

May 1989  
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## THE SCENIC RESOURCES ANALYSIS

### A. Introduction

The long term protection of scenic resources is one of the primary reasons for the Scenic area Act. An intimate knowledge of the visual resource of the National Scenic Area is an obvious necessity in land management planning. The visual resources inventory will be a primary decision variable in most land allocations. Because of the importance of this inventory, a sophisticated methodology was designed that would give us multiple layers of inherent visual quality and visual sensitivity.

### B. Information and inventory

Some work had been done specific to the Scenic Area, most notably the research done on visual quality in the National Park Service Alternatives Study and the Jones and Jones study. This work served as a good beginning, but was of insufficient detail and scope to be used as other than reference material. Based on the Forest Service Visual Management System, a detailed visual resource inventory was developed.

### C. Process

As designed, the analysis process for scenic resources includes six major mapping exercises:

1. VISUAL ATTRIBUTES -- Visual attributes, or cultural landscapes, are those representative landscapes that repeat themselves throughout the Gorge. We identified twelve separate landscapes, ranging from pastoral farmland and rural townscape to tablelands and cliffs.
2. LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY -- Most professionals and practitioners agree that the key element of natural beauty is diversity. The Columbia River Gorge is a wonderful example of natural and man-made diversity, and our maps reflect this with many area of outstanding diversity.
3. SEEN AREAS FROM KEY VIEWING AREAS -- The public involvement process used in writing the Interim Guidelines identified key viewing areas the length of the gorge. With the aid of our computer, we mapped the landscapes that are seen from these areas. There are large areas of land that are not seen from the key viewing areas, usually far removed from the river corridor.
4. LANDSCAPE SIGNIFICANCE -- Landscape significance is an important concept in scenic analysis, and is an integral part of the U.S. Forest Service Visual Resource Management System. The concept simply states that those lands which are inherently beautiful, and that are seen from important travelways or overviews, are most significant. Much of the land in the Gorge was deemed highly significant.
5. VISUAL QUALITY ABSORPTION CAPABILITY -- Visual absorption capability is based on the premise that some landscapes can absorb visual change to a greater degree than other landscapes. Our study used the complex patterns of vegetation and slope in the gorge to identify these landscapes. There are large acreages of minimal or low visual absorption capability lands in the National Scenic Area.

6. LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY -- By using all the mapped information that we had collected, we identified a spectrum of landscape sensitivity. We found that some landscapes are more sensitive to visual changes than others, and that definite patterns of sensitivity emerged in the gorge. There are large areas of land with a critical landscape sensitivity rating, especially along the shores of the Columbia River.

Each of these six maps will be data layers in our land use planning process. We anticipate that some layers will be used more than others in formulating alternatives and strategies, but all of the information that we have collected is important, and will be used/.

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## VISUAL ATTRIBUTES

Visual attributes are the primary component that make up separate visual provinces, or cultural landscapes. While primarily natural features, they can be substantially the product of man, such as the pastoral landscape. The mapping was completed using the strongest landscape feature, or descriptor, as the visual attribute for that landscape. These include:

### 1. \* Special

Some areas have such unusual or outstanding landforms or vegetation, such as Multnomah Falls, that it is unnecessary to study them further before classifying them as "Special".

2. Pastoral - Agricultural lands especially orchards. This type includes pockets of forest, cliff and water. The forest edge is visually essential because it creates a strong positive spatial experience. The field edge creates strong line, as do tree rows. Overall, we see order imposed on nature with repeated forms and textures. This pattern & texture is very attractive, especially alongside wild, rugged trees, cliffs and wide river areas. The areas are similar to some visions of the Romantic English Manors.

3. W - Water edge, shoreline - lake shores and more scenic parts of the Columbia River shoreline. The powerful line of the water's edge separate strong color and texture contrasts.

4. Cliff - dramatic sheer vertical rock landform. Colors vary from dark basalt to high chroma reds. The cliffs often have strong top and side lines. Texture is usually rough.

5. Tablelands - even, often smooth textured slopes defined on 3 sides by rough rocky steep sides. This is especially characteristic of this area. In spring, light grass contrasts pleasantly with dark rock and conifers on the steep side slopes.

6. Stream - tributary canyons. Water and visually associated slopes, often including vegetation along the stream. The form is 'U' or 'V' shaped. Line can be straight or meandering. The area can have some fall color. Texture varies but is usually rougher than adjacent grasslands.

7. Ridge - prominent ridges, usually open on top allowing expansive vistas. These are less dramatic features than special landforms. Areas are characterized by strong form and sometimes line of the skyline.

8. Forest - deciduous or evergreen cover. Line and form are weak. Color and texture are stronger, especially seasonal color.

9. Oak Savannah - rolling oak scrub and associated grasslands. Characterized by undulating line and forms which seem to flow down gullies and hillsides. Color is subdued, and smooth texture of the grass contrasts with the stiff stems of the oaks. Grass may be grazed or cut. There is generally a complex edge where scrub meets grasslands. This interesting edge is included in 'oak' rather than homogeneous 'Grassland'.

10. Erosion Features - rough rocky areas resulting from catastrophic flood events in The Gorge. Scablands. Some broad columnar forms, weak line, dark colors and very strong, rough textures.

