

SUMMER 2015

Enhancing Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

COMMUNITY COUNCIL REPORT

A report to the residents of the region
between Burbank and Dayton, from the
Snake River to Milton-Freewater

Enhancing Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Community Council Study Committee

The 2014–2015 Study Committee members met for 26 weeks, from Sept. 16, 2014, to April 7, 2015.

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Cover photo Bennington Lake Gold

Photo by Esther Wofford, courtesy of Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Dark-eyed Junco at Bennington Lake
Photo by Heather Ibsen, courtesy of BMLT

Enhancing outdoor recreation is a complex issue that affects many aspects of the region. Addressing the possibilities and challenges associated with this study topic has the potential to create, strengthen, or expand outdoor recreation opportunities and programs in ways that can significantly impact the region's social, environmental, and economic spheres.

Spending time outdoors has been demonstrated to have positive effects on community members' physical and mental health while simultaneously instilling in them a sense of responsibility to the environment. Speakers noted that improving outdoor recreation frequently acts as a financial boon to regions that invest in outdoor recreation and its associated components, such as education, programs, access, activities, marketing, and promotion.

The issue statement for this study asked, "How can we promote, enhance, and develop outdoor recreational opportunities and accessibility to improve the region's quality of life and economic vitality?" A variety of approaches is necessary to answer this question and to boost community participation in outdoor recreation. This study sought to address the issue from multiple perspectives, including 30 resource experts and outdoor recreation users. As the study committee learned, enhancing outdoor recreation in Community Council's region necessitates investigating and addressing the reasons why residents and visitors are users or non-users of outdoor recreation.

The study committee met over the course of 16 weeks to learn about different aspects of the study topic. In the subsequent 10 weeks, the committee organized the study findings and developed conclusions and recommendations using a consensus-based method.

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STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

CHALLENGES

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Awareness

Although the region offers a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, there is no single informational resource that informs residents or visitors what these opportunities are, where they are located, or how to access them.

Create a centralized, comprehensive outdoor recreation information portal that maintains an up-to-date inventory of recreational opportunities in the region.

Time

Many children and adults have highly scheduled time, and their routines do not allow for extra time outside.

Promote the incorporation of outdoor recreation and environmental education activities into as many school offerings and regional programs as possible.

Visibility

The region currently lacks the brand/image of being an outdoor recreation hub.

Develop a marketing plan and brand to promote outdoor recreation in the region.

Cost

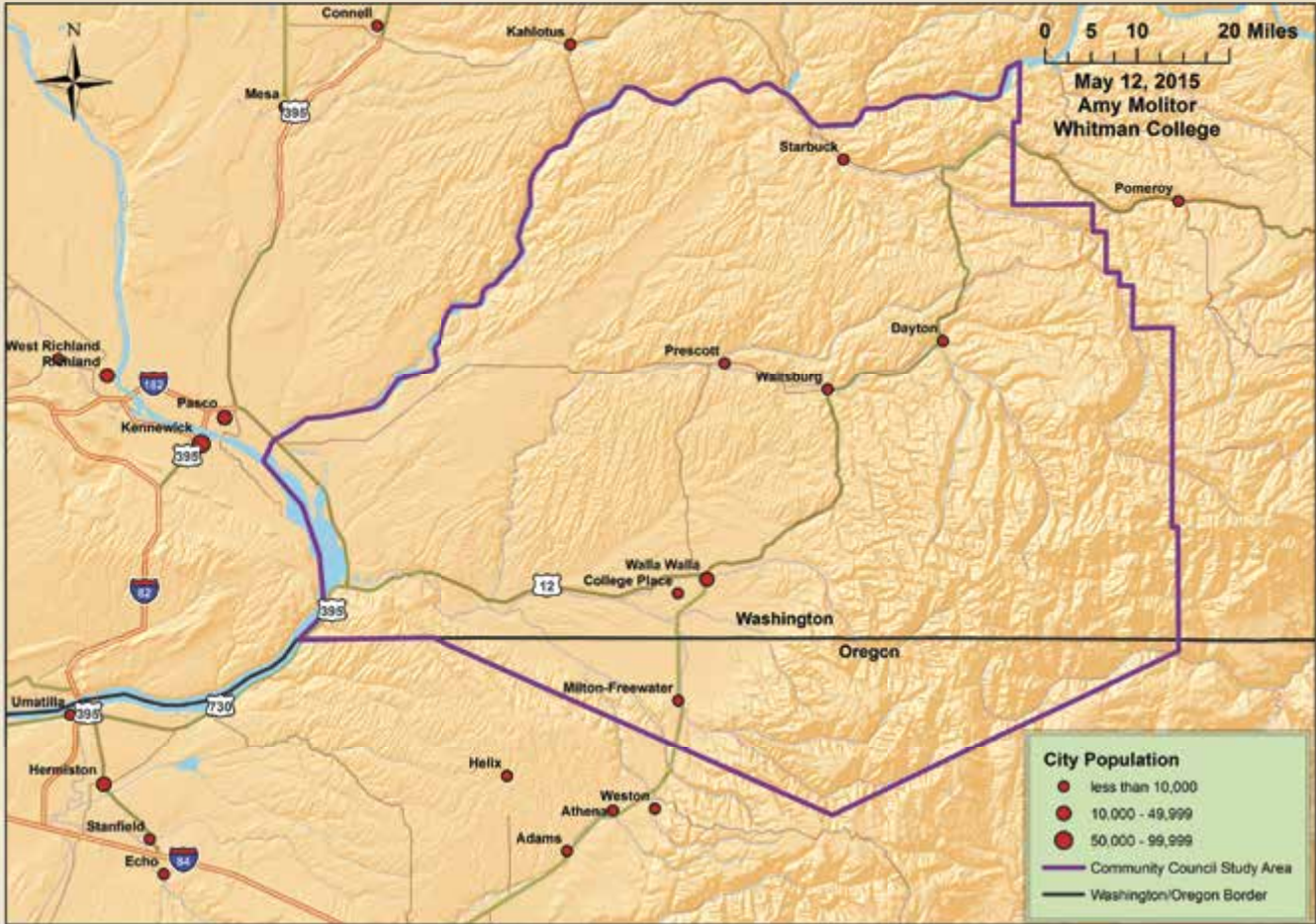
Cost, which includes direct fees, transportation, equipment, training, and time, can be prohibitive.

Make outdoor recreation programs and activities accessible to low-use groups with respect to identified barriers such as cost.



Quail

Photo by Mike & MerryLynn Denny



A summary of what was heard

These findings represent information received by the study committee and the study committee’s consensus as to the reasonable validity of the information received. They are derived from published materials, from facts reported by resource people and from a consensus of the committee’s understanding of the opinions of the resource people.

BACKGROUND

Enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities holds enormous potential social, environmental, and economic benefits. This study sought to answer the question, “How can we promote, enhance, and develop outdoor recreational opportunities and accessibility to improve the region’s quality of life and economic vitality?” As the study committee learned from multiple resource speakers and outdoor recreation experts over

the course of the study, there are many possible ways to answer this question.

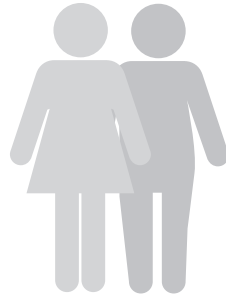
The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDAFS) provides one useful framework, which considers the sustainability of outdoor recreation as being contingent on the healthy interaction and balance of three spheres: social, environmental, and economic. Having strong outdoor recreation opportunities provides significant advantages in those realms.

For the purpose of this study,

“outdoor recreation” was defined as leisure activities within a natural resource-based setting. Natural resource-based recreation refers to activities in natural landscape environments—land and water—as opposed to user-oriented recreation, which relies on built environments made to accommodate a specific activity, such as a golf course or pool. This study focused on identifying natural resource-based recreation opportunities in the region that utilize existing resources. It also examined how to promote, enhance,

and develop access to those opportunities for all.

