

Appendix J

Recommended SMS Refinements

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Abstract - Presented here are refinements to the SMS which practitioners may use as an alternative method to manage and sustain scenic quality within an ecosystem management context. This appendix, if applied, replaces corresponding sections within *Chapter 2 – Scenic Integrity* and refines and supplements parts of *Chapter 1 – Landscape Character*, *Chapter 5 – Scenery Management System Application* and the *Glossary*. The alternative method to Handbook Chapter 2 presented here is based on the use of two indicators for evaluating scenery: Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability. It is important that those who choose to use this appendix use all its concepts in its entirety and not try to “pick and choose” between parts of it and the corresponding sections of Chapters 1, 2 and 5.

Highlights of this appendix include the following:

- Clarification of relationships between the scenery-related aspects of ecosystems, such as Sense of Place, Recreation Setting, Landscape Aesthetics, Landscape Character, Scenic Character and Scenery Management.
- Recommendation of two indicators to measure, communicate and monitor scenery:
 - o Scenic Integrity: Its definition and the criteria for its six levels have been refined to emphasize that the aesthetics of visual disturbances is the focus of the Scenic Integrity indicator, while other ecological conditions are specifically excluded. The revised definition **also** includes the aesthetics of natural disturbances visible in the existing landscape, if they are so visually extreme as to be inconsistent with the historic norms for that landscape.

The criterion for “Low Scenic Integrity” is clarified to be the condition when the valued scenery and visual disturbances are “co-dominant” (replaces the potential confusion of the “begin to dominate” phrase). When scenic integrity levels are used as LMP standards or guidelines, the terminology has changed from “Scenic Integrity Objectives” to “Minimum Scenic Integrity” (MSI) in order to emphasize that they are minimally acceptable levels to be achieved, or exceeded whenever possible, rather than a target condition. Time limits for achieving Minimum Scenic Integrity have been re-established similar to those in the Visual Management System (VMS). For situations where the time limits cannot be met due to the need to achieve other desired conditions, it may be appropriate to identify a short-term Minimum Scenic Integrity (MSI) that is lower than the long-term MSI. Along with this indicator is a tool (Table 3 – Prioritization of Scenic Integrity Management Actions) which identifies actions to maintain Scenic Integrity.

- o Scenic Stability: This new indicator for the SMS has been introduced to provide ecological sustainability information necessary to conserve valued scenery for future generations. Sustainability of scenery is primarily based on two aspects of a place: 1) the set of scenery attributes that make up its socially valued scenic character, and 2) the historic range of variability of those attributes, which provides information about how scenery attributes were perpetuated within the ecosystem. The Scenic Stability analysis first identifies sustainability of individual scenery attributes that

make up the valued scenic character. Then it identifies the cumulative sustainability for a landscape's overall scenic character, through assignment of a scenic stability level. Common valued scenery attributes of vegetation include aspen groves, meadows, big tree character and open forest canopies, which are highly influenced by ecosystem changes and imbalances. Other valued scenery attributes include water bodies, landforms and cultural features. When scenic stability levels are used as LMP standards or guidelines, they are termed "Minimum Scenic Stability" (MSS) to emphasize that they are minimally acceptable levels to be achieved, or exceeded whenever possible, rather than a target condition. Along with this indicator is a tool (Table 4 – Prioritization of Scenic Stability Management Actions) which identifies actions to sustain Scenic Stability.

Introduction - After ten years of applying the SMS Handbook, practitioners have developed several recommendations to clarify, refine and extend the system's ecological approach to scenery management. The purpose of Appendix J is to address the need behind these recommendations and achieve a more effective and nationally consistent application of the SMS Handbook. The underlying SMS goal remains to achieve and sustain the highest scenic quality possible and to enrich society through the many benefits that beautiful landscapes provide.

It is recommended that this appendix be used where appropriate, but its use is optional at this time. After a trial period in which practitioners apply Appendix J, it will be reviewed, revised as necessary, and may ultimately be incorporated through a formal SMS revision. Feedback from practitioners is encouraged to assist in this process and should be sent to the Forest Service Chief Landscape Architect.

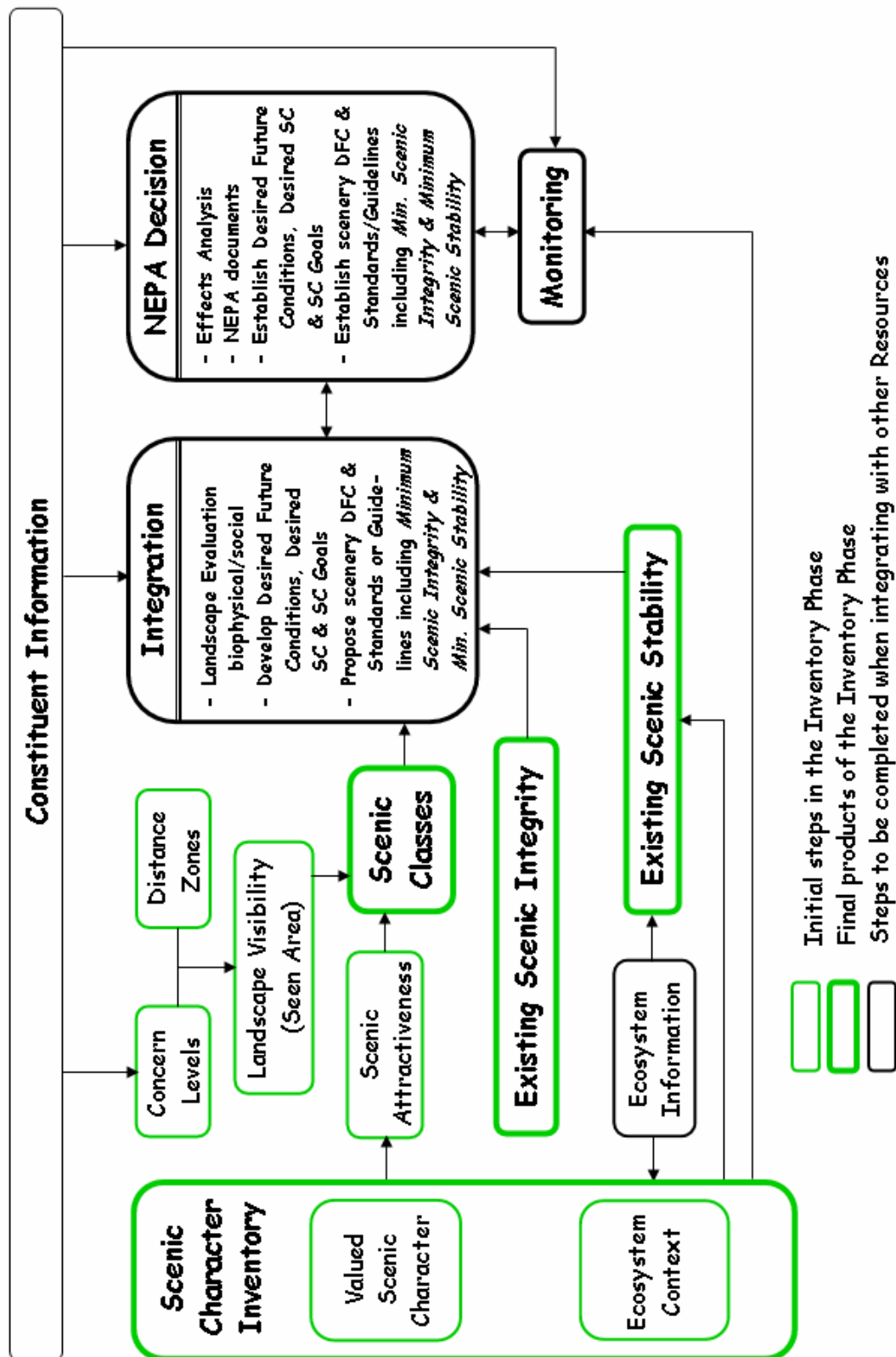
Appendix J was developed to meet the following objectives:

- **Improve national consistency in the application of SMS** by clarifying its definitions and approaches as well as using more transparent terminology. For example, the Landscape Character definition is broadened in scope to address the aesthetic, social and biophysical identity of a place, often called "Sense of Place." The term "Scenic Character" is established to more directly and simply address scenery only and excludes all other attributes of the ecosystem. Scenic Integrity is redefined as an indicator of visible disturbance to the valued scenery only, rather than ecosystem intactness or an immeasurable blend of the two.
- **Provide a national method for sustaining valued scenery within an ecosystem management context.** A second scenery indicator is established, Scenic Stability, to identify and measure the sustainability of the valued scenery. This indicator will help insure that the sustainability of scenery is addressed as an issue and integrated into projects and forest plans. "What gets measured gets done." The word stability is used to avoid confusion with ecosystem sustainability and to limit it to the sustainability of scenery only.

Although Appendix J introduces a new scenery indicator, Scenic Stability, the overall SMS inventory and implementation process remains similar to the Handbook. On the next page is an illustration of the overall SMS process for use in land management planning (LMP) and project-level planning with the addition of Scenic Stability and expanded Scenic Character Inventory elements, along with how the specific SMS elements are applied.



Scenery Management System Process



Key SMS definitions and principles - It is generally understood that ecosystems are composed of physical, biological and social/cultural aspects that interdependently function and evolve. It is also understood that valued “scenery” is the visible expression of ecosystems that people enjoy and seek to sustain. In contrast, many other scenery-related terms, such as Landscape Character, Landscape Aesthetics, Scenic Character and Scenic Quality are much less commonly understood, yet are equally critical to a nationally consistent implementation of SMS. Key SMS definitions and principles are listed below to reinforce the conceptual foundation of SMS and to clarify recommended refinements. Several of the original SMS definitions have been changed to increase the system’s effectiveness and simplicity.

