



Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project: Scenery Effects Analysis

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1. Issues Addressed

This section includes issues pertaining to the Scenery resource that have been identified for detailed analysis. “An issue is a statement of cause and effect linking environmental effects to actions” (FSH 1909.15). No scenery resource issues have been identified for detailed analysis.

This analysis will answer the following questions with respect to the project’s potential effects to the scenic resource:

1. Will proposed vegetation removal and restoration activities (i.e., mechanical treatments) meet Visual Quality Objectives?
2. Will proposed fuels treatments (i.e., prescribed fires) meet Visual Quality Objectives?

2. Methodology

The National Forest Visual Management System has been used by the Forest Service since the early 1970s and provides the basis for describing acceptable degrees of landscape alteration within the Boise National Forest. This system describes a range of desired conditions; but more importantly provides a means of assessing the potential visual effect of various proposals, relative to prescribed management objectives found within the current Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) (as amended in 2010). Natural landscape features and viewer sensitivity (both physical numbers and concern for the environment) help to establish visual management objectives for any given area. All public lands within the Boise National Forest were first inventoried in the early 1980s. Since that time, the Visual Management System has been routinely used on the Boise National Forest to evaluate proposed activities and determine visual compatibility since that time.

The visual analysis for a proposal on public lands starts with a description of the physical attributes that comprise affected and surrounding landscape characteristics. This overall impression is created by a unique combination of visual features which include the land, existing vegetation, water, rock outcrops, and topography. In addition to physical landscape features, perceptual factors also help to determine “how” forest visitors or highway travelers might perceive a proposed site alteration.

The attributes of a proposed activity can then be assessed by the same method and a comparison drawn between the existing environment and proposed management activity. The degree of landscape alteration can be evaluated and a comparison made as to whether or not a proposal is consistent with inventoried Visual Quality Objectives and direction provided in the forest plan. These planning guidelines and management direction are provided to assure the protection of Boise National Forest scenic values, and cannot be compromised. All new proposals must remain consistent with the visual management objectives of the proposed area of impact.

Visual Quality Objectives are identified using a combination of overlay data, including: distance zones, sensitivity levels, and landscape variety class (each defined below). VQOs used on the Boise National Forest can be defined as follows:

Preservation (P) – reserved for Wilderness or Wilderness study areas, etc. Not present in the project area.

Retention (R) – provides for *management activities which are not visually evident to the casual forest visitor*. Activities may only repeat form, line, color, and texture which are frequently found within the characteristic landscape. Changes in size, intensity, patterns etc. should not be evident.

Partial Retention (PR) – provides for *management activities which remain visually subordinate* to the characteristic landscape. Activities may repeat form, line, color or texture common to the characteristic landscape but changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., remain visually subordinate.

Modification (M) – *management activities may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape*. Activities which are predominately introduction of facilities, such as buildings, signs, roads, etc., *should borrow naturally established form, line, color, and texture so completely and at such scale that its visual characteristics are compatible with the natural surroundings*.

Maximum Modification (MM) – represents the lowest level visual quality objective within our management system.

2.1. Resource Indicators and Measures

Table 1. Resource condition indicators and measures for assessing effects

Issue	Indicator or Measure	Source
Visual Quality Objective Compliance	Management action landscape impact(s) on adopted Visual Quality Objective	Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Determining Visual Quality Objective Compliance

Analysis Scale

The scenery analysis will include the project area as a whole and not areas outside of the project area boundary. While the various project management actions may be visible from points outside of the project area, a visual resource analysis typically specifically considers the proposed management action(s) on a site that must meet the inventoried/mapped Visual Quality Objective (VQO) for that site. There may be exceptions, but typically if a project meets an inventoried VQO from the foreground distance zone, it will, by extension meet that VQO from further distance zones that may include areas outside of the project area boundary.

The temporal limits or duration of visual impacts, defined as the permitted amount of time for a management activity to create a reduction in form, line, color or texture contrast to meet a specific VQO, are as follows:

- *Retention* – Immediately post-project*
- *Partial Retention* – Within one year**
- *Modification* – Within one year or meet other Regional/Forest or project/area guidelines**
- *Maximum Modification* – Within five years

* Relevant forest plan guideline: (SCGU02) – Duration of visual impacts from ground disturbing and vegetation removal activities to allow for herbaceous vegetation recovery of ground cover may extend to three years in fgR (Foreground/Retention)... Consider timely initiation of reseeded in areas where natural recovery is questionable.

