WASHINGTON COUNTY RURAL TOURISM STUDY

DESCRIPTION & WORK PROGRAM

Washington County is uniquely positioned at the edge of Oregon’s major urban center and contains some of the state’s most fertile, productive, and beautiful agricultural lands. In light of recent state legislation (SB 841 and 960) that expands possibilities for tourism outside the urban growth boundary, it is timely to evaluate rural tourism’s potential benefits and impacts.

For the purposes of this study, rural tourism should be considered in a broad sense, to include agricultural, ranch, and winery tourism, educational tourism, voluntourism, eco-tourism, recreational and fitness tourism, culinary experiences, lodging/hospitality, retreat, and event arrangements, entertainment and other events, activities, or uses intended to draw visitors to the rural area.

A. Goals and Objectives

The goals of this study are to provide a better understanding of existing agriculture and rural tourism in Washington County, and to evaluate potential impacts and benefits of providing greater opportunity for rural tourism in the county. Preparation of the study will involve county staff and a range of relevant stakeholders. Interviews with rural residents, farmers, ranchers, winemakers, and other rural event interests will be a key element of this research. The county will form an external Work Group (WG) to review draft products for each program task.

Questions to be addressed include, but are not limited to:

• What are the current and trending conditions of Washington County’s agricultural sector?
• What are the current and trending conditions of rural tourism in the county?
• What can we learn from rural tourism programs in other areas that we might be able to apply?
• What changes in allowed activities and uses in exclusive farm use areas might better support the county’s rural tourism sector?
• What is the current state and local regulatory framework for allowing activities and uses in rural Washington County, especially in exclusive farm use areas?
• What changes to state or county regulations might be needed?
• What are potential impacts of increased rural tourism on the county’s infrastructure, adjacent farm uses, and residents, and how might conflicts be addressed?

Research would consider the breadth of opportunities under existing standards, winery amendments contained in SB 841, provisions for events on resource lands contained in SB 960, ongoing related legislation, and other factors. This study will move the county toward the next steps of developing appropriate code standards that can be more consistently
applied by county planning, permitting, and enforcement staff; and more easily understood by staff and customers alike. Study results may also inform other county departments with developing roles in rural tourism.

B. Products and Outcomes

The end product of this study will be a comprehensive report that looks into the future of agriculture and rural tourism in Washington County, and provides recommendations toward clarifying opportunities that may help both industries coexist and thrive.

The report will result in a multi-faceted approach with a series of strategic planning recommendations, both regulatory and non-regulatory – to attempt to maximize benefits and minimize impacts of rural tourism. The study may spur changes to the county’s rules and processes as well as suggested changes to state law.

The report should be clear and succinct, supported by clear and relevant charts and graphs that summarize findings.

Understanding that essential protections for the county’s rich and vital farmlands are critical to maintain, this study is intended to clarify opportunities both for agricultural interests to promote their farm products and services, and for tourists and the greater community to enjoy and support local agriculture.

C. Work Program Tasks

Consultant should plan on an initial meeting with the external Work Group (WG) established by the County, and at least one meeting with the WG for each Task. County will select the WG, arrange and advertise meetings. Consultant to facilitate WG meetings.

Task 1, Sector Analysis: Agriculture Industry Production, Processing and Distribution

This Task will contribute to an understanding of Washington County’s agricultural sector and the factors that are important to sustain its success. It includes:

1.1 Compiling existing research and data/statistical information on Washington County’s agricultural sector, and creating an inventory of current conditions. This will include identifying existing presence/share of various types of agriculture in the county by product/service, general location/geographical distribution, land share in acres, market share, and income statistics.

1.2 Conducting interviews and focus groups with growers, agriculture industry leaders, and representatives of related businesses and non-profit organizations. (Interviewees should represent all parts of rural Washington County and its various forms of agriculture. Consultant to work with county to develop questions).

1.3 Assessing the conditions of Washington County agriculture, identifying current issues, trends, opportunities and constraints and how these dynamics are trending.
1.4 Defining success factors necessary to sustain a viable local agriculture sector.

1.5 Providing geographic and technical data for mapping by county.

**Product: Report addressing the above, including text and graphics.**

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**Task 2, Sector Analysis: Rural Tourism**

Washington County also desires to better understand tourism in its rural area, how it relates to agriculture, and what is needed to support the ongoing viability of rural tourism here. This task will include:

2.1 Compiling information on exemplary rural tourism programs and policies from elsewhere in the country and abroad (e.g., Vermont, Georgia, and Italy).

2.2 Compiling information on rural tourism in the state from the Oregon Tourism Commission, Travel Oregon, WCVA and others.

2.3 Identifying and profiling rural tourism sectors and sub-sectors in rural Washington County (e.g. agricultural, ranch, and winery tourism sectors; recreational and fitness tourism, lodging/hospitality, and others); identifying associated activities, and interviewing and holding focus groups with participants from these sectors as well as other identified stakeholders. (Interviewees should represent a comprehensive cross-section of trending tourism types in rural Washington County, including farmers interviewed in Task 1 that are also hosting events. Consultant to work with county to develop questions). **NOTE: There is some overlap here with task 2.4.**

2.4 Assessing the condition of rural tourism in the county, including existing presence/share of sectors (tourism activities) researched through interviews/focus groups in task 2.3, current issues, trends, opportunities, desires, and constraints. The intent is to understand the nature and scale of tourism activities – what people are doing now and what they want to do – and any extent to which these may correlate with particular types of agriculture practiced in the county (as identified in task 1.3). This information may be used to help project which agricultural industries and locations in the county will most likely experience growth in rural tourism and which associated types of tourism may be on the rise.

