The Interagency Visitor Use Management Council

Framework Training

- Module 1: Introduction to the Framework and Council
- Module 2: Sliding Scale
- Module 4: Element 2- Define Management Direction

http://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/
Importance of Visitor Use Management

Proactively planning for visitor use maximizes the ability of agencies to encourage access and protect resources and values.
What is Visitor Experience

• **Visitor use:** refers to the human presence in an area for recreation purposes, including education, interpretation, inspiration, and physical and mental health.

• **Visitor experience:** is the perceptions, feelings, and reactions that a visitor has before, during, and after a visit to an area.
Importance of Visitor Use Management

Visitor Use Management helps land managers....

• Enhance opportunities to connect visitors to the park’s fundamental resources and values
• Assess the appropriateness of new visitor activities
• Align public expectations with visitor opportunities
• Minimize impacts to resources and experiences caused by visitor use
• Manage visitor demand at popular destinations
• Balance tradeoffs between different visitor use management strategies
Recent Media on Visitor Use Management

Record Visitation Strained Some National Parks This Year, Creating Concern Over What 2016 Might Bring
By Kurt Repanshek on December 19, 2015

Yellowstone Saw Nearly 1 Million Visitors in July; Is That A Good Thing?
By Kurt Repanshek on August 26th, 2015

Forest Service eyes new management system for Maroon Bells–Snowmass Wilderness
By Scott Condon
The Aspen Times
POSTED: 05/04/2016 07:25:03 PM MDT | UPDATED: 8 DAYS AGO

One million visitors.
That seems like a lot for an entire year, and definitely a lot in one month for Yellowstone National Park, which came within 18,000 of passing an all-time record for visitors over the July Fourth holiday weekend. The Park Service is still counting this weekend's numbers, but preliminary figures show visits through July were about 190,000 higher than last year. It's the second consecutive year that the Park has seen a significant increase in visitors, and officials are already eyeing potential solutions to manage the growth.

Yellowstone, after seeing 840,700 visitors in July, is riding a 15 percent increase in traffic over last year. Rocky Mountain National Park, 17 percent, and Badlands National Park, 16 percent, are also seeing increases. The increase is being fueled by record-breaking tourism around the country, which has been driven by warm weather and strong economic growth.

As the Park Service points out, it is difficult to compare this year's figure to last year's, since the Park was closed due to the government shutdown earlier this year. However, even compared to the same period last year, this year's numbers are still up significantly. For example, in July 2015, the Park had 720,000 visitors, compared to this year's 840,700.

One of the main concerns is the impact of increased visitors on the Park's natural resources. The Park Service is already seeing wear and tear on trails and viewing areas, and officials are looking at ways to manage the growth in a way that minimizes impact on the Park's fragile ecosystem.

One potential solution is to implement a system of permits for 12 major areas of the Park, including the boundaries of the Grand Canyon, Old Faithful, and Yellowstone lakes. The system would allow visitors to book up to 24 hours in advance, and would be based on a lottery system that takes into account factors such as distance from the visitor's home, and the number of people in the party.

Officials are also looking at ways to reduce the number of cars entering the Park, which is a significant source of congestion and noise. One possibility is to establish a vehicle-free zone in the Park, which would allow for more space for wildlife and visits to enjoy the Park's natural beauty.

In the meantime, Park Service officials are urging visitors to plan ahead and be prepared for possible delays. They are also reminding visitors to follow Park regulations and respect the Park's natural resources.

It's a busy time at the Cataract Creek Hot Springs in a shot from a recent summer evening. The Forest Service wants to limit visitors through a permit system. (White River National Forest / Courtesy photo)
The Interagency Visitor Use Management Council

Mission:

Provide guidance on long-term visitor use management policies and give direction on the most pressing needs by building technical competencies and improving interagency coordination.

http://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/
Council Products and Activities

Position Papers
- Visitor Use Management on Public Lands and Waters: A Position Paper to Guide Policy
- Visitor Capacity on Federally Managed Lands and Waters: A Position Paper to Guide Policy

Visitor Use Management Framework

Coming Soon!
- Monitoring Guidebook
- Visitor Capacity Guidebook
- Training
Visitor Use Management

Process for managing all characteristics of visitor use and settings

• Sustain resource conditions and visitor experiences

• Variety of strategies and tools
  — Education
  — Site Management
  — Regulation
  — Enforcement
  — Rationing/allocation
Visitor Capacity