Establishing successful outdoor recreation opportunities requires recognizing and addressing both barriers and opportunities associated with the region, its resources, the environment, the local population, and outdoor programs.



Active and passive time outside have been shown to improve physical and emotional health and well-being, increase self-esteem, boost concentration, calm attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), reduce stress, and help people develop a personal bond with the natural world.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Description of region

Community Council's region includes Walla Walla and Columbia counties in Washington and the northeastern part of Umatilla County in Oregon, extending from Dayton to Burbank and from Milton-Freewater to the Snake River (See map on page 6). Most land in the region is privately owned. The public land that is available for recreation is managed by a wide variety of governmental agencies—local, state, federal, tribal, and others.

Demographics

Many speakers suggested that in order to promote involvement by all community members, it is important to understand the demographics of the region and find out people's needs, interests, and preferences.

OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

This region has many outdoor recreation opportunities, according to many of the speakers who presented to the study committee. Many of these opportunities are not widely known and are underutilized.

Social

Both physical and mental health have been shown to improve with time spent outdoors. Research suggests that for many people, outdoor exercise is more likely to be repeated than indoor exercise, largely because outdoor exercise is often more mentally stimulating.

Positive health effects of active outdoor exercise include: control of weight, cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar; boosted immune system; decreased risk of stroke, heart attack, and falling; reduced severity of asthma and arthritis; better sleep.

People do not necessarily need to get active outdoor exercise to benefit from the outdoors—passive activities also offer advantages. Active and passive time outside have been shown to improve physical and emotional health and well-being, increase self-esteem, boost concentration, calm attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), reduce stress, and help people develop a personal bond with the natural world.

In 2014, out of Washington's 39 counties, Walla Walla County was ranked 12th with respect to health. A Dayton health practitioner suggested that delivering positive

messages on a communitywide basis about health as it relates to outdoor activity is more effective than listening to a private lecture in a doctor's office. Emphasizing health and outdoor recreation on a large scale has the added benefit of inspiring participation from varied populations, especially when the messages are crafted to target certain ages, abilities, and interests.

Staff from the Walla Walla Department of Community Health reported that children who live close to parks are more likely to be physically active than those who do not. Physically active children generally have lower rates of obesity, as well as better overall mental and physical health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents in the past 30 years. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported a troubling statistic: Only 6.4 percent of children average the recommended 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity at age 7. Increasing the number of children who reach that minimum amount of exercise is crucial to boosting the health of the region's youth.

FINDINGS

While many of the health benefits of outdoor recreation occur for people of all ages, there are specific additional benefits for children. Speakers reported that allowing children to explore the outdoors gives them a chance to play and experiment without fear of getting in trouble, inspires creative play, and enhances learning.

Outdoor education is an important step in cultivating long-term interest in the outdoors, and allowing children to spend time outside instills an understanding of their role as stewards of surrounding resources.

Outdoor recreation offers other social benefits as well. Wallowa Resources is an organization that works with public and private partners to create thriving rural communities in Wallowa County through strong educational opportunities; a commitment to taking care of the land and water; and diverse, locally owned businesses. Its staff works closely with teachers to help students meet district learning goals through outdoor education. Participants report spending more time outside as a result of their involvement in Wallowa Resources' programs.

The REACH Museum and Interpretive Center is a gateway to the Hanford Reach National Monument, which offers multiple learning opportunities, including those that touch upon the natural, cultural, and scientific history of eastern Washington. Their vision is to “inspire

wonder and discovery through education for all people.” Staff at The REACH Museum and Interpretive Center spoke about the importance of “place esteem” and how outdoor recreation and learning enhance place esteem by helping residents develop a sense of place and pride in their region.

Environmental

Several speakers stressed that opportunities to recreate outdoors are key to developing an increased understanding of the environment and a commitment to stewardship. An environmental humanities professor defined environmental stewardship as the “ongoing protection of the natural world and everything humans find in nature.” The natural world includes everything from forests, water, and wildlife to working landscapes and urban spaces—as he noted, “There is nowhere nature isn’t.”

Stewardship involves identifying environmental problems, such as pollution or overdevelopment, and creating solutions through every possible capacity—scientific, political, and economic resources, etc.—to benefit people and nature. To promote stewardship, it is crucial to instill a sense of responsibility to the environment in all generations, which helps ensure outdoor resources will be available in perpetuity.

The committee heard from speakers that impressing the importance of environmental stewardship should be done through direct, repeated, and ongoing exposure to the outdoors starting at an early age. Discussion with youth regarding stewardship must also be intentional. Outdoor

education is an important step in cultivating long-term interest in the outdoors, and allowing children to spend time outside instills an understanding of their role as stewards of surrounding resources. Such exposure is the best way to nurture a sense of responsibility for the environment, and at the same time, create the future environmental stewards of the community.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) is composed of three tribes: the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla. They provide a “First Foods” approach to environmental conservation and stewardship. The CTUIR’s vision to guide fisheries restoration addresses hydrology, geomorphology, connectivity, riparian vegetation and aquatic biota with the goal of restored floodplain and first foods for tribal use. First foods serving order is water, salmon, deer, cou and huckleberry.

The tribes’ first priority is to preserve the streams and environment, which, in turn, leads to plentiful food and better recreation. The CTUIR Fisheries program manager confirmed that the health of the land and water directly correlates with humans’ quality of life—specifically, the Indian people who rely upon natural resources as food. Tribal hatchery operations focus on reintroduction of extinct populations or rebuilding depressed populations for natural production and harvest for both Indian and recreational non-Indian fisheries. He stressed the importance of protecting the environment in order to protect its natural resources and the people who benefit from them.

Economic

The region has many untapped economic opportunities in the arena of outdoor recreation, and money is left on the table by not taking advantage of them. The outdoor recreation industry in the U.S. is a \$645 billion business overall. Outdoor recreation opportunities are an important component of attracting visitors, which stimulates economic growth through local business development.

A January 2015 report published by Earth Economics, *Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State*, notes that “outdoor recreation markets play an important role in bridging urban and rural communities. The recreation market is unquestionably one of the largest markets in the state for moving income from urban to rural areas and building sustainable jobs in rural Washington state. Out-of-county visitors create a redistribution of wealth between the place of origin and the destination of recreation” (*Executive Summary, page x*).

The Executive Director of Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance stated that Washington state has less than \$1 million to promote tourism statewide, leaving it up to local communities to sustain their own economy and publicity. Thus, it is crucial that all players and stakeholders collaborate.

He also stated that the greater

55 BILLION DOLLARS

Nationwide, almost \$55 billion is raised through wildlife viewing, and 72 million people participate in outdoor recreation each year.

Walla Walla Valley has six key factors for local tourism: wine industry, culinary scene, lodging, arts, retail, and outdoor recreation. None of these factors can stand alone; their successful interdependence will influence the success of the tourism industry and economy. Outdoor recreation and retail shopping were noted as the two keys that could be most improved in the region. It could be advantageous to package different activities together.

Mike Denny, an outdoor enthusiast and former coordinator for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in Pomeroy, Whitman, Palouse Rock Lake, and Palouse Conservation Districts, reported that nationwide, \$54.9 billion is raised through wildlife viewing, and 72 million people participate in outdoor recreation each year. Reviving the Fall Foliage and Feathers event could encourage more tourism in the region, as it combines several of the aforementioned tourism key factors. Members of the Friends of McNary Wildlife Refuge host a win-

ter birds event in February, which could be promoted in conjunction with other winter tourism events.

A retired bicycle tourism executive suggested the committee look for “unusual suspects” for business ideas. He mentioned Treo Ranch in Oregon as an example.

He also said scenic bikeways and other bicycle recreation opportunities have a big economic impact and could be a valuable addition to the region. The three fastest-growing segments of the cycling industry are the following: urban bike tourism, bike-share programs, and gravel riding. Cycle tourism in Oregon is mainly composed of a user group with an average annual income of \$120,000, and bicycle tourism contributes over \$400 million each year to the Oregon state economy.

