

Appendix H

Visual Resource Inventory Process

Introduction

The visual resource analysis consists of a scenic quality evaluation, sensitivity level analysis, and a consideration of distance zones. Based on these factors, BLM administered lands are placed into one of four visual resource classes. These inventory classes represent the relative value of visual resources, with Class I and II being the most valued, Class III representing a moderate value, and Class IV being of least value. In addition, areas can be identified through the RMP process as Class V – areas where the natural character of the landscape have been disturbed to a point where rehabilitation is needed to bring it up to one of the four other classifications. This classification also applies to areas where there is potential to increase an area’s visual quality; Class V is often used as an interim classification until objectives of another VRM Class can be reached.

The establishment of VRM classes on public land is based on an evaluation of the landscape’s scenic qualities, public sensitivity toward certain areas, and the location of affected land from major travel corridors (distance zoning).

Desired Future Condition

Landscapes seen from high use travel routes, recreation destinations, and special management areas will be managed to maintain or enhance their appearance. Landforms that provide a visual backdrop to communities will also be managed to maintain or enhance their appearance. To the casual observer, results of management activities in these areas either will not be evident or will be visually subordinate to the existing landscape.

Landscapes will be enhanced by opening views to distant peaks, unique landforms, or other features of interest. Variety will be introduced to uniform landscapes by creating openings and edges between juniper woodland and sagebrush grassland. Landscapes containing negative visual elements, including braided or extremely dense road networks, garbage piles, unstable cut or fill slopes, open pits, or a preponderance of damaged trees or stumps, etc. will be rehabilitated.

Management activities on highly visible landforms that form a community backdrop will not be evident. In these areas, vegetation management will only be approved if it protects and improves visual quality.

Rationale

Section 102(8) of FLPMA declares that public land will be managed to protect the quality of scenic values and, where appropriate, to preserve and protect certain public land in its natural condition. NEPA, Section 101(b), requires Federal agencies to “assure for all Americans...esthetically pleasing surroundings.” Section 102 of NEPA requires agencies to “utilize a systematic, interdisciplinary approach which would ensure the integrated use of... environmental design in the planning and decision making process.” Guidelines for the identification of VRM Classes on public lands are contained in BLM Manual Handbook 8410-1, Visual Resource Inventory.

Characteristics of the Planning Area

The planning area is located within the Columbia Plateau Physiographic Province (Illustration 5 – Physiographic Province Map, Manual 8410 – Visual Resource Inventory). This physiographic province is characterized by incised rivers, extensive plateaus, and anticlinal ridges. The planning area itself consists of gently sloping to flat lands covered in Sagebrush - grassland and Juniper. This general visual character is punctuated by the Deschutes River Canyon and the Crooked River Canyon; and by numerous buttes (e.g., Cline Buttes, West Butte, Grey Butte, and others). Other visual features of the planning area include smaller canyons such as Squaw Creek, several dry

canyons, and several large water bodies, including Prineville Reservoir and Ochoco Reservoir. The BLM lands are generally seen against a longer distance backdrop of high peaks and forest lands to the west (Cascade Range – Deschutes National Forest), to the north and east (Gray Butte – Crooked River National Grasslands, Ochoco Mountains – Ochoco National Forest), and to the south (Pine Mountain – Deschutes National Forest). Other key visual elements of the planning area include the rock cliffs and upland spires along the Crooked River at Smith Rock State Park and adjacent BLM lands. Pronounced cliffs and river views are also apparent along the Chimney Rock Segment of the Crooked River south of Prineville.

Portions of the major river canyons in the planning area are designated as Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers. The Lower Crooked (Chimney Rock Segment) Wild and Scenic River is classified as a Recreational River. This stretch of river is located below Prineville Reservoir in Crook County. The Middle Deschutes Wild and Scenic River between Lake Billy Chinook and Odin Falls is classified as a Scenic River. The Crooked River between Lake Billy Chinook and Ogden Wayside is classified as a Recreational River. These two stretches of river are located adjacent to Crooked River Ranch in Deschutes and Jefferson Counties. While the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River does not flow through BLM lands in La Pine, a small portion of BLM lands between Forest Road 4360 and La Pine State Park are located within the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

The visual resource management guidelines for the Chimney Rock segment of the Crooked River are defined as a Retention Visual Quality Objective (VQO) or Partial Retention VQO. These correspond roughly to BLM's Visual Resource Management Class II and Class III. The Middle Deschutes and Crooked Wild and Scenic River stretches adjacent to Crooked River Ranch are designated as VRM Class I within the canyon, and Class II for the surrounding upland above the rim. The VRM Classes for a portion of the Middle Deschutes Wild and Scenic River were superseded by BLM Instruction Memorandum 2000-096, which applied a VRM Class I to the Steelhead Falls WSA. The Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River/State Scenic Waterway Plan (1996) applied a Partial Retention VQO to the 79 acres of BLM lands within the Upper Deschutes W&S River – this corresponds roughly to BLM's VRM Class III designation.