** Note: Because this forest plan guideline is permitted/identified in a R VQO (R), it is therefore assumed that this guideline will also apply to the less restrictive VQOs of PR and M and allow recovery to extend to three years in these VQOs.

Viewing Distance and Travel Routes/Use Areas

Distance zones are divisions of a particular landscape being viewed. They are used to describe the part of a characteristic landscape that is being inventoried or evaluated. The three distance zones are Foreground (up to ½ mile from the observer), Middleground (between ½ and 3 miles from the observer), and Background (further than 3 miles from the observer). Management activities that would be potentially visible within the project area are all located within the foreground or middleground viewing distance zones. While background views may occur, visual mitigations will be developed/reviewed from the applicable foreground or middleground distance zones where they potentially have a greater impact.

Primary ravel Routes include all National Forest System roads and trails (summer and winter – motorized and non-motorized) within the project area. See project area transportation map (see the Sage Hen environmental assessment, Appendix D: Maps) for specific trail and road numbers.

Project area Use Areas include the campgrounds (Antelope Annex, Sage Hen Creek, Sage Hen Overflow, Eastside, Cartwright Ridge, and Hollywood Point), day use areas (Sage Hen Dam, Sagehen Nature Trail, and Sage Hen Creek Boat Ramp), and trailheads (Joe’s Creek, Renwyck Creek, Poison Creek, Wilson’s Corrals, Gabe’s Peak, and West Mountain). See project area recreation map (see the Sage Hen environmental assessment, Appendix D: Maps) for developed recreation site locations.

Viewer Sensitivity

Because the project area contains multiple popular recreation use areas, it is understood that the general public has a generally high sensitivity to Forest Management activities where these activities are located. People use this area (the Sage Hen reservoir in particular) to recreate and to access other recreational opportunities. Due to the level of recreation use this area receives and the varying types of uses provided for, users will likely display either a mid (Level 2 – overall project area) or high (Level 1 – Sage Hen reservoir area) level of sensitivity to the landscape character, out of 3 levels, as inventoried, mapped and adopted in the Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Landscape Character Type

A scenic quality inventory is contingent upon establishing a physical, ‘on the ground’ frame of reference. This is accomplished by defining and mapping landscape character types which are broad areas, having distinguishing general physical characteristics unique or common to each particular physiographic unit.

The physical characteristics of each character type are compared in terms of visual variety and attractiveness, both of which are evaluated through classifications called variety classes. There are three variety classes: A (Distinctive), B (Common), and C (Minimal). The Boise National Forest lies within a single character type – the Southern Batholith. This area covers south central Idaho. It is characterized by mountains of moderate to high relief and cascading streams of mature drainage systems.

Within the Boise National Forest lands, the visual appearance is variable. The rivers and streams are generally characterized by fast moving, high gradient water. Small waterfalls, pools, and small islands are usually part of the visual character of water features. Except during runoff periods, the water is clear enough to reveal streambed features.

Landforms here appear rolling to mountainous with strong stream-cut drainages. Project area elevations range from approximately 3,360 to 8,320 feet in elevation. The vegetative patterns are reflected as a mosaic of brush/grass south slopes and timbered north slopes and well-defined riparian areas and meadows. Vegetation is primarily composed of conifers with shrub/grass types and patches of aspen in wet, south facing areas and mixed types in the riparian areas. These natural features can be defined within any landscape, in terms of four dominance elements—form, line, color and texture. All four dominance elements are usually present, but exert differing degrees of visual influence within the landscape scene. Within the proposed project area, the landscape character can be described as follows:

Form –Slopes within the project area generally range from narrow segments of flat lowland riparian to moderate to steep mountainsides. There are large stands of conifers and some limited aspen stands interspersed by open meadows. Landforms here are generally dictated by the narrow viewsheds afforded by the steep drainages present. Strong valley bottom and ridgeline features are dominant.

Line –The valley bottom is framed by adjacent mountains on each side of the drainage. Views toward the mountains and ridgelines are of continuous stands of conifers interspersed with occasional meadows. Travelers along forest roads within the project area have either very confined corridor views of the forest along the road or where the limited breaks in vegetation are present; the adjacent dominant ridgeline along either side of the road prevails.