Improving outdoor recreation could indirectly increase the demand for services in the area due to more visitor traffic, according to the executive director of Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance. Higher demand would affect lodging, restaurants, and other local businesses. Recently, investors have shown a new interest in investing in local lodging. The hotel occupancy rate for the city of Walla Walla currently stands at 86 percent. The addition of more lodging enlarges the region’s capacity for guests, which in turn, necessitates an increase in supporting infrastructure.



Spring Along Middle Waitsburg Road
Photo by Bill Rodgers, courtesy of BMLT

FINDINGS



Female Western Bluebird
Photo by Mike & MerryLynn Denny

Although the region offers a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, there is no single informational resource that informs residents and visitors what these opportunities are, where they are located, or how to access them.

CHALLENGES FOR ENHANCING OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

The potential of the area's outdoor recreation opportunities remains broadly untapped. Several speakers noted the barriers that can hinder outdoor access—barriers that negatively affect residents' physical and social health, environmental sustainability, and the regional economy. Staff from Whitman College's Outdoor Program said that opportunities to access the outdoors do not need to be extravagant to be effective, but awareness and knowledge of them are necessary in order for people to take advantage of them.

Lack of public awareness of existing opportunities

Many speakers mentioned that although the region offers a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities, there is no single informational resource that informs residents and visitors what these opportunities are, where they are located, or how to access them.

Public land in the region is often underused due to lack of knowledge of its existence and how to access it. Due to agencies' varying requirements regarding recreational access to their land, it can be difficult for community members and visitors to remain knowledgeable about when and where they can participate in outdoor recreation.

Staff from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the largest provider of outdoor recreation in the country,

and the U.S. Forest Service informed the study committee that each organization offers myriad outdoor recreation opportunities, but few community members are aware of them. Even if they have some familiarity with these organizations, community members do not necessarily think to check their national websites for information on how to find a local trailhead or route.

Camp Wooten, which is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), is an underutilized treasure that has many amenities, including 17 cabins, a cafeteria, a swimming pool, canoes, and an archery range. The camp sits on 40 acres with access to the Tucannon River, a lake, horse paddocks, and interpretive trails. Current registration practices require payment for a minimum of 75 people or more to visit. In the past, Camp Wooten has accommodated youth groups, church groups, and family reunions. If contacted in advance, state park rangers can provide interpretive information about the environment to either individuals or groups. A state park ranger for the Blue Mountain area said that state parks are now exploring the possibility of offering the camp facilities to smaller groups, extending the season, and marketing their offerings to get more users.

In addition to their primary mission—improving natural habitat for fish—Tri-State Steelheaders offers classroom visits to elementary-age through college-age students and visits to project sites. The organization also sponsors a family fishing day at Bennington Lake. Staff mentioned these offerings could be better utilized.

Private Property

There is a large amount of privately owned land in the region. Some entities have been successful in gaining access to private land for their organization's specific purposes/missions for specific groups. Their access required permission from the landowner(s), which they all said required relationship building with the landowner. Landowners have many concerns about allowing access, including liability, vandalism, and safety concerns. Some organizations that do have relationships with private landowners have expressed reluctance about promoting general public recreational use of private land.



Even areas considered “wild,” like forest trails, require funding. Hiking trails require routine upkeep and sometimes rerouting because of rock slides or downed trees.

Regional branding not focused on outdoor recreation

Regional branding is important to raise awareness, which, in turn, promotes participation in outdoor recreation. While the region is a physical gateway to the northern Blue Mountains, the region currently lacks the brand/image of being an outdoor recreation hub. Mike Denny recommended advertising the region with an appropriate name or tagline in an effort to attract more outdoor enthusiasts to the area. These mountains are iconic to the region and contribute to local pride and place esteem. Garnering community enthusiasm increases the likelihood of attracting visitors. An urban and strategic planning

consultant recommended targeting the west side of Washington state with advertisements to distribute information and spread knowledge of what the area has to offer.

Limited budgets and focus on outdoor recreation

Many speakers addressed the fact that providing outdoor recreation opportunities requires funding. Even areas considered “wild” require funding. For example, forest trails require routine upkeep with annual hiking trail maintenance, or—in the case of rock slides or downed trees—rerouting. Signage could be improved, parking lots could be reevaluated, and potential

hazards should be assessed. Upkeep requires both a budget and dedicated personnel. Limited funding creates challenges with the management of these aspects of maintenance and safety. CTUIR personnel noted that stream restoration project costs vary and can be hefty—up to \$1 million per mile. Payoff for those expenses does exist, since caring for the environment through projects like watershed restoration has a direct correlation with the quality of outdoor recreation.

Speakers explained that prioritization of an organization's use of its funding is determined by its mission and vision. Enhancing outdoor recreation and recreational access is a low priority for many of the resource

speakers' organizations.

For Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT), the Tri-State Steelheaders, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, conservation is the primary mission. The conservation director at BMLT noted that it is difficult for his organization to be proactive in outdoor recreation and public outreach because they can employ only two part-time staff members. U.S. Fish and Wildlife refuge lands must first fulfill conservation goals before a refuge can be open to the public. With the addition of more resources, staff at nonprofits and governmental entities showed willingness to consider making outdoor recreation a higher priority.

At the federal level, the budget process can limit developing and operating outdoor recreation systems for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Forest Service. The Forest Recreation program manager at Umatilla National Forest informed the committee that government funding is insufficient to maintain the existing network of trails in the Umatilla National Forest. Neither the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers nor the U.S. Forest Service is looking to add new trails. U.S. Fish and Wildlife also expressed difficulty in keeping up with maintenance. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is in the process of reevaluating the need to write and print material regarding its outdoor recreation offerings since, due to lack of budget, their printed materials are out-of-date. Even when land is available for recreation, maintenance costs can burn up much of an organization's budget.

A park ranger from the Blue Mountain region said state parks experienced massive budget cuts in 2011 that led to changes in manage-

FINDINGS



Photo by Amy Busch,
Courtesy of Wallowa Resources

ment structure, and changes in staffing led to the elimination of funded interpretive programs statewide. Park rangers can do interpretive programs that address the natural and cultural history of a state park or area, but these classes are no longer part of the ranger job description.

Speakers mentioned that regionally, Walla Walla County has provided limited support, maintenance, and funding for outdoor recreation opportunities. On the city level, Walla Walla Parks and Recreation is not a high priority in the city budget, which makes funding the organization's primary challenge. While the Director of Walla Walla City Parks and Recreation mentioned his eagerness to expand outdoor offerings, the organization is unable to do so due to limited funds. Between 1982 and 1998, Walla Walla Parks and Recreation was shut down specifically due to lack of funding.

Limited diversity of users of outdoor recreation

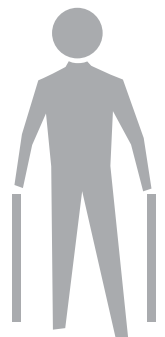
According to the Umatilla Forest Recreation program manager, 98 percent of Umatilla National Forest users are Caucasian. He suggested that due to the U.S. Forest Service's lack of signage in Spanish, the Latino community may be missing out on multiple recreational opportunities.

Some studies indicate that underrepresentation of minorities in outdoor recreation is also present in youth. The "2010 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report" from the Outdoor Foundation found that 79 percent of youth outdoor participants are Caucasian, although it remains unclear if this is true in this region. Speakers mentioned that the why of these statistics is important

and that there is a need to research not only the reasons that keep people of color from participating in outdoor opportunities, but also how to improve their knowledge and access of these areas. The outcome of that research may lead to a need to alter the infrastructure of outdoor recreation in order to accommodate and welcome all members of the community.

Staff from the Washington Odd-Fellows Home reported that senior citizens also need access to the outdoors to reap its positive effects. For this group, however, the outdoors can pose problems or present needs that do not affect other age groups. Unintentional run-ins with dogs or children can be dangerous for seniors or anyone with limited mobility. Some seniors worry about slipping, falling, and otherwise injuring themselves on uneven surfaces like trails and sidewalks.

