Nicole R Hill /WO/USDAFS
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To Dan Seifert/R1/USDAFS@FSNOTES, Traute Parrie/R1/USDAFS@FSNOTES
cc
bcc
Subject Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project - Revised Visual Mitigation

Hello Dan,
Just to follow up from our phone conversation, the following visuals mitigation are also acceptable for the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project and would not change the visuals effects analysis. All VQOs would be met in the timeframes specified in the report with the following mitigation applied. Also, a reminder for the timber folks is that the stump mitigation does not apply to the entire unit, it is only within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Benbow Road.

Please let me know if you have any other questions or concerns.
Thanks! Nicole

Minimize visual effects of stumps of removed vegetation in retention and partial retention VQO to maintain naturally appearing scenery. ● Where slopes are flat and terrain allows, in areas with retention VQO, cut stumps of all size classes flush with the surface of the ground within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, and all campgrounds, trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas. ● Where slopes are not flat and terrain allows, in areas with retention VQO, cut stumps of all size classes low (less than 4 inches on the high side of the stump) within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, and all campgrounds, trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas. ● Where slopes are not flat and terrain allows, in areas with partial retention VQO, cut stumps of all size classes low (less than 6 inches on the high side of the stump) within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Benbow Road and all trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas.	**Apply this mitigation to the following units in Retention VQO and any other units deemed necessary during implementation:** Main Fork area: All units **Apply this mitigation to the following units in Partial Retention VQO and any other units deemed necessary during implementation:** Benbow Area: 01, 02, 03, 56, 57, 58
Reduce any long-term visual effects of marking paint that may be left on site. ● If paint is used for marking, use a cut tree mark and place "stump" mark on side away from viewing of the nearest sensitive viewpoint. ● When possible, mark unit boundary trees on the side of the tree away from the nearest sensitive viewpoint (i.e. on the side of the tree facing away from the road).	**All units**

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Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project

Custer National Forest – Beartooth Ranger District

Visuals Resource (Scenery) Specialist Report

Prepared By:
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August 27, 2008

Executive Summary: This analysis describes the existing condition of the scenic resources within the project area and evaluates the potential effects of the alternatives on scenic resources. Evaluations made in this analysis are based on the changes potentially seen on the landscape from a given viewshed and identified sensitive viewpoints and the level of acceptable change for the project area. Main Fork Road, Highway 212, Benbow Road, and numerous recreation sites and system trails were identified as the primary sensitive viewpoints for the project. Hell Roaring Canyon Road was also identified as a sensitive viewpoint.

The majority of effects to scenery resources are short term in duration with long term benefits which would help maintain the valued landscape character and valued cultural attributes. Short-term visual effects of storm damage clean-up and fuels reduction activities are often most noticeable in foreground views until the growth of grasses and shrubs begin to soften the effects of these activities.

A key issue for the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project is the effects to visual resources, particularly the visual appearance around recreation sites and those areas with retention visual quality objective. The analysis indicator and threshold for this issue are the visual quality objectives assigned to the project area by the Management Plan.

If the visual mitigation is implemented, the Action Alternative would meet the retention, partial retention, and modification VQOs as outlined in the Custer National Forest Management Plan, because the effects of proposed activities in retention VQO are anticipated to be naturally appearing, repeating the form, line, color, and texture which are frequently found in the characteristic landscape. In partial retention VQO areas, any deviations present are expected to be subordinate to the natural landscape character. It is anticipated that the proposed activities would meet the VQOs assigned to the project area in the short term either at project completion or about one to two growing season after all proposed project activities are complete.

The Action Alternative would be consistent with Custer National Forest Management Plan goals, standards, and guidelines for visuals. No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to scenery resources are expected in the long term from the storm damage clean-up and fuels reduction activities. There are no irreversible or irretrievable commitments related to scenery resources from the Action Alternative.

VISUAL RESOURCE (SCENERY) - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Visual Resource Introduction

Scenery, just as any other resource, must be cared for and managed for future generations. Visual resources vary by location and existing natural features including vegetation, water features, landform and geology, and human-made elements. All activities experienced by forest visitors occur in a scenic environment which is defined by the arrangement of the natural character of the landscape along with components of the built environment.

This analysis describes the existing condition of the scenic resources within the project area and evaluates the potential environmental effects (direct, indirect, and cumulative) of the proposed action on scenic resources.

This report contains the detailed data, methodologies, analyses, conclusions, maps, references, and technical documentation relied upon to reach effects analysis conclusions related to this project.

Issue #1 – Effects to the visual resource (scenery)

Introduction: The Beartooth Front is valued for its naturally appearing scenery and diverse summer and winter recreation opportunities including but not limited to: driving for pleasure, hiking, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. These activities and more experienced by forest visitors occur in a scenic environment which is valued for its naturally appearing character and cultural values.

Majority of the project area is naturally appearing with some areas appearing slightly altered due to recreation developments and roads, but these alterations most often provide the viewing platform for scenery and provide views of natural and naturally appearing landscapes outside of the project area. Due to the high use and visual sensitivity of the project area, effects to visual resources have been identified as a key issue, particularly the visual appearance around recreation sites and those areas with retention visual quality objective. Hazardous fuels reduction and storm damage clean-up activities may have effects to the visual resources which are noticeable to the casual forest visitor. The analysis indicator and threshold for this issue are the visual quality objectives assigned to the project area by the Management Plan as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Scenery Analysis Indicator and Threshold

Issue	Attribute	Indicator	Predictor	Threshold	Measurement Technique
Issue #1	Visual Resource, Scenery	Acres meeting designated VQO	VQO designated by Management Plan	VQO designated by Management Plan	Whether the effects of the proposed activities meet the VQO designated by the Management Plan

Regulatory Framework for Issue #1

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) states that it is the "continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to use all practicable means to assure for all Americans, aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings." NEPA also requires "A systematic and interdisciplinary approach which will insure the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts into planning and decision-making which may have an impact on man's environment." To accomplish this, numerous federal laws require all Federal land management agencies to consider scenery and aesthetic resources in land management planning, resource planning, project design, implementation, and monitoring.

Several USDA handbooks have been developed to establish a framework for management of visual resources including but not limited to: National Forest Landscape Management Volume 2, Chapter 1 the Visual Management System; Agriculture Handbook 462 (USDA Forest Service 1974) and Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management; Agriculture Handbook 701 (USDA Forest Service 1995).

The Custer National Forest Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1986) has recognized the importance of visual quality and scenery by providing management direction for visuals in the Custer National Forest Management Plan. The Management Plan direction listed below pertains to the project area.

Forest Plan Direction

Forest Wide Management Direction

Goal: The goal of visual resource management is to maintain the overall natural appearing landscape recognizing that there are some areas that will be affected by management activities.

Management Standards – Recreation – Visual Resource Management: 1) As a general rule, the Visual Quality Objective (VQO) established by management area direction or project assessment will be met. In the event a project environmental analysis determines that the VQO cannot be met, the project will either be modified to meet the VQO for the Management Area or the Forest Plan amended. The natural appearing landscape will remain dominant across the Forest. The VQO of Maximum Modification will not usually be appropriate. 2) Management practices will be designed to blend with the natural environment.

Management Area Direction for the Visual Resource (Scenery)

Management Area F (Main Fork Rock Creek area)
Goal: …Resource management conflicts are resolved in favor of maintaining or enhancing the recreation opportunities including the visual setting.

Management Standards: (i) Visual Quality Objectives in the foreground viewing area from a developed site or along an access corridor will be either Retention or Partial Retention.

Management Area T (Main Fork Rock Creek area)
Management Standards: (a) The Visual Quality Objective for this Management Area will be Retention.

Management Area B (Benbow area)
Management Standards: (b) Visual quality objectives will include Retention, Partial Retention and Modification and management activities will be designed and implemented to blend with the natural landscape. The visual quality objective as assigned to the areas or as determined through the environmental analysis will be met by the development activities, subject to valid existing rights.

Management Area D (Benbow area)
Management Standards: (c) Visual quality objectives will include Retention, Partial Retention and Modification and management activities will be designed and implemented to blend with the natural landscape.

Assumptions, Methodology & Scientific Accuracy, and Information Used for Issue #1:

This analysis was completed using the framework outlined in USDA Forest Service handbook, The Visual Management System (VMS). USDA Forest Service handbook, Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management, was also consulted.

