

Scenery

Goal: Provide 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 Forest in order to achieve the adopted Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Background: Each Land Use Designation (LUD) in the Forest Plan has a corresponding Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) 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 (VAC) settings. Additionally, part of the FORPLAN 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 five 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?

Recreation development projects and special use requests are analyzed for scenery impacts relative to the viewshed location they are in. These development projects are the focus of this year’s scenery monitoring report.¹

¹Definitions:

Harvest treatment – clear cut, clear cut with reserves, group selection, single-tree selection, and diameter-limit partial cut.

Visual Absorption Capability (VAC) – the ability of a landscape to absorb human-caused alterations without significantly changing the natural appearance. There are three classifications – Low, Intermediate, and High. Low VAC landscapes are generally those with steep slopes, minimal terrain, and vegetative diversity with less of a capability to alteration. High VAC landscapes are those with gentle slopes, and/or high terrain and vegetative diversity and more adaptive to alteration.

Distance Zone - The area of the landscape characterized by a specified distance from the observer, Foreground (1/2 mile), Middleground (1/2-5 miles), and Background (greater than 5 miles). Not seen landscapes are those not observable from a specific location or travel route due to screening from topography or vegetation or areas greater than 10 miles distant.

Scenic Integrity Objective - The degree of acceptable alteration to the landscape from a natural condition.

Percent Allowable Visual Disturbance - A measurement to express the cumulative visual impact that has occurred from past, present, and reasonable foreseeable management activities such as timber harvest and road construction. Landscapes based upon their land use designation have varying degrees of acceptable alteration from a natural condition. The point of maximum alteration is referred to as the desired future condition, achieved at the end of the timber harvest rotation.

The Forest Plan directs that a representative set of viewsheds across the Forest that have been harvested during implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines are selected for evaluation and monitoring. This should occur three to five years following adoption of the Forest Plan and at approximately five-year intervals thereafter.

Evaluation Criteria

For a viewshed under review, the evaluation criteria is whether the combination of unit size, type of harvest treatment, dispersal of openings, and overall percentage of viewshed "disturbed" results in the scenery objective being met.

Sampling/Reporting Period

Annual sampling / five year reporting period

Monitoring Results

Tongass National Forest landscape architects analyzed numerous project sites and scenic viewsheds associated with these project sites in fiscal year FY 2012. The list that follows is intended to provide an overview of the individual viewshed analyses completed for monitoring of the scenic resource during FY 2012. A formal scenery resource report was written for some of the projects, while the analyses for other projects is reflected in site planning drawings and decisions made in the design process. In both cases, design and project recommendations are made to be consistent with the scenic integrity objectives in the Forest Plan.

Visual analyses were conducted on all ranger districts in 2012 with the exception of Yakutat and Admiralty. Five analyses took place on Craig Ranger District—Sal Creek young-growth cabin site concept plan, young-growth three sided cabin design and site plan, Sunnahae Trail location and design phase 2, Seaside Park at Coffman Cove day use site design, and Honker Portage Trail survey and design. The Bohemia Basin Trail scenery resource evaluation was conducted at the Hoonah Ranger District. In Juneau, the Forest Sciences Laboratory site plan support, the Petersen Lake Trail design support, the West Glacier Trailhead Concept Plan, the Greens Creek Mine EIS support, and the Sweetheart Lake Hydro project analyses occurred. Ketchikan- Misty Fjords also had five analyses—Saddle Lakes Timber Sale EIS support, Upper Silvis Trail Construction, Ward Lake Accessible Trail survey and design, Carlanna Lake Trail survey and design, and Lunch Creek Trail survey and design. There were six in Petersburg—Cascade Creek Trail design support, Raven Trail Phase 2 survey and design, Petersburg Lake Trail design support, Seal Point Recreation Site concept plan, South Mitkof Boat Launch design support, Cascade Creek Hydro resource report review. In Sitka there were analyses of the Cascade Creek bridge (survey and design, Cross trail), the Takatz Hydro ID Team support, the White Sulphur Springs Bathhouse (survey and design), the Sitka Office design support, and the Redoubt Cabin (survey and design). Thorne Bay had two, Big Thorne timber sale NEPA support for scenery, and Seaside Park (Coffman Cove) Site Analysis and Concept Plan. Lastly, there were three in Wrangell—Wrangell Island Timber Sale NEPA support, Berg Bay Cabin survey and design, and Garnett Ledge Cabin survey and design.

Evaluation of Results

The five year monitoring plan scheduled for 2012 will be postponed until FY 2013. The monitoring plan will focus on timber sales conducted during the five year period between 2007 and 2012. Ten viewsheds within timber sale project areas listed in the table 1 will be monitored for compliance with the SIOs adopted for the Tongass Forest Plan.

Scenery Table 1. Viewsheds/Units by Timber Sale

Timber Sale Name – Ranger District	NEPA Name	VCU	Unit Number
Slake TS - TBRD	Logjam EIS	573	1,11,12,13
Scratchings TS - CRD	Scratchings EIS	633	17,18,20
Scratchings TS - CRD	Scratchings EIS	634	100, 101, 011
Scratchings TS - CRD	Scratchings EIS	635	12, 13, 14, 15, 16
Shady TS - WRD	Shady EA	480	25, 26, 35, 60
Backline Helicopter Reoffer II TS- WRD	Backline TS EA	477	1
Kuakan TS		525	31,32,34,35
Campbell TS		510	

Value comparison units (VCUs) in the Tongass Land Management Plan are generally synonymous with drainages. Viewsheds can be an entire VCU or a subset of a VCU. Units listed in the adjacent table lie within the VCU and timber sale listed in the same row. Ten viewsheds from the VCUs listed will be monitored for attainment of Scenic Integrity Objectives adopted for the VCUs in the Forest Plan.

Viewpoints for monitoring will be selected from Visual Priority Routes and Use Areas listed in the Forest Plan. Where possible, viewpoints already selected as part of the analysis for the timber sale or for the Forest Plan will be used for the five year monitoring. Viewpoints will provide maximum visibility of selected units as typically seen by area visitors.

The effectiveness of management actions prescribed in the timber sale unit design and documented in the environmental analysis or on unit cards to achieve Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) will be judged by Forest Landscape Architects. Views from specified viewpoints will be documented with photos and the SIO attained will be listed. A summary of findings and an Action Plan to correct any deficiencies in harvest methods or prescriptions to attain SIOs will be written.

See [Scenery Appendix](#) for more information in response to this monitoring question.