

Appendix G

Visual Management System



Cover photo: Turner Mill Wheel, Mark Twain National Forest, USDA Forest Service
Photographer: Randy Long

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Overview

In response to increasing environmental concerns, the Forest Service developed The Visual Management System to inventory, classify, analyze, and manage its visual resources. Maintenance and enhancement of the natural appearance of the characteristic landscape while actively managing for various resource benefits such as timber, grazing, wildlife, and recreation are the system's main objective.

The Visual Management System measures and evaluates two main elements; the physical and man-made features of the land and the public's concern for scenic quality.

Variety Classes

The physical and man-made features are evaluated within the context of the local physiographic character type in terms of three degrees of quality. They are expressed and mapped as Variety Classes; A - Distinctive, B - Common and C - Minimal. These variety classes consider the presence and quality of the elements' landform, rock form, vegetation, streams, lakes and cultural features (man-made elements).

Sensitivity Levels

Public concern for scenic quality is measured and evaluated in terms of the number and type of users and the distance they are able to view the landscape from travelways and use areas. The number and types of users are classified to levels of Sensitivity; Level 1 (highest), Level 2 (moderate), and Level 3 (seldom seen). The actual area viewed is considered by distance zones of foreground (fg), middleground (mg) and background (bg) with the premise that the closest area (fg) is most critical. Thus, Sensitivity Level 1, foreground (fg 1) is the most sensitive viewing area.

The following situations were considered Sensitivity Level 1 during mapping:

- Use Areas classified as development level 3, 4 or 5, and those with high level of use.
- Roads and trails (hiking/horse riding) with National or Regional importance (i.e. Ozark Trail), including designated Scenic Byways.
- Primarily, all Interstate, U.S. Highways (Federal primary system which includes principal and secondary arterials) and State numbered roads (principal collectors). Roads that are paved, with high design and construction standards and/or primary connector between collector roads.
- Roads and trails providing primary access to Level 1 Use Areas.
- Waterbodies with National and Regional Ozark Highlands importance; i.e., Eleven Point National Scenic River, Council Bluff Lake, Table Rock Lake.
- Waterbodies that are floatable and fishable at least 10 months of the year. Receives high to moderate recreation-oriented use.

The following situations were considered Sensitivity Level 2 during mapping:

- All developed recreation areas not designated Level 1.
- Primarily all State lettered principal and secondary collectors, all-weather County and Forest Service System roads with observed moderate to high recreation-oriented use and moderate non-recreational use.
- Usually all-weather paved (can be gravel surface) and usually carries through traffic (not dead-end).
- Roads providing access to Level 2 Use Areas.
- All developed trails not designated Level 1.
- Relative large perennial springs that are not developed that receive moderate recreation use.
- Water bodies that are floatable approximately two months of the year (water levels fluctuate moderately with seasons.) Fishing and other water enjoyment activities may occur all year. Receives moderate use.

The following situations were considered Sensitivity Level 3 during mapping:

- Primitive County, Forest Service and private roads. Soil and/or gravel surfaced two-wheel tracks.
- Usually no through traffic. Low recreation-oriented use and high non-recreational use.
- Water bodies that are only periodically floatable and no developed public access; i.e., intermittent streams, small farm and wildlife ponds. Receives low recreation-oriented use.

Visual Quality Objectives

The physical components of the landscape as Variety Classes are combined with the user related Sensitivity Levels to produce Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) of management. There are five differing levels of Visual Quality Objectives; Preservation (P), Retention (R), Partial Retention (PR), Modification (M), and Maximum Modification (MM). Following is a brief description of these five VQO's:

Preservation - Allows ecological change only. Management activities are prohibited except for very low visually impacting recreation facilities.

Retention - Management activities may not be visually evident. Contrasts in form, line, color and texture must be reduced during or immediately after the management activity.

Partial Retention - Management activities must remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Associated visual impacts in form, line, color and texture must be reduced as soon after project completion as possible but within the first year.

Modification - Management activities may visually dominate the characteristic landscape. However, landform and vegetative alterations must borrow from naturally established form, line, color or texture so as to blend in with the surrounding landscape character. The objective should be met within one year of project completion.

Maximum Modification - Management activities including vegetative and landform alterations may dominate the characteristic landscape. However, when viewed as background they must visually appear as natural occurrences within the surrounding landscapes or character type. Reduction of contrast should be accomplished within five years.