

Appendix D

Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes and Objectives

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Purposes of Visual Resource Classes

Visual resource classes are categories assigned to public lands and serve two purposes: (1) an inventory tool that portrays the relative value of the visual resources, and (2) a management tool that portrays the visual management objectives. Visual resource classes are labeled Class I, Class II, Class III, and Class IV.

Visual Resource Inventory Classes

Visual resource inventory classes are assigned through the inventory process and are based on a combination of scenic quality, sensitivity level, and distance zones. Inventory classes provide the basis for considering visual values in the land use planning process. Inventory data is recorded and maintained in GIS within a BLM geodatabase data standard. This data will be used to ensure scenic values of the public lands are considered and documented in land use plans, and available for project level NEPA analysis of impacts on visual values. All BLM Field offices must use these standards when inventorying, recording, amending, or maintaining VRI data sets.

Visual Resource Management Classes

Visual resource management (VRM) classes are assigned through RMPs. The assignment of visual management classes is ultimately based on the management decisions made in RMPs. However, visual values must be considered throughout the RMP process. All actions proposed during the RMP process that would result in surface disturbances must consider the importance of the visual values and the impacts that the project may have on those values. Management decisions in the RMP must reflect the value of visual resources. In fact, the value of the visual resource may be the driving force for some management decisions. For example, highly scenic areas that need special management attention may be designated as scenic Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) and classified as VRM Class I based on the importance of the visual values. A map is developed in each RMP showing the approved visual resource management classes.

Objectives for Visual Resource Classes

Class I. The objective for this class is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. This call provides for natural ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention.

Class II. The objective for this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Class III. The objective for this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape may be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Appendix D.

Class IV. The objective for this class is to provide for management activities that require major modifications of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape may be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of view attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements.

Monitoring

The visual contrast rating system described in BLM Manual 8400 will be used, where appropriate, in assessing proposals for projects on public lands or private lands with federal subsurface mineral rights. Potential projects are assessed for changes in existing form, line, color, and texture to determine their compatibility and contrast with the existing VRM class. Procedures assess, and as needed revise and implement, measures of visual mitigation and rehabilitation activities conducted for surface-disturbing activities.

Visual Simulations

Many proposed actions will require visual simulations to be done by the proponent or private contractors. Visual simulations will be done for selected Key Observation Points (KOPs) as identified by the BLM. The simulations must be accurate, reliable, valid, and representative of the real-world depiction of the finished or interim proposed action on the landscape. Simulations will be prepared to scale depicting any and all parts of the proposed action. This includes all structures and supporting infrastructure (roads, utilities, etc.) and the resulting disturbances to the surrounding landscape.

All requested simulations will be evaluated by the BLM staff to determine their accuracy and will become an official part of the documentation files (SEIS, EA, CX, etc.) for the proposed actions. Analysis and mitigation measures will be based on these simulations, and the proponent's end product will be held to the final visual simulation documents. If the end result is not what was represented within the visual simulations, the proponent will be out of compliance with the project proposal and the Environmental Assessment.