VISUAL QUALITY BEST PRACTICES









VISUAL QUALITY BEST PRACTICES

April, 2025

Laura M. Rotegard[1], Gary W. Johnson[2], Ksienya A. Taylor[3], Mark E. Meyer[3]

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Natural Resource Stewardship and Science — Air Resources Division
Denver, CO 80225

1. National Park Service, Retired
   Indianola, WA, 98342

2. National Park Service, Retired
   Asheville, NC 28804

3. National Park Service
   Natural Resource Stewardship and Science — Air Resources Division
   Lakewood, CO 80225

Suggested citation:
Rotegard L.M., Johnson, G.W., Taylor, K. A., and Meyer, M. E., 2024. Visual Quality Best Practices, National Park Service, Lakewood, Colorado.

Cover image credits: Overlook image - NPS; Flower image - NPS/Hannah Schwalbe; Building image - NPS/Chris Wonderly; Deck image - NPS

This page is intentionally blank

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to Visual Quality Best Practices! This is where efficiency meets excellence and theory transforms into tangible success. These aren't mere guidelines for improving visual quality and safeguarding valued scenery. They're the culmination of wisdom distilled from successes and lessons learned. Landscape architects, architects, engineers, and project professionals have been exchanging these pearls of wisdom for years within the National Park Service. Now, these invaluable insights are documented, and available to you for application and widespread sharing.

Viewing stunning, important scenery is, and always has been an expected and iconic park service experience. Providing a positive experience remains at the heart of our service. That experience includes the entirety of a visit from approaching the park to arriving at the destination to take in the views. Improving visual quality throughout the park is critical to creating an attractive park image and enhancing that positive experience. Implementing these best practices can help you enhance visual quality while addressing challenges like increasing visitation, encroaching energy development, and maintaining aging facilities.



Figure 1. A view in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The Visual Quality Best Practices collection is the latest tool developed by the NPS Visual Resources Program to help parks manage visual resources. The 35 best practices have recommendations and practical examples that work for different projects and parks. A Project Planning Questionnaire in the Appendix includes guidance to identify which Best Practices would typically apply to each kind of project. Most projects will benefit from the use of several best practices across the six (6) categories:

- SITE RIGHT: ideas that highlight the importance of finding the right place
- VIEW SMARTS: the essentials about planning for different viewing experiences
- DESIGN WISE: recommendations for "Best fit" designs for the existing landscape
- WORKING WITH PLANTS: techniques for using plants, including making development less visible and more aesthetic.
- SURFACE SMARTS: insights on the ways that surface colors and textures affect visual quality.
- SIGNS & LIGHTING: ideas for two particularly difficult areas that greatly influence visual quality.

Use the Best Practices. Revise them, and improve on them. Consider them as a primer — not the final word. Caring for visual resources can be shared by all park staff and enhances the sense of stewardship and positive staff morale. Join us in embracing these best practices to elevate our collective efforts for conserving scenery and enhancing visual quality for visitors today and in the future.

This page is intentionally blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part 1 – Background and Purpose 7

1.1 Visual Quality is Important 7

1.2 Purpose 8

1.3 How to Use this Document 9

1.4 Key Concepts 10

Part 2 – Visibility and Landscape Analysis 11

2.1 Introduction 11

2.2 Project Visibility 11

2.3 Reading the Landscape 16

2.4 Visitor Experience 21

2.5 Park Visual Themes 25

Part 3 – Visual Quality Best Practices 26

3.1 Introduction 26

3.2 The Six Principles 28

3.3 How to Choose the Most Useful Best Practices 30

3.4 Best Practices 30

Glossary 114

Appendix A – Reading the Landscape Worksheet and Guide 120

Guide - Reading the Landscape 120

Worksheet 121

Landscape features 124

Visual Element Vocabulary 125

Appendix B – Know Your Own: Identifying Your Park's Visual Themes 126

Know Your Own 126

Visual Theme Statement Worksheet 128

Appendix C – Project Planning and Best Practice Selection 132

Worksheet Reference Guide 132

Worksheet 137

Best Practice Selection Matrix - A 139

Best Practice Selection Matrix - B 141

Appendix D – Resources 143

National Park Service 143

Bureau of Land Management 145

US Forest Service 147

Federal Aviation Administration 148

Online Resources 148

This page is intentionally blank

PART 1 – BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

1.1 Visual Quality is Important

The National Park Service (NPS) has the responsibility of protecting majestic and significant scenery across the nation. It represents not only the beauty of nature but also our diverse history and culture. These iconic landscapes serve as a critical component of the visitor experience, drawing millions of people each year. But enjoying scenic views is just one aspect of a visitor's time in a park. Their experience spans from approaching the park to arriving at their destination. That's why improving visual quality throughout a park is key to enhancing their overall experience.

Protecting visual quality and scenery is a core part of the NPS mission as stated in the Organic Act of 1916:

> *"...to conserve the scenery...and wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" (Title 54, Section 100101, United States Code [54 USC § 100101]).*

NPS Management Policies (Section 1.4.6), reinforce this directive. The enabling legislation of many parks includes scenery protection. It also is found in many purpose and significance statements. Implementing visual quality best practices is integral to achieving this goal.

A best practice simply means the best, most effective way of doing something. Visual quality best practices are ideas and techniques that apply to a wide variety of park projects. They range from choosing appropriate paint colors to selecting the best locations for projects. The key to using these practices is understanding the existing landscape and the park's visual character. Then you can determine how to best fit your project into the existing setting.

Parks face many challenges. Things like increasing visitation, encroaching energy development, and reducing safety hazards are common. Best practices help you consider visual quality as you address these challenges. Incorporating them through everyday management activities enhances the visual identity of the park. They can also help to increase landscape resilience.



Visual Quality Best Practices is the newest tool from the NPS Visual Resources Program. These tools help parks manage visual resources and the visual experience of a park. They lay the foundation for managing visual resources. Existing tools include:

- *Visual Resources Inventory (VRI).* A field-tested process to identify and assess the value of existing views.
- *Visual Impact Assessment Methodology and Guidelines (VIA).* The NPS method for describing the impact of changes to views. It supports NEPA documentation.
- *Evaluating Photosimulations for Visual Impact Assessment.* The companion tool of the VIA. It aids in understanding the quality of visual simulations used for impact assessment.

1.2 Purpose

Best practices enable parks to incorporate techniques into park projects that enhance visual quality. They are meant to be integrated into the overall design and planning process for all types of projects. Many best practices can also be useful for providing constructive input on projects that could affect park views. If a park is using them, it is more credible to suggest recommendations to others. The best practices collection is intended to be a flexible resource that can be used by each NPS unit as appropriate for their projects. Even if a project is being developed through the Region or Denver Service Center (DSC), understanding these best practices will make you a better participant in any project planning process. In this document, the term project refers to any development or activity inside or outside a park that changes existing conditions.

The best practice collection presents a summary of information. For complex projects, additional resources, standards, and expert advice should be consulted. Neither this document nor the NPS has any binding authority to impose restrictions or regulations on any landowner or agency.

1.3 How to Use this Document

For first-time users of the best practice collection, we recommend reading and studying Part II. It centers around understanding the existing landscapes and what needs to be protected. Part II explores this topic, offering insights into how visitors experience the park. There are also ideas for understanding the visual character of a park. Most importantly there is a method for learning to assess the existing landscape and potential project site. This is known as "reading the landscape". Knowing this process will help in planning any project. Each best practice includes "reading the landscape" as part of the example project solution.

Part III serves as best practices, a stand-alone reference intended for returning users. If you have already reviewed Part II and are comfortable with evaluating project sites — go straight there. In Part III, users will learn how to select and use best practices. The 35 best practices are grouped into six principles. They are adaptable to a wide variety of projects and landscapes. Most projects will benefit from the use of several best practices. The principles are:

- **SITE RIGHT:** Selecting the right site for a project is a critical early decision in project planning. These best practices have ideas for making sure a project does not encroach on a view and making use of existing features to fit into the existing landscape.
- **VIEW SMARTS:** Parks offer many different viewing experiences. Some are informally created over time by visitors. Others need to be updated or developed to handle more visitors. These best practices have ideas for making sure visitors can have the best experience possible.
- **DESIGN WISE:** Fitting projects into the existing landscape depends on many factors. These best practices explain how to work with the forms and lines of the landscape, how to get the scale right, and how to use the right details to maintain the visual quality of the park.
- **WORKING WITH PLANTS:** Landscaping is sometimes an afterthought in project planning. These best practices provide basic landscape design techniques for using native plants to enhance aesthetics and minimize visibility up front in the planning process.
- **SURFACE SMARTS:** For new or existing projects colors and materials are important for blending into the landscape and enhancing visual quality. These best practices have ideas for selecting colors and insights into the way textures affect visibility.
- **SIGNS & LIGHTING:** Signs and lighting are challenges in many parks. Signs are often added over time to address specific issues. Lighting may be added to solve a security issue and result in effects on park resources. These best practices have ideas and examples for addressing these areas to improve visual quality.

Part III is designed to accommodate updates with additional best practices. They can be added based on insights from field applications.

1.4 Key Concepts

Similar to other visual resource program components, the best practices toolkit was developed around six key concepts that focus on NPS-specific needs. The NPS visual best practices:

- Work for all kinds of parks/protected units. Natural landscapes, historic battlefields, archaeological sites, urban corridors, and wilderness areas all have visual resource values. Visual changes from projects are evaluated in the context of their primary landscape (e.g., natural, agricultural, urban). Throughout the document, the generic term "park" is used to reference all types of national park system units and special status areas, including Heritage Areas, Trails, and National Historic Register Properties.
- Work for many kinds of projects. Best practices can be implemented at large scales and at the smallest scales. There are many effective visual best practices that are not particularly expensive or difficult to do. For example, painting structure components to blend with the landscape background.
- Capture a viewer's perspective. The NPS goal is to provide visitors with enjoyment of scenery. What the visitor sees is called the visual experience. Best practices are techniques to maintain a positive experience.
- Are easy to use. They are meant to be flexible. Use what works in any given situation. Combine best practices. Start from where parks are.
- Help with planning ahead. The best outcomes are achieved when best practices are considered and implemented as early as possible.
- Work in concert with other design and resource protection programs. Visual best practices provide additional techniques to consider alongside other resource values. They help any project fit better into the landscape.

PART 2 – VISIBILITY AND LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

2.1 Introduction

A new project is likely to be seen from multiple locations. Sometimes from important viewpoints that are critical to the park's purpose. Evaluating the surrounding landscape at the specific site is a critical step in the planning and implementation of a project. The context and function of the park setting as well as the visitor's experience are also important considerations. Before selecting best practices, it is important to understand how a project is seen, the landscape where it is located, and its relationship to the visitor's experience. The following sections describe how to consider these components in project planning. Using the park project questionnaire found in Appendix C is a good way to keep a record of this process. Reaching out to planners, landscape architects, and others at the Region or Denver Service Center (DSC) can assist and be helpful in planning and executing a successful project.

2.2 Project Visibility

Maintaining and enhancing visual quality begins with our ability to 'read' the landscape. Reading the landscape means understanding its physical and aesthetic qualities. This includes the park's identified views. Understanding the landscape will help you see how proposed changes may affect the visual quality. Knowing this, you can better communicate park visual values. You may avoid negative changes while preserving the important parts of views.

We often look at views without understanding them. It starts with identifying where you see the landscape from and what type of view it is. It includes describing the landscape features and visual elements. Studying them will help you to understand the composition. Then answer the following questions about your project site and the surrounding landscape. It will help you choose the relevant best practices to guide your project design and implementation.

WHERE CAN IT BE SEEN FROM?

What you see depends on where you are looking from. Projects may be seen from many parts of the park. Consistent with other aspects of the NPS visual resource program it is important to look at projects from the viewer's perspective. Sometimes a project might be seen from an established, important viewpoint. These locations are referred to as key observation points or KOPs. It may also be seen from other areas such as the walkway from a parking lot or along a trail. These locations are often referred to as a viewpoint or observation point. What the visitor sees from any location is important to their visual experience.

Any KOP or viewpoint is a location where a viewer can see any portion of a project within a viewed landscape. They may also be a selected point in a larger area such as wilderness. Some KOPs may be established viewpoints or overlooks. It is helpful to select viewpoints and KOPs that will give the best perspective for understanding potential visual impacts. They will also provide insight for planning and design to protect the visitor experience and NPS values. Things to consider in selecting viewpoint and KOP locations include:

- Serving the needs of high visitor-use areas
- Using locations intended for viewing opportunities
- Showcasing areas promoted by NPS and/or promoted in other media, e.g., hiking guides
- Choosing important historic, cultural, scenic, or other resource-related views
- Using locations related to interpretive themes
- Checking areas outside the park that may have a view of the project

WHAT IS THE VIEWER'S POSITION IN RELATION TO IT?

It is important to know if the viewer is primarily looking up at the viewed landscape, level with it, or looking down at the viewed landscape (Figure 2). An elevated view often shows more of the landscape than looking at eye level or up at a view. This will matter when assessing the potential visual impacts of future development. Changes in the landscape may be more visible if you are looking down on them.



Figure 2. Examples of observer positions.

WHAT IS THE VIEW TYPE?

The view type has an important relationship to the scenic quality of the view and the perception of changes. Adding a project near the focal point in a feature view will often have a larger negative impact than locating the project in other parts of the view. There are six different view types. They are defined below. Figure 3 shows a general graphic of the characteristics. Some views may have characteristics of more than one view type. View types include:

- Panoramic views are essentially unobstructed and usually 180° or more in width.
- Enclosed views have features or a group of objects (e.g., trees or ridges) that form visual walls that limit the view.
- Feature views contain an object or group of objects that draws your attention. Examples of features include prominent landforms, large trees, waterfalls, towers, or historic elements.
- Focal views have elements that lead the observer's eye to a point of convergence. Elements with focusing lines include converging canyon walls, roads, trails, and rivers. They can also be parallel rows of trees that form an "Allée."
- Framed views contain visible edges of landforms, vegetation, or structures that limit the viewer's perspective. They create a feeling of "looking through a window" to the scene beyond.
- Canopied views are in locations that give you a sense of having an overhead "ceiling" rather than viewing a canopy from an outside viewpoint.

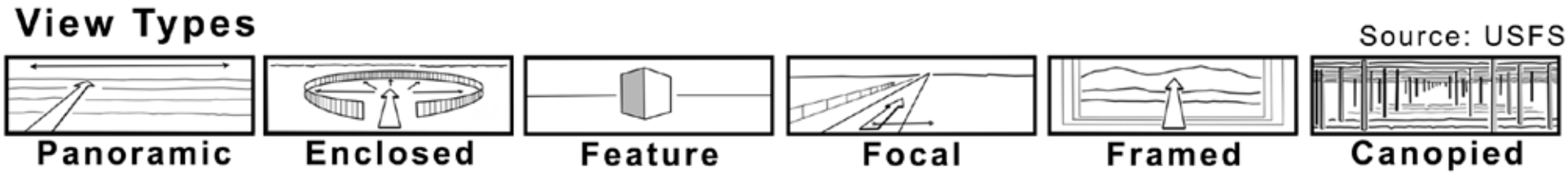


Figure 3. The six view types.

HOW FAR AWAY IS IT?

The visibility of a proposed project and how much detail you see depends on the distance of the project from the observer (Figure 4). At shorter distances, textures, and colors are most visible and immediate. At greater distances forms dominate. Knowing how far away observers will be from a proposed project will help you to determine which best practices to consider. Understanding distance zones helps to gauge the potential for contrast. Contrast is often the primary culprit in degrading views and diminishing visual quality.



Figure 4. Examples of foreground, middle ground, and background distance zones.

Foreground

In the foreground, the human scale is most important, and viewers may feel like they are "part of the landscape." Characteristics of the foreground zone include:

- Surface textures that are often visible with distinct colors.
- Visible details of trees, such as leaves and branches.
- Building details such as doors, windows, and roof shapes are visible.
- Details of human activities, such as people (e.g., hiking, fishing, or camping) and wildlife that are easily observed.
- On a map, the foreground would extend out to about ¼ to ½ mile from the viewpoint.



Middle ground

In the middle ground, viewers may feel more like they are looking "at the landscape" rather than "being in it." Characteristics of the middle ground zone include:

- Individual trees and shrubs that are distinguishable, but details that are not.
- Vegetation, landforms, and other landscape elements that form patterns.
- The form of individual buildings may be visible, but details are indistinct.
- The outlines of objects are more distinct. Colors become somewhat muted.
- Details of human and animal activities are less visible.
- On a map, the middle ground would extend from the limit of the foreground to about 3 to 5 miles from the viewpoint.

Background

Landscape elements in the background are very far away and little detail is visible. In estimating the background limits, you rely mostly on vegetation, landforms, and normal-sized structures (not wind turbines). Other characteristics of the background zone include:

- Large forms that dominate. The horizon line is evident. Mountains and other landforms create the end of the scene.
- Forest, shrublands, grasslands, and non-vegetated areas are seen as blocks of color and form. Texture and patterns have largely disappeared except those created by the dominant landforms.
- Colors are muted, often taking on a gray or bluish hue because of atmospheric conditions.
- On a map, the background would extend from the edge of the middle ground to a limit suitable for project analysis. This could be 10 to 20 miles for a large project beyond park boundaries. Most park projects would be much closer.



2.3 Reading the Landscape

Reading the surrounding landscape at the site is an essential step in the planning and implementation of a project. It means identifying and understanding the eight primary visual cues of a scene. There are four landscape features and four visual elements (Figure 5). They form the distinct visual characteristics of the view. Landscape features and visual elements contribute to scenic and visual quality. They determine the visual relationships within the view. They are also important to determining how a proposed project will "fit it" in with the existing landscape.

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Landscape features are natural or human-made and form the structure of a view. They give it its unique signature and contribute to its value as a scenic view. Landscape features are the basic parts that visually define every landscape's character. They are the 'bone structure.' The landscape features are:

- Landform — Landforms are large, three-dimensional features with characteristic shapes. Examples include plains, mountains, ridges, valleys, and canyons.
- Landcover — Land cover is the physical material covering the landforms. Often it is a type of vegetation. Other examples include lakes, barren areas, cultivated croplands, and human development.
- Land use — Land use is visible human activity involving the use of the land. If there is no visible human use, then the land use is considered natural.
- Structures — Structures are any built objects. They include buildings, towers, oil wells, and highways.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Visual elements describe the primary artistic qualities of the landscape. Considered together, they attribute a "sense of personality" to a view. Reading the landscape records the most prominent visual elements in a view. They are the basis for identifying the contrast that could be introduced by changes. Thinking through these elements often reveals the best way to make changes fit in. The visual elements are:

- Form — The visual mass of two-or three-dimensional object shapes, both natural and human-made.
- Line — The paths that the eyes follow, such as the horizon, silhouettes, or edges of fields. A line is often perceived where there is an abrupt difference in form, color, or texture, creating an edge. A line might also be visible where objects in the landscape are aligned in a sequence.
- Color — Color is the major visual property of surfaces in a viewed landscape. It is often described in terms of hue (e.g., red), lightness (e.g., dark), and intensity (e.g., vivid).
- Texture — Texture is the visual surface pattern of natural features and structures. You might think of texture as what the landscape features might feel like if you could touch them.

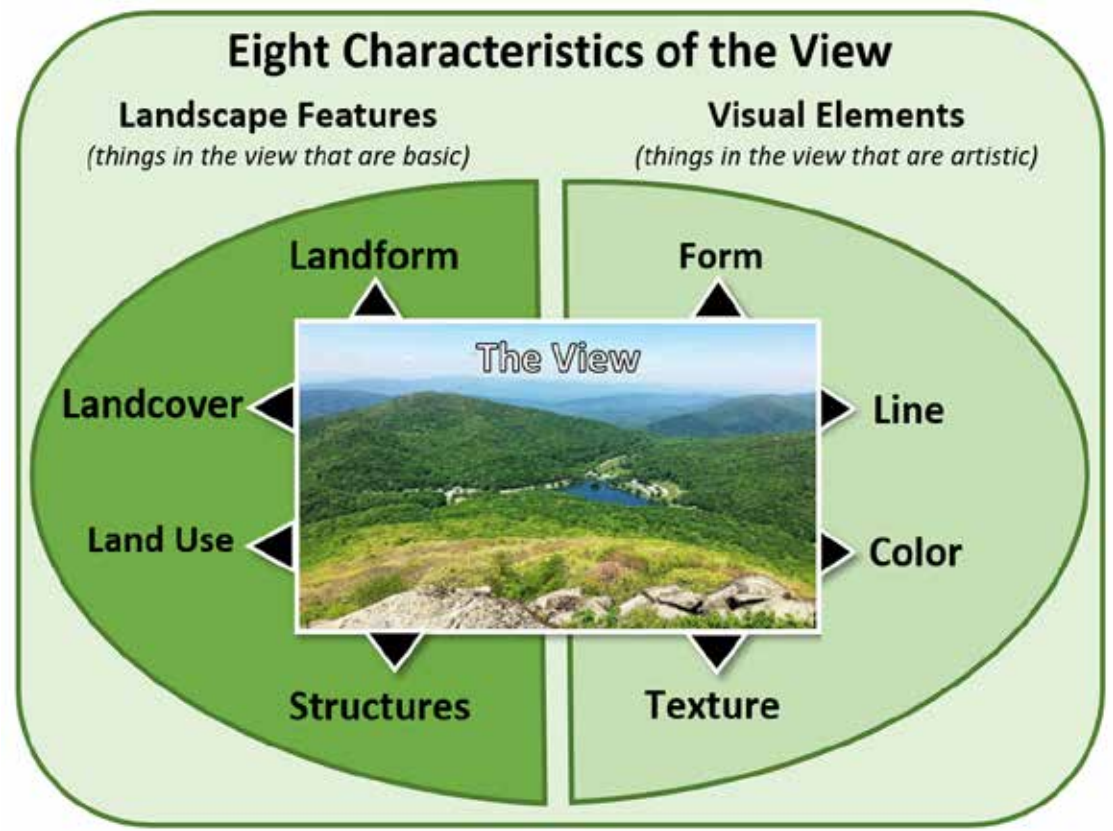


Figure 5. The landscape features and visual elements of the landscape in a view.

LET'S PRACTICE

Let's bring it all together in an example. Identify the landscape features and visual elements you see in the view in Figure 6. It is along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The first step is to identify the view type and a way to record that is in Figure 7. Figures 8 and 9 show one way to envision the landscape features and visual elements using a photograph with lines and text. With practice, you can find these eight elements in every view, and learn to describe them easily. A worksheet for recording the results is in Appendix A. However, you can use any method you like to capture your thoughts and share them with your team.

Select the View Type

This view is panoramic with a feature in the middle ground. This is a good example where views can exhibit multiple view types.



Figure 6. A view along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

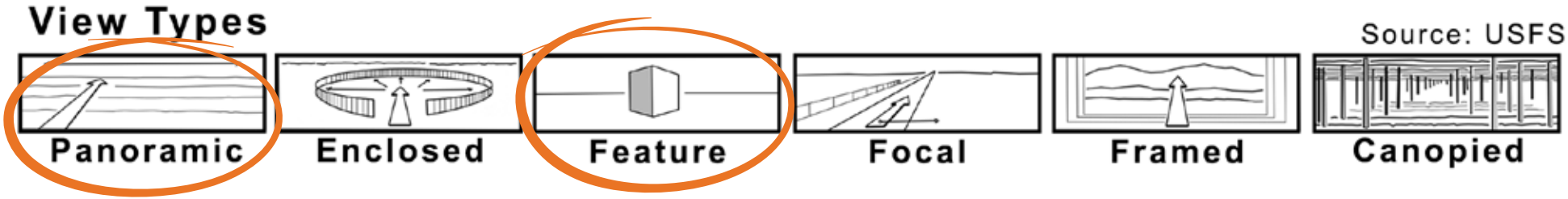


Figure 7. The view types in the example view.

Identifying Landscape Features

- Landform — mountains, hills, ridges, valleys
- Landcover — deciduous forests, shrub scrub, lake, maintained landscape
- Land use — natural, parks/recreation, transportation
- Structures — buildings, roads, parking

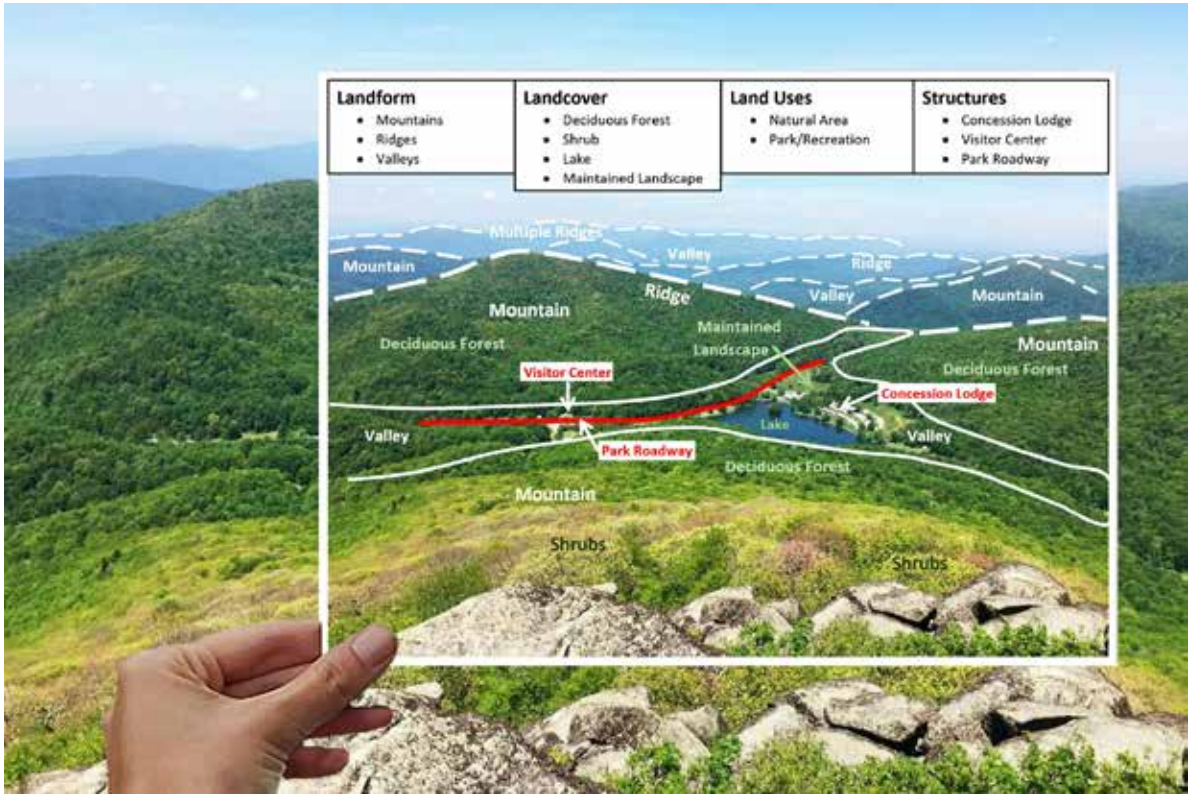


Figure 8. A demonstration of identifying landscape features.