• Subcomponent of visitor use management

• **Maximum amounts and types of visitor use** that an area can accommodate

• While sustaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences
Visitor Use Management Framework

1. Why
   - Build the Foundation

2. What
   - Define Visitor Use Management Direction
   - Universal to the Framework:
     - Law
     - Agency Policy
     - Sliding Scale
     - Public Involvement

3. How
   - Identify Management Strategies

4. Do
   - Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, and Adjust
Visitor Use Management Framework

Builds upon past frameworks:

- Takes the best and incorporates lessons learned.
- Application of sliding scale.
- Diversity of settings and opportunities.
- Clearly identifies where visitor capacity fits in the framework.
- Consistent terminology!
- Focus on process that integrates into agency planning procedures.
Visitor Use Management Framework

Sliding Scale

- The ‘thought process’ is the same regardless of complexity
- Match investment with level of uncertainty
- Consistent with National Environmental Policy Act
- Framework includes Decision Support Tool
- Criteria:

![Sliding Scale Diagram]
Visitor Use Management Framework

1. **WHY**
   - Build the Foundation
   - **Steps:**
     1. Clarify project purpose and need.
     2. Review the area’s purpose and applicable legislation, agency policies, and other management direction.
     3. Assess and summarize existing information and current conditions.
     4. Develop a project action plan.
   - **Outcome:** Understand why the project is needed, and develop the project approach.

2. **WHAT**
   - Define Visitor Use Management Direction
   - **Steps:**
     5. Define desired conditions for the project area.
     6. Define appropriate visitor activities, facilities, and services.
     7. Select indicators and establish thresholds.
   - **Outcome:** Describe the conditions to be achieved or maintained and how conditions will be tracked over time.

3. **HOW**
   - Identify Management Strategies
   - **Steps:**
     8. Compare and document the differences between existing and desired conditions, and, for visitor use-related impacts, clarify the specific links to visitor use characteristics.
     9. Identify visitor use management strategies and actions to achieve desired conditions.
     10. Where necessary, identify visitor capacities and additional strategies to manage use levels within capacities.
     11. Develop a monitoring strategy.
   - **Outcome:** Identify strategies to manage visitor use to achieve or maintain desired conditions.

4. **DO**
   - Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, and Adjust
   - **Steps:**
     12. Implement management actions.
     13. Conduct and document ongoing monitoring, and evaluate the effectiveness of management actions in achieving desired conditions.
     14. Adjust management actions if needed to achieve desired conditions, and document rationale.
   - **Outcome:** Implement management strategies and actions, and adjust based on monitoring and evaluation.
Visitor Use Management Framework

Element 1- Build the Foundation

1) Clarify project purpose and need.
2) Review the area’s purpose, legislation, policy and management direction.
3) Assess existing information and current conditions.
4) Develop project planning strategy.
Visitor Use Management Framework

Element 2 - Define Visitor Use Management Direction

5) Define desired conditions (resources, recreation opportunities, visitor experiences).

6) Define suitable visitor uses, facilities, and services based on desired conditions.

7) Determine acceptable levels of impact.
Visitor Use Management Framework

Element 3 - Identify Management Strategies

8) Compare and document the differences between existing and desired conditions and, for visitor related impacts, clarify the specific links to visitor use characteristics.

9) Identify visitor use management strategies and actions to achieve desired conditions.

10) Where necessary, identify visitor capacities and strategies to manage use levels within capacities.

11) Develop monitoring strategies.
Visitor Use Management Framework

Element 4-Implement, monitor, evaluate, and adjust

12) Implement management actions.

13) Conduct and document ongoing monitoring and evaluate the effectiveness of management actions in achieving desired conditions.

14) Adjust management actions if needed to achieve desired conditions and document rationale.
Visitor Use Management Framework

Sliding Scale

- The ‘thought process’ is the same regardless of complexity
- Match investment with level of uncertainty
- Consistent with National Environmental Policy Act
- Framework includes Decision Support Tool
- Criteria:
Sliding Scale

**Issue Uncertainty:** what is the level of uncertainty about the issue being addressed?

- Can we connect impacts to visitor use conclusively?
- Is the project clearly stated?
- What is the likelihood that more issues continue to emerge?
Sliding Scale

Impact Risk: Are there considerable threats to the quality of resource conditions and visitor experiences?

