

## Oregon State Parks and Recreation Commission

September 18, 2024

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Agenda Item: 9b

Information

Topic: Rogue River community outreach summary

Presented by: Chris Havel

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Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) recently completed a community engagement project about recreation and resource management of the upper Rogue River. The Oregon State Marine Board, Department of State Lands, Parks and Recreation Department, and Department of Fish and Wildlife collectively hired OKT to learn more about public values, beliefs, and desires for river management after several years of public concern about conflicts between different kinds of personal and commercial use of the river, including (but not exclusively) questions about the presence of jet boats in the region between Gold Hill and the Lost Creek dam.

Through the OKT project, agencies learned more about the conflict caused by recent changes in the ways people use and enjoy the river. The agencies will digest the report (attached) and discuss ways to collaborate and manage within their agency roles to improve public benefits within current policies and rules and add the results to their existing staff expertise and previous public outreach and decide whether to update policies and rules or take some other action. Updating administrative rules is governed by strict procedures to guarantee public involvement in proposed changes. Any agency that decides to try and amend rules will start its own, independent public involvement process.

OPRD is grateful for OKT's quality work.

**Action Requested:** None

**Attachments:** 9b Attachment A, Community Engagement – Upper Rogue River Summary of Report

**Prepared by:** Chris Havel

# Community Engagement – Upper Rogue River

## Summary of Report

Four state agencies—Department of State Lands (DSL), the Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB), Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD), and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)—partnered with Oregon’s Kitchen Table (OKT) to ask people how they use, protect, and feel about the stretch of the Upper Rogue River between the old Gold Ray Dam site and Lost Creek Dam. Over 2,600 people who live in and visit Jackson County shared their thoughts and feelings about the river and their ideas about how to keep the river safe and healthy into the future.

This is a summary of what people said and how we reached people during the process. There are also suggestions for future opportunities for the agencies to engage people.

Please see the full report (<https://www.oregonskitchentable.org/results/upper-rogue>) for more details.

## OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

OKT used the following methods to reach people and hear their thoughts about and ideas for the river:

- Interviews with 31 people representing 22 organizations (community connectors)
- Four community conversations (three in-person; one on Zoom)
- Online and paper surveys in English and Spanish
- OKT tables at cultural and community events
- Partnerships with community organizers to increase participation
- A community conversation with high school students
- Three conversations hosted by community organizations and a local government

## WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE RIVER

The following commonly held perspectives emerged across various community conversations, interviews, and responses to survey questions:

### Overall Themes

- This stretch of river is special to many people. It is also important to the state and region, now and in the future.

- The things people love about the river should be protected for future generations.
- People should enjoy and share the river and should respect what matters to people who visit and live near the river.
- People (and agencies) should do what they can to keep the river and the fish and wildlife that live in and near it healthy.
- No single group should “take over” control or use of the river, including homeowners, commercial users, conservationists, fly fishers, jet boat operators, or anyone else.
- This stretch of river has many parts. It includes a variety of areas that are suited for different activities. There is a desire for any future decisions to account for the physical variation, current and past uses, and fish and wildlife habitat.

### **Conflicts and Concerns**

- Over the past few years, there have been conflicts between people who use the river in different ways. Many people have either experienced those conflicts themselves or have heard about them. Other people have not seen or heard about any conflicts, and some feel these reports are exaggerated
- Many different river activities occur at TouVelle State Recreation Site. Many people feel there are significant conflicts there.
- There is disagreement about what activities can safely co-exist and about the impacts that some activities—particularly jet boats and commercial operations—have on the health of the river and the fish and wildlife that live on or near the river.
- There is broad concern about the enforcement of current rules and regulations and what that might mean for enforcement of any future rules.
- There is interpersonal conflict among community members related to the river, and that conflict came up in many ways throughout the process.
- Many people feel that people experiencing aging, disabilities, or limited mobility have fewer ways to access to the river.

### **Preferred Actions**

- People disagree about how best to manage conflicts on the river, even those who have a shared vision for the future.
- Though most people want to see a river that is safe and healthy for people and wildlife, many people disagree about the specifics of that vision and how to achieve it.
- A majority of the people we heard from want action to limit or ban some activities. However, people disagree about what actions are needed. And, there is a significant number of people who do not believe that any additional limitations are necessary.

- There is strong interest in engaging with the agencies directly as part of any proposed new rules or regulations.

### **Information Needs**

- Many people want to know more about the current rules and how they are or could be enforced.
- Throughout the process, people offered competing information related to the health of the river and/or the consequences of particular activities. There is a need and a desire for additional, consistent information.

## **FUTURE ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS**

### **Future Rulemaking**

Among people who have been highly engaged in questions related to conflicting uses of the river, there is a strong interest in what the state agencies will do next. People want to give more input on specific proposals, and they want agencies to hear many different opinions before making decisions.

### **Information and Data**

People also want agency decisions to be based on sound data and reliable information. They would like access to data about the health of the river, how the various uses affect the health and safety of the river, and how river use impacts the economy. They also want the data to look at the impacts of any proposed changes.

### **Ongoing Relationship Building**

Many people love this stretch of river and care about its future. Many of those people—particularly those who have been left out of traditional engagement processes—are unlikely to come to a large community meeting, especially if it is likely to be only in English or contentious. There are opportunities for the agencies and other decision-makers to build relationships with those community members in the places where they already gather and to use places like the picnic areas at TouVelle to invite culturally specific communities for events along the river.

### **Futures Thinking**

Because the river, river use, and the area surrounding the river is always changing, the agencies have an opportunity to engage interested community members in thinking about the longer term future of the river. Tools like long-term planning or futures thinking may be helpful as people think about the consequences of changing conditions, current and future activities, and potential regulations.

## **Community Dynamics**

Given that community and personal conflicts have simmered – and sometimes boiled over—around this stretch of river for many years, it is unlikely that any state government decision (or non-decision) will resolve those conflicts and resulting hard feelings. Therefore, alongside any action taken by state agencies, it is likely that community dynamics will need to be addressed at the community level.

## **ABOUT OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE**

*Oregon's Kitchen Table is a statewide community engagement program that invites all Oregonians to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. We particularly focus on reaching, engaging, and hearing from Oregonians that have been left out of traditional engagement processes.*

*Using culturally specific and targeted outreach, as well as community partnerships, we work with organizers, translators, and interpreters to assure that materials and online and in-person engagement activities are available for and relevant to all Oregonians. We honor and value the wide range of values, ideas, and lived experiences that community members share with us and with public decision-makers.*

*OKT is housed in the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University.*