- **Landscape Aesthetics:** *“Generally, the study, science, or philosophy dealing with beauty and with judgments concerning beauty; more specifically, those aspects of National Forest System lands which are related to the human senses of, predominantly, sight, smell, and sound. In scenery management, aesthetics describe landscapes that give visual and sensory pleasure”* (definition per FSM 2380.5, May 2003). It is important to clarify that the SMS focus is on the pleasurable “sights” of a place, typically referred to as “scenery.” This Appendix continues that focus on scenery and also expands upon the ecological sustainability of scenery to enable a comprehensive analysis of scenery issues. Stewardship of other important non-scenery aesthetic attributes of the landscape (such as the valued sounds, smells, tastes and physical contacts) is also highly recommended. However, their inclusion in the SMS process would create undue complexity and dilute its ability to address scenery adequately. Methodologies for considering other aesthetic attributes of the landscape should be developed and applied parallel to, yet outside of, the SMS process.
- **Landscape Character:** *“The identity of a place, often called “Sense of Place,” resulting from human perceptions of its aesthetic, social and biophysical aspects”* (new, expanded definition from the original SMS definition). Landscape character includes all elements that contribute to the identity of a place/ecosystem: its aesthetics (perceivable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical contacts), social context (community, cultural, economic, historic, recreational and spiritual values) and biophysical aspects (land, water, vegetation, atmosphere, climate, wildlife, and other life forms). While conservation of the many Landscape Character elements listed above is far beyond the scope of the SMS process, several elements will benefit directly from SMS scenery conservation outcomes.

Since the early 1970s, the USFS has defined Landscape Character as the visual image, appearance or scenery of a place that expresses its unique identity. Stated most simply and transparently, “landscape character” has been applied as “scenic character.” Appendix J strengthens this SMS focus on scenery by establishing Scenic Character as the term that most simply and clearly represents the scenic identity of a place.

SMS was introduced in 1995 to more directly integrate people’s values about scenery within an ecosystem management context. Because of this more holistic context, some SMS practitioners applied expanded meanings to the term Landscape Character and

included other socially valued aesthetic or ecological aspects of the landscape such as sounds and smells, forest health, recreation or social setting, sense of place, etc. Such expanded applications of the term “landscape” are commonly used by natural resource professionals, and are defined within USFS publications such as the 1976 USFS Wildland Planning Glossary and the 1995 USFS National Hierarchal Framework of Ecological Units. This diverse application of the terms “landscape” and “landscape character” has made transparent communication of SMS principles more difficult. The original, scenery-based SMS definition of Landscape Character is substantially different from ecosystem character or even landscape aesthetics (since there are aesthetic attributes other than scenery). Landscape Character as applied in Appendix J is now more broadly defined and includes aesthetic, social and biophysical aspects that make up the identity of a place, thereby providing a larger context for evaluation of Scenic Character. These aspects of landscape character should be addressed independently through parallel processes other than SMS. Appendix J recognizes Scenic Character as the primary aesthetic value to be given immediate and full consideration within SMS.

The original SMS Landscape Character Descriptions often combined descriptions of scenery attributes **and** ecosystem context information, creating confusion about the definition of landscape character. The positive scenic identity composed of valued scenery attributes was often “described” to include other distinctly different aspects of the landscape such as constituent information; aesthetic sounds, smells and contacts; recreation setting; sense of place; or other social/biophysical values, functions and dynamics. In this Appendix J process, these are now more appropriately addressed as Ecosystem Context within the Scenic Character Inventory.

A complete **Scenic Character Inventory** should include the following distinct elements:

- o Scenic Character Description: This consists of written text and photos describing the landscape’s inherent positive scenic identity (physical appearance) as expressed through its unique composition of existing socially valued, positive scenery attributes (such as valued landform, vegetation, water form, wildlife, cultural and historic features). In addition, it identifies the “ideal” or optimal set of valued scenery attributes, including those currently absent or under-represented, and how they would further enhance the scenic character.

Remember, only the valued attributes of scenic character are part of this description and not any visual disturbances to that character, which are measured by Scenic Integrity. Similarly, ecological conditions of the scenery that are not sustainable, such as excessive encroachment of shade-tolerant species, are also not valued attributes of scenic character; they are measured by Scenic Stability.

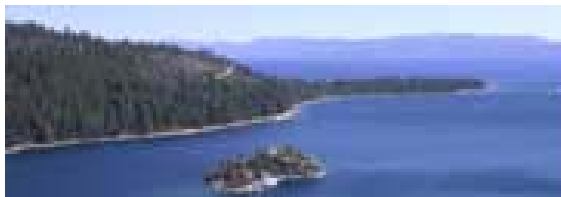
In addition, it is necessary to identify whether the attributes are dominant or minor. A dominant attribute is prominent in a landscape and is essential to its valued image. A minor attribute contributes to the valued image of a landscape but is less noticeable and not essential to that image.

It may be helpful to identify Scenic Character Themes such as Naturally Evolving, Natural Appearing, Pastoral, Agricultural, Rural, Urban, etc., when evaluating scenery in projects that encompass multiple land ownerships and uses.

- Ecosystem Context:
 - Constituent information about the valued scenery attributes including preferences and thresholds regarding their management, sustainability and scenic integrity.
 - Synthesis of the landscape's ecosystem information as a summary of the ecological condition of the valued scenic character's scenery attributes and their ecological stressors (physical, biological and social conditions; their historic range of variability [HRV]; trends; predicted and future states; etc.). This information may already be available as existing forest information and/or data layers, or it may be developed by the interdisciplinary team. It serves as a benchmark for evaluating Scenic Stability and will also be used to develop Scenic Character Goals and identify opportunities to maintain, enhance or restore valued scenery attributes. Ultimately this will help achieve a fully integrated and sustainable Desired Scenic Character within the ecosystem.
 - Other important place-related landscape character information about other aesthetic values or recreational, spiritual, social, economic, community or community values and attachments.
- **Desired Scenic Character:** *“The most complete, attractive and sustainable expression of the valued scenic character which is compatible with that landscape’s fully integrated set of Desired Future Conditions.”* (SMS Handbook definition page 5-5 expanded). Desired Scenic Character represents the most “ideal” and attractive scenic identity that is possible, given the limitations of the ecosystem and achievement of other resource objectives as defined in the LMP or project-level Desired Future Conditions.
- **Scenic Character:** *“A combination of the physical, biological and cultural images that gives an area its positive scenic identity”* (revised from the original SMS definition of landscape character). Scenic Character provides a frame of reference from which to determine Scenic Attractiveness and to measure Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability.
- **Scenic Character Goal:** *“A statement or management prescription that identifies scenery management activities to restore, maintain or enhance the positive scenic identity of the Desired Scenic Character.”*
- **Scenery:** *General appearance of a place, landscape and/or its visible features* (definition per SMS Handbook Glossary, slightly revised and shortened for clarity).
- **Scenic:** *Of or relating to landscape scenery; pertaining to natural, natural-appearing or other valued scenery; constituting or affording pleasant views of natural landscape*

attributes or positive cultural elements (definition per SMS Handbook Glossary, slightly revised for clarity).

- **Scenic Quality:** *Degree to which the appearance of a place, landscape or feature can elicit psychological and physiological benefits to individuals and, therefore, to society in general* (definition per SMS Handbook Glossary, revised). Scenic Quality is described and measured through the Scenic Character Inventory information and the cumulative conditions of the two primary SMS indicators described in this Appendix, Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability.
- **Scenic Integrity:** *The degree to which a landscape is free from visible disturbances that detract from the natural or socially valued appearance* (revised definition for this Appendix). Scenic Integrity disturbances most typically result from human activities, but can also result from **natural events which exceed** the landscape's historic range of variability (HRV) in terms of magnitude, duration or intensity. An exception to this is direct human alterations that have become accepted over time as positive scenic character attributes; e.g., historic cabins, farms and ranches.
- **Scenic Stability:** *The degree to which the valued scenic character and its scenery attributes can be sustained through time and ecological progression* (new definition introduced in this Appendix).
- **Scenery Management:** *The art and science of arranging, planning and designing landscape attributes relative to the appearance of places and expanses in outdoor settings. Scenery management involves administering the use of National Forest System Lands within the context of multiple-use ecosystem management to ensure high quality scenery for the overall well-being and psychological welfare of society and future generations*" (definition per FSM 2380.5).
- **Sense of Place:** *"The identity of a place created by people's social meanings and attachments, including valued scenery and recreation settings, cultural and spiritual values, economic, social and biophysical characteristics."*



Scenery Indicators

Scenery is evaluated by two indicators which identify and measure the two distinct aspects of scenic quality: **(A) Scenic Integrity** – the degree to which a landscape is free from visible disturbances that detract from the natural or socially valued appearance, including any visible disturbances due to human activities or extreme natural events outside of HRV; and **(B) Scenic Stability** – the degree to which the valued scenic character and its scenery attributes can be sustained through time and ecological progression. In order to achieve and sustain the highest possible scenic quality, scenery evaluations for forest and project planning should include analysis and application of both indicators.

A. Scenic Integrity

Scenic Integrity measures the amount of natural or socially valued appearance in a landscape along with the amount of visual disturbance that contrasts with and detracts from that appearance (the valued scenic character) existing at the time of measurement. It provides information regarding the presence, intensity and dominance of human-caused visual disturbances in the landscape, such as timber harvesting, road construction, mining, utility corridors, recreation facilities, ski areas or other special uses.

