

**Visual Resource Specialist Report**  
**Motorized Travel Management EA**  
**San Bernardino National Forest**

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## Visual Resources

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### Affected Environment

Dramatic scenery defines the existing visual condition of the San Bernardino National Forest; a mountain refuge surrounded by rapidly growing, diverse urban communities. From the edge of busy metropolitan areas to rugged deserts, scenic canyons and backcountry wild lands of chaparral which rise to towering peaks, dense forests and cool lakes, the Forest offers many and varied natural recreation opportunities. There are green-cloaked mountains with deeply incised canyons and swift-flowing streams; steeply rising peaks that create a strong visual and physical edge to the urban development of the Inland Empire; and twisting, climbing roads along big-tree forested landscapes on the mountain sides – all unique visual attributes that quickly separate the mountain communities from the valley cities below.

The most attractive landscapes are located where the highest combination of landform, water form, rock form, and vegetation variety occur. These locations are classified as Scenic Attractiveness Class A (SAC-A) and make up approximately 32 percent of the Forest. The more common landscapes—those classified as Scenic Attractiveness Class B (SAC-B)—consist of steep, chaparral-covered mountains intermixed with foothill and valley areas consisting of oak woodlands and grassland. These areas make up approximately 38 percent of the Forest. The remaining 30 percent are classified as Scenic Attractiveness Class C (SAC-C), or less distinctive landscapes.

“Key Places” as defined and discussed in the Forest Plan FEIS represent the most picturesque national forest locations. These Key Places possess their own distinctive landscape character and are particularly valued for their scenic quality. They generally serve as urban backdrops or recreation destinations, or they contain scenic routes and byways. Key Places within the San Bernardino National Forest include:

- Arrowhead 36,663 acres
- Big Bear 39,078
- Big Bear Backcountry 63,889
- Front Country 13,079
- Garner Valley 38,451
- Idyllwild 44,361
- Lytle Creek 42,384
- San Bernardino Front 84,566
- San Gorgonio 99,925
- Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mtns 63,726

See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/scfpr/projects/lmp/mapindex.htm>.

There are two designated National Forest Scenic Byways – Rim of the World (State Highways 38, 18 and 138) and Palms to Pines (State Highways 74 and 243) - with important viewsheds.

The National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) survey of 2003 found that about 41% of Forest visitors participated in 'Viewing Natural Features' and 17% participated in 'Driving for Pleasure'.

## **Environmental Consequences**

### **Introduction**

This section of the Motorized Travel Management environmental analysis examines the extent to which alternatives respond to visual resources management direction established in the San Bernardino National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan) and the Travel Management (TM) Rule. The Forest Plan visual resources direction was established under the implementing regulations of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA).

Landscape management is used to meet people's scenery expectations for the management of national forest landscapes. In the development of the Forest Plan, the Forest's visual resources were inventoried to determine the landscape's scenic attractiveness. To ensure that scenic integrity is maintained, three Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) were found applicable for the San Bernardino National Forest's selected Forest Plan alternative. They are derived from the landscape's attractiveness and the public's expectations or concerns. Each scenic integrity objective depicts a level of scenic integrity used to direct landscape management: Very High (unaltered), High (appears unaltered), and Moderate (slightly altered). Generally, landscapes that are most attractive and are viewed from popular travel routes are assigned higher scenic integrity objectives. SIOs are generally synonymous with the Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) in the original land management plan.

Roads and trails create linear alterations in landscapes that can be mitigated through sound design. Unmitigated, they present uncharacteristic line qualities in forest landscapes. Landscapes with a dense canopy cover have the capability of masking these linear alterations; sparsely covered landscapes have less capability. An increase in unauthorized routes, particularly in sparsely covered landscapes, can adversely affect the Forest's visual resources.

### **Analysis Framework: Statute, Regulation, Forest Plan, and Other Direction**

Direction relevant to the proposed action as it affects visual resources includes:

National Forest Management Act (NFMA) The National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and its implementing regulations, required the inventory and evaluation of the forest's visual resource, addressing the landscape's visual attractiveness and the public's visual expectations. Management prescriptions for definitive lands areas of the forest are to include Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Travel Management Rule The TM Rule does not cite aesthetics specifically, but in the designation trails or areas, the responsible official shall consider effects on forest resources, with the objective of minimizing effects of motor vehicle use.

