The Basics of Scenery Management

What is the Scenery Management System?

It is a system of analysis to address the amount of visible impact created by man-made activities on National Forest lands. The Scenery Management System (SMS) "presents a vocabulary for managing scenery and a systematic approach for determining the relative value and importance of scenery in a National Forest." It helps talk about scenery, which can be a very value-laden resource, in ways that are more objective and less value-driven than the way people talk about scenery.

"Landscape Aesthetics" is the Handbook for Scenery Management System (SMS). It was published for nationwide use in 1995 but was not integrated into the Tongass Forest Plan until the 2008 version. It is the current handbook outlining scenery analysis for the Tongass.

Elements of Scenery Management on the Tongass:

Visual Priority Routes and Use Area (VPR): A VPR is a location from which people are known to view the forest. They include: ferry routes, cruise ship and small boat routes, major roads, trails, anchorages, and important recreation areas. Important recreation areas would be campgrounds, picnic areas, cabins, rivers, or well-known dispersed recreation areas (such as an alpine area used for hunting). They are not limited to recreational places—they include areas where people are traveling, commuting to work, commercial fishing, and hunting. VPRs are defined in the Forest Plan (Appendix F).

Land Use Designation (LUD): LUDs are defined in the Forest Plan, and are defined areas of land specific to which management direction is applied.

Distance Zone (DZ): Areas of landscapes denoted by specified distances from a VPR. They include: Foreground, Middleground, Background and Seldom Seen.

Scenic Attractiveness Class (SAC): The scenic importance of a landscape based on human perceptions of the intrinsic beauty of landform, rockform, waterform, and vegetation pattern. SAC is relative to an area's defined landscape character, and classified as: Distinctive, Typical, or Undistinguished.

"QUICK GUIDE" FOR SCENERY ANALYSIS

VPRs: Visual Priority Route and Use Areas
LUD: Land Use Designation
DZ: Distance Zones
SAC: Scenic Attractiveness Class
SIO: Scenic Integrity Objective
VAC: Visual Absorption Capacity
ESI: Existing Scenic Integrity

Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO): The desired level of scenic quality and diversity of a landscape based on physical and sociological characteristics of an area. SIO indicates the degree of acceptable visual impact that human activity can have on a landscape. SIO levels include: Very High, High, Moderate, Low, and Very Low. The following are examples:

| High SIO | Moderate SIO | Low SIO | Very Low SIO |

Visual Absorption Capacity (VAC): VAC is the capability of the landscape to visually absorb management activities (such as timber harvest, mining, road construction, and recreation facility development). Landscapes are rated with high, intermediate, or low abilities to absorb management activities. VAC is a factor of landscape variety and topographic characteristics.

Existing Scenic Integrity (ESI): Current state of the landscape of an area, when looking at existing human-made alterations and comparing to the "intact" landscape charater. ESI levels include: Very High, High, Moderate, Low, Very Low and Unacceptably Low.

How does Scenery relate to Project Planning?

⇒ It is important to find out the SIO for the area you want to plan a project in. The SIO will give a general sense of how much visual disturbance an area can tolerate. There are lots of factors that will play into the details of planning a project, but knowing the SIO is the first step. Your USFS landscape architect can help you figure out the SIO(s) for a project area, and what it may mean to your project.

⇒ It is important to know the LUD where the project is located. It will help figure out the SIO, and some LUDs have other standards and guidelines that apply to projects.

⇒ SIOs and other Forest Plan standards and guidelines do not prohibit an activity from happening but it may limit the visual impact a project can have.

⇒ USFS landscape architects can work with project planners to help design the activity to minimize the effects to scenery.

⇒ Collaborating with landscape architects during the early planning stages of a project will help the project meet the Forest Plan without having to backtrack.