

Visual Quality

CONTENTS

The Value of Visual Quality...3

A Concern for Aesthetic Quality...3

Benefits of Visual Quality Management...5

Visual Sensitivity Classifications...6

Recognizing Different Levels of Visual Sensitivity...6

Visual Sensitivity Categories...7

The Value of Visual Sensitivity Classifications...8

Determining Classifications for a Particular Site...9





Scenic quality is one of the primary reasons people choose to spend their recreation time in or near forested areas. *Photo courtesy of Dorian Grilley*

The Value of Visual Quality

A Concern for Aesthetic Quality

Minnesotans are concerned about the aesthetic quality of forested lands throughout the state, which are a great source of pride for Minnesota citizens. Scenic beauty—or “visual quality”—is one of the primary reasons people choose to spend their recreation and vacation time in or near forested areas.

They are also attracted by the peace and quiet of the outdoors, the serenity, the solitude, and a host of other emotional, spiritual and sensory responses that make up the richly aesthetic and deeply personal experience that is so closely tied to time spent in or near our forests.

4 *Visual Quality*



Minnesota forests are particularly vital to the health of two industries: tourism and forest products. *Photos courtesy of Minnesota Department of Tourism (left) and Minnesota Timber Producers Association (right)*

Minnesota forests are particularly vital to the health of two industries: tourism and forest products. While many of the demands on the forests from these two industries are compatible and even complementary, concern about the specific impacts of various forest management practices on visual aesthetics has led to the development of a guidebook titled *Visual Quality Best Management Practices for Forest Management in Minnesota*.

Published in 1994, this guidebook provides the source of the visual quality guidelines that have been integrated into this larger guidebook.

To obtain a copy of *Visual Quality BMPs for Forest Management*, contact:

Cultural and Aesthetics Program Coordinator
Minnesota DNR Forestry
413 S.E. 13th Street
Grand Rapids, MN 55744
(218) 327-4449
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Benefits of Visual Quality Management

Visual quality is one important aspect of the broad, multi-faceted concept of integrated forest resource management. Visual quality management can:

- Enhance visual quality of forested lands for recreational users, resulting in a healthy tourism economy.
- Reduce conflicts with and negative perceptions of the timber industry, therefore helping to sustain a healthy timber economy.
- Minimize visual and audible impacts of forest management activities on tourists and recreational users.
- Minimize visibility of harvest areas by limiting apparent size of harvest.
- Minimize visual impact of slash.
- Minimize the impact of landing operations on recreational viewers and users.
- Minimize visual contrast created by snags and broken or leaning trees.



Minnesotans are concerned about the aesthetic quality of their forest areas, which are a source of pride for citizens of the state. *Photo courtesy of Minnesota DNR*

6 *Visual Quality*

- Reduce visual impacts associated with the design and use of forest access roads.
- Reduce the visual impact of site preparation practices and reduce the time that the effects of these practices are visible.
- Promote more natural-appearing stands.
- Enhance the aesthetics of visual management areas by minimizing visual impacts of TSI activities.
- Reduce visual impacts of treated vegetation.
- Reduce noise and unsightliness related to gravel pits.

Visual Sensitivity Classifications

Recognizing Different Levels of Visual Sensitivity

In 16 of the most heavily forested counties in Minnesota, county visual quality committees have classified all roads, designated recreation trails, and lakes and rivers into one of three visual sensitivity categories.

Three factors were used in determining classifications:

- The perceived degree of sensitivity of users of that travel route or recreation area concerning landscape aesthetics
- The volume and type of use the travel route or recreation area receives
- The speed of travel within the route or area



Large unbroken clearcuts are generally perceived by the public as unsightly, at least until the newly established regeneration begins to restore the natural beauty of the site. *Photo courtesy of Itasca County Land Department*

Visual Sensitivity Categories

Three visual sensitivity classifications reflect different levels of concern on the part of typical users:

Most Sensitive

Applies to travel routes and areas where significant public use occurs and where visual quality is of high concern to typical users. Examples of such routes may include public highways, local roads, recreational lakes and rivers, and designated recreational trails and areas that provide a high level of scenic quality.

Moderately Sensitive

Applies to travel routes or recreation areas, not identified as “most sensitive,” where visual quality is of moderate concern to typical users. Examples of these routes and areas may include public highways and local roads, recreational lakes and rivers, and designated recreational trails that provide moderate to high scenic quality but less significant public use.

8 Visual Quality

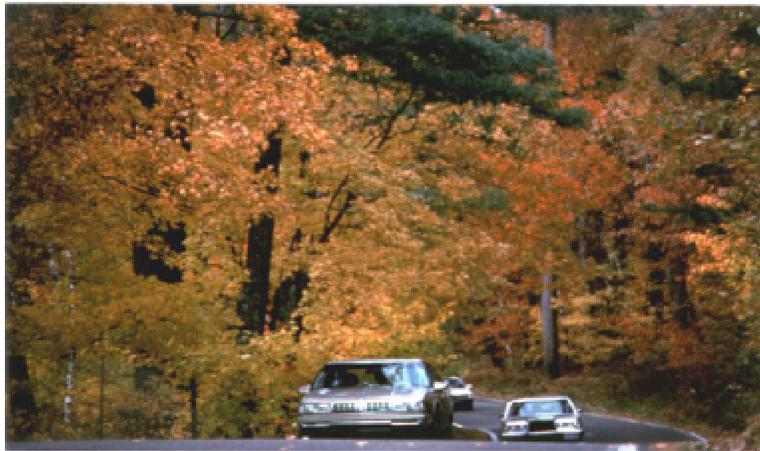
☐ Less Sensitive

Applies to travel routes or recreation areas, not identified as “most sensitive” or “moderately sensitive,” where visual quality is of less concern to typical users. Examples of these routes may include public highways and low-volume local forest roads, non-designated trails, and non-recreational lakes and rivers.

The Value of Visual Sensitivity Classifications

Visual sensitivity classifications help the landowner, resource manager and logger choose visual quality guidelines that help fulfill the expectations of the county visual quality committees. Visual quality guidelines used in an area classified as “most sensitive” would be different than guidelines used in an area classified as “less sensitive.”

An example: In areas classified as “most sensitive,” landings should be avoided within view of travel routes or recreation areas. However, in areas classified as “less sensitive,” landings may be visible, but placing landings in the travel route right-of-way should be avoided.



The “most sensitive” classification applies to those travel routes or areas where significant public use occurs and where the visual quality is of high concern to typical users. *Photo courtesy of Minnesota Department of Tourism*

Determining Classifications for a Particular Site

The 16 counties where visual sensitivity classifications have been completed include Aitkin, Becker, Beltrami, Carlton, Cass, Clearwater, Cook, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Lake of the Woods, Mille Lacs, Pine and St. Louis counties.

County visual sensitivity classification maps may be viewed by contacting county land departments or local DNR Forestry offices within the counties. See *Resource Directory*.

In counties where there are no formal visual sensitivity classifications, landowners, resource managers and loggers should use their knowledge and experience to classify the visual sensitivity of the area where they are working. Based on their determinations of the area's visual sensitivity, they should follow the appropriate guidelines for that sensitivity classification.