- Are there imminent threats to unique or irreplaceable resources?
- Are there imminent threats to unique or irreplaceable experiences or recreation opportunities?
- Are the potential impacts landscape scale?
- Are special interest groups involved?
Sliding Scale

**Stakeholder Involvement:** What is the level of stakeholder interest in the issue?

- Are special interest groups involved?
- Are they well organized, established, and engaged?
Sliding Scale

Level of controversy/potential for litigation

• Is this issue one that has been previously litigated on in this unit or other units?
• Does previous litigation give clear guidance on what should now be considered precedent?
Visitor Use Management Framework

Sliding Scale – Decision Support Tool

**CRITERIA** - Use the ratings assigned to questions 1-8 to evaluate the following 4 sliding scale criteria. Combine those criteria into a single qualitative rating (high, moderate, or low) of the project’s appropriate location on the sliding scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>MODERATE</th>
<th>LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A  Issue Uncertainty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  Impact Risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  Stakeholder Involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D  Level of Controversy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location on the Sliding Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CRITERIA - Use the ratings assigned to questions 1-8 to evaluate the following 4 sliding scale criteria. Combine those criteria into a single qualitative rating (high, moderate, or low) of the project’s appropriate location on the sliding scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>MODERATE</th>
<th>LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Issue Uncertainty</td>
<td>This project is clearly stated, and the ability to complete the work is fairly certain. No surprises are anticipated.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Impact Risk</td>
<td>The risk to resources and visitor experience is low since the campground is established and surveys have been completed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Stakeholder Involvement</td>
<td>Stakeholders are supportive of the project and want it to be completed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Level of Controversy</td>
<td>Low levels of controversy exist due to the established nature of the campground. Additionally, the project will create opportunities to improve the visitor experience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location on the Sliding Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CRITERIA** - Use the ratings assigned to questions 1-8 to evaluate the following 4 sliding scale criteria. Combine those criteria into a single qualitative rating (high, moderate, or low) of the project’s appropriate location on the sliding scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>RATIONALE</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
<th>MODERATE</th>
<th>LOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Issue Uncertainty</td>
<td>Resource conditions and potential impacts are well understood; however, how the issue will affect visitor experiences and surrounding communities is less certain.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Impact Risk</td>
<td>There are significant natural resources, cultural properties, and visitor experiences involved with this issue.</td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Stakeholder Involvement</td>
<td>The process is being closely followed by multiple stakeholder groups, each with a different opinion about what is appropriate.</td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Level of Controversy</td>
<td>All potential solutions will be considered controversial by one or several stakeholders, and there is a history of litigation for this park.</td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location on the Sliding Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Element 1

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK
Visitor Use Management Framework

Element 1- Build the Foundation

1) Clarify project purpose and need.
2) Review the area’s purpose, legislation, policy and management direction.
3) Assess existing information and current conditions.
4) Develop project planning strategy.
Element 1: Build the Foundation

Step 1: Clarify project purpose and need

What are the project issues?
• Develop clear and concise issue statements

Analysis of Issues
• What is creating the issue or opportunity?
  • Amount of use? Timing? Changes in visitor preferences or interests?
• What key values or desired conditions are being affected?
• Who is being affected? What is known about their concerns?
Element 1: Build the Foundation

Step 2: Review the area’s purpose and applicable legislation, agency policies, and other management direction.

What does the legislation and policy tell us about:

• Desired conditions?
• Appropriate kinds of use?
• Management direction?
• Resource management?
• Recreation and access?
Element 1: Build the Foundation

Step 3: Existing Conditions

What do we already know?

• Existing monitoring and research data
• Anecdotal information/unit staff knowledge of field conditions
• Public scoping and other content from past plans

What are the key information gaps that are critical to the plan?

*Important to separate “must have” from “nice to have” information*....

• Rapid assessment using park staff and volunteers
• Public scoping for the process
• Needed research to fill critical gaps
Element 2

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK
Element 2 - Define Visitor Use Management Direction

5) Define desired conditions (resources, recreation opportunities, visitor experiences).

6) Define appropriate visitor activities, facilities, and services.

7) Select indicators and establish thresholds
Element 2: Build the Foundation

Step 5: Define Desired Conditions

Desired conditions provide a picture of the character, condition and quality of park settings and visitor experiences.
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 6: Define appropriate visitor activities, services, and facilities
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 7 - Select indicators and establish thresholds

**Indicator:** Specific resource or social attributes that can be measured to track change in conditions so that progress towards achieving and maintaining desired conditions can be assessed.