San Bernardino National Forest Land Management Plan The Plan contains Forest-wide management direction in the form of Scenic Integrity Objectives for visual resources and identification of “Key Places” for visual management emphasis.

Part 2 of the Forest Plan contains the following three landscape management objectives:

**LM 1 - Landscape Aesthetics.** Manage landscapes and built elements to achieve scenic integrity objectives:

- Use best environmental design practices to harmonize changes in the landscape and advance environmentally sustainable design solutions.

**LM 2 - Landscape Restoration.** Restore landscapes to reduce visual effects of nonconforming features:

- Prioritize landscape restoration activities in key places (Arrowhead, Big Bear, Big Bear Back Country, Front Country, Garner Valley, Idyllwild, Lytle Creek, San Bernardino Front Country, San Gorgonio, and Santa Rosa and San Jacinto National Monument). Integrate restoration activities with other resource restoration.
- Restoration of landscape should consider not only the existing condition but the sustainable natural appearing landscape that is the desired condition of the mature forest.

**LM 3 - Landscape Character.** Maintain the character of "Key Places" (see LM2) to preserve their intact nature and valued attributes:

- Maintain the integrity of the expansive, unencumbered landscapes and traditional cultural features that provide the distinctive character of the place.
- Promote the planning and improvement of infrastructure along scenic travel routes.

Part 3 of the Forest Plan identifies the following two standards:

**S9.** Design management activities to meet the scenic integrity objectives (SIO) shown on the Forest Plan Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) Map.

**S10.** Scenic integrity objectives will be met with the following exceptions:

- (1) minor adjustments not to exceed a drop of one SIO level are allowed with the forest supervisor’s approval; and
- (2) temporary drops of more than one SIO level may be made during and immediately following project implementation providing they to not exceed three years in duration.

## Indicator Measures

Indicator Measures are intended to address how each action individually (direct and indirect effects) and each alternative as the sum total of its proposed actions (cumulative effects) respond to the Forest Plan and the TM Rule.

**Measurement Indicator:** Compliance with the Scenic Integrity Objectives. The extent to which the NFTS proposals fall within the High or Moderate SIO (number of miles traversing landscapes that are to remain natural to slightly altered appearing in character) for each alternative is determined.

Within the San Bernardino National Forest, only those lands within existing or recommended wilderness are classified as having a Very High SIO. No portion of the motorized NFTS currently occurs within or is proposed for this SIO.

The entire rest of the Forest, with the exception of a few small scattered parcels of land with a Moderate SIO that are primarily located along the fringes of the Forest, is classified as having a High SIO. In a High SIO, the valued landscape character appears intact and management attempts to retain this character. Deviations may be present but must repeat form, line, color, texture and pattern common to the landscape so they are not evident.

See: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/scfpr/projects/lmp/mapindex.htm>.

All action alternatives (1, 3, and 4) propose changes to the NFTS that traverse landscapes classified with a High SIO. The NFTS in the no action Alternative (2) also traverses landscapes classified with a High SIO. The NFTS in all alternatives also traverse several extremely small areas that are classified with a Moderate SIO, but for purposes of this analysis they are considered insignificant.

## Direct, Indirect and Cumulative Effects

### Effects Common to All Alternatives

Recreation and administrative transportation experiences will be somewhat different among the alternatives, all of which contain routes ranging from high standard surfaced roads already designated for public highway-licensed motor vehicle use to infrequently maintained native surface roads and trails. All of the action alternatives differ in motorized use mileage from that included in Alternative 2 (No Action). Management of the systems proposed in all of the action alternatives will represent a change from the current condition. The visual resources of the Forest would be maintained, altered or restored as described below. Opportunities for viewing scenery would vary - the construction of new transportation routes would generally create more chances for viewing scenery while some viewing may be decreased by road and trail closures. Landscapes would be managed to maintain a natural-appearing character in all alternatives and would meet their assigned SIOs; however, landscape restoration to

achieve desired landscape character would change depending upon the theme of the alternative.