Color – The predominant vegetation is coniferous, with varying shades of dark green throughout the year. Aspen and riparian vegetation occur in the lower elevations of the project area and provide lighter shades of green while leafed-out in the spring/summer and brown/red/white bark colors during the fall and winter months. Surrounding meadows are typically sage green to earth-tone colors of tan/brown with periods of more intense green during the spring. In winter, these features would be most likely to display snow.

Texture – Refers to the amount of degree of discernible detail which can be perceived on a given landscape. Texture is directly related to viewing distance from identified affected priority travel routes and use areas (above). A foreground viewing situation is usually considered to be from zero to ¼ or ½ mile to the observer. At these viewing distances a high degree of individual detail is obvious, such as individual trees, branches, leaves or needles, flowers, and grasses. A middleground view is usually defined as a viewing distance from foreground out 3 to 5 miles from the observer. Individual tree forms can still be discernible in very sparse or open landscapes. More often, vegetation becomes more obscured, and texture is characterized by masses of trees in stands of uniform tree cover.

3. Environmental Consequences

3.1. Environmental Consequences of No Action

Direct and Indirect Effects of No Action

The direct (same time and place) and indirect (occurs later in time or further in space) impacts of the no-action alternative include potential impacts on the viewsheds within the Sage Hen project area, which would not be altered by management activity associated with the project proposal.

Scenery resources would continue to be subject to cyclical natural disturbances such as fire, wind, drought, insect infestations, and vegetative succession. Adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) would

remain ‘intact’ on the landscape with existing infrastructure (road, campground, and trail) developments—all consistent with Boise National Forest adopted VQOs.

3.2. Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action

This section discloses the environmental impacts of the proposed action. The following design features were identified by the interdisciplinary team for the Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project. See appendix B of the environmental assessment for a more detailed description of activities each design feature “**Applies to**” (as referenced below).

Design Features

The following project design features specifically address potential scenic resource impacts:

RR-5 Where mastication occurs, the maximum stump/stubble height is 8 inches above the ground or an obstacle such as a rock or log.

RR-6 Within 100 feet of roads and trails noted under **Applies to**, trees will be pruned/limbed up to a variable (rather than consistent) height range.

RR-7 Slash created by project activities should be piled and burned or lopped and scattered to a height of 3 feet or less except where specified otherwise as 2 feet or less.

RR-8 On higher sensitivity trails and trailheads (see **Applies to**), a variable 20 to 50-foot-wide reduced-cut buffer would be maintained in which no more than 30 percent of the trees would be cut.

RR-9 Trees would be directionally felled away from trails where possible. Any stumps within 3 feet from the edge of the tread of the trail shall be flush cut. For locations listed under **Applies to**, any stumps within 10 feet from the edge of the tread of the trail shall be flush cut.

RR-10 Within 100 feet of trails noted under **Applies to** and where slash is to remain, lop and scatter slash to a maximum height of 2 feet.

RR-11 Within 100 feet of priority travel routes and recreation facilities (see **Applies to**), stumps less than 8 inches in diameter shall be flush cut and stumps 8 inches and greater shall be cut to 6 inches or less in height measured on the uphill side.

RR-12 Within 100 feet from the outermost edges of constructed recreation facilities (campground roads, restrooms, pads, restrooms, etc.), retain approximately 70 percent of trees less than 12 inches diameter at breast height (except for hazard trees).

RR-13 Shape of Individual Units—The goal is natural appearing opening(s) when viewed individually and a natural appearing mosaic when viewed within the broader landscape. Created openings and treatment units shall not be symmetrical in shape. Straight lines and hard angles should be avoided. Created openings should resemble the shape of those found in the surrounding landscape. Boundaries of created openings should not coincide with ridgelines.

RR-14 Edges of Individual Units—To create natural-appearing transition between treated and untreated vegetation, edges should be irregularly shaped and ‘feathered’ to avoid an unnatural/abrupt edge and shadowing effect from visible tree boles in the cut unit.

RR-15 Where skid trails and temporary roads meet primary travel routes (see **Applies to**), they should curve, where practicable, to minimize the length of the route that is visible.

RR-16 To the maximum extent practicable, locate constructed landings in locations not visible from developed recreational facilities using natural screening features.

RR-17 Avoid use of broadcast burning treatments in campgrounds. If piles are burned, ensure that impacts to residual trees are negligible.

RR-18 No pile burning may occur within 300 feet of trailheads.

