SESSION TITLE: TRAILS AS CORRIDORS ON BLM AND FOREST SERVICE LANDS

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OBSERVATIONS, COMMENTS, & CONCLUSIONS:

SYSTEM-WIDE

- National Trails System Act (NTSA) intent is for scenic and historic trails resources to be protected as corridors;
    - "Nature & Purpose" of each scenic trail (derived from NTSA) should be clearly described in the trail's Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP);
    - The "Nature & Purpose" should guide management policy, strategy, and decisions;
    - Congressionally authorized trails have special significance beyond all of the trails in each agency's trails system – "This is not like any other trail" – this leads to realization that scenery management for preservation is integral to the proper management of national scenic trails;
    - Challenge is to convey intent of Congress to agency leaders and to make it motivate agency policy;
- Management consistency within and across agency and jurisdictional boundaries is essential;
    - Need principles or Guidelines to foster consistent management in all jurisdictions;
    - National Guidelines must supersede local jurisdictional management decisions;
    - Challenge in communicating consistent management approaches throughout an agency and across agencies;
    - There should be coordination amongst the agencies and amongst the various scenic trails;
- Problem: scenic and historic trails (NSHTs) have no recognized corridor in BLM and Forest Service resource management plans; The trails have no consistent boundaries;
    - Trails are not just treads or historic ruts;
    - Scenic and historic trails are corridors of land being managed for specific resource purposes;
    - There are multiple layers of natural, historic, and cultural resource values along NSHTs that should be protected within a special management corridor;
- Both BLM and FS are focusing on management of larger landscapes as integral units;

- By their land use management decisions the agencies are creating “de facto” boundaries for the NSHTs that are often only feet away from the trail’s tread or historic travel route;
- Confusion remains about the nature of “Rights-of-way” and “easements” on federal lands related to the NSHTs and how either or both of these concepts relate to a “trail corridor;” These terms need clarification;
- Regarding special management of corridors for NSHTs there is a big difference between Eastern and Western politics:
    - The Appalachian Trail has enjoyed a very favorable political “landscape” whereas resource management decisions in the West have been very contentious for many years;
    - Much more litigation has arisen over resource use and land management decisions in the West than in the East;

BLM FOCUSED

- BLM is developing national policy guidance for scenic and historic trails as part of its implementation of the NSHT Strategy;
    - Guidance Policy is being prepared by a team of various managers from within BLM and also FS and NPS NSHT managers;
    - Guidance Policy is to be finished and promulgated in 2012;
    - Guidance Policy will guide BLM administration and management of scenic and historic trails;
- Resource Management Plans (RMP) are developed for large areas and are the way that BLM guides local management of lands it administers;
    - NST CMPs pertain across the entire landscape and jurisdictions of the trail but do not provide the detailed guidance to direct management of specific Resource Management Areas;
    - There is a range of management alternatives available in RMPs;
    - Public can advise on how those plans are developed;

FOREST SERVICE FOCUSED

- New Rule on Forest Land Use Planning is emphasizing management of lands to protect or restore larger resource values, such as protection of water quality in watersheds, corridors for wildlife migration, and control of invasive species;
    - Special Management or Recreation Areas were used in earlier Forest Plans to define a corridor and guide management of some scenic trails – Appalachian, Ice Age, and North Country NSTs at least;
    - Appalachian Trail “Local Management Guide” could serve as a model for similar guidance for the other national scenic trails;
- Continental Divide NST CMP Amendment in 2010 defined the “Nature & Purpose” of the trail to provide guidance for land management decisions and to support designation of a management corridor for the trail;
- Challenge for management consistency along trails is the decentralized structure of the Forest Service;

    - Forest Supervisors and District Rangers have considerable autonomy in deciding how lands they administer are to be managed;
    - There is not necessarily a unified approach to resource management across districts, forests, or regions;

National Scenic Byways

- National Scenic Byways are scenery management corridors not unlike national scenic trails;
- Should integrate the experience of Byways with trail experience by:
    - Expanding outreach to Byways visitors;
    - Getting people out of their cars to walk on the adjacent trail;
- Should integrate planning for scenic trails and adjacent scenic byways – acknowledge the experiences each can provide and the expertise that planners can share from these two recreation corridors;

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- New national scenic trails should be careful to clearly state their "Nature & Purpose" in their CMP;
- We should insist on management consistency across jurisdictions for each and all NSHTs;
- Forest Service should return to establishing "Special Management Areas" to define corridors along national scenic trails to be managed for the resource values associated with the trails;
- We should consider how to use NEPA authorities to preserve the continuity and quality of the national scenic trails;