Identifying Visual Elements

- Forms — rounded, flat, rugged
- Lines — curving, undulating, irregular
- Colors — light gray rocks, light brown/ yellow green shrub scrub, dark green forest, blue/gray hills
- Textures — coarse rocks, coarse/medium/ fine forested areas, smooth lake, stippled shrub scrub

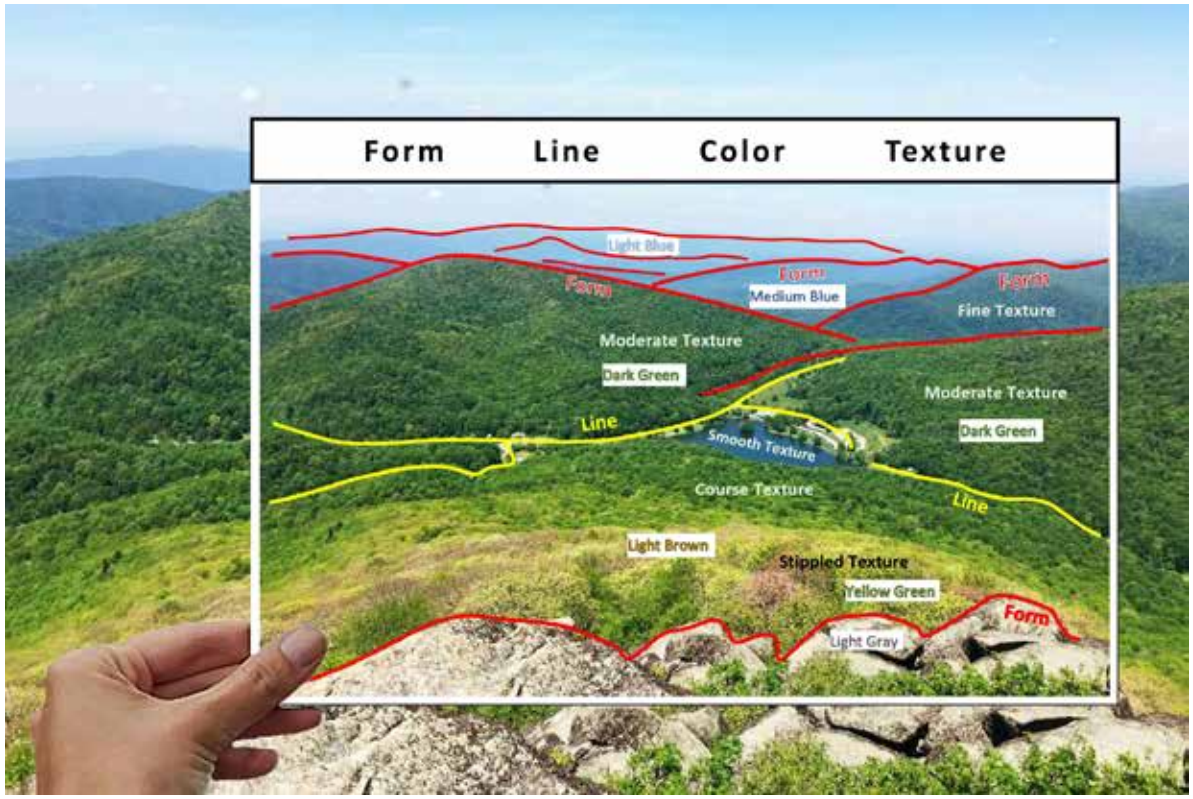


Figure 9. A demonstration of identifying the visual elements in the landscape.

Reading the Landscape Description

When you think you have a good list of the landscape features and visual elements, it is helpful to put together a short narrative description.

This is a panoramic view with a lake feature in the middle ground. The lake is surrounded by rounded hills covered by deciduous forests. Shrub scrub covers the hillsides in the foreground along with some rugged rock outcrops. In the background, distant blue-gray ridge tops create curved, undulating lines. The curving roadway, buildings, and parking areas are visible near the lake. The colors are mostly green with some yellow and buff in the foreground. There are deep blues and grays as you get farther away. The textures are generally medium to fine in forested and shrub scrub areas.

2.4 Visitor Experience

The visitor experience, along with the context and purpose of the park, are important considerations beyond just understanding the project site and surrounding landscape. There are places in parks that visitors go to or are directed by park staff. They may have driven many hours to get there. The experience of these park destinations typically happens in a sequence (Figure 10). Visitors first 'Approach' the destination. Then they 'Arrive' to and, finally, 'Connect' with the destination. These three experience stages line up with landscape/architectural spaces in parks. For example, parking lots for arriving and visitor centers for connecting. While the park setting varies, this sequence applies to most units. In many cases, parks plan and intentionally design for a seamless and positive visual experience from the approach to the destination. In units such as Blue Ridge Parkway and scenic or historic trails, there are many and widely variable opportunities to experience the sequence throughout the length of the park. Taking the time to understand those opportunities will inform planning for a positive visual experience for visitors.

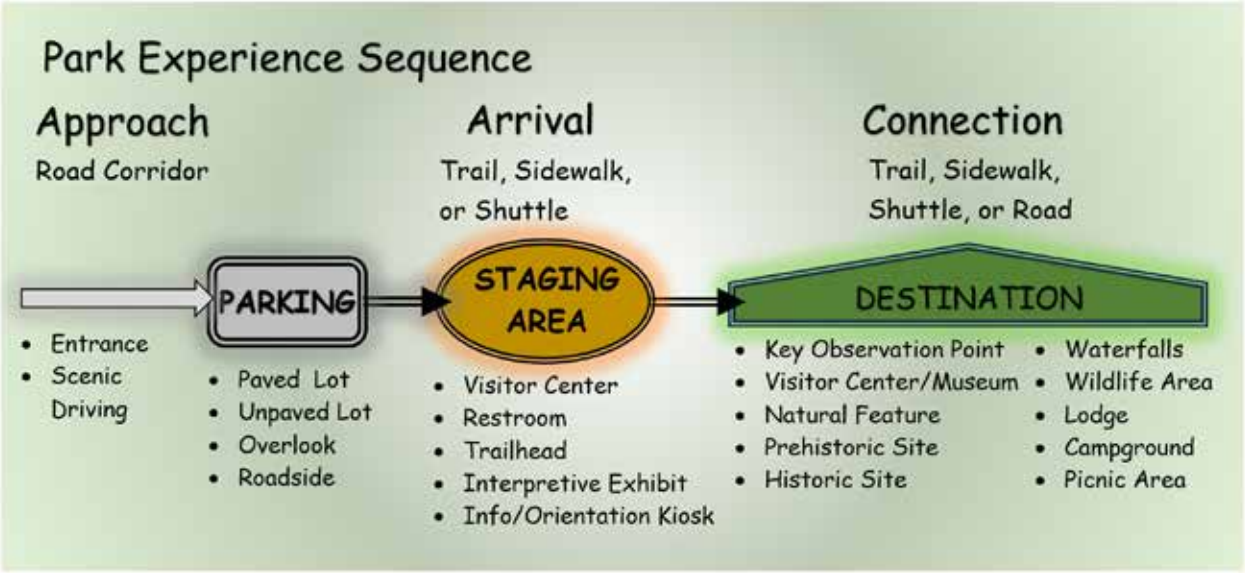


Figure 10. The park experience sequence (approach, arrival, and connection) corresponds to park spaces listed in bullets.

Figure 10 lists some examples of the corresponding landscape and architectural spaces in parks for the stages in the sequence. Understanding where a project fits within the sequence is useful for visual considerations. It is important to collectively consider the approach, arrival, and connection experiences when evaluating the effects of any proposed action. The goal is to maintain the visual flow and existing visual landscape character. The following sections describe each part of the sequence in more detail. They also provide further considerations while planning a project or assessing current experiences.

APPROACH

The approach experience often occurs within a road corridor. It is a visitor's first impression of the destination. Arriving at a park is a key experience that creates anticipation and reveals the visual character. The visual character of the approach can vary from undeveloped natural to an urban city street. It might vary from straight to curving, from long to short. The approach is all about the visitor enjoying the park scenery and being directed to parking for their destination. The parking area is the most common interface between the approach road and the destination. Parking areas come in all shapes and sizes. They may be paved or unpaved. They may be at an overlook or along the roadside. They may be designated and undesignated. Parking is not only about vehicles. It is also about moving people safely from them, often on a walkway or path to somewhere that is a staging area. For the visitor approach consider:

- Which parking areas best serve the arrival/staging areas closest to key resource or activity destinations? Direct visitors to those areas based on that analysis.
- Will proposed changes mar the first impression of visual character? Will things such as road cuts or utility lines in a natural setting detract from a positive approach experience?
- What is the best way to provide information (e.g., speed limit, directions) with minimal disruptions to the first impression? What will fit with the visual character of the approach?



Figure 11. A parking lot at Grand Canyon National Park.

ARRIVAL

The arrival experience can happen in two parts. First when visitors arrive at the park; and second, when visitors walk or take a shuttle to arrive at a staging area. Staging Areas meet immediate needs and share accurate, need-to-know, information. The initial information guides visitors to desired park destinations. The area may be as simple as a wayside along a walkway. It might be more complex such as a visitor center with restrooms and information/orientation kiosks.

The arrival experience is about getting the visitor's feet on the ground and moving them to a staging area. That is where the necessary information and orientation messages are communicated. Staging areas are important for information, orientation, and/or interpretation. Keep these considerations in mind:

- What information does the visitor need to know at the arrival?
- What is the most effective way to display the needed information? Consider the impact of signs on circulation and information overload. (See signs best practice)
- How can you use design to guide flow? For example, creating direct paths for quick arrival experiences when the visitor is stimulus-driven (e.g. when a restroom is urgent). Using a direct path may mean they miss visual cues unrelated to immediate needs. Consider alternative designs for when the visitor is slowly experiencing the arrival. They may be paying attention to plants, information material, and other visual cues.
- Do the planned or current structures that are part of the arrival experience fit with the existing landscape? Do they fit with the visual character of the destination/park (e.g., materials and colors)?



Figure 12. Visitor Center at Grand Canyon National Park.

CONNECTION TO DESTINATION

Connecting visitors with their destination is the final stage of the sequence. Destinations are the end-of-the-road in the visual experience sequence. Though most parks have many destinations for visitors to choose from, they may be grouped by category. They could be natural areas, scenic areas, and historical or cultural heritage sites. They may also be outdoor recreation areas or food and lodging services. The connection experience for visitors can be a pedestrian trail or shuttle service. In some parks, it might be a loop road with many stops. The following are some questions to consider when planning a project:

- For a trail or road loop, does it flow easily through the landscape? Creating a sequence of views to mark the way enhances the anticipation. It can be a major consideration in a successful visual experience.
- How does the visitor see their destination? Is it framed in a distant view or is it concealed then revealed, catching only glimpses of it? Encourage the mystery.
- Do the materials, colors, and textures of structures and signs have a similar character? What about exhibits, interpretive waysides, benches, trash receptacles, etc.? Is there a unified visual experience?
- What interpretive themes or stories are exhibited in the visual landscape?
- How do the approach and the arrival affect the connection to the destination? Are they compatible, or complementary? Is there a unified visual experience?



Figure 13. Mather Point at Grand Canyon National Park.



2.5 Park Visual Themes

When parks understand their visual themes, it helps create a consistent look across all development activities, enhancing the visitor experience. Understanding the park visual themes will also help in selecting best practices for future projects.

A park must be aware of its own visual themes before commenting on situations outside its boundaries. NPS senior leadership recognizes the essential importance of having our “own house in order” before expecting the same from others. This principle has been a focal point in management training, particularly regarding the protection and care of park resources and facilities. This, in turn, bolsters our credibility when engaging with stakeholders on development initiatives beyond park boundaries that may impact that experience.

Knowing your own means understanding the key physical and visual aspects of your park’s landscape. From that, you can develop themes that describe the values of those aspects. The themes form the basis for developing a unified visual character between existing and future development. The Know Your Own exercise in Appendix B is an activity for a multi-disciplinary team. It does not have to be done for a specific project. It can be done at any time and will serve as a basis for considering future development projects in the park. The results are also helpful for communicating your park’s visual character to others.

PART 3 – VISUAL QUALITY BEST PRACTICES

3.1 Introduction

Visual best practices are techniques to help improve the visitor's visual experience. Parks can apply these techniques to park projects. They build upon concepts used in landscape architecture and design. Recommendations range from selecting the best site to choosing the right building materials. Many are focused on reducing contrast makes projects more visible. They are organized into six principles (Figure 14). These best practices are flexible to work for different projects and parks. They are not prescriptive. Also, not every best practice is appropriate for every project. As parks use best practices, the guidance will be updated to capture new ideas. Sharing successful uses can lead to innovative solutions to meet the challenges of today and the future.

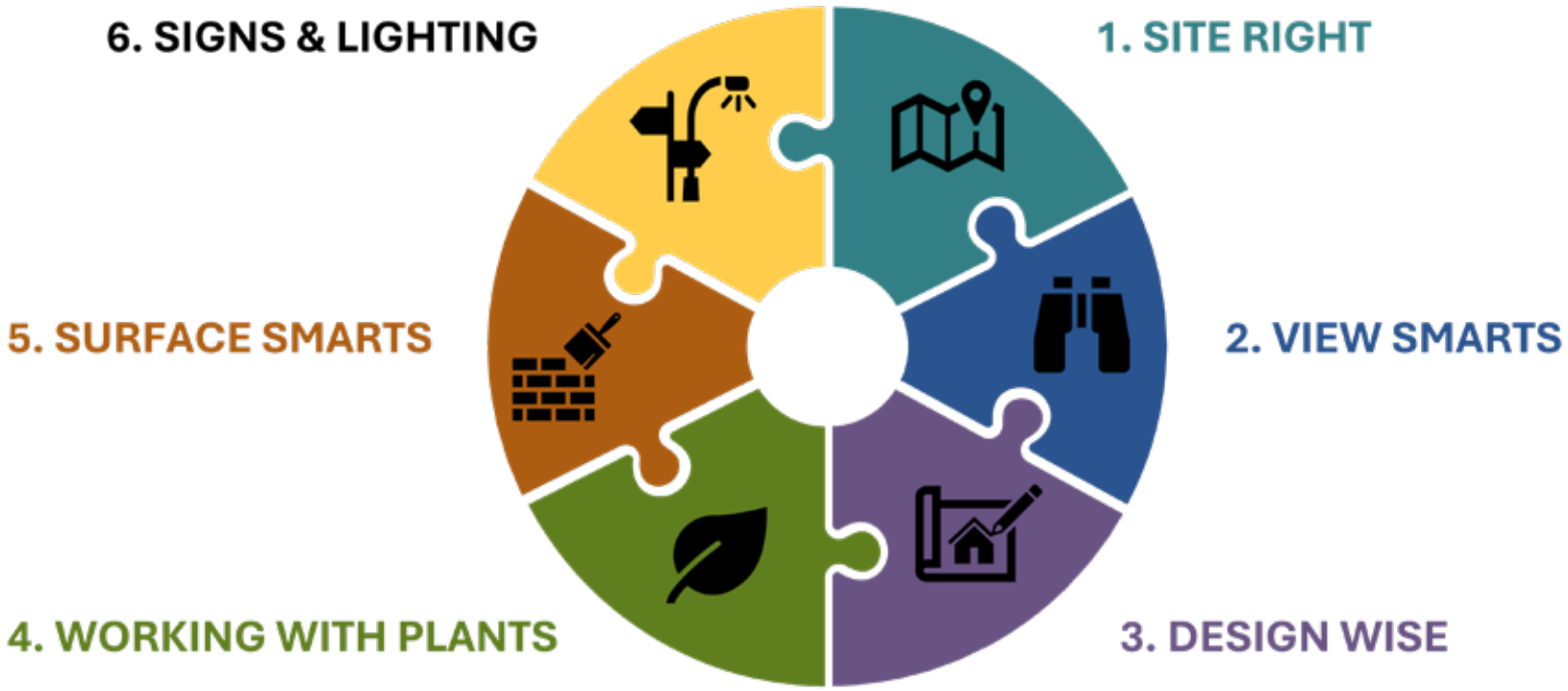


Figure 14. The six principles of visual quality best practices.

Best practices include information on why using them matters and things you can do to use them on your projects. There are also example solutions. However, visual best practices don't stand alone. They can and should be used together. In almost every instance, using multiple best practices will result in a better project. Importantly, they must also be used in conjunction with other activities, clearances, and design considerations needed for most projects. The list below notes some of these but is not exhaustive. Specific project needs will vary by type, location, and affected resources.

- Consult NPS Management Polices and relevant Guidelines. Wilderness areas have preservation guidelines and development limitations.
- Get clearances required by the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Research tribal and historic connections before deciding on development.
- Perform archeological surveys. Get clearances as required by the National Historic Preservation Act.
- Check to see if there is a park visual character theme or design guidelines.
- Refer to park planning documents for zoning guidelines. They may describe location and style considerations, particularly for entrance-type signs.
- Understand locations of critical habitat or other areas with sensitive biological resources.
- Consider limiting lighting. Be aware of night lighting best practices. Refer to Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division for support on complex projects.
- Consider visitor safety in implementing projects including consulting with law enforcement staff.
- Include Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements in the design of all facilities and site development.

We encourage all readers to consider the indigenous and multi-cultural context of a project site. We recognize that cultures view the visual landscape with different values. For example, values of healing, sustenance, or spiritual and religious practices may be important to one culture and not to another. Shared values such as utility and preserving beauty, may exist as well. This intimate level of values is difficult to capture in a national document accurately and respectfully. When considering visual best practices, seek common ground with all affected cultures and reflect it in your project solutions.

3.2 The Six Principles

1. SITE RIGHT

Choosing a location is most important for fitting new development into a landscape. A poorly sited building or other feature can be distracting even with good design. The right location can help protect the visitor's visual experience. Site Right practices are ideas for placing built elements so that they are less visible. Using existing landforms or vegetation rather than grading and adding new screening can also save time and money. Best practices in Site Right include:

1.1 Choose Elsewhere
1.2 Fade into the Background
1.3 Hide It
1.4 Keep the Focus
1.5 Park it There
1.6 Fit for Purpose
1.7 Unbroken Horizon
1.8 Have an Anchor
1.9 Keep the Rhythm
1.10 Respect History

2. VIEW SMARTS

Viewpoint design will determine what visitors see and how they see it. Viewpoints can be developed or managed in many ways. View Smarts practices describe how to plan for different viewing experiences. Framing a view by using vegetation management or formalizing a socially developed viewpoint to protect resources are examples of how you can define the viewer's experience to meet specific needs.

The design of viewpoints along roads will require specific criteria to assure the safety of visitors and park staff. Consult with traffic engineers and landscape architects at your region or DSC for the needed expertise. Best practices in View Smarts include:

2.1 Keep Views Open
2.2 Photo Op
2.3 Keep Eyes on the Road
2.4 Curb Appeal
2.5 View Story
2.6 Overlook Siting
2.7 The Right Spot
2.8 Elbow Room
2.9 Canopy View Care

3. DESIGN WISE

Designing features to fit in means to complement the existing landscape. This includes elements such as the forms, lines, colors, and scale. Built features that don't fit into the landscape can draw attention to themselves and be distracting. Design Wise practices are recommendations for "Best fit" designs for the existing landscape. They build on the view's intrinsic visual balance created by line, proportion, scale, and form. Best practices in Design Wise include:

3.1 Forms and Lines
3.2 Stay in Scale — People
3.3 Stay in Scale — Landscape
3.4 Bird's Eye View
3.5 Building Harmony
3.6 Architectural Screening

4. WORKING WITH PLANTS

Plants are often a major component of projects. NPS Management policies especially note the value of native plants as resources as well as their use in resource management. Examples include salvaging native plants before project development, using them in landscape restoration, or placing them for screening. They have subsistence value, contribute to habitat resilience, and enhance scenic quality. Plants are also important in historic and cultural landscapes These best practices are techniques to make development less visible and more aesthetic. Ideas include planting in masses or groups similar to how they occur naturally. Also matching native vegetation with new native plants for screening or when infilling in places where plants died. Using native plants as accents, to accentuate focal points and structurally to create enclosure and space, increases attractiveness and park biological health. With time, this topic has room to grow as parks become more engaged in plant uses. Best practices in Working with Plants include:

4.1 Follow the Pattern
4.2 Screening with Plants
4.3 Roadside Variety

5. SURFACE SMARTS

Appropriate colors and textures can help new development blend in with the existing natural and built features. Surface Smarts practices are the next steps after finding the right site and selecting a good design.

Some of the recommendations are the simplest and quickest to apply. For example, starting with a coat of paint. Best practices in Surface Smarts include:

5.1 Color Me Local
5.2 Two Shades Darker
5.3 Rough Textures
5.4 Reflections

6. SIGNS AND LIGHTING

Signs are an important part of communication with visitors. Lighting is also a necessary feature for visitor safety and facility security. However, these elements often are added over time without a clear understanding of the gradual changes that occur. Signs can easily become overwhelming in both numbers and complex messages. Lighting diminishes the visitor experience and impacts wildlife. Signs and lighting best practices provide basic guidelines and ideas to improve these components. Signs are an especially diverse project type. It will often be helpful to seek out specialized support from regions and DSC. Online resources for lighting projects are in the Appendix. Consulting with specialized support is also recommended for this technical and well-researched topic. Best practices in Signs and Lighting include:

6.1 Sign Siting and Design
6.2 Sign Content and Messaging
6.3 Night Lights



3.3 How to Choose the Most Useful Best Practices

Using the Project Planning Worksheet in Appendix C helps in the planning of any project. It is a way to record analysis steps and select the most helpful best practices. It is also a good record to share with the project team. There are also two matrixes that can assist in choosing the most relevant Best Practices. One is organized by the landscape features most likely to be affected. The other is organized by project type. Both are meant to be starting points to get you thinking about all aspects of your project and how to best fit it into the existing landscape and visual character of the park.

For small projects, a team with knowledge of park resources can use the Appendix C worksheet and matrix resources to pick the most useful best practices. For more complex projects, a team of resource specialists, partners, and stakeholders could be helpful. Complex projects include those with muti-year or large budgets, ones led by Region or DSC, or projects that need an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The team approach ensures that visual best practices are applied where they are most needed. A team can also weigh costs and benefits providing input on how projects fit with other park initiatives and programs.

3.4 Best Practices

The following pages contain the visual best practices organized by Principle. Along with the recommendations and a conceptual example, each has several related best practices. Some of the best practices have additional information in the form of helpful tips, exploring concepts, and other fun facts.

This page is intentionally blank

1. SITE RIGHT

Related Best Practices:
Keep the Focus, Hide It, Fade into the Background, Unbroken Horizon

1.1 Choose Elsewhere

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Locating development outside important views.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Special consideration should be given to high-value views. The value of this best practice is that it retains significant scenic views and meets the intent of the Organic Act language. These views have high scenic quality and importance. They are valued by visitors and the NPS. They are high priority and should be protected and unaltered. Filling open spaces can add distracting features to the landscape. Keeping views open will improve visitor satisfaction. Leaving a view undisturbed benefits natural resources. Views of wilderness and in wilderness are one kind of landscape where this is crucial. Historic and cultural landscapes are another.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

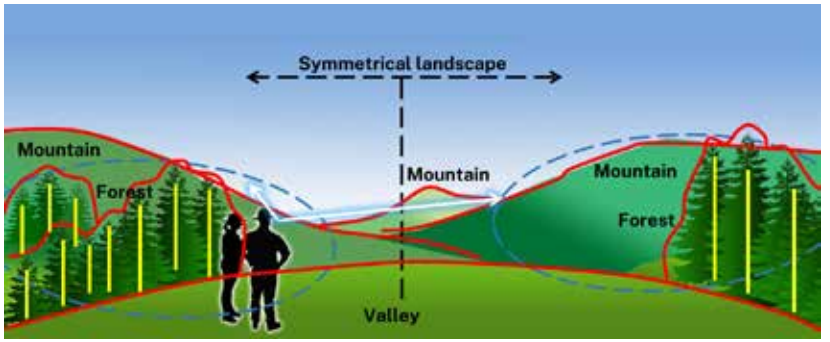
1. Use a visual resources inventory to identify areas of high value.
2. Site development outside of views with high value. Where possible, site development in landscapes with low scenic quality or importance.
3. Resist placing objects in open spaces because of construction benefits. For example, adding development in the center of valley bottoms.
4. Choose a different location if changes would be prominent in the landscape. This is important for viewpoints where the viewer is looking down at the landscape. Or, where the landscape is flat with limited vegetation.
5. Consider an alternate location if adding the project will impact the existing positive visual character (i.e., natural, agricultural, pastoral, historical, etc.).

SCENARIO

The park is looking to add restrooms to improve the visitor experience. One option for the new restroom location is within a high-quality natural view.

Reading the landscape

The view is a natural landscape without any human-introduced land uses or structures. The viewer's eyes rest on a mountain feature in the background. It is framed by mountain slopes and smooth grassland valley floor in the foreground. The view has high scenic quality. It has intact natural landscape character, symmetry, and balanced composition.



✔ Good Example

A completely different site was selected. Retaining the openness allows a viewer to clearly see all elements of a view. No contrasting facilities or features compete with or block the focal point of the view. The framing created by the mountain slopes remains unbroken. The natural scene remains unified and symmetrically balanced.



✘ Not So Good Example

Adding a building to this open space creates a distracting feature in the view. It becomes the center of the viewers' attention. The building negatively impacts the unity of the landscape composition. It upsets the symmetrical balance of the scene, creating weight on the right side.



Related Best Practices:
Hide It, Have an Anchor, Screening with Plants, Unbroken Horizon, Stay In Scale — Landscape, Two Shades Darker

1.2 Fade into the Background

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Using the advantage of long distance to reduce the perceived size of human-made objects.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Distance softens colors, forms, and textures. The greater the distance, the less detail a viewer can see. The value of this best practice is that it preserves scenic integrity and view quality. Close development can become a distracting feature of the view. This upsets the visual balance and diminishes the quality of the view. Perceiving such impacts to the view reduces a positive visitor experience. Economic studies at the Blue Ridge Parkway determined that when a view was degraded visitors went elsewhere for scenic enjoyment. When that happens, gateway communities could lose revenue.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

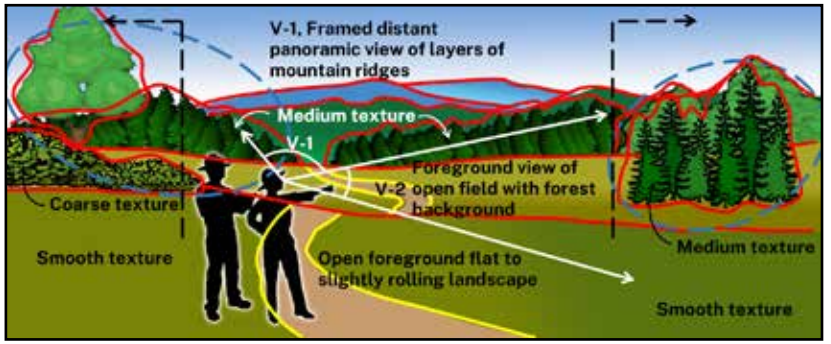
1. Keep development as far from the viewer as possible. Even without vegetation screening, moving facilities farther away will reduce their perceived size. Perception is exponential. Moving development away a short distance results in a much-reduced visual impression.
2. Consider greater distances to reduce contrasts.
3. Use distance especially for larger-sized developments. It will soften bright colors, reflective materials, or structures with motion. Features will blend into the landscape better.
4. Place structures behind hills and/or vegetation for best screening.
5. Use a visual resources inventory to identify areas of high value.

SCENARIO

Park is looking for an easily accessible site to build a structure for a backcountry fire cache.

Reading the landscape

The primary view (V-1) is a framed, panoramic setting. It has flat to slightly rolling landscape forms. The foreground is open with mountains in the background. The visual balance is symmetrical. Trees on the right and left evenly frame the distant mountain layers. In the secondary view (V-2) the forest in the middle ground encloses the view.



✔ Good Example

Locating the structure farther away from the trail makes it appear considerably smaller. Putting it behind existing vegetation in the secondary view rather than in any part of the primary view, makes it less visible.



✘ Not So Good Example

Adding a building in the foreground of the secondary view is less desirable. The building is imposing. Viewers notice every detail of its colors and textures. Even if the park uses dark colors and low reflective materials, the building will be the main focus of the view. Visitors see it first rather than the memorable view behind it.



Related Best Practices:
Fade Into the Background, Screening with Plants, Stay In Scale—Landscape, Two Shades Darker, Rough Textures, Night Lights

1.3 Hide It

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Using existing landforms and/or vegetation to hide new human-made features.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Facilities are often placed without taking into account the surrounding landscape or from where people will see them. This best practice shows how to keep views scenic by hiding development. The shape and size of landforms and vegetation determine what an area can hide. Placing structures in open spaces pulls focus and creates visual distraction. This can lessen a positive visual experience and diminish visitor satisfaction. This best practice also reduces glare. The location of buildings in relation to the surrounding landscape will sometimes affect the amount of glare from reflections that visitors experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

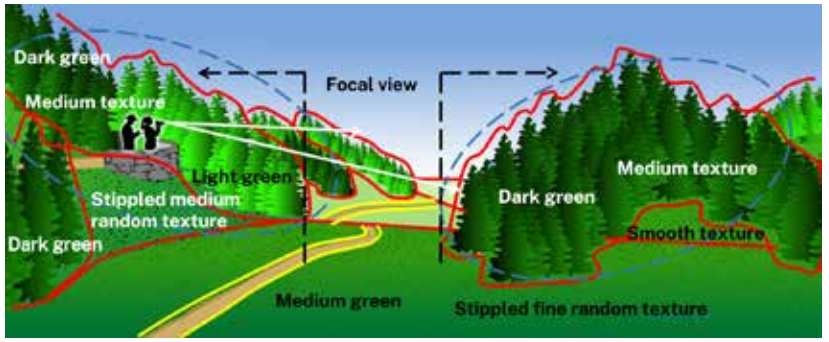
1. Look for areas in the landscape that have pockets and edges created by landforms and vegetation. Place development in these areas to keep it out of sight from visitor viewing locations.
2. Use trees and shrubs furthest from the viewer to hide and obscure development. This can also minimize night sky impacts.
3. Use the topography furthest from the viewer to hide structures. Landform screening may also reduce night sky impacts.
4. Keep structures as small as possible to help them fit with the nearby landforms and plants.
5. Consider security concerns. A building might need to be partially visible for visitor safety and law enforcement monitoring.

