a practical plan that outlines roles for all NHA participants. The NPS also has concluded that support for the concept of the Columbia Pacific NHA, as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, is extremely strong within the proposed boundary. This demonstrates that Criterion 6, required for national heritage area designation, has been met. (Refer to Chapter 7 for more information.)



Planning workshop for a project on the proposed NHA, involving local stakeholders and representatives from the NPS and Washington State parks