Other features that play a role in the area's visual quality and diversity include large tracts of rural ranch and farmland that generally preserve open views and provide a pastoral setting. The area still retains a large number of older buildings and vestiges of earlier ranching, agricultural, and land settlement activities that are valued for their historic and visual interest. Many irrigation canals are located on BLM lands, and these also provide some visual interest, particularly during the summer, when they are at full flow. Isolated geologic features such as lava tubes, lava blisters, and individual large juniper trees, etc. also have high visual interest.

When compared to the visual character of the cascade peaks and slopes or the Deschutes and Crooked River canyons, the majority of BLM lands have much less pronounced visual quality – these are not lands that are going to appear on many travel postcards. However, given the rapid development of central Oregon, these lands are highly valued for their visual quality in that they are not developed and provide a natural backdrop for local communities and a buffer between rapidly developing areas.

The presence of large stands of juniper is seen by some people to be a visual benefit, particularly for residents whose homes are screened and somewhat isolated by existing juniper stands. The planning area contains many large stands of old growth juniper, which when viewed individually, have great visual interest, character and diversity; however, at a regional scale, these old growth stands are not highly distinguishable.

Visual Resource Management (VRM) Mapping Process

Existing Visual Quality

Based on the characteristics of the physiographic province and the local area, the elements in the following table (Table H-1) were used to develop a scenic quality overlay (map) for the planning area:

Table H-1. Characteristics of the physiographic province and the local area.

	Landform	Water	Cultural Modifications	Adjacent Scenery
Class A – combines the most outstanding characteristics of each rating factor.	High vertical relief such as prominent cliffs, spires, or large rock outcrops or a concentration of surface variation such as ridges, canyons, or lava tubes	Clear and clean appearing still, or cascading white water, any of which are a dominant factor in the landscape	Landscape free from esthetically undesirable or discordant sights and influences or modifications add favorably to visual character	Adjacent scenery greatly enhances visual quality
Class B – Area in which there is a combination of some outstanding features and some that are fairly common to the physiographic region.	Mesas, buttes, or interesting size or shaped landforms, though not dominant or exceptional	Flowing or still water, but not dominant in the landscape	Cultural modifications distinctive, though somewhat similar to others in the region	Adjacent scenery moderately enhances visual quality
Class C – Area in which the features are fairly common to the physiographic region.	Low hills or gently sloping to flat lands with few interesting or detailed landscape features.	Water is absent or not noticeable	Modifications are so extensive that scenic qualities are mostly nullified or substantially reduced.	Adjacent scenery has little or no influence on overall visual quality

Sensitivity Level Analysis

Each viewer of BLM managed public lands in the planning area has different perceptions formed by individual influences. To some, the BLM lands are a desert wasteland, to others a place to recreate, to others a source of income, and to still others, a defense against unchecked growth and urbanization. The high growth rates and development in the area has led to many public concerns over visual quality and the role of the landscape in providing community identity and in maintaining a quality of life standard in central Oregon. Many land use issues have recently become publicized as visual resource and quality of life issues, including: the placement of cell phone towers; the recent construction of a highly visible golf driving range north of Bend; and the proposed piping of water formerly transported in surface canals. The common element of these issues is the public concern for visual quality and a desire to retain the special, intrinsic and appreciated qualities of the natural backdrop surrounding local communities.

Given the urban nature of the planning area, and the fragmented public land pattern of the BLM parcels, these BLM lands are highly visible on a daily basis to a large number of residents and visitors. While these viewers may not have expectations for pristine views as seen in a national park or other highly managed area; these views are common, continuous, and experienced by large numbers of viewers who have a high degree of ownership and concern about the visual character of landforms that come to define their community (e.g., Cline Buttes, Powell Buttes, etc.). As the area continues to grow and develop, the use volume, or number of viewers will increase (thus increasing the visual sensitivity), and the relative scarcity of undeveloped, natural landscapes will increase (again increasing the visual sensitivity).

Most of the higher elevation or moderate to high slopes category BLM managed land in the planning area are regularly seen by a multitude of public viewpoints, including State Highways, County Roads, State or local parks, and community areas. These lands are often highly recognized landscape features that give identity to local communities such as Powell Butte and Cline Buttes. While these areas may not be of extreme visual quality when viewed in the context of the physiographic region, their prominence as a community backdrop in a rapidly

growing and developing area makes them of high sensitivity – i.e., the public generally has a high degree of concern for scenic quality in these highly visible and prominent areas.

In other cases, areas of BLM managed land have specific values and identity for a variety of recreationists. These areas include the Steelhead Falls area along the Deschutes River, the Horse Ridge area, Dry River Canyon, the Deep Canyon area, and the Badlands WSA. In these areas, visitors generally are seeking a natural setting and some degree of solitude and generally have a relatively high degree of concern for visual quality.

The factors referenced in BLM Manual 8410-1 relating to Sensitivity Levels include type of user (e.g., recreational vs. commuter), amount of use, public interest (local, statewide, national), adjacent land uses, and special areas.