SCENARIO

The park wants to build an accessible restroom facility. The steep mountain slopes limit construction opportunities. The selected site is in the immediate foreground.

Reading the landscape

The forested mountains on either side of the trail draw the eye down the valley. Landcover in the foreground is a low ground cover and some evergreen stands. Mountain slopes in the middle ground are forested. The ground cover of the valley floor is low grasses. The viewer is at an elevated location, looking down, and sees more details in the landscape.



✔ Good Example

Existing evergreens that are furthest from the viewer hide and obscure new development. The gentle sloping landform helps hide the height and mass of the structure. The beauty of the natural view is preserved. The new facility has good visibility from the trail for visitor access and safety.



✘ Not So Good Example

When the structure is placed in the open area, it becomes the first and most dominating thing you see in the view. The scenic valley landscape is no longer the strongest visual experience.



Related Best Practices:
Choose Elsewhere, Hide It, Screening with Plants, Color Me Local, Reflections, Rough Textures, Night Lights

1.4 Keep the Focus

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Siting projects away from a prominent focal point.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Views with a strong ending point, a place your eyes are drawn to have a focal point. The value of this best practice is that it respects this primary visual element that can make or break a scene. A focal point can be a feature (e.g., rock formations, waterfalls, lakes, statues). It can be a point of convergence created by landscape features (e.g., roads, rivers, canyon walls). Built structures can also be strong visual features in a historic landscape. Natural and cultural focal points that attract and hold visual attention enhance scenic quality. A rule of thumb for focal points is one is best. Competing elements in a view dilute the impact of one strong organizing focal point. This can create visual tension and eye fatigue, lessening visitor satisfaction.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

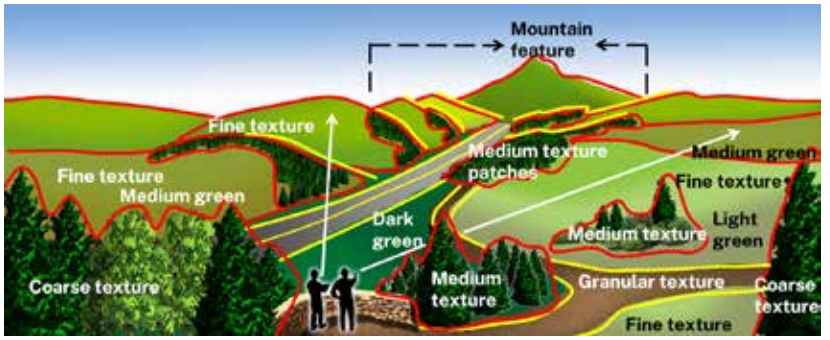
1. Identify a prominent feature that is a positive focal point in the view. Keep it clear of distractions.
2. Keep development outside the viewing area. Place structures at least 90 degrees away from the area created by your sight lines. This minimizes competition with the focal point.
3. Keep the edges along the sight line to the focal point unbroken and clear of new development. This especially applies when features need to be added near the viewing area.
4. Use colors, textures, and non-reflective materials to blend development into existing landscape.
5. Use minimal lighting to avoid creating a focal point in the night landscape.

SCENARIO

The park is looking to add a restroom because of increased visitation at a popular overlook.

Reading the landscape

The road, framed by the vegetated hills, draws your eyes down a focal line. The line ends at a prominent mountain that is a pleasing focal point. There are mature trees and shrubs in the foreground. Similar vegetation extends into the middle ground and background.



✔ Good Example

The restroom is placed outside of the view, to the far right, and within the trees. It does not interrupt the journey of the eye to the mountain. The trees provide a good opportunity to blend the restroom into the landscape. The location still provides good visitor access. Choosing a location that respects the focal point enhances the visitor experience.



✘ Not So Good Example

When the building sits in the open within the view angle, it creates a second focal point. It becomes a visual distraction competing for the observer's attention. The building pulls focus from the mountain and detracts from the visitor experience.



Related Best Practices:
Choose Elsewhere, Hide It, Keep the Focus, Screening with Plants, Color Me Local, Night Lights

1.5 Park it There

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Minimizing the visual impacts of parking lots with site planning that meets practical and functional needs.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Parking lots are necessary components in national park areas. Though needed, visitors may not want to see this kind of development as a prominent feature. The value of this best practice is that it uses good design solutions to reduce the visibility of parking areas. Minimizing visual impacts improves visitor satisfaction while meeting practical and functional needs. It is often a challenge to get parking lots to blend in with the existing landscape. Selecting sites for parking lots that avoid visual impacts can enhance the visitor experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

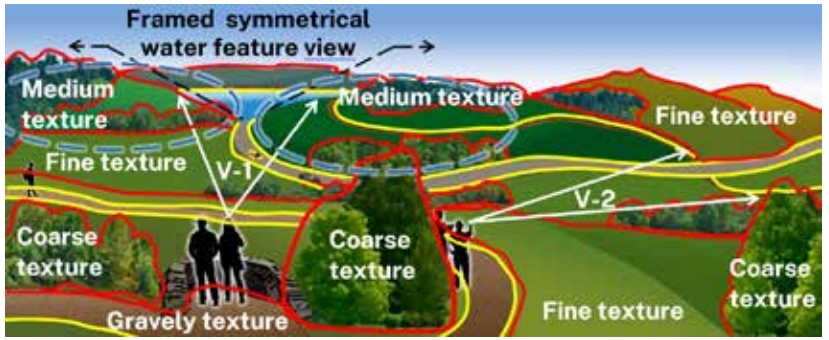
1. Locate parking lots outside of the line of sight in important views.
2. Choose level or minimally sloping sites to lessen the visual impact caused by increased grading.
3. Situate parking lots so that users are closer to their arrival needs, e.g., to a trailhead.
4. Size the parking lot on the smaller side. Use the DSC formula that computes an average based on visitor use data for peak days.
5. Match the level of development to the level of remoteness. In less developed areas, keep parking lots more natural. Use gravel surfaces and natural material boundaries.
6. Match hard surfaces to earth colors and textures in the adjacent area. Asphalt pavement is typically a black/dark gray surface that rarely matches natural park settings. Other materials may be visually more suitable depending on levels of use. Concrete pavers or permeable pavers (i.e., 'lawn looking') might be an alternative for high-use areas but can be expensive. Crushed granite or compacted earth is easier to match to the adjacent landscape.
7. Use native or native-appearing species to screen parking lot edges, dumpsters, and other visitor-use structures. Match color, form, and texture as well as groupings that mimic local, existing arrangements.
8. Resist adding lighting for security. Locating lots near roads is more effective. Law enforcement can easily scan them as they drive by.
9. Contact landscape architects or engineers at the region or DSC for assistance. Parking lot siting and design are often complex.

SCENARIO

The park noticed increased use of a trail. It is looking to add a new parking area to resolve safety and resource issues from visitors parking on the side of the road.

Reading the landscape

The primary view (V-1) is an important scenic overlook. It overlooks the lake, which is the park's most significant resource and the focal point of the view. The visual balance is symmetrical and framed by hills forested with evergreen trees. The foreground composition is a flat open valley with a low ground cover of grasses. There is nothing in the view that detracts from experiencing the lake. The secondary view (V-2) is one of many undesignated viewpoints along the trail. It takes in the whole valley view. V-2 is also a view of an open valley floor with low ground cover and forested hillsides.



✔ Good Example

Siting the parking lot to the right and out the primary view (V-1) preserves the most important view of the lake. This location also takes advantage of proximity to the main road and the trailhead. It will require a less paved and hard-surfaced area to serve this arrival location.



✘ Not So Good Example

Siting the parking lot directly in the line of sight to the lake is disruptive. It is an obvious intrusion in the open and flat valley grassland. There is a larger distance between the parking lot and the trailhead. The distance requires adding unnecessary trails to connect across the valley.



Related Best Practices:
Keep the Focus, Stay in Scale — Landscape, Stay in Scale — People , Color Me Local, Curb Appeal

1.6 Fit for Purpose

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Choosing the right size, location, and density for development to meet proposed activity needs.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Evaluating a site and the proposed activities is critical for accommodating multiple uses and maintaining a positive visitor experience. The value of this best practice is that it recommends siting techniques after assessing the ability of the site to absorb those activities. Clustering new development can reduce visual prominence and provide visual organization. It preserves open space and minimizes disturbed areas. It can reduce infrastructure such as roads or trails. Grouping also helps avoid unorganized development creep. In some cases, it is more beneficial to disperse development to take advantage of existing landforms and vegetation to obscure new structures. Such a strategy can offer benefits in terms of managing traffic and reducing noise pollution.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

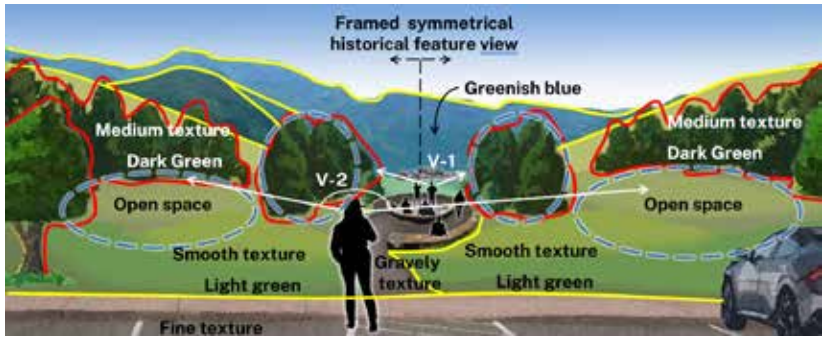
1. Evaluate the requirements of proposed activities to ensure a cost effective fit and a positive visitor experience within the proposed site. Create a list of needs for each activity. Example considerations include spatial requirements and noise levels. Avoid grouping activities with conflicting needs in close proximity.
2. Evaluate the setting for pockets of buildable places that fit the needs of the activity. Note how they link together for accessibility and circulation. Look for screening opportunities.
3. Size development to the available spaces. Locating against a background helps it to recede and not dominate a view. This works especially well with picnic areas and camping sites.
4. Cluster structures as tightly as possible while preserving a high-quality visitor experience and avoiding spreading over a wider area.
5. Divide larger development into smaller groups if existing vegetation and landforms are insufficient to lessen or hide the visual impact.
6. Use land that is already disturbed, if possible.
7. Use materials, colors, and textures that match the location to help the development be less visible.

SCENARIO

The park needs to add new picnic facilities to support an increase in the level of visitors. The location has a developed overlook for one of its iconic views. The park has regular programs at the amphitheater. Day-use visitors disperse over a large area, including near the overlook.

Reading the landscape

The primary view (V-1) and the view from the parking area (V-2) focus on a historic structure and distant mountain range. The elevated parking area overlooks the primary viewpoint and amphitheater. Both views are framed by trees and mountains. There is a symmetrical balance in both views. Land cover for the V-2 view is low ground cover, shrubs, with evergreen trees and deciduous shrubs. Land cover in the primary view has low groundcover grasses with a forest wall blocking a deeper view. The main view corridor to the historic structure is open.



✔ Good Example

Picnic sites are clustered around the two small open spaces away from the overlook. Both are anchored by a tree background. There are fewer tables, so picnickers have a more pleasant experience. The noise and movement of the picnickers are less disturbing to visitors and programs from the primary viewpoint. The layout of picnic sites on both sides of the overlook fits in with the natural setting. Table placement retains and mimics the symmetry of the original landscape.



✘ Not So Good Example

Picnic sites are spread out and located throughout the site, close to the overlook and as well as into the trees. The picnicking use dominates the landscape. Visitor noise and movement impose on the overlook and may interrupt interpretive programs. The two types of uses are not able to share the same site without negatively impacting the other.



Related Best Practices:
Hide It, Choose Elsewhere, Have an Anchor, Screening with Plants, Fade Into the Background, Stay In Scale — Landscape, Reflections

1.7 Unbroken Horizon

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Not breaking horizon lines with new features to maintain the natural visual dominance of the horizon.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it preserves the scenic quality of views with strong horizons while finding a good location for infrastructure. Horizons are the most sensitive part of a view to development impacts. The location in a view where the sky and the ground meet, is called the horizon line. Horizons can be ocean/sky, mountain/sky, or prairie/sky. Eyes are naturally drawn to this strong line. In a view with a strong horizon line, vertical features are likely to be prominent and draw attention. A communication tower is an example of a development that can impact strong horizon lines. Park development such as radio towers and buildings may also impact horizon lines. Understanding horizon lines helps to minimize visual impacts while meeting functional requirements.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

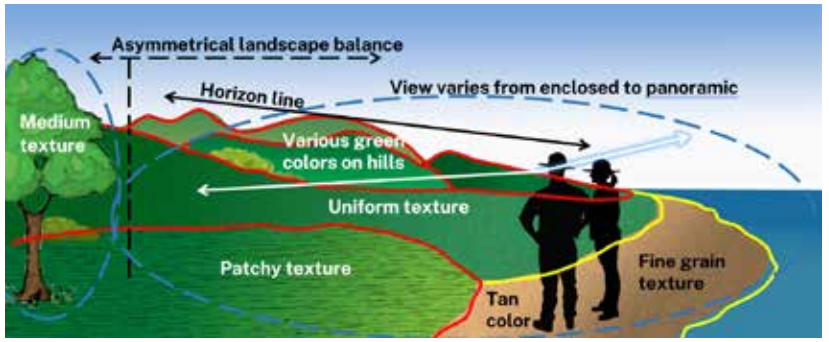
1. Place development below ridgetops so that rooflines, towers, or project features do not break the horizon. If possible, move the location downslope so that the height of the installation is no more than about 10 feet above existing vegetation.
2. Find another location if breaking an important horizon line is unavoidable.
3. Reduce the height or the number of vertical features that can break the skyline.
4. Use low-profile structures. They tend to blend into a landscape dominated by strong horizon lines.
5. Set back development/buildings from shore edges.
6. Use colors and textures to disguise and hide infrastructure.
7. Keep structure heights low enough to avoid lighting them. Refer to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), state, county, and municipal regulations/ordinances for the exact height.
8. Think about how distance and the curvature of the Earth make development recede and disappear on ocean surfaces, large water bodies, or flat open plains.

SCENARIO

The park needs to find a location for a new communication facility near the shoreline. The facility design is not flexible on the height of the development.

Reading the landscape

The view is a panorama with a strong horizon line when looking at the lake. Looking away from the lakeshore, the view is enclosed by surrounding low, rolling hills. They also create a strong horizon. Landcover in the fore and midground is dominated by low grasses and small clusters of low shrubs and trees. The visual balance is asymmetrical with the weight on the left created by hills.



✔ Good Example

The communication tower and structure are placed below the ridge line and behind the first ridge. This avoids breaking the horizon line. It still meets functional requirements. The tower is located so that background landforms help it blend in. In this location, the facility and tower are far from one side of the view. They are not near the shoreline and the primary line of sight.



✘ Not So Good Example

In this location, the tower and the structure break the horizon line. They are also in the center of the view. The development is visually prominent and draws the attention of the visitor. The positive quality of the view near the lake is diminished.



Related Best Practices:
Choose Elsewhere, Hide It, Screening with Plants, Architectural Screening, Color Me Local, Rough Textures, Reflections

1.8 Respect History

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Minimizing the visibility of development in cultural/historic/ethnographic views.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it keeps high-quality settings around historic properties and cultural landscapes intact. Views of historic, ethnographic, or cultural landscapes are special places in park units. They may be contributing features listed in the National Historic Register nominating reports. Keeping these views clear of inconsistent features maintains the integrity of their setting. The setting may be a feature often listed on National Register documents. It also meets legal and NPS policy mandates. This best practice contributes to cultural and natural resource preservation goals.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

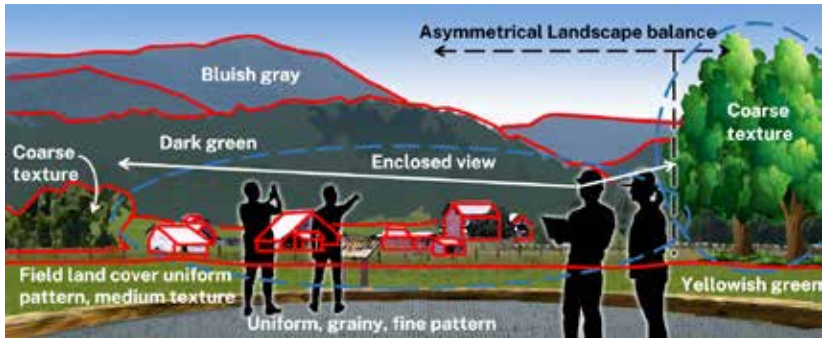
1. Consider if a facility is truly needed. Assess the number of visitors stopping at and enjoying a view and the amount of time they spend at a viewpoint. This will help determine if facilities like restrooms, are necessary. Informal collaboration to include historic or cultural perspectives may be helpful. If the view has cultural significance to Native Americans, consult with tribes for the best solution.
2. Locate new buildings, signs, or other features, outside of the primary view area. Keep locations of new elements to the periphery where and when appropriate.
3. Use on-site vegetation and existing features like landforms to hide and blend development.
4. Follow Secretary of Interior Standards as applicable. The standards apply if a site is listed on, or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. If a property is more than 50 years old, check its listing and eligibility. If a treatment plan identifies preservation, consider locating facilities elsewhere. The standards for Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction allow the introduction of new facilities. New structures should match the colors, forms, and materials of existing features. However, they should be different from the original. Consult Historic Preservation specialists in your Region or at the National Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC) for support.

SCENARIO

A park wishes to place a new visitor facility near a view of an important historic farm landscape.

Reading the landscape

The view is enclosed by mountains with a historic farm scene in the middle ground. An expansive valley floor with low grasses and small clusters of low shrubs is in the foreground and middle ground. The visual balance is asymmetrical with larger foreground trees framing the right side of the view.



✔ Good Example

Locating the facility on the far-right side of the view keeps it out of the view and peripheral. In this location, it is minimally visible in the primary view. It is placed so that the round, large tree canopy behind it absorbs and anchors it. The facility blends in with the existing features. The view remains asymmetrical by placing it on the right side.



✘ Not So Good Example

By placing the new facility close to the viewers, it dominates the visual experience. The facility blocks the left side of the featured view. Locating the facility on the left side creates an additional visual draw. Because it is opposite of the other features on the right side of the view, it becomes a new stand-alone feature. It pulls the attention from the historic scene in the middle ground.



Related Best Practices:
Keep the Focus, Fit for Purpose, Color Me Local, Curb Appeal

1.9 Have an Anchor

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Anchoring development by placing it near existing natural and human-made landscape features.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Placing facilities or signs often happens without careful consideration of the visual consequences. The value of this best practice is that it encourages an orderliness that respects the existing landscape. Giving a new feature an anchor or a backdrop can help unify and balance the visual experience. It makes development less noticeable and distracting. It may also help reduce land disturbance, visual clutter, and developmental creep. A positive visual experience reflects a park that is well cared for.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

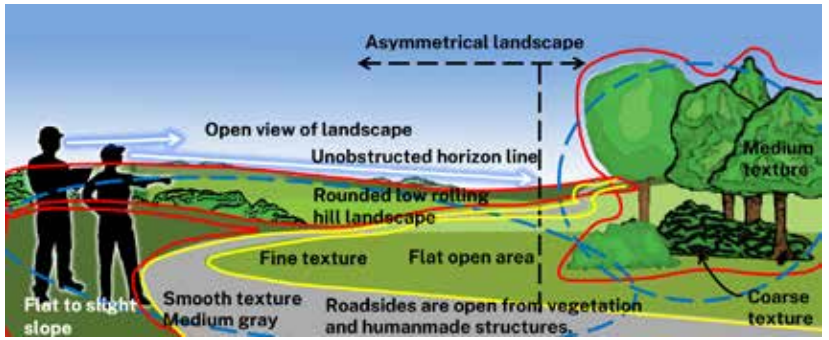
1. Tie new development features to existing landform, land cover, or development. A backdrop can serve as an anchor.
2. Place new features with existing built items. For example, add signs to other signposts or locate structures with other structures.
3. Consult Region or DSC Landscape Architects for ideas on anchoring techniques.
4. Use boulders, where appropriate, to visually anchor features. They create a more natural look and protect features from damage. Bury boulders and large rocks 1/4th to 1/3rd of their height. This will create a pleasing, organic look — as if they belong there — and help prevent them from being moved.

SCENARIO

A park wants to move an entrance sign to a new location.

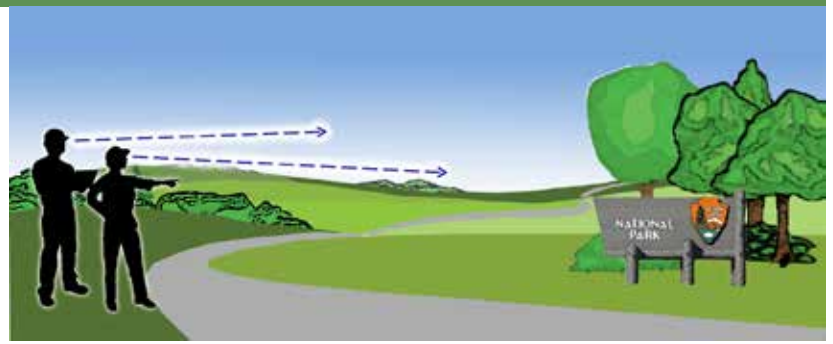
Reading the landscape

The preferred area is an open view of the landscape. There is an unobstructed horizon line. The visual balance is asymmetrical with a cluster of trees and shrubs on the right side only. The foreground and middle ground are flat to rolling. The roadside is open and lacks large vegetation and human-made structures.



✔ Good Example

The park places the sign near the cluster of trees and shrubs. It anchors the sign to the existing visual composition. This also keeps it out of the primary viewing area, yet very visible. The sign is proportional to the trees and shrubs behind it. Its colors stand out enough to be visible without dominating the open view.



✘ Not So Good Example

By placing the sign to grab the visitor's attention it becomes a dominant feature. The view now has a distraction and no longer retains its open visual character.



Related Best Practices:
Keep the Focus,
Stay in Scale — Landscape,
Forms and Lines,
Rough Textures

1.10 Keep the Rhythm

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Siting development considering the existing pattern, pulse, or arrangement of the view.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Rhythm in a landscape refers to visual movement. It is created by features that flow together as one impression. Repeating forms, lines, textures, and colors create rhythm in the landscape. Rhythm may consist of sequences of plants, structures, or other features. Rhythm and strong lines guide the eye through the landscape. examples might include orchards and streetscapes. Rows of tombstones or a tree-lined parade ground also have rhythm. Rhythm that attracts visual attention often enhances scenic quality. The value of this best practice is that it maintains the energy and the pulse of a view. This retains a positive visitor experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

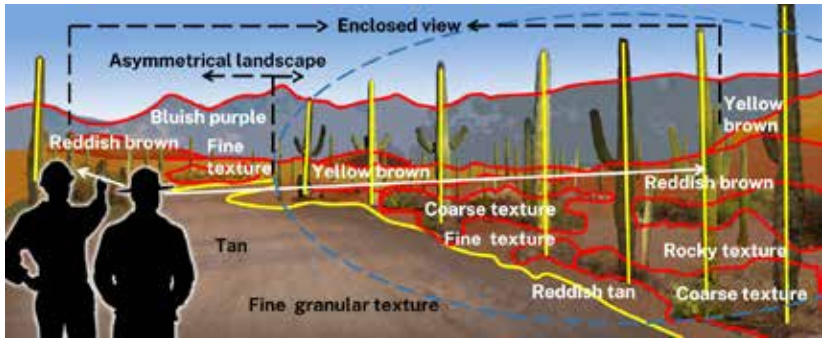
1. Identify the rhythm in park landscapes so that it is not unintentionally disrupted. Consider the flow of the movement — how the eye navigates through the scenery.
2. Place development features so that they do not interrupt the existing rhythm created by repeated landscape features or design elements. This could include repeated landforms, vegetation, or structures. It may also include repeated forms, lines, textures, and/or colors.
3. Keep a smooth flow from front to back in a view. This is the most relaxing visual experience. It can be achieved by repeating similarly sized forms, textures, and colors.

SCENARIO

The park wants to find the best location for a new entrance sign.

Reading the landscape

The view is enclosed by mountains in the background. The visitor has an expansive view of a desert landscape through the openings between the saguaro cacti. The strong rhythm of the cacti gives the viewer a positive feeling and a direction to follow. The road edges and line of saguaro cacti create an asymmetrical view with more weight on the right side. There is a focal point where the road turns the corner.



✔ Good Example

The sign is located at the visual end of a long line of cacti. It leaves the rhythmic beauty of the saguaro line unchanged. The sign blends in and leads the eye in the direction of travel, through the view. The sign balances with the strong line of cacti without losing their dominance. The top edge of the sign is below the middle ground horizon line of the reddish hills helping it blend in.



✘ Not So Good Example

The sign location stops the eye, interrupting the pleasing, repeating pattern of cacti. It now dominates the view and draws attention. It adds weight to an already heavy right side, further unbalancing the view. The sign's top edge breaks the middle ground horizon line. The location within the line of saguaro cacti requires the removal of one mature plant.



2. VIEW SMARTS

Related Best Practices:
View Story, Photo Op, Curb Appeal, Stay in Scale — People, Keep Eyes on Road

Helpful Tip



It is never easy to decide to remove vegetation in natural sites, less so in historical or cultural contexts. When the decision is made, properly removing, felling, or pruning trees to open a blocked view can result in restoring significant value to the viewing experience. Failing to completely remove trees can instead create a strange, new unpleasant visual scene. Trees that are not properly pruned or completely removed may die or send up suckers creating maintenance issues.

2.1 Keep Views Open

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Maintaining open vistas at overlooks by removing vegetation that blocks a view.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Maintenance of a designed view presents a positive image of a park. Many views can end up almost completely blocked by vegetation encroachment. The value of this best practice is that it keeps views once selected for their interest and beauty, open for continued appreciation. Re-opening or clearing a view helps visitors experience views as they were intended. For views with historic significance, vegetation management may be part of a treatment plan. These plans comply with the Secretary of Interior Standards for the treatment of Historic Properties. Foundation Documents or Resource Stewardship Strategies may identify key views as fundamental resources.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

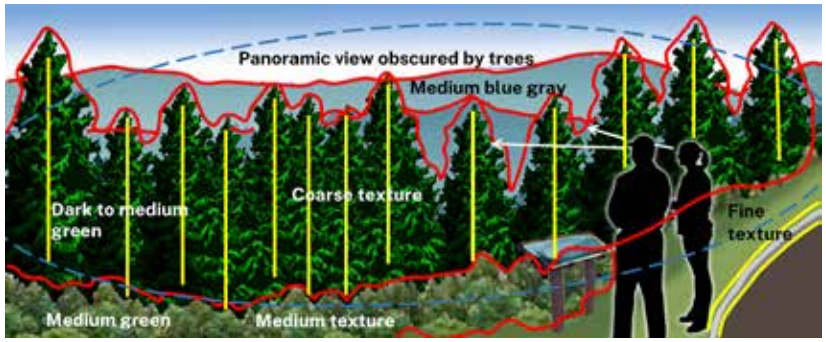
1. Clear areas where the best viewing experience is located.
2. Create or maintain openings where park documents identify important views.
3. Address locations with interpretive signs, first. This is especially important if content describes features that are blocked. If it is not possible to re-open to its original width, it may be good to remove the sign.
4. Be thorough when opening up a view by removing the trees completely.
5. Consider the current scenic quality within the view. Assess the history, safety, and wildlife/avian resource priorities before creating a removal plan. Sometimes the solution is to move a viewing location rather than disturb other resources or create safety concerns. Consult across divisions to make the best decision.
6. Consider developing a vista management plan if the park does not have one. It will identify maintenance schedules and budgets to keep selected views open. A park inventory of all views, per the NPS method, helps make these decisions.

SCENARIO

A park plans to remove trees at a viewpoint. Vegetation growth blocks the view described on the existing wayside. There has been little development in the valley beyond. If opened up, the view will once again be a high-quality scenic view.

Reading the landscape

The view is obscured by tall evergreen trees that have filled in the vista. They block the middle and background landscapes. The view beyond was a panoramic landscape with mountain ranges that are explained on the wayside.



✔ Good Example

The trees blocking the view in the foreground, on park land, have been removed. The interpretive sign is low and not in the view. It is adjacent to where people naturally gather to best experience this view.



✘ Not So Good Example

Only a few trees have been removed. This might be to protect other resources. The view is more open but remains mostly blocked. Visitors may be frustrated because the wayside describes mountain features blocked by trees.



