Flathead National Forest Plan

Scenery Management Monitoring Guide and Evaluation of Results (MON-SCN)

Point of Contact

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Introduction

This document provides the instructions and information needed to address the monitoring of trends in scenic character of the Forest. The monitoring items included in this document are listed below:

Monitoring Item and Question (Chapter 5 of Flathead Forest Plan)
MON-SCN-01. Is the existing condition and trend of the scenic character meeting or moving toward desired conditions?

Purpose and Outline of this Document

Each individual monitoring item in the Forest Plan monitoring program (Chapter 5 of the Plan) has been addressed in a document such as this one, which is intended to serve as the primary location for information needed to conduct the monitoring and to record the results. It is designed to aid in the tracking and preservation of monitoring methods, data and results over the life of the plan. It is anticipated that these documents would be revisited and used as a guide to conduct the monitoring for each biennial reporting; to see past results and record new results; and updated where needed based on recommendations for change in the previous biennial report.

This document is **NOT** the final Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report (MER), but it should contain most if not all the information needed to prepare that report, and functions as project record material for the biennial MER.

Each monitoring item in this document is organized into five main sections:

- **Introduction:** Key information from the monitoring plan (i.e. indicators, plan component being monitored, data source/collection)
- **Methods**: Detailed information on how the monitoring will be accomplished, the intent of the selected indicators, data sources and confidence levels, etc.
- **Results:** Summary of the monitoring data used and the results for the current biennial monitoring report.
- **Discussion of Results**: A fact-based discussion of results. A list of general questions (see below) and in some cases more specific resource-based questions are provided to help guide this discussion

- **Evaluation of Results for Adaptive Management Finding:** evaluation of what the results mean in terms of management decisions. This information is incorporated into the Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report.

SCENERY MANAGEMENT MONITORING (MON-SCN)

MON-SCN-01. Is the existing condition and trend of the scenic character meeting or moving toward desired conditions?

Introduction

Desired condition FW-DC-SCN-02 states "The Forest's scenery provides a range of scenic quality as described by the scenic integrity objectives. The desired distribution of scenic integrity objectives is displayed in figure B-15."

Guideline FW-GDL-SCN-03 states **"**To maintain the Forest's scenic character (see appendix F), vegetation management activities should be designed to reflect natural disturbance regimes and processes to meet or exceed the scenic integrity objective."

Table 1. MON-SCN-01 plan components, indicators, data source, data collection interval and point of contact

Plan Components	Indicator	Data Source / Partner	Data collection interval	Point of Contact
FW-DC-SCN-02 FW-GDL-SCN-03	IND-SCN-01. Management actions or activities that move towards the desired scenic integrity objectives	Forest site-specific environmental analysis documents and decisions that include scenery analysis.	Biennial	Forest landscape architect

Methods

Review of the Forest's site-specific environmental analysis documents and decisions that have occurred since December 2018 (signing of the forest plan decision) that include a scenery analysis such as vegetation management, mineral or special use decision. The scenery analysis should include an analysis of any change from existing condition for the scenic integrity objectives to the desired scenic integrity objectives. Review the scenic integrity objectives to make sure management actions are aligned with them. If activities from these decisions have occurred within the monitoring period (the 2 years since the previous monitoring report) then document the actions that occurred and if actions moved existing scenic integrity objectives towards desired.

Results

Table 2: Monitoring results for MON-SCN-01. Scenic character meeting or moving towards desired conditions for projects with a scenery analysis

	Monitoring Year		
Monitoring indicator	**2021** (for project decisions in 2019 and 2020)		
IND-SCN-01. Management actions or activities that move towards the desired scenic integrity objectives	Vegetation mgmt. projects with scenery analyses: • Taylor Hellroaring • Crystal Cedar • Salish Good Rec mgmt. projects with scenery analyses: • Hellroaring Basin Improvements Project		

Excerpts from the Scenery sections of project analyses that had decisions in 2019 and 2020

Taylor Hellroaring Project

The proposed management activities, with design features implemented may create some short-term scenic contrasts, primarily from Holbrook private properties. However, overall, these impacts would lessen over time and may potentially enhance the private properties views towards Whitefish Lake and more distant landscape vistas. Highway 93 and Farm-to-Market Road middle-ground and background views may experience some moderate impacts lasting longer than 5 years. These travel-ways have short duration views and are at oblique angles to the project area, reducing the severity of these views. Over time these impacts should become less evident to indiscernible. The scenic character of the landscape should still dominate these impacts in the long-term. All of the proposed treatments should meet or exceed scenic integrity objectives in the long term. Three units (Units 1, 2, and 5) mosaic the scenic character of the entire landscape (off-Forest included).

In summary, the mix of vegetation treatments across this project area should create a mosaic of various textures, forms, colors and scales creating a diverse scenic composition. These treatments may remove trees to address uncharacteristic species composition, under-represented stand structures and unsustainable tree densities. This may decrease competition and increase growth rates in the residual stands as well as decrease the risk of uncharacteristic disturbance from insects, disease and wildfire by promoting resistant species and increasing crown spacing.