RR-19 Within 100 feet of priority travel routes (see **Applies to**), where burn piles are created, to the extent practicable burn piles within one year of completion of project activities.

RR-20 To the maximum extent practicable, locate ‘constructed’ fireline/handline outside of areas visible from priority travel routes.

RR-21 Fireline/handline should not develop unnatural, continuous linear features (greater than 300 feet) on the landscape. Rehabilitate longer fireline where applicable.

RR-22 Maintain existing vegetative and landform screening as visible from locations identified under **Applies to**. Locate gravel stockpile piles away from downhill side of sites. Favor multiple lower piles versus fewer larger piles to ensure pile height is less visible from distance.

Management actions proposed that have potential to affect the Scenery resource

Timber Harvest

Up to of 20,700 acres could be treated. Sale areas have been delineated based on the existing transportation system and primary haul route locations. Other considerations include species composition, logging system and type of vegetation management activity deemed appropriate during development of silvicultural prescriptions. Approximately 3,000 to 5,400 acres of commercial harvest could be implemented annually. Table 2 shows Visual Quality Objectives and the number of acres that fall within commercial timber harvest units.

Table 2. Visual Quality Objectives and the number of acres within commercial timber harvest units

Visual Quality Objective	Acres in Commercial Harvest Unit
Modification	9,154.8
Maximum Modification	2,571.3
Partial Retention	8,904.0
Retention	38.3

Scenery design features RR 11 through RR 16 each focus on ensuring Timber Harvest management actions will meet PR and M VQOs from travel route/use area foreground viewsheds. The approximately 38 acres of harvest proposed within the most restrictive R VQO will not be visible from primary travel routes or use areas. The treatment areas within the MM VQO will, by extension, meet the scenery guidelines for that VQO from the background distance zone, where visible at all from that distance.

Temporary Road Construction

Approximately 92 miles of temporary roads may be needed to implement timber harvest activities. These roads, to include those utilizing existing prisms, would be obliterated (decommissioned) upon completion of management activities in a timber sale area. These miles of temporary road would not all be constructed and in use at one time.

The visual impact of temporary roads will be limited temporally to the project timeline. Road decommissioning/obliteration will ensure the former temporary roads ultimately meet VQO timelines, specifically SCGU02. Overall the project will improve visual site conditions by removing some existing non-system road prisms within the project area.

Prescribed Burning

Approximately 35,000-45,000 acres of National Forest System lands could be treated with prescribed fire over the next 20 years to restore vegetation and fuel conditions, improve wildlife habitat and promote the development of fire-adapted ecosystem communities. Approximately 500 to 10,000 acres of fire would be applied annually.

Scenery design features RR 20 through RR 21 focus on ensuring that the most potentially impactful management actions associated with burning, fireline development, will meet VQOs as visible from travel route/use area viewsheds.

Non Mechanical and Mechanical Fuels Removal and Non-commercial Thinning

Mechanical/non-mechanical hazardous fuels reduction and non-commercial thinning could be used on approximately 11,200 acres. Hazardous fuels reduction and non-commercial thinning treatments would be used strategically as needed along travel corridors and control lines to maintain or improve stand conditions and to ensure firefighter safety in preparation for prescribed fire treatments. These treatments would reduce stand densities and ladder fuels in mature stands, plantations and dense understories. Approximately 500 to 3,000 acres could be treated annually.

Scenery design features RR 5 through 10 and RR 17 through 19 focus on ensuring that post thinning/fuels treatments will meet PR and M VQOs from travel route/use area foreground viewsheds.

Reforestation

When natural regeneration of the desired species is not possible (e.g. lack of viable ponderosa pine in the overstory), and a need for additional trees has been identified by a silviculturist, artificial regeneration would be implemented. Seedlings would be planted with variable spacing, using strategies such as only planting in locations with existing shade.

The proposed action includes variable spacing for reforestation practices. Visual impacts during implementation will be minimal and results will improve visual conditions and ultimately, screening.

Road Reconstruction

Approximately 10 miles of road reconstruction through realignments and placing new aggregate surfacing will be needed as part of implementing management activities and improving existing road conditions.

This management action will further develop existing travel routes from which visual impacts of management activities are measured. Reroutes and surfacing will create minimal visual contrast impacts in the short term with overall long term impacts similar to existing conditions.

Addition of Unauthorized Routes

Approximately ½ mile of unauthorized routes will be added to the Forest Transportation System to implement management activities and increase dispersed recreational opportunities.