Related Best Practices:
View Story, Keep Eyes on the Road, Keep Views Open, Roadside Variety, Curb Appeal, Stay in Scale — People

2.2 Photo Op

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Creating a new formal viewing location at an undesignated, socially developed photography stop.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Photos from a truly great spot are often posted on social media. They bring popular recognition to the park's scenic quality, possibly increasing visitation. This can lead to the creation of informal stops along roads that become safety hazards. The value of this best practice is that it helps you think through the concerns of views that can become dangerous by being popular. Developing a viewpoint with appropriate support facilities should meet engineering and safety standards. This will help avoid accidents and increase visitor satisfaction. Formalizing a public choice location may also help lessen litter and vandalism.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Evaluate viewing locations for safety as well as scenic quality. If they are unsafe and there are limited options to make formal pullouts, take steps to eliminate them. For example, planting vegetation and installing large enough natural-looking boulders that physically prohibit stopping. Gates, fencing, and signs typically do not work well.
2. Consider blocking the informal stopping area if there is another location offering a similar view. This is especially applicable at a pullout that is already developed or an area where it is more feasible to develop a new pullout.
3. Change surface textures between the road and pullout. It will alert drivers that they are in a different space.
4. Add edges and curbs to define traffic areas for safety and resource protection.
5. Keep vegetation removal to the minimum needed to open the viewing opportunity.
6. Resist adding site furniture: trash receptacles, benches, or signs, to a location that is a short stop on a touring route.
7. Consider making the park entrance sign a safe photographing location. Entrance signs are popular for this purpose.

SCENARIO

A park has a challenge with an undesignated pullout. It has become popular because of frequent wildlife sightings posted on social media. Increased stopping and parking causes traffic problems. It also creates a dangerous situation along the roadway.

Reading the landscape

The view is a framed opening that gives a glimpse of distant mountains as you drive by. The road corridor is enclosed with occasional breaks in the vegetation. The informal stopping area is on a straightaway. Landcover in the immediate foreground is turf ground cover. The turf area has deciduous and evergreen trees along the edge. Informal parking has damaged the turf.



✔ Good Example

Because there is ample area along the edge of the road, a new formalized viewpoint has been developed. It has defined edges of curbing and a wall for visitor safety. The pullout is paved creating safe parking, entrance, and exit. Traffic patterns have good sight distances in both directions. The location is next to a steep drop-off that has been made safer with a barrier wall high enough to keep visitors from falling backward if taking a selfie photograph. The viewpoint provides a safe space for taking photos away from the traffic.



✘ Not So Good Example

The less desirable solution is to block off the informal stopping area. The view is likely to remain popular on social media. Visitors still may get glimpses of the view traveling by. They may become frustrated because there is no way to stop at the viewpoint. However, some may try to stop nearby, creating a safety hazard and causing resource damage. Direct them to other good views.



Related Best Practices:
Keep Views Open, Photo Op

Helpful Tip



Developing safe openings is the goal. Having openings that are properly angled for driving may not always be possible. Where strong winds are common, create openings perpendicular to the direction of prevailing winds. Openings with the wind, create strong wind tunnels, increasing the risk of 'wind thrown' hazard trees.

2.3 Keep Eyes on the Road

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Opening vistas along roadways at angles so that drivers can see a view without taking their eyes off the road.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it increases roadway safety while improving the viewing experience from a moving vehicle. Correctly angled openings help prevent distracted driving. Drivers will not need to turn their heads to look across the road to see the view.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

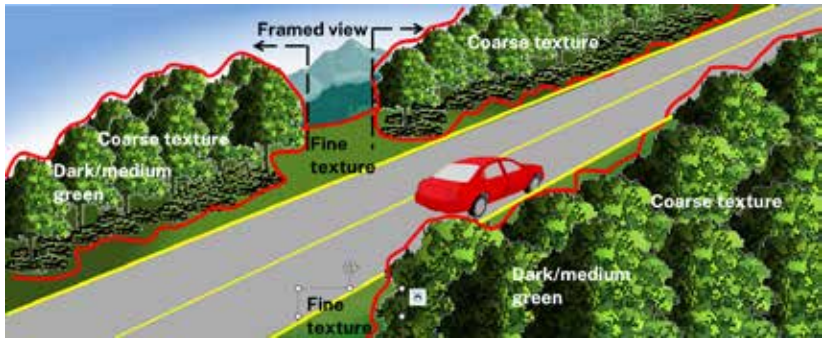
1. Evaluate glimpses of views that peek through dense vegetation for safety and visual quality. If retaining these views is important, manage them to enhance safety.
2. Open vistas to about 30 degrees measured from the direction of travel. This aligns the driver's eyes with the view reducing the need to turn their head. This approach works best for traffic moving in one direction. Consult with the transportation team at the Denver Service Center for further assistance. They can help evaluate road plans and driving speeds to estimate viewing angles.
3. Allowing the view to fill in or planting to block the view may be the best alternative where safety is a concern. Visually blocking will eliminate an attractive nuisance.

SCENARIO

A park has a small opening along a scenic road that was created by a storm.

Reading the landscape

There is a narrow opening in the trees along the road creating a framed view. It provides a fleeting glimpse of scenic mountains beyond. This is not a managed roadside vista and there is no parking or other development. The edge of the road is a forest with low understory and grass areas close to the edge of the road.



✔ Good Example

Additional trees and understory have been removed. This creates a larger opening and leaves a clear, undistracted view. The opening is cut at about a 30-degree angle to the primary travel direction. This allows drivers to see the view without moving their heads and taking their eyes off the roadway. This keeps oncoming traffic safely in their vision.



✘ Not So Good Example

A few trees have been removed but the opening remains small. It is still open at 90 degrees, perpendicular to the travel lane. At this angle, there is a potential hazard for drivers. To see the view, the driver must take eyes off the roadway and oncoming traffic.



Related Best Practices:
Overlook Siting, Photo Op, Color Me Local, Rough Textures, Have an Anchor, Sign Siting and Design, Sign Content and Messaging

2.4 Curb Appeal

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Organizing site furniture and signs so that the view is the dominant feature.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

First impressions matter. Improperly placed features such as signs, trash receptacles, benches, and sandwich boards, can dominate the foreground of the approach and arrival to a visual experience, turning visitors away. The value of this best practice is that improving that first impression through de-cluttering allows visitors to experience the destination in its best condition. Ask yourself, what does the visitor really need to know at this spot, at this moment? Rearranging, organizing, and removing unnecessary signs and furniture is one of the fastest and easiest ways to improve the park's visual image.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

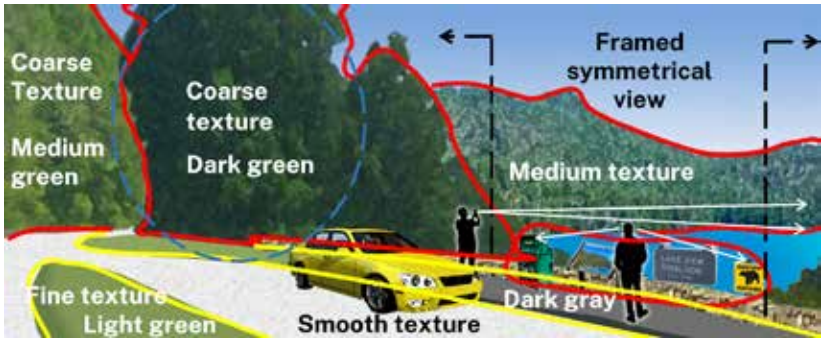
1. Perform an inventory of site furniture and signs as the initial step in de-cluttering. Build a park-wide repair/replacement plan to manage clutter comprehensively.
2. Minimize site features/furniture, i.e., benches, trash receptacles, and signs. For example, removing trash receptacles from short-term visitor experiences, like road pullouts, reduces a source of visual clutter. Many parks are already doing this with positive results.
3. Match the color, materials, and style of new components to each other. Also, match the style that is closest to the park's visual theme for a unified look.
4. Limit the number of signs to only those critical to the location. Consolidate multi-division messages to the extent possible. This will reduce the total area of signs that are viewed from one point.
5. Consider if some signs or interpretive material are best on social media. Small signs with QR codes can deliver information electronically.
6. Consult with Harpers Ferry experts or Regional Sign Coordinators for information about NPS sign policies and design guidelines.
7. Seek funding for the complete development of a viewing area to avoid piecemeal solutions.

SCENARIO

A popular viewpoint has seen a large increase in visitors. Over time, the park added many new things to the area to serve the high number of viewers.

Reading the landscape

The view is symmetrically framed on both sides with trees. The viewing area is flat with no vertical obstructions. There are many signs to address interpretive and visitor safety. Trash cans for maintenance are in the view. They were added over time and now clutter the setting. They also create the perception of a wall between the visitor and the view. The low natural rock wall with coarse texture is in character with the natural setting. It does not hinder the viewer's experience.



✔ Good Example

The trash can and nonessential signs are relocated. This allows the visitors to find room to enjoy the view without feeling crowded. The one remaining sign explains the view and connects the visitor to the primary viewing experience. It is placed so as not to interfere with the view.



✘ Not So Good Example

The choice of leaving things as is does not help improve the viewer's experience. The collection of features creates a visual distraction in the visitor's immediate foreground. Visitors need to move to the side of the viewing area to have an uncluttered view.



2. VIEW SMARTS

Related Best Practices:
Photo Op, Overlook Siting, Keep Eyes on the Road, Curb Appeal, Stay in Scale—People, Respect History

Trees as Storytellers



Champion trees define national character and regional identity. We record size, but do we understand their worth beyond numbers? We know them as silent witnesses of American history such as some of the trees at Gettysburg National Military Park. They are storytellers in their own right, their silent presence speaking volumes to those who pause to listen. Some Native Americans recognize the significance of trees as storytellers. They are repositories of ancestral wisdom and guardians of cultural narratives.

2.5 View Story

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Creating a formalized pullout at a socially developed location to promote a new interpretive opportunity about park resources.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Developing a pullout area that interprets a new point of view, cultural or natural, helps the park use its resources to form memorable connections for the public. It gives meaning to park stories, illustrating them and connecting them to the ground. Opening up a new location to do this can bring a new perspective to light. It can reinforce the park's purpose and mission. The value of this best practice is that it celebrates a visually important landscape while increasing safety and making it memorable. This increases visitor enjoyment and promotes park appreciation and stewardship.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

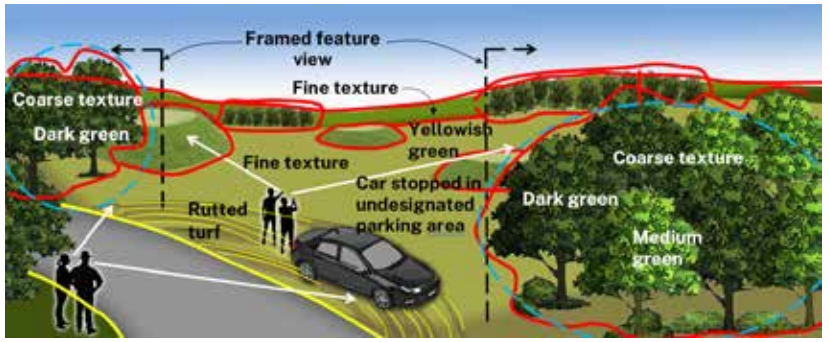
1. Evaluate the views from socially developed locations for their scenic quality or interpretive potential. Why are people stopping at that location?
2. Enhance views, where appropriate, to provide information about significant park stories and resources. Exhibits allow visitors to understand what they see and discover a meaningful, new perspective. Keep interpretive media below the main viewing area or to one side.
3. Consult with affiliated Tribal Nations if the site has tribal significance. They can help create an appropriate message. They also have an important role in determining if the view should be accessed at all. Some sites with indigenous values may be too sensitive to open up.
4. Use traffic engineering principles to create a safe pullout. Provide appropriate sight distances for entering and exiting the parking area.
5. Add edges and curbs to define traffic areas for safety and resource protection. Change surface textures between the road and pullout. It allows users to sense different spaces and behave accordingly.
6. Use site design details that align with the park's visual theme.
7. Keep pullouts simple and uncluttered. Avoid introducing new site furniture. A brief stop along a well-traveled route may not need trash receptacles, benches, or lights.
8. Ensure that the landscape is protected from trespass and exploration by visitors. Control access so that it follows current laws and/or indigenous concerns.
9. Consider that the development of a pullout may not be the best solution for resource protection. Visually and physically blocking off the pullout may be preferred where resources are sensitive.

SCENARIO

A park has a challenge with an informal pullout that is popular because of its unique view of a cultural landscape. Visitors currently pull off into a grass area with limited room for stopping and parking. They also stop on the opposite side of the road and walk across the roadway, creating a safety hazard.

Reading the landscape

The viewing area is framed on two sides by different sized trees. The trees create an asymmetrical composition with cultural features spread across the view. Landforms are rolling hills with a relatively flat area at the informal pullout. Land cover is shrubs and medium trees in the background. There are low grasses in the foreground, between the stopping point and the cultural features.



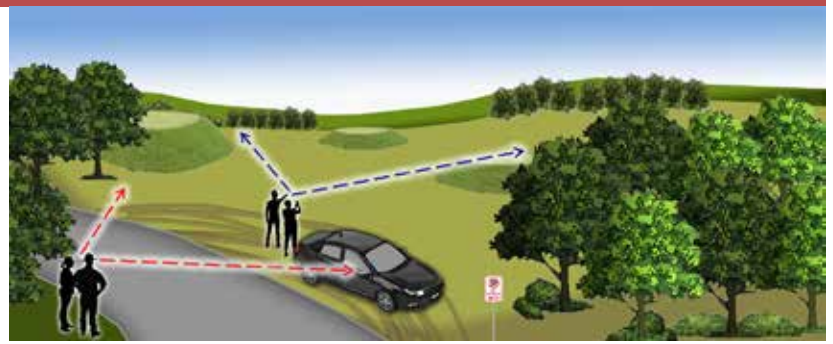
✔ Good Example

A socially created pullout has been formalized. Visitors can better appreciate and learn about the cultural landscape with a new interpretive display explaining its history. The parking area provides room to safely get out, take a photo, and review the new interpretive material. Site furniture such as benches and trash cans have not been added to avoid cluttering the viewpoint.



✘ Not So Good Example

The informal pullout remains unmanaged. A no parking sign has been added but is ineffective. Resource damage and safety problems persist. Visitors miss out on a chance to learn about a culturally significant landscape.



Related Best Practices:
Keep The Focus, Curb Appeal, The Right Spot, Stay In Scale — People, Color Me Local, Rough Textures

2.6 Overlook Siting

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Placing viewing area development so that the view remains the attraction, not the facilities that provide access to it.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

People often seek the highest point to overlook a natural landscape. However, it may not be the ideal construction location. The value of this best practice is that it lets nature prevail and preserves the integrity of a great view. It prevents the human-made items often needed at overlooks from becoming dominant in the view. In some cases, the best location would put the new infrastructure in a location where it becomes a distraction to the viewing experience, as in the approach to the view. Well placed facilities consider the natural viewing position and the viewed landscape.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

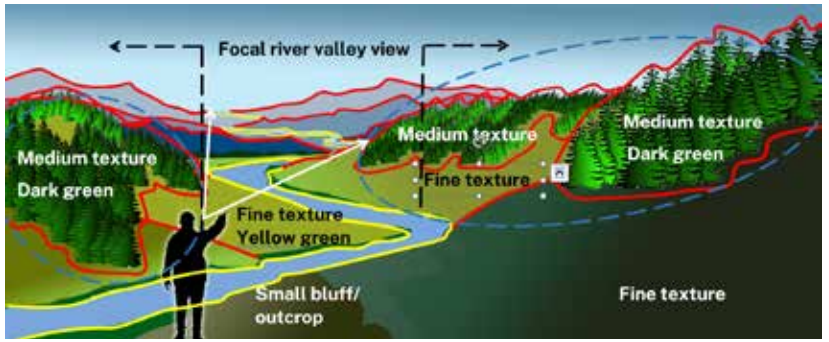
1. Select sites for overlooks by considering the view and the viewer's best viewing location. Recognize that visitors frequently choose these 'oh wow' views instinctively. Construction considerations may be secondary to achieving the most desired viewing experience.
2. Locate structures, signs, benches, etc., away from strong focal lines created by the approach to the overlook and within the view of rivers, roads, and ridges.
3. Orient support facilities at overlooks to take advantage of the existing framing of the view.
4. Let the scenic features in a view remain unchanged and unblocked.
5. Use colors and textures that allow the development/facilities to recede and blend in.

SCENARIO

A park would like to develop a formal overlook for an iconic river view. There has been some resource damage due to informal access to take photos.

Reading the landscape

From near the trail, a high spot offers a focal view with the eye drawn down the river to the mountains in the background. The view is symmetrically balanced with low rolling hills and evergreen forests on both sides of the river. The location is on a bluff landform that attracts many visitors. There is another possible viewing location away from the trail. It is flatter and would be easier for construction but is not where visitors gather to see this view.



✔ Good Example

The overlook is built on the bluff near the trail, to one side. It does not block the view as you approach or while viewing. Overlooking the river is a powerful visual experience from this location that visitors seek out. The overlook is set so that visitors encounter the narrowest dimensions of its size as you approach it from the trail. This minimizes the intrusion on the natural setting and view. The natural, dark stone material used to construct the overlook fits in with the natural setting.



✘ Not So Good Example

The overlook is built in a flatter location where there is a less powerful, but still good, view of the river and mountains. The constructed overlook dominates this location. It creates a focal point that takes the emphasis away from the view and diminishes the visual experience.



Related Best Practices:
Photo Op, Overlook Siting, View Story, Keep the Focus, Curb Appeal

2.7 The Right Spot

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Finding the right locations on a trail that offer the best opportunities to enjoy the scenic quality and maximize the interpretive potential.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it enhances the visitor experience and protects other resources from wear and tear along a trail. What you see depends on where you are looking from. Choosing the best location along a trail for new viewpoints with interpretive media is as important to the visual experience as the scenic view. Good design takes advantage of the best lines of sight in a view. It highlights the natural framing, balance, and visual harmony of the landscape. For example, there may be many locations on a trail with a view of the same landscape features such as a river, lake, or mountain. One of the locations may direct the view so that it enhances the composition and focuses on key interpretive features. Using views to share wisdom, knowledge, and stories enhances the park experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

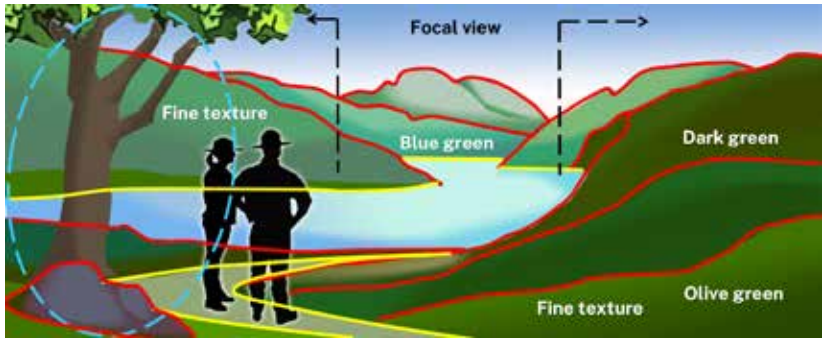
1. Identify locations where visitors already stop to enjoy the scenery, as a starting point. They often stand, sit, or look from a spot where you can follow the landscape lines that lead to a point of interest.
2. Narrow the selection to locations that offer the most vivid and harmonious views. It should be where visible features support an intended story.
3. Support the human instinct to be near water. Avoid adding anything that would distract from a good water view or limit safe access to the water's edge.
4. Keep interpretive media below or to the side of the view. Keep site furniture to a minimum.

SCENARIO

A park is trying to find a new viewpoint along a trail to interpret a mountain lake landscape that explores habitat adaptation and resilience. Views from two locations along the lakeshore have shown up on social media as some of the park's most photographed spots.

Reading the landscape

The most popular view has a distant mountain as a feature and strong lines of the lake edges. The surrounding hills focus the eye on the mountain feature. The visual balance is asymmetrical. The left side of the landscape is dominated by a large tree in the foreground. Landforms are gently rolling hills in multiple layers leading into the background. There is a rolling to flat area in the near foreground. Land cover is mostly low ground cover and shrubs with forested areas on some of the distant hills.



✔ Good Example

The selected viewpoint allows the eye to travel the lines of the features from the water's edge to the mountain. It has all the features needed for the habitat message. The size and location of the interpretive media are low and unobtrusive. To the right side of the view, the sign balances the tree on the left. The view takes advantage of the natural scenic quality of the view and maximizes the interpretive potential.



✘ Not So Good Example

Another spot along the trail is a short distance from the selected location. It is also popular with visitors. The area is a bit flatter, allowing for simpler development with more room to accommodate visitors. However, the mountain is hidden from this location and the view lacks the framing and composition of other features. It is missing elements that are important to the habitat message.



Related Best Practices:
Overlook Siting, Photo Op, Park It There, Curb Appeal, View Story, Stay in Scale—People

Exploring Concepts



Personal space expands and contracts with the setting. It varies with the activities and familiarity with the other people. It also varies with different cultural norms. Most family groups are comfortable being close together at a public viewpoint. Strangers, especially from different cultures, may prefer being further apart. North Americans desire the largest amount of personal space, roughly equal to our height in public spaces. More space is desirable in wide open parks or wilderness settings.

2.8 Elbow Room

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Sizing viewpoint areas to provide human comfort for a positive visitor experience.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Crowding at popular viewpoints has become the new norm at many parks. The value of this best practice is that it helps manage overcrowding, protects resources, and gives visitors a sense of personal space. When creating formal viewing sites, it is important to size the area for human comfort. Different settings may demand different spacing for enjoyment of the view. In wilderness areas, people feel more comfortable further apart than in urban areas. Respecting personal space in viewpoint design creates a positive viewing experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

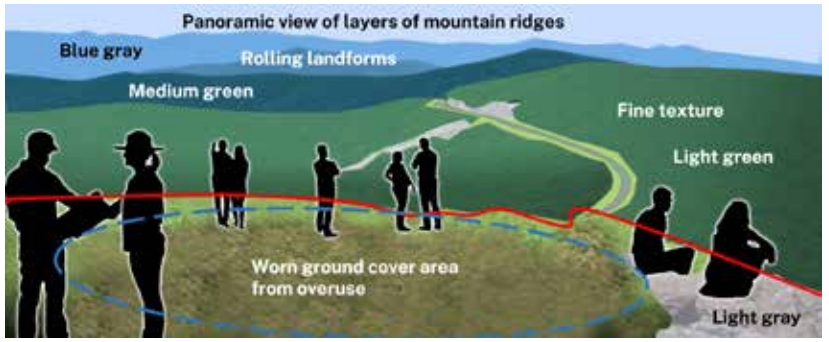
1. Consider a Visitor Use Study to assess crowded and/or heavily damaged areas. Studies will document use and aid in decisions for the design of facilities. They may also inform the opening or closing of viewing areas. Data collected will note how visitors use a site. It should include party size, length of stay, time of day, and seasonal demand. NPS Cooperative Ecosystem Study Units (CESU) and contract experts can help execute these and offer helpful guidance. This kind of data collection is also a great opportunity for citizen science.
2. Design overlooks to accommodate approximately 75% of visitors on a high season day. Designing for the maximum number on a maximum day may lead to overbuilding a site.
3. Consider the appropriate distance between people where each feels comfortable. Personal space of 3 to 6 feet between parties is optimal. In some cases, a 6-foot person may prefer 3 feet out from the body core to all sides, resulting in a 6-foot bubble. Informal, self-guided, or wilderness experiences may demand greater distances between people and parties.
4. Determine if developing an overlook is the best solution for resource protection. The presence of sensitive species or other resources may require closing some areas. Denying access could be difficult as people always find a way to a spectacular view. But if critical resources are at risk, it must be done.
5. Design any solution to safeguard users from unintended falls or other hazards.

SCENARIO

A socially developed overlook has grown in popularity and the park wants to reduce resource damage. The leadership team has decided to develop a formal overlook.

Reading the landscape

The view is a dramatic panoramic view of distant mountain ridges. There are forested mountain landforms in the middle ground. The viewpoint offers a symmetrical composition of the landscape. The immediate foreground is a fairly wide-open flat area with low ground cover. It has been damaged from overuse.



✔ Good Example

The development includes a new paved walkway and rock wall. The overlook has space for three comfortable areas for visitors spaced 4 to 6 feet apart. The overlook accommodates 75% of the visitors on a high season day. The design respects personal space and viewer sensitivity. It provides the necessary space to appreciate the view and reduces the chances of crowding.



✘ Not So Good Example

The overlook development is smaller. Visitors must be closer together than is comfortable. Even though it protects resources, it is too small to meet the needs of visitors. Visitors may avoid this site, return when it is not crowded, or pass it by feeling unsatisfied with the viewing experience.



Related Best Practices:
Keep Views Open,
Keep the Rhythm,
Stay in Scale — People

2.9 Canopy View Care

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Pruning and/or selectively removing vegetation to improve a canopy viewing experience.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Proper pruning of trees to open a view can restore value to the viewing experience. Removing understory vegetation may be needed to achieve this. The value of this best practice is that it opens up a view in a specific way that gives the visitor an intimate setting. It creates a personal connection to their enjoyment of the view. Canopy views are best appreciated by walkers, hikers, or stationery travelers. This view type reveals details beneath the canopy and the view beyond. These views require greater attention to detail for maintaining the visual experience than other view types. Visitors often spend longer time at these viewpoints. They experience the foreground up close and personally. Removing the understory contributes to a visually pleasant trail experience. Creating these views may help disperse visitors away from overused areas by opening up other choice view areas to experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

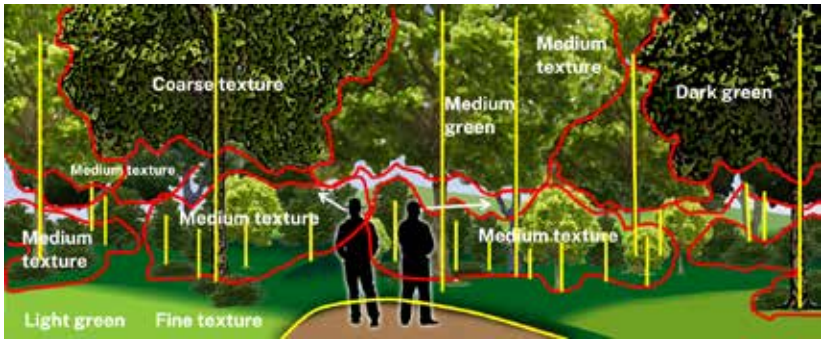
1. Leave downed and decaying vegetation along the 'sides' of the view so that visitors can experience the natural processes.
2. Use this best practice on trails. The scale and detail in a canopy vista are best experienced and understood by someone on foot.
3. Evaluate any site for pruning or vegetation removal carefully. Be aware of potential impacts on other resources, especially wildlife, birds, and pollinators. Consult across divisions to make the best decision.
4. Go slowly and assess the work as you go. Remove the least amount of vegetation to achieve the desired result. Start with removing dead and diseased first, then living tissue. Plan to remove no more than 25%–33% of total leaf area.
5. Know the best season to prune plants. After the peak growing season is usually the best time to prune but will vary by species. Note: If park staff have limited experience in caring for these types of views, check with volunteer trail clubs. They may have the specialized skills and labor needed.

SCENARIO

A park would like to open up a view along a popular trail. Records show that it once was an important view to the park's interpretive themes. Scenic hills are behind the understory vegetation that now blocks the view.

Reading the landscape

The view from the trail is through a canopy of tall trees. The regrowth of understory shrubs and small trees blocks the view. Textures of the understory are fine to medium and medium to coarse in the canopy. The height of the tree canopy still allows for a view of the landscape beyond.



✔ Good Example

The view under the large trees has been cleared of small trees and shrubs. The main view of the hills is now open under the canopy. The edges and sides remain untouched. This allows an up-close experience with the natural landscape under the canopy. It may also be another interpretive opportunity.



✘ Not So Good Example

The view remains mostly blocked. Removing only part of the understory limits the viewing experience. Leaving the view blocked is a lost opportunity for increasing visitor enjoyment and park understanding.



3. DESIGN WISE

Related Best Practices:
Unbroken Horizon, Keep the Rhythm, Two Shades Darker, Rough Textures, Stay in Scale — People, Stay in Scale — Landscape

Exploring Concepts



Lines can guide flow from one space to another. Spaces with straight lines direct visitors to destinations they want to reach quickly, such as restrooms. When seeking information, their path may be indirect as they move from one place to another. It will depend on how they encounter the information. Spaces that flow along curved lines can encourage slower movement to stop and check out displays.