11. Grasslands - This can include dryland grains or grazing lands. The grass dominates, although rock outcrops and clumps of shrubs may exist. The area may be very smooth textured or fairly rough, due to rock outcrops.

12. U - rural townscape - urbanized - manmade forms dominate. Lines from streets, driveways and utilities are prominent. Colors may include colors not commonly found in nature. Texture varies from smooth lawn to very rough industrial looking towers, poles, and structures.



## LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY

Landscape Diversity, or variety class, is based on the premise that the most diverse landscapes are the highest in inherent natural beauty. The following tabular information describes the three categories, outstanding, distinctive and common land found in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

	<u>OUTSTANDING</u>	<u>DISTINCTIVE</u>	<u>COMMON</u>
Landform	Slopes which are dissected, uneven, sharp exposed ridges or large dominant features.	Lands of special scenic concern or land immediately adjacent to outstanding lands. Slopes have many interesting features, but are less than outstanding.	Slopes with little or no variety
Rock Form	Features stand out on landforms. Unusual or outstanding slopes, outcrops, etc. in size, shape and location.	Features that are strong, but are more common in the area or blend with other similar features in surrounding lands.	Features obviously do not stand out. but not outstanding talus slopes, and rock outcrops
Vegetation	High degree of patterns.  Large old-growth timber. Unusual or outstanding diversity in plant species.	Vegetative cover with interspersed patterns and diversity of plants. Mature but not outstanding old-growth.	Continuous cover patterns.
Water Forms, Lakes	(1) Unusual or outstanding shoreline configuration, (2) reflects major features. (3) outstanding shoreline vegetation or rock forms. All of the Columbia River.	Some shoreline irregularity. Minor reflections only. Shoreline vegetation. Often adjacent to outstanding water forms.	Small or seasonal bodies without shoreline or rock
Water Forms, Streams	Drainage with numerous or unusual changing flow characteristics, falls, rapids, pools and meanders or large volume.	Attractive water features which were not judged outstanding.	Intermittent small perennial with little or no variation in flow rapids, or meanders





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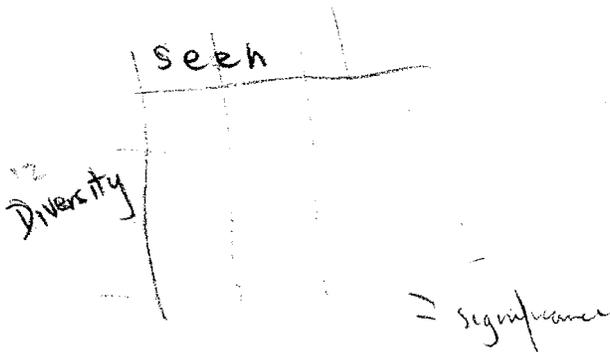


## SEEN AREA MAPPING

1. The mapped areas shows the areas seen from the key viewing areas that were established in the interim guidelines.
2. The seen area mapping was completed using the New Perspectives Program. Elevation data was hand digitized for the entire scenic area. Field checking was done in representative and problem areas.
3. Those areas seen as foreground from the key viewing areas were determined to be of greater importance than middleground views.
4. The majority of the seen area reflects the view as middleground.
5. There were substantial acreages that were not seen.

## LANDSCAPE SIGNIFICANCE

1. Landscape significance is based on the premise that those lands which are inherently beautiful, scenic or diverse, and that are seen from important viewing areas, are more significant than lands not seen. This has been a basic tenet of the Forest Service Visual Management System.
2. Landscape Significance was mapped from the overlay of Landscape Diversity and Seen areas. Four levels of significance were mapped: primary, secondary, third order and least. A matrix was developed which showed the various combinations of diversity and seen areas and the resultant significance levels.





## VISUAL ABSORPTION CAPABILITY MAPPING

1. A simple VAC mapping method was proposed as a combination of slope and existing vegetation. Soil color was not deemed to change appreciably through the gorge, as was discounted as a qualifier. Aspect was dismissed as a qualifier because of the strong linear arrangement of the key viewing routes recreated the seen area mapping. Slope and vegetation were considered the most important variables by far.
2. There were five slope categories that were mapped: 0-10%, 11-25%, 26-40%, 41-60%, and over 60%. These categories best reflected the range of natural conditions in the gorge, and the local adaptation of land uses to slope.
3. Six vegetation types were mapped which best coincided with the visual condition: 1. open (pasture, rock, brush), 2. orchard and row crops, 3. reforested areas less than 20' in height, 4. deciduous forest (75%+), 5. mixed deciduous and coniferous forest, and 6. coniferous forest (75%+).
4. Four VAC categories were created with the overlay of slope and vegetation: high, moderate, low and minimal. A matrix showed the combinations that created each category.

## LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY

1. Landscape sensitivity is based on the premise that that all lands have a capacity for visual absorption. Those lands that are most significant (most beautiful and prominently seen), and have a low or minimal capacity for visual absorption, are our most sensitive or critical lands when considering development.
2. Landscape sensitivity was mapped from an overlay of VAC and Landscape Significance. Five levels of sensitivity were developed: critical, high, moderate, low and minimal. A matrix showed the various combinations of VAC and significance, and the resultant sensitivity levels.