In general the following criteria were used to establish Sensitivity Levels for the Upper Deschutes Planning Area:

High Sensitivity

1. Landforms that form community backdrops or are prominent at a regional scale
2. Areas with congressional or state designations, or areas that could be perceived by the public as having the same type of designations and protections...i.e., Wild and Scenic River corridors and the remaining public land river parcels that are outside these designated corridors. WSAs also fall into this category.
3. Areas that serve as recreation destinations for a variety of user groups and are used by out of area visitors on a regular basis. These would include river corridors, BLM lands adjacent to State Park units, dry canyons with defined and well used trail systems, etc.

Moderate Sensitivity

The Sensitivity Level is Moderate for most of the remainder of the planning area. These areas would be those that receive moderate to low levels of recreational use, or high levels of use that are primarily higher speed, motorized trail use, or are used nearly exclusively by local residents.

Low Sensitivity

This includes lands that receive little if any recreation use, and are mostly used only by adjacent residents. Areas of low sensitivity also include BLM lands that are isolated small parcels that have no legal public access, or are not recognizable by the majority of the public as being public land. Areas of BLM managed land that are so fragmented by inholdings or convoluted ownership boundaries that the public land is not recognizable may also be designated as Low sensitivity.

Key Observation Points

Due to the relatively high development density throughout the planning area, when compared to the other resource areas in the BLM Prineville District, nearly all BLM lands are visible from residences, use areas or public roads. Key observation points (KOPs) are identified in the RMP process to establish distance zones, which in turn lead to differentiating areas of different visual sensitivity (i.e., areas that are seen in the distance can typically absorb greater degrees of alteration and visual contrast). Since the planning area is so heavily developed, these key observation points may overlap to the extent that little, if any differentiation is made based on distance zones.

Key Observation Points were mapped and viewsheds generated using Arcinfo for most of these points (redundant points located close together were not all used). The list of KOPs is as follows:

Roads

1. State Highway 20
2. State Highway 97
3. State Highway 126
4. State Highway 27 (includes National Back Country Byway)
5. State Highway 31 (Outback State Scenic Byway)
6. State Highway 26
7. Paulina Lake Highway (Forest Road 21)
8. South Century Drive
9. Finley Butte Road (Forest Road 22)
10. The Millican Road was added during the RMP alternative development process when the decision to pave the road was made through legislative action.

Parks

1. Smith Rocks State Park
2. Prineville Reservoir State Park
3. Cline Falls State Park
4. Tumalo State Park
5. Pilot Butte State Park
6. Ochoco Wayside/Ochoco Lake State Park
7. Peter Skene Ogden Wayside State Park
8. La Pine State Park
9. Rosland Campground

Note: The scattered State Parks parcels along State Highway 97 between Bend and Redmond (approximately 600 acres in about 8 parcels) were not identified as Key Observation Points. Based on discussions with State Parks officials, these parcels have no current development plans, and are not signed or identified as State Park parcels to the public. In general, these parcels receive custodial management and serve only as open space buffers along the highway corridor to maintain a more natural or rural appearance between Bend and Redmond.

Water Bodies

1. Deschutes River
2. Crooked River
3. Squaw Creek
4. Mayfield Pond
5. Reynolds Pond
6. Ochoco Reservoir
7. Prineville Reservoir
8. Little Deschutes River

Special Management Areas

1. Tumalo Canal ACEC
2. Huntington Wagon Road ACEC

Distance Zones

Based on BLM Manual Handbook 8410-1, Visual Resource Inventory, distance zones are defined as follows:

Foreground/Middleground = 0 to 5 miles

Background = 6 to 15 miles

Seldom Seen = area beyond 15 miles or areas within F/M that cannot be seen

Distance zones and seen areas were generated from Key Observation Points. However, given the multitude of key observation points, there were few areas that fall outside the foreground view of at least some KOPs.

Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes

Class 1 – Natural ecological changes and very limited management activity are allowed. Any contrast created within the characteristic landscape must not attract attention. This classification is applied to wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers (primarily those classified as scenic), and other similar situations. In the UDRMP area, two areas receive VRM Class 1 designations:

Steelhead Falls WSA
Badlands WSA

Class 2 – Changes in any of the basic elements (form, line, color, texture) caused by a management activity should not be evident in the characteristic landscape. Contrasts are seen, but must not attract attention.

Class 3 – Contrasts to the basic elements caused by a management activity are evident, but should remain subordinate to the existing landscape.

Class 4 – Any contrast attracts attention and is a dominant feature of the landscape in terms of scale, but it should repeat the form, line, color, and texture of the characteristic landscape.

Class 5 – The classification is applied to areas where the natural character of the landscape has been disturbed to a point where rehabilitation is needed to bring it up to one of the four other classifications. The classification also applies to areas where there is potential to increase the landscape's visual quality. It would, for example, be applied to areas where unacceptable cultural modification has lowered scenic quality; it is often used as an interim classification until objectives of another class can be reached.