3.1 Forms and Lines

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Making the forms and lines of structures consistent with existing landscape features to help make them compatible with the setting.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it creates harmony in the development setting. Development that fits in with the surrounding landscape allows natural landforms to remain a central feature. When lines meet, they create forms in the landscape. Together lines and forms define the structure of the landscape that visitors experience. In landscapes with predominantly round forms, adding new rectangular structures will create contrast. They will not be compatible with the existing landscape. In other cases, straight lines may be more suitable. For example, adding structures that reinforce the horizon or the horizontal lines in geologic layers ties the natural and built spaces together. It maintains the visual harmony.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

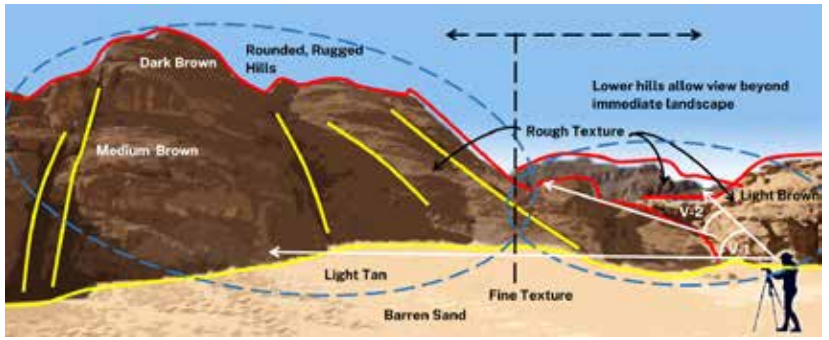
1. Use building shapes that fit in with the natural forms and lines of the site and surrounding landscape. Where the landscape inspires and suggests circular forms, use them.
2. Use lines in the design to direct movement and define space.
   a. Curved lines move the eye around and through space gently, drawing attention to features along the line.
   b. Horizontal lines move the eye along the ground making spaces feel wider, spacious, and restful. They also create levels that can divide or tie spaces together.
   c. Vertical lines suggest height and draw attention upward making a space feel taller.
3. Create groups of buildings or features that are similar to the masses of the landforms in the view.
4. Grade new contours and landforms to fit with the existing landforms.
5. Use surface textures that are similar to site textures to maximize blending. Use darker colors near the ground plane and lighter colors higher.
6. Use colors that are two shades darker than the backdrop.

SCENARIO

A park needs to develop a new facilities management area. The site was selected to protect archeological resources in other parts of the park.

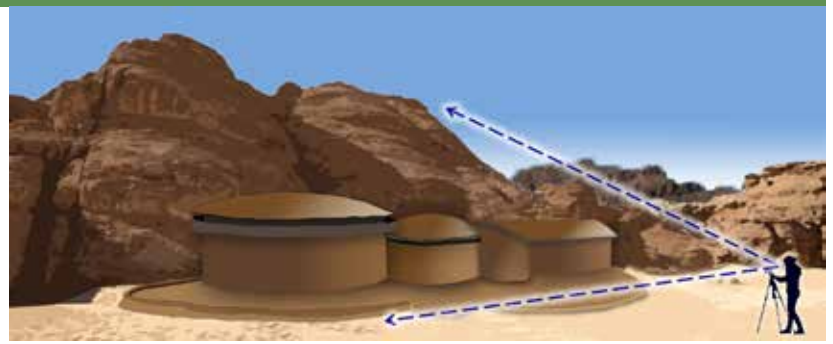
Reading the landscape

The site is a flat, barren area located next to hills that have rough textured, rounded forms. Non-linear curved lines define the edges of the geologic landforms. The landscape is asymmetrical with taller hills near the proposed site.



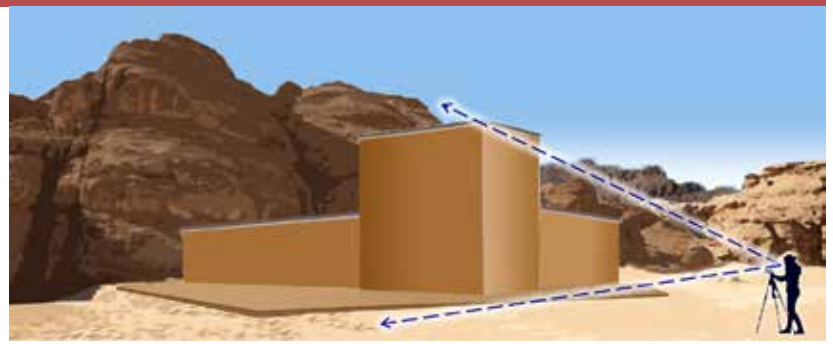
✔ Good Example

The structures have rounded forms, circular walls, and roofs, like the hills behind. The curving lines of the two larger buildings soften the development. The straight lines of the smaller building are less noticeable because of the curved roof. The buildings scale down in height, repeating the rhythm of the descending landforms in the background. The dark wall color recedes into the brown backdrop of the hills. The horizon line is not broken. The buildings visually fit in.



✘ Not So Good Example

The flat walls, vertical lines, and horizontal roofs compete with the rounded background. The roofline of the larger building breaks the horizon line when viewed from the main viewing area. The lighter wall color stands out from the brown backdrop of the hills. The strong contrast of the building causes it to dominate the viewer's attention. It distracts the viewer from the natural beauty of the setting.



Related Best Practices:
Curb Appeal, Have an Anchor, Keep the Focus, Photo Op, Color Me Local

Scale Illusions



When visitors feel comfortable in the spaces around them, it can enhance their overall experience. Disney has perfected this by intentionally distorting scale. Buildings on Disneyland's Main Street have floors that are shorter than normal. Shrinking the scale in this way brings the whole scale down to a more personal level.

3.2 Stay in Scale — People

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Sizing new development with human scale in mind to create more personal, comfortable spaces.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Getting small scale development right can enhance the visitor experience in the park. The value of this best practice is that it creates a comfortable, pleasing setting with attention to small design details. The foreground is where visitors first encounter a view and choose to leave or stay for a deeper experience. In this up-close and personal space, viewers are sensitive to what they experience. Even small details affect the overall visitor enjoyment.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

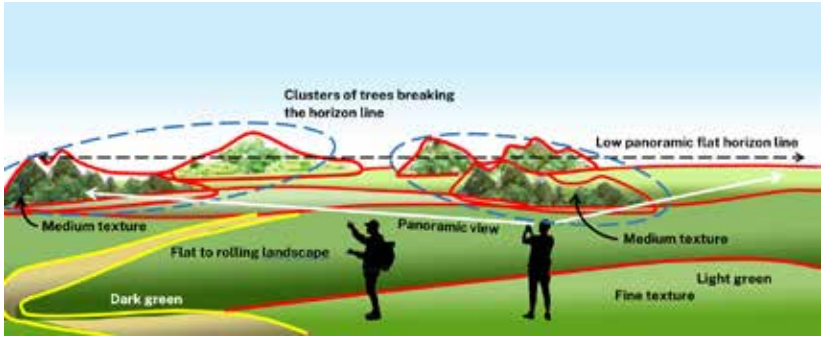
1. Use building shapes that fit in with the land and vegetation forms with lines of the foreground site.
2. Respect human scale and create personal comfort. Use human height and reach as proportions to size details like walls, kiosks, and waysides.
3. Place benches with something solid at their back and facing what's most interesting.
4. Make large spaces smaller, human scale, by creating edges and rooms. Use vegetation, building edges, signs, and outside structures, like fences, to define boundaries and create human-sized spaces.
5. Strengthen a focal point to create interest in a larger space. Define and contain spaces around it by adding edges.
6. Avoid adding vertical lines that draw the eye skyward. This makes spaces feel big and less human scale.

SCENARIO

The park needs to develop a new viewing area. Several designs are being considered.

Reading the landscape

The view is an open panoramic landscape with no visible structures or intrusions. The land cover is primarily grassland with low rolling hills and scattered tree clusters. Lines are generally horizontal. The pattern and organization of hill lines and tree clusters make the view seem proportionally ordered and balanced.



✔ Good Example

The trellis structure is just high and wide enough to create a comfortable human-sized, shaded space. The space is small enough to not compete with the spaces of its setting. The interpretive wayside is properly sized and sited. It is oriented to be easily read and not interfere with the view. It is not overbuilt or breaks the horizon line. The completed site creates a human-scale space and keeps the scenic view open.



✘ Not So Good Example

The trellis structure is much larger with a height that is twice the human height. The new trees are a larger, non-native species and become a dominant feature. Together the interpretive wayside, new trees, and shrubs are too large for human comfort and the scale of the setting. The horizon line is broken, and the view is partially blocked by the new plantings and wayside.



Related Best Practices:
Fit for Purpose, Unbroken Horizon, Screening with Plants, Stay In Scale — People, Forms and Lines

Parkitecture



'Parkitecture' defines the NPS experience as much as the landscapes. Early park buildings used native materials like whole logs and local stone. There was an emphasis on high-quality details, and craftsmanship. Built by hand, often by the Civilian Conservation Corps, this grand rustic style established the NPS's early identity. Designers sought to create buildings that harmonized with the location's wooded and typically mountainous, spirit. When they were successful, unity was achieved.

3.3 Stay in Scale — Landscape

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Sizing structures to fit in with the surrounding landscape where they will be viewed.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This best practice creates a harmonious setting and preserves the character of the site. The goal of good site design is to size development so that it feels comfortable and matches the scale of the site. Development that is consistent with the size of its setting has a positive visual impact. Overly large, out-of-scale structures overpower the natural scale of the view and tend to draw visual attention. Development that is too small for its setting appears out of place, unnecessary, and unimportant.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

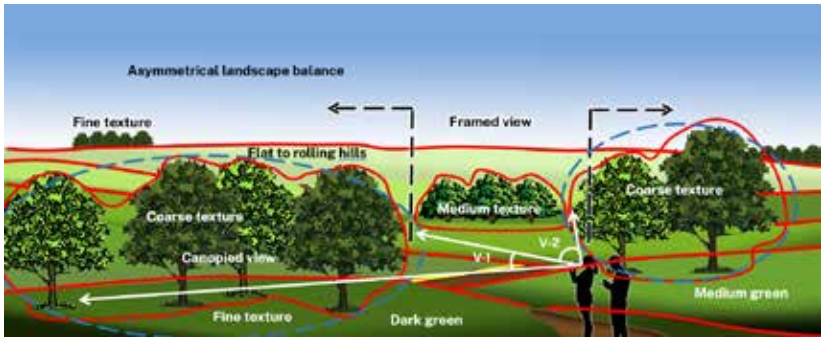
1. Create height and mass of structures that fit in with existing landforms and vegetation. Note: In landscapes that have very large landforms, it may not be desirable to 'scale up' by adding larger development to match the landscape. Rather, mimic the landscape's 'forms' in the built features i.e., make the angle of a roof pitch similar to the angle of adjacent steep slopes.
2. Use low-profile, one-story development in flat, rolling, sparsely vegetated landscapes.
3. Avoid breaking the horizon line.

SCENARIO

The park needs to add new facilities to enhance visitor services. Several options are studied to achieve the necessary square footage.

Reading the landscape

A panoramic view is visible through the frame of trees. The tree canopy also draws the viewer's eyes down to below the canopy. There are horizontal to low rolling hills in the background. The foreground has mostly flat areas and medium-scale trees.



✔ Good Example

In this solution, a group of single-story structures nestles among the trees. The buildings are not higher than the tree canopy. They closely match the height and forms of the surrounding vegetation. This retains the original balance of the view. It keeps the framed view through the trees as a central focus.



✘ Not So Good Example

Adding one tall structure is a visually overpowering solution. The building's roofline is above the trees and breaks the horizon line. It is out of proportion to the surrounding landscape. The structure is now dominant and the view becomes unbalanced.



Related Best Practices:
Have an Anchor, Keep the Focus, Park it There, Stay in Scale — Landscape, Forms and Lines, Two Shades Darker, Night Lights

3.4 Birds Eye View

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Choosing forms, colors, and textures that can make development seem smaller when viewed from above.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Overlooks are elevated viewpoints where the viewer looks down at the landscape. Elevated views capture a sense of context and grand perspective. These are special, intentional locations in park sites. In these views, future development or changes in the landscape are highly visible. The value of this best practice is that it carefully introduces development in a way that protects the scenic quality of a signature type of view. Poorly designed or sited development disrupts the experience of a pleasant, overview perspective.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

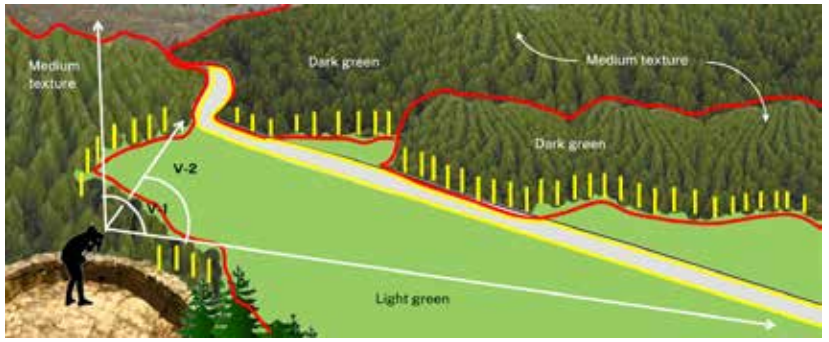
1. Use small, repeated forms to fit into many types of topographic situations.
2. Anchor development to vegetation or other landscape features so that it appears rooted.
3. Reduce large, straight building walls that introduce contrasting lines.
4. Keep building heights below the vegetation and landform backdrop.
5. Add varying rooflines and offsets that mimic forms of nearby tree groupings.
6. Use colors that are two shades darker than ground colors. The higher the elevated overlook, the more the ground becomes the background color.
7. Choose dull, rough textured materials for surfaces (walls, roofs) to minimize reflective glare.
8. Locate development away from the prominent center or focus of a view. Make use of the sweet spot (i.e., the area directly below the viewer) for building placement. It is often nearly hidden from a viewer looking out over a scene.
9. Use minimal or no lighting. Lights dominate a scene from elevated viewpoints.

SCENARIO

A park needs a new multi-use facility at a secondary park entrance. It will accommodate a visitor contact station, administrative offices, and backcountry supplies.

Reading the landscape

The view is an elevated panorama of a mostly natural landscape. There is an expansive forested landscape to the left. The open meadow is surrounded by a forest that creates a wall-like enclosure with irregular edges. From the overlook, a viewer clearly sees the patterns of trees and textures of the land cover. The large open meadow in the foreground is the dominant feature.



✔ Best Solution

Repetitive, connected forms break down the mass of the building. Roof angles mimic the angle of the evergreen trees. The forms have protruding and recessing spaces. They blend with the irregular edge of the forest. The building height is below the height of the adjacent tree line with a low profile that hugs the ground. The development is close to a forested edge, to the side and out of the main body of the view.



✘ Not So Good Example

Creating one, tall unbroken building and roofline is a less desirable visual solution. The building dominates the landscape. Its straight edges contrast with the irregular tree edge. This exaggerates its height and mass. The building is taller than the surrounding trees, adding to the visual contrast. Even though it is close to the forest edge and out of the main view, it distracts from the expansiveness of the view.



Related Best Practices:
Respect History, View Story, Stay in scale — People, Color Me Local, Night Lights

3.5 Building Harmony

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Blending into existing surrounding architecture and built landscapes to maintain the character and visual harmony.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it creates a visually unified built setting. Buildings that fit into an existing architectural setting create visual order and cohesiveness. Order keeps important areas aligned with national historic guidelines. Respecting existing character is required in National Register-listed or eligible historic properties. Adding a structure that is out of character affects the integrity of the area and diminishes the whole. When NPS approaches "infill" issues it is often in park housing or a single structure within an urban area. National preservation laws help determine the best solution for a site if listed or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

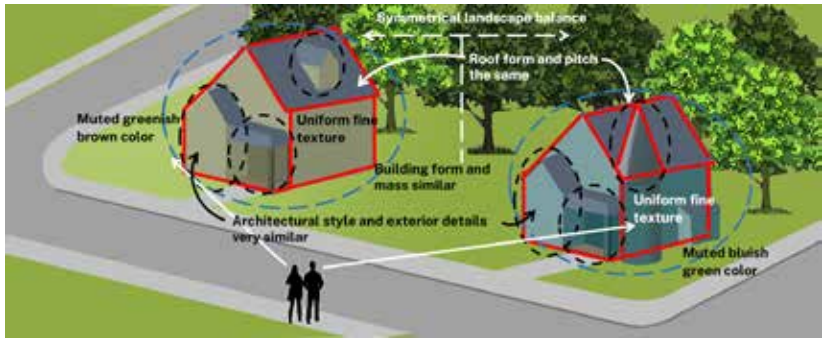
1. Design buildings that are compatible with the surrounding buildings. First, blend in with those closest, such as on either side. Then consider how to blend with those across the street or a little further away.
2. Match the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of nearby buildings, but with some variation. For example, the shape and pitch of its roof, siding materials, colors, and architectural style should be similar but different from the original.
3. Follow the Secretary of Interior Standards on Historic Preservation.
4. Reach out to technical experts if needed. Consult with NPS Architects in the Region or at the Denver Service Center (DSC). NPS also has historic preservation professionals at the Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC), in Fredericksburg, Maryland.

SCENARIO

A park has the opportunity to add housing to help meet a critical need. The area of consideration has a distinct style. The existing block is not in a historic district.

Reading the landscape

The housing block has a small, human-scale residential character. The composition is symmetrical and balanced with block forms of similar height. Architectural features include open, steep-pitched, gable roofs. There are external add-ons such as porches, dormers, and turrets. Rounded forms of trees create a backdrop behind the units. Structures have muted earth-tone colors.



✔ Good Example

The forms, size, and architectural details of the new building are compatible with the other buildings. Its colors are also muted, and the roofline and pitch are similar. It matches but does not copy the architecture exactly. The integrity of the existing historic structures is not negatively affected. It is neither too big nor too small for its setting. The block of buildings is pleasing and exhibits unity and harmony.



✘ Not So Good Example

The middle building is not the same shape or form. Even though it is about the same size, its architectural details are different. The roof is flat, not peaked. The building's form is a simple square box, not the more complex forms on either side. Its white color contrasts with its neighbors. It stands out and becomes a focal point when viewing the whole block. The visual integrity of the block is diminished.



Related Best Practices:
Screening with Plants, Color Me Local, Reflections, Keep the Focus, Building Harmony, Forms and Lines

3.6 Architectural Screening

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Using compatible architectural elements to screen new features.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The value of this best practice is that it obscures new development and helps it blend into an existing landscape. Screening new development with architectural elements requires understanding the entire scene. Effective screening designs can conceal or blend development year-round. Done in a thoughtful way, it will complement the existing setting.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

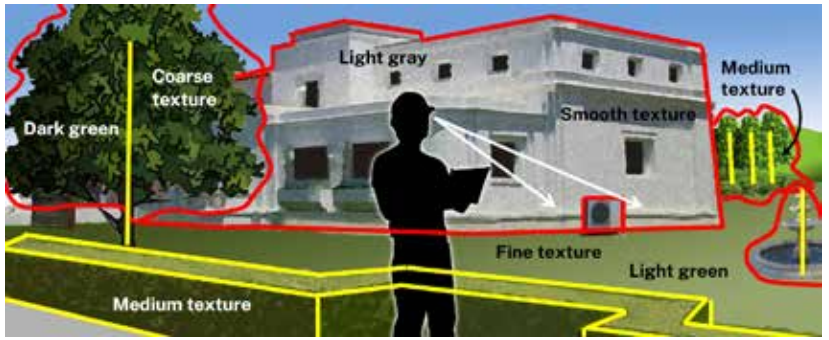
1. Consider if architectural screening is appropriate. Study the built and natural elements together. Screening with vegetation is often a preferred alternative to architectural screening where the space allows and is appropriate.
2. Avoid creating features that visually compete with other features or the focal point.
3. Use materials, colors, and textures consistent with building exteriors.
4. Keep the height of a screen as low as possible to do the job.
5. Consult cultural landscape inventories (CLI) and cultural landscape reports (CLR). They have critical information about historic or cultural landscapes. That information may suggest less intrusive solutions.
6. Consult the Secretary of Interior Standards and seek landscape architecture assistance. Review documents for historic landscapes that are on or eligible for the National Register. These might include: a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), a Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), or a Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS).
7. Match plant types to existing ones when including vegetation as part of a screening design. This applies to both natural and cultural landscapes.

SCENARIO

A park made a recent upgrade to the mechanical system for collections protection and visitor comfort. It has resulted in a small ground-mounted component next to the building.

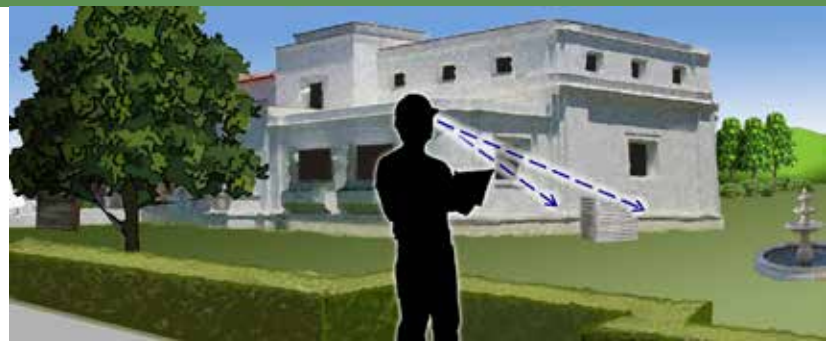
Reading the landscape

The view from a designated viewpoint looks out to the building in a maintained lawn area. There is a large canopy tree with a coarse texture that anchors the left side of the view. It is visually connected to similar trees behind the building. The trees contrast with the smooth texture and light color of the building. The mechanical equipment has become a visual distraction because of its location. It is next to the building, in an open lawn area. The primary focus is supposed to be the fountain and the building.



✔ Good Example

This solution includes a screen with color and texture similar to the building. It is not taller than necessary. It blends with the setting. It is a minor distraction in the overall scene.



✘ Not So Good Example

A less desirable solution is a new, small planter area next to the building. It provides a natural vegetation screen. However, the irregular shape of the curb, mix of colors, and vertical evergreen shrubs attract attention. It becomes a new focal point. There are no similar foundation plantings around the building in the view. The landscape is a flat, open lawn. The screening does not recede into the landscape. It competes with both the fountain and the building for the viewer's attention.



4. WORKING WITH PLANTS

Related Best Practices:
Screening with Plants, Hide It, Architectural Screening, Color Me Local

Helpful Tip



Even new native plants will need extra water for at least one growing season. Using drip irrigation systems with timers and watering early in the day and evenings helps conserve water. Limit the use of sprinklers to areas seeded for restoration or turf. Apply water to the bottom of the plant. Overhead spraying can damage them. Features such as lawns, fountains, and bubbling pools typical of residential yards are not appropriate and rarely occur in NPS units. They waste water. Where they exist, unless they are historic, consider removing them.

4.1 Follow the Pattern

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Mimicking natural, native plant variety, density, and arrangement when adding new vegetation.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Working with natural patterns can improve planting designs for solving visual intrusion problems. The value of this best practice is that it combines design concepts of landscape architecture with the natural, on-site landscape. In nature, plants often grow in groupings. These groupings of native plants may be visually pleasing and often have ecological advantages like providing shade and retaining soil moisture. They can soften an angular building or completely screen a development. Masses of trees, shrubs, and groundcovers also create effective windbreaks and wildlife habitat. This technique is most effective when built upon biological, ecological, and horticultural knowledge.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

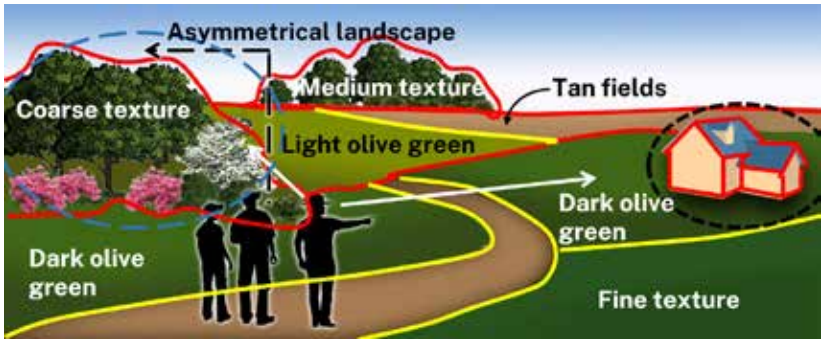
1. Conduct a plant survey to identify trees, shrubs, and groundcovers/grasses at the site. Note the spacing between plants, which plants reside together. How many of each type create a complete grouping? Making a map may help. Knowing the genus and species enables quick access to information about plant growth habits. This will help to come up with the best solution.
2. Select native plants to create a mosaic of species that are similar in density, size, color, and texture to the existing plants.
3. Arrange new plants to mimic local on-site plant communities in pattern and species type and ratio. Do the same for the patterns of plants in cultural or historic landscapes.
4. Create groupings or masses. Plant small groups in odd numbers — 3, 5, 7 as it appears more natural. Resist lines — groupings are more authentic than straight rows in natural landscapes.
5. Study the plants and patterns of designed landscapes. These might include historic and cultural scenes and ethnographic and vernacular landscapes. Screening for new development is often required. Consult regional or DSC cultural landscape architects for assistance.
6. Space plants to allow for mature growth, typically 5–8 years for shrubs or 10–15 years for trees. Time to maturation greatly depends on the growth habit of each plant type, the location, and the health of individual plants.
7. Plan for irrigation or watering for the first year of a new planting, even if the planting consists of local, native species. New vegetation often requires more water than existing conditions can provide to become fully established.
8. Know the ecological and biological aspects of the site before introducing new plants.
9. Consult Region or DSC Landscape Architects for more design considerations.

SCENARIO 1

A park has added a new storage facility for trail maintenance. The location is an open area set back from the trail and was selected to protect other resources.

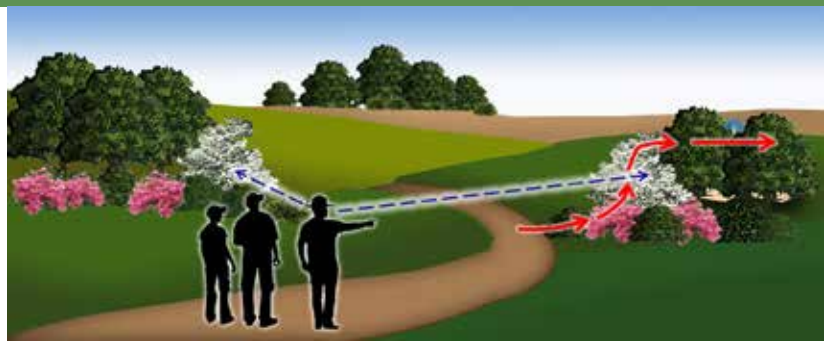
Reading the Landscape

The view along the trail is asymmetrical. In the foreground, there is a mass of medium-sized, coarse-textured trees on the left side of the trail. They have an understory of shrubs of various colors and textures. The rest of the foreground has a low grassland cover of dark green. The storage facility creates a visual intrusion that distracts from the panoramic view.



✔ Good Example

The proposed planting design for screening the building includes planting shrubs and trees. They are in an arrangement similar to the existing vegetation on the other side of the trail. The planting mimics the rounded forms of the cascading shrubs in front of larger, rounded deciduous trees. The selected native plants match the existing plants in color and size. This planting design should provide almost complete screening. It will minimize the visibility of the building, so it is not a distraction in the view.



✘ Not So Good Example

A simpler, less costly planting design uses fewer shrubs and trees that would not fully screen the building. The linear arrangement of the plants does not mimic the local pattern. It also creates a rhythm of high and low masses that attracts undesirable attention.

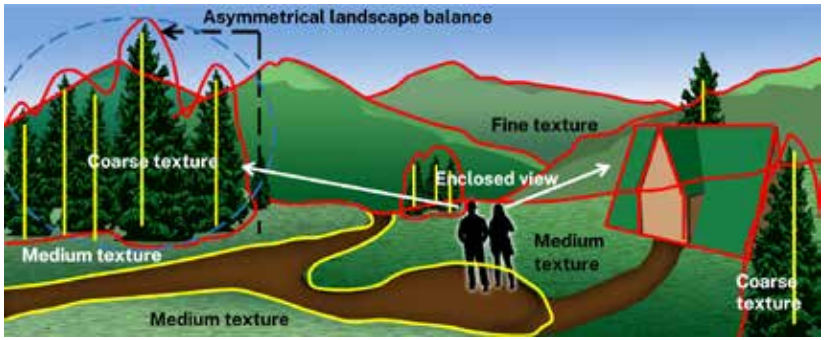


SCENARIO 2

A park needs to remove a building near a viewpoint and revegetate the site.

Reading the Landscape

The view is enclosed. Surrounding mountains and evergreen trees create walls around the rolling valley floor. The visual balance is asymmetrical with the left side stronger because of a close mass of evergreen trees. Landcover in the foreground is low grasses with masses of evergreen trees. The middle ground of the valley is low grasses and the background mountains have forested hillsides.



✔ Good Example

New trees that match those around the building and across the trail have been planted on the building site. Native seeding with the same species as in the surrounding ground cover was also used and the site blends with the existing landscape surrounding the viewpoint.



