

APPENDIX I

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
CLASSES AND OBJECTIVES

APPENDIX L

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CLASSES AND OBJECTIVES

VISUAL RESOURCES — A PUBLIC RESOURCE

The public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) contains many outstanding scenic landscapes. Activities occurring on that land, such as recreation, mining, timber harvesting, grazing, or road development, for example, have the potential to disturb the surface of the landscape and impact scenic values. Visual resource management (VRM) is a system for minimizing the visual impacts of surface-disturbing activities and maintaining scenic values for the future.

By law, the BLM is responsible for managing public land for multiple uses. But the BLM is also responsible for ensuring that the scenic values of public land is considered before allowing uses that may have negative visual impacts. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (Title 43 United States Code Part 1701 *et seq.*) mandates that scenic values on public land will be inventoried and protected. This mandate is incorporated into BLM policy in *BLM Manual*, Section 8400: Visual Resource Management, which describes the VRM program and how it is to be administered on public land.

This appendix discusses BLM's VRM program and draws upon information found in the *Visual Resource Management for Fluid Minerals, Best Management Practices* (BLM 2007).

VISUAL MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The VRM process begins by employing specific objectives (classes) and a rating process that applies to all BLM projects:

- Visual management objectives (classes) are developed through the resource management planning process for all BLM land.
- The approved VRM objectives (classes) provide the visual management standards for the design and development of future projects and for rehabilitation of existing projects.
- The contrast rating process (*BLM Manual Handbook*, Section H-8431-1, Visual Resource Contrast Rating) is used as a visual design tool in project design and as a project assessment tool during environmental review.

The VRM process involves (1) inventorying scenic values, (2) establishing management objectives for those values through the resource management planning process, and (3) then evaluating proposed activities to analyze effects and develop mitigations to meet established VRM objectives.

Inventory

The visual resources inventory involves the following:

- Visual values are identified through the VRM inventory process (*BLM Manual*, Section 8410).
- Visual resource inventory is based on an analysis of three primary criteria influencing visual values: (a) scenic quality, (b) public sensitivity, and (3) distance zones from primary travelways or special areas.
- Visual resource inventory objectives (classes) are assigned based on the following:
 - **Class I:** Class I is assigned to all special areas where the current management situations require maintaining a natural environment essentially unaltered by human actions.
 - **Classes II, III, and IV:** These classes are assigned based on combinations of scenic quality, sensitivity levels, and distance zones.
- All acres of BLM land must be inventoried. A matrix is used to combine relative ratings for each of the criteria to determine an overall visual resource inventory rating (except for areas managed as VRM Class I).

Visual Resources Management Objectives (Classes)

Management objectives (classes) for scenic values are established through the resource management planning process as follows:

- Visual resource inventory ratings are considered with other resource values and allocations during the resource management planning process.
- These ratings are adjusted up or down in each alternative to balance with other resource concerns and management themes.
- The Record of Decision and Final Resource Management Plan must define the final VRM objectives for the *Planning Area*. VRM objectives must be assigned to all acres of BLM-managed land.
- Expressed as VRM classes, VRM objectives range from VRM Class I to Class IV. Class IV allows for the most visual change to the existing landscape, while Class I allows the least (see Table L-1).
- VRM classes are area-specific objectives that provide standards for planning, designing, and evaluating future management projects.

TABLE L-1 VRM CLASSES AND MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE			
VRM Class	Visual Resource Objective	Change Allowed (Relative Level)	Relationship to the Casual Observer
Class I	Preserve the existing character of the landscape. Manage for natural ecological changes.	Very low	Activities should not be visible and must not attract attention.
Class II	Retain the existing character of the landscape.	Low	Activities may be visible, but should not attract attention.
Class III	Partially retain the existing character of the landscape.	Moderate	Activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view.
Class IV	Provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape.	High	Activities may attract attention, may dominate the view, but are still mitigated.

Activity Planning/Evaluation

- After VRM classes are established in the Resource Management Plan, all subsequent activities must be designed, evaluated, and modified to meet these objectives.
- The VRM system is designed to lend objectivity and consistency to the analysis process.
- The basic design elements of form, line, color, and texture are used to evaluate landscapes and to minimize potential contrast with the natural landscape.
- Modifications in a landscape that repeats these elements are thought to **be in harmony** with their surroundings. Modifications which do not harmonize are said to **be in contrast** with their surroundings.
- The Contrast Rating Form is used as a systematic method for describing the landscape, evaluating the visual effects of activities, and for developing mitigations to meet the VRM objectives established for that area.
- The VRM system relies on fundamental design techniques and strategies to mitigate the visual impacts of proposed projects.