Scenic integrity also applies to extreme scenery disturbances caused by natural events whenever these events are outside the historic range of variability (HRV) for the landscape. Large-scale or high intensity events such as catastrophic wildfires, insect/disease outbreaks, or wind/ice storms that exceed the HRV are considered negative visual disturbances to the valued scenic character, while those within HRV are considered positive elements.

Frame of Reference - Scenic Integrity measures these disturbance effects in degrees of consistency, harmony, dominance and contrast with the valued scenic character being viewed at the time of measurement. It indicates the presence and magnitude of visual disturbance (contrast in form, line, color, texture, pattern, size or scale) to that valued scenic character. It uses a graduated scale of six levels from ‘Very High Integrity’ to ‘No Integrity.’ The highest Scenic Integrity ratings apply to scenery that appears natural and unaltered, with little or no contrast to or disturbance of the valued scenery attributes. Scenic Integrity levels define the minimum degree of natural or socially valued appearance and disturbance that either exists now (Existing Scenic Integrity), or is a standard or guideline defining minimally acceptable levels (Minimum Scenic Integrity - MSI) that would be permitted on future management projects.

Scenic Integrity Levels

- **VERY HIGH INTEGRITY** - the valued scenery “appears natural or unaltered.” Only minute visual disturbances to the valued scenery, if any, are present. When used as a standard or guideline, this level should be achieved immediately upon project completion.
- **HIGH INTEGRITY** - the valued scenery “appears natural or unaltered,” yet visual disturbances are present; however, they remain unnoticed because they repeat the form, line, color, texture, pattern and scale of the valued scenery. When used as a standard or guideline, this level should be achieved as soon after project completion as possible or within 3 years maximum.
- **MODERATE INTEGRITY** – the valued scenery "appears slightly altered." Noticeable disturbances are minor and visually subordinate to the valued scenery because they repeat its form, line, color, texture, pattern and scale. When used as a standard or guideline, this level should be achieved as soon after project completion as possible or within 3 years maximum.
- **LOW INTEGRITY** - the valued scenery "appears moderately altered." Visual disturbances are co-dominant with the valued scenery, and may create a focal point of moderate contrast. Disturbances may reflect, introduce or “borrow” valued scenery attributes from outside the landscape being viewed (such as the size, shape, edge effect and pattern of natural openings; vegetative type changes or socially valued architectural styles). Scenery attributes borrowed from outside the viewed landscape appear compatible with or complimentary to those within. When used as a standard or guideline, this level should be achieved as soon after project completion as possible or within 3 years maximum.
- **VERY LOW INTEGRITY** - the valued scenery "appears heavily altered." Disturbances dominate the valued scenery being viewed; and they may only slightly borrow from, or reflect, valued scenery attributes within or beyond the viewed landscape (due to their size, shape, edge effect and pattern). However, disturbances must be shaped and blended with the natural terrain (primary landforms) so they do not dominate the overall composition when viewed as background (beyond 3-4 miles). Such disturbances might include unnatural appearing openings, roads, landform modifications or structures. If used as a standard or guideline, this level applies immediately upon project completion. However, its use as a management objective or standard/guideline is strongly discouraged; its primary use should be to inventory existing scenic integrity.
- **NO INTEGRITY** - the valued scenery “appears extremely altered.” Disturbances are excessively dominant regardless of viewing distance; and they borrow little if any form, line, color, texture, pattern or scale from the valued scenery within or near the vicinity. Scenery at this level needs rehabilitation. In addition, this level should only be used to inventory existing scenic integrity and never as a management objective or standard/guideline for future achievement.

B. Scenic Stability

Scenic Stability is an indicator of the ecological sustainability of the scenic character's valued attributes. **Scenic Stability does not measure or evaluate the entire ecological condition. Rather, it addresses how ecosystem dynamics will affect the long-term stability of the valued scenery and its attributes.** The highest Scenic Stability ratings apply where all the valued scenic character attributes, both existing and desired potential attributes, can be sustained through time and ecological progression. This indicator is based on an understanding of the ecological processes that support the valued scenery attributes.

The Scenic Character Inventory's "Ecosystem Context" section should describe how the dynamic processes, structures and functions in ecosystems sustain the valued scenic character. A balance between the condition of valued scenery attributes and the ecological stressors is necessary to sustain the valued scenery within dynamic ecosystems.

In areas where the sustainability of the valued scenic character is not at risk, a cursory Scenic Stability evaluation in qualitative, narrative form may be all that is necessary. If the valued scenic character or its scenery attributes are potentially at risk, then a more in-depth analysis and integration with other resources is recommended to adequately inform decision-makers about trends and foreseeable effects on the valued scenery.

Frame of Reference - Scenic Stability considers the condition of valued scenery attributes identified in the Scenic Character Description, evaluating whether their condition is within the historic range of variability (HRV), the range that indicates a properly functioning ecosystem. For example, the condition of forest vegetation-related scenery attributes (pattern, stand structure/density, species composition, etc.) gives an indication of whether the ecosystem is functioning properly and if the vegetation components of valued scenery can be sustained. If conditions are outside of HRV or are trending away from that range, then it is likely that scenery attributes will decline or be lost.

Scenic Stability also considers the known stressors that can affect scenery such as fire, insects/disease and infestations of noxious weeds. Stressors often exist at levels that do not threaten scenery attributes when the ecosystem is "healthy" and functioning within its HRV. When stressors exceed those levels, the expected change to the scenery attributes will be detrimental and cause the valued scenic character to decline along with the Scenic Stability rating.

Scenic Stability uses a graduated rating scale of six levels from 'Very High Stability' to 'No Stability' to identify the degree to which the socially valued scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are likely to be perpetuated within the ecosystem. The highest Scenic Stability ratings apply to scenery within resilient ecosystems that are functioning within their HRV and where all scenic character attributes are present and likely to be sustained for the foreseeable future. Standards or guidelines for Scenic Stability (Minimum Scenic Stability - MSS) guide planners by rating the likelihood that valued scenery attributes will be maintained in the future. Lower MSS levels indicate those areas where intensive

vegetation management practices to restore ecosystem health and function could also benefit scenery by restoring and/or maintaining into the future the valued attributes of scenic character. Areas with higher MSS levels need less intensive or minimal management to maintain their valued scenic character attributes.

Identifying existing Scenic Stability is critical to managing the valued scenery for the long term. This indicator enables managers to recognize trends and/or conditions that would cause improvement, loss or diminishment of the valued scenic character and its attributes. Managers can then make well-informed decisions to develop management strategies and implement projects that would restore or maintain the valued composition of scenery attributes.

Assessing Scenic Stability

With an understanding of the ecological context as well as the known scenery attribute conditions and ecosystem stressors, one can then begin to assess Scenic Stability through time. The assessment is an exercise in determining ecological risks and effects upon the valued scenery attributes, given known conditions and stressors that exist. Scenic Stability assessments may vary in detail from a cursory level (qualitative and in a uniform pattern) to a more in-depth level (quantitative, qualitative and with complex distribution). An example of an in-depth analysis is presented below.

Scenic Stability assessments evaluate dominant and minor as well as stable and vulnerable scenery attributes of the landscape. Since vegetation is usually a dominant scenery attribute and the landscape element most vulnerable to change and potential loss, Scenic Stability assessments focus primarily on vegetation. Typically, the more stable scenery attributes, such as water features and landform, require only a cursory evaluation since little or no change is expected. Evaluation of one or more dominant scenery attributes should be part of every Scenic Stability assessment; minor scenery attributes can be included as needed.

Scenic Stability Assessment for a particular landscape

Assessing Scenic Stability for a particular landscape involves two basic steps: (1) Determine the Risks to the valued attributes of scenic character based on their conditions and the ecosystem stressors affecting them, and (2) Determine the Scenic Stability of the scenic character based on the collective risks to its individual scenery attributes.

- 1. Scenery Attribute Risk Determination** - Refer to the Scenic Character Description and Ecosystem Context sections of the Scenic Character Inventory. Use this information to identify the dominant and minor scenery attributes of the valued scenic character and their ecological condition, stressors, HRV, etc., along with any available forest GIS data layers that indicate scenery attribute conditions and stressors.

Compile a list of the individual scenery attributes which collectively make up the valued scenic character being evaluated (this may include attributes that are currently absent). Then use the Individual Scenery Attribute Risk Determination table (Table 1) on the next page to determine the degree of “Risk” for each dominant scenery attribute that is vulnerable to excessive or adverse change. Note that in some cases even an isolated or infrequent, yet important, scenery feature such as a waterfall or rock outcrop may qualify as a “dominant” attribute. First, qualify the condition of each scenery attribute as either strong, fair or poor based on available information from the Ecosystem Context section and/or forest data. Then qualify the ecosystem stress on each attribute as minor, moderate or severe. The “Risk” for each individual scenery attribute is shown in the corresponding box as either “No Risk,” “Low Risk,” “Moderate Risk” or “High Risk.” It may be desirable to weigh some data more heavily than others due to their influence on the sustainability of the individual scenery attributes.

Table 1 – Individual Scenery Attribute Risk Determination

Scenery ATTRIBUTE RISK Determination				
Scenery ATTRIBUTE CONDITION	ECOSYSTEM STRESS upon the Scenery Attribute			
		MINOR	MODERATE	SEVERE
	STRONG	No Risk	Low Risk	Moderate Risk
	F A I R	Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk
	P O O R	Moderate Risk	High Risk	High Risk

The following two descriptions are examples of **Individual Scenery Attribute Risk Determination** for dominant scenery attributes.

