

VISUAL QUALITY TERMS

perceptual quality: Perceptual quality results from the interpretation of physical character features that is altered by the viewer's perception of what is seen. These perceptions are based upon a viewer's cognitive assimilation of landscape elements into a memorable landscape image, distinguishable from other landscapes within the region. Perceptual quality factors include:

- **vividness:** the memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns.
- **intactness:** how well a visual scene appears to match its original natural or manmade composition without major changes or disturbances. This definition is important since an intact visual scene is always contrasted more highly than a scene that is not intact.
- **unity:** a proportionate arrangement of form, line, color, and texture; a blend of harmonious elements with those that vary.
- **visual organization:** the way individual elements fit with other elements to make an organized composition. Chaotic arrangements of elements that do not relate to each other are considered to have poor visual organization.
- **scarcity:** the frequency of occurrence of a view within a region.
- **adjacent scenery:** an area at the edge of one's cone of vision that affects one's perception of the area viewed.
- **cultural modifications:** manmade improvements that either add or detract from the character of an area.

visual character unit: An area that has a definable boundary with similar character. Each unit can be classified as having a particular visual quality and sensitivity to change.

Visual character units with a high visual quality may include physical characteristics such as landforms with high vertical relief; a variety of vegetative types with different forms, colors, textures, and patterns; the presence of clear or cascading water; numerous colors in the soil, rock, vegetation or water; and many visually different elements. A high perceptual quality would include a balanced composition of line, form, color, and texture; striking visual patterns or the presence of distinct focal points; enhancement from the adjacent scenery; the absence of cultural modifications or, if present, compatibility with the character of the landscape setting; and a unique or visually scarce setting within the region.

Moderate visual quality is based on interesting but not dominant or exceptional landforms; one or two major types of vegetation; the presence, but not dominance, of water; three to five colors in the landscape; and three to five different visual elements. The perceptual quality factors would include a varied, but unbalanced, composition; perceivable, but not striking, patterns created by the landscape elements; moderate enhancement from the adjacent scenery; the presence of

cultural modifications that do not detract from the landscape setting; and a setting that is distinct but similar to others within the region.

Areas with a low visual quality may have the following physical characteristics: few or no interesting landforms, few vegetation types, the absence of water, few color variations, and few undifferentiated elements within the setting. Low perceptual quality may have the following factors: a varied, but chaotic appearance; elements that appear random with no perceivable patterns; adjacent scenery that detracts from or has little influence on the scenic quality; cultural modifications that detract from the setting; and an interesting setting that is common within the region.

visual sensitivity to change: Visual sensitivity is based on the ability of a particular area to absorb changes in the character or quality resulting from new elements. Specific design elements that determine the ability to absorb changes within the visual character unit include:

- form: the shape or structure of an element.
- line: an intersection of two planes or the silhouette of a form, such as landforms, the skyline, and structures.
- color contrast: a diversity of color that enables one to differentiate similar objects.
- texture: the interplay of light and shadow created by variations in the surface of an object.
- intactness: the visual integrity of the natural and manmade landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements.

visual quality: The visual quality of an area is based on the aesthetic character of the area, defined by physical and perceptual quality factors. Physical character factors are the physical elements present in the area. The combination of physical elements creates the visual framework of a particular view. Visual quality physical character factors include:

- landform: the shape or mass of the landform, often defined by edge and outline.
- vegetation: distinct plant communities (grassland, scrub, riparian, etc.), which differ from one another in appearance.
- water: the appearance of water in its many forms: clear, calm, flowing, rolling, etc.
- color: the appearance of light that enables the viewer to differentiate otherwise identical objects through differences in chroma, value, or hue.
- diversity: variety in landscape character; a function of the number of various elements and the intermixing of these elements.