Adopting less than ½ mile of existing roads is very limited in scope and, as a result, will not adversely impact the scenery resource.

Roads and Trails Decommissioning

Approximately 14 miles of existing National Forest System road roads and 1.0 mile of National Forest System road motorized trail (trail 389) are proposed for decommissioning.

Roads decommissioning will ultimately benefit the scenery resource. Obliteration timelines will meet VQO temporal guidelines identified in SCGU02.

Removal of Unauthorized Routes

Unauthorized routes discovered during preparation/layout of timber sales would be addressed to the extent needed during timber sale implementation when necessary equipment is already in the area.

Route removals will benefit the scenery resource. Obliteration timelines will meet VQO temporal guidelines per SCGU02.

Road Storage or Administrative Status

Approximately 8 miles of existing National Forest System road roads are proposed to be placed into road storage as part of implementing management activities and protecting resources.

Moving existing roads into storage status is a net neutral impact to the scenery resource. Current conditions meet adopted VQOs and this management action will not affect that.

Road Maintenance

Roads will be maintained as part of implementing management activities or improving existing road conditions. Road maintenance includes road prism blading and shaping, roadway vegetation clearing, roadway ditch and culvert cleaning, drainage culvert replacement and installation, water bar removal and installation, road aggregate resurfacing, dust abatement and surface repair including spot aggregate placement.

Road maintenance is considered/assumed an ongoing background management action with minimal impact to the scenery resource.

Snowplowing

Harvest activities could affect snow grooming routes both inside and outside the project area. The maximum total miles where snowplowing could affect groomed routes is not expected to be greater than approximately 67 miles.

Snow grooming does not affect the scenery resource because there is no ground disturbance associated with the activity. The effects are temporary and seasonal.

Culvert Improvements

The existing culverts located at Pole Creek/road 625, Cold Springs Creek/road 625, and Antelope Creek/road 609 will be removed and replaced with structures and/or culverts that allow and restore aquatic organism passage.

Existing culvert improvement/maintenance is considered and assumed ongoing background management action with minimal impact to the scenery resource.

Aggregate Source Development

The existing mineral material sources for Sage Hen (adjacent to National Forest System road 626), Mill Creek Summit (adjacent to National Forest System roads 618/699), and Mesa (adjacent to National Forest System road 624) would be expanded and developed to economically support the road surfacing and maintenance activities on project roads.

Scenery design feature RR 22 was developed to ensure existing vegetative screening at the three proposed project area source sites is protected and continues to screen these sites and meet VQOs.

Campground Improvements

Reconstruction is proposed to bring Antelope Annex and Cartwright Ridge campgrounds in line with current Forest Service standards and the recreational needs of the Sage Hen Reservoir area. The proposed

changes are intended to reduce resource damage in the Sage Hen Reservoir recreating area while improving public access and use opportunities.

Improvements to existing campgrounds will benefit the scenery resource and improve the resource condition. Improvement colors and textures should borrow from characteristic landscape and materials should be chosen that compliment site conditions rather than unnecessarily attract attention to continue to meet VQOs.

Trailhead Improvements

Renwyck Trailhead reconstruction and vault toilet installation at the Renwyck Trailhead.

Trailhead reconstruction and toilet installation will benefit the scenery resource and improve the resource condition. Restroom color should borrow from characteristic landscape colors and materials should be chosen that compliment site conditions rather than unnecessarily attract viewer attention to meet VQOs.

Dispersed Camping Authorization

The dispersed camping authorization would be removed on National Forest System road 614 only on the portion of the road adjacent to and between the Hollywood Campground and Antelope Campground.

This will improve scenery resource conditions within the visually sensitive Sage Hen developed recreation area by allowing for vegetative regeneration in areas currently impacted by dispersed camping and removing camping impacts from the foreground viewshed.

Direct and Indirect Effects of the Proposed Action

The direct and indirect impacts of the proposed action include scenery resource indicators. Scenery resource 'indicators' have been identified to serve as potential project resource impact management actions to be individually analyzed to determine their effect on the resource.

Scenery Resource Indicators:

- *Indicator 1:* Skid trail development/location
- *Indicator 2:* Landing development/location
- *Indicator 3:* Slash treatments and locations
- *Indicator 4:* Vegetative removal patterns/density
- *Indicator 5:* Prescribed fire – fireline development

Effects for Indicator 1: Skid Trail Development

Skid trails and temporary roads are typically developed to haul timber and slash from the point-of-creation to a landing or haul road.