ArcMap geographic information system (GIS) was used to analyze the proposed activities in regards to recreation use, sensitive travel corridor and viewpoint locations, potential viewsheds from sensitive travel corridors, and visual quality objectives assigned to the area. The potential impacts to scenic resources from this project were determined based on site visits to the project area, review of photos of the project area, use and interpretation of GIS data and review of research and analysis of similar projects. Evaluations made in this analysis are based on the amount of changes potentially seen on the landscape from a given viewshed and identified viewpoints and the level of acceptable change for the project area. The Custer National Forest Management Plan direction for visual resources was reviewed to determine the level of acceptable change for this project area.

This analysis will use visual quality objectives (VQOs) to determine if the alternatives meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines by comparing the degree of alterations to the existing landscape. Visual quality objectives describe a desired level of scenic quality and diversity of natural features based on physical and sociological characteristics of an area and refers to the degree of acceptable alterations of the characteristic landscape (USDA Forest Service 1986).

The Scenery Management System (SMS), as outlined in Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management, is today's best science to achieve high-quality scenery as an outcome of National Forest ecosystem management practices. The Custer National Forest and TEAMS Enterprise are currently completing SMS inventories to prepare for forest plan revision. During the forest plan revision process, scenic integrity objectives will be developed. Scenic integrity objectives (SIOs) describe the level of acceptable alteration of the natural landscape and its valued scenic attributes. Scenic integrity objective definitions are also provided to understand the subtle differences between visual quality objectives and scenic integrity objectives.

Visual quality objectives are established in the Custer National Forest Management Plan. Management Plan direction for Management Areas B, D, and F establish a range of visual quality objectives. To determine the visual quality objectives for these Management Areas, the SMS visibility and scenic attractiveness inventory GIS data were used in conjunction with the visual quality objective matrix in the VMS Handbook (USDA Forest Service 1974, 43). Within the project area, the visual quality objectives as determined by the above process were field reviewed for accuracy. The VQO GIS layer was updated for the project area to reflect actual, on the ground conditions. The visual quality objectives found in the project area include:

Retention VQO – Human activities are not evident to the casual Forest visitor (USDA Forest Service 1986). Under retention, activities may only repeat form, line, color, and texture which are frequently found in the characteristic landscape (USDA Forest Service 1974).

> High SIO – The valued landscape character "appears" intact or unaltered. 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 (USDA Forest Service 1995).

Partial Retention VQO – Human activities may be evident, but must remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape (USDA Forest Service 1986). Activities may also introduce form, line, color, or texture which are found infrequently or not at all in the characteristic landscape, but they should remain subordinate to the visual strength of the characteristic landscape (USDA Forest Service 1974).

> Moderate SIO – The valued landscape character appears slightly altered. Noticeable deviations must remain visually subordinate to the landscape character being viewed (USDA Forest Service 1995).

Modification VQO – Human activity may dominate the characteristic landscape but must, at the same time, utilize naturally established form, line, color, and texture. It should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed in middle-ground or background (USDA Forest Service 1986).

> Low SIO – 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.

The effects analysis will consider how the proposed action meets these visual quality objectives from the identified viewpoints in order to determine the proposed action's compliance with the

Custer National Forest Management Plan. The scenery analysis considered the area within the proposed treatment units and the viewsheds of Main Fork Road and Benbow Road within the National Forest boundary, which is referred to as the project area boundary in the Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences sections of the Visuals Resource Specialist Report, unless otherwise noted.

ISSUE #1 – AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The project area is located in the Beartooth Mountains of south-central Montana. Located only 65 miles from Billings, Montana's largest city, this area provides recreation opportunities in scenic canyons below rugged, often snow capped mountains.

Many people are drawn to the area for its beautiful mountain scenery with sheer rock cliffs and talus slopes mixed with diverse forests and riparian areas. The environment of the area ranges from sagebrush and grasslands in valley bottoms to lush forests on mountains slopes with rugged cliffs and peaks at the highest elevations. Campgrounds and picnic areas are nestled in the canyons surrounded by steep white and grey colored cliffs and clear, blue skies. These lands are heavily used for recreation activities including but not limited to driving for pleasure, hiking, camping, picnicking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and sightseeing.

The project area lies within the Yellowstone Rockies Landscape Character Type subregion (USDA Forest Service n.d.). This subregion contains rugged mountain peaks, narrow valleys, rounded mountains and hills, large plateaus, and forested tablelands. Deep, narrow canyons with vertical rock walls and massive rock outcrops are frequent displays of the rugged mountain scenery. Vegetation is diverse with continuous forest cover on the moist mountainsides with islands of deciduous vegetation as well as unique patterns among the forest with open grass and sagebrush parks where moisture is scarce. Water is also an important feature adding serenity, sound, and movement to the landscape. Mountain streams are usually high gradient rushing over rocks and rubble while lakes and reservoirs have high reflectivity.

The project area, more specifically, is characterized by steep, forested, wind-prone mountain slopes and narrow, canyon drainages of the Main Fork Rock Creek and Little Rocky Creek. Lower elevation vegetation is composed of grasslands and sagebrush that mix with forests as elevation increases. Forests throughout much of the project are primarily dominated by even-aged, mature lodgepole pine with some scattered spruce, Douglas-fir, subalpine fir, and whitebark pine. Lower elevations and moist areas are interspersed with aspen and cottonwood adding distinctive variety with yellow and gold colors in the fall.

In the Main Fork Rock Creek Area, forested stands of lodgepole pine surround recreation sites and cover the valley floor. Open sagebrush and grassland parks to the east and northeast of the project area are dotted with colorful wildflowers and mingle with the pine forests and aspen pockets on steeper slopes. These open parks offer panoramic views of the surrounding canyon walls and the Main Fork project area. In the Little Rocky Creek area, or Benbow area, the subdued, rounded landforms and vegetative components, consisting of a continuous forest canopy with few natural openings, result in a landscape common to the area with some inclusions of distinctive features.

The primary disturbance regimes which have formed and continue to form the natural landscape character of the area are wind and fire. The mountain slopes of the project area are prone to wind events which funnel down u-shaped glacial valleys to create openings in the forest canopy. Additionally, the habitat types in the project area are characterized by high severity fires with a frequency of 35 to 200 or more years.

Existing Condition

A wind event with recorded gusts over 100 miles per hour brought widespread damage to the Beartooth Front area in November 2007. This wind event created heavy concentrations of wind damaged and fallen trees throughout the Main Fork Rock Creek and Benbow areas.

The landscape character attributes of form and texture have been affected by the wind event resulting in downed trees and openings where a continuous canopy of trees had previously characterized the area. In some areas the wind damaged and fallen trees dominate the landscape character being viewed with large areas of downed trees and large, up-ended root wads dominating the view. Trees with broken tops also are noticeable throughout the wind-damaged areas. Wind damage viewed from the Main Fork Road generally does not dominate the landscape being viewed. More wind damaged trees and up-ended root wads are noticeable after Greenough Lake and near M-K Campground. From Benbow Road, the wind damage is primarily viewed as broken topped trees with some up-ended trees. Larger areas of wind damage are not easily viewed from Benbow Road due to vegetative screening. The needles on these fallen trees will eventually turn red and fall to the ground. These downed trees will continue to dominate the landscape being viewed until new growth sprouts around them.

The wind event has affected the scenic attributes around recreation sites by altering the valued landscape character attributes around these sites. Large, character trees that contributed to a campsite's sense of place may have been damaged or have fallen to the ground changing the shade, screening, and views from these sites. The wind event has removed vegetative screening in some areas and opportunities now exist which provide dramatic views of the surrounding cliff walls and rugged, picturesque mountains.

Fire is a natural part of these ecosystems and suppression efforts over the last eighty years have kept fire from this ecosystem causing a large buildup of vegetative fuels. Concentrations of wind damaged and fallen trees in combination with fuels conditions that existed before the wind event have increased beetle infestation potential and created potentially hazardous fuel loads putting the valued landscape character attributes at risk.

Proposed activities are located in the following areas in MAs B, D, F, and T: Main Fork Rock Creek and Benbow area. The Main Fork Rock Creek area is accessed by US Highway 212, also called the Beartooth Highway, as well as Forest Road 2421 (Main Fork Road) with activities proposed along these routes. These are sensitivity level one travel routes and provide the primary viewsheds into the project area for short and long durations of view. US Highway 212 south of Red Lodge, Montana, is a nationally designated scenic byway for its scenic characteristics. Project activities are also located around the following sensitive viewpoints located along Main Fork Road: Parkside Campground, Limberpine Campground, Greenough Lake Campground and recreation site, and M-K Campground. Parkside NRT is a sensitivity level one trail located in and near the project area. Vista Point Overlook along Highway 212 is also a sensitivity level one

viewpoint which views the project area. The project area is also located in the foreground viewing distance of Hell Roaring Canyon Road 2004, also a sensitivity level one travel route.