- Scenery Attribute: open, park-like, big-tree appearance with a ponderosa pine-dominant, mixed-conifer forest and a high frequency/low intensity fire-influenced landscape** – In this warm, dry pine/mixed conifer forest, the open, park-like, big-tree appearance is a valued and dominant scenery attribute that is vulnerable to excessive change or loss. The practice of historic fire suppression in these landscapes has allowed non-fire resistant tree species to encroach into the scenic pine and mixed conifer stands. Such encroachment diminishes the valued scenic character by eliminating the open, park-like appearance. Stand density and species composition here is known to be greater than what is historically characteristic (HRV) and therefore not sustainable.

This “overstocked” condition allows the inevitable wildfires to more dramatically alter the forest canopy by burning much more intensely and across a larger area. The history of lightning strikes in this area is known to be high, and the fire return interval is frequent (10-30 yrs). The fire condition class indicates that a fire will burn

not only small trees and undergrowth but is likely to kill entire stands of fully mature, fire-resistant trees that would have historically survived a low-intensity fire. Excessively large forest areas would likely be left without canopy cover, creating openings that are uncharacteristic of HRV landscape patterns and the valued scenic character. Both the condition and the ecosystem stressors substantially threaten the ecological stability of this dominant scenery attribute which could be lost for many decades.

To determine the Risk for this scenery attribute, the condition (excessively dense forest) is qualified as “**fair**” and the ecosystem stressors (fire, insects and disease) are qualified as “**moderate**.” Using Table 1, the Individual Scenery Attribute Risk is therefore “**Moderate Risk**.”

- **Scenery Attribute: aspen groves within a high frequency/low intensity, fire-influenced landscape** – A dominant scenery attribute that is vulnerable to adverse change or loss in this landscape is the aspen groves, which provide valued scenic variety in color and texture to a mixed conifer forest. Many aspen stands show signs of over-maturity and lack of new growth. Fire suppression and past over-grazing have prevented renewal of aspen stands. The existing “**fair**” scenery attribute condition (absence of aspen renewal) and the “**moderate**” ecosystem stressor (fire suppression and over-grazing) both pose a risk to the sustainability of aspen as a functioning scenery attribute. The continued loss of aspen will result in more continuous stands of coniferous forests with less variety in color and texture. Therefore the Individual Scenery Attribute Risk (from Table 1) is “**Moderate Risk**.”

The above descriptions also serve as examples of overall cursory, qualitative assessments that would suffice when a more in-depth analysis is neither possible nor necessary. This type of cursory, qualitative assessment can be applied to either entire landscapes or individual landscape analysis units. Analysis units may vary widely depending on a forest’s interdisciplinary analysis and available data. A cursory Scenic Stability assessment could evaluate an entire landscape as a single analysis unit. However, a more detailed assessment could be done using ecological land unit (ELU) polygons or polygons generated by other GIS data to analyze and develop a Scenic Stability rating for numerous analysis unit polygons within an entire landscape. How to determine the Scenic Stability level for each analysis unit is explained below.

2. **Scenic Stability Level Determination** - The ecosystem “Risks” to a landscape’s scenery attributes are translated into a single Scenic Stability rating by applying Table 2 (Scenic Stability Level Determination) on page 17. A single Scenic Stability Level may be determined for an entire landscape or, where greater detail is desired and possible, a level may be determined for each analysis unit (polygon) within a landscape.

The following simplified Lake Tahoe Basin example explains a more quantitative approach to Scenic Stability Level Determination for an entire landscape. It begins with the Individual Scenery Attribute Risk (using Table 1, page 13) for three dominant scenery attributes plus two minor scenery attributes in the Lake Tahoe Basin landscape.

Dominant Scenery Attributes

- Moderately dissected and glaciated mountainous landform encircling a large and clear high-elevation lake – **Low Risk** based on a cursory evaluation of trends that indicate lack of foreseeable change.
- Open, park-like big-tree appearance within a mixed conifer forest canopy – **Moderate Risk** based on an in-depth evaluation of the vegetation condition compared to its HRV as well as its ecosystem stressors of fire and insects/disease.
- Scattered aspen groves – **Moderate Risk** based on an in-depth evaluation of the condition of the vegetation compared to its HRV as well as its ecosystem stressors, especially fire-suppression and over-grazing.

Minor Scenery Attributes

- Scattered small meadows – **High Risk** based on cursory ecosystem trend information about conifer encroachment compared to its HRV.
- Riparian stringers and streams – **Low Risk** based on cursory ecosystem information.

The “Risk” for all the dominant attributes is combined into a single Scenic Stability Level by using Table 2 (Scenic Stability Level Determination) on page 17. There may be one Scenic Stability Level for an entire landscape (single analysis unit), as in this simplified Lake Tahoe Basin example where the attributes are more or less evenly distributed across the entire landscape; or each analysis unit (polygon) within a larger landscape may have its own Scenic Stability Level, depending on the desired detail of the assessment. In the latter case, the Scenic Stability Levels will vary across the landscape depending on the combination of attributes that occur in each analysis unit.

In this simplified Lake Tahoe Basin example, the dominant landform attribute has **Low Risk**. The two dominant vegetation attributes have **Moderate Risk**. To combine these risks into one Scenic Stability Level, see Table 2. The left column, “ECOSYSTEM RISK to the Dominant Scenery Attributes,” shows a range of risks with the lowest risk at the top of the column. Select the box that best describes the set of Risks to the dominant attributes of the analysis unit. In most cases there will not be a perfect match between the maximum risks described in the boxes of this column and the set of Individual Scenery Attribute Risks for each analysis unit. **The most appropriate ECOSYSTEM RISK box will describe Risks that are equal to or greater than and closest to the combined Individual Scenery Attribute Risks of the landscape.**

The **NO Risk to ALL** and **LOW risk to ALL** boxes both identify maximum risks that are lower than the Moderate and Low Risks of this simplified Lake Tahoe Basin example. However, the next box down, **HIGH Risk to a FEW**, easily accommodates the Moderate Risks of the vegetation attributes. Therefore this box most closely describes the collective Ecosystem Risk to the Lake Tahoe Basin’s dominant scenery attributes and overall scenic character.

Continuing with Table 2, the columns to the right of the **ECOSYSTEM RISK** column show the corresponding **STABILITY of the Dominant Scenery Attributes** and the **SCENIC STABILTY LEVEL**. Given the Ecosystem Risk of this example, **HIGH Risk to a FEW**, the overall Scenic Stability Level for the Lake Tahoe Basin landscape is **MODERATE STABILITY**. A narrative description of the Scenic Stability Levels is shown on page 18.

There may be cases where influence of the minor scenery attributes on the aesthetics of the overall scenic character is very significant and/or the stability of their conditions and ecosystem stressors are very different from those of the dominant scenery attributes. If so, consider shifting the overall landscape’s Scenic Stability Level up or down one level. Based on the High and Low Risk of the two minor scenery attributes in the Lake Tahoe Basin example, no further adjustment to the Scenic Stability Level is necessary.



Table 2 – Scenic Stability Level Determination

ECOSYSTEM RISK ¹ to the Dominant Scenery Attributes	STABILITY ² of the Dominant Scenery Attributes	SCENIC STABILITY LEVEL
LOW Risk to ALL ³ (includes dominant & minor attributes)	ALL are Stable	VERY HIGH STABILITY
LOW Risk to ALL	ALL are Stable	HIGH STABILITY
HIGH Risk to a FEW	MOST are Stable	MODERATE STABILITY
HIGH Risk to SOME	SOME are Stable	LOW STABILITY
HIGH Risk to MOST	FEW are Stable	VERY LOW STABILITY
HIGH Risk to ALL	NONE are Stable	NO STABILITY

¹ **“ECOSYSTEM RISK”** identifies the maximum (most severe) degree of risk to some or all of the dominant scenery attributes in each analysis unit polygon. For example, “HIGH risk to a FEW” means that 10-40% of all the dominant attributes are at high risk while the remaining 60-90% ranges from NO risk up to MODERATE risk. For ease of analysis, the amount of the dominant scenery attributes likely to be affected can be expressed in a range as follows:

- **“ALL”** means 90-100% of all the dominant attributes
- **“MOST”** means 60-90% of all the dominant attributes
- **“SOME”** means 40-60% of all the dominant attributes
- **“FEW”** means 10-40% of all the dominant attributes
- **“NONE”** means 0-10% of all the dominant attributes

² The word **“Stable”** in these columns refers to scenery attributes with MODERATE, LOW or NO risk (HIGH risk attributes are not stable).

³ This is the only box that considers both the dominant and minor scenery attributes in order to correspond with the definition of VERY HIGH STABILITY.

Scenic Stability Levels

- VERY HIGH STABILITY – All dominant and minor scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are present and are likely to be sustained.
- HIGH STABILITY – All dominant scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are present and are likely to be sustained. However, there may be scenery attribute conditions and ecosystem stressors that present a low risk to the sustainability of dominant scenery attributes.
- MODERATE STABILITY – Most dominant scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are present and are likely to be sustained; a few may have been lost or are in serious decline.
- LOW STABILITY - Some dominant scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are present and are likely to be sustained. Known scenery attribute conditions and ecosystem stressors may seriously threaten or have already eliminated the others.
- VERY LOW STABILITY – Most dominant scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are seriously threatened or absent due to their conditions and ecosystem stressors, and are not likely to be sustained. The few that remain may be moderately threatened but are likely to be sustained.
- NO STABILITY – All dominant scenery attributes of the valued scenic character are absent or seriously threatened by their conditions and ecosystem stressors. None are likely to be sustained, except relatively permanent attributes such as landforms.