✘ Not So Good Example

Fast-growing trees and shrubs were used to restore the site so that the disturbed area filled in more quickly. The area near the viewpoint is filled in with plants and the former building site is not visible. However, the landscape does not blend in with the surrounding landscape and is a distraction for visitors at the viewpoint because it is so different.

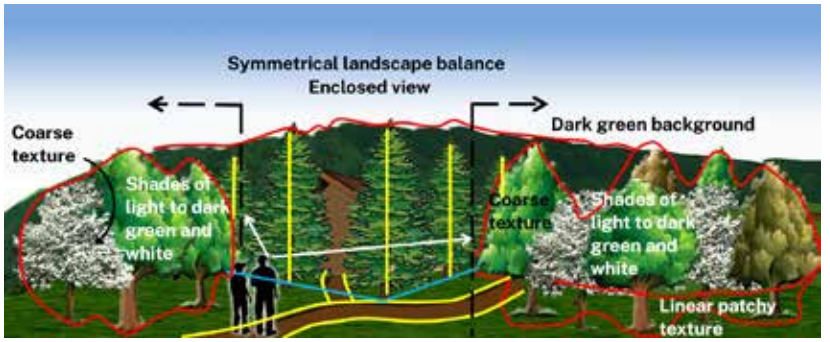


SCENARIO 3

A park has acquired a new parcel to expand the boundary and needs to remove an existing house that predates the park.

Reading the Landscape

The view from the nearby trail is enclosed with low hills in the background. The forested areas around the new parcel are a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees with low, native grass understory. Tree colors are light to dark greens, gold and white (when in bloom) and ground cover is medium green. Textures vary from coarse to fine.



✔ Good Example

The house and its surrounding non-native, ornamental landscape have been removed. The site is revegetated with trees that match the species in the surrounding, native area. Native seeding covers disturbed ground areas. Though smaller to start, the new trees blend in with the existing trees and fill in the site in a few years.



✘ Not So Good Example

The house was removed, and native seeding was used to cover the disturbed ground areas. However, the existing trees around the house were left in place. While it might be tempting to keep the mature trees, they do not fit in with the existing landscape. They could create a distraction for trail users as they are curious about why there is such a different landscape in that area.



4.2 Screening with Plants

Related Best Practices:
Architectural Screening, Follow the Pattern, Hide It, Park It There, Keep the Focus, Forms and Lines

Helpful Tip



Look into propagating native plants from your site (e.g., seeds or grafting). This requires special skills and facilities that may exist among parks and NPS staff or within other agencies. NPS also participates in the National Seed Strategy managed by BLM. This is an interagency project to grow, collect, store, and distribute seed for restoration projects. It also enhances long-term ecosystem restoration and adaptation goals across landscapes.

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Using plants that fit in with the surrounding landscape to reduce the visual distraction of development.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Using existing vegetation and topography is often the most effective way to provide desired screening. If this is not possible, planting new screening vegetation can be effective. The value of this best practice is that it can improve the visual quality of new or existing development. Vegetation screens can have added benefits beyond improving visual quality. They can also provide habitat for wildlife. They may reduce visual clutter, glare, and other visual impacts associated with development. Maintenance areas, utility components, and storage buildings often need screening as they do not need to be visible to visitors. Other features such as restrooms or parking areas need some level of visibility. However, they should not be visually dominant, especially from key viewing areas.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

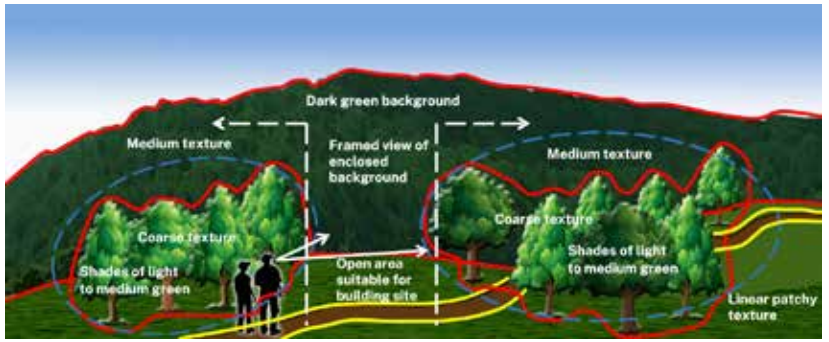
1. Conduct a plant survey. Identify trees, shrubs, and groundcovers at the project site.
2. Work with the plants you have on-site by placing the development to take advantage of existing screening. If possible, salvage plants from the site and re-plant after construction.
3. Choose sizes of vegetation appropriate to the size of the development to be hidden. For example, select plants that will be 20–30 feet high to screen a one-story shed instead of ones that will be 60–80 feet tall.
4. Keep development lower than the height of mature existing vegetation.
5. Use native plants. If exact species of natives are not available try to find materials that are within the same genus, and close to the same species as native ones. Ask around other public sites. Some may have on-site nurseries that can assist within a partnership agreement.
6. Use vegetation that matches or fits in with the surrounding vegetation or cultural landscape. This includes species, sizes, forms, patterns, textures, and colors. When appropriate, use vegetation that provides screening year-round. If that is not possible, it should provide the best screening during the high visitor season.
7. Correctly space plants apart to allow for mature growth, which depends on plant type and environmental factors.
8. Plan for irrigation or watering for a new planting. Even local, native species, need supplemental water to get established, usually 1–2 years.
9. Consult with NPS Landscape Architects for planting suggestions and assistance. Local commercial nurseries may be useful if they are able to supply native plants.

SCENARIO 1

The park would like to add a new restroom in an existing opening near a trailhead. The building needs some visibility for visitor access without becoming too prominent.

Reading the Landscape

The view from the trail is enclosed by forested hillsides with low grasses and large clusters of deciduous trees in the foreground. Forested areas on either side of the existing opening create a symmetrical, framed view of the site. Vegetation colors are shades of green.



✔ Good Example

Native vegetation screening matches the deciduous trees found in the foreground. The development visually recedes. The dominant, lushly forested hill remains the memorable impression of this location. The building is still visible and appears to fit into the landscape around it.



✘ Not So Good Example

Without additional screening, the restroom is framed by the foreground trees and is very prominent. Being close to the trail, it becomes the most memorable part of the view and the focal point.

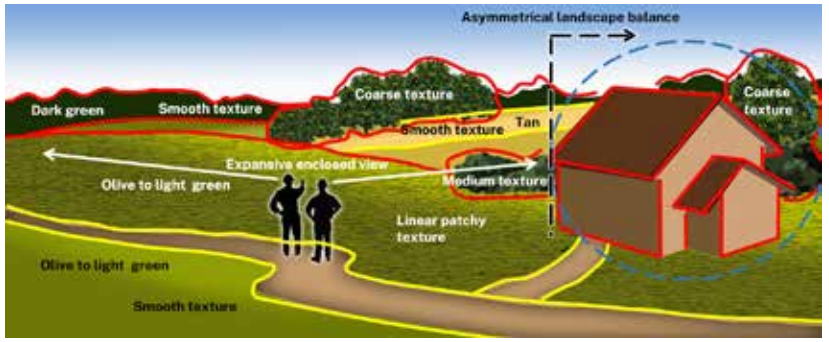


SCENARIO 2

The park has an existing maintenance structure that they would like to screen from the nearby trail.

Reading the Landscape

The view from the trail is panoramic, with flat to slightly rolling grasslands in the foreground and middle ground. There are also agricultural fields in the middle ground. The visual balance is asymmetrical, with a building that adds more weight to the right side. The grasslands emphasize horizontal landforms with colors of olive to light green. The foreground and middle ground trees and shrubs have rounded forms with medium to coarse textures. They are forest green in color. Dark green forested hills are in the background.



✔ Good Example

The vertical sides and angular roofline are partially screened by medium-sized, rounded tree forms. The screening trees mimic the type and pattern of existing trees. The screening softens the boxy form of the building. It blends in, recedes, and does not attract attention. The view remains asymmetrical. The focus is on the landscape as visitors move along the trail.



✘ Not So Good Example

The tall, vertical forms of the evergreen trees look out of place as screening trees. Although evergreen trees offer year-round screening, they conflict with the rounded native vegetation. The vertical trees draw the eye upward. They grab the visitor's attention to themselves and amplify the development.

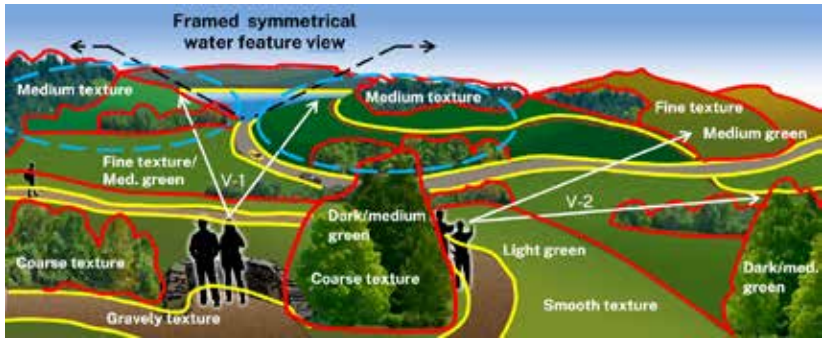


SCENARIO 3

The park needs to develop a new parking area to accommodate increased visitation.

Reading the Landscape

The V-1 viewpoint is an important scenic overlook of the lake. It is the park's most significant resource and the focal point of the view. The visual balance is symmetrical and framed by hills forested with evergreen trees in distinct patterns. The foreground is a flat open valley with low ground cover grasses. Nothing detracts from the lake view. The V-2 viewpoint is one of many undesignated viewpoints along the trail. The views take in the whole valley. It has an open valley floor with low ground cover and forested hillsides.



✔ Good Example

Including screening in the design reduces the visibility of the parking area, making it less of an obvious intrusion. The vegetation matches the forms, colors, and textures of the existing landscape.



✘ Not So Good Example

Choosing not to plant screening creates an unnecessary visual intrusion in the valley. It draws attention from a primary view of the lake. The parking lot colors and textures conflict with the existing landscape. It is highly visible and diminishes the view.



Related Best Practices:
Keep the Rhythm, Keep Eyes on the Road, Canopy View Care, Screening with Plants

Flower Power



"When flowers bloom, so does hope." - Lady Bird Johnson

Brava to First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson who launched a beautification movement. Her work started in Washington D.C. and spread across the country. It resulted in the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 that sought to beautify the rights-of-way of state and federal highways with a focus on wildflowers. We still enjoy the fruits of that labor on our highways today, especially in her home state of Texas.

4.3 Roadside Variety

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Thinning dense edges to enhance visual interest along monotonous forested roadways as part of other activities such as hazard tree removal or wildfire mitigation

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Visitors expect a positive driving experience along park roads. Combining potential visual improvements with other resource needs is an effective management strategy to achieve this. Adding openings and irregular edges in dense roadside forests can create a visually stimulating and positive experience. This best practice replaces a dull, uninteresting drive with a visually stimulating and positive experience. By breaking up the uniform edge, the experience becomes more visually interesting. Open edges also create visual movement from one side of the road to the other. There may be safety improvements by creating openings. There is increased visibility along the road. It enhances driver interest along extended forested areas of a roadway, combatting driving fatigue.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

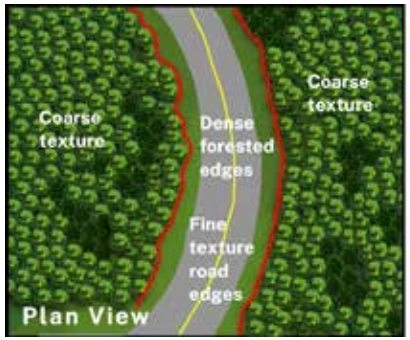
1. When planning resource management activities such as hazardous tree removal, wildland fire management, or habitat restoration, look for opportunities to enhance the roadside visual landscape by creating openings along the roadway.
2. Open edges to create visual movement that leads the eye from one side of the road to the other.
3. Vary the size of locations for openings to the extent possible to maintain visual interest and surprise.
4. Create a pulse to the openings to add life and energy to the groupings by timing their location to a relaxing rhythm, like a heartbeat. Use curves as places for visual change. They naturally grab the eye's attention.
5. Research wildlife activity and check with park biologists to know where openings will aid habitat and movement.
6. Create groupings by leaving odd numbers of trees when possible. Groups of odd-numbered plantings create harmony similar to nature.
7. Include restoration of disturbed areas as part of project planning.
8. Consult Region or DSC landscape architects for assistance and design ideas.

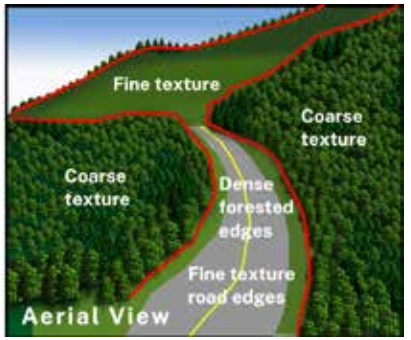
SCENARIO

A park needs to remove hazard trees along a park roadway.

Reading the Landscape

The view along the roadway is within an enclosed curving corridor. There are narrow grassland bands and dense forests along the road. The forested areas are on hillside slopes with dark green color and coarse texture. This creates a nearly symmetrical, balanced view with a monotone boundary. There are minimal views beyond the edges.





✔ Good Example

Hazard trees have been removed. The road edge is also selectively thinned along a continuous forested road edge. The visual interest enhances the driving experience. Drivers can see further down the road through the openings and can also see deeper into the forest.





✘ Not So Good Example

The park decides to only remove the identified hazardous trees. The road edge remains dense and visually dull. Drivers may experience visual fatigue from the consistent, uninteresting road edge.





5. SURFACE SMARTS

Related Best Practices:
Two Shades Darker, Rough Textures, Reflections, Building Harmony, Bird's Eye View

Helpful Tip



You can obtain a color selection tool by requesting a paint card set of BLM Standard Environmental Colors at: BLM_OC_PMDS@blm.gov.

5.1 Color Me Local

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Choosing the best colors to help a structure blend in with its surrounding landscape.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Structures with colors not found in the existing landscape have increased contrast. They will be more visible. The value of this best practice is that it is often a simple, cost-effective way to improve how features fit into the landscape. When implemented park-wide, choosing local colors creates a simple, unified improvement to visual quality.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Choose colors present in the surrounding landscape during the season of greatest visitation. Avoid using both warm tones and cool tones together.
2. Select colors by using paint store chip samples, onsite. Or use the BLM's Standard Environmental Color palette as a starting point for selecting colors. It was developed primarily for Western landscapes. However, it can provide a basis for color selection in many different locations.
3. Determine the existing colors in the landscape with apps like Adobe Capture and Photoshop. Use these applications to help develop a full-color palette parkwide by ecological zone as Rocky Mountain National Park has.
4. Review the Two Shades Darker best practice before making final selections.
5. When selecting new paint colors, identify the formula or specification number. Most paint suppliers can match colors. One system for paint matching is the Pantone Matching System, where each color has a unique number. Having a record allows for efficient coordination and makes matching in the future simpler.
6. Choose matte or flat finishes. This will reduce reflections that make features more noticeable.
7. For Historic Districts, use the predetermined colors identified in the nomination package. If not identified, seek input from cultural resource specialists to develop a color palette.

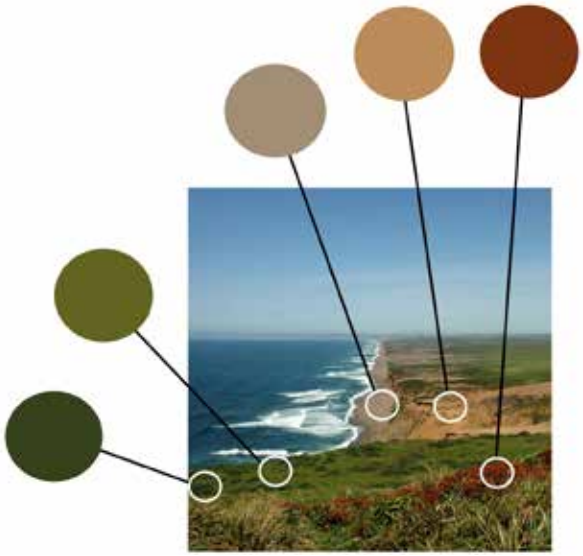


Figure 1. Coastal-
Point Reyes
National Seashore

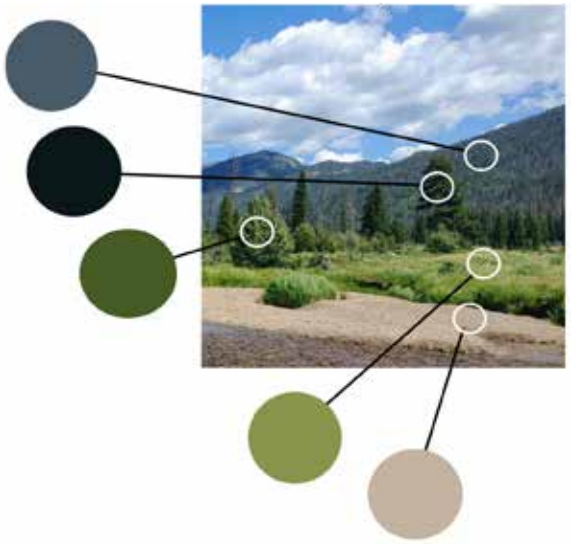


Figure 2. Mountain-
Rocky Mountain National Park

EXAMPLES

Views with a large amount of water and sky (Figure 1) can have cool (blue) base tones that dominate a view. Most other landscapes have warm, or yellow base tones. The sky and water tones can change rapidly and may not be the most suitable colors to choose. Land tones tend to remain stable. In Figure 2, the cool colors of the mountain dominate the view, but there are warmer colors in the foreground. New development often occurs in the foreground and middle ground where warmer colors exist. Choosing these will help development recede in the landscape.

Colors in nature tend towards warm colors, those that have yellow base tones. We can see this in both Figures 3 and 4 where the ground cover has green/brown and light/terra cotta red colors. These colors are predominant in these landscapes, adding warmth to a scene.

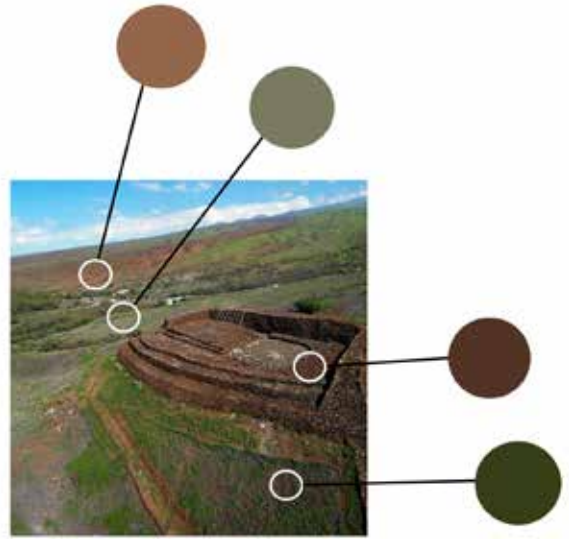


Figure 3. Historic Site-
Pu'ukohola Heiau National
Historic Site

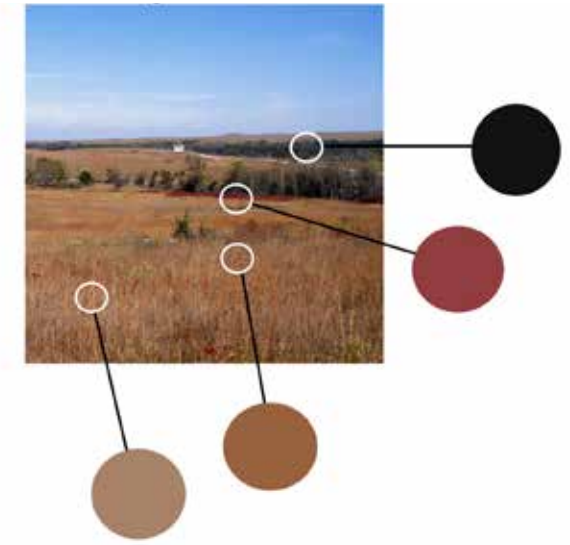


Figure 4. Prairie-
Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

Related Best Practices:
Color Me Local, Reflections, Rough Textures

Exploring Concepts



Two shades darker? In the world of color, value refers to how light or dark a color is. Light colors have high value so select colors that have a lower value than the reference color. Paint colors are often organized into short series of variations a bit like a spectrum. If the reference color is determined to be similar to A, then B would be two shades darker.

5.2 Two Shades Darker

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Selecting darker colors than those in the surrounding landscape to help a feature blend into the landscape.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Facilities that are less noticeable help keep the focus on the reasons why a visitor has come to the park. Darker tones of colors act like shadows and help objects blend in better than a simple match to a color nearby. Elements that disappear into the landscape can improve overall visual quality. They will not attract attention. The value of this best practice is that it makes features in the landscape less noticeable. Colors of human-made objects in the landscape can be tricky to blend in. If done well, the structure goes from 'popping' to 'didn't even see it.'

WHAT YOU CAN DO

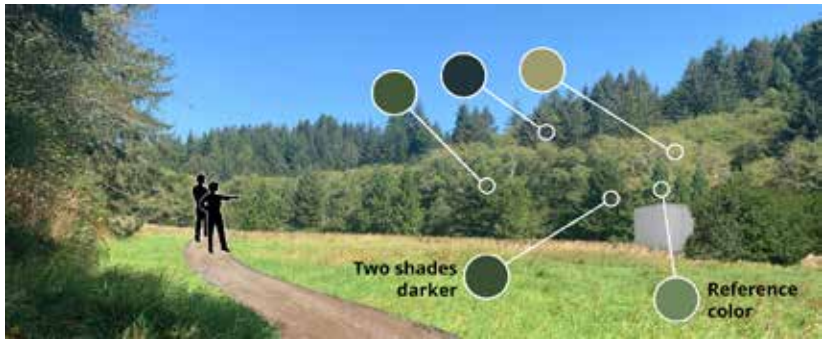
1. Choose a reference color that is directly behind and surrounding the object to be painted. Then choose a color that is two shades darker.
2. Choose a reference color that is present during the season of greatest visitation. If that season is not a green season, look closely at grays and browns. They are neutral colors that recede and easily blend in.
3. Use software or phone apps to determine the existing colors in the landscape. Examples include Photoshop and Adobe Capture.
4. Use the BLM's Standard Environmental Colors as a starting point for selecting colors. They are dark colors that work in many situations. They were developed primarily for Western landscapes. However, they can provide a basis for color selection in many different locations. Get a set of samples by contacting the BLM at BLM_OC_PMDS@blm.gov.
5. Choose darker options than the background landscape when using prefab structures. If darker colors are not an option, paint the structure after it is installed.
6. Consider relocating a small structure or facilities out of the view if the function allows.
7. Refer to Best Practices Rough Textures and Reflections. Two Shades Darker works best when considering these other Best Practices also.

SCENARIO

A park has added a small shed for staging maintenance equipment along a trail leading to a backcountry area. The structure came painted light gray or was painted with paint that was already on hand.

Reading the landscape

The visible area along the trail is enclosed. Before the shed was added, the trail acted as a focal line drawing the viewer's eye. Colors are primarily light, medium, and dark greens in trees. The field has yellow grass. The coarse textures of the foreground trees and shrubs, along with the evergreen trees beyond, create strong shadows. They contrast with the fine texture of the grass area. The light gray shed contrasts with the landscape colors and is a distracting element.



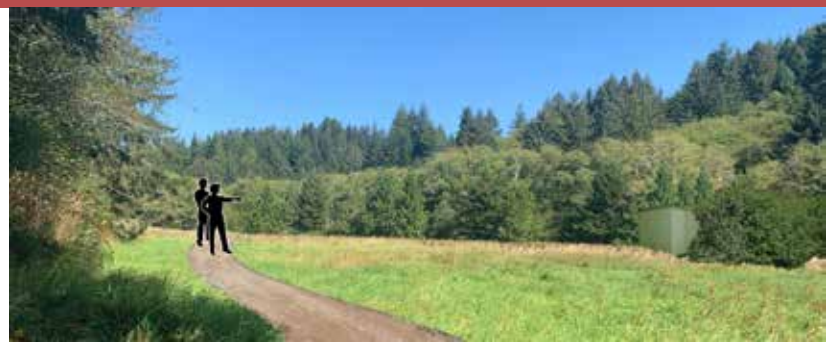
✔ Good Example

The building is darker than the reference color. It is also darker than the ground, the plants on either side and the background. The color mimics shadow patterns near the building. It is less noticeable to trail users.



✘ Not So Good Example

The building is similar to the reference color. This color is from the landscape palette and seems like the appropriate choice. Though better than the gray color, this option does not let the building blend in as well as it could. It is more noticeable than a darker selection.



Related Best Practices:
Reflections, Color Me Local, Two Shades Darker, Bird's Eye View

5.3 Rough Textures

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Choosing rough surfaced materials to reduce contrast and visibility of projects.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Development that uses smooth surfaces may contrast with natural textures and reflect light. Textured surfaces absorb more light than smooth surfaces. They reduce reflectivity that leads to glare. The value of this best practice is that it helps the 'blending in' process begin in early in the design stages with the selection of materials. Surface textures similar to local materials also give a well-grounded look to new development. They appear to be an integrated part of the landscape. Choosing the appropriate materials throughout the park creates a more positive visual experience.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Choose materials inspired by the textures in the surrounding landscape. They might be pebbly, dimply, grainy, gritty, gravelly, stoney, or rubbly. These textures will reduce glare and improve blending in.
2. Choose flat or matte finishes for paints and stains. Even on surfaces with heavy texture, this will further reduce possible reflections leading to glare.
3. Refer to the Color Me Local and Two Shades Darker best practices for details on color selection. It is critically linked to texture.
4. Use rusted-appearing steel instead of galvanized. When used for guardrails or other exposed metal it reduces glare and will need minimal maintenance.
5. Use exposed aggregate on concrete to reduce smooth surfaces.
6. Explore indigenous solutions or materials for adaptations that may prove useful.
7. Consider the limitations of some naturally occurring materials. For example, wildfire concerns may limit the use of some flammable materials, primarily wood.
8. Get expert help from Specialists at the Historic Preservation Training Center (HPTC). Historic designations will likely dictate material choices. They know about the pros and cons of building materials for any situation.

EXAMPLES

Figures 1 and 2 show the importance of texture to blend into a setting. Stone walls have uneven surfaces that catch light and cast shadows. Roofs are wood, rough shingled, and dark in color. Both buildings break up the light and lessen glare while firmly attaching them in place.

Figures 3 and 4 show the use of texture to help small scale development recede into the natural backdrop. The textures of the roof and walls of the last chance restroom mimic the rock backdrop. The building is less visible from an elevated viewpoint. The wood surfaces on the vault toilet are smoother than rock or stone. They blend into the forested landscape. Vertical texture in the siding mirrors the vertical lines in the trees aiding the building to blend in.



Figure 1. Park headquarters in Crater Lake National Park



Figure 2. Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park



Figure 3. Last chance restroom at Timpanogos Cave National Monument

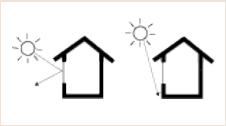


Figure 4. Vault toilet restroom at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

5. SURFACE SMARTS

Related Best Practices:
Rough Textures, Color Me Local, Two Shades Darker, Bird's Eye View

Exploring Concepts



The sun's angle moves hourly throughout the day affecting the quality and character of views. It also changes seasonally throughout the year. Our viewing ability is influenced by lighting conditions created by the sun's movement. How sunlight illuminates a scene directly determines viewing pleasure and scenic quality.

5.4 Reflections

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Minimizing the use of reflective materials and positioning windows away from visitor viewing areas to decrease potential sun glare.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

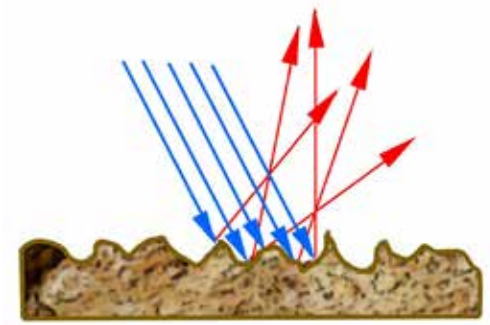
Glare stems from direct sunlight or reflections off surfaces into the eye. It causes discomfort and hampers the viewing experience. When glare is minimized, the visual experience is more positive. Furthermore, glare can disturb birds and other wildlife active during daylight hours. By reducing glare, disruptions to visitors' daytime visibility are minimized, and wildlife resources are better protected.

