

Scenery

Sierra Club/Alliance for the Wild Rockies

Issue

Objectors believe scenery protections in the revised forest plan cannot be enforced.

Response:

The Forest Service provides for scenery management as outlined in Forest Service Manual 2380 – Landscape Management, and Landscape Aesthetics - A Handbook for Scenery Management (Agricultural Handbook Number 701). The directives comply with statutory requirements including the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and rules at Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219, among others.

The 1982 Planning Rule (Sec.219.21) requires visual resource be inventoried and evaluated as an integrated part of evaluating alternatives in the forest planning process, addressing both the landscape's visual attractiveness and the public's visual expectation. Section 13.13a of FSH1909.12_Chapter 10 Land Management Planning, Recreation and Scenery, states “when pertinent to the issues involved in the planning process, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and the Scenery Management System (SMS) should be used to describe recreational desired conditions and objectives.”

In 1995, the Forest Service replaced its previous scenery management system, the Visual Management System, with the Scenery Management System (SMS). These systems are structured to primarily emphasize “natural appearing” scenery, but the SMS recognizes the positive scenic values associated with some human modified (cultural) features and settings that are valued for their scenic influence. The SMS allows for a “seamless” analysis and conservation of aesthetic values, and provides a systematic approach for determining the relative value and importance of scenery on National Forest System lands.

The SMS is built on foundational concepts of primary aesthetic qualities (e.g., naturalness, variety), regional context (landscape character and sense of place), criterion judgments (scenic attractiveness and integrity), and local sensitivity to change (landscape visibility and constituent analysis). These basic concepts are well-corroborated by empirical research on people’s scenic quality perceptions and as a foundation for aesthetic landscape assessments are widely accepted as valid and critical components for determining scenic character in forest-level landscape planning.

The SMS has been legally accepted under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as the “best available professional practice” for addressing scenic character in national forest planning. As a NEPA-compliant method of assessment, the SMS provides a logical and efficient approach based on well-accepted concepts that can be consistently applied by trained experts to produce desired outcomes.

Five levels of desired scenic integrity (scenic integrity objectives, “SIOs”) are used to manage the Colville NF: very high, high, moderate, low, and very low. These objectives determine how much alteration from the landscape character is permissible, according to USDA Handbook 701 “Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management” (USDA FS 1995).

In addition to including the full range of SIOs, the Colville Plan provides tables that show SIO level(s) prescribed for each management area. All Colville ranger districts are mapped and the maps highlight SIOs with concern level travel routes. The Plan has scenery plan components including desired conditions, objectives, standards and several guidelines. Scenery Management monitoring is referenced in Table B-1. “List of proposed management actions.”

The Colville Plan SIOs are mapped and defined (similar to other plan allocations – ROS, suitability, etc.). This makes it possible to track whether future projects and activities are consistent with relevant plan direction. Additional SMS-related plan components (standards, guidelines, suitability) help with enforcement by giving more specific direction to future projects and activities. In addition, by including scenery in its monitoring plan, the Colville is making it possible to track whether the Forest is meeting plan direction for scenery.

Conclusion:

Federal statutes require the USFS to manage for scenic impacts on NFS lands and the Scenery Management System (SMS) is legally accepted under NEPA as the best available professional practice for inventorying, assessing, managing and monitoring for scenic character in national forest planning. The Colville Plan adequately provides for scenery and meets requirements of NFMA and applicable regulations.

The forest’s analysis and LMP direction pertaining scenery were done in accordance with USDA and FS directives.