Cross-country motorized vehicle travel has been (since 1989) and will continue to be prohibited within the San Bernardino National Forest. The prohibition of cross-country motorized vehicles continues to have a positive effect on the Forest's visual resources. Improvement of the visual resource is on-going and long-term; unauthorized routes and impact areas gradually heal over time when use is controlled.

In all action alternatives, visual resources would not be affected by the modification of vehicle class or the addition of mixed use.

The viewshed is the unit of spatial analysis for determining all effects. For the San Bernardino National Forest, viewsheds are in Key Places and Scenic Byway corridors.

The short-term timeframe is one year (not applicable in the cumulative effects analysis) and the long-term (and cumulative effects) timeframe is 20 years.

### **Alternative 1**

Alternative 1 would change the NFTS as described in Chapter 2. It has the second most motorized road and trail mileage of the three action alternatives. Options for motorized travel are proposed to provide greater access and diversity of motorized riding experiences.

Alternative 1 proposes a motorized route system of (mileage approximate):

- Unauthorized Routes for Green/Red Sticker Vehicles up to 50 inches Wide = 8.25 miles
- Unauthorized Routes for Street Legal Vehicles = 0.30 miles
- Restoration of Unauthorized Routes = 74.20 miles
- Reclassification of Routes for Green/Red Sticker Vehicles up to 50 inches Wide = 55.25 miles
- Decommissioning of Routes = 18.49 miles
- Reclassification of Routes For Street Legal Vehicles Only = 24.93 miles
- Reclassification of Routes for Administrative Use Only = 50.63 miles
- New Construction of Green/Red Sticker Routes = 0.45 miles

The motorized recreation opportunities in Alternative 1 would directly and indirectly affect the natural appearance of the forest landscapes.

All of the proposed NFTS falls within the High Scenic Integrity Objective, traversing landscapes that are to be retained - remaining natural in appearance and character. The addition of unauthorized routes and the re-classification or decommissioning of existing routes would not affect visual resources as these improvements are already in place on the landscape. The new construction proposed is very minor and would not significantly affect the SIO. And the restoration of unauthorized routes would greatly enhance the SIO. ***Overall, Alternative 1 complies with the Forest SIO of High.***

No viewsheds in key places have the potential to be negatively affected by the proposed NFTS in this alternative. However, the Big Bear Backcountry Place has the potential to be very positively affected through the restoration of unauthorized routes to allow the return of a more natural landscape. Over time, natural revegetation would occur within these unauthorized routes, obscuring the constructed appearance and reducing contrast with the surrounding landscape. This more natural appearing landscape across the Place would result with less evidence of human activity. No views from Forest Scenic Byways would be affected by Alternative 1.

Non-characteristic line quality created by new trail segments is the greatest direct impact to the Forest landscape visual resources. Although not significant for Alternative 1 (less than one half mile), the location and design of these segments would significantly reduce their visual impact through best environmental and design practices.

The NFTS additions in Alternative 1 that contribute to the continuity of motor touring would have a beneficial effect on visual resources, since it is assumed that dead-end route situations would be reduced.

## **Alternative 2**

This 'no action' alternative would propose no change to the NFTS.

There would be almost no direct or indirect effects other than the continued beneficial effects of the prohibition of motorized cross-country travel. Under this alternative the agency will take no affirmative action (no change from current management or direction). The use of all unauthorized routes will continue to be illegal and no changes will be made to the current NFTS. The no action alternative is a proposal to 'do nothing' and maintain the 'status quo'.

The only direct effect would be negative - that no unauthorized routes would be rehabilitated and therefore no natural revegetation would occur to obscure the constructed appearance and contrast with the surrounding landscape.

## **Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 would change the NFTS as described in Chapter 2. It has the highest motorized road and trail mileage of the three action alternatives, and proposes the greatest addition to the non-highway legal vehicle system and the most highway legal mileage. Additional options for motorized travel are proposed in alternatives to provide greater access and diversity of motorized riding experiences.

