39. Scenery

Goals: Provide Tongass National Forest visitors with visually appealing scenery, with emphasis on areas seen along the Alaska Marine Highway, tour ship and small boat routes, state highways, major forest roads, and from popular recreation places; recognize that in other areas where landscapes are altered by management activities, the activity may visually dominate the characteristic landscape.

Objective: Manage the scenery of the Tongass National Forest in order to achieve the adopted scenic integrity objectives (SIO).

Background: Each land use designation (LUD) in the Forest Plan has a corresponding scenic integrity objective that defines maximum levels of visual impact desirable from human-induced alterations to the natural landscape character. Associated with each objective is a set of recommended guidelines that includes unit size ranges and type of harvest treatment for different visual absorption capability settings. Additionally, part of the FORPLAN[1] modeling process includes a set of guidelines that define roughly how much of a viewshed (or logical part of a viewshed segment) can be in a "disturbed" condition and still meet the visual quality objective. The 5-year monitoring effort is intended to assess whether these guidelines, as applied, actually result in meeting established visual objectives.

Annually, landscape architects on the Tongass evaluate many sites for a wide range of projects, including timber harvest projects. Special use project requests, ranging from recreation cabins to transmission lines, have the potential to visually impact the scenery. Evaluation of these projects and sites utilize the Forest visual priority travel routes and use areas reference list (Forest Plan, Appendix F). Assessment and monitoring of these projects and requests will help to meet our overall scenery goal and objectives by comprehensively evaluating the entire spectrum of potential impacts.

Scenery Question: *Are the adopted scenic integrity objectives established in the Forest Plan being met?*

Evaluation Criteria

Tongass National Forest landscape architects completed 14 analyses (Table 1) for compliance with scenery standards and guidelines as part of implementing the Forest Plan in FY2014. There were also numerous minor scenery resource support efforts provided to several ranger districts for special use permits and small district projects (modifications to cabins, communication sites, a fish pass, and small-scale tree thinning projects). Some of these projects will be monitored in the coming years as they are implemented.

Many of the projects that were implemented during 2014 (other than timber sales) were evaluated using the "exception for small areas of non-conforming developments, such as recreation sites, transportation developments, log transfer facilities and mining development... on a case-by-case basis" as allowed by the LUD.

[1] FORPLAN is a timber modeling computer program

Scenery Table 1. Projects completed by landscape architects in FY2014

Ranger District	Project
Craig	Sunnahae Trail construction
Hoonah	Eight Fathom Rock Pit EA
Juneau	Lena Beach Recreation Area Reconstruction EA and design support
	Sweetheart Lake Hydroelectric Project PDEA review
	West Glacier Recreation Area EA and design support
	Kensington Mine Fuel Storage Depot EA
Ketchikan-Misty Fiords	Saddle Lakes Timber Sale resource report (DEIS published in 2014)
	Margaret Creek Wildlife Observatory Enhancement EA and design support
Petersburg	Mitkof Island Timber Sale EA resource report
	Kake-Petersburg Powerline Intertie scenery resource review
	Thomas Bay Timber Sale Gate 1 analysis
	Raven's Trail construction (Phase 1)
	Seal Point Recreation Area construction administration support
	Cascade Trail Reconstruction contract package development
	Blind River Rapids Picnic Shelter contract administration
Sitka	Takatz hydroelectric
	Sawmill Creek Campground design
	Sitka office
Thorne Bay	Interpretive Kiosks design and contract package preparation
	Luck Lake construction contract administration support
	Sarkar Lake construction contract administration support
	Salt Chuck Mine Interpretation Project site design
	Kosciusko Vegetation Management and Watershed Improvement Project scenery resource input
Wrangell	Wrangell Island Timber Sale EIS scenery analysis
	Anan Wildlife Observatory survey/design for safety improvements

In these situations, the SIO allowed under the exception often differs from the SIO established by the LUD's standards and guidelines because the benefit to the public of the development or management activity has been judged to outweigh the need to strictly conform to the original SIO. Considerations that may lead to allowing an exception include user safety, a known socio-economic need, or resource protection. Most often, the impact affects the foreground viewing distance. For example, when a new recreation development is desired for reasons of improved user safety and erosion control, but it could not meet a high SIO for foreground conditions because it would be visually evident to the casual observer, the decision would allow compliance with an SIO compatible with the development while still maintaining the intent of the LUD.