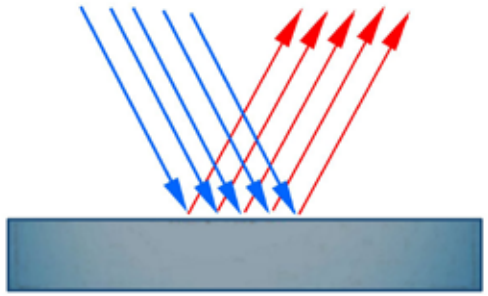
WHAT YOU CAN DO

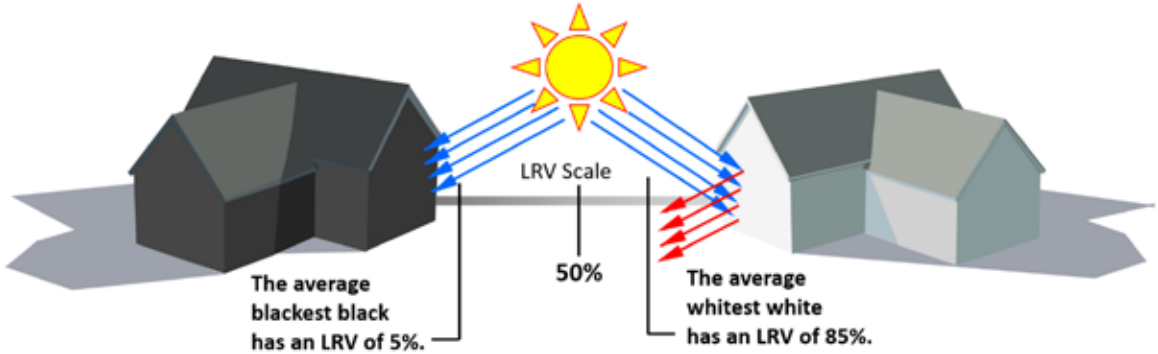
1. Reduce the likelihood of reflections by placing or orienting facilities away from direct sunlight exposure.
2. Choose dark colors, matte finishes, and rough textured materials for new projects in areas with direct sunlight exposure.
3. Avoid mirrored or reflective glass. Install window treatments such as shades or films that can adjust or filter incoming sunlight to reduce glare.
4. Reduce the number of windows or reflective surfaces where they will be seen from important viewpoints.
5. Use ground forms and vegetation to screen development and help block excessive sunlight.
6. Avoid light color roofing materials if visible from elevated viewpoints.
7. Use overhangs, recessed windows, or vegetative screening on south-facing walls to reduce the risk of glare.
8. Be aware of placing viewpoints where the view is over water, especially if the view faces east or west. Water acts like a mirror. Reflections in the early morning or late in the day could erase the benefit of the best viewing/photographing time created by soft dawn and dusk light.
9. Use dark, matte, or flat finishes on the backs of metal traffic signs to reduce glare.
10. Install ground-mounted solar panels so that buildings or structures help reduce the visibility of glare and reflection.

EXAMPLES

Rough textures disperse the light that hits them, reducing the chance of strong glare. Smooth surfaces do the opposite. They are effective at reflecting light. Smooth textures combined with light colors can be highly visible.







Paint colors have a light reflective value (LRV) that indicates the percentage of the light reflected by the color on a smooth surface. Lighter colors reflect more light and have a higher LRV. Try to select colors with a LRV of 40 or less. Using the Color Me Local and Two Shades Darker best practices will often result in selecting colors below this value.

Exposed windows, especially on south-facing surfaces, may have glare throughout the day. Using landscape screening will reduce the direct visibility of the glass and reduce the possibility of glare. Overhangs will reduce the sunlight that directly hits windows while allowing views out the windows. Providing shade for the windows can also save energy and keep the building more comfortable for staff and visitors.



6. SIGNS AND LIGHTING

Related Best Practices:
Curb Appeal, Color Me Local, Sign Content and Messaging

6.1 Sign Siting and Design

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Being thoughtful in the placement and design of signs to avoid sign clutter and create a consistent design style.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Too many signs can present a poor park image and are expensive to maintain. The value of this best practice is that it reduces a cluttered look at parks through the thoughtful placement and design of park signs. Over time signs are added that have different fonts, materials, and colors. Too many styles or types of signs confuse and create visual noise. Signs for traffic control, alerts, closures, and special conditions are important. However, they can add to the mix of styles. Combining many sign styles with unmatched benches, trash receptacles, etc., compounds the visual problem. Overall, this mishmash can convey disorder and a lack of attention.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Minimize, consolidate, and simplify. Ask — Is the information *absolutely necessary* to convey? Is there any other way to convey necessary information that does not need a physical sign? A hard sign should be a last resort. Consider using social media, except in situations where reading while driving makes it impractical.
2. Place signs below sightlines and peripheral to views. Keep signs out of a scenic view, especially the line of sight to important natural and cultural features. For example, making sure safety messages at waterfalls are not within the primary views that visitors experience.
3. Avoid using traffic signs to try to correct a problem. For example, “Slow Down” or low speed limit signs are sometimes placed after an accident. There could be a traffic design issue in that area. If a road is a straight, wide, paved surface it encourages speeding. Ask yourself, is there a traffic problem? If you solve the underlying traffic issue, the sign is not necessary.
4. Work to streamline all park signs to a simple style that is easy to comprehend, manufacture, and maintain. It may take years of PMIS projects but determine one style based on the park’s most aesthetic architectural/character theme and stick to it. Consider the distinct requirements of maintenance, law enforcement, and interpretation in planning a style. Traffic signs are metal, produced by UNICOR by requirement and NPS Agreement. All others need to be visually compelling and compatible.

5. Design the entry sign — the most important in the park — to artistically reflect the park's character. There are books on this subject. Most parks have entrance signs. When they need to be replaced it is an opportunity to enhance the park's image. Find the artists on your staff, at local schools, or in your community, and use their creativity. Where a park has more than one entrance, coordinate so that signs reflect a hierarchy of importance and match in style and lettering type.
6. Place signs so that nothing in the background competes for attention. Often to the side, is best. Consider the approach and the viewer's position while reading. Note: If the words refer to the scene, the scene should be directly behind the sign for best effect.

EXAMPLES



Figure 1
Unplanned placement of signs along with multiple designs and colors creates an unorganized visual setting. When signs need to face different directions, it is good to include color on the backs of signs so that they recede (see Two Shades Darker). Align signs in an organized manner, i.e., in a row, or centralized on one post, to improve the visual experience.



Figure 2
A well-designed and placed kiosk at this trailhead loses some of its visual appeal with the addition of the small, overly complex, information sign. It is also too low to comfortably read. Place the additional sign on the kiosk at the correct height or align it with the kiosk on a taller post to improve the look at the trailhead.



Figure 3
Multiple signs in a good location and on a single kiosk. They are out of the traffic area with plenty of room for visitors.



Figure 4
Nice all-in-one design. Good use of graphic symbols but too small and too low for best readability. A side-by-side four-square design would mimic the horizontal feel of the site, be more readable, and not overtop the fencing.



Figure 5
Too many individual signs and types. Division communication is important. When temporary signs are necessary, they can be better organized into a single grouping, in a line, or on one post.



Figure 6
An example of good location, right height, and simple messaging at the start of an accessible trail.



Figure 7
Too much text and too small to read without getting off the boardwalk. This results in resource damage. Would be better to relocate the kiosk near the boardwalk edge or add a hard surface to the kiosk area and connect it to the boardwalk.



Figure 8
Good location. Signs are out of the walkway from the parking area to the main trail access and to the right, the preferred side for most readers.



Figure 9
Too many signs. Each competes for attention creating visual noise. Interpretive and regulation signs require reading time. The ideal location would be to the right of the walkway at the approach. A recommended solution is to combine the destination and symbol signs onto a single sign and place it on the left.

6. SIGNS AND LIGHTING

Related Best Practices:
Curb Appeal, Sign Siting and Design, Overlook Siting

Helpful Tip



Signs do not replace rangers! Meeting face-to-face with a ranger is one of the National Park Service's primary, iconic experiences. No number of signs — even if they are high quality — replaces the joy and efficiency of that encounter for the public. As field staff, we have to own this fact.

6.2 Sign Content and Messaging

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Developing concise, effective messages for park signs.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Visual noise and fatigue created by too many words and signs will diminish the visitor experience. The value of this best practice is that it keeps messages focused on the really important information visitors need to know. Operational issues, especially short staffing may cause a proliferation of signs in an effort to keep visitors informed. At the beginning of the planning process ask — do we really need a hard sign for this? When you do plan to add a sign consider how people will engage with it, walking up to it, or driving by it. Do they need to change their actions as a result? What is the least amount and essential only information they need to know?

WHAT YOU CAN DO

7. Think less is more. Keep it simple. Think of signs as poetry, the fewest words the better. We often overstate and say too much. Costs are often tied to size which is tied to the amount of text/images. More words can mean higher costs.
8. Avoid too many messages on one sign. Incorporate simple and relevant graphics or symbols to enhance understanding, especially if the information is complex or if the audience includes non-native speakers. (see recommendation 8).
9. Place the reading text of signs at the eye-level height of the audience. Consider the height of the intended reader (i.e., 3.5' adults sitting in a car, 5–6' adults standing. Err on the side of too low versus too high.
10. Make sure the content is large enough to easily read. Font should be proportional to absorption speed. There are font size relationships to travel speed so that messages can be absorbed effectively. Bigger is better for a quick message. Aging eyes benefit from larger fonts. Children should be able to read the message.
11. Order content to help drivers prepare for direction changes. Left turn info first because it takes the most driver time to get ready for. Right turn next, straight-ahead, last. Space signs adequately apart to provide time for the driver to read each one.
12. Keep in mind a maximum reading time of about five seconds for walking and fewer when driving by. Avoid unnecessary information and focus on the critical need-to-know message.

13. Remember that tone is critical. Humor is golden. Using positive language to ask visitors to do what you want them to do is the best approach. A negative tone is almost never a good idea. Sign studies and experience on what changes behaviors show that positive reinforcement wins the day, i.e., Please Stay on the Trail, rather than Do not walk off trail.
14. Use international graphic symbols. These carefully designed images convey messages immediately, without words. Harpers Ferry Design Center, Regional and Park sign coordinators can advise.
15. Strive for simple regulation explanations. State the desired positive behavior. Add a CFR citation only if you need a reason to back up the law enforcement citation process. If you need to advise on behaviors, do it in the Unigrid, as an insert, or special regulations. For example, 'Please leave Columbine flowers alone to grow. They are the state flower protected by state law, as well as a federally protected 19JJ resource. Thank you for your cooperation.' Citing a regulation by reproducing a page of code on a sign is a serious turnoff and could backfire.
16. Be Mannerly. Demonstrate and lead from civility. Choose messages that request compliance and appreciate visitors for doing so. Use please and thank you. There is lots of psychological proof that doing so helps reduce vandalism and lessen visitor frustration.
17. Whisper, don't scream. Resist using red, fluorescent colors, and metal, which adds glare. Safety messages work in brown and white. To draw attention to your message, do so with good placement and positive wording.
18. Consider alternatives. Is your desire for a sign the result of short staffing? Are you using sandwich boards or other temporary signs to inform and make announcements? Are they taking the place of having personnel inform visitors about events and programs? Find other ways. Use amplified group announcements, outside with a roving position, post on the park website, and insert handouts in a Unigrid at the desk. Anything that is recurring information is prime for social media and other formats.
19. Road signs should only include speed limit, direction, and mileage to destinations. Critical visitor safety warnings should be highly visible and located with other road signs, when possible. If the issue is temporary, make them removable so they can be taken down when the issue is resolved. Keep the experience of approaching the park clear of visual intrusions.
20. Sign design is an art form and a necessary responsibility to be in a centralized position in each field unit. Always consult with these staff if you have them. Contact specialists at your Region or Harpers Ferry Design Center if you don't.



Figures 1
Examples of simple signs with good use of symbols and words. They clearly and quickly inform visitors of facilities and activities.



Figure 2
A simple and easy to understand traffic sign.



Figure 3
All signs need maintenance. A good simple message is diminished because of the sign's condition.



Figure 4
A positive message is helpful in making visitors feel welcome and can lead to better outcomes in following park guidelines and rules.



Figure 5
An example of a sign that is too detailed. Even up close there is a lot to read — mostly about navigating the trail and logistics for getting picked up at the end. This could be good content for a QR code or an app.



Figure 6
A regulatory sign with more text than needed. May not effectively capture visitor's attention and provides more detail than most will read.



Figure 7
Existing regulatory sign to be redesigned. “Regulations” title can be off-putting to visitors as the first thing they see. While there is good use of symbols, almost all messages are negative and there is too much text explanation.



Figure 8
Revised regulatory sign developed in collaboration with the local community and Native American tribes. Many messages are reframed positively and presented first. Better use of graphics and less text highlight key information and make the sign more visitor friendly.

6. SIGNS AND LIGHTING

Related Best Practices:
Reflections, Building Harmony, Screening with Plants, Architectural Screening

Exploring Concepts



The Kelvin temperature scale is used to measure light's warmness or coolness. Lower color temperatures have a warm hue (warm white, yellow, and amber). The higher color temperatures of 5000–6000 Kelvin are very blue to white. When selecting LED fixtures, opt for warmer color temperatures that reduce glare and are less harmful to wildlife. Researchers have connected blue lights to negative health effects on people and greater problems for wildlife.

6.3 Night Lights

THIS BEST PRACTICE IS ABOUT...

Selecting lighting that meets safety needs, protects natural and cultural resources, and improves the night viewing experience.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Stargazing and interest in night sky programs have increased in many parks. Providing safe access to viewing locations is important for the enjoyment of these activities. However, light pollution can greatly impact the experience of views at night and disrupt natural and cultural resources. These effects are well-researched. A single 65–75-watt bulb can contribute to light pollution by substantially brightening the night sky, which can obscure the visibility of stars and other celestial objects. Doing basic things to avoid excess light while maintaining safety can enhance the night viewing experience. It will also support species that rely on dark skies for their well-being.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

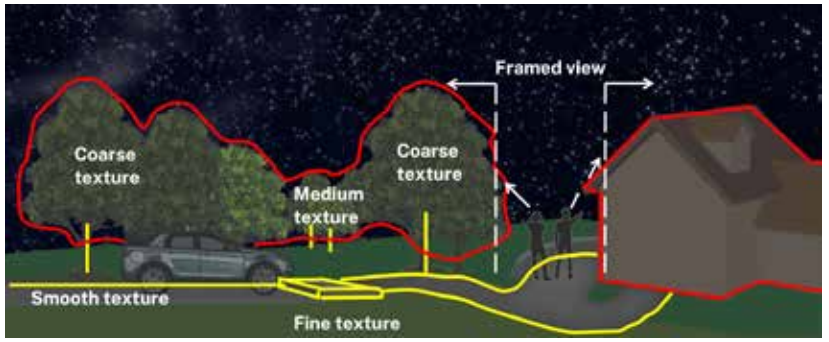
1. Consider if lighting is the only solution. It should be your last choice. Use it only where necessary and at the minimal level needed for safety and security. In planning and calculation, err on the side of underlighting.
2. Select downward-facing fixtures. They are sometimes called full cutoff fixtures. Avoid fixtures that direct light upward or sideways. Reorient up lighting on park signs and flags to point downward.
3. Use LEDs in warm colors like yellow or amber. Avoid blue or white light fixtures.
4. Use fixtures that include timers, motion detectors, hue adapters, and dimmers. They may increase energy efficiency and enhance visitor safety. They can also reduce impacts on natural and cultural resources.
5. Consider using tubes of lights along walking paths for temporary nighttime events such as star parties. Many will illuminate enough for safety and meet dark skies concerns.
6. Consider reflective tape or other reflective surfaces for roadways and parking lots. They can also be used on trails where people will have headlamps, flashlights, and cell phone lights.
7. Reduce glare and light pollution, as required, to retain park certification as a Dark Sky Place. Many parks are certified as one of five designations from Dark Sky International. In many units, night skies are a cultural resource protected by NPS policy. New Mexico state law protects the night skies for the whole state.
8. Contact the Natural Sounds Night Skies Division for technical support on complex projects.

SCENARIO

The park visitor contact station is closed at night, but the site is open for night sky viewing. The parking area, sidewalk, and trail are not lighted. The park is considering adding lighting for visitor safety reasons.

Reading the landscape

When approaching from the parking area the view is framed by trees on the left and a building on the right. There is a limited area that needs lighting. Landforms are flat. There are minimal obstructions between the parking area and the patio where viewers gather. The mature trees are dense and have coarse texture.



✔ Good Example

The pole is short and the selected fixture directs light downward. These shielded or full cut-off fixtures provide light only where it is needed. There is enough lighting for safety in the parking area, along the sidewalk, and the trail down to the patio area. The warm, yellow/amber-colored light is less disruptive to wildlife than the blue/white options. The density and coarse texture of trees can help absorb and diffuse light, which may reduce the amount of light that spills into surrounding dark areas. Additionally, mature trees with a full canopy can provide more effective shielding from light pollution.



✘ Not So Good Example

The fixture on the taller pole floods the area with more light than is needed. Light escaping upward beyond the trees scatters into the atmosphere. The night sky features are more difficult to see. Upward projected light contributes to destructive glare that diminishes human night vision. It also negatively affects nocturnal species such as bats. The fixture's blue-white light is much brighter and emits far more glare.



GLOSSARY

Background Distance Zone
The visible area of a landscape that is far enough away from a viewpoint that little detail is visible. Vegetation and non-vegetated areas are seen as blocks of color. Colors are muted by atmospheric haze.

Canopied (view type)
A type of view bounded on the top by elements that limit the view. The elements overhead create the feeling of a "ceiling" or "canopy" for the view.

Color
The property of reflecting light of a particular intensity and wavelength (or mixture of wavelengths) to which the eye is sensitive. Color enables the eye to differentiate otherwise indistinguishable objects. Color is typically rated or otherwise considered in visual resource inventories.

Contrast
Opposition or unlikeness of different forms, lines, colors, or textures in a landscape.

Cultural resources
Archaeological sites, structures, or features; traditional use areas; and Native American sacred sites or special use areas that provide evidence of the prehistory and history of a community.

Distance Zones
A subdivision of the landscape as viewed from an observer position. The subdivisions (zones) include foreground/middle-ground, background, and seldom seen (BLM and USFS only).

Enclosed (view type)
Enclosed views are bounded by a contiguous group of objects.

Feature (view type)
Feature views include a dominant feature or group of features that draw the eye.

Focal (view type)
Focal views have real or implied lines that converge to "lead the eye" to focus visual attention on a particular area.

Focal points
Prominent landscape features that attract and hold viewer attention. In the NPS VRI views with a single strong focal point generally have higher scenic quality than views with multiple focal points that vie for the viewer's attention.

Foreground
The visible area of a landscape in which viewers may feel like they are "part of the landscape" or the scene. It is the area where details are clearly visible.

Form
The mass or shape of an object or objects that appears unified, such as a vegetative opening in a forest, a cliff formation, or a water tank.

Framed (view type)
Framed views are bounded on the sides by objects that limit the view.

Geographic Information System (GIS)
A computer application used to store, view, and analyze geographical information, especially maps.

Horizon line
The apparent line in the landscape formed by the meeting of the visible land or water surface and the sky.

Impact
The effect, influence, alteration, or imprint caused by an action. See effect.

Interdisciplinary team
A group of individuals with different training, representing the physical sciences, biological sciences, social sciences, and environmental design arts, assembled to solve a problem or perform a task.

Interpretive themes
The central concept within an exhibit, heritage site, park, trail, etc. meant to engage, excite, and explain related subject matter to a visitor. In the NPS VRI, Interpretive Themes is one of three components used to evaluate the Viewed Landscape Importance factor in the View Importance Rating.

Land cover
One of four landscape elements used to describe the view. Land cover is the physical material visible on the earth's surface, including vegetation, lakes, bare areas, etc., including human-made development.

Land use
A characterization of land in terms of its potential utility for various activities, or the activities carried out on a given piece of land.

Landform
Any recognizable physical form of the earth's surface having a characteristic shape. Landforms include major forms such as plains, plateaus, and mountains, and minor forms such as hills, valleys, slopes, and moraines. Taken together, landforms make up the surface configuration of the earth.

Landscape
The expanse of visible scenery; including landforms, water bodies, vegetation, and man-made elements such as roads and structures. Also, the traits, patterns, and structure of a specific geographic area, including its physical environment, its biological composition, and its anthropogenic or social patterns.

Landscape character
An overall visual and cultural impression of a landscape that embodies distinct landscape attributes that exist throughout an area. It is a product of both the natural and human influences on the landscape.

Landscape features
Visible objects and activities in the landscape that help to determine a landscape character type. The combination of landscape features helps to determine a landscape's scenic quality. Landscape features include landforms, land cover, land use, and structures.

Line
The path, real or imagined, that the eye follows when perceiving abrupt differences in form, color, or texture.

Middle ground
The visible area of a landscape in which viewers may feel more like they are looking "at the landscape" rather than being in it. In this area, viewers can discern patterns, forms and colors clearly.

Mitigation
The avoidance, minimization, rectification, reduction, or elimination of impacts over time or compensation for impacts.

Mitigation measure
An action that avoids, minimizes, rectifies, reduces, or eliminates an impact over time, or compensates for an impact.

Monitoring
Periodic observation of construction, operation, and decommissioning activities to ensure proper mitigation measures or other resource protection protocols are being followed. Long-term monitoring observes the progress or quality of mitigation measures over a period of time.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)
A federal law providing that property resources with significant national historic value be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. It does not require permits; rather, it mandates consultation with the proper agencies whenever it is determined that a proposed action might impact a historic property.

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)
The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. NEPA establishes legal requirements for the management of aesthetic resources.

Observer position
The vertical and horizontal placement of a viewer relative to the landscape being viewed.

Panoramic (view type)
A "wide open" view of a broad expanse of the landscape, where at least part of the view is unobstructed to the horizon.

Scenery
The general appearance of a place or a landscape or features of a landscape.

Scenic Integrity
The degree of "intactness" of a landscape that is related to the existing amount of visual disturbance present. Landscapes with higher scenic integrity are generally regarded as more sensitive to visual disturbances.

Scenic quality
A measure of the perceived attractiveness of landform, waterform, and vegetation in the landscape, as well as appreciation of visible human additions or alterations to the landscape.

Scenic value
The importance of a landscape that is based on human perception of the intrinsic beauty of landform, water form, and vegetation in the landscape, as well as any visible human additions or alterations to the landscape.

Simulation
A realistic visual portrayal that demonstrates the perceivable changes in landscape features caused by a proposed activity. This is done through the use of photography, artwork, computer graphics, and other such techniques.

Structures
Built objects, such as buildings, towers, oil wells, and highways that are visible in the viewed landscape

Texture
The visual manifestations of the interplay of light and shadow that are created by the variations in the surface of an object or landscape.

Texture contrasts
Visual contrasts between different objects or landscapes that result from different visual manifestations of texture.

Topography
The shape of the earth's surface; the relative position and elevations of natural and man-made features of an area.

Vegetation
Plant life or total plant cover in an area.

View
Something that is looked toward or kept in sight, especially a broad landscape or panorama. Act of looking toward this object or scene.

View Type
In the NPS Visual Resource Inventory, a description of the general spatial characteristics of the view. View types include: panoramic, enclosed, feature, framed, focal, and canopied.

Viewed Landscape
The geographic area that can be seen from a given viewpoint. In the NPS Visual Resource Inventory, a Viewed Landscape is one of the three factors evaluated in the View Importance process.

Viewer motion
Change in position of the viewer within the landscape. The visual experience changes as the viewer moves through the landscape.

Viewer Sensitivity
The degree to which viewers are sensitive to changes in the visual character of visual resources. In the NPS Visual Resource Inventory, Viewer Sensitivity is one of three components used to evaluate the Viewer Concern factor in the View Importance Rating.

Viewing geometry
The spatial relationship of the viewer to the viewed object (e.g., a renewable energy facility), including the viewer's position and aspect.

Viewpoint
A point from where a landscape is viewed. Also, a point from where a landscape view is analyzed and/or evaluated. In the NPS Visual Resource Inventory, the viewpoint is one of the three components of a view.

Viewshed
The total landscape seen or potentially seen from a point, or from all or a logical part of a travel route, use area, or water body.

Viewshed analysis
A spatial analysis that uses elevation data, such as a Digital Elevation Model or Surface Elevation Model, to determine which parts of the surrounding landscape are likely to be visible from a designated point or points.

Viewshed map
The outcome of a viewshed analysis that shows which areas of the surrounding landscape would theoretically be visible from the viewshed origin (the viewpoint).

Visibility
The ability to visually discern an object in the landscape; also, the distance an individual can see as determined by light, atmospheric, and weather conditions.

Vista
A vista is sometimes human-created or designed for a specific view, such as creating an opening in trees for the view of a valley. As such a vista may be subject to design and/or specific maintenance to retain the view. In the NPS visual resources inventory, vista may be a view that is inventoried.

Visual contrast
See: contrast.

Visual elements
Key visual and spatial properties of the major elements of the view. They are usually expressed as forms, lines, colors, and textures.

Visual experience
The degree of familiarity with the visual characteristics of a particular object in the landscape based on having seen it previously.

Visual impact
Any modification in landforms, water bodies, or vegetation, or any introduction of structures or other human-made visual elements. Impacts may negatively or positively affect the visual character or quality of a landscape and the visual experience of persons viewing the landscape through the introduction of visual contrasts in the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture.

Visual mitigation
Actions taken to avoid, eliminate, or reduce potential adverse impacts on scenic resources. See mitigation.

Visual Resource Inventory (VRI)
A systematic assessment of the visual resources that exist within one or more views that provides NPS managers with the means for determining baseline visual values for the views. The NPS VRI consists of a Scenic Quality Evaluation and a View Importance Evaluation, which are combined to give the final Scenic Inventory Value.

Visual resource management
The planning, design, and implementation of management objectives for maintaining scenic values and visual quality.

Visual resource
Any object (natural, and built, moving, stationary) or feature, such as a landform or water body that is visible on a landscape.

Visual sensitivity
Public concern for the maintenance of scenic quality in a particular landscape setting.

Visual simulation
A pictorial representation of a proposed project in its landscape setting, as it would be seen from a specified viewpoint, and used to visualize the project before it is built, typically in order to determine its potential visual contrasts and associated visual impacts.

Visual value
See: scenic quality or scenic value.

This page is intentionally blank

APPENDIX A – READING THE LANDSCAPE WORKSHEET AND GUIDE

Guide - Reading the Landscape

The first step in selecting best practices is to understand the existing landscape. The worksheet is a tool you can use to record the results of the reading of the landscape process described in Section 2.4. You can use any other format that is helpful to record the information that will inform the selection of the visual best practices. They will help your project fit in with the landscape character of the park and its specific site. Reading the landscape can be done from one of the selected viewpoints or from a location where the project site is fully visible. The following are general guidelines for completing the worksheet.

VIEW TYPE

Circle the view type(s) that most closely fit how the view looks from the evaluation viewpoint. It may not be the same for all viewpoints but is not usually necessary to "read the landscape" from multiple locations.

DISTANCE ZONES

Distance Zones: Provide a brief description of the extent of each distance zone. Example: foreground – "extends to the edge of the forested area at the base of the hill." Refer to the Project Planning and Best Practice Selection Reference Guide for more details.

LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Landscape Features: Check off the boxes for the distance zones where the features occur. The listed features are some examples. Add any local features at the bottom of each list.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

Visual elements: Each section has a list of typical vocabulary. Add the names of elements that have the characteristics of the descriptors such as rolling – "hills", and rounded – "trees." For colors add the most prominent colors and associated elements. As with landscape features, add descriptors and elements at the bottom of each category that better describe your landscape.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following pages provide additional Reading the Landscape worksheets, ideas and vocabulary for identifying the landscape features and visual elements. It is not necessary to identify every landscape feature and visual element in a view. Concentrate on what seems most visible and important.