Figure 1. View of Main Fork Rock Creek area viewed from a switchback on Highway 212.

The Benbow area is accessed primarily from State Highway 419 and Benbow Road 2414 with treatments proposed along this route. The viewpoints for the Benbow area are Benbow Road 2414 and Fiddler Creek Road. Benbow Road 2414 is a sensitivity level two route and provides the primary viewshed for the Benbow area for short and longer durations of view. Fiddler Creek Road is also a sensitivity level two route providing views of the Benbow area for short durations of view. During field review, it was determined the project area is not visible from State Highway 419 due to topographic and vegetative screening.

Most proposed project activities are located within the immediate foreground (300 feet) and foreground views of sensitivity level one or two travel routes and use points. In some cases the proposed project activities are located in the middleground viewing distance from sensitivity level one or two routes and use points. See the map, Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Areas for the locations of proposed treatments in relationship to visual quality objectives.

Figure 2. Photo of Main Fork Rock Creek area viewed from Main Fork Road.

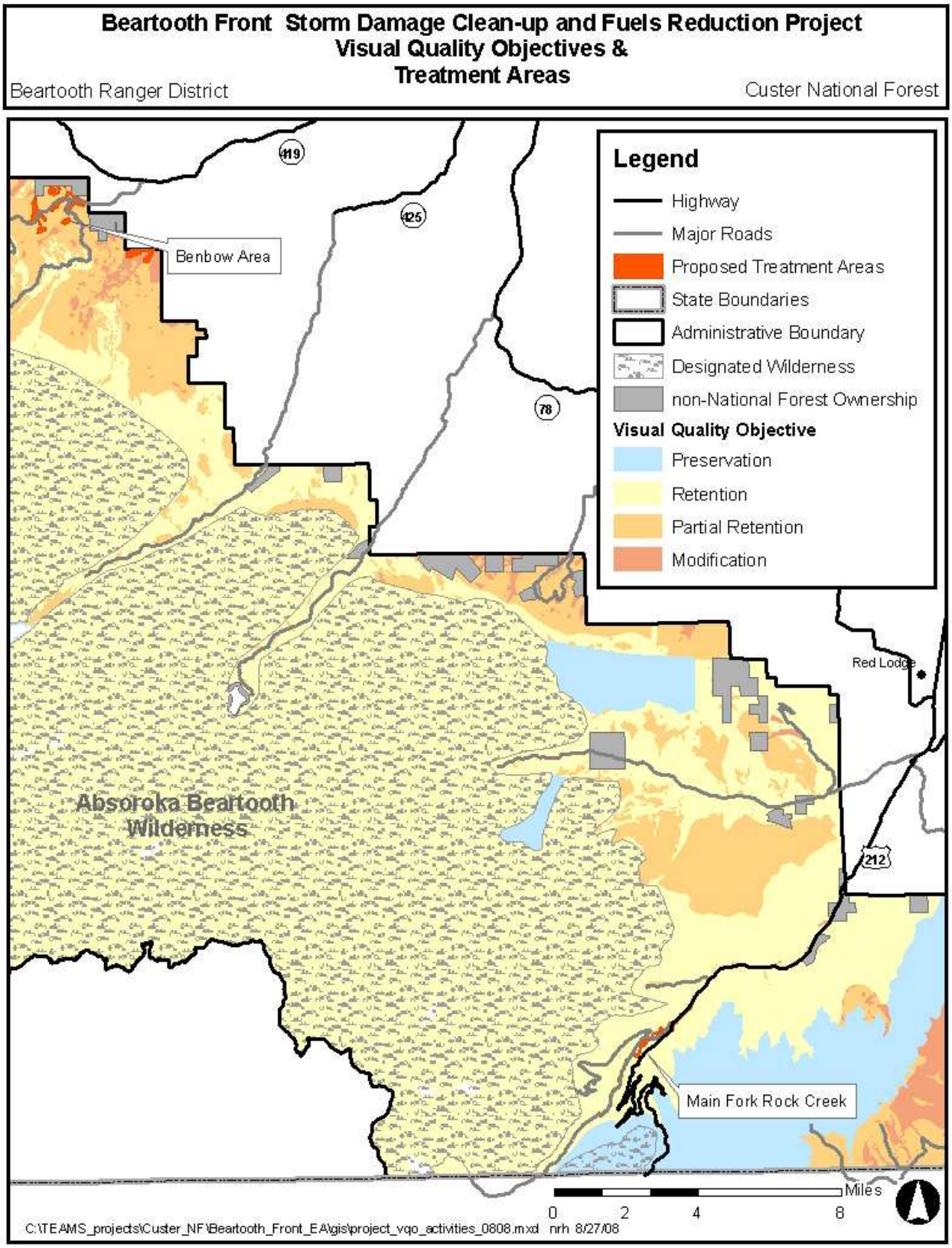

Figure 3. Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Areas in the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project

Land Use Patterns

The lands in Main Fork Rock Creek area have been managed for both summer and winter recreation. Steep slopes confine most recreational activities and developments to canyon floors. The recreation developments, including picnic sites and campgrounds, provide destination type use. The potential for wildfire exists with the high density of recreation developments. There have been fires in the past, many man-caused, making evacuation routes and safety zones important.

The Beartooth Front is valued for its naturally appearing scenery and diverse summer and winter recreation opportunities including but not limited to: driving for pleasure, hiking, camping, picnicking, wildlife viewing, and snowmobiling.

Majority of the project area is naturally appearing with some areas appearing slightly altered due to recreation developments and roads. The landscape outside of recreation developments is naturally appearing with few alterations. The only alterations evident are those roads and trails which most often provide the viewing platform for scenery, establish the recreation experience, and provide views of natural and naturally appearing landscapes outside of the project area. Some timber harvest and prescribed burning has also occurred in the project area, but these activities are not visually evident.

ISSUE #1 – ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCS

Effects caused by the No Action and Action Alternatives were considered in relation to the existing appearance and desired landscape character.

Effects to existing appearance
Public attitudes and beliefs regarding aesthetics and forest management have been studied. "In general, natural forest disturbances that result in extensive areas of dead or dying trees (Haider and Hunt 2002, Ribe 1990) such as the destruction of the forest by fire or flooding are perceived negatively (Daniel 2001; Fanariotu and Skuras 2004; Gobster 1994, 1995)" (cited in Ryan 2005, 17). Larger scale disturbances tend to change the landscape character of an area by altering the physical appearance of the landscape that contributed to the area's identity and sense of place. Large amounts of dead woody material are perceived negatively by viewers regardless if the tree mortality is caused by harvesting or natural forces (Ryan 2005).

Effects to desired landscape character
Desired landscape character is defined as the appearance of the landscape to be retained or created over time (USDA Forest Service 1995). The Action Alternative, although it may have some short-term negative impacts, begins to move the landscape toward the desired landscape character. Effects that would move the vegetation toward the desired landscape character are beneficial to scenery resources in the long term. These beneficial effects are often realized over a long period of time but lead to the lasting sustainability of valued scenery attributes.

Desired landscape character often includes and is linked to preferred visual settings. Gobster (1994) summarizes visually preferred settings as having four common attributes: large trees,

smooth, herbaceous ground cover, an open midstory canopy with high visual penetration, and vistas with distant views and high topographic relief.

Visual access, or how far one can see into a forest, is also a preferred scenic setting (Ryan 2005). Some areas of this landscape now have a great degree of visual access due to the loss of vegetative screening. In the long term, the visual resource will have higher scenic quality if visual access is achieved and enhanced.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Direct and Indirect Effects

Under the No Action Alternative, no fuels reduction or additional storm-damage clean-up would occur. Hazardous buildups of vegetative fuels in the forest would remain and current management practices would continue to occur in the Main Fork and Benbow areas. Visual quality objectives under the No Action Alternative would be maintained. Large amounts of downed woody material would continue to be visible in the immediate foreground of sensitivity level one travel routes and use points. Large amounts of dead woody material are perceived negatively by viewers regardless if the tree mortality is caused by harvesting or natural forces (Ryan 2005). No action would be taken to improve the existing visual condition, and the valued landscape character attributes would be at risk. If the vegetation in these areas was consumed by fire, scorched timber would alter the forested setting, changing the sense of place for visitors in the area and the existing landscape character would be lost for 20 to 30 years until the re-growth of vegetation begins to develop characteristics of a closed canopy and the valued landscape character attributes return. If recreation sites were consumed by fire, scenery viewing opportunities would be altered and valued cultural landscape attributes would be lost.