Selecting healthy trees for retention would result in openings at naturally random intervals ensuring that a variety of density patterns and species compositions remain. This contributes to the scenic stability of the scenic characters of the project area. Overall, the proposed management activities would begin the transition of moving the forest setting on a landscape scale towards a more sustainable scenic character by reducing natural fuels and reducing susceptibility to insect/disease infestations. The effects of either the no action alternative or the proposed action alternative should not reduce the scenic character of the project area and should not be significant effects.

Crystal Cedar Project

The proposed action should not cause significant direct or indirect effects to the scenery resource because of project design to reduce the scenic contrast between the management activities and the scenic character of the area. Units with acres where the Existing scenic integrity (ESI) does not meet or exceed the Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIO) should meet or exceed their SIOs through management activity and project design. All of those acres will not meet the SIO in the short term but in the long term the vegetation diversity in structure, form and texture should increase the scenic variety and create a more stable scenic composition and meet or exceed the SIO. Likewise, there are a number of activity units that have both an ESI and SIO of high. In these units, activities may diminish retention of high integrity in the short term. In the long term these units should meet or exceed the high SIO and become more scenically stable by reducing the risk of a large-scale alteration to the scenic landscape which could diminish the scenic character. In summary, 3382 of 3877 acres in the proposed action meet or exceed their SIO in both the shortterm and long term.

Salish Good Project

It is expected with the application of project design features, all of the activity acres would meet or exceed their assigned scenic integrity objectives in the long term. In the immediate and short term, some units may not meet their scenic integrity objectives until vegetation regrowth reduces contrasts in color, texture and pattern. Two alternatives (alternatives B and C) would help move the analysis area towards being less susceptible to uncharacteristic changes that would dramatically alter the scenery and the scenic character.

Hellroaring Basin Improvements Project (Whitefish Mtn Ski Resort)

The proposed action would not cause substantial direct or indirect effects to the scenery resource because of project design features to reduce the scenic contrast between the management activities and the scenic character of the area. Feathered glades around ski runs and chairlifts would better mimic natural openings' forms within the scenic characters of the area. Likewise, the proposed roads and the cat track would not adversely affect the scenery resource because vegetation retention would reduce the appearance of unnatural lines (lines that would not replicate the scenic character). The built structures proposed would not significantly impact the scenery condition because the Built Environment Image Guide, Rocky Mountain Province color palette would be used to mimic the natural color palette of the scenic character. Finally, removal of the existing Chair 8 and natural revegetation of that area would, in the long-term, reduce the discernibility of this unnatural appearing linear feature. In the short-term, this feature would continue to be discernible until sufficient vegetation has regrown.

The Taylor Hellroaring Project proposed action would cumulatively benefit the Hellroaring Basin Improvements Project because the vegetation treatments near proposed Hellroaring Basin runs 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8, Glade 1, the Grand Junction service road, and Chair 12 would create more naturally diverse appearing openings. These openings would better mimic natural openings. Vegetation treatment from the Taylor Hellroaring Project around the upslope end of existing Chair 8 would likewise reduce the scenic contrast of this linear feature by better integrating it with the natural composition of openings within this scenic character. Overall, the scenic character of the area would be retained, and the moderate scenic integrity objective would be achieved. There are no other reasonably foreseeable actions that would cause significant cumulatively effects to the scenery resource. In summary, 798 acres of 802 acres meet or exceed SIO in the short-term and 802 of 802 acres meet or exceed SIO in the long-term.

Discussion of results

- *Do the site specific analyses show that management actions or activities are moving towards the desired scenic integrity objectives?* YES.
- *Are management actions or activities consistent/not consistent with the desired scenic integrity objectives?* Management actions are consistent with the desired SIOs.

Evaluation of Results for Adaptive Management Finding

The following findings and recommendations resulted from the evaluation of monitoring results.

Table 3. Summary of Findings for Monitoring Item MON-SCN-01

1. Plan Monitoring Results: Does the monitoring question and indicator(s) provide the information necessary to understand the status of the associated plan component listed above?
YES
Recommendations –
2. Plan Implementation Status [1]: Do monitoring results demonstrate intended progress of the associated plan components for with this monitoring item?
YES **(E) -** Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired as all above projects meet the SIO.
Recommendation –
3. Type of change under consideration [2]: If corrective action/change was indicated under either #1 or #2, where might that change might be needed?
NA

[1] **PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STATUS: (A) Uncertain -** Availability of data or Interval of data collection beyond this reporting cycle (*indicate date of next time this monitoring item will be evaluated*); **(B) Uncertain -** More time/data are needed to understand status or progress of the plan component(s)**; (C) Uncertain -** Methods inadequate to assess the status or progress toward achieving plan component(s).(**D**) **NO** - Implementation of plan component(s) ARE NOT trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired**; (E) YES -** Implementation of plan component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired

[2] **CHOICES for where change may be needed include**: Monitoring program, plan component, management activity, plan assessment, program strategy or approaches documents, public engagement strategy