

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
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To: All Field Officials  
From: Group Manager, Recreation Group  
Subject: Visual Resource Management (VRM) Policy Restatement

It has been brought to my attention that there is a lack of understanding in some of our field offices regarding the need for incorporating VRM in our land-use planning and environmental documents, and in our on-the-ground operative decisions. This memorandum is a reiteration of the current Bureau policy.

It is Bureau policy that VRM management classes be assigned to all public lands as part of the Record of Decision for an RMP, and that visual design considerations shall be incorporated into all surface disturbing projects occurring on public lands regardless of the size or potential visual impact of these projects.

Several manuals/handbooks establish Bureau policy for the administration and use of the Visual Resource Management system. They include:

- BLM Manual 8400 - Visual Resource Management, dated 4/5/84
- BLM Manual Handbook H-8410 -1 - Visual Resource Inventory, dated 1/17/86
- BLM Manual Handbook H-8431-1 - Visual Resource Contrast Rating, dated 1/17/86
- BLM Manual 1616 - Prescribed Resource Management Planning Actions, dated 4/6/84
- BLM Manual 1620 - Supplemental Program Guidance, dated 11/14/86
- BLM manual 1621 - Supplemental Guidance For Environmental Resources, dated 1/14/86

It is important to consider the applicable national laws and as well as the above manuals/handbooks when attempting to interpret Bureau policy and intent. Reading single sentences or phrases out of context can be misleading.

The excerpts from these manuals/handbooks, noted Attachment 1, capture the spirit and intent of the pertinent national laws and the Bureau VRM policy. This language affirms that the Bureau has a basic stewardship responsibility to manage visual values on public lands and that local management discretion for decisions related to visual resource management issues is guided by this basic stewardship responsibility and decisions in planning documents.

In summary, it is the intent and policy of both the Department and the Bureau of Land Management that the visual resource values of public lands must be considered in all land-use planning efforts and surface disturbing activities. This does not mean that VRM should be used as a method to preclude all other resource development. It means that the visual values must be considered and those considerations documented in the decision-making process, and that if resource development/extraction is approved, a reasonable attempt must be made to meet the VRM objectives for the area in question and to minimize the visual impacts of the proposal.

It is also important to understand that the VRM Contrast Rating Process, which is part of the VRM system, should not be viewed as a means to preclude development, but rather as a design tool to assist management in the minimization of potential visual impacts.

Please contact Richard Hagan, the Bureau's National VRM Coordinator at (303) 236-9508, if you have any questions.

Signed by:  
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Group Manager  
Recreation Group

Authenticated by:  
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1 Attachment 1- Visual Resource Management Guidelines, Abstracted (4 pp)