Participating in outdoor recreation can be challenging to senior citizens in ways that do not affect other age groups. People with disabilities also have special needs, such as equipment, to be active outdoors.



Participating in outdoor recreation can pose particular challenges for persons with physical and/or mental disabilities. For example, special equipment is sometimes required to enable them to participate. The founder of the Creating Memories program, located in Wallowa County, reported the following data from the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau: Washington and Oregon’s populations include approximately 80,000 youth with disabilities between the ages of 5 and 17. The census also showed that a higher proportion of families living in poverty include a family member with a disability. The founder of Creating Memories also said it is important to make accommodations that give outdoor recreation access to community members with disabilities.

Cost to users

Accessing many outdoor recreation opportunities requires the ability to afford them. Cost, which includes direct fees, transportation, equipment, training, and time, can be prohibitive.

Rates of youth participation

Several speakers reported that the effects of exposing youth to nature are positive. Nationally, only 29 percent of youth play outside every day. In 2008, the Outdoor Foundation reported that American youth participation in all age groups (ages 6–12, 13–17, and 18–24) had steeply dropped since 2005. For girls, participation fell from 77 to 58 percent; for boys, participation fell from 79 to 69 percent.

A physician illuminated the direct correlation between screen time and both child and adult obesity. Some children are just

not interested in being outside, while others prefer the draw of technology—television, tablets, smartphones, and video games. For others, it is a location and/or proximity issue—some individuals and families are not close to parks. Even if they were, many children have highly scheduled school and extracurricular time, and their routines do not allow for extra time outside.

Barriers such as school liability policies can prevent children from participating in specific outdoor activities during the school day, according to staff from The REACH. Also, many teachers are focused on preparing students for the rigors of standardized testing, resulting in limited opportunity for individual teachers to welcome outside speakers into their classrooms or to take children on field trips. Only about 1,200 students visit McNary Wildlife Refuge as part of their science instruction each year—a low percent-

age considering the overall number of students in the area.

A resident from Valle Lindo Homes, a local community neighborhood for farmworkers, mentioned that parental concern for their children’s safety can lead to reservations about outdoor activities. Some parents are wary of stigma or judgment toward caretakers who allow their children to play unsupervised. While parental worries include anything from lack of insurance to the dangers that nature may present, it is also a reflection of their own habits. For some parents, it is difficult to get outdoors themselves—work schedules limit outdoor recreational opportunities. It is also possible that they, too, simply lack interest. Even if parents do enjoy the outdoors and want their children to partake in it, there’s the added cost of transportation, equipment, and time, as well as the often complex logistics of getting one child to one place and another somewhere else.



Wallula Gap

Photo by Mike & MerryLynn Denny

FINDINGS

Fears related to the outdoors and lack of outdoor skills

Several speakers communicated that a sense of safety is important to users. Without it, participants of outdoor recreation cannot fully enjoy their outdoor experience. Understanding the attitudes that drive recreational use—or lack thereof—is critical to creating successful outdoor experiences. Some residents or visitors may suffer from a legacy of fear related to the natural world and its potential dangers. They may believe animal predators will hurt them. People who are urban in their background are not necessarily afraid of animals, but they may fear an unfamiliar setting.

A freelance wildlife and aquatic consultant for E3 EcoVentures

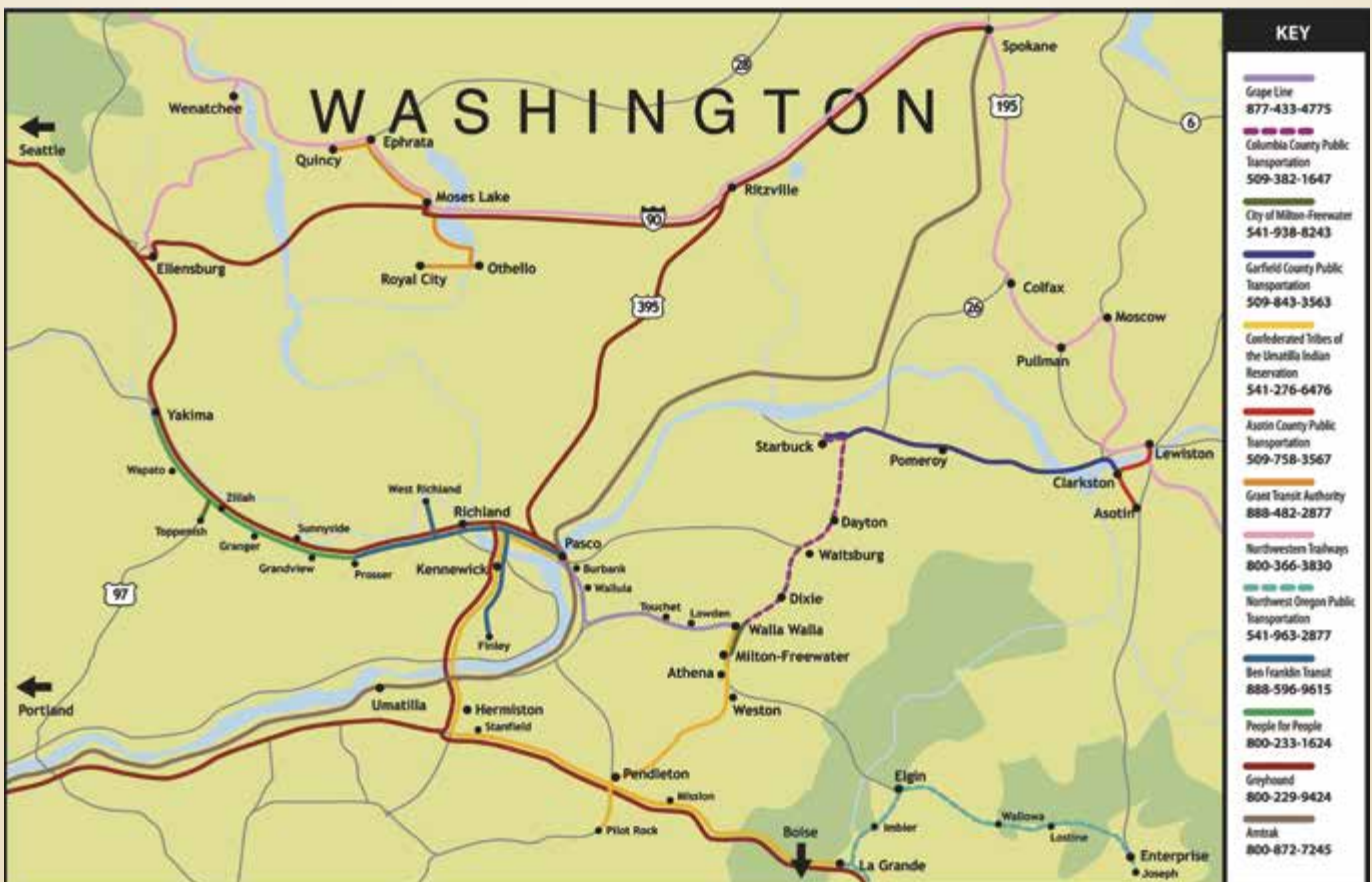
stressed that before embarking on an activity, it is important to determine what skills are required, the level of risk, and the user's personal limits. It may be necessary to have contingency plans for worst-case scenarios and to consult professional guides or local experts before partaking in activities. For example, some kayaking requires knowledge and training like knowing how to rescue as well as basic directional paddling and navigational skills. A lack of skills in something like making a legal campfire or knowing how to treat small injuries can discourage people from outdoor recreation.

Staff from the Walla Walla Department of Community Health reported that in a survey conducted in 2013 of

Walla Walla County residents, a portion of respondents indicated they do not feel safe walking in their neighborhood, which may account for their aversion to recreational walking.

Transportation

The region has a network of public transportation, but it can be challenging for people to get the information they need about how to use it. Some neighborhoods do not have access to public transportation, such as Valle Lindo Homes in Walla Walla County. Among the regional providers, Walla Walla Valley Transit is the only service that will stop outside of designated stops. The map of connected routes is available online. A screenshot is below.



