

FRPA General Bulletin, Visual Resource Management Interpretations



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Visual Resource Management Interpretations

This bulletin has been prepared to provide advice aimed at promoting consistency of interpretation and application of Visual Resource Management.

Introduction

Over the past 30 years much research has been carried out, and policy work completed to guide the Visual Resource Management activity. Not all of this work appears in legislation, much remains in the policy realm as supporting information. In addition, some concepts promoted during Land Use Plan discussions are being misinterpreted as current policy. While not legal, this bulletin provides advice aimed at promoting consistency of interpretation regarding Visual Resource Management.

Significant Public Viewpoint

This term is used extensively in the *Forest Planning and Practices Regulation* (FPPR) section 1.1 but is not defined. Field staff has requested guidance as to what constitutes a significant public viewpoint.

For the purpose of providing clarity: “A significant public viewpoint means: a place or location on the water or land that is accessible to the public, provides a viewing opportunity and has relevance to the landscape being assessed”.

Examples of significant public viewpoints that might be considered when completing a visual impact assessment would be: a stretch of highway or waterway leading toward a harvest unit, a highway rest stop, a recreation site or park, marine anchorage, a group of homes, a settlement/community/town or a tourist-related commercial enterprise. It is important to review the location(s) offering the best or most direct view of the alteration. This may not necessarily be a viewpoint that provides a stationary or stopping location.

Caution: Visual Landscape Inventory viewpoints are used to derive visual sensitivity unit boundaries and for rating the sensitivity of the landform. They were not established for the purposes of completing Visual Impact Assessments so may or may not be appropriate for this purpose.

Landform vs. Landscape

The term landform was used under the Forest Practices Code to define the unit against which to measure and evaluate forest alterations. *Ref: Visual Impact Assessment Guidebook 2nd Edition January 2001 and Clear-cutting and Visual Quality: A Public Perception Study, BC Ministry of Forests, November 1996.*

The word landscape appears in the Categories of Alteration definitions in the *Forest Planning and Practices Regulation* section 1.1. All Ministry of Forest and Range research is based on landform so this is the most appropriate unit against which to measure VQO accomplishment. Landform may be defined as: "A distinct topographic feature on the surface of the earth that is three dimensional in form i.e. has a length, height and width." Landforms are generally defined by ridgelines, shorelines and skylines. Recognized examples include; hills, mountains and ridges. Landforms often occur in different distance zones (foreground, mid-ground and back ground). These distance zones are usually distinct landforms because they are usually separated by incised valleys, creek draws or topographic breaks.

Measuring perspective scale of alteration for the purposes of visual impact assessments is done relative to individual landforms as opposed to broader landscape scenes or panoramic views composed of multiple landforms.

Size and scale

Guidance has been requested as to what small, medium and large scale mean in the context of the categories of visually altered forest landscapes as defined in FPPR section 1.1.

Reference to scale serves two purposes in visual resource management. They provide a tool for practitioners to estimate the levels of alteration on a landform (in perspective view) and provide the means by which to model current management in Timber Supply Analyses (planimetric view).

While the intent in FRPA is to focus on the qualitative definitions, scale cannot be ignored, as it is a strong predictor of both public preference and visual quality. (77.8% reliable for Retention and 85% reliable for Partial Retention) *Ref: Clear-cutting and Visual Quality: A Public Perception Study, BC Ministry of Forests, November 1996.*

The Visual Impact Assessment Guidebook, (Second Edition January 2001) table 3, contains numerical ranges by Visual Quality Class that have been used operationally since 1996 to guide the scale of alteration for clear-cutting on landforms. The numbers in the Guidebook were derived through multiple research projects. In the absence of direct guidance in FPPR 1.1, the percent landform alteration ranges from the guidebook (see below) may describe appropriate levels of scale by VQO.

<u>VQO</u>	<u>Scale</u>	<u>Most Probable % Alteration</u>
Preservation	very small	0%
Retention	small	0-1.5%
Partial Retention	medium	1.6-7.0%
Modification	large	7.1-18%
Maximum Modification	very large	18.1-30%

The decision as to whether a VQO has been achieved will not rest solely on numbers. The goal is to achieve the spirit and intent of the definition and to practice good visual design. Numbers are used in support of these practices. Caution is urged in interpreting numerical ranges too literally. It assumes that good visual design is being practiced. It is also important that scale is measured relative to an appropriately defined landform.

Training and Competency

Given the discussion above, one of the most practical ways to ensure more consistent interpretation and application of visual resource management concepts and definitions is through on-going training. This bulletin is not a substitute for training or experience in visual resource management. All forest professionals working in the area of visual resource management have an obligation to take available training and to develop their competencies in that subject in order to meet their scope of practice requirements. In addition, most forest certification programs (e.g., SFI and FSC) require that licensees provide staff with the education and training sufficient to their roles and responsibilities. Field staff may contact regional or provincial visual staff to determine when the next available government sponsored training will occur or visit <http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/values/visual/index.htm>

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