UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

March 21, 2000

In Reply Refer To:
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EMS TRANSMISSION 03/27/2000
Instruction Memorandum No. 2000-096
Expires: 09/30/2001

To: All State Directors

From: Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning

Subject: Use of Visual Resource Management Class I Designation in Wilderness Study Areas

This memorandum provides clarification on the appropriate Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class designation to be used when preparing Resource Management Plans (RMPs), or other management plans or guidance for lands that contain Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs).

Specifically, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Handbook, H-8410-1, Visual Resource Inventory, states on page 6, paragraph 1, that ". . . Class I is (emphasis added) assigned to those areas where a decision has been made previously to maintain a natural landscape. This includes areas such as wilderness areas, . . . and other congressionally and administratively designated areas where decisions have been made to preserve a natural landscape." The BLM has interpreted this statement to include WSAs until such time as these areas are designated as wilderness or released for other uses by the Congress.

It is important to understand that in these situations, the VRM management objectives are being used to support WSA management objectives. For WSAs, this is not only about visual values as many WSAs do not necessarily contain exceptionally high scenic values. The primary objective of WSA management is to retain the WSA's natural character essentially unaltered by humans during the time it is being managed as a WSA.

Therefore, it is the Bureau position, recognizing case-by-case exceptions for valid existing rights and grandfathered uses, that all WSAs should be classified as Class I, and managed according to VRM Class I management objectives until such time as the Congress decides to designate the area as wilderness or release it for other uses. If a WSA is designated as wilderness, the area would continue to be managed as VRM Class I. However, if the WSA is released, the RMP for the area would need to be amended and appropriate VRM management objectives established.

This policy applies to all future plans and plan amendments.

The attachment to this memorandum consists of questions and answers that may be helpful in fully understanding this policy clarification.

Please contact Rich Hagan of my staff at (303) 236-9508 regarding technical implementation of this memorandum.

Signed by:
Elaine M. Brong
Deputy Assistant Director
Renewable Resources & Planning

Authenticated by:
Robert M. Williams
Directives, Records
& Internet Group,WO540

1 Attachment
1 - Questions and Answers - Visual Resource Management Policy Clarification for WSAs (2 pp)

Directives forwarded to State Director, CA-930, P. Brink on 3/27/00

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY CLARIFICATION FOR WSA'S

Q. What is the reason for this policy clarification?

A. This policy clarification will insure consistent application of the visual resource management policy for wilderness study areas when plans and plan amendments are prepared.

Q. Why should wilderness study areas be included as Class I areas in future planning efforts?

A. Class I is assigned to areas where a management decision has been made previously to maintain a natural landscape. WSAs are administratively or Congressionally designated areas where the decision has been made to retain a natural landscape until Congress makes a decision as to its future management.

Q. Is this policy clarification consistent with the H 8400-1, Visual Resource Inventory Handbook?

A. Yes. The clarification is consistent with the Visual Resource Inventory Handbook, H-8400-1, Section V.A.1., which states that administratively designated areas with an objective of preserving an existing natural landscape should be assigned Class I. This is clearly the case with Wilderness Study Areas.

Q. Why were WSAs not specifically included in the H 8400-1 Handbook?

A. A specific reference to WSAs in the 1984 Handbook was probably an oversight. The purpose of the Instruction Memorandum is to clarify the intent of the Handbook.

Q. What is the process for implementing this policy clarification?

A. This policy should be incorporated in all future plans and plan amendments in areas with WSAs. It is not necessary to amend existing plans solely to change VRM class ratings.

Q. Why is a VRM Class I needed for WSAs? Doesn't the BLM's Interim Management Policy adequately protect WSAs?

A. The BLM's Interim Management Policy prevents the impairment of wilderness values, but does allow some modifications to the natural character of the area if modifications are found not to impair or are allowed because of valid rights, grandfathered activities, safety considerations or other reasons. In these cases visual resource management complements interim management by providing techniques to insure that changes are designed not to attract attention.

Q. Why should WSAs with low scenic quality be classified as Class I areas?

A. The visual resource management process takes into consideration the concepts of both scenic quality and natural appearing landscapes. Areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, and wild sections of wild and scenic rivers are designated with the intent to preserve their natural appearing landscape regardless of their scenic value. High scenic quality may be a value of these areas, but is not necessary for their designation.

Q. Will Class I prevent construction of structures or maintenance of existing structures that would be allowed in WSAs under the Interim Management Policy (IMP)?

A. No. Resource Management Plans addressing this issue should note that the visual resource management (VRM) objectives are designed to support the IMP guidelines to not impair the natural character of the existing landscape. They should never be used to supercede the IMP guidelines.

Kim Allison
07/28/2000 10:49 AM

To: Dianna Brink/CASO/CA/BLM/DOI@BLM
cc:

Subject: Re: Monthly Grazing Permit/Lease Progress Report--DUE July 31

Ridgecrest and Palm Springs have not renewed any permits for leases in July. I have sent out all the renewal permits and leases for Ridgecrest and Palm Springs, and have asked that they be returned signed before August 15. We should be able to report all permits and leases renewed in August.

Kim