Scenic Stability Evaluation Case Study

The following case study illustrates a more comprehensive, quantitative and spatially complex Scenic Stability evaluation for the Lake Tahoe Basin. The two dominant vegetation attributes (described on pages 13-14) of big-tree character within a mixed conifer forest canopy and scattered aspen groves were combined into one attribute of vegetation, which was evaluated in depth. The Basin's other scenery attributes were given a cursory evaluation only.

First, consistent with step 1 – Scenery Attribute Risk Determination, the condition and stressors of the vegetation scenery attribute were evaluated. Existing forest GIS data from the Lake Tahoe Basin Firehatched Assessment representing elements of vegetation condition and ecological stressors on vegetation (see Figure 1- Vegetation Condition, Figure 2 – Insect & Disease Risk, and Figure 3 – Fire Stress, pages 20-22) were used to determine the vegetation scenery attribute's Risk. The three data layers, one depicting attribute condition and two depicting ecosystem stress, were overlaid to create Scenery Attribute Risk polygons representing variations in Risk to the vegetation scenery attribute across the Lake Tahoe Basin. In this example insect and disease stress was weighted more heavily than vegetation condition or fire stress.

Next, consistent with Step 2 – Scenic Stability Level Determination, the vegetation Scenery Attribute Risk polygons were combined with the Low landform Risk and applied to Table 2 (Scenic Stability Level Determination). The result was a Scenic Stability Level determination for each polygon, shown in Figure 4- Existing Scenic Stability (page 23), that reflects the collective risk of all the dominant scenery attributes across the entire Lake Tahoe Basin analysis unit.

This GIS layer for Existing Scenic Stability, along with a Scenic Character Inventory and GIS layers for Existing Scenic Integrity and Scenic Classes, would complete an SMS Inventory.