Alternative 3 proposes a motorized route system similar to Alternative 1 with the following modifications:

- Designate access for street legal vehicles to designated (yellow post) dispersed camping sites. (5.6 miles)
- Do not reclassify portions of 1N34 and 1N35 for administrative use only.

- Do not decommission 3N11.
- Do not decommission 3W12 and 3W13 (just south of 3N34).
- Do not make changes to the following routes northeast of Lake Arrowhead: do not decommission 3W12, 3W13 and 2N95; do not make 2N96 administrative use only; and do not remove green sticker use on 2N28Y. Also no construction of access connector to Forest Service North Shore Work Center and no construction of connector between 3W12 and 3W13.
- Do not remove green sticker use on 2N30 and 2N40 (Marshall Peak).
- Do not remove green sticker use on 3N10 (John Bull trail).
- Do not remove green sticker use on 3N53 (along railroad).

### **Yellow Post Site Names/Numbers - Alternative 3**

- Coon Creek 1-19
- South Shore Big Bear  
26-30
- Clark's Ranch 1
- Fawnskin  
1,2,4,5,6,7,31,33,34
- Thomas Hunting  
Grounds 1
- Keller Peak 1-10
- Fuller Ridge 1
- Black Mountain  
1,3,4,5
- Seven Pines 1
- Hall Decker 1
- Santa Rosa  
Campground 1
- Santa Rosa Springs 1
- Santa Rosa  
Yellowpost
- Toro Camp 1,2
- Southridge 1-3
- Apple Canyon 1-3
- South Lake Hemet 1
- Thomas Mountain 2-7
- Thomas Mountain  
Lookout 3
- Tool Box Springs 1-5
- Goff Flat 1

Mileage totals by category are as follows.

**Table 1. Alternative 3; Proposed Route Changes, by mileage**

Add green sticker use on existing Street legal routes	55.25
Decommission	14.24
Make administrative use only	40.96
New construction	0.17
Add unauthorized routes to system	14.71
Rehabilitate unauthorized routes	73.58
Remove green sticker use from street legal routes	6.14

The motorized recreation opportunities in Alternative 3 would directly and indirectly affect the natural appearance of the forest landscapes.

All of the proposed NFTS falls within the High Scenic Integrity Objective, traversing landscapes that are to be retained - remaining natural in appearance and character. The addition of unauthorized routes and the re-classification or decommissioning of existing routes would not affect visual resources as these improvements are already in place on the landscape. The new construction proposed is very minor and would not significantly affect the SIO. And the restoration of unauthorized routes would greatly enhance the SIO. ***Overall, Alternative 3 complies with the Forest SIO of High.***

No viewsheds in key places have the potential to be negatively affected by the proposed NFTS in this alternative. However, the Big Bear Backcountry Place has the potential to be very positively affected through the restoration of unauthorized routes to allow the return of a more natural landscape. Over time, natural revegetation would occur within these unauthorized routes, obscuring the constructed appearance and reducing contrast with the surrounding landscape. This more natural appearing landscape across the Place would result with less evidence of human activity. No views from Forest Scenic Byways would be affected by Alternative 3.

Non-characteristic line quality created by new trail segments is the greatest direct impact to the Forest landscape visual resources. Although not significant for Alternative 3 (less than one quarter mile), the location and design of these segments would significantly reduce their visual impact through best environmental and design practices.

The NFTS additions in Alternative 3 that contribute to the continuity of motor touring would have a beneficial effect on visual resources, since it is assumed that dead-end route situations would be reduced.

#### **Alternative 4**

Alternative 4 would change the NFTS as described in Chapter 2. It has the lowest motorized road and trail mileage of the three action alternatives, and proposes the least addition to the non-highway legal vehicle system and the most highway legal mileage. Additional options for motorized travel are proposed in alternatives to provide greater access and diversity of motorized riding experiences.

Alternative 4 proposes a motorized route system similar to Alternative 1 with the following modifications:

- Decommission 1N39A between Highway 38 and Fish Creek (1.5 miles).
- Decommission 1N05A after the Aspen Grove trailhead (0.8 miles).
- Do not add green sticker use to 2N90A (to Tip Top Mountain).
- Do not add green sticker use to 4S19 (San Jacinto District).

