2. California State Scenic Highway System reroutes as designated in the September 1970 Master Plan. [These] highways include:
   - State Highway 120, west of U.S. 395 to Tioga Pass;
   - U.S. 395;
   - State Highway 158;
   - State Highway 203; and
   - State Highway 168.

The Mammoth area can be partially viewed from U.S. 395 and State Highway 203. Although the specific proposed project will not be visible from U.S. 395, it is within the immediate foreground and foreground view distances of State Highway 203. (It will be noted in the following site-specific visual analysis that although the proposed project is within immediate foreground and foreground distances, the majority of it cannot be seen from State Highway 203 due to elevation differences and existing tree cover.)

In Chapter 4 of the INFLRMP, the management direction for visual resources within this area is described as meeting or exceeding "the Partial Retention [VQO] for runs, lifts, and base areas as seen at middleground distances from Sensitivity Level 1 routes and occupancy sites."

It appears that the Management Direction of maintaining the Partial Retention VQO would therefore apply to the proposed project.

METHODOLOGY

In order to accurately assess the potential visual impacts of the proposed project, two methodologies were employed: a regional approach and a site-specific approach.

Scenery Management System

The Scenery Management System (SMS) is a regional approach to understanding and classifying the visual context of an area as established by the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service Division (*Agricultural Handbook No. 701,* December 1995). The SMS creates an inventory and analysis of aesthetic values while attempting to determine the relative value and importance of scenery in a national forest.

The SMS establishes a series of components to analyze in a rational sequential format in order to arrive at a set of visual goals and objectives for Forest Service lands. The initial component is the Ecological Unit Description, which describes the basic physical and biological elements of the study area. The Landscape Character Description is developed by characterizing the existing landscape and describing its unique, natural elements. Once this general description is established, Scenic Attractiveness Classes are developed: Class A (Distinctive), Class B (Typical), and Class C (Indistinctive). Scenic Attractiveness Classes attempt to further describe the existing landscape in terms of line, color, form, texture, and the combined context. Scenic Integrity is also described, mapped, and categorized in qualitative rankings ranging from Very High to Unacceptably Low.

Landscape Visibility rates the viewing constituency in terms of vantage points and distance to the area in question. This is further developed into a Constituent Analysis, which connects the relative importance of the viewed landscape to the public, resulting in Concern Levels ranging from High to Low. Seen Areas and Distance Zones are mapped to indicate the distance of the public viewers from the viewed landscape, with general categories of Foreground, Middleground, and Background.

Figure 3 depicts the interactive relationship of these components. Further, the SMS applies to all Forest Service property when developing an inventory, database, and management objectives, as well as in considering potential changes to the landscape.

Pursuant to the aforementioned publication, the SMS should identify the following:

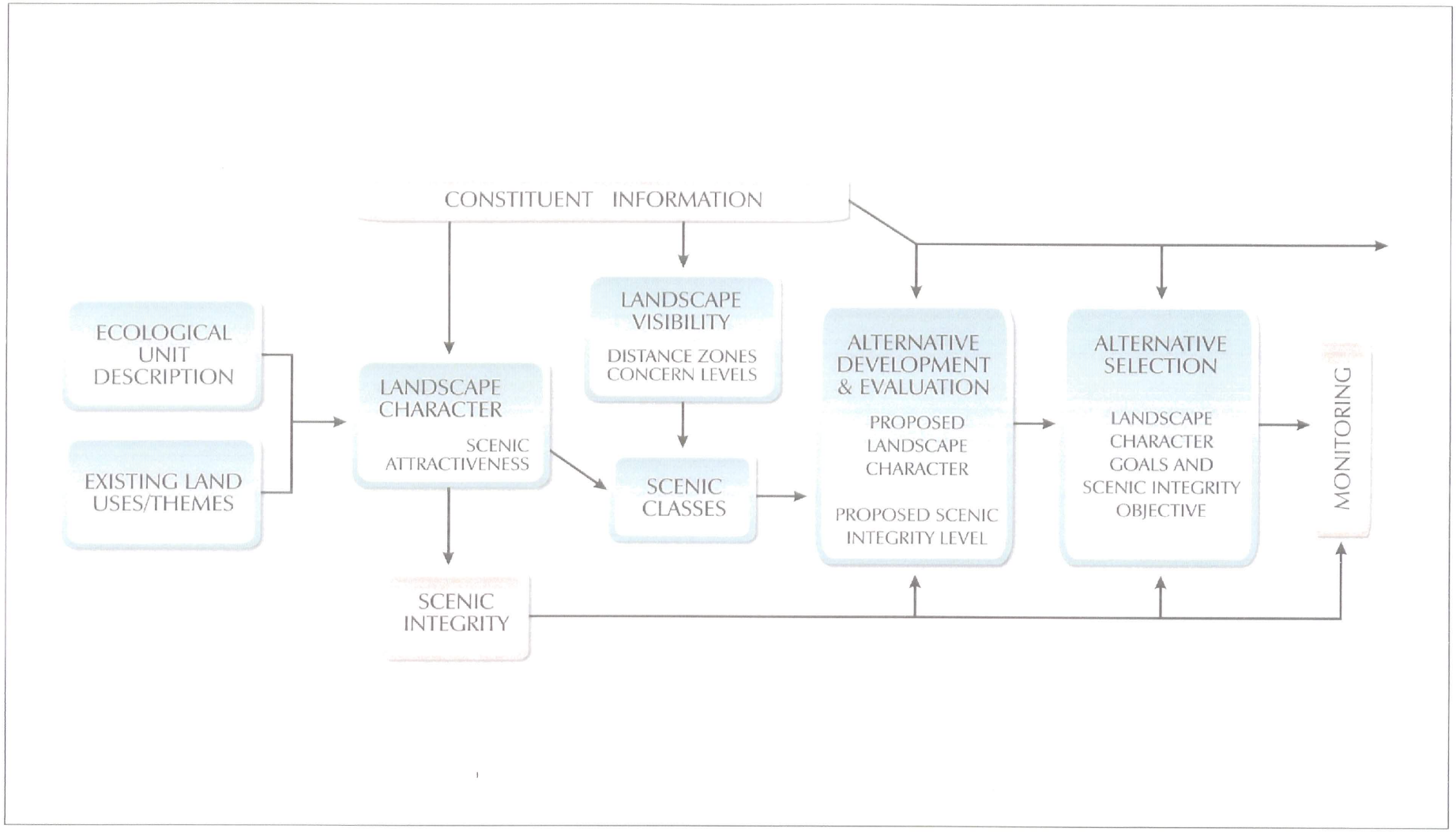
- Landscape Character
- Visual Sensitivity
- Scenic Integrity

Overall, the SMS communicates the importance of the natural landscape of the national forest in both its intrinsic state and as viewed by constituents. Being a "system," several sequential phases of analysis characterize the SMS process. First, the Landscape Character is defined by identifying the Existing Land Uses within the Ecological Unit. Then Scenic Attractiveness values, Distinctive, Typical, and Indistinctive, are established for subunits within the study area. The SMS then sets forth the Scenic Integrity (e.g., degree of intactness vs. disruption and/or alteration) for these areas. Landscape Visibility is based upon public vantage points in terms of the uniqueness of and distance from the viewed area. Scenic Attractiveness and Landscape Visibility are combined to determine a numerically ranked Scenic Class. These Scenic Classes are ranked in an order identifying relative scenic importance, or value, of discrete landscape areas.

Site-Specific

Although the SMS is employed as a planning and assessment tool, it is intended for application on a regional, subregional, and community scale. It can be used at a project-level scale; however, in order to assess the potential visual impacts of the proposed project, a more detailed, direct sight line analysis is warranted due to its remoteness, size, and relatively limited potential area of impact and visibility.

This site-specific approach identifies key public and private vantage points and pre- and postproject views from these vantage points.



LSA

FIGURE 3

Mammoth Mountain Ski Back Trail

SMS Process Flow Chart

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