Created by Valley Transit

IDEAS FROM SPEAKERS

A few speakers shared the following suggestions with the study committee about how to build successful programs:

- ▶ Get the right team to accomplish your goals.
- ▶ Share responsibility so that all stakeholders are invested.
- ▶ Be bold with ideas.
- ▶ Advertise the group's efforts.

Puget Sound Energy's senior environmental and communications project manager also advocated for program designs that not only sustain self-maintenance but offer a plan for long-term maintenance. This requires time and investment from all participants.

Staff from the Walla Walla Department of Community Health showed that improving community resources can have a high or low impact on enhancing outdoor recreation and quality of life. These changes also

come with lower or higher costs as seen in the chart below.

A Blue Mountain Land Trust (BMLT) survey revealed which resources survey participants believed enhance their quality of life in the Blue Mountain region. The highest-scoring categories included: water quality, wildlife and fish habitat, scenic vistas and views, open and recreation lands, and accessible public trails.

Speaker ideas for outdoor recreation opportunities

Whitman College's Outdoor Program coordinator presented the following suggestions:

- ▶ Enhance city parks with natural space and nature playgrounds.
- ▶ Extend the river walk.
- ▶ Transform Mill Creek into a water playground.
- ▶ Connect the Whitman Mission to town via a river side trail.
- ▶ Partner with Umatilla National Forest to provide more trails close to town.

Awareness of existing opportunities

The region has many opportunities for outdoor recreation, but they are underutilized. Many speakers suggested that creating a database and guide of regional outdoor opportunities would have immediate benefits:

- ▶ Users could gain instant access to information regarding available outdoor opportunities. Such a single-point access could cultivate a stronger outdoor brand for the region.
- ▶ Local outdoor programs and organizations could gain greater visibility for the programs or resources they offer.

Utilizing satellite images and geographic information system (GIS) tools could help expedite the research process for compiling existing opportunities and help provide a comprehensive guide for users. Asset mapping is also important in assessing which resources are available.

Some organizations in the area are making efforts to provide such a resource. For example, BMLT has begun work on an online trail guide for hikers, although they currently lack the resources to make this a priority. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Forest Service have their own maps and use GIS mapping. They are interested in better using technology to increase their visibility to the public. In particular, Umatilla National Forest has plans to increase awareness of the cross-country skiing trails that run through Horseshoe Prairie and Meacham Divide.

Getting information, whether

Matrix showing impact and cost of specific outdoor recreation enhancements



FINDINGS



Blue Mountain beauty, a cyclist's delight
Photo by Kevin Thonney

historical, scientific, etc., about the environment does not need to be difficult. The Kennewick Rotary has discussed adding Quick Response (QR) codes scannable by smartphones at Sacajawea Park to provide viewers with information about specific sights and the local environment.

Government entities like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as charitable organizations such as Tri-State Steelheaders and Creating Memories, have outdoor recreation opportunities for properly trained volunteers.

Outdoor skills and stewardship

Staff from The REACH noted that implementing the “Leave No Trace” practice ensures outdoor programs encourage environmental sustainability and an expectation of citizen stewardship. It is important to have facilitators on the ground to promote practices that ensure environmental sustainability.

Creating an organization similar to the Whitman Outdoor Program for the regional community could increase awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities as well as outdoor skills, according to a professor from Whitman College’s environmental humanities department. Community members would not only be able to rent the gear needed to enjoy activities, but could also gain the necessary knowledge to feel confident in the outdoors.

The summer backpacking trip Wallowa Resources leads for youth is a good example of a guided experience that helps young people get outside and develop the skills necessary to be comfortable and successful. Group trips offer companionship and can ease anxiety about participating in outdoor activities.

Access to private land

A large amount of land in the region is privately owned. An environmental humanities professor suggested that looking for opportunities to work with private landowners to gain public access for outdoor recreation may be easier than trying to increase officially designated public lands.

Access to private land requires permission from the landowner(s), which speakers said was based on relationship-building with the landowner. Landowners have many concerns about allowing public access, including liability and vandalism of crops and equipment.

Organizations that have successfully worked with landowners to obtain permission for public access for specific purposes include:

- ▶ Blue Mountain Land Trust
- ▶ Tri-State Steelheaders
- ▶ Creating Memories
- ▶ Wallowa Resources (Stewardship Program)
- ▶ The Gallatin Valley Land Trust (Main Street to the Mountains)
- ▶ Puget Sound Energy (Hopkins Ridge Wind Facility)

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) developed a land-access permit program in Columbia County by working with landowners and the public, as well as other stakeholders like law enforcement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, local businesses, and the wind farms.

Working together, these groups established rules for land usage that protect not only the land and

landowners, but also users, wind farm workers, and equipment such as wind turbines. Once the program was developed, PSE drafted agreements for land access between the PSE and willing private landowners.

The permits are obtained from a local store as well as from Puget Sound Energy. The permit allows the holder access to two different wind farms—Hopkins Ridge Wind Facility and Marengo—which together encompass approximately 25,000 acres across about 60 landowners' land. Originally at 400 permit sign-ups, the program's participation has grown significantly over the past eight years to over 1,000 users. Puget Sound Energy's senior environmental and communications project manager reported that as a result of the permit program, there were positive gains in community, government, and landowner relations, as well as local economic growth.

Bozeman, Montana, through the Gallatin Valley Land Trust, has a successful trail program called Main Street to the Mountains.

Blue Mountain Land Trust's mission is to "collaborate with communities and landowners to protect the scenic, natural, and working lands that characterize the Blue Mountains region," and they have 11 easements currently in place that further that mission. None of those easements allow public access. Because of a survey BMLT conducted, they are now considering facilitating public access agreements for trails.

The Creating Memories program and the Wallowa Resources educational programs have successfully obtained landowner permission for access for their specific programs and activities—both organizations' successes rely heavily on collabora-

tion and personal relationships. These organizations have their own liability insurance.

A representative of Tri-State Steelheaders said that when users provide a private landowner with details such as a prospective user's purpose, size of group, time period of desired use, and incentives for the landowner, users' success gaining access is increased. If permission is granted, following up with landowners with gratitude maintains positive relations.

Speakers mentioned a state law and a federal program that might assist in expanding outdoor recreation. The City of Walla Walla Parks director said that the Washington State Recreation Immunity Act might assuage private landowners' fear of litigation. A Tri-State Steelheaders representative also mentioned the Federal Land Access program, which may have funds available as a potential grant opportunity for gaining access onto federal lands.

Outdoor recreation in regional branding

Mike Denny suggested the region could be branded with an appropriate name or tagline to reflect outdoor recreation opportunities. Another way the community could gain more publicity is to officially become a bike-friendly community through the Bike League's Bicycle Friendly Community program. A retired bicycle tourism executive said that this would put the city name of Walla Walla on several tourism websites and gather positive publicity.

The bike-friendly designation would also allow the region to receive road signs that inform visitors of the area's bike-friendly status. The

region has all of the assets it needs to get the bike-friendly designation, though it has not yet gone through the official process to be recognized as such. Completion of this process may encourage local businesses to advertise to a broader demographic. The nonprofit Cycle Oregon has a successful biking event that brings cyclists to wineries in the Willamette Valley, which could be a model for this region.

Social media outlets provide an effective way of reaching diverse populations. Regardless of how information is dispersed, regional organizations could consider providing all information in Spanish and/or pictographs.

The region has all of the assets it needs to get a bike-friendly designation.



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Winter Storm Over Pike's Peak
Photo by Bill Rodgers, courtesy of BMLT

Creating a network of trails leading from urban destinations to parks or other outdoor recreation might encourage people to take longer walks or runs in order to access a green area.

Connected trails

The region could make the outdoors more accessible to people based on their location, according to a staff member at the Walla Walla Department of Community Health. Creating a network of trails leading from urban destinations to parks or other outdoor recreation might encourage people to take longer walks or runs in order to access a green area.

