

Appendix J – Scenic Value Criteria for Scenery Inventory and Management

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**TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY VISUAL RESOURCES
SCENIC VALUE CRITERIA
FOR SCENERY INVENTORY AND MANAGEMENT**

The criteria for classifying the quality and value of scenery has been adapted from a scenic management system developed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and integrated with current planning methods used by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The classification process is also based on fundamental methodology and descriptions adapted from *Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management*, Agriculture Handbook Number 701, USFS 1995.

The process and criteria are used to compare the value of scenery to other resource values during inventory and land planning tasks. They are also used to evaluate the extent and magnitude of visual changes that could result from proposed projects, as part of the environmental review required under the National Environmental Policy Act. In addition, they can be useful to help establish management objectives for improving or maintaining the scenic quality of managed lands.

Scenic Attractiveness - 3 levels

Attractiveness is a measure of scenic quality based on human perceptions of intrinsic beauty as expressed in the forms, colors, textures, and visual composition of each landscape. The combination of rock outcrops, water bodies, landforms, vegetation patterns, and other natural features that shape landscape character also help define scenic importance. The presence or absence of these features, along with valued attributes such as variety, uniqueness, mystery, pattern, order, vividness, harmony, and balance are used to classify the scenic attractiveness of a landscape.

Category 1: Distinctive - Areas where the variety of land forms, rock, vegetation patterns, water, and other features have outstanding or unique visual quality. These areas have strong, positive attributes that are relatively uncommon in the characteristic landscape. This category also includes areas in visually strategic locations that have somewhat more common attributes.

Category 2: Common - Areas where the land forms, rock, vegetation patterns, water, and other features have ordinary or common visual quality. These areas have generally positive but typical attributes, with a basic variety of forms, colors, and textures that are normally seen throughout the characteristic landscape.

Category 3: Minimal - Areas where the natural features have little change in form, line, color or texture resulting in low visual quality. Rock forms and vegetation patterns of any consequence are often not present, and these areas generally have weak or missing attributes. All areas not classified as 1 or 2 are included in this category.

Scenic Integrity - 4 levels

Integrity is a measure of scenic importance based on the degree of visual unity and wholeness of the natural landscape character. Human alteration can sometimes raise

integrity, such as an impounded water body that unifies the landscape while adding variety, mystery, harmony, and balance. Most often scenic integrity is lowered by human alteration and the addition of visually disruptive elements. The presence and degree of discordant alteration is used to classify the scenic integrity of a landscape.

High: Areas where the valued landscape character appears to be intact and unaltered, with very minor deviation. Any deviation present must repeat the form, line, color, texture, and pattern of the landscape so closely and at such a scale that they are not evident.

Moderate: Areas where the valued landscape character appears to be slightly altered. Noticeable deviations must be visually subordinate to the landscape being viewed, and borrow much of the natural form, line, color, texture, and pattern.

Low: Areas where the valued landscape character appears to be modestly altered. Deviations begin to dominate the landscape being viewed, but the alterations should share natural color, shape, edge pattern, and vegetation characteristics in order to remain compatible or complementary.

Very Low: Areas where the valued landscape character appears to be heavily altered. Deviations strongly dominate the landscape and may not share any of the visual attributes. The alterations may be visually disruptive and provide significant negative contrast to the natural landscape characteristics.

Scenic Visibility - 2 parts, 3 levels each

Landscape visibility is a measure of scenic importance based on several essential interrelated considerations, which include viewer context and sensitivity, number of viewers, frequency and duration of view, level of detail seen, and seasonal variation. A large number of highly concerned viewers who view the landscape for a long time period may raise the scenic importance significantly. The importance may be much lower when only a few viewers with low concern see the landscape for a brief period. These considerations are combined in two parts, which are used to classify the scenic visibility of a landscape.

Sensitivity: The level of scenic importance based on expressed human concern for the scenic quality of land areas viewed. Sensitivity may be derived/confirmed by resident and visitor surveys.

Level 1: High - Areas seen from the reservoir, lakeshore residents, and lake view residents, where the number of viewers and concern for scenic quality are normally quite high.

Level 2: Moderate - Areas seen from principal roadways, use areas, and other public viewing areas. Concern for scenic quality is generally high while the number of viewers, view frequency, and duration are moderate.

Level 3: Low - Areas seen from secondary travel routes, use areas, and any not included in the other levels. Concern may be high in some areas, but number of viewers is generally low.

View Distance: A principal indicator of scenic importance based on the distance an area can be seen by observers and the degree of visible detail within that zone.

Foreground: From 0 feet to 0.5 mile. A distance zone where the individual details of specific objects are important and easily distinguished. Details are most significant within the immediate foreground, 0 to 300 feet.

Middleground: From 0.5 mile to 4 miles. The zone where most object characteristics are distinguishable, but their details are weak and they tend to merge into larger patterns. When landscapes are viewed in this zone, they are seen in broader context. Human alteration may contrast strongly with the larger patterns and make some middleground landscapes more sensitive than the foreground.

Background: From 4 miles to the horizon. The distant landscape, where specific features are not normally discernible unless they are especially large, standing alone, or have a substantial color contrast. Details are generally not visible, and colors are lighter.

Scenic Value Class - 4 levels

The value class of a landscape is determined by combining the levels of scenic attractiveness, scenic integrity, and visibility. The selection matrix below shows the various combinations and the resulting scenic class. It is a guide that is intended to complement both a thorough field analysis and careful review of the visual absorption capacity.

