

*Speech given in ceremonies at Conceptual Plan rollout event by Friends of the Falls President and co-founder, Rick Hastings
March 28, 2002, Museum of Arts and Culture, Spokane*

“**Five** years ago, Friends of the Falls **began meeting** and discussing the prospect of embracing the Falls and Gorge as a civic centerpiece with numerous groups and organizations.

We found **unanimous support** for the idea, though many wondered about the potential impacts of the proposed span over the falls, then under development.

When the Spokane community determined to end that project, our group returned to each of the organizations we’d been in touch with; to see if **the time was ripe** to work together on a common vision for the Falls and Gorge.

In April of 2000, Friends of the Falls convened the first meeting of nearly two dozen organizations, many of whom had never worked together before. From Neighborhoods to Downtown groups, from governmental agencies to private landholders, recreational interests to Tribal needs, many **diverse viewpoints came together** on one thing: that Spokane should prize and preserve its river.

Frankly, it took us awhile to believe such agreement was indeed real.

After the initial shock wore off, we realized we had a lot of work ahead of us.
How should we move forward?

We applied to the National Parks Service, for help from the Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance Program. In the fall of 2000, we were awarded that help.

That December, we held our first process meeting, leading to the Concept Plan we see tonight. The assembled groups **adopted a name**, the “Great Gorge Group,” or G3; we developed and **adopted a vision and mission statement**,

and **set our path** for a three-phase process: **Concept Plan, Master Plan, and Implementation.**

On September 8 of 2001, we held a day-long design workshop, or **charette**, to put our ideas to paper, to begin to define our collective hopes for the area. On September 27th, we held our **first public event** at the former Salty's restaurant, and despite our community's grief from events only two weeks earlier, over 200 citizens turned out to share their hopes for the gorge.

We took those ideas and incorporated them into our plans. Our vision, it seemed, had a lot in common with most residents.

In January of this year, we held a **follow-up meeting** to the first, a kind of "pre-flight" checkup to make sure we'd heard the message loud and clear.

Now, tonight, we're ready to share what we've heard, seen and learned over the past two years. Our Conceptual Plan **is now complete.**

Several in the group had the terrific idea of printing **posters of the plan**, instead of producing some thick bound report. We have copies of these available free of charge, thanks to generous donations from many in the group.

What is this vision for the Gorge? Briefly, it's about embracing **four main ideas:**

- Working to tell the stories about the rich **History and Culture** surrounding the Gorge.
- Working to develop better **access and links** to the river where appropriate to help connect the river to neighborhoods and the community.
- **Protecting and conserving** the natural elements in the gorge, both plant and animal.

- Exploring opportunities for **recreation** in some areas, and of types that are quiet and compatible with the essential nature of the river.

This Concept Plan is just that – **an outline** for our community to fill in during the coming months, as we begin to collaborate on specifics for the Gorge.

What is this area likely to become? Is “Park” the best word? Is “Greenway?” Is this a “Landscape?” Do we even need to try to fit the Gorge into a **category**? I don’t know.

J.B. Jackson once defined the character of landscape as “one that all generations and points of view have agreed upon.” **Wallace Stegner** hoped that one day, we’d learn that that “...cooperation, not rugged individualism is the pattern that most characterizes...” our place in the West, continuing that then we have a chance to “create a society to match our scenery.”

Ultimately, our Falls and Gorge are **wholly unique**; beautiful in their own way and aren’t comfortably categorized. I believe this to be true of Spokane as well. By honoring this landscape, we can **learn** more of ourselves, **build** relationships, and in so doing realize the exceptional promise of this place.

Aubrey L. White saw this, the Olmsted Brothers saw this, citizens began again to see this near the middle of the last century, and our community regained a portion of this nearly 30 years ago at Expo ’74.

It’s not a new idea. In fact, it goes back thousands of years.

The late **Peter Campbell**, a Colville Tribal leader that helped realize this fabulous museum, was interviewed by the Spokesman-Review shortly before he died. After speaking about his habit of returning to the river for “his mental health days,” when he’d stop along the shoreline just to listen, he added: “When

you talk to non-tribal people, there is something they're looking for - security and a place where they can belong." What they seek exists here, he said.

"There is a history and a culture and a law and a way of life that has always existed in this place," he said. "And they can link into that. All they need to do is listen." ¹

This project must be **much more** than a "Park." We hope, at long last, it represents a community joining to listen to what the river tells us about ourselves. Our identity, our collective character and pride as a place both adjoining, and in harmony with, a breathtaking natural environment can **map our future** as a place envied by the world.

Even twenty or thirty years from now, people won't recall much of the ups and downs of our economy, of personalities, of the day-to-day issues that occupy so much of our time. What they will know is what we did with our lives, with our opportunities, and how we contributed to their world. **It's time for our generation** to add to the legacy others have given us, to move forward on the basis of the sacrifice previous generations have made for us.

This project, in its own small way, represents that chance for us.

Thank you."

¹ "Native Truths," Rob McDonald, *Spokesman-Review*, March 28, 1999