|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240  [http://www.blm.gov](http://www.blm.gov/)    July 7, 2009    In Reply Refer To:  8400 (250) P    EMS TRANSMISSION 07/14/2009  Instruction Memorandum No. 2009-167  Expires: 09/30/2010    To: All Field Officials    From: Director    Subject: Application of the Visual Resource Management Program to Renewable Energy    **Program Areas**: Visual Resource Management and Renewable Energy (Solar, Wind,  Geothermal and Bio-mass)    **Purpose**: To emphasize the importance of proper implementation of the Visual Resource Management (VRM) program specifically in regard to renewable energy.    **Policy/Action:** Management of visual resources is a mandatory land use management policy intended to be administered consistently across the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The policy establishes criteria and procedures for inventorying visual values (visual resource inventory classes) and provides a framework for managing these values (visual resource management classes).    The Federal Land Policy and Management Act requires the BLM to inventory and manage for scenic value. Public lands are objectively evaluated for scenic values and then assigned to one of four visual resourceinventory (VRI) classes. Classes are determined through inventorying and assessing scenic quality, public sensitivities and visibility. The VRI classes are intended for informational use only. The VRI classes are referenced during the land use planning (LUP) process and serve as a part of the baseline for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses.    Management of VRI values are decided during the LUP process by designating one of four VRM classes. Inventory classes are not intended to automatically become VRM class designations. Management classes are determined through careful analyses of other land uses and demands. The VRM classes are considered a land use plan decision that guides future land management actions and subsequent site-specific implementation decisions. The VRM class designations are to be assigned to all BLM public land. One of four VRM Classes (I-IV) must be designated for all areas of BLM public land. Class determination is based on a full assessment that evaluates the VRI in concert with needed resource uses and desirable future outcomes. The VRM class designations may be different than the VRI classes assigned in the inventory and should reflect a balance between protection of visual values while meeting America’s energy and other land use, or commodity needs.    All surface disturbing projects must be designed to meet the corresponding VRM management class objectives. Contrast Rating Handbook H-8431-1 provides guidance on evaluating projects for compliance.    All field offices (FO) are required to have current VRIs in place and to have VRM classes designated within its LUPs. Both the inventory and management class determinations are critical for baseline NEPA visual impact analysis and compliance evaluation with visual resource management objectives and for facilitating appropriate advancement of all surface disturbing land use activities, including renewable energy projects.    In the future, Renewable Energy Zones (REZ) on public lands may be designated within many FOs, if local area conditions are found to be suitable to host renewable energy development. Designation as a REZ is based on the recognition of the potential of a tract of land for the development of renewable energy projects in the form of solar, wind, geothermal or biomass resources. If VRIs are not current and VRM management class designations have not been designated in the LUPs (per VRM manuals and handbooks), then they must be completed.    Areas outside of REZ also need to be in compliance with VRM policies, especially those FOs preparing to amend or revise a resource management plan.    Every State, District and Field Office shall appoint a VRM coordinator. All VRM coordinators along and key individuals involved in ground disturbing management activities that affect visual values must be properly trained. State Directors must identify at least one person within the state as the VRM program point of contact. This position should have the capability and expertise to provide visual design assistance on major projects and to conduct VRM training. Compliance with this policy is critical to achieve consistent BLM-wide VRM implementation. All VRM leads and practitioners should attend the National VRM 5-day training course, which is held annually through the National Training Center.    **Timeframe**: Effective Immediately.    **Budget Impact**: None.    **Background**: This policy clarifies the existing VRM policy and procedures for the purpose of establishing consistent VRM implementation and application, as described with BLM Manual 8400 - Visual Resource Management, 4/5/1984; BLM Manual Handbook H-8410 -1 - Visual Resource Inventory, 1/17/1986; BLM Manual Handbook H-8431-1 - Visual Resource Contrast Rating, 1/17/1986; and BLM Handbook H-1601-1 - Land Use Planning, 3/11/2005.    **Manual/Handbook Sections Affected**: None.    **Coordination**: This guidance was coordinated with the Division of Decision Support, Planning and NEPA (WO-210), the Division of Fluid Minerals (WO-310), the Energy Policy Office (WO-300), and the Division of National Conservation Areas and National Monuments (WO-171).    **Contact**: If you have any questions please contact Bob Ratcliffe, Division Chief, Recreation and Visitor Services at 202-452-5040 or John McCarty, Chief Landscape Architect, National Recreation and Visitor Services Division (WO-250) at 202-785-6574.      Signed by: Authenticated by:  Mike Pool Robert M. Williams  Acting Director Division of IRM Governance,WO-560      1 Attachment  [1 – Frequently Asked Questions (11 pp)](http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/policy/im_attachments/2009.Par.22965.File.dat/IM2009-167_att1.pdf)   |  | | --- | |  | | |  |
| Last updated: 10-20-2009 |  |