EFFECTS OF THE ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Mitigations Included in the Action Alternative for Issue #1

See Appendix A at the end of this report for more information on where to apply visual mitigation.

Unit Layout and Design – The project area lies within scenic corridors and viewsheds. Special care should be taken to protect these viewsheds and maintain a naturally appearing landscape. Randomness is the key to a naturally appearing landscape. Care should be taken to mimic existing patterns found in the landscape to reduce unnatural edges between treated and non treated areas.

- Tie outer unit boundaries where possible to natural landform and vegetation edges.
- Minimize straight lines and geometric shapes to create free form vegetative shapes that mimic natural patterns by feathering unit edges and meandering and varying roadside thinning unit widths. Feathering should be a gradual transition between treated and non-treated areas.
- When possible, leave trees in such a way as to make the stand appear open in some areas and denser in others.

- In immediate foreground (300 feet) of Main Fork Road, Highway 212, Benbow Road, and recreation sites in retention and partial retention visual quality objective (VQO) areas, utilize irregular tree spacing concepts to obtain naturally appearing tree spacing.

Minimize visual effects of stumps of removed vegetation in retention and partial retention VQO to maintain naturally appearing scenery.

- Where slopes are flat and terrain allows, in areas with retention VQO, cut stumps of all size classes flush with the surface of the ground within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, and all campgrounds, trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas.
- Where slopes are not flat and terrain allows, in areas with retention or partial retention VQOs, cut stumps of all size classes low (less than 4 inches on the high side of the stump) within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, Benbow Road, and all campgrounds, trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas.

Consider the views from campgrounds and picnic areas which are sensitive viewpoints to maintain a naturally appearing landscape.

- Retain a portion (about 10-15%) of understory trees which do not pose a hazardous fuels risk for vegetative screening around recreation sites. This can be accomplished by leaving individual trees as well as leaving trees in clumps.
- Within 50 feet of campground and picnic area developed site footprints, preserve some vertical diversity in the forested stand by retaining clumps of small trees or individual trees or shrubs that do not pose a ladder fuels risk.

Reduce any long-term visual effects of marking paint that may be left on site.

- If paint is used for marking, use a cut tree mark and place "stump" mark on side away from viewing of the nearest sensitive viewpoint.
- Use a method other than paint to mark unit boundaries, such as ribbon, and remove once the project is complete.

Enhance views when possible at pullouts used as scenic overlooks. At pullouts which could be used as scenic overlooks, remove vegetation in a way that enhances the view from these areas.

Landings and Slash Treatment – Minimize visual effects of landings and slash debris once the project is complete.

- When possible use topography and vegetation to screen landings from view of Main Fork Road and Highway 212. Once management activities are complete, clear slash and debris in landings and revegetate.
- If any vegetative clearing is needed, shape edges of landings to mimic natural patterns and openings.
- Remove any slash debris that may make it to the main road surfaces once the management activities are complete.

Landings and Skid Trails – Reclaim and rehabilitate impacted portions of these areas so as to facilitate rapid recovery and prevent future visible erosion and noxious weed infestation.

Slash Treatment – Slash disposal will be very important in order to retain a naturally appearing landscape and reduce visual effects of pile and burn sites.

- When possible, establish burn piles away from sensitive viewpoints (roads, campgrounds, trails, trailheads, dispersed recreation sites, and cabins). If piles are visible, remove as soon as possible by burning, chipping, etc.
- If after one year pile-burned sites are visible from sensitive viewpoints, areas should be rehabbed by re-burning, scattering, and/or covering with natural duff in order to minimize the visual impact of these management activities.

Limiting Future Recreation Use – If barriers are needed to limit recreation use of an area, use naturally appearing barriers that borrow from the immediate landscape character. Some examples are boulders or wood rail fence. If boulders are used as barriers in recreation areas, 1/3 the size of the boulder should be buried and the naturally weathered side should be up.

Direct and Indirect Effects of the Action Alternative on Issue #1

The Action Alternative proposes storm damage clean-up and fuels reduction activities that may have an impact on scenery resources. Visual effects generated by vegetative management activities vary in duration and intensity depending on the treatment prescribed and the removal method used.

Direct and Indirect Effects of Treatment Types in the Action Alternative on Issue #1

The proposed action involves the following treatments: remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees and thin live trees and/or thin remaining live trees. Trees would be removed by ground-based machine or hand. Approximately 39 percent of the proposed activities are located in retention VQO. Project activities would take place on about 238 acres of retention VQO, 287 acres of partial retention VQO and 90 acres of modification VQO. Project activities in modification VQO are located in the Benbow area

Table 2. Visual Quality Objectives Acres in Proposed Treatments Areas

Proposed Treatment Areas	Retention VQO	Partial Retention VQO	Modification VQO
Main Fork Area	238	0	
Benbow Area	0	287	90
TOTAL	238	287	90

Short-term visual effects of salvage harvesting and fuels reduction treatments are often the most noticeable until the growth of grasses and shrubs begin to soften the effects of harvesting and fuels reduction treatments. Short-term for this analysis refers to a two to five year period after all harvesting and slash treatment activities in an area are complete. Short-term effects are especially noticeable when the viewer has an up close view of the logging site usually in the foreground viewing distance which is up to ½-mile from the viewer. Long-term effects, which for this analysis is considered beyond five years, vary by the treatment type and the logging method used. Most proposed units have more than one treatment type. For specific locations of proposed

treatment types, VQOs, and sensitive viewpoints see the following maps: Main Fork Rock Creek Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Types and Benbow Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Types.

Effects common to all treatment types

Stumps, slash, and edge effects of freshly logged areas or units, depending on the intensity of the treatment, can result in a forest that appears moderately altered in the short term. The contrast between harvested and unharvested areas in the short term is often quite noticeable. With all the visuals mitigation applied, proposed activities are anticipated to not be evident to the casual Forest visitor one to three growing seasons after all project activities are complete.

Tree stumps have impacts to visual resources in the short term and would be most noticeable in the immediate foreground views of Main Fork Road, Benbow Road, recreation sites, and system trails. Visible tree stumps from timber harvesting are generally disliked by viewers (Daniel and Boster 1976). Mitigation measures are in place to reduce the visibility of stumps and minimize their impacts. Stumps would become less visible within one to two growing seasons as grasses, forbs, and shrubs sprout new growth.

Remove and Salvage Windfall and Wind-damaged trees

Windfall and wind-damaged trees would be removed where such trees are concentrated or scattered. Remaining slash and non-merchantable down and damaged material would either be removed or piled and burned onsite. This treatment type is proposed in the immediate foreground and foreground views of Main Fork Road, Benbow Road, Highway 212, system trails, and the developed recreation sites in the project area which are sensitivity level one use points. Unit 60, located in the Benbow area, is in the middleground viewing distance of Fiddler Creek Road, a sensitivity level two travel route. During field review, it was determined that unit 60 is not visible from Fiddler Creek Road due to topographic and vegetative screening.

Large amounts of dead woody material are perceived negatively by viewers regardless if the tree mortality is caused by harvesting or natural forces (Ryan 2005). In areas with extensive wind damage, the forested stand is more open than it was in the past allowing forest visitors to view greater distances. Removal of this downed woody material would improve the existing visual condition by reducing the amount of downed woody material noticeable to forest visitors in the foreground viewing distance from sensitive travel corridors and use points. In some cases large overturned root wads dominate the view from the sensitivity level one and two travel routes. After trees are removed, majority of the root wads would be left in place having a short term effect to visual resources. The removal of these root wads would cause noticeable ground disturbance having a greater effect on scenic quality and the visual resource than leaving these root wads in place. The resulting ground disturbance from removing these root wads would not meet retention VQO.

Removal of windfall and wind-damaged trees would occur on about 218 acres of retention VQO, 287 acres of partial retention VQO, and 90 acres of modification VQO. It is anticipated that the proposed removal and salvage of windfall and wind-damaged trees, with all the visual mitigation

implemented, would not be noticeable to the casual Forest visitor about one to two growing seasons after all proposed activities are complete.