In these cases, project design considers various elements such as size, shape, orientation to viewer, color, texture, etc. in determining whether or not individual structures and the development as a whole can meet the new adopted SIO.

The following are projects that underwent construction in 2014 and fall into the "exceptions" clause category:

- Sunnahae Trail reconstruction (active project)
- Raven's Roost Trail new construction Phase 1a (completed June 2014)
- Seal Point Recreation Area new construction (completed May 2014)
- Luck Lake Recreation Area new construction (completed in 2015)

This monitoring report will discuss the outcome of Seal Point Recreation Area and Raven's Roost Trail Phase 1a.

Active timber sales in 2014 included:

- Lindenberg Timber Sale (Lindenberg Peninsula, Kupreanof Island)
- Tonka Timber Sale (Kupreanof Island) – sort yard expansion
- Miscellaneous small and salvage sales

This monitoring report will discuss the outcome of two elements of the Tonka Timber Sale: sort yard expansion and harvest of Unit 207.

Monitoring Results

Seal Point Recreation Area

Seal Point Recreation Area is approximately 8.5 miles south of Kake, Alaska. Recreation area facilities consist of two day use sites, a boat ramp, two vault toilets, and parking. The larger day use site (Site 1) is located on Seal Point, and offers two picnic shelters, a vault toilet, beach access, and parking. The smaller day use site (Site 2) offers one picnic shelter, a vault toilet, and parking (see Photo 2). The boat launch and its parking area are located between sites 1 and 2. Day use site 2 falls within a timber production LUD with a low SIO adopted for foreground situations; the boat launch and day use site 1 are within a semi-remote recreation LUD, with an SIO of moderate in the foreground. It is rare that one recreation area would cross LUD boundaries, but this was a previously undeveloped site, offering little more than a patch of ground cleared by repeated use and overgrown parking spurs that were mainly a by-product of timber harvest activities. The existing boat launch was built with so little slope that it was only useable at a 16-foot tide or better. The NEPA decision permitted a small area of non-conforming development, with the goal being to meet an SIO of moderate.

Scenery Photo 1. Day use site 1 before completion of the Seal Point Recreation Area

One concession made to keep project costs down and allow for all site elements was to use the nearest rock source for aggregate material, a white limestone. This resulted in a greater impact to scenery but the primary users, residents of Kake, are accustomed to the rock and have expressed no complaints. The rock will darken over time. The picnic shelter materials, colors, and style of construction were chosen to blend with the site while affording a more vandal-proof structure (wood-wrapped steel). The shelters were also designed to accommodate future addition of carved panels in the gable ends through funding from another source. Log wraps on the posts compliment the natural surroundings, help ground the structures in this outdoor setting, and will be compatible with the carved panels.

Scenery Photo 2. Day use site 1 after the development of the Seal Point Recreation Area

Construction was completed in May of 2014. Overall, it is felt that the development meets a moderate SIO under the “exceptions for recreation developments” clause.

Scenery Photo 3. Vegetative plugs near the rest area along the Raven's Roost Trail, Phase 1a

Future monitoring should watch for issues with drainage, revegetation, and the erosive action of tides and weather in an intertidal area.

Raven's Roost Trail, Phase 1a

Raven's Roost Trail, Phase 1a shares trailhead parking with Sandy Beach Park, near the town of Petersburg, Alaska. The purpose of this trail is to provide an easy hiking experience near town. The trail is wide enough for hikers to pass each other easily. The trail tread is packed three-quarter-inch–minus gravel, and there are no steps. There is one rest area midway through this trail segment (Photo 3), and ample space for hikers to gather and wait at the trailhead.

Much of the trail was constructed over muskeg by laying down a geotextile fabric over ground that had been cleared of trees, stobs, and large shrubs. Low-growing vegetation remained in place, and oftentimes the cleared trees and shrubs were placed under the geotextile to reduce waste and help "float" the trail. The result is a solid trail surface which lays nicely over the muskeg with very little apparent disturbance to adjacent ground.

During construction, a short section of trail was laid in an undesirable location relative to the rest area. With this type of trail construction, the contractor was able to remove the gravel down to the geotextile, move the geotextile to the desired location, and rebuild the gravel surface with very little impact to the muskeg. The location has recovered well; an uninformed hiker would not know where this occurred.