2.5 Defining success factors necessary to sustain viable rural tourism.

2.6 Providing information on events/activity types and geographic and technical data for mapping by county.

**Product: Report addressing the above; including text and graphics.**
Task 3, State and County Regulatory Framework: Ag-Related Tourism

Rural tourism and other uses on exclusive farm use lands operate within a defined framework of state and county regulations. It is critical to understand this framework when considering desired outcomes. Some of this information has been compiled. Additional research and analysis will be required, including but not limited to:

3.1 Assessing whether and how the range of existing and desired rural tourism activities identified through interviews/focus groups in Task 2 are addressed by state and county regulations; identifying county standards that appear to prevent or complicate such activities; and considering how those county standards might be amended to remove unnecessary obstacles while maintaining compliance with state law. NOTE: A table of allowed uses/activities and associated regulations has previously been prepared by staff. Initially, this task would involve looking more closely at how specific activities identified in task 2 may fit within the more general allowed uses/activities outlined in that table.

3.2 Reviewing existing and upcoming legislation related to agriculture, rural tourism, and rural land use, including but not limited to Senate Bills 841 and 960; assessing how these might be used to amend county code standards to better accommodate activities identified in task 2; and which may pose particular barriers to allowing such activities. NOTE: State law applies certain regulations specific to “marginal lands” counties, of which Washington and Lane Counties are the only two, so certain restrictions/allowances applicable to all other Oregon counties may not directly apply.

3.3 Identifying potential amendments to state law that might realistically be sought to allow certain existing or desired activities, currently not allowed, that appear to be favored/trending per research and interviews conducted in prior tasks.

Product: Report addressing the above.

Task 4, Assess potential impacts of increased rural tourism on the county’s infrastructure and adjacent land uses/owners and how these might be addressed

This will inform decisions regarding appropriate levels of rural tourism activity to allow. It will include analyses of rural tourism’s potential impacts on existing rural infrastructure, nearby agricultural uses, neighboring residents, and emergency services. Subtasks include:

4.1 Using existing rural tourism sites* in the county as case studies (as identified through interviews/focus groups and research in prior tasks), or building representative case studies based on information gathered, evaluate existing capacity and conditions of roadways that serve these, assessing traffic levels (and ITE trip generation when similar uses to event/activity type exist in that manual) and characteristics (i.e. generally arriving and leaving en masse or traffic coming and going throughout the event), assessing event conflicts with agricultural traffic, existing methods used for access management during events, what access conditions and event scenarios currently work best and which seem most problematic in terms of traffic. *NOTE:
Where interviewees prefer, names may be withheld and site locations generalized in the final report, but more detail is preferred where participants agree.

4.2 Identifying likely future rural tourism destinations in the county (considering stakeholder interest, locations of agricultural uses/farm types commonly associated with trending tourism, accessibility from urban areas, roadways that serve these, and other factors), generally evaluating capacity and conditions of roadways that serve these, and assessing potential tourism-generated traffic conflicts with nearby agricultural and residential uses (based in part on similar case studies in Task 4.1).

4.3 Identifying existing and potential tourism-generated impacts on emergency and law enforcement services, and other public infrastructure and services, especially in cases of frequent or large-scale events and areas where a concentration of neighboring sites may attract rural tourism. (Staff, service partners, and emergency personnel have met to discuss ways to collaborate on such issues. Staff notes will be shared with consultant).

4.4 Identifying options to improve accessibility and best manage traffic, especially in areas most likely to experience rural tourism growth (as determined in Task 4.2). While potential for rural scale road improvements may exist, alternatives should be a central focus, such as traffic management standards, bike routes, standards/incentives for shuttle/tour bus usage, etc. Additionally, considerations should be given to an approach that road and access constraints particular to a site may be used to limit event scale on a discretionary basis. NOTE: Although this study will look at opportunities that may be available or lobbied beyond the scope of SB 960, that senate bill currently prohibits alteration of land, including grading, paving, and filling, for the purpose of “agri-tourism.” State staff has indicated that this provision prohibits such activities for road improvements on behalf of agri-tourism as well. For this reason, alternatives beyond suggested road improvements alone may prove important.

4.5 Summarizing existing and potential conflicts between rural tourism and traditional agricultural uses, how these are currently managed, and recommended practices to protect farming operations in accord with the state’s right to farm laws.

4.6 Summarizing existing and potential conflicts between rural tourism and neighboring residential uses, how these are currently managed, and recommended best management practices.

Product: Report detailing the above.

Task 5, Final Report Preparation and Presentations (Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners)
D. Projected Study Timeline

August - early October 2014  Refine Scope of Work, consultant selection
Oct - May  Consultant performs tasks and prepares reports
June, 2015  Final Report Preparation and Presentations

E. Estimated Product Budget – Professional Services

The total budget available for the work is $80,000. Consultant to propose allocation of funds by task.

Task 1  Agriculture Sector Analysis
Task 2  Rural Tourism Sector Analysis
Task 3  Regulatory Framework
Task 4  Assess Potential Impacts
Task 5  Report and Presentations

Total Professional Services  $80,000