Thin live trees and thin remaining live trees

Trees would be thinned to create a shaded fuel break. The majority of these areas contain non-merchantable size timber. After thinning there would be an average 10 foot spacing between remaining individual tree crowns. This treatment type is proposed in the immediate foreground and foreground views of Main Fork Road, Benbow Road, Hell Roaring Canyon Road, Highway 212, system trails, and the developed recreation sites in the project area which are sensitivity level one use points.

Thinning of these trees would open the tree canopy and change the texture of the canopy especially as viewed from Main Fork Road, Highway 212, Vista Point, and Hell Roaring Canyon Road. Thinning of dense areas would result in a more open appearing forested stand as viewed from the sensitive travel routes and recreation sites with opportunities to view greater distances across the otherwise forested stand and providing greater visual access into the forested areas. More of the forest floor between trees would be visible in the forested stand as viewed from Main Fork Road and Benbow Road, with more light likely to reach the forest floor. Care should be taken when thinning trees around recreation sites in order to retain the scenic quality and character around these sensitive use points. Visual mitigation includes retaining a portion of understory trees which do not pose a hazardous fuels risk for vegetative screening around recreation sites. In some areas the shaded fuel break may at first feel quite open compared to untreated areas, but design criteria for visuals would help break up the unnatural uniformity of the fuelbreak and activities should not be evident to the casual Forest visitor one to two growing seasons after project activities are complete.

Thinning of live trees would occur on about 201 acres of retention VQO, 287 acres of partial retention VQO, and 90 acres of modification VQO. It is anticipated that the fuel break, with all the visuals mitigation implemented, would meet the prescribed VQOs one growing season after all project activities are complete.

Some units have more than one proposed treatment type. The Treatment Type and Visual Quality Objectives Approximate Acres Summary table summarizes the proposed treatment type combinations by each VQO. For specific locations of proposed treatment types, VQOs, and sensitive viewpoints see the following maps: Main Fork Rock Creek Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Types and Benbow Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Types.

Table 3. Treatment Type and Visual Quality Objectives Approximate Acres Summary

Proposed Treatment Types	Retention VQO	Partial Retention VQO	Modification VQO
Remove and salvage windfall and wind-damaged trees	37	0	
Remove and salvage trees; Thin remaining live trees	144	287	90
Thin live trees and/or thin remaining live trees	57	0	
TOTAL	**238**	**287**	**90**

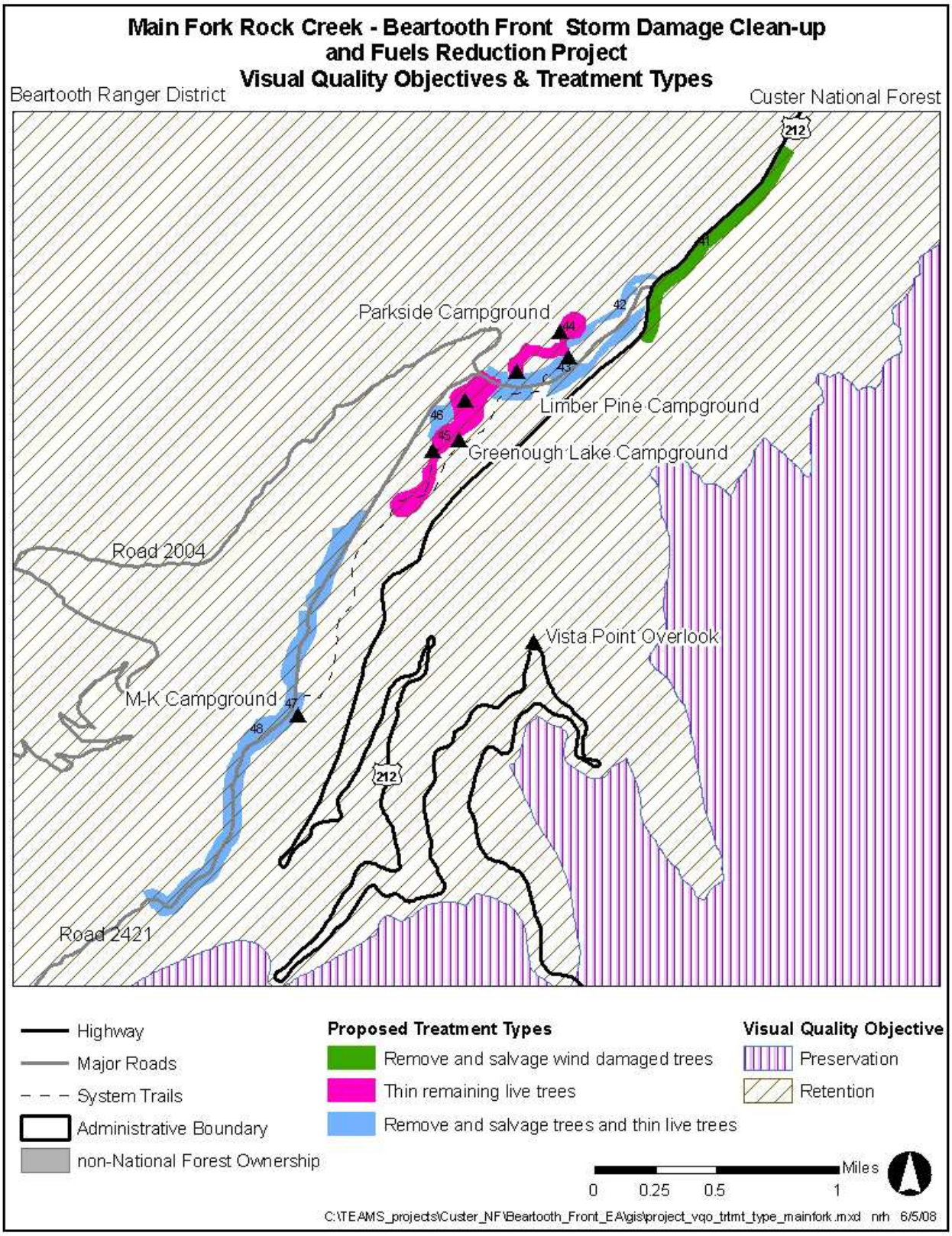

Figure 4. Main Fork Rock Creek Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Types.