One area near the trailhead which had a drainage issue during construction was reconfigured with a shallow drain dip and sloped outward; this site is draining well. The entire length of this newly constructed trail section is in excellent condition; draining and wearing well under regular use. All culverts appear to be well-located and moving water.

One issue to monitor on future visits will be the revegetation of the trail's shoulders. These were revegetated with plugs of muskeg plants taken from the trail footprint during construction (Photo 3). To help the plugs become established, the gravel shoulders were first dressed with a layer of topsoil from an offsite source.

Tonka Sort Yard Expansion

Sort yard expansion at the Tonka log transfer facility (LTF) was completed in 2012 but has never been monitored for its effects to scenery. The site is located along the Wrangell Narrows, on the east side of Kupreanof Island south of Mountain Point. It is viewed in the foreground distance zone from state ferry and other boat traffic traveling the Wrangell Narrows, and in the middleground from several private homes on Mitkof Island. The LUD is scenic viewshed; SIOs are high for the foreground situation and moderate for the middleground.

The original scenery resource report for the Tonka Timber Sale Project states, "The sort yard has been

Scenery Photo 4. Sort yard above Tonka Mountain LTF as viewed from Mitkof Island

designed to be mostly screened from view of the Wrangell Narrows by foreground vegetation and topography." However, in July 2012, an industry-driven design change added 3 acres to the facility's footprint, moving the upper sort yard bay back into the hillside farther than planned. A change analysis was done prior to construction to analyze whether the new design can still meet the SIO.

The change analysis concluded, "Provided windthrow does not become an issue and clearing limits are strictly adhered to, it is expected that the visual impacts of development…will be limited to brief views of some portions of the road system, along with the shadowy effect created by a gap in the tree canopy and brief views of exposed tree boles at the northern end of the upper bay. Homeowners across the Narrows will see the shadowy effect created by a gap in the tree canopy and the top portions of tree boles along a 200' or more length of the northern backline. The canopy gap will exist for the life of the site; tree boles will be covered eventually by new vegetation but not for 30 years or more. These effects fall within acceptable limits for meeting the SIO of High in this Scenic Viewshed LUD."

In Photo 4, the opening created by sort yard clearing is seen as a horizontal, light-colored patch uphill from the LTF. The sort yard was not built to the expected size due to unforeseen bedrock issues. In the two years since completion, blowdown has not increased the opening in the vegetation. The result is similar to what was expected, and conforms to a moderate SIO; the appearance will improve over time as new vegetation grows in.

Tonka Harvest Unit 207

Unit 207 of the Tonka Timber Sale is located on Kupreanof Island across the Wrangell Narrows from the popular Papke's Landing boat launch on Mitkof Island south of Petersburg. The harvest prescription was clearcut with 15 percent retained as reserves; the unit falls within a scenic viewshed LUD and is seen from the Wrangell Narrows in the middleground viewing distance. The unit card states, "Consult landscape architect at implementation to ensure retention and unit size meet a Moderate SIO."

Scenery Photo 5. Unit 207 from the Tonka Timber Sale is visible just above the tree line as seen from Papke's Landing on Mitkof Island

In May of 2012, the layout forester contacted the landscape architect regarding unit boundary changes that were recommended based on field conditions. The reviewing landscape architect judged the result would be an improvement over the planned unit shape and size; the backline was brought downslope and the new shape eliminated the appearance of a straight line cutting across the slope. In addition, the landscape architect recommended dropping a triangular patch of ground in the northwest corner of Unit 207 and adding it to the helicopter harvest unit above (Unit 205); with this done, there would be no need for additional retention within Unit 207 to meet the SIO. This was done and the change analysis was approved in July of 2012. In 2013 the unit was harvested.

Forest Plan standards and guidelines state that the harvest activity should meet the SIO within one year of project completion. Assessing the unit's appearance from Papke's Landing boat launch one year post-harvest, the unit shape does appear subordinate to the natural landscape character, and by that standard meets the SIO. There is an unavoidable color contrast which will eventually moderate as it greens up.

Evaluation Results

Projects monitored met designer expectations regarding effects to scenery at the time of this report.

Action Plan

Monitor the Raven's Roost Trail and Seal Point Recreation Area in the next one to three years for effectiveness of revegetation efforts, erosion control, and the impacts of intertidal wave action.