She also suggested connecting trails to destinations that people want or need to travel to, such as stores or restaurants. Studies show that the more trails connect with other trails, the more people will use them. Continuous trails that do not intersect with traffic are the most successful.

One example of disconnect in the region is the trail/path along Highway 12, which is broken by train tracks and is neither in compliance with the ADA nor bike- or family-friendly. The trail between Fort Walla Walla and 13th Street is a great start, but it does not connect anywhere useful. The area lacks a safe, continuous walking and biking route from Walla Walla to College Place and beyond.

Richland, having created a connected network of trails that lead users to popular destinations, is a potential model for street and trail connectivity. This connected loop of trails facilitates bike and pedestrian transportation and recreation. Bozeman, Montana, also enjoys a successful trail connectivity program called Main Street to the Mountains. A cycle specialist suggested that the scenic bikeways plan in Oregon could also be adapted for use in this region, enabling the community to implement continuous trails with beautiful views.

Outreach to a wider demographic

The REACH has found that the best way to get groups involved with their programs is to target their needs. It is important to research the needs of the audience, to promote opportunities that match those needs, and get the appropriate parties involved—city, county, nonprofits, private sector, etc.—to fulfill those needs.

The director of Inspire Development Centers suggested that one-on-one interactions and door-to-door outreach would be an effective way of raising awareness of outdoor activities at Valle Lindo Homes. Communication in groups' respective languages could encourage more people to take advantage of outdoor program offerings.

The study heard about two groups that provide outdoor recreation opportunities specifically designed to meet the needs of disabled individuals. Creating Memories in Wallowa County serves disabled youth and adults. The program creates an atmosphere for individuals to create their own memories or relive them, whether it be through hunting, fishing or camping. Boise Parks and Recreation in Idaho has an alternative mobility adventure sport program that allows individuals with physical and mental disabilities to participate in whitewater rafting, biking, fishing, boating, wheelchair sports, swimming, and more.

Senior citizens benefit from the opportunity to get outside and walk, according to the Wellness Coordinator at the Washington OddFellows Home. Easy access to restrooms is important to seniors. One way to address this need is to provide swipe-card access on the weekends at public places with tracks, thereby

increasing seniors' access to safe and convenient facilities. Providing walking sticks at senior centers and public parks could also offer a sense of safety and security to seniors, as would offering senior-only designated areas in parks. Indoor balance classes can give seniors the physical readiness they need to enjoy the outdoors on their own terms.

Affordable activities for users

Ideas heard by the study committee for keeping activities affordable for users were:

- ▶ Collaborate to make the best use of resources.
- ▶ Recycle materials.
- ▶ Seek donations of outdoor recreation equipment and clothing.
- ▶ Subsidize the cost through fundraising.
- ▶ Use volunteers.
- ▶ Offer scholarships.

Collaboration between entities

Many speakers stressed that partnerships and collaboration are critical for developing recreation programs and opportunities. It is important to involve as many different stakeholders as possible in the planning and implementation processes—providers, users, etc.—so that they are invested.

Both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Umatilla National Forest are examples of entities seeking partnership to better provide services and resources. Umatilla National Forest suggested that financial barriers might be overcome through

partnership. Federal agencies cannot lobby Congress, but other community groups can. Badger Mountain in the Tri-Cities is a good example of collaboration between nonprofit and government entities.

Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) maintains the William A. Grant Water and Environmental Center, which includes representatives from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Both WWCC and CTUIR work together to host the “Return to the River Salmon Festival & Watershed” symposium. These organizations also offer K–12 outreach and education. The community college offers a watershed ecology degree.

Shared-use agreements between school districts and the public can make outdoor recreation more convenient in communities. The Touchet Public School District has already implemented this type of agreement.

Mike Denny suggested that local schools could add wildlife educa-

tion programs to their offerings—for instance, expanding resources to include courses in professional outdoor guiding services. There could also be potential for new curriculum in park management and environmental sustainability. This curriculum could be developed in collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service to prepare students for work with both the U.S. Forest Service and other outdoor organizations and further encourage outdoor involvement.

Opportunities for youth to recreate outdoors

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes an entire community actively working together to get children and teens outside, according to Wallowa Resources personnel. Children with minimal to no experience in the outdoors are positively affected by being outside, whether they come from a city or a rural region. Schools can play an important role in encouraging a love



Sunset Ride Along Bennington Lake
Photo by Ben Wentz, courtesy of BMLT

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of nature by incorporating the ideals of stewardship into students' curricula. It is also important to provide outdoor recreation opportunities for youth in non-school times, such as after school, on weekends, and during breaks.

McNary Wildlife Refuge provides employment opportunities to youth through AmeriCorps and the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), which both allow students to actively participate in the betterment of their environment. The YCC gives teens 15–18 years old the opportunity to work 40 hours a week and earn minimum wage while performing tasks such as maintaining trails or clearing invasive species. AmeriCorps provides youth from ages 18 to 24 a chance to participate in a variety of work opportunities and experiences. Wallowa Resources also offers internships to 11th- and 12th-graders interested in natural resource management.

The National Park Service, McNary Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers together developed Service First, a program designed to educate high school students about careers in the natural resources field. Staff from McNary Wildlife Refuge suggested a partnership between the Carnegie Picture Lab and Blue Mountain Audubon could lead to an educational outdoor program that combines art and nature.

Wallowa Resources recommended the following ways to get youth outside:

- ▶ Keep it simple. Outdoor recreation can be in one's own backyard.
- ▶ Baby steps: Use local parks near neighborhoods before taking trips

to the wilderness.

- ▶ Make nature accessible.
- ▶ Use existing resources.
- ▶ Make it fun!

The assistant Outdoor Program coordinator at Whitman College recommended the following ways to overcome barriers to young people having nature experiences:

- ▶ Partner with or develop programs to get children outside that parents can afford and are comfortable with.
- ▶ Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, City Parks and Recreation, schools and after-school programs, and church groups can play a role in facilitating outdoor time.
- ▶ Programs run by other entities could be advertised through Parks and Recreation, such as those run by Whitman Mission.
- ▶ Partner with CTUIR, local colleges, and commercial providers such as: Bluewood; rafting on the Grand Ronde and other rivers; and various providers in the Wallowa Mountains.

One example of a program that focuses on getting children outdoors for learning is the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Their program, the Prairie Science Class, features over 220 fourth- and fifth-graders' spending half their school day learning outside the classroom.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, the Prairie Science Class uses the local prairie ecosystem as

a springboard from which to teach math, writing, and science. U.S. Fish and Wildlife reports that "the education philosophy of this program is to provide the student with interdisciplinary, experiential learning through authentic field-based experiences." The center also enjoys several educational partner relationships with local organizations.

Recreation data and recreation plans

The U.S. Forest Service conducts its own assessment of resource usage every five years—studies that could help track trends and highlight progress toward goals. The last assessment (2008–2009) predicts that in the next 10 years, the baby boomers will increase participation in outdoor recreation by 28 percent. Tracking those predictions could prove useful in preparing the National Forest Service to accommodate more users—for example, increasing the diversity of National Forest users and increasing mileage of available trails.

The latest U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' report provides valuable statistics to drive future planning. Their latest report details that Bennington Lake and Mill Creek area drew about 300,000 person-visits last year. Columbia County created a Cooperative Park Master Plan in 2014. The city of Walla Walla does not currently have a comprehensive park plan.

Transportation

Technology is a useful tool in providing transportation information. Whether traveling by car, bus, bike, or foot, users on the Internet can map routes to their destinations via Google (www.google.com/transit). A Walla Walla Valley

Transit smartphone application will be available in the summer of 2015 for users to find routes to destinations and bus arrival times. Public transit buses in Umatilla and Walla Walla counties have bike racks, facilitating the opportunity for those who wish to ride away from home to do so. At the time of the study, Columbia County’s public transit buses did not have bike racks.

Wallowa Resources, which offers a variety of outdoor education programs, encourages program participants to provide their own transportation. Staff suggested that carpooling can help limit transportation costs and transport children efficiently. If necessary, staff provide transportation to their participants who cannot travel to their location.