The proposed design features for the development of skid trails will ensure that their development meets mapped/adopted VQOs. The potential scenery impacts of skid trails include the creation of an uncharacteristic linear feature visible on the landscape from travel routes and use areas that have a degree of potential to visually dominate a particular viewshed. Design guideline RR15 was developed to mitigate the potential linear visual effects of these features. Wherever practicable, skid trails should be located so as not to be visible from primary travel routes and use areas. While this may, in application, extend the overall length of these features in order to ensure their routes remain outside of a particular viewshed, the net result from a visual resource perspective will be a minimum degree of management activity evidence. Skid trails will be reclaimed post-project to ensure their impacts meet VQO restoration timelines, typically within three years post-project as identified in the VQO guidance above (SCGU02).

Effects for Indicator 2: Landing Development

Landings (and similarly, staging/stockpile areas) are typically developed as an area for various logging systems staging/mobilization and as a transfer site to which materials are hauled from their point-of-origin and from which the same materials are hauled off-site.

The proposed design feature for the development of landings will ensure that their development meets mapped/adopted VQOs where applicable. The size, quantity and location of project landings all have the potential to adversely affect the scenery resource. Specifically, project design feature RR 16 was developed to mitigate the scenery resource impact of these features.

Effects for Indicator 3: Slash Treatments

This indicator is qualitative (versus quantitative) due to the fact that the overall quantity of the area treated matters less than the location in which the treatment is to occur and its relative visibility from travel routes and use areas—evaluated on a site specific basis. The various treatments of slash from vegetation removal activities may affect the scenery resource due to the potential visibility of this management action from project travel routes and use areas. Potential slash treatment options for this project include: piling and burning the slash, lopping and scattering the slash, or mastication. Each treatment option has included design features developed to mitigate their individual and collective effect on the scenery resource.

Lopping and scattering slash is more difficult to manage from a scenery resource perspective than piling and burning due to its potential to cover/affect a larger area thereby potentially being more visible and requiring more intensive management. As a result, design feature SE-2 (see above) was incorporated into the project to ensure that this treatment option meets project VQOs where applicable.

Effects for Indicator 4: Vegetation Removal Pattern/Density

This indicator is qualitative (versus quantitative) due to the fact that the overall quantity of the area treated matters less than the location in which the treatment is to occur and its relative visibility from travel routes and use areas—evaluated on a site/area specific basis. In addition, with design features and careful placement, the effects of such treatments can often appear as natural in the characteristic landscape over time.

Other vegetation removal actions with potential scenery resource impacts include vegetation removal density, openings/developed clearings, and stump visibility. The following design features will ensure that VQOs would be met: RR 6, RR 8, RR 9, and RR 11 – RR 14.

Effects for Indicator 5: Prescribed Fire – Firelines

This indicator, primarily related to constructed firelines, is qualitative (versus quantitative) due to the fact that the overall quantity of the area treated matters less than the location in which the treatment is to occur and its relative visibility from travel routes and use areas – evaluated on a site/area specific basis. Fire in the landscape and its effects, natural or prescribed, in and of itself does not necessarily negatively affect the scenery resource. This is because fire is a natural component of the characteristic landscape ecosystem. Its effects on the landscape, while dramatic, are a natural part of the successional/regenerative system of the forest landscape in this area. The forest plan recognizes this through SCGU17 (see above).

The management activity associated with prescribed fire that has the greatest potential to affect the scenery resource is fireline development. However, fireline development sensitive to the scenery resource is built-in to this project (except for no action, for which fireline would not be developed). Additionally, the design features RR 20 and RR 21 were developed to ensure minimal scenery resource impact (VQOs would be met, where applicable) with respect to prescribed fire.

Cumulative Effects of the Proposed Action

Reasonably foreseeable future actions that could affect scenic quality include ongoing road and recreation site maintenance activities, wildfire, and grazing. However, impacts from these activities are expected to remain reasonably similar to past and present versions of the same activities and are not therefore expected to critically affect the visual resource beyond the current ‘background levels’ as ‘existing conditions.’

Considering the existing development level within the project area, mitigation measures and best management practices for potential and foreseeable developments and likely ongoing maintenance activities, and the minimal effect on the visual resource associated with the proposed project, cumulative effects on the visual resource associated with this project are not expected to exceed (or be out of compliance with) the existing or proposed VQOs as described.