Mileage totals by category are as follows.

**Table 2. Alternative 4, Proposed Route Changes, by Mileage**

Add green sticker use on existing street legal routes	50.99
Decommission	20.81
Make administrative use only	50.63
New construction	0.45
Add unauthorized routes to system	8.75
Rehabilitate unauthorized routes	74.20
Remove green sticker use from street legal routes	24.94

The motorized recreation opportunities in Alternative 4 would directly and indirectly affect the natural appearance of the forest landscapes.

All of the proposed NFTS falls within the High Scenic Integrity Objective, traversing landscapes that are to be retained - remaining natural in appearance and character. The addition of unauthorized routes and the re-classification or decommissioning of existing routes would not affect visual resources as these improvements are already in place on the landscape. The new construction proposed is very minor and would not significantly affect the SIO. And the restoration of unauthorized routes would greatly enhance the SIO. ***Overall, Alternative 4 complies with the Forest SIO of High.***

No viewsheds in key places have the potential to be negatively affected by the proposed NFTS in this alternative. However, the Big Bear Backcountry Place has the potential to be very positively affected through the restoration of unauthorized routes to allow the return of a more natural landscape. Over time, natural revegetation would occur within these unauthorized routes, obscuring the constructed appearance and reducing contrast with the surrounding landscape. This more natural appearing landscape across the Place would result with less evidence of human activity. No views from Forest Scenic Byways would be affected by Alternative 4.

Non-characteristic line quality created by new trail segments is the greatest direct impact to the Forest landscape visual resources. Although not significant for Alternative 4 (less than one quarter mile), the location and design of these segments would significantly reduce their visual impact through best environmental and design practices.

The NFTS additions in Alternative 4 that contribute to the continuity of motor touring would have a beneficial effect on visual resources, since it is assumed that dead-end route situations would be reduced.

### **Cumulative Effects**

The Forest Plan provides guidance to reduce unauthorized routes over time. However, Alternative 2 (No Action) has the greatest potential for having a negative cumulative effect for visual resources. The continued presence of un-restored unauthorized user-created routes in the Big Bear Backcountry Place would create uncharacteristic visual quality in that forest landscape.

There are no other cumulative effects in Alternatives 1, 3 or 4. All would comply with the Forest SIO of High. A more natural appearing landscape across the Forest would result with less evidence of human activity in those areas where unauthorized restoration has occurred. No viewsheds in key places or scenic byway views would be significantly affected in any alternative.

### **Compliance with the Forest Plan and Other Regulatory Direction.**

All alternatives would meet the goals and objectives of the San Bernardino National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan).

- Although there are NFTS changes by alternative within the Scenic Integrity Objectives in alternatives 1, 3 and 4, no SIO would be compromised in any alternative.
- Part 2 of the Forest Plan contains the LM 1,2,3 objectives for Visual Resources. All alternatives would meet these objectives. In particular, Alternatives 1, 3 and 4 would to varying degrees as described above meet the objectives of managing and restoring landscapes and maintaining the character of Key Places.
- And all action alternatives would plan, design, construct, and maintain the National Forest System roads and trails to meet Plan objectives, promote sustainable resource conditions, and safely accommodate anticipated levels and types of use. Unnecessary unclassified roads would be eliminated and landscapes would be restored. Finally, unclassified roads would be added to NFTS in Alternatives 1, 3 and 4 to improve the user experience as described above.

All alternatives would meet the Regulatory Direction (NFMA, NEPA and TM).

- ‘Off-Highway Vehicle’ use would be planned and implemented to protect land and visual resources, promote public safety, and minimize conflicts with other uses of the NFS lands.
- Areas have been described that would be affected by the alternatives under consideration; the environmental impacts of the alternatives including the proposed action, any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided, and the relationship between short-term uses of man’s environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity, and any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposal should it be implemented.
- In designating NFS roads and trails, responsible officials have considered visual resources.