SCENIC VALUE CLASS SELECTION MATRIX													
Visibility:	Sensitivity Level View Distance	1 foreground			1 middleground			2 foreground			2 middleground		
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Scenic Attractiveness Categories													
Scenic Integrity Levels	High	E	G	F	E	E	G	E	G	F	E	E	G
	Moderate	G	G	F	E	G	F	G	G	F	E	G	F
	Low	F	F	P	F	F	P	F	F	P	F	F	P
	Very low	P	P	P	F	P	P	P	P	P	F	P	P
		Scenic Value Class: E = Excellent; G = Good; F = Fair; P = Poor											

Excellent: Areas with outstanding natural features that appear unaltered. Very minor deviations may be present but are generally unnoticeable even in the foreground. These areas are highly visible in the foreground and middleground from both land and water. Unaltered areas that may be less outstanding but are in a visually strategic location are also classified as excellent scenic value.

Good: Areas with attractive but common scenic quality and no distinctive natural features. Minor human alteration may be seen in the foreground but is barely noticeable in the middleground. These areas have relatively high visibility from both land and water.

Fair: Areas of common or minimal scenic quality with little or no interesting features. Moderate human alteration provides discordant contrast that is seen in the foreground but is less distinct in the middleground due to compatible form and color. These areas have relatively high visibility from both land and water.

Poor: Areas that have very little scenic importance and/or visually significant disturbances resulting from human activity. The alterations provide discordant contrast in the natural landscape due to incompatible size, shape, color, and material. The areas are clearly visible in the foreground and middleground and have relatively high visibility from both land and water.

Severity of Impact

The threshold of significance is the extent or magnitude of alteration to the existing landscape that is sufficient to change the scenic value class by two levels or more.

Visual Absorption Capacity

Absorption capacity indicates the relative ability of a landscape to accept human alteration with the least loss of landscape character and scenic value. These indicators are useful to help predict potential difficulty or success with proposed development and scenic management. They are based on characteristics of the physical factors found in a landscape. Each characteristic has a capacity range from less to more, and the primary ones are shown in the list below. Visual absorption is also affected by the variety of landscape patterns and the amount of screening provided by landforms, rock, water bodies, and vegetation.

Factor	Least Capacity to Absorb Change	Greatest Capacity to Absorb Change
Slope	Steep Unstable geology	Level Stable geology
Vegetation	Sparse cover Low cover, grasses and shrubs Few species, little or no pattern	Dense cover Tall cover, trees Multiple species, diverse pattern
Landforms	Simple shape	Diverse shapes, heavily dissected
Soils	Easily eroded Poor; slow revegetation	Erosion resistant Rich; fast revegetation
Shoreline	Simple line, little or no interruption	multiple interruptions, diverse features
Color	Narrow range of indigenous colors	Broad range of indigenous colors

Desired Landscape Character

Scenic attractiveness and the existing level of scenic integrity serve as the foundation for selecting the preferred landscape character. Lake adjacency and ecosystem trends should be considered along with the historic visual character to help any changes be more complete, attractive, and sustainable. Several types of landscape character and the related long-range objectives for scenic integrity are described below.

Natural Evolving landscape character expresses the natural change in ecological features and processes with very limited human intervention.

Natural Appearing landscape character expresses predominantly natural qualities but includes minor human interaction along with cultural features and processes that are relatively unobtrusive.

Pastoral landscape character expresses dominant human-developed pasture, range, and meadow, along with associated structures, reflecting historic land uses, values, and lifestyles.

Rural landscape character expresses sparse but dominant human residential and recreational development, along with associated structures and roadways that reflect current lifestyles.

Urban landscape character expresses concentrations of human activity in the form of commercial, residential, cultural, and transportation facilities, along with supporting infrastructure.

Visual Management Objectives

Based on the scenic value class, management objectives may be developed to accomplish or maintain the visual character desired for each area.

Preservation:

Areas classified Excellent and managed for a natural evolving landscape character. Only very low-impact recreational and scientific activities are allowed, and no facilities are permitted.

Retention:

Areas classified Good and managed for a natural appearing landscape character. Permitted activity or minor development should repeat the natural form, line, color, and texture of the area and remain visually subordinate to the surrounding landscape. Changes in the size, intensity, direction, and pattern of activity should be unobtrusive and not readily evident.

Modification:

Areas classified Good or Fair and managed for pastoral or rural landscape character. Permitted activity and development may dominate the original character but should remain visually compatible with the remaining natural landscape. Vegetation and landform alterations should repeat the natural edges, forms, color, and texture of the surrounding area. The scale and character of structures, roads, and other features should borrow naturally established forms, lines, colors, and patterns to provide the greatest possible visual harmony.

Maximum Modification:

Areas classified Fair or Poor and managed for urban landscape character. Permitted activity and development generally dominates the original visual character. Vegetation and landform alterations should remain visually harmonious with the adjacent landscape. When seen in the foreground and middleground, they may not fully borrow the surrounding natural forms, lines, colors, and textures. Likewise, development features seen from the same distances may be out of scale and have significant details that are discordant with the natural landscape character. Overall development should be directed toward achieving the greatest possible visual harmony.

Enhancement:

Any area classified less than Excellent with a relatively short-term management objective intended to restore and/or improve the desired scenic quality. Rehabilitation activities may include alteration, concealment, or removal of obtrusive and discordant elements.

Enhancement activities may include addition or modification of natural elements and man-made features to increase the variety and attractiveness of spaces, edges, forms, colors, textures, and patterns.