A survey conducted of Valle Lindo Homes residents, by Walla Walla Valley Transit, found that many of the respondents would like improved transportation during the day. The Walla Walla City Parks and Recreation director expressed interest in partnering with another organization to provide transportation to and from Valle Lindo Homes.

NEARBY MODELS

Wallowa Resources

Wallowa Resources believes thriving rural communities need strong economies, a commitment to land stewardship, and top-notch learning opportunities. Since 1996, they have worked within Walla Walla County to enhance economic opportunities on their forest and rangelands while caring for the land, water, and community, preserving them for future generations. The organization does this through three distinct areas of programming, all

of which work together and support one another:

- 1 Watershed stewardship:** They work with private and public landowners to maintain working lands through weed control and restoration contracts.
- 2 Education:** They educate youth, college students, community members, and policymakers about rural issues. Learning is hands-on, practical, and place-based.
- 3 Community development:** They bring innovative ideas to economic development around natural resources. They provide capital, business services, and technical support. As a result, they have helped start businesses in small-diameter wood products, land stewardship, and renewable energy.

Wallowa Resources’ Youth Stewardship Education Program (YSEP) is a K–12 education program designed to provide natural and cultural history as well as stewardship education for every grade level in Walla Walla County. YSEP provides hands-on, experiential opportunities for the county’s youth to learn and experience an interdisciplinary approach to the natural and cultural history of local systems. The organization is also a science, technology, engineering and mathematics hub—it uses a comprehensive approach to further students’ grasp of STEM concepts. The variety of program offerings sustains children’s interest in nature over an extended period of time—hopefully for a lifetime.

Programs and community outreach opportunities include:

- ▶ Wallowa Resources Exploration of Nature (WREN): a Friday science enrichment program, a teen summer backpacking trip, and a day camp program for fifth- through eighth-graders.
- ▶ Outdoor Wallowa Learning (OWL): an outdoor school program for fourth- through sixth-graders designed in partnership with Wallowa County schools.
- ▶ Watershed Evaluation Teams (WET): a high school student-conducted watershed monitoring program in partnership with the local schools, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries, and the Grande Ronde Model Watershed.
- ▶ High school internships (HAWK): a six-week paid internship for juniors and seniors to explore natural resource management careers.

Wallowa Resources also shared their keys to success:

Wallowa Resources’ Youth Stewardship Education Program (YSEP) is a K–12 education program designed to provide natural and cultural history as well as stewardship education for every grade level in Walla Walla County.

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Photo by Amy Busch,
Courtesy of Wallowa Resources

- ▶ High-quality programs.
- ▶ Great staff.
- ▶ Strong fundraising.
- ▶ Building programs over time.
- ▶ Making activities fun.
- ▶ Bringing children to nature.

The REACH Museum and Interpretive Center

The REACH is a 24,000-square foot-museum and interpretive center in the Tri-Cities that opened in July 2014 and continues to grow. Visitors and locals come to hear stories regarding the people, places, environment, history, and heritage of the region. The REACH Museum and Interpretive Center (Center) is part of the Hanford Reach National Monument, which is managed as part of the Mid-Columbia River National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The National Wildlife Refuge System is within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The REACH staff works hard to ensure its visitors enjoy their time in outdoor education (particularly

STEM), outdoor play, and social interaction outdoors. Offerings include:

- ▶ Museum field trips and classroom visits.
- ▶ Tours for adults and community members.
- ▶ The exhibits “Ice Age Floods,” “Wine & Agriculture,” “Columbia River,” “Wildflowers,” “Photography,” and “WWII History.”
- ▶ Regional heritage field experience trips out to Hanford Reach National Monument and other public lands.
- ▶ Hiking, jet boating, kayaking, photography, etc.
- ▶ STEM education through visitor engagement strategies such as: Makerspace, Touch Tables and Discovery Carts, lectures, and public panel discussions.

The REACH has a three-tiered approach to getting people outside:

- 1 Offer hands-on and engaging experiences at the Center to introduce individuals to natural resources in an intriguing way.
- 2 Give people a hands-on experience, both in the museum and outside, and let them use their senses to understand the importance of outdoor time.
- 3 Encourage people to experience the river, public lands, and other places and apply their knowledge to nature.

The REACH’s long-term strategy is to reach out to youth under age 18 who are at or under the poverty line. Staff are in the process of brainstorming what can be done for children under age 5 to prepare them for outdoor education. While they primarily serve Benton and Franklin counties, they also serve the counties in this region.

When it comes to getting children outdoors, The REACH has learned:

- ▶ **Work with the communities where they are most available.** For example, children might be more available when they are in summer camps, not in schools.
- ▶ **Be specific.** Ask for things instead of intangible dollar amounts (e.g., tennis shoes instead of \$5,000).
- ▶ **Provide a menu of learning opportunities:** When it comes to STEM, don’t forget the humanities.
- ▶ **Collaboration is key:** Get creative with funding; look for unconventional funders.

Keys to success are:
 - ▶ Partnering with organizations at the federal, state, and local levels.
 - ▶ Working directly with teachers and educators.
 - ▶ Empowering youth with community service projects.
 - ▶ Listening to stakeholders about what they want.
 - ▶ KISS: Keep It Simple ... Seriously. Most success comes from small activities families can do together.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1** Enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities holds enormous potential social, environmental, and economic benefits for residents and visitors.
- 2** Many people in the Blue Mountain region value high water quality, vibrant fish and wildlife habitat, scenic views and vistas, open and recreational lands, and accessible public trails as important resources for enhancing their quality of life.

By getting outside and experiencing these assets, people can develop a sense of “place esteem.” Place esteem is important for cultivating a conservation ethic, promoting environmental sustainability, and protecting the long-term availability of the region’s outdoor assets.
- 3** Outdoor recreation opportunities already exist in our community; however, these activities are underutilized because residents and visitors alike find it difficult to locate the information they need to access them. The area lacks a centralized method of communication that could increase public awareness of and access to outdoor recreation opportunities in our region.
- 4** Our region would benefit from having a comprehensive outdoor program that could offer guided activities and outdoor education, provide access to needed equipment, and serve as a source of information about regional outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 5** The quality and variety of outdoor recreation opportunities in our region could benefit from collaboration with private landowners. Addressing private landowners’ concerns and fostering a relationship of trust between users and landowners could help increase access. Coordinating public access to private land can be facilitated by a third-party organization that serves as a consistent point of contact and manages expectations and concerns.

The region could benefit from studying examples of successful collaboration resulting in private land being utilized for recreational purposes. There are a number of organizations that have well-established relationships with private landowners who might be willing to explore these partnerships.
- 6** Outdoor recreation can be enhanced by creating both urban and remote trail networks that link multiple trails, allow users to avoid vehicular traffic, and/or lead to functional destinations. There is also a need for more easily accessible trailheads in the region. Bozeman, Montana, and the Tri-Cities have good examples of continuously connected and accessible trails.
- 7** Outdoor recreation is one of the largest economic drivers in the state and plays a significant role in moving income from urban to rural areas via tourism and local job creation.

A regionwide marketing approach for outdoor recreation, such as branding and promoting
- the area with an appropriate name or tagline could lead to economic gain by drawing in visitors. Other examples include developing and designating our region as “bike-friendly,” and promoting high-quality wildlife viewing in order to capture the economic benefits of these visitor activities.
- 8** Increased tourism from outdoor recreational opportunities may require improvement and expansion of infrastructure to accommodate more visitors.
- 9** Recreating outdoors offers physical and mental health benefits to all users. Communitywide promotions about the health benefits of outdoor recreation may be effective for improving the health of individuals.
- 10** Research indicates that minorities, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities are under-represented users of outdoor recreation. By reducing or eliminating real or perceived barriers, low-use groups may more frequently access outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 11** Direct fees, transportation, equipment, physical training, and time needed to travel and participate in outdoor recreational activities all contribute to cost. Efforts made to keep outdoor recreation affordable can increase access.
- 12** Physical ability can be a barrier to accessing outdoor recreation. Accommodating these limitations by utilizing special equipment,

CONCLUSIONS

adapting certain activities, and modifying facilities (e.g. rest-rooms) can help make outdoor recreation available to all.