Figure 1 - Vegetation Condition

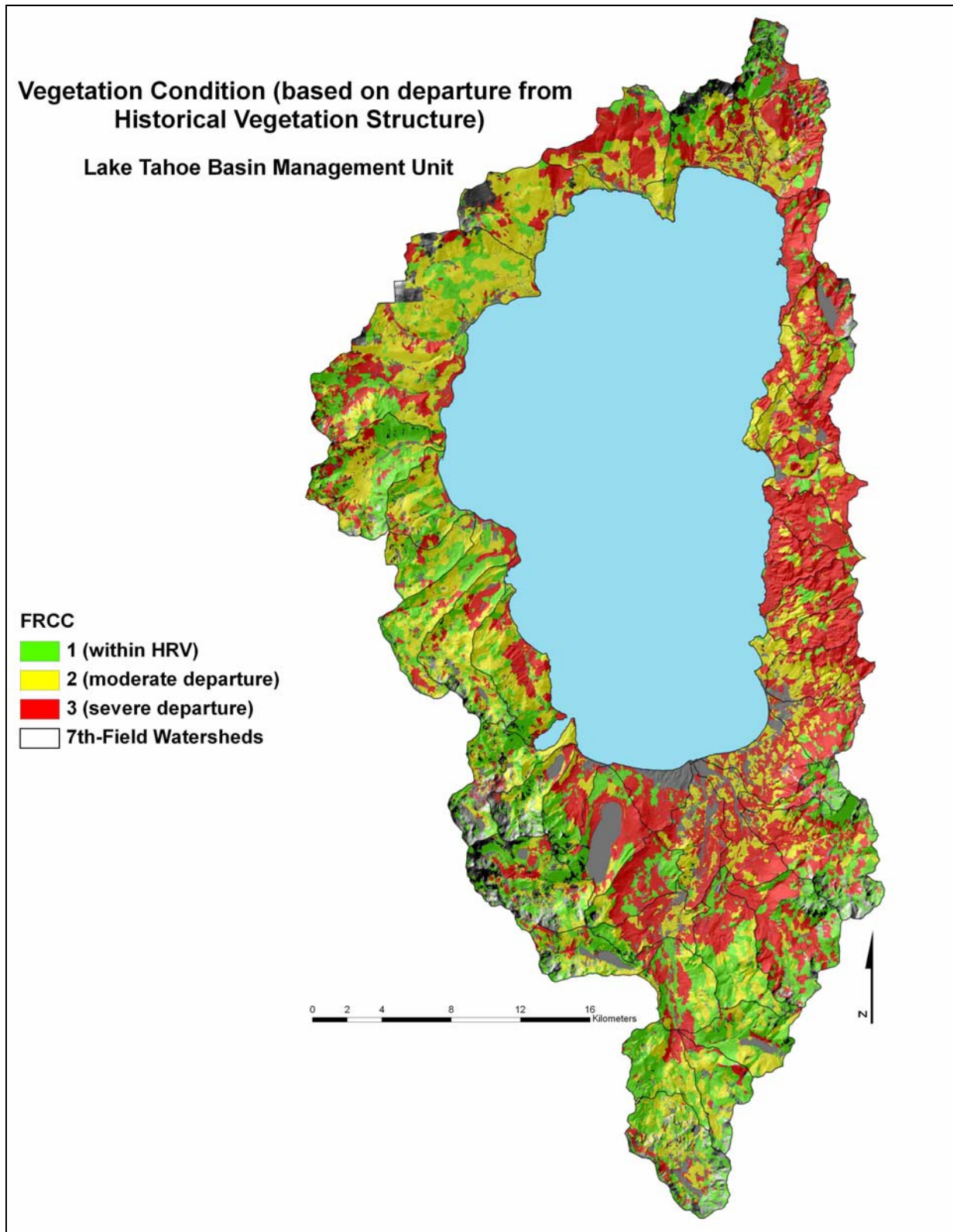


Figure 2 – Insect & Disease Stress

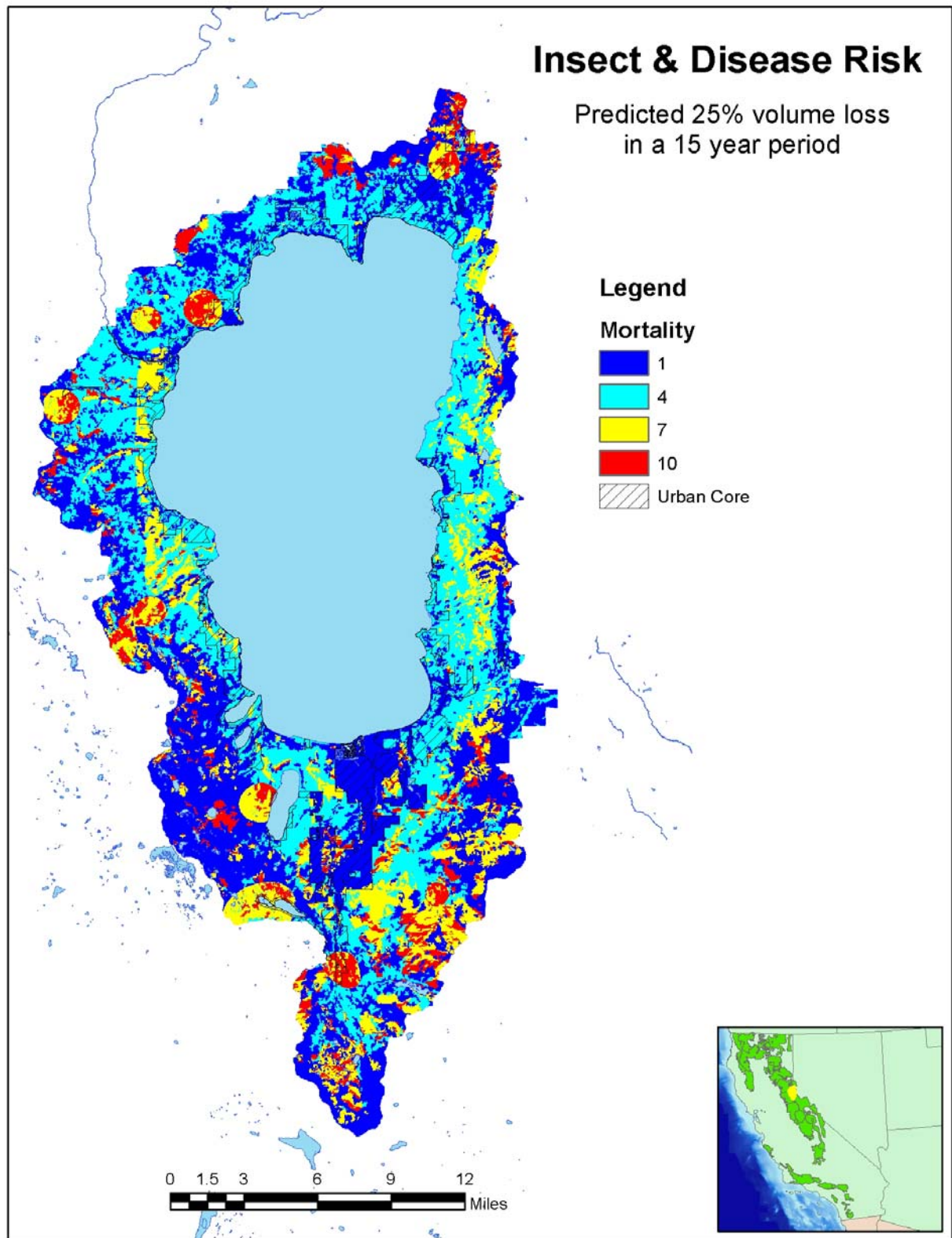


Figure 3 - Fire Stress

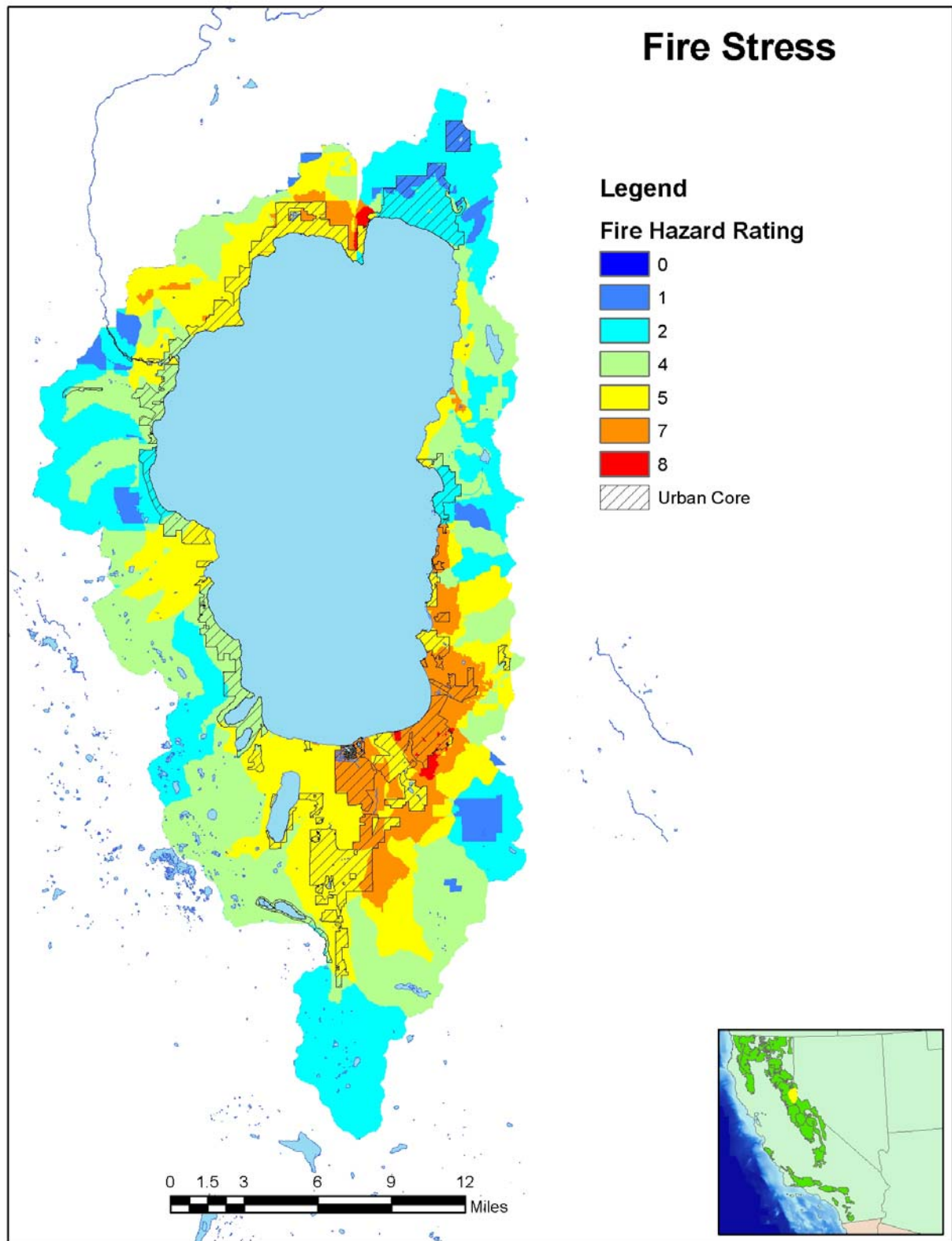
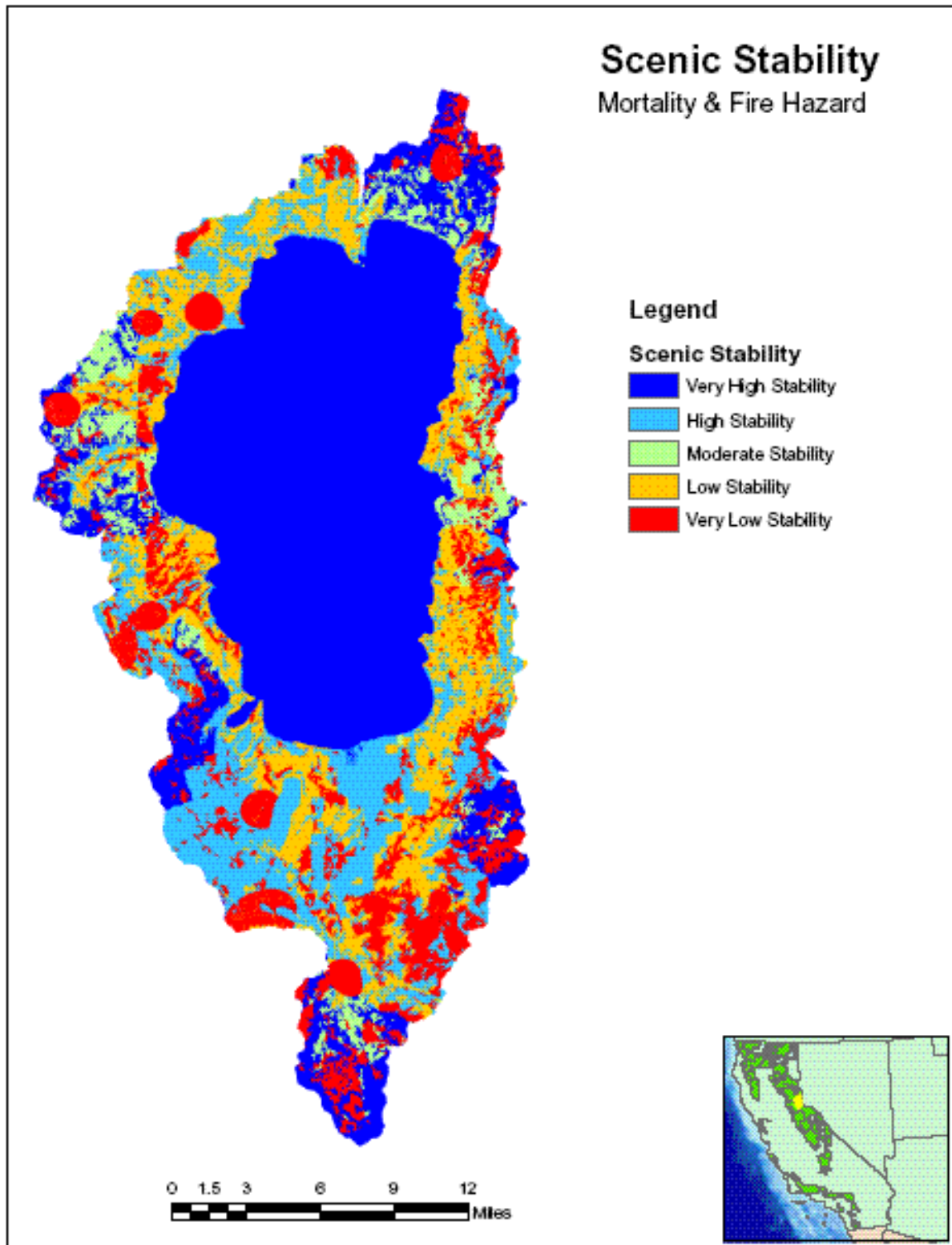


Figure 4 – Existing Scenic Stability



Applying SMS in Forest (LMP) & Project Planning

The purpose of Chapter 5 (Scenery Management System Application) in the SMS Handbook was to integrate scenery with other resources in forest and project planning. When it was written, the SMS Handbook addressed planning using the 1982 Planning Rule. The original purpose of this section of Appendix J was to provide similar guidance on how to apply SMS to the 2005 Planning Rule; however, as of April 2007 the 2005 Planning Rule has been enjoined by the Northern District Court in California. It is unknown if a new planning rule will reflect the structure and philosophy of the 2005 Planning Rule. In the interim, WO direction is to use the 2000 planning rule, as clarified by the 2004 Interpretive Rule. In this case, the 1982 planning rule's planning procedures may be used for plan amendments and revisions.

Development and implementation of forest plan direction for scenic quality requires application of landscape planning and design skills to restore, maintain and enhance valued scenery with a project by project approach. In addition, NEPA mandates federal agencies to develop methodologies for managing scenery to assure "aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings" for all Americans. It also requires an interdisciplinary approach and "the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts in planning and decision-making." Many existing USFS publications, along with this Appendix J, present methodologies which fulfill this NEPA mandate. The National Forest Landscape Management Volume 1 handbook of 1973 provides an essential foundation for scenery analysis and environmental design techniques, including the primary concepts, elements, principles and variables of the scenery resource. Subsequent Visual Management System handbooks offer specific design approaches for key activities that influence scenery in national forests: Timber, Fire, Roads, Recreation, Utilities, Ski Areas, Range, etc. The SMS Handbook offers additional information on meeting Scenic Integrity Objectives (now termed Minimum Scenic Integrity (MSI)) in Chapter 2 page 2-5 and meeting Desired Scenic Character in Chapter 5 pages 5-5 to 5-9.