**Threshold:** the “minimally acceptable” condition associated with each indicator.
Element 2: Build the Foundation

Step 5: Define Desired Conditions

Desired conditions provide a picture of the character, condition and quality of park settings and visitor experiences.
Element 2: Build the Foundation

Step 5: Define Desired Conditions

Desired Conditions should be:

- future oriented/results oriented
- statements of aspiration
- focused on visitor experiences and resources
- responsive to stakeholder interest
- connected to purpose or reason area was established
Element 2: Build the Foundation

Example Desired Conditions

• The area is predominately natural with evidence of human development only along the trail system.

• Visitors would have the opportunities to better understand the riverways’ significant resources and values through a wide range of interpretive facilities and services, interact with other visitors and park staff, and recreation an environment that is supported by a variety of visitor services.
Small Group Exercise

Defining Desired Conditions for Moose Creek Watershed Restoration Project

VUM Framework, Appendix B
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 6: Define appropriate visitor activities, services, and facilities

Some criteria for evaluating visitor use of federal lands and waters could be:

- Consistent with the unit purpose and significance, laws, regulations, and policies.
- Achieves desired conditions of the unit
- Does not unduly conflict with other uses and activities and is consistent with existing plans for public use and resource management.
- Contributes to visitors’ understanding and appreciation of area’s purpose and significance.
- Enhances visitor experiences consistent with unit purposes, significance, and mission goals.
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 7 - Select indicators and establish thresholds

**Indicator:** Specific resource or social attributes that can be measured to track change in conditions so that progress towards achieving and maintaining desired conditions can be assessed.

**Threshold:** the “minimally acceptable” condition associated with each indicator.
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 7 - Select indicators and establish thresholds
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 7 - Select indicators and establish thresholds

Overcoming Barriers

Keep *focused* on the most important topics

Consider existing monitoring activities and identify those related to visitor use – can we overlap monitoring efforts?

Find simple, easy to monitor indicators *that matter* to make the process efficient and effective

Only set indicators and thresholds for conditions that we are willing or able to take actions to correct
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 7 - Select indicators and establish thresholds

Identifying Indicators

• How is the public affecting natural and cultural resources, or the visitor experience?
• What data do you already have on human use impacts?
• What indicators related to human use are being monitored?
• What do conditions look like on the ground?

Prioritizing Indicators

Which of these impacts/topics are of highest priority because of:

• Importance of the natural or cultural resources or visitor experiences that are being impacted
• Vulnerability of the natural or cultural resources or visitor experiences being impacted
• Clarity of connection between visitor use and the impact?
Element 2: Establish Management Direction

Step 7 – Select indicators and establish thresholds

Developing Thresholds

Most important: It represents an acceptable condition and is a threshold for management action well before reaching a degraded or impaired condition.

There is no one, absolute, “right” threshold
Indicators and Thresholds

YOSE Stoneman Meadow
1978

YOSE Stoneman Meadow
2012
Natural Resource Indicators

Informal Visitor Created Trails

- **Indicator**: The number of visitor-created trails leaving designated trail (measured every mile).
- **Threshold**:
  - *Zone 1*: No more than one visitor-created trail leaving designated trail per 1 mile measurement.
  - *Zone 2*: No more than three informal visitor-created trails leaving designated trail per 1-mile measurement.

- **Indicator**: Amount of roadside disturbance to soil and vegetation
- **Threshold**: No more than 1 roadside disturbance area greater than 5 square feet off of X road.
Cultural Resource Indicators

- **Indicator:** Percent change in integrity of cultural resource condition every year.
- **Threshold:** 0% change detected on 80% of sites surveyed each year.
- **Indicator:** Number of incidents of vandalism to historic structures.
- **Threshold:** No more than 1 incident reported per year for every 20 sites surveyed.
Social Indicators

- **Indicator:** The number of people encountered on trail
- **Threshold:** Visitors will not encounter more than 20 people on segment B of the trail, 80% of the time
- **Indicator:** People per viewscape at select destinations
- **Greatview Overlook Threshold:** No more than 20 people per viewscape, 80% of the time
- **Lily Pond Threshold:** No more than 10 people per viewscape, at all times
Small Group Exercise

Defining Indicators and Thresholds for Moose Creek Watershed Restoration Project

VUM Framework, Appendix B
Questions