

A scenic landscape photograph of a forested hillside. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored rocks and a dense patch of vibrant orange flowers. The middle ground is dominated by a dense forest of tall, dark evergreen trees. In the background, rolling mountains are visible under a clear sky. The overall scene is a natural, undisturbed landscape.

Chapter 2 Scenic Integrity

Scenic Integrity is a measure of the degree to which a landscape is visually perceived to be "complete." The highest scenic integrity ratings are given to those landscapes which have little or no deviation from the character valued by constituents for its aesthetic appeal. Scenic Integrity is used to describe an existing situation, standard for management, or desired future conditions.

Scenic Integrity

Scenic Integrity indicates the degree of intactness and wholeness of the landscape character. Human alterations can sometimes raise or maintain integrity. More often it is lowered depending on the degree of deviation from the character valued for its aesthetic appeal.

Definition



Most dictionaries have three definitions of integrity of which two are applied to managing scenery (1) the state of being whole, complete, entire or unbroken and (2) a sound unimpaired or perfect "condition." Landscape character with a high degree of integrity has a sense of wholeness, intactness, or being complete. Its scenic condition is near-perfect with no evident discordant elements or deviation from the existing character valued for its aesthetic appeal. For example, the landscape character in this photo is a natural-appearing continuous textured landform with no evident timber harvest, power line, roads, or other human alterations.



In the photo on the left, landscape character includes a positive cultural element of a historical cabin. Its structural form, color, texture, pattern, and scale of materials, supporting rock walls and steps are in concert with architectural style of the period and meets the public's psychological expectations for such elements. Most constituents accept the cabin as having a high degree of integrity.

Scenic integrity as used in ecosystem assessment and planning may include:

1. A historic or past state of integrity.
2. An existing or current state of integrity. The existing integrity is the baseline from which to develop number three.
3. An interim or short-term minimum level necessary to reach a long-term character goal.
4. A long-term level of integrity achievable when the long-term goal is reached. The character goal must be an integral part of a sustainable "Desired Condition."

Discussion

In its purest definition, "integrity" means perfect condition. However, in managing scenery degrees of integrity are defined as very high to very low.

Integrity in this handbook is limited to the deviations from or alterations of the existing landscape character that is valued for its aesthetic appeal.

Integrity could also be used to define the wholeness or condition of the ecosystem but it is assumed that will take place as part of the overall integrated ecosystem management process. However, a landscape character goal of high scenic integrity should also be one of high ecosystem integrity. One does not necessarily ensure the other.

In some situations, preferred scenic conditions such as absence of downed woody debris from timber harvest may run counter to the need for woody debris to provide wildlife food and cover, nutrient recycling, etc. Providing a high level of scenic integrity may in some cases have to be achieved through establishing an "ecological aesthetic," over time through knowledge and appreciation of how a healthy ecosystem functions and how we as humans fit into it.

Integrity could also be used to manage the attributes of landscape character: i.e. vegetative, pattern, form, line, color, texture, and scale; and other senses of aesthetic, such as sound, touch, smell, and taste. It is recommended these be handled through development of a landscape character goal.

Integrity levels as a measurement tool is highly dependent on a complete and accurate description of the positive attributes of the existing landscape character. This is the baseline from which to judge deviations. It should be drawn from credible research, i.e., Floyd Newby's findings that "people expect to see natural or natural-appearing scenery," or from Stanley White...architecture must be... "becoming to the (landscape) form as well as the completion of the meadows, woods, and slopes we presume to compliment...Landscape character should be intensified (by the architecture) not obliterated." Constituent preferences and expectations can also be drawn from professionally designed constituent surveys, interviews, observation of behavior, etc. See chapter on constituent information.

A complete and accurate description of character is also essential when a cultural element such as a historic structure is involved. Structures are usually valued by constituents when they have been accepted and valued over time i.e., covered bridges, split rail fences, old barns, and farmhouses. We recommend soliciting the help of professional historians and cultural ecologists in developing character statements for cultural features. Values to be considered should include traditional (community, family, individual), spiritual (visual quest), historic, experiential (i.e., Recreation), religious, cultural, etc.