SMS concepts can be applied at any planning scale (project, mid-scale or forest planning). Professional evaluation of the landscape using the SMS Inventory and other resource information identifies the existing, potential and desired scenery conditions. These scenery conditions are considered with other resource conditions to develop the LMP forest-wide or management area Desired Conditions (DC) or goals. Scenery-specific Desired Scenic Character (Desired SC), Scenic Character Goals (SC Goals) and standards or guidelines can also be developed through extensive interaction between the planning team, the public and the Responsible Official. Desired SC, SC Goals and standards or guidelines should be based on analysis of all the SMS Inventory elements and integrated with other ecosystem desired conditions and goals. SC Goals and Standards or guidelines identify the actions and parameters to achieve the Desired SC, which is part of the forest-wide DCs/goals.

Desired Conditions - During forest or project planning, the planning team develops an overall vision for the Forest Service unit or project, which includes descriptions of Desired Conditions (1982 Planning Rule) integrating all resource areas including scenery. The

planning team then develops a strategy for how to achieve the DCs/goals. The scenery-specific elements of Desired SC and SC Goals which support and help describe the DC are part of this strategy. The forest-wide and management-area DC statements should address the Desired SC. The following is an example of a DC statement for scenery:

“The desired scenic character is ecologically stable and displays minimal visual disruption resulting from disturbance events.”

Desired Scenic Character - The Desired SC identifies the most aesthetically desirable set of valued and sustainable scenic character attributes possible given the multiple land uses compatible with a particular landscape. The Desired SC is achieved through programs and project-level activities that implement forest-wide SC Goals (scenery management strategies and prescriptions) and standards or guidelines for scenery (including MSI and MSS) to increase the attractiveness, visibility and sustainability of all the scenery attributes that are possible within the limits of the DC. An example of Desired SC is the following statement:

“The XYZ National Forest desired scenic character includes open, park-like stands dominated by ponderosa pine within a mixed conifer forest around a large, clear mountain lake.”

Scenic Character Goals – SC Goals are defined in the SMS Handbook as management prescriptions designed to maintain or modify the existing scenic character to a desired future state (Definition for Landscape Character Goals p. Glossary - 3) and help meet LMP objectives and DC. They identify scenery management activities to restore, maintain or enhance the positive or valued scenic identity of the Desired SC. SC Goals typically include temporal, quantitative and/or qualitative recommendations across a forest or project area, especially within high priority landscapes. The following are examples of SC Goals for a scenic byway corridor:

“In order to achieve the Desired Scenic Character, enhance 5,000 acres of immediate foreground by increasing visibility and diversity of the forest understory and opening views to distant landscapes. Restore 3,000 acres, currently meeting the Low or No Scenic Integrity levels, to meet the long-term standard of High Scenic Integrity. Restore 12,000 acres to meet the High Scenic Stability level within 10 years.”

For the Lake Tahoe Basin, one Scenic Character Goal might be to selectively remove the unstable, overly dense mixed conifer understory in order to restore and sustain big-tree character and open, park-like stands dominated by jeffrey pine.

To develop SC Goals it is necessary to first identify where and what type of scenery management actions may be most appropriate to achieve the Desired SC. Tables 3 and 4 on pages 27-28 below (Prioritization of Scenic Integrity Management Actions and Prioritization of Scenic Stability Management Actions) help identify appropriate management actions. They evaluate Existing Scenic Integrity, Existing Scenic Stability and

Scenic Classes together to identify potential management actions. Management actions for improving Scenic Integrity may be very different and even conflict with management actions to improve the existing Scenic Character or Scenic Stability, so all SMS inventory elements and other desired conditions need to be carefully considered.

Standards or Guidelines - In addition, the LMP planning team develops standards or guidelines for scenery. Standards or guidelines serve as technical and scientific specifications for project design and implementation to achieve the LMP Desired Conditions. Maps of Minimum Scenic Integrity (MSI) and Minimum Scenic Stability (MSS) and their definitions provide foundational scenery-related standards or guidelines for project and activity design. Other standards or guidelines may also be desirable. An example might be the following:

“Above-ground transmission corridors should be avoided in areas designated as High and Very High Minimum Scenic Integrity.”

Mapping MSI and MSS levels involves balancing public preferences and thresholds for scenic quality with: a) the ecosystem’s inherent ability to support the valued scenery and b) the type and intensity of proposed land uses and management activities that may affect valued scenery. This is best done through an interdisciplinary landscape evaluation of the Scenic Character Inventory, Scenic Classes map, Existing Scenic Integrity map, Existing Scenic Stability map, Scenic Character Inventory, constituent preferences and other resource opportunities and limitations.

Minimum Scenic Integrity is achieved through activities that reduce or minimize visual disturbance in the landscape. The SMS Handbook, Scenic Integrity Chapter p. 2-5, includes design recommendations to “repeat” or copy the existing valued scenery or nearby valued scenery and to “shape and blend” proposed activities with dominant elements of the valued scenic character. In exceptional cases, such as where extreme fire hazard threatens the ecosystem, substantial changes in scenic integrity may be necessary to move existing ecosystem conditions towards Desired Conditions. In these cases, achievement of desired Scenic Integrity may not be possible in the short term, so establishment of both short-term and long-term MSI guidelines may be necessary. For example a short-term MSI guideline that is lower than the long-term desired scenic integrity could be appropriate in cases where large expanses of high-risk, excessively dense canopy need to be aggressively thinned to achieve a sustainable, open, park-like condition. Refer to SMS Handbook Chapter 5 for information regarding Alternative evaluation (pages 5-5 through 5-9) for Scenic Integrity, and apply similar procedures for Scenic Stability.

Minimum Scenic Stability is accomplished through project-level activities that enhance, maintain or restore the long-term sustainability of existing scenery attributes and their overall composition (the valued scenic character). Activities may also include reintroduction of valued scenery attributes that are currently absent. Achieving MSS will typically involve activities that both improve the condition of scenery attributes and reduce

ecosystem stressors on those attributes, such as the thinning of excessively dense and fire-prone forest canopy conditions.

Monitoring - To monitor Desired Scenic Character, Scenic Character Goals, Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability, use procedures similar to those described in the SMS Handbook Chapter 5 discussion regarding “Achievement of Landscape Character Goals and Monitoring.” (See SMS Handbook pages 5-9 through 5-11.) GIS tools and digital imagery, not mentioned in the SMS Handbook, are now available to facilitate and expedite monitoring.



Development of Scenery Management Priorities

The following tables provide a tool to prioritize activities to restore, maintain or enhance Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability. In addition, be aware that strategies for achieving Desired Scenic Character also need to be developed in order to implement Scenic Character Goals.

Table 3 – Prioritization of Scenic Integrity Management Actions

Existing Scenic INTEGRITY	Very High/High Scenic Integrity	Moderate Scenic Integrity	Low/Very Low Scenic Integrity	No Integrity
Scenic Class 1	Maintain or Enhance	Recommend Restoration	Restore	Aggressively Restore
Scenic Class 2	Maintain or Enhance	Recommend Restoration	Restore	Aggressively Restore
Scenic Class 3	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration	Aggressively Restore
Scenic Class 4	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration	Restore
Scenic Class 5	Maintain	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Restore
Scenic Class 6	Maintain	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration
Scenic Class 7	Maintain	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration

RED/RED = HIGH priority to achieve Desired Future Conditions

GOLD/OLIVE = MODERATE priority to achieve Desired Future Conditions

BLUE/GREEN = LOW priority to achieve Desired Future Conditions

Maintain = Perform activities to prolong current stability or integrity.

Enhance = Perform activities to further increase scenic quality, which is already at or near Desired Future Conditions, by increasing the visibility and stability of the valued attributes or reducing scenic disturbances.

Restore = Perform activities to raise the stability or integrity from the existing diminished or impaired conditions towards the Desired Future Conditions.

Table 4 – Prioritization of Scenic Stability Management Actions

Existing Scenic STABILITY	Very High/High Scenic Stability	Moderate Scenic Stability	Low/Very Low Scenic Stability	No Stability
Scenic Class 1	Maintain or Enhance	Recommend Restoration	Restore	Aggressively Restore
Scenic Class 2	Maintain or Enhance	Recommend Restoration	Restore	Aggressively Restore
Scenic Class 3	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration	Aggressively Restore
Scenic Class 4	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration	Restore
Scenic Class 5	Maintain	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Restore
Scenic Class 6	Maintain	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration
Scenic Class 7	Maintain	Maintain	Consider Restoration	Recommend Restoration

Scenic Stability Evaluation Case Study (cont.)

Returning to the Lake Tahoe Basin example, the following maps illustrate the application of Table 4 to develop scenery management program objectives for Scenic Stability. Figure 5 on the next page shows Scenic Classes 1 and 2 overlaying Existing Scenic Stability (Figure 4, page 23). Figure 6 on page 31 shows the scenery management program objectives for Scenic Stability which were developed by combining information from Table 4 and Figure 5. The red areas (Aggressive Restoration) show where Scenic Stability is very low and Scenic Class is high. These areas have the greatest need to restore their Scenic Stability. A similar map could be made using Table 3 to identify areas with the greatest need to restore Scenic Integrity. Since actions that benefit one indicator may adversely affect the other, it is important to consider their interactions in order to determine an appropriate balance and schedule for achieving these objectives.

