

SCENERY

Goal: Provide Forest visitors with visually appealing scenery with emphasis on areas seen along the Alaska Marine Highway, popular small boat routes and use areas, State highways, major Forest roads, major recreation facilities and from popular recreation places. Recognize that in other areas where landscapes are altered by management activities, the activity may visually dominate the characteristic landscape.

Objectives: Manage the scenery of the Forest in order to achieve the following visual quality objectives:

- Retention – 4.8 million acres plus acres of Retention in Wilderness;
- Partial Retention – 3.2 million acres;
- Modification – 0.4 million acres; and
- Maximum Modification – 2.8 million acres.

Background: Each land use designation (LUD) in the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) has a corresponding visual quality objective (VQO) that defines maximum levels of visual impact desirable from human-induced alterations to the natural landscape character. Associated with each objective is a set of recommended Scenery Standards and Guidelines that include unit size ranges and type of harvest treatment¹ for different visual absorption capability² settings in timber harvest areas. The Forest Plan modeling process includes a set of guidelines that define roughly how much of a viewshed (or logical part of a viewshed segment) can be in a “disturbed” condition and still meet the visual quality objective. This monitoring effort is intended to assess whether the Scenery Standards and Guidelines, as applied, actually result in meeting established visual objectives.

Scenery Resource Question: Are the Standards and Guidelines effective in attaining the adopted Visual Quality Objectives established in the Plan?

The Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation criteria determine the effectiveness of the Scenery Standards and Guidelines based on whether timber harvest unit size, type of silvicultural system used, amount of dispersal between units, and the overall percentage of viewshed disturbed are generally adequate to meet the different visual quality objectives in different types of landscapes.

The Forest Plan directs that a representative set of viewsheds across the Tongass that have received timber harvest during implementation of Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines are selected for evaluation and monitoring. The viewsheds selected should be associated with the Visual Priority Travel Route and Use Areas identified in the Forest Plan. The viewsheds should include areas representing the different characteristic landscapes and different Visual Absorption Capability settings. Monitoring should include assessing the effectiveness of alternatives to clearcutting management.

¹ Harvest treatment – clearcut, group selection, single-tree selection, and diameter-limit partial cut.

² Visual Absorption Capability (VAC) is the ability of a landscape to absorb human-caused alterations without changing the natural character of the landscape. There are three classifications, Low, Intermediate, and High. Low VAC landscapes are generally those with steep slopes, minimal terrain, and vegetative diversity. High VAC landscapes are those with gentle slopes, and/or high terrain and vegetative diversity.

Monitoring Results

No scenery monitoring was reported for FY2006. According the Tongass Forest Plan the monitoring was to initially be conducted 3-5 years after adoption of the plan then at 5 year intervals thereafter (Tongass Land Management Plan, 1997 page 6-9). In support of this monitoring sampling schedule, the Monitoring Protocol Guidebook for the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (2000), scenery monitoring protocol states that:

“For each 5-year period, select 10 viewsheds across the Forest associated with the visual priority travel routes and use areas listed in Appendix F of the Forest Plan. Chosen viewsheds should (1) contain harvest units cut under the current Forest Plan, and (2) include areas representing the different characteristic landscapes (e.g., if possible include relatively high elevation rugged terrain with significant alpine openings along with the lower elevation, broad or rolling landscapes with more or less uniform forest cover); different visual absorption capacity settings; and different visual quality objectives.”

Citations

USDA Forest Service, Tongass National Forest. Monitoring Protocol Guidebook for the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (2000). Document of file at the Ketchikan Supervisor’s Office, Tongass National Forest.

USDA Forest Service, Tongass National Forest. *1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volumes 1, Appendix A-L, maps, and Record of Decision*. USDA FS R10-MB-338dd. On file, Ketchikan Supervisor’s Office, Ketchikan. 492 pp.