

FOREST PLAN

APPENDIX F

VISUAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

In response to increasing environmental concerns the Forest Service developed The Visual Management System to inventory, classify, analyze and manage its visual resources. Maintenance and enhancement of the natural appearance of the characteristic landscape while actively managing for various resource benefits such as timber, grazing, wildlife, and recreation are the system's main objective.

EXISTING VISUAL CONDITION

The first step in the system is to inventory the existing visual condition occurring on-the-ground at the beginning of the planning effort. This provides a means for issue identification, assists analysis, establishes a base to weigh management alternatives and monitor progress. Six Existing Visual Condition (EVC) types are used to quantify or describe the physical landscape in terms of its deviation from a natural appearance. Following is a description of the six types:

- Type I** - Areas in which only ecological change has taken place except for low standard trails needed for access. They appear to be untouched by man's activities. (Formal Wilderness designation does not necessarily classify the area as EVC Type I).
- Type II** - Areas in which changes in the characteristic landscape are not visually evident to the average person unless pointed out.
- Type III** - Areas in which changes in the landscape are noticed by the average forest visitor, but they do not attract attention. The natural appearance of the characteristic landscape still remains dominant. Changes appear as minor disturbances.
- Type IV** - Areas in which changes in the landscape are easily noticed by the average forest visitor and may attract attention. They appear to be disturbances but resemble natural patterns found in the characteristic landscape.
- Type V** - Areas in which changes in the landscape are strong and would be obvious to the average forest visitor. These changes stand out as a dominating element in the characteristic landscape yet they are shaped so they might resemble natural patterns when viewed from 3 miles or more in the distance. They appear to be major disturbances.
- Type VI** - Areas in which changes in the characteristic landscape are in glaring contrast to the natural appearance. Almost all forest visitors would be displeased with the effect. They appear to be drastic disturbances needing visual rehabilitation.

The Visual Management System then measures and evaluates two main elements; the physical and man-made features of the land and peoples concern for scenic quality.

VARIETY CLASSES

The physical and man-made features are evaluated within the context of the local physiographic character type in terms of three degrees of quality. They are expressed and mapped as Variety Classes; A - Distinctive, B - Common and C - Minimal. These variety classes consider the presence and quality of the elements' landform, rock form, vegetation, streams, lakes and cultural features (man-made elements).

SENSITIVITY LEVELS

Peoples concern for scenic quality is measured and evaluated in terms of the number and type of users and the distance they are able to view the landscape from travelways and use areas. The number and types of users are classified to levels of Sensitivity; Level 1 (highest), Level 2 (moderate), and Level 3 (seldom seen). The actual area viewed is considered by distance zones of foreground (fg), middleground (mg) and background (bg) with the premise that the closest area (fg) is most critical. Thus, Sensitivity Level 1, foreground (fg 1) is the most sensitive viewing area.

The following situations were considered Sensitivity Level 1 during mapping:

Roads and trails (hiking/horse riding) with National or Regional importance, including designated scenic roads, i.e., Glade Top Trail, Ozark Trail.

Primarily, all Interstate, U.S. Highways (Federal primary system which includes principal and secondary arterials) and State numbered roads (principal collectors). Roads that are paved, with high design and construction standards and/or primary connector between collector roads.

Roads and trails providing primary access to Level 1 Use Areas.

Waterbodies with National and Regional Ozark Highlands importance; i.e., Eleven Point National Scenic River, Council Bluff Lake, Table Rock Lake.

Waterbodies that are floatable and fishable at least 10 months of the year. Receives high to moderate recreation-oriented use.

The following situations were considered Sensitivity Level 2 during mapping:

Primarily all State lettered principal and secondary collectors, all-weather County and Forest Service System roads with observed moderate to high recreation-oriented use and moderate non-recreational use.

Usually all-weather paved (can be gravel surface) and usually carries through traffic (not dead-end).

Roads and Trails providing access to Level 2 Use Areas.

All developed trails not designated Level 1.

Relative large perennial springs that are not developed that receive moderate recreation use.

Water bodies that are floatable approximately two months of the year (water levels fluctuate moderately with seasons.) Fishing and other water enjoyment activities may occur all year. Receives moderate use.

The following situations were considered Sensitivity Level 3 during mapping:

Primitive County, Forest Service and private roads. Soil and/or gravel surfaced two-wheel tracks.

Usually no through traffic. Low recreation-oriented use and high non-recreational use.

Water bodies that are only periodically floatable and no developed public access; i.e., intermittent streams, small farm and wildlife ponds. Receives low recreation-oriented use.

VISUAL QUALITY OBJECTIVES

The physical components of the landscape as Variety Classes are combined with the user related Sensitivity Levels to produce Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) of management. There are five differing levels of Visual Quality Objectives; Preservation (P), Retention (R), Partial Retention (PR), Modification (M), and Maximum Modification (MM). Following is a brief description of these five VQO's:

Preservation - Allows ecological change only. Management activities are prohibited except for very low visually impacting recreation facilities.

Retention - Management activities may not be visually evident. Contrasts in form, line, color and texture must be reduced during or immediately after the management activity.

Partial Retention - Management activities must remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Associated visual impacts in form, line, color and texture must be reduced as soon after project completion as possible but within the first year.

Modification - Management activities may visually dominate the characteristic landscape. However, landform and vegetative alterations must borrow from naturally established form, line, color or texture so as to blend in with the surrounding landscape character. The objective should be met within one year of project completion.

Maximum Modification - Management activities including vegetative and landform alterations may dominate the characteristic landscape. However, when viewed as background they must visually appear as natural occurrences within the surrounding landscapes or character type. Reduction of contrast should be accomplished within five years.

INVENTORY VISUAL QUALITY LEVELS

The Inventory Visual Quality Levels are the theoretical-best regarding the visual resource and may be modified in consideration of other resource benefits. This modification may be made in the multi-resource land management planning process which includes participation by other agencies, groups and the general public. The management direction obtained in this planning process generally results in modified visual management direction and results in what are termed Adopted Visual Quality Objectives. These objectives are further refined in desired character by planning and landscape design efforts during on-the-ground implementation.

VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPACITY

The Visual Absorption Capacity (VAC) system is used to estimate the relative ability of the landscape to accept manipulation. Pertinent physical characteristics as vegetative screening and recovery potential, soil stability, slope, and aspect are measured and evaluated to estimate the degree of difficulty and cost to maintain visual quality objectives under various resource activities. High VAC ratings indicate a high inherent capacity to absorb impacts and recover with relatively low cost. Low VAC ratings portray just the opposite, little ability to absorb impacts and also high costs.

The Mark Twain National Forest has made an analysis by Ecological Land Types (ELT) to determine VAC ratings.

Additional information regarding the Visual Management Systems can be found in several Forest Service Manual and Handbook references. Forest Plan, Chapter IV, Section 2300 under both Forest-wide and management prescription standards and guidelines documents visual management policies which will be sought during the 10-15 year Plan period.