Figure 5 - Scenic Class and Scenic Stability

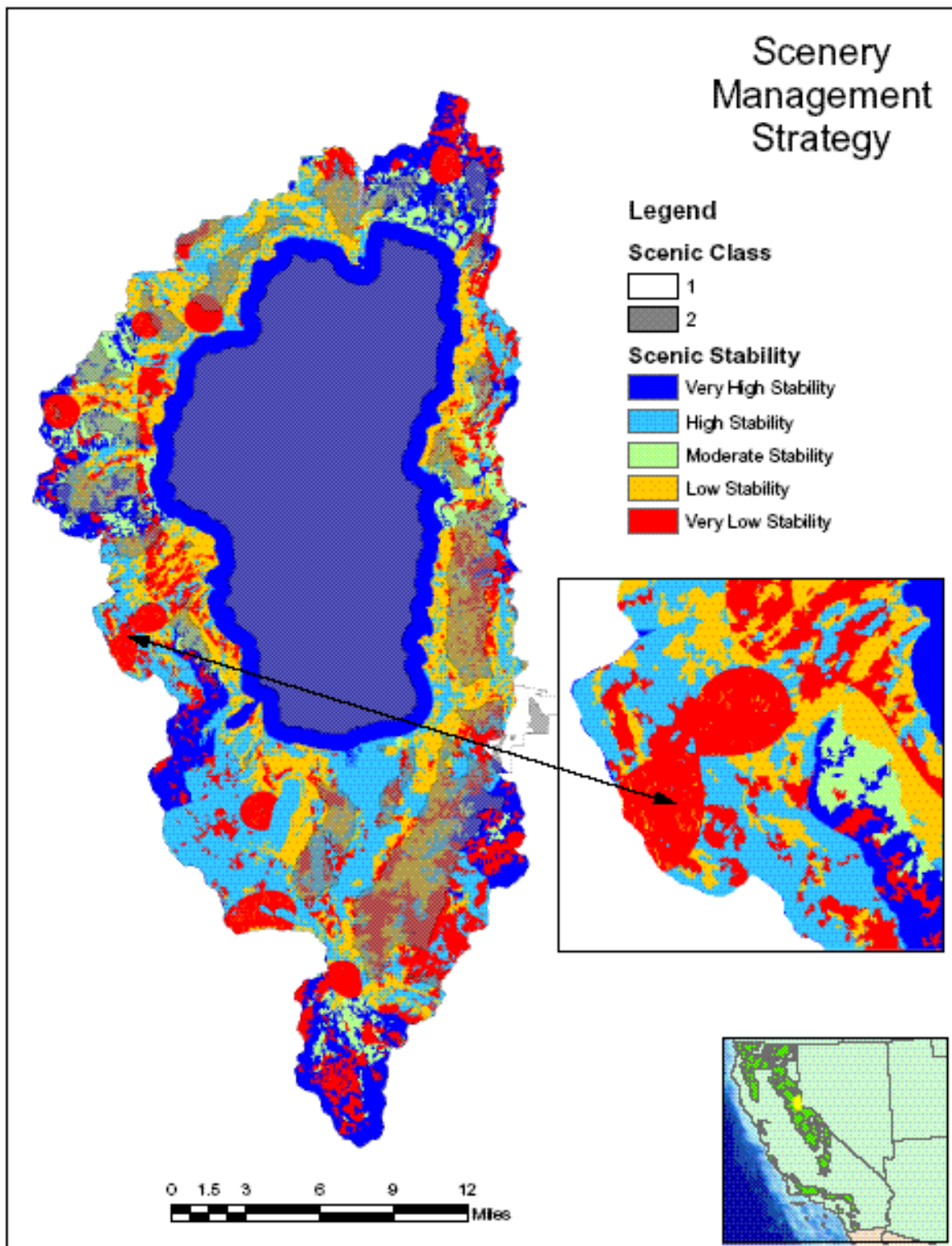
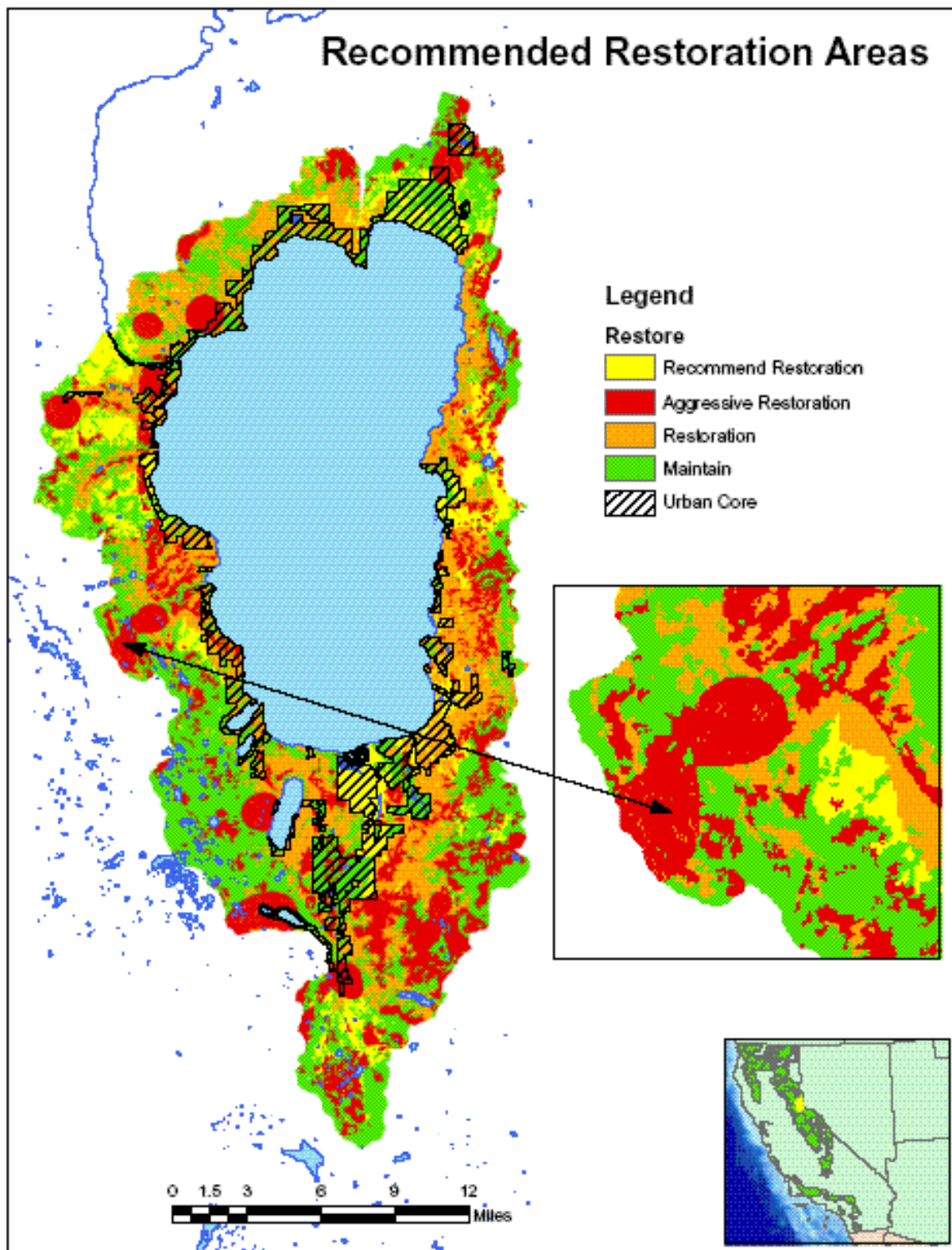


Figure 6 - Prioritized Scenery Management Actions



Quick Guide for Scenic Stability Assessments

1. Scenery Attribute Risk Determination

- Identify dominant and minor scenery attributes across each analysis unit(s).
- Use Table 1 on page 13 and steps a-c below to determine the presence and degree of Risk for each dominant scenery attribute:
 - a. Evaluate and map the conditions of each scenery attribute as strong, fair and poor using forest data.
 - b. Evaluate and map the ecosystem stress on each scenery attribute as minor, moderate and severe using forest data.
 - c. Using Table 1, map the Individual Scenery Attribute Risk for each attribute in each analysis unit by selecting the box at the intersection of the appropriate attribute condition row and ecosystem stress column.

2. Scenic Stability Level Determination

- Use Table 2 on page 17 to combine the Individual Scenery Attribute Risks for all dominant attributes into a single Scenic Stability rating for each analysis unit.
 - a. First, refer to the left column (“ECOSYSTEM RISK to the Dominant Scenery Attributes”) and select the box which describes the level of Ecosystem Risk that is **equal to or greater than and closest to** the Individual Scenery Attribute Risks of all dominant scenery attributes.
 - b. The box in the middle column to the right of the box selected for the Ecosystem Risk above translates the Ecosystem Risk into Stability of the dominant scenery attributes.
 - c. The corresponding box in the right column translates Ecosystem Risk and Stability of the dominant scenery attributes into a Scenic Stability Level for the analysis unit. Map Scenic Stability for the SMS Inventory.

Quick Guide for Planning Applications

- With the interdisciplinary team and the SMS Inventory information, develop and map integrated Minimum Scenic Integrity and Minimum Scenic Stability standards/guidelines.
- Develop integrated scenery management strategies and Scenic Character Goals (prescriptions) to identify the actions necessary to achieve the Desired Scenic Character that is the Desired Future Condition for scenery.
 - a. Overlay a Scenic Classes GIS layer with GIS layers for existing Scenic Integrity and existing Scenic Stability (created as described in #2 above).
 - b. Create GIS layers or lists of prioritized scenery management actions for both Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability using Tables 3 and 4 (pages 27-28).
- Describe the Desired Future Conditions for scenery using the elements of Desired Scenic Character, Scenic Character Goals, Scenic Integrity and Scenic Stability.