Maintenance

A reasonably foreseeable action that has any potential to affect scenic quality is ongoing Forest road maintenance of primary and secondary Motor Vehicle Use Map roads. However, impact from this activity is expected to remain similar to previous and ongoing actions and therefore it is not expected to critically affect the visual resource beyond the current ‘background levels’ that exist now.

Fire

Previous fires have affected the landscape. However the forest plan recognizes fire as a natural component of the scenic landscape and only attempts to manage fire suppression and rehabilitation management efforts for the scenery resource. These management actions do not cumulatively affect the scenery resource. The most likely effect to the scenic resource is fireline construction, due to its unnatural linear development. There is no visible evidence of fireline scars within the project area.

Grazing

Grazing can affect the scenery resource in different ways. Pasture boundary differing vegetation types can create unnatural patterns. Fence lines can be apparent depending upon density and type/style. Overgrazing and associated resource impacts have the greatest potential to affect the scenery resource. While grazing occurs in the area, its effect on the visual resource from primary vantage points is minor to the point that it is a ‘background’ action with negligible scenery impacts in this area.

There are no other current proposals/decisions identified that might affect the scenic resource in the project area.

4. Consistency with Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy

4.1. Land and Resource Management Plan

Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Standards and Guidelines

- (SCGO01) Manage the Boise National Forest’s scenic resource to maintain the recreation and visual resource values, while meeting resource needs.
- (SCST01) All projects shall be designed to meet the adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) as displayed on the Boise National Forest VQO maps.
- (SCGU02) Duration of visual impacts from ground disturbing and vegetation removal activities to allow for herbaceous vegetation recovery of ground cover may extend to three years in fgR.... Consider timely initiation of reseeding in areas where natural recovery is questionable.

- (SCGU04) Slash and harvest residues remaining after project completion should appear to be naturally occurring downed material in fgR and mostly naturally occurring downed material in fgPR. Techniques to mitigate visibility of slash include lopping to low heights, burning, physically removing material excess to other resource needs, and dispersing concentrations.
- (SCGU06) Ridgeline silhouettes in mgR, mgPR, and bgR should not have unnatural-appearing breaks along them.
- (SCGU17) Wildland fire use and prescribed fire that emulates natural-appearing landscape character and utilizes natural fire/fuel breaks may be considered consistent with a VQO of Preservation. In some cases of wildland fire use, constructed fuel breaks may be consistent with a VQO of Preservation when they are low impact and do not negatively affect wilderness values. Such situations should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- (SWG05) After completion of ground disturbing activities in a watershed, the minimum ground cover should be sufficient to prevent erosion from exceeding the range of soil erosion rates that are characteristic of the local soil type, landform, climate, and vegetation of the area, or the soil-loss tolerance.

Forest Plan Management Area 16 – Sage Hen Reservoir – Scenic Environment Standards and Visual Quality Objectives

Scenic Environment	Standard	1665	Meet the visual quality objectives as represented on the Forest VQO Map, and where indicated in the table below as viewed from the following areas/corridors:
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Sensitive Travel Route Or Use Area	Sensitivity Level	Visual Quality Objective								
		Fg			Mg			Bg		
		Variety Class			Variety Class			Variety Class		
		A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Sage Hen Reservoir and recreation sites	1	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	M
State Highway 55	1	R	R	PR	R	PR	PR	R	PR	M
Forest Road 446	1	R	R	PR	R	PR	PR	R	PR	M
Forest Trail 153, 133	2	PR	PR	M	PR	M	M	PR	M	MM
Forest Roads 618, 626, 614, 645	2	PR	PR	M	PR	M	M	PR	M	MM
Forest Roads 643, 644	2	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	MM
Forest Trails 131, 134, 135, 136, 137	2	PR	PR	M	PR	M	M	PR	M	MM
Forest Trails 138, 140, 141, 223	2	PR	PR	M	PR	M	M	PR	M	MM

Figure 1. Table from the forest plan showing Management Area 16 – Sage Hen Reservoir – Scenic Environment Standards and Visual Quality Objectives

* Table value acronym definitions: (Fg) Foreground, (Mg) Middleground, (Bg) Background; (P) Preservation, (R) Retention, (PR) Partial Retention, (M) Modification, and (MM) Maximum Modification.