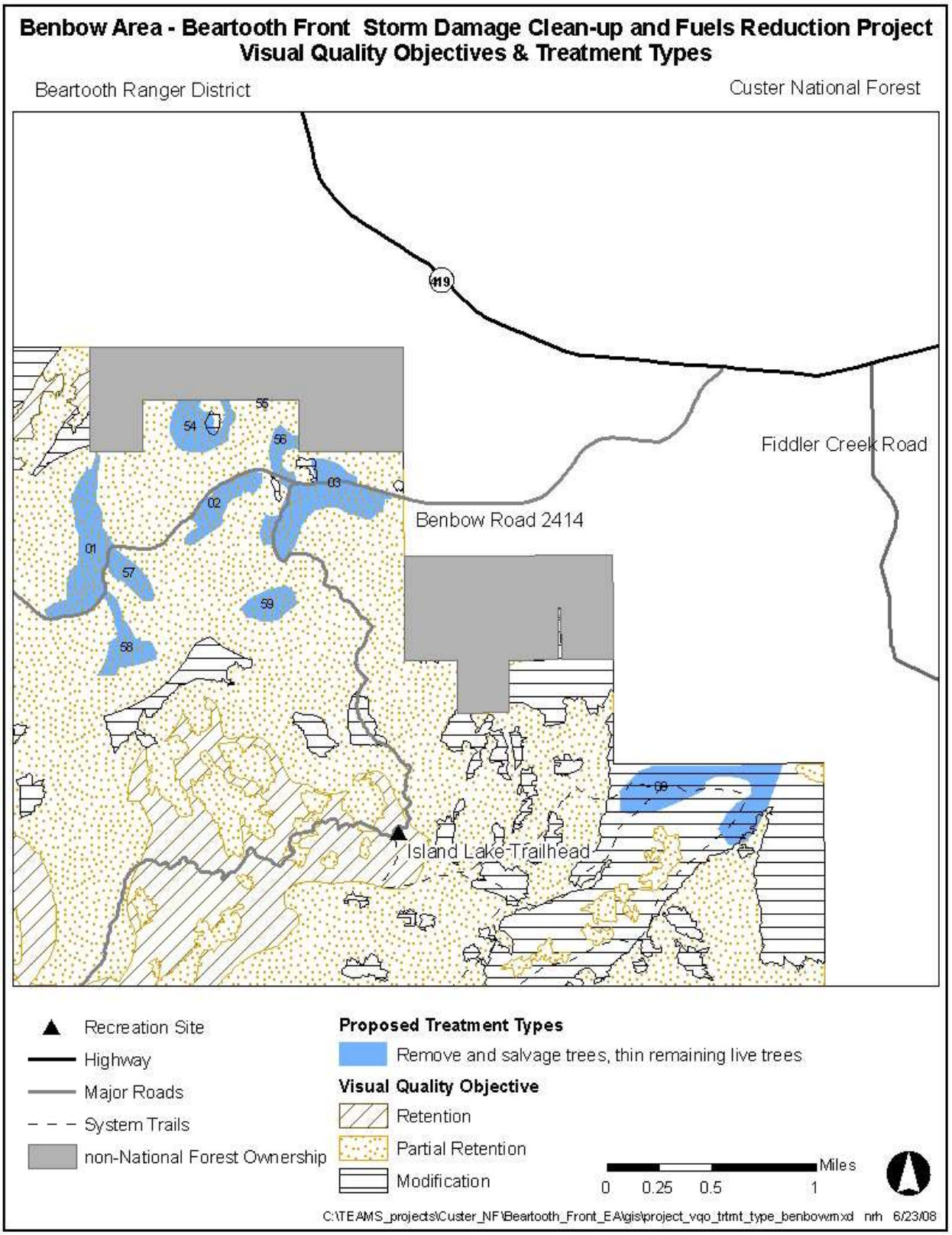

Figure 5. Benbow Visual Quality Objectives and Treatment Types.

Direct and Indirect Effects of Removal Methods and Slash Treatment of the Action Alternative on Issue #1

Removal Methods

Trees would be removed by ground based machine or hand. Some units have the option of using both of these methods. Ground based machine removal methods would occur in units throughout the project area. Equipment used could include skidders, low-angle cable-logging systems, feller bunchers, and/or forwarders. Landings associated with ground based removal would be located away from view where possible and if any vegetative clearing is needed, would be shaped to appear as natural openings and reclaimed and restored upon completion of project activities.

Effects to scenic resources from ground based removal include skid trails which often create lines of exposed soils across the forest floor. Ground based systems would be used adjacent to sensitivity level one travel routes, including Main Fork Road and Highway 212 and adjacent to Benbow Road, a sensitivity level two route. About 237 acres of treated vegetation could be removed by ground based machine in retention VQO, a total of about 287 acres in partial retention VQO, and about 90 acres in modification VQO.

Low-impact, small, ground based machines could achieve retention VQO one growing season after all project activities are complete, with the reduced impacts from the visual mitigation. If larger equipment were used, resulting in a lot of soil disturbance, and a small amount of regrowth by understory vegetation occurred, it may take up to two or three growing seasons to meet retention VQO once all project activities are complete.

Hand removal methods could occur in units in the Benbow area. Effects to scenery resources by hand removal are minimal and would not be noticeable to the casual Forest visitor. Vegetation removal by this method would meet retention VQO. About 95 acres of treated material could be removed by hand in partial retention VQO. The following table, Removal Method and Acres by Visual Quality Objective, illustrates the removal method options and acres located in each VQO.

Table 4. Removal Method and Acres by Visual Quality Objective

Proposed Treatment Areas	Retention VQO	Partial Retention VQO	Modification VQO
Machine	237	192	90
Machine and/or Hand	0	95	0
TOTAL	237	287	90

For specific locations of proposed removal methods, VQOs, and sensitive viewpoints in the Benbow area, see the Benbow Visual Quality Objectives and Removal Methods map. All units in the Main Fork area are proposed for machine removal.

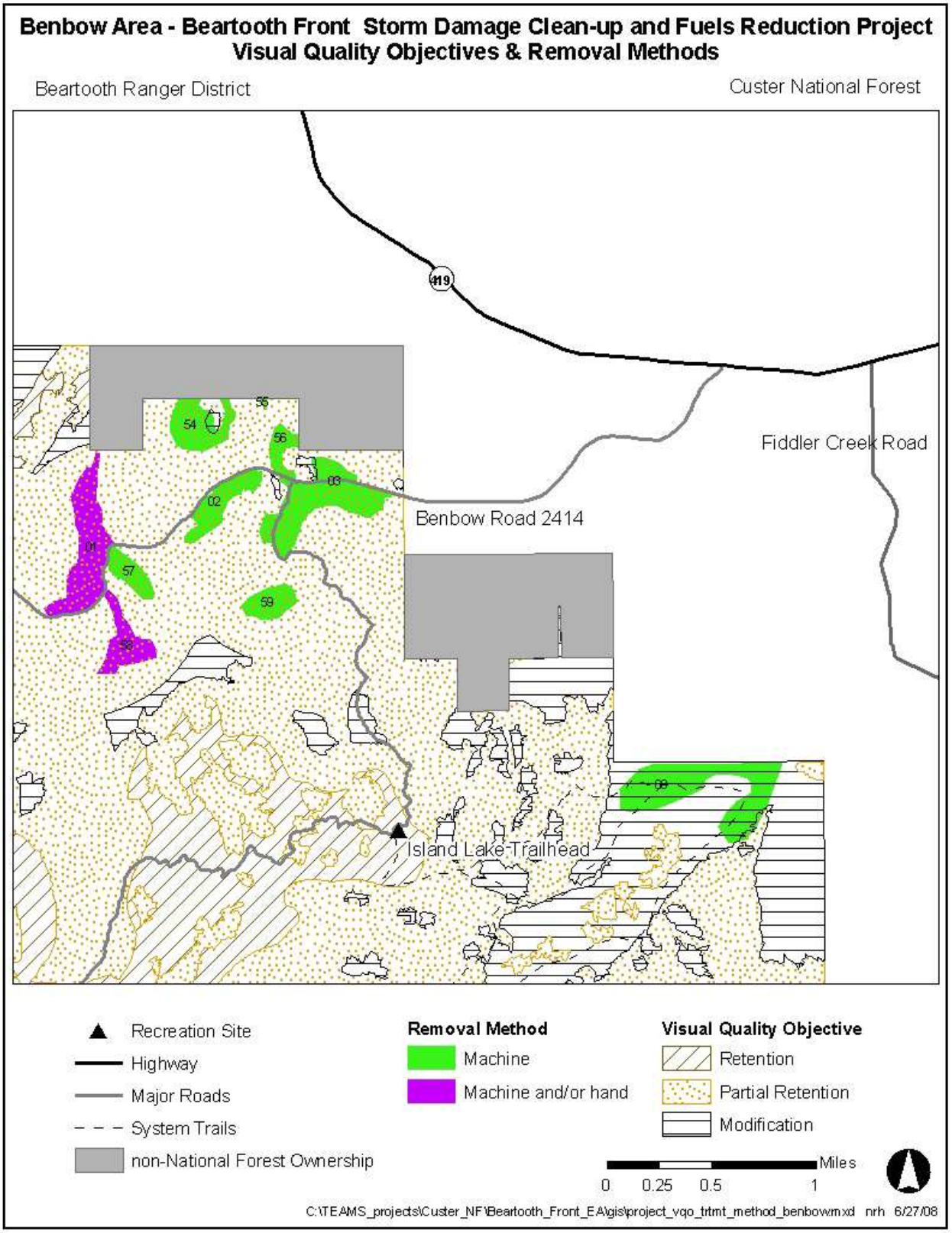

Figure 6. Benbow Visual Quality Objectives and Removal Methods.

Slash Treatment

In machine operable ground, slash would be machine piled to leave less than 10 tons to the acre. In areas not machine operable, or unable to utilize biomass for forest products, the following would apply: tree boles six inches and greater would be bucked to six foot lengths and left in place, all material down to a three inch top would be handpiled, remaining material will be bucked to lie flat on the ground, and piles would be burnt.

The visual impacts of slash are usually temporary and depend on the amount of woody debris left on the ground. Large amounts of slash often initially have negative impacts on scenery (Ryan 2005). For this reason, visuals mitigation regarding slash treatment has been added to reduce the visual effects of slash in the short term. Piling and burning of slash has short term impacts to visuals until the piles are removed by burning, chipping, etc.. In the long term, piling and burning of slash has the least amount of effects to scenery since most of the woody debris is removed from the site.