- 13** Inclusion of environmental education and outdoor activities in regional K–12 and local community college curricula could increase youth and family participation in outdoor recreation, offer training in outdoor-related careers, and improve environmental stewardship by fostering a conservation ethic.
- 14** Interpretive centers can facilitate outdoor and environmental education and recreation for residents and visitors.
- 15** Children can gain exposure to the outdoors during school, after school, and through participating in summer programs. Some children recreate outdoors with their families, and some rely on opportunities offered by community organizations. Outdoor recreation can be as simple as spending time in one's own backyard.



Heron

Photo by Tod Crouter, courtesy of BMLT

- 16** Children who live near green spaces (parks or playgrounds) are more physically active than those who do not, and it has been shown that even passive involvement in the outdoors contributes to physical and emotional well-being. Green spaces offer our communities the benefit of easily accessing the outdoors in a natural setting, and having green spaces within walking distance of home increases physical activity and participation in outdoor recreational activities. In addition, green spaces are an affordable outdoor recreation option for low-income individuals.
- 17** It would be beneficial for counties and municipalities in the region to have a comprehensive plan for their parks. For example, Columbia County has a Cooperative Park Master Plan that could be emulated.
- 18** Public transportation could be optimized to allow residents and visitors easier access to outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 19** Repairing, updating, and creating signage and written information using multiple languages, pictographs, and Quick Response (QR) codes could significantly improve user experience and increase access to outdoor recreation in our region.
- 20** Perception of lack of safety can limit some people's outdoor activity. Educational programs might help change those perceptions.
- 21** There is no entity with the primary purpose of enhancing outdoor recreation in the region. While several public and private active organizations in the region embrace enhancing outdoor recreation as a secondary purpose, their efforts are constrained by limited funding.
- 22** Increasing awareness of legal liabilities pertaining to outdoor recreation may be helpful for creating enduring outdoor programs and activities.
- 23** Developing partnerships between land management agencies, nonprofits, and volunteers can not only fill gaps where funds fall short, but can also provide some decision-making influence regarding recreational opportunities. Volunteer efforts can also be critical for maintaining and expanding programs and infrastructure.
- 24** In order to inform their programming efforts, organizations need more data about the demographics, usage, needs, and preferences of all users. With data in hand, development of a comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation could be developed.
- 25** Wallowa Resources is an innovative organization that uses collaboration with private and public resources to enhance economic vitality, care for land and water, and provide high-quality education opportunities. A similar program could be implemented in this region.

Steps for enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities

Recommendations are the study committee's specific suggestions for change, based on the findings and conclusions. They are listed without prioritization.

- 1** Conduct a regionwide survey and use existing data to determine demographics, usage patterns, preferences, and barriers to access of outdoor recreation users and potential users.
- 2** Make outdoor recreation programs and activities accessible to low-use groups with respect to identified barriers, and encourage participation from isolated and/or underrepresented populations such as minorities, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- 3** Assess parks and park programs to understand how to enhance use by children and families, and encourage the region's cities and counties to create comprehensive master plans for parks and green spaces.
- 4** Create one organization with the primary goal of enhancing regional outdoor recreation through providing access to needed equipment, disseminating information about recreation opportunities, and offering guided outdoor activities and education.
- 5** Create a centralized, comprehensive outdoor recreation information portal that maintains an up-to-date inventory of recreational opportunities in the region.
- 6** Promote the physical and mental health benefits of engaging in outdoor recreation opportunities to all populations.
- 7** Explore strategies of successful and relevant programs to implement in the region—those of Gallatin Valley Land Trust, Wallowa Resources, Puget Sound Energy, etc.
- 8** Identify organizations and groups to build relationships with private landowners to explore public recreational opportunities on private land.
- 9** Connect the public to communities and landmarks via a network of trails in the region, such as completing a River Walk from Bennington Lake to the Whiteman Mission.
- 10** Encourage regional outdoor recreation entities to collaborate and/or form partnerships to accomplish common goals and increase on-site usage through:
 - a** Minimizing usage fees.
 - b** Increasing usable and accessible trails.
 - c** Informing the public about underutilized resources and opportunities, such as Camp Wooten.
- 11** Advocate for uniformity in regional public transportation services to enhance access to outdoor recreation through:
 - a** Providing on-demand stops along established routes.
 - b** Including racks on all public transportation vehicles that could accommodate recreation gear.
- 12** Implement innovative and practical transportation solutions (e.g., van service) to increase access to green spaces and remote outdoor recreational lands.



Photo by Amy Busch,
Courtesy of Wallowa Resources

RECOMMENDATIONS / SPEAKERS

Steps for enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities

—Continued from page 25

- 13** Encourage local entities, including both public agencies and nonprofit organizations, to offer environmental and outdoor education programs and activities for all community members.
- 14** Promote the incorporation of outdoor recreation and environmental education activities into as many regional programs and school offerings as possible (e.g., Boy Scouts, YMCA, Valle Lindo, Campfire, Quest, senior centers).
- 15** Establish place-based interpretive centers and kiosks in the region.
- 16** Develop a marketing plan and brand to promote outdoor recreation in the region.
- 17** Adopt bicycle-friendly community standards and seek certification for the region.
- 18** Encourage regional population centers to seek certification to become bicycle-friendly communities.
- 19** Explore recreational opportunities in the Blue Mountain foothills, especially near population centers, such as increasing access to the Umatilla National Forest by developing new trailheads.

Study resource speakers

Brian Burns
Tri-State Steelheaders

Amy Busch
Wallowa Resources

Stephanie Button
The REACH

Stuart Chapin
Whitman College

Ken Coreson
Creating Memories

Mike Denny
*Conservation Reserve
Enhancement Program (CREP)*

Jim Dumont
*Walla Walla City Parks
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Yolanda Esquivel
Inspire Development Centers

Dick Fondahn
Walla Walla Valley Transit

Lorena Garcia
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Allyn Griffin
Jubilee Leadership Academy

Dee Haun
Washington OddFellows Home

Heather Ibsen
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Tom Ibsen
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Gary James
*The Confederated Tribes of the
Umatilla Indian Reservation*

George Jameson
Blue Mountain Audubon Society

Jay Jeffrey
E3 EcoVentures

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Megan Ortega
Washington State Parks

Larry Randall
Umatilla National Forest

Tom Reilly
Blue Mountain Land Trust

J. Andrew Rodriguez
Wheatland Wheelers

Don Snow
Whitman College

Duane Wollmuth
Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance

Anne Walsh
Puget Sound Energy

Larry Zalaznik
Tri-State Steelheaders

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Bioneers
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Walla Walla Community College
Water & Environment Center
watereducationcenter.org

Wallowa Resources
wallowaresources.com



Mule's ear balsamroot
Photo by Mike & MerryLynn Denny

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Clara and Art Bald Trust
Blue Mountain Community Foundation
Mary Garner Esary Trust
Donald and Virginia Sherwood Trust
J.L. Stubblefield Trust
Yancey P. Winans Testamentary Trust

Community Partners:

Punkey Adams
Brian and Dede Anderson
Anonymous
Jon and Mary Campbell
The Clubb Family
Columbia Fresh Produce
Columbia REA
Cora and Jock Edwards
Anne Haley and Jim Shepherd
Jeffrey and Jane Kreitzberg
Julie and Ryan Reese
Jeff Reynolds
Sawatzki Valuation, Litigation & Forensic Services
Tallman's Pharmacy
Walla Walla General Hospital

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Photo by Amy Busch,
Courtesy of Wallowa Resources



Community Council

The mission of Community Council is to foster a civic culture that inspires a citizen-driven, consensus-based, problem-solving process to prepare the greater Walla Walla area for future growth, change and challenges to enhance the quality of life for everyone.

Community Council studies may be downloaded at

www.wwcommunitycouncil.org.



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