Scenic integrity is a continuum ranging over five levels of integrity from very high to very low. Corresponding levels of existing scenic conditions and visual quality levels from the original Visual Management System are shown to the right of each level.

Scenic Integrity Levels

Frame of Reference

The frame of reference for measuring achievement of scenic integrity levels is the valued attributes of the "EXISTING" landscape character "BEING VIEWED". In Natural or Natural appearing character this is limited to natural or natural appearing vegetative patterns and features, water, rock and landforms. Direct human alterations may be included if they have become accepted over time as positive landscape character attributes.

The scenic integrity levels are shown below.

VERY HIGH (Unaltered)..... preservation

VERY HIGH scenic integrity refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "is" intact with only minute if any deviations. The existing landscape character and sense of place is expressed at the highest possible level.

HIGH (Appears Unaltered)..... retention

HIGH scenic integrity refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears" intact. Deviations may be present but must repeat the form, line, color, texture, and pattern common to the landscape character so completely and at such scale that they are not evident.

MODERATE (Slightly Altered)..... partial retention

MODERATE scenic integrity refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears slightly altered." Noticeable deviations must remain visually subordinate to the landscape character being viewed. See section below on meeting integrity levels.

LOW (Moderately Altered)..... modification

LOW scenic integrity refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears moderately altered." Deviations begin to dominate the valued landscape character being viewed but they borrow valued attributes such as size, shape, edge effect and pattern of natural openings, vegetative type changes or architectural styles outside the landscape being viewed. They should not only appear as valued character outside the landscape being viewed but compatible or complimentary to the character within.

VERY LOW (Heavily Altered)..... maximum modification

VERY LOW scenic integrity refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears heavily altered." Deviations may strongly dominate the valued landscape character. They may not borrow from valued attributes such as size, shape, edge effect and pattern of natural openings, vegetative type changes or architectural styles within or outside the landscape being viewed. However deviations must be shaped and blended with the natural terrain (landforms) so that elements such as unnatural edges, roads, landings, and structures do not dominate the composition.

UNACCEPTABLY LOW scenic integrity refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character being viewed appears extremely altered. Deviations are extremely dominant and borrow little if any form, line, color, texture, pattern or scale from the landscape character. Landscapes at this level of integrity need rehabilitation. This level should only be used to inventory existing integrity. It must not be used as a management objective.

Meeting Integrity Levels

In general a specific integrity level can be achieved by decreasing the visual contrast of the deviation being viewed. Several approaches may meet integrity levels:

1. Usually the most effective way is to repeat form, line, color, texture, pattern and scale common to the valued landscape character being viewed. For example, in natural or natural appearing landscapes such deviations as created openings can sometimes be added by repeating size, shape, edge effect, surface color and pattern from natural openings common to the landscape character. Adding structures or structure additions to cultural landscapes can sometimes be done by repeating architectural form, line, color, texture, pattern, and scale. If repetition is accurate and well designed the deviation may blend so well the change is not evident (HIGH). It may only borrow well enough to be noticeable but visually subordinate (MODERATE).

2. Another approach is to borrow form, line, color, texture, pattern and scale from similar but different valued landscapes outside that being viewed. For example, it may be possible to borrow the size, shape, edge effect, surface color, and pattern of natural openings and repeat them in continuous textured landscapes where they do not presently exist. For structures in cultural landscapes it may be effective to borrow the dominance elements of different but compatible architectural styles from outside the landscape being viewed. Because these are introduced elements from landscape character outside the one being viewed these are usually evident (MODERATE) if not dominant (LOW).

3. An approach used for the VERY LOW level is to shape and blend only with the land forms. Harvest unit boundaries, for example, would follow draws where low branched trees and brush exist over ridge or hill tops to avoid dominance of unnatural appearing edges. Roads and landings would conform to folds and ridge lines in the landscape to avoid dominance. Harvest boundaries would normally utilize all breaks in topography to avoid excessive unit size.