Cumulative Effects Analysis

The cumulative effects analysis area for visual resources is the project area and the viewsheds of US Highway 212 from Lions Camp to Vista Point, Main Fork Road from US Highway 212 to the state line, and Benbow Road from Highway 419 to about 3.5 miles inside the forest boundary on both National Forest System lands and those under other ownership. Past harvest of timbered slopes is generally noticeable for 15 to 30 years depending on harvest type, soils, aspect, and vegetative species composition. At the end of this time period the re-growth of vegetation begins to develop characteristics of a closed canopy and the area no longer appears altered.

Since private lands do not have regulations for scenic resource management, the effects of ongoing private developments next to National Forest System lands can sometimes have negative effects on scenic resources when viewing a continuous landscape. If activities on private lands are designed to lessen impacts to scenic resources, the difference between private lands and Forest lands are less apparent.

Past Activities

Timber Harvest: Past timber harvest and salvage operations have occurred throughout the analysis area in the Main Fork and Benbow areas. Activities occurred about 1979 through 2004 using a variety of harvest prescriptions. These activities are not apparent to the casual Forest visitor in the viewsheds of Highway 212, Main Fork Road and Benbow Road. Storm damage clean-up has occurred around recreation sites in the Main Fork area in 2007 and 2008. These activities may be noticeable to the casual Forest visitor for one to two growing seasons until remaining woody debris is removed.

Wildfire: Fire has played a part in shaping the current vegetative mosaic of the area. Vegetation reestablished after the fire and the effects of the wildfire are naturally appearing and not evident to the casual Forest visitor in the viewsheds of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, and Benbow Road. Some slight changes in the forest canopy texture or blackened tree boles may be

noticeable from past wildfires, but the effects are natural in this ecosystem. Past wildfire suppression activities, such as fireline construction, may be noticeable to some Forest visitors, but generally remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape being viewed.

Livestock Grazing: Livestock grazing on the Custer National Forest in the Benbow area occurs under Forest Service permits and is the only such grazing in proposed treatment areas. The effects of livestock grazing on scenic resources generally include visible fences to manage allotments, water improvements, and livestock trails. Effects of livestock grazing can have negative effects to scenic resources when lands have been continuously grazed resulting in decreased ground cover or in areas with extensive trailing. Effects of livestock grazing in the area are not noticeable to the casual Forest visitor and do not dominate the landscape being viewed.

Mining: The Benbow millsite, an abandoned mine, is located in the Benbow area. Concrete foundations of the mill with tailings piles are noticeable from Benbow Road. Additional mining and mineral exploration has occurred on National Forest System lands and privately owned lands to the south and west of the Benbow millsite. The landscape appears slightly altered by these activities. Most of these past activities have facilitated current motorized recreation opportunities in the area and most often form the viewing platform and opportunities for viewing scenery. No active mining or mineral exploration is occurring in proposed treatment units.

Mineral leasing and materials: Federally-owned oil and gas resources located in the Benbow area on both National Forest System and private land surface ownership is either currently under lease or has been nominated for lease. The oil and gas drilling activity which has occurred in the area is naturally appearing and not evident to the casual Forest visitor. No oil and gas exploration or production is occurring in proposed treatment units. Roadside non-mechanized collection of rock has occurred within the analysis area under personal use mineral materials permits. These activities are not evident to the casual Forest visitor.

Noxious weeds sites and control: Effects to scenery resources from the control of noxious weeds are minimal and not evident to the casual Forest visitor.

Other activities: Other additional activities include: road building and maintenance, developed campgrounds and trailheads, and summer, fall, and winter recreation including hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and dispersed camping. The effect to scenery resources from these activities is negligible. Most of these past activities have formed the current recreation opportunities in the area and most often form the viewing platform and opportunities for viewing scenery.

Present / On-going Activities

Present and on-going activities include: livestock grazing, mineral material collection, use and maintenance of forest roads, summer, fall, and winter recreation including hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, developed and dispersed camping, and noxious weed assessment and control. Other than being visible while actually occurring, these activities generally do not result in effects to scenery resources which would be evident to the casual Forest visitor. These activities generally remain visually subordinate to the surrounding landscape. Use and

maintenance of forest roads and summer, fall and winter recreation would continue to provide opportunities for viewing scenery.

Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities

Timber harvest: Thinning and harvest adjacent to the Forest boundary is proposed on 40 acres of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management in the Benbow area. Once these project activities are complete, it is anticipated these activities would not be evident to the casual observer from Benbow Road.

Mineral leasing: The Beartooth Oil and Gas leasing FEIS predicted in the Reasonably Foreseeable Development scenario (RFD) that exploratory oil/gas wells would be drilled at Richel Lodge in the Main Fork and in the East Fishtail Creek area. No production was predicted in the RFD. Mineral leasing activities may result in scenery which appears slightly altered and would be noticeable to the casual observer.

Wildfire: Given that these are fire-dependent ecosystems, additional wildfires are expected to start and burn in the analysis area (see the Fuels and Fire Specialist Report for this project). Large scale disturbances tend to change the landscape character of an area by altering the physical appearance of the landscape that contributed to the area's identity and sense of place. Large amounts of dead woody material are perceived negatively by viewers regardless if the tree mortality is caused by harvesting or natural forces (Ryan 2005). However, less severe natural disturbances, such as low burn severity fires where understory burned but most mature trees were not killed, result in preferred forests over time (Taylor and Daniel 1984). The effects of wildfire on scenery resources are covered in more detail in the Environmental Consequences section of this report and would also apply to the scenic resources in the cumulative effects analysis area if a fire were to occur.

Wildfire suppression: Fire suppression activities and related impacts (retardant use, firelines cut by hand and heavy equipment and subsequent rehabilitation) are also expected to continue. Fire suppression activities may create some short-term effects to scenery resources including control lines and dozer lines which create wide swaths through vegetation and ground disturbance, danger tree felling for firefighter safety, fire retardant use, and openings created for safety zones which may be noticeable to Forest visitors, but generally remain subordinate to the characteristic landscape being viewed. Once ground disturbance is seeded and recontoured, effects to scenery resources would generally be rehabilitated within three years. Wider swaths in vegetation and larger openings created for safety zones would take longer to rehabilitate and may be noticeable until trees reach a height of 20 feet.

Other activities: Other reasonably foreseeable future activities include: livestock grazing, mineral material collection, use and maintenance of forest roads, summer, fall, and winter recreation including hunting, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, developed and dispersed camping, and noxious weed assessment and control. It is anticipated that these activities would have minimal effects to scenery resources which would not be noticeable to the average viewer or would remain visually subordinate to the surrounding landscape. Use and maintenance of forest roads and summer, fall and winter recreation would continue to provide opportunities for viewing scenery.

Cumulative Effects of the No-Action Alternative on Issue #1 – Visuals resource

Cumulative effects to scenery resources under the No Action Alternative are expected to meet the visual quality objectives of the Forest Plan. In retention VQO areas, any cumulative deviations present are expected to repeat natural form, line, color and texture so that they are naturally appearing and not evident to the casual Forest visitor. In partial retention areas, any deviations present are expected to be subordinate to the natural landscape character.

Under the No Action Alternative, no fuels reduction or additional storm-damage clean-up would occur. Hazardous buildups of vegetative fuels in the forest would remain in the Main Fork and Benbow areas. Large amounts of downed woody material would continue to be visible in the immediate foreground of sensitivity level one travel routes and use points. No action would be taken to improve the existing visual condition, and the valued landscape character attributes would be at risk. Valued scenic attributes may be altered if a large high burn severity fire were to occur in the project area. Views of the area would likely be dominated by large amounts of dead trees, which is not part of the desired landscape character. This alternative likely results in conditions and trends that put valued scenery attributes at risk with cumulative effects that reduce the stability of scenery resources in the long term.

Cumulative Effects of the Action Alternative on Issue #1 – Visuals resource

While fuels reduction would occur under the Action Alternative, there would be potential for large scale wildfires to occur across the cumulative effects analysis area. Increased firefighting efficiency resulting from treatment (see the Fuels and Fire Specialist report for this project) may decrease large fire frequency and severity, particularly in the case of human caused fires that are ignited adjacent to roads in the treatment areas. Additionally, the proposed fuel treatments are designed to improve defensibility of structures and adjacent private property, which would help maintain the valued cultural landscape character attributes. However, due to the density and expanse of hazardous fuels across the cumulative effects analysis area, outside of the proposed treatment areas associated with this project, wildfires which are not initially suppressed would still have the potential to develop into large scale fires. The valued landscape character attributes would be at risk in untreated areas. If the vegetation in these areas was consumed by fire, scorched timber would alter the forested setting, changing the sense of place for visitors in the area and the existing landscape character would be lost for 20 to 30 years until the re-growth of vegetation begins to develop characteristics of a closed canopy and the valued landscape character attributes return.