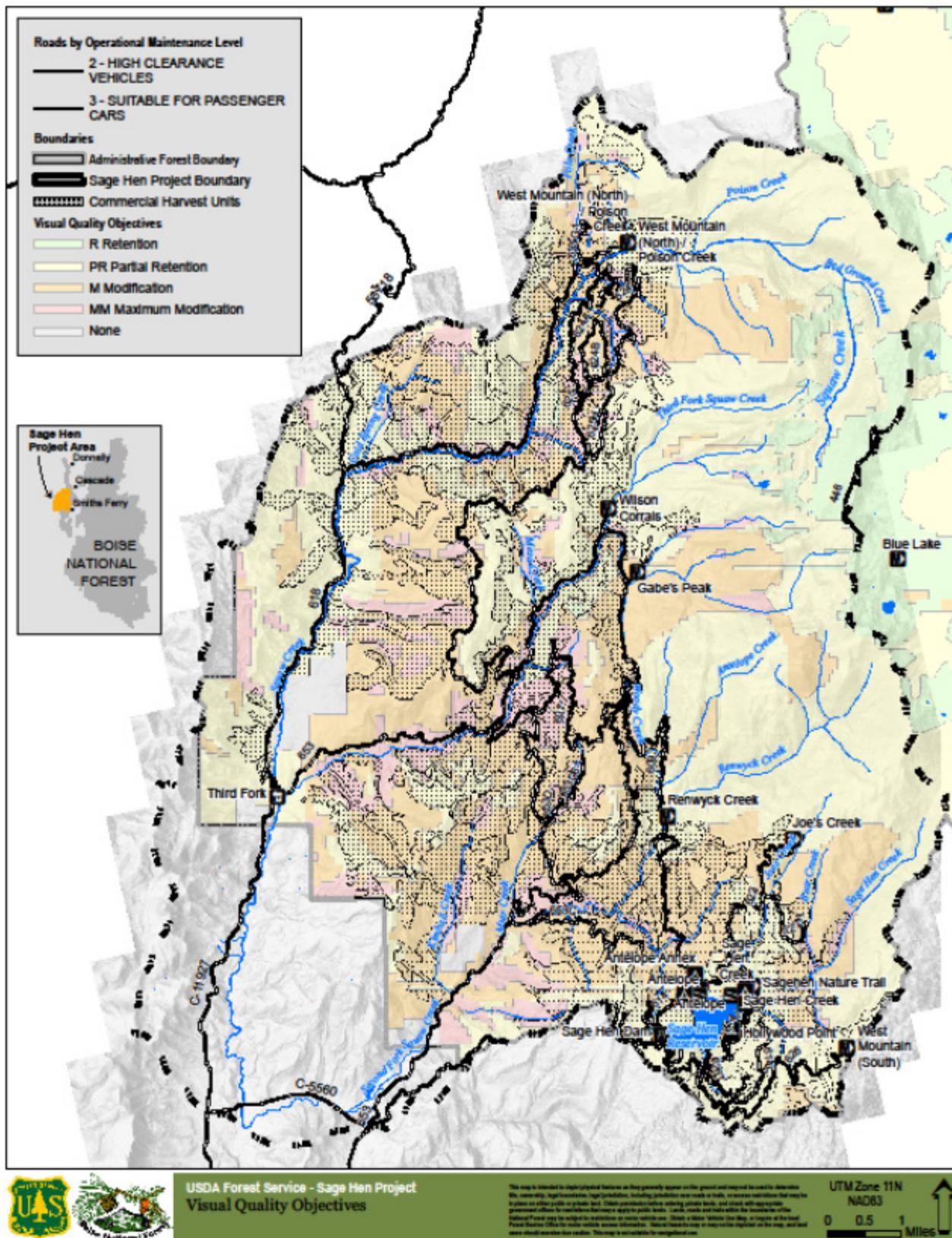


Figure 2. Map showing the Visual Quality Objectives in the project area

5. Conclusion

The no action alternative will continue to meet the existing mapped/adopted Visual Quality Objectives.

The proposed action based on a comparison of the natural site characteristics, existing dominance elements, the physical proximity of forest users to the project area, the forest user viewer sensitivity, and the degree of landscape alteration created by the project proposal, this project if implemented as proposed and including the design features identified above *will meet* Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan adopted Visual Quality Objectives throughout the project.

6. References Cited

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