4. The most difficult situation is where proposed deviations are in direct opposition to the dominance elements of valued landscape character being viewed. Examples include a horizontal road (line) in an otherwise vertical landscape above tree line or... a metal lattice work utility tower in the middle of a highly valued historic village. The first approach should be to relocate such deviations so they are not evident or can be subdued to be visually subordinate. Utility structures are often geometric, forceful, and large. In addition to careful location they can often be designed in simpler form to blend better with the setting or be more compatible with architectural styles of a cultural landscape. See USDA Handbook 478 Utilities; inside cover and pages 26, 34, and 85.

5. The evaluations of deviations in the Very High Scenic Integrity Level is based on a viewer wandering through any part of the area. The evaluation of deviations in the other scenic integrity categories is based on views from identified viewing locations.

The following matrix provides a quick summary of these integrity level descriptions. The first line, labeled DOMINANCE, indicates which element has the strongest visual weight (or stands out visually over the other); the landscape character or the deviation from it. The second line describes the DEGREE OF DEVIATION from the Landscape character in terms of dominance. The third line describes the degree of INTACTNESS of the Landscape character. Reading down each column gives a summary word picture of each level of integrity.

Scenic Integrity Summary

Criteria for Scenic Integrity of the L.C. Image/Sense of Place	(VH) Very High	(H) High	(M) Moderate	(L) Low	(VL) Very Low	(UL) Unacceptably Low
<u>Dominance</u> Landscape Character vs. Deviation	Landscape Character	Landscape Character	Landscape Character	Deviation	Deviation	Deviation
<u>Degree of Deviation</u> From the Landscape Character	None	Not Evident	Evident but not dominant	Dominant	Very Dominant	Extremely Dominant
<u>Intactness</u> of the Landscape Character	Landscape Character Fully Expressed	Landscape Character Largely Expressed	Slightly Altered and Character Expression Moderate	Altered and Low Expression of Character	Heavily Altered and Very Low Expression of Character	Extremely Altered

Scenic Integrity: Past, Present, and Future

As stated earlier, the concept of scenic integrity can be used to describe varying degrees of wholeness or completeness and levels of scenic condition from very high to unacceptably low...and it can be used to describe the level integrity in landscapes in the past, present, and predicted for the future. Past integrity can be drawn from existing books on historical landscapes. A general description may be written for each ecological unit from these photos and captions. For those ecological or landscape units that are missing in the literature, interpolations can often be made from photos of surrounding units. Past integrity may trends and help identify alternative character options within the range of variability. Existing integrity of the landscape being viewed may be described using one or a combination of two of the methods below:

1. As viewed from the air, which is most revealing
2. As viewed from existing travelways and use areas, using typical on-the-ground observer positions
3. As viewed from unusual and more unpredictable on-the-ground observer positions, while the observer wanders through the National Forest.

These examples are described in more detail in Appendix E . An inventory of existing scenic integrity serves multiple purposes of forest planning, project implementation, and monitoring, as follows:

- It provides important benchmarks.
- It serves as a historical record of the degree, location, and extent of physical alteration of the landscape at given points in time.
- When Combined with past integrity levels, it is used to develop scenic integrity trends during Forest Planning.
- It helps determine the location, cost, and extent of rehabilitation required to achieve the desired scenic integrity levels.
- Once the Forest Plan is adopted, an inventory of existing scenic integrity is used to determine prioritization, location, and extent of rehabilitation required during plan implementation.
- Combined with visual absorption capability, type, and intensity of planned activities anticipated during the planning period, existing scenic integrity will assist in predicting future scenic integrity levels for alternatives.
- Existing scenic integrity and its trends assist managers in monitoring progress toward meeting predicted future scenic integrity levels in a Forest Plan.

The existing scenic integrity inventory will result in a map that may be stored in a GIS format.