Cumulative effects to scenery resources in the project area are expected to meet the visual quality objectives of the Forest Plan in the short term. In retention VQO areas, any cumulative deviations present are expected to repeat natural form, line, color and texture so that they are naturally appearing and not evident to the casual Forest visitor. In partial retention VQO areas, any deviations present are expected to be subordinate to the natural landscape character.

The Action Alternative combined with the projects and activities listed above would have short term effects on scenery resources. Visual mitigation measures are in place in minimize the effects of the project so they meet the assigned VQOs of retention, partial retention, and

modification in the short term, one to two growing seasons after all project activities are complete.

Short-term Uses vs. Long-term Productivity of the No Action and Action Alternatives for Issue #1 – Visuals resource

None identified.

Irreversible/Irretrievable Commitments of the No Action and Action Alternatives to Issue #1 – Visuals resource

None identified.

Unavoidable Adverse Effects of the No Action and Action Alternatives on Issue #1 – Visuals resource

None identified.

Forest Plan Consistency of the Action Alternative for Issue #1

The Action Alternative has been designed to meet the visual quality objectives set for this area by the Custer National Forest Management Plan in the short term by applying all the visual mitigation. In addition, the Action Alternative also begins to move the area toward maintaining the desired landscape character. Proposed project activities along with the projects and activities listed above would have no long-term effects to scenery resources. The Action Alternative would be consistent with Custer National Forest Management Plan goals, standards, and guidelines for visuals.

Other Required Disclosures under the Action Alternative for Issue #1

None identified.

Conclusions for Environmental Consequences of Alternative One on Issue #1

The majority of effects to scenery resources are short term in duration with long term benefits which would help maintain the desired landscape character. Short-term visual effects of storm damage clean-up and fuels reduction activities are often most noticeable in foreground views until the growth of grasses and shrubs begin to soften the effects of these activities.

A key issue for the Beartooth Front Storm Damage Clean-up and Fuels Reduction Project is the effects to visual resources, particularly the visual appearance around recreation and those areas with retention visual quality objective. The analysis indicator and threshold for this issue are the visual quality objectives assigned to the project area by the Management Plan.

If the visual mitigation is implemented, the Action Alternative would meet the retention, partial retention, and modification VQOs as outlined in the Custer National Forest Management Plan, because the effects of proposed activities in retention VQO are anticipated to be naturally appearing, repeating the form, line, color, and texture which are frequently found in the

characteristic landscape. In partial retention VQO areas, any deviations present are expected to be subordinate to the natural landscape character. It is anticipated that the proposed activities would meet the VQOs assigned to the project area in the short term either at project completion or about one to two growing season after all proposed project activities are complete.

The Action Alternative would be consistent with Custer National Forest Management Plan goals, standards, and guidelines for visuals. No direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to scenery resources are expected in the long term from the storm damage clean-up and fuels reduction activities. There are no irreversible or irretrievable commitments related to scenery resources from the Action Alternative.

/s/ Nicole R. Hill August 27, 2008

SPECIALIST SIGNATURE DATE

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Appendix A: Project Wide and Site Specific Visuals Mitigation

Mitigation Statement	Unit Number
Unit Layout and Design – The project area lies within scenic corridors and viewsheds. Special care should be taken to protect these viewsheds and maintain a naturally appearing landscape. Randomness is the key to a naturally appearing landscape. Care should be taken to mimic existing patterns found in the landscape to reduce unnatural edges between treated and non treated areas. • Tie outer unit boundaries where possible to natural landform and vegetation edges. • Minimize straight lines and geometric shapes to create free form vegetative shapes that mimic natural patterns by feathering unit edges and meandering and varying roadside thinning unit widths. Feathering should be a gradual transition between treated and non-treated areas. • When possible, leave trees in such a way as to make the stand appear open in some areas and denser in others.	**All units**
• In immediate foreground (300 feet) of Main Fork Road, Highway 212, Benbow Road, and recreation sites in retention and partial retention visual quality objective (VQO) areas, utilize irregular tree spacing concepts to obtain naturally appearing tree spacing.	**Apply this mitigation to the following units in Retention VQO and any other units deemed necessary during implementation:** Main Fork area: All units **Apply this mitigation to the following units in Partial Retention VQO and any other units deemed necessary during implementation:** Benbow Area: 01, 02, 03, 56, 57, 58

Minimize visual effects of stumps of removed vegetation in retention and partial retention VQO to maintain naturally appearing scenery. • Where slopes are flat and terrain allows, in areas with retention VQO, cut stumps of all size classes flush with the surface of the ground within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, and all campgrounds, trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas. • Where slopes are not flat and terrain allows, in areas with retention or partial retention VQOs, cut stumps of all size classes low (less than 4 inches on the high side of the stump) within 300 feet, or visual sight distance if less that 300 feet, of Highway 212, Main Fork Road, Benbow Road, and all campgrounds, trails, trailheads and dispersed recreation areas.	**Apply this mitigation to the following units in Retention VQO and any other units deemed necessary during implementation:** Main Fork area: All units **Apply this mitigation to the following units in Partial Retention VQO and any other units deemed necessary during implementation:** Benbow Area: 01, 02, 03, 56, 57, 58
Consider the views from campgrounds and picnic areas which are sensitive viewpoints to maintain a naturally appearing landscape. • Retain a portion (about 10-15%) of understory trees which do not pose a hazardous fuels risk for vegetative screening around and recreation sites. This can be accomplished by leaving individual trees as well as leaving trees in clumps. • Within 50 feet of campground and picnic area developed site footprints, preserve some vertical diversity in the forested stand by retaining clumps of small trees or individual trees or shrubs that do not pose a ladder fuels risk.	**Sensitive Viewpoints for this mitigation include:** Main Fork Rock Creek area: Parkside Campground, Limberpine Campground, Greenough Lake Campground and recreation site, and M-K Campground.
Reduce any long-term visual effects of marking paint that may be left on site. • If paint is used for marking, use a cut tree mark and place "stump" mark on side away from viewing of the nearest sensitive viewpoint. • Use a method other than paint to mark unit boundaries, such as ribbon, and remove once the project is complete.	**All units**
Enhance views when possible at pullouts used as scenic overlooks. At pullouts which could be used as scenic overlooks, remove vegetation in a way that enhances the view from these areas.	**Opportunities to be determined by Recreation Staff during implementation**

Landings and Slash Treatment – Minimize visual effects of landings and slash debris once the project is complete. • When possible use topography and vegetation to screen landings from view of Main Fork Road and Highway 212. Once management activities are complete, clear slash and debris in landings and revegetate. • If any vegetative clearing is needed, shape edges of landings to mimic natural patterns and openings. • Remove any slash debris that may make it to the main road surfaces once the management activities are complete.	**All landings**
Landings and Skid Trails – Reclaim and rehabilitate impacted portions of these areas so as to facilitate rapid recovery and prevent future visible erosion and noxious weed infestation.	**All landings and skid trails**
Slash Treatment – Slash disposal will be very important in order to retain a naturally appearing landscape and reduce visual effects of pile and burn sites. • When possible, establish burn piles away from sensitive viewpoints (roads, campgrounds, trails, trailheads, dispersed recreation sites, and cabins). If piles are visible, remove as soon as possible by burning, chipping, etc. • If after one year pile-burned sites are visible from sensitive viewpoints, areas should be rehabbed by re-burning, scattering, and/or covering with natural duff in order to minimize the visual impact of these management activities.	**Sensitive Viewpoints for this mitigation include:** <u>Main Fork Rock Creek area:</u> Main Fork Road, Parkside Campground, Limberpine Campground, Greenough Lake Campground and recreation site, M-K Campground, and Parkside NRT. <u>Benbow area:</u> Benbow Road
Limiting Future Recreation Use – If barriers are needed to limit recreation use of an area, use naturally appearing barriers that borrow from the immediate landscape character. Some examples are boulders or wood rail fence. If boulders are used as barriers in recreation areas, 1/3 the size of the boulder should be buried and the naturally weathered side should be up.	**To be determined by Recreation Staff during implementation**