Worksheet

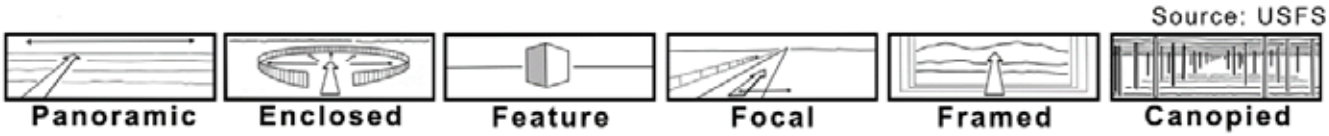
Name: Date:

Project title:

Site location:

Photo record	
Number(s)	Notes:

View type



Distance Zones

Foreground:

Middle ground:

Background:

Landscape Features

Landform	F	M	B	Landcover	F	M	B	Land Use	F	M	B	Structures	F	M	B
Mountains				Development				Natural Areas				High Rise - Residential			
Hills				Barren				Timber				Low Rise - Residential			
Buttes				Forest - Deciduous				Grazing/Rangeland				High Rise - Commercial			
Mesas				Forest - Evergreen				Agriculture				Low Rise - Commercial			
Valleys				Forest - Mixed				Mining				Farm Buildings			
Cliffs/Bluffs				Shrub/Scrub				Industrial				Misc. Indust. (Factories, etc.)			
Canyons				Grassland				Office/Retail				Power Plants			
Plains				Pasture/Hay				Urban Residential				Wind Turbines			
Ridge				Cultivated Crops				Suburban Resid.				Solar Facilities			
Beaches				Wetland/Bog				Rural Residential				Communication Towers			
Sand Dunes				Ocean				Transportation				Oil/Gas Wells			
Islands				Lake/Pond				Parks/Recreation				Local Roads			
Headlands				River/Stream				Urban Center				Highways			
Water								Small Town				Transmission/Substations			
								Energy Generation				Unidentifiable Structures			
								Transmission							

Visual Elements			
FORMS		**LINES**	
Descriptor	**Elements**	**Descriptor**	**Elements**
Rolling		Vertical	
Blocky		Horizontal	
Rugged		Curving	
Angular		Undulating	
Conical		Angular	
Pyramidal		Diagonal	
Rounded		Broken	
Circular		Irregular	
Flat			

COLORS		TEXTURES	
Color	**Elements**	**Descriptor**	**Elements**
		Smooth	
		Rough	
		Medium	
		Coarse	
		Fine	
		Patchy	
		Stippled	
		Random	
		Uniform	
		Ordered	

Notes:

This page is intentionally blank

Landscape features

Landform Features
peak/crest/mountain
valley/glen
gorge/canyon/ravine
cliff/precipice/scree
slope/rise/rolling
plateau/mesa
ridge/saddle/spur
bench/terrace/shelf
moraine/knoll/drumlin
basin/hollow/declivity
plain/flat
rock outcrop/crags
other

Coastal Features
cliffs
beaches
dunes
islands
rocks/promontories
dikes/sea walls
estuary/marshes
other

Water
lake/pond
reservoir/dam
wetland/floodplain
shore/drawdown
river/stream/canal
delta/river mouth
dike
falls/rapids
other

Pasture/Range
moorland/grassland
dwarf shrub/heather
sedge/rush/bog communities
bracken/fern
scrub/shrub
scattered trees and scrub
other

Woodland/Trees
conifer plantation/forest
mixed plantation/forest
deciduous forest/plantation
woodland edge
tree clumps/avenues
parkland trees/savanna
clearcut/harvested area
other

Farmland
arable/irrigated
horticulture/greenhouses
permanent pasture
meadow/pasture
orchard/vineyard
large/small fields
regular/irregular fields
hedges/hedgerows
fences
fences/stone walls
other

Recreation
picnic area
camping/trailers
fishing
golf course
marina/boats
parkland/playing fields
commercial development
other

Structures
suburban/urban settlement
rural settlement/hamlet
farmhouse/barn
church/cemetery
commons/courtyard/plaza
windmill
historic structure/castle/ruins
traditional buildings
modern buildings
excavations/quarries
industrial/commercial park
auto sales/repair/parking
landfill/dump/junkyard
bridges
utility line/corridor/ substation
other

Linear Features
footpaths/bikeways
minor roads/tracks
trunk road
highway/turnpike
railway tracks/yard
fences
power lines high/low voltage
cut/fill embankments
other

Adapted from: Land Use Consultants. 1991. Landscape Assessment Principles and Practice. Countryside Commission for Scotland.

Visual Element Vocabulary

Form
asymmetrical
angular
bold
circular
concave
contrasting
convex
compatible
complex
conical
cubic
diverse
domed
few
flat
high
inferior
irregular
large
long
low narrow
numerous
oval
parallel
prominent
pyramidal
rectangular
regular
rhomboid
rolling
rounded
rugged
short
simple
small
smooth
solid
spherical
superior
square
symmetrical
tall
transparent
triangular
wide

Line
angular
arching
bold
broken
circular
concave
contrasting
converging
convex
continuous
curvilinear
curving
flowing
hard
horizontal
intersecting
irregular
oval
jagged
parallel
perpendicular
regular
semicircular
simple
soft
straight
sweeping
transected
undulating
vertical
warped weak

Color
bold
blended
bright
brilliant
camouflaged
clear
contrasting
cool
discordant
dull
faded
glaring
gradient
harmonious
hues *(red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet, black, white, grey)*
luminous
monotone
muted
non-descript
opaque
pleasing
pastel
pure
radiant
saturated
solid
subdued
subtle
transparent
vibrant
vivid
washed out
warm

Texture
abrupt
billowy
clumped
coarse
continuous
contrasting
cracked
dense
directional
dotted
fine
fissured
glossy
gradational
grainy
linear
ordered
patchy
patterned
matte
medium
jagged
non-continuous
non-directional
subtle
uniform
zigzagged
porous
random
rough
rows
rugged
scattered
smooth
soft
sparse
stippled
striped

Source: BLM

APPENDIX B – KNOW YOUR OWN: IDENTIFYING YOUR PARK'S VISUAL THEMES

Know Your Own

A park must be aware of its own visual themes before commenting on situations outside its boundaries. Knowing your own means understanding the key physical and visual aspects of your park's landscape. From that, you can develop themes that describe the values of those aspects. The themes form the basis for developing a unified visual character between existing and future development.

Getting to know your park's visual character is a two-step process. You can use this process for the overall park landscape or focus on specific areas. Step 1 — answering the park analysis questions helps cultivate an understanding of the existing attributes. These questions are useful for developing in-park projects. Step 2 — developing visual themes adds physical details to the park analysis. Themes bring information together with thoughts on the value and meaning of experiencing the landscape. The themes are helpful in communicating landscape values to stakeholders that may be beyond the park's boundaries.

PARK ANALYSIS

First Impression:
What is the first thing visitors see on arrival to the park? Where is the arrival place? Do they 'arrive' before they get to an entrance station?

What Is Remembered/Memorable:
What is the overall visual impression of the park setting? Is it mostly a natural place, what kind? Is it a place with buildings of one style, what style? Or a place with buildings of many styles? Are any Cultural Landscape Reports completed in the park? If the park has or is a National Historic Landmark, this language is in the nomination package.

What is prominent:
What visual features stand out in the park (both that fit in and do not fit in with the landscape character)? Some examples include radio communication towers, cell towers, alternative energy areas(solar/wind), a historic area, and architecture.

Eyesores:
Are there areas in the park that others, outside the park, consider an eyesore or have complained about? Some examples include park housing, radio hills, maintenance equipment parking lots, and materials storage areas.

Views:
Do you have formal views that visitors enjoy? Are they inventoried and documented? The Visual Resource Inventory process does this effectively. Are there less known, informal areas where visitors congregate that have views?

Unity:
What is the visual appearance of trailheads? These are arrival points. Do the colors, materials, and textures of manmade facilities match, trailhead to trailhead? Repeat this question for campgrounds, picnic areas, most facility areas, and across all facility types.

PARK VISUAL THEMES

A visual theme is a central idea or concept. It is a visual impression or a first or lasting impression that expresses what you see, feel, and remember. The memories might be from a collection of places or views, within a similar area of the park. These ideas or concepts can be expressed as visual theme statements. Visual theme statements are written to describe a park area's visual character. They can be used to guide the design of a project and to inform the Affected Environment section of an EA or EIS. They also communicate important visual resource information. Statements help to unify visual elements; form, line, color, and texture, and to recognize significant resources that you want to protect.

The visual character of a landscape considers the two sets of information from Reading the Landscape (landscape features and visual elements) that create a distinct identity. Specific natural and built features, distinguishing materials, a signature form, and recognizable spaces, combine to create that identity. A visual landscape theme organizes these characteristics into a statement or two.

The following questions identify visual elements (form, line, color, texture), composition types, and your sense of place and feelings about the landscape. From these answers, visual theme statement(s) can be written.

- LANDSCAPE FEATURES: What are the landscape's identifiable parts: 'the bone structure', the landforms, land cover, structures, and land use patterns?
- VISUAL ELEMENTS: What are the landscape's distinct forms, lines, colors, and textures that give the area its sense of place and personality?
- COMPOSITION VIEW TYPE: Which of the six composition view types is this landscape: panoramic, enclosed, feature, focal, framed, or canopied?
- MEMORABLE DESCRIPTORS: What words convey the way this landscape makes you feel? What aesthetic/scenic qualities of the landscape does it have?
- OBSERVATION: How has the landscape area been described or portrayed in art, photography, literature, music, or other media? What views and opinions do the public and other stakeholders express about the area?

The blank worksheet provides a way to record answers to the visual theme questions.

Examples of completed worksheets are on the following pages. The examples are of two different landscapes. The first is located in a late Gilded Age country estate along the Blue Ridge Parkway. It is on the National Register. The theme statements are written from notes recorded after a site visit that recorded answers to the five questions. The second is a conceptual example of a natural landscape.

Visual Theme Statement Worksheet

Landscape Area Name:	
Landscape Features (landform, landcover, land use, structures)	
Visual Elements (form, line, color, texture)	
Composition View Type (use chart)	
Memorable Descriptors (adjectives)	
Observations (value statements)	
Visual Theme Statement:	

WRITING THEME STATEMENTS — Strike a balance between facts about the landscape parts — its bone structure — and the memorable descriptions and observations about its visual character — its personality.

SCENARIO 1







SCENARIO 2







Landscape Area Name: Carriage Road Landscape*	
Landscape Features (landform, landcover, land use, structures)	A rolling to steep landform covered in dense forest in the background. A roadway and some retaining walls are the only man-made structures.
Visual Elements (form, line, color, texture)	Curvilinear roadway. Vertical lines of numerous tree trunks surrounding the roadway. Various colors of green and brown vegetation changing with the sunlight conditions.
Composition View Type (use chart)	Focal landscape experience defined by the curvilinear carriage road built into the landscape leading the eye forward along the roadway. Canopied landscape with expansive shaded understory with numerous canopy views.
Memorable Descriptors (adjectives)	Ever-changing light and cast shadows
Observations (value statements)	Mythical forest experience. A place of quiet solitude on some days.
Visual Theme Statement: The travel experience on this densely forest-enclosed roadway creates a focal line that follows rolling to steeply sloped hills with an expansive shaded understory. Numerous under-canopy views and some open, framed views reveal an ever-changing play of green colors, light, and shadow.	

*Integrating Visual Resource and Visitor Use Management Planning: A Case Study of the Moses H. Cone National Historic District, Blue Ridge Parkway prepared by Gary W. Johnson in 2018.

Landscape Area Name: Natural Resource National Park	
Landscape Features (landform, landcover, land use, structures)	Valley floor covered in grasslands and scattered woodland areas. Valley enclosed by rolling hills and mountains with forest and grassland cover.
Visual Elements (form, line, color, texture)	Rolling to flat valley bottom, shallow to steep slopes hills and mountains. Grasslands with Bright green to straw color and fine texture, dark green forests with patchy textures
Composition View Type (use chart)	Enclosed valley with expansive views along valley floor.
Memorable Descriptors (adjectives)	Nature appears intact. Dramatic seasonal changes and abundant wildlife.
Observations (value statements)	Strong sense of place.
Visual Theme Statement: Experiencing the valley along the park road or on foot provides an expansive view of nature. There is a strong feeling of enclosure with long valley views leading the visitor to continued exploration. Seasonal changes of vegetation and wildlife offer interest year round.	

APPENDIX C – PROJECT PLANNING AND BEST PRACTICE SELECTION

Worksheet Reference Guide

The following sections provide brief directions on completing the project planning and best practice selection worksheet. Any other format that you find helpful can be used to help in the identification of the best practices for your project.

SECTION 1

Basic project information. It can be based on your knowledge, or it can be lifted from PMIS statements and the PEPC system.

SECTIONS 2 AND 3

These sections identify the viewpoints where visitors will be able to see the project, the viewing position, and how far away it will be. Some viewpoints are considered Key Observation Points (KOPs). Views from these locations have a higher priority for using best practices to reduce visual impacts.

This section also provides a place to record photos. Having a photo record of the existing conditions at the project site, as seen from selected viewpoints will be helpful to others who may not have the opportunity to visit the site. They are an important part of the project file.

Observer Position – Why it Matters

What is the observer's position in relation to where they will see your project from? Each viewpoint is important because it can tell you how visible the project might be.



Looking Up



Looking Level



Looking Down

Up. Viewers will be looking up at a view when they are in valleys or low areas and the landforms rise above them on one or more sides. Projects are least visible when looking up at them.

Down. When a viewer is standing on ridges or mountainside slopes they are looking mostly down. Projects are very visible when looking down at them.

Level. When the viewer is standing in a location where the landscape and project site area are mostly at the same elevation.

Distance Zones – Why it Matters

Indicate how far away the project will be from observers at the viewpoint. How much and what you see depends on how far away you are from the project. Close in, textures and colors are very visible. At greater distances forms and bold colors are more prominent. Knowing the distance helps you to determine which best practices to consider and apply to minimize contrast that degrades scenic quality.



Foreground is closest to you and where you feel you are in the landscape. It is where details are most visible.

Middle Ground is where you start to feel you are looking at the landscape rather than in it. Masses of landforms and vegetation are important, and details are less visible.

Background goes as far as you can see. Landforms are the primary visible features. You cannot see details. Colors are usually muted.

SECTIONS 4 AND 5

These sections use the results of Reading the Landscape. Provide a brief description of how the project would affect the Landscape Features and Visual Elements of the project area. For example, note how landforms could be affected by the grading for a new parking lot. Note how the standard color of a new maintenance shed might blend in or contrast with the colors of existing vegetation and other built features at the site.



SECTION 6

List the best practices to use in making final plans for your project. The list documents what the project needs to be compatible with the visual character of the site and the park. The list also helps in the communication among the project team so everyone understands the plans for reducing visual impacts. Initial ideas can be identified by using one of the Best Practices Selection Matrixes. Matrix A is organized by the landscape features often related to a particular best practice. Matrix B is organized by a selection of best practices that might be associated with typical types of projects. Use the appropriate recommendations of the best practices to develop the final design and implementation of your project.

Other considerations for selecting practices include:

- phase of development you are in (e.g., Site Right best practices work best for projects where a location has yet to be selected)
- potential impacts on other resources.
- project type (e.g., viewpoint maintenance versus new construction)
- park objectives you are trying to achieve (e.g., Annual Report goals)
- cost-effectiveness and technical feasibility
- other guidance: regulations, park programs, initiatives e.g., safety

This page is intentionally blank

Worksheet

1. What do you want to do?	
Name:	Date:
Project Title:	PMIS #:
Site Location:	
Project Description:	

2. Where can the project be seen from?			3. Relationship to project					
Viewpoints	KOP?		Observer Position (Viewer looking…)			Distance Zone		
	Y	N	Down	Level	Up	FG	MG	BG

Photo Record

Viewpoint	Photo number(s)	Notes

4. What Landscape Features would be affected by the project?

Identify how the landscape features (landforms, land cover, land use, and structures) in the project area would be affected. Projects such as traffic signs, wayside exhibits, trail signs, kiosks, and trash receptacles typically do not affect landscape features.

☐ **NONE** – Project is not expected to result in changes to landscape features.



Stop here and go to Section 5. Also, review **Sections 2.2** (Park Experience Sequence) and **Section 2.4** (Know Your Own). Good general best practices to review are in the Surface Smarts and Sign and Lighting Principles.

Will the proposed project alter the site's landform by requiring grading, filling, or other changes to topography?		
Y	N	If yes, how?
Will the proposed project remove, replace, or alter site vegetation, ground cover, or water features?		
Y	N	If yes, how?
Will the proposed project change the type of land use, increase, or lessen the density of current use?		
Y	N	If yes, how?
Will the proposed project add a structure on an empty site, increase the number, or change the type of structures in the area?		
Y	N	If yes, how?

5. What Visual Elements would be affected by the project?		
Identify the visual elements (form, line, color, texture) that could be affected by all parts of your project.		
Will the proposed project alter the form (i.e., shape or mass) of the existing landforms, or structures or introduce new forms that do not fit in with the existing site's landforms or structures?		
Y	N	If yes, how?
Will the proposed project interrupt edges, bands, or horizon lines, or introduce lines that contrast with existing lines?		
Y	N	If yes, how?
Will the proposed project add contrasting colors to surfaces in terms of hue (e.g., green, red) or be a lighter shade?		
Y	N	If yes, how?
Will the proposed project create surface textures that contrast with existing ones? Examples of contrast include fine or smooth vs. coarse, sparse vs. dense, ordered vs. random, and stippled vs. patchy.		
Y	N	If yes, how?

6. Recommended Best Practices	
Using one of the best practice matrixes identify those that you think will be most beneficial in maintaining or enhancing the visual character of the park and the project area. For each best practice, identify appropriate recommendations from the "What You Can Do" list. For simple projects, it may be one or two. For larger, more complex projects, there could be several more. This is also not a final or limited list. Some on this list may not be used. You may think of others during project planning and certainly should use them.	
Best Practice	Recommendation(s)

Best Practice Selection Matrix - A

The matrix is organized by the four landscape features and the four visual elements along the top and the 35 Best Practices down the side. The gray cells represent the features and elements that are closely related to the best practice. Using the results of the Project Planning worksheet, look for the best practices that are most closely related to the features and elements you determined would be most affected by your project. Review those and see if applying them could improve the visual aspects of your project. Also, take note of the 'Related Best Practices' for each one as another way to find what would work best.

	BEST PRACTICES	LANDSCAPE FEATURES				VISUAL ELEMENTS			
		Landform	Land cover	Land Use	Structures	Form	Line	Color	Texture
Site Right	Choose Elsewhere	■	■						
	Fade into the Background	■	■						
	Hide It	■	■						
	Keep the Focus	■	■			■	■		
	Park it There	■	■	■		■	■		
	Fit for Purpose								
	Unbroken Horizon	■	■				■	■	
	Respect History			■	■	■			
	Have an Anchor	■	■					■	
	Keep the Rhythm	■	■			■	■		
View Smarts	Keep Views Open		■			■	■		
	Photo Op		■			■	■		
	Keep Eyes on the Road		■				■		
	Curb Appeal					■	■	■	
	View Story		■		■	■	■		
	Overlook Siting	■	■			■	■		
	The Right Spot	■	■			■	■		
	Elbow Room		■			■	■		
	Canopy View Care		■			■	■		

	BEST PRACTICES	LANDSCAPE FEATURES				VISUAL ELEMENTS			
		Landform	Land cover	Land Use	Structures	Form	Line	Color	Texture
Design Wise	Forms and Lines	■	■			■	■	■	■
	Stay in Scale - People	■	■			■	■		
	Stay in Scale - Landscape	■	■			■	■	■	■
	Birds Eye View	■	■			■	■		
	Building Harmony			■	■	■	■	■	
	Architectural Screening		■		■	■	■	■	■
Working with Plants	Follow the Pattern		■			■	■	■	■
	Screening		■			■	■		
	Roadside Variety		■			■	■		
Surface Smarts	Color Me Local	■	■					■	
	Two Shades Darker	■	■			■	■	■	
	Rough Textures	■	■		■	■	■	■	■
	Reflections					■	■	■	■
Signs and Lighting	Signs – Siting and Design				■	■	■	■	■
	Signs – Content/ Message					■	■	■	
	Night Lights					■	■	■	

Best Practice Selection Matrix - B

This matrix is organized by general project type. The shaded cells represent some of the most likely best practices that would be helpful for maintaining visual quality as you develop your project. It is not an exhaustive list of projects so find what seems to be most similar. It also does NOT represent the only best practices to use. It is just a starting point to help organize thoughts about what best practices could work for your project. Each best practice has a list of related best practices which provides another way to find what would work best.

Best Practice \ Project type	Kiosk	Traffic signs	Wayside exhibits	Trash receptacles	Site Furnishings	Roads and parking	Trails and walks	Trailhead parking	Borrow pits	Vista Clearing	Revegetation	Landscaping	Clearing/Grubbing	Park housing	Park operations	Campgrounds	Picnic areas	Other day-use areas	Visitor Use area	Buildings	Vault toilet	Shade structure	Contact station	Water tank	Maintenance yard	Utilities	Electric line	Comm. Tower			
Site Right																															
Choose Elsewhere									■											■	■				■			■			
Fade into the Background									■					■	■					■				■		■					
Hide it									■											■				■	■	■	■				
Keep the Focus																															
Park it There						■	■																								
Fit for Purpose																			■												
Unbroken Horizon																				■							■	■			
Respect history	■																			■	■										
Have an Anchor	■																					■									
Keep the Rhythm	■											■																			
View Smarts																															
Keep Views Open							■			■		■																			
Photo Op										■																					
Keep eyes on the Road										■																					
Curb Appeal	■	■	■	■	■											■	■	■	■				■								
View Story		■	■									■																			
Overlook Siting					■					■																					
The Right Spot			■	■			■																								
Elbow Room			■														■	■				■									
Canopy View Care			■				■			■																					

Best Practice \ Project type	Kiosk	Traffic signs	Wayside exhibits	Trash receptacles	Site Furnishings	Roads and parking	Trails and walks	Trailhead parking	Borrow pits	Vista Clearing	Revegetation	Landscaping	Clearing/Grubbing	Park housing	Park operations	Campgrounds	Picnic areas	Other day-use areas	Visitor Use area	Buildings	Vault toilet	Shade structure	Contact station	Water tank	Maintenance yard	Utilities	Electric line	Comm. Tower			
Design Wise																															
Forms and Lines							■	■	■																						
Satay in Scale — People	■		■																			■									
Stay in Scale — Landscape																				■						■	■				
Birds Eye View														■						■						■					
Building Harmony														■	■					■			■								
Architectural Screening						■								■	■										■	■					
Working with Plants																															
Follow the Pattern						■	■				■																				
Screening with plants											■	■		■	■		■			■	■				■						
Roadside Variety										■	■																				
Surface Smarts																															
Color Me Local	■	■	■	■	■	■								■						■	■	■	■		■			■			
Two Shades Darker														■						■	■			■	■						
Rough Textures																				■	■										
Reflections																			■	■					■						
Signs and Lighting																															
Sign Siting & Design	■	■	■					■																							
Sign Content & Messaging	■	■	■					■																							
Night Lights						■		■							■				■	■					■	■					

APPENDIX D – RESOURCES

The following are additional resources that may be helpful in searching for additional best practices and design ideas. It is not an exhaustive list. Partners and stakeholders can be a good source of ideas for a specific area.

National Park Service

VISUAL RESOURCE INVENTORY TRAINING MANUAL

The manual is a comprehensive instruction manual for the NPS visual resource inventory process. There are two main parts to the inventory – Scenic Quality and View Importance. The manual includes detailed discussions of both components and how they combine to represent the overall value of a view to the park. Also included is an overview of how to plan an inventory and an introduction to the mapping tools available for completed data. The manual is intended to accompany instructor-led training and is useful as a reference for conducting future VRI work.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2253582

VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY AND GUIDELINES

The manual describes the NPS approach to assessing visual impacts of projects. The methodology is designed to support the preparation of documents required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for project development. The method can be used for internal park projects and provided to consultants for projects beyond park boundaries as visible from park viewpoints.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2299249

EVALUATING PHOTOSIMULATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This guidance series includes a main photosimulation guidance document and accompanying case studies. Note that this guidance is for evaluating photosimulations rather than for creating them. It is intended primarily for use by any NPS staff with professional responsibility for assessing visual impacts based on photosimulations.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2287365

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK DESIGN GUIDELINES

The design guidelines are intended to aid park managers, architects, and others in their decision-making process with regard to the built environment. They are not hard and fast rules. They are intended to set sideboards within which designers can still find creative solutions. While developed for Rocky Mountain National Park many concepts can be applied in many other park environments. With forethought and sensitivity, the built environment can enhance the visitor experience and protect the important park views.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306112

A NEIGHBOR'S GUIDE TO THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

Brochure

A quick reference guide designed for property owners along the Blue Ridge Parkway. It has basic ideas of good site planning, architectural design, and use of native vegetation to retain the visual character that can be used in types of projects. Published by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306115

Comprehensive Design Book

This guide has more details on the ideas described in the Brochure. Meant to provide additional information for neighbors and developers as they move forward with the planning and design of projects. Also contains enough detail that it can serve as the basis for developing design guidelines and/or ordinances in collaboration with local agencies and partners. Published by the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306116

Bureau of Land Management

GUIDELINES FOR A QUALITY BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The purpose of these guidelines is to help ensure that facilities are attractive, functional, and sustainable. While developed for BLM facilities there are many great ideas for site design, material selection, and easy-to-use design guidelines for a variety of different facility types. The guidelines can be helpful in all phases of facility planning, design, construction, and maintenance and also can help facilitate conversation amongst internal staff as well as with contractors, volunteers, and the public at large.

Specific information: Site Planning, p. 68, Parking, p. 82, Picnic Areas, p. 110, Trailheads, p.122, Trails, p. 126, Barriers, p. 164

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306117

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR REDUCING VISUAL IMPACTS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY FACILITIES ON BLM-ADMINISTERED LANDS

This comprehensive guide was developed to specifically address the unique characteristics of large-scale renewable energy development. It includes BMPs for avoiding and reducing visual impacts of a facility, such as wind farms or solar energy collectors, and also includes BMPs for reducing visual impacts associated with ancillary components, such as electric transmission, roads, and structures. It covers activities that typically have a major effect on the visual impacts associated with facility development, including project siting and design, mitigation planning, structure design and materials selection, materials surface treatments, lighting practices, soils and vegetation management.

Specific information: Wind, p. 35, Solar, p. 61, Siting and Design, p.141, Structure Design and Material Selection, p. 170, Materials Surface Treatments, p. 183, Lighting, p. 208.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306118

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT'S STANDARD ENVIRONMENTAL COLOR TOOL

Proper color selection can dramatically mitigate adverse visual impacts of many types of projects. The BLM spent years testing and developing a set of standard colors that can blend with different landscapes primarily in the West. The Information Bulletin at the link below has information on ordering the free color samples as well as large-scale panels for testing in the landscape. It is important to use the color samples because they are actual paint chips, allowing for perfect paint matching. Electronic copies or printed copies will fail to provide a color-correct product for proper matching.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306119

THE USE OF COLOR TO MITIGATE VISUAL IMPACTS

This handbook provides guidance on effective strategies for manipulating color for visual mitigation of development. Keep in mind, however, that color is only one of several visual characteristics used to mitigate visual impacts. For effective visual mitigation, color should be combined with the manipulation of texture, line, form, and scale.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306120

SURFACE OPERATING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT

These guidelines, also known as the "Gold Book" were developed to provide oil and gas operators with a combination of guidance and standards for ensuring compliance with BLM policies and operating requirements. It contains information on siting, coloring of facilities, site restoration, and other development strategies to reduce the environmental impacts of oil and gas development.

Specific information: Roads and Access Ways, p. 19, Road Design and Construction, p. 22, Drainage and Drainage Structures, p. 31, Painting of Facilities, p. 41,

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306125

THE USE OF COLOR FOR CAMOUFLAGE CONCEALMENT OF FACILITIES

The use of color and camouflage applications on facilities is one such design strategy that may be used to minimize visual impacts from development. This technical note is a result of numerous field studies on the use of camouflage conducted over an 11-year period and is intended to provide guidance on the manipulation of color and camouflage application strategies for the effective visual concealment of built facilities.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306126

US Forest Service

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IMAGE GUIDE FOR THE NATIONAL FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

This is a comprehensive guide used by USFS for development throughout the country. It has good, basic ideas for small projects such as signs, toilets, and kiosks as well as architectural design concepts for larger facilities such as visitor centers and maintenance facilities. A very helpful aspect of the guide is that the USFS has identified eight provinces across the country ranging from the North Pacific Province that covers the Pacific Northwest and Southeast Alaska to the Northeast Province that includes the middle Atlantic states and extends into New England. In addition to universal concepts such as color selection and site design, it provides architectural and site guidelines that respond to the ecological and cultural influences of the provinces.

Specific information: Signs, p. 40, Structures, p.45, The Eight Provinces, p. 53.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306127

SUSTAINABLE RECREATION SITE DESIGN GUIDE

Published in April 2024, the "Sustainable Recreation Site Design Guide" (SRSDG) is a technical guidebook describing best practices and processes for implementing sustainable recreation design. Is it focused on national forest recreation sites, but the concepts can be applied to a wide variety of NPS projects. The guide identifies general principles of sustainable design that apply to recreation settings, site-specific considerations for implementing sustainable recreation design, and agency requirements and processes associated with making improvements to developed recreation sites.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306128

FOREST LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION AND INVENTORY—A BASIS FOR LAND PLANNING AND DESIGN

One of the earliest documents, dating to 1968, provides a basis for understanding scenic values. It describes six analytical factors and seven compositional types useful in the recognition and description of scenic resources. Illustrates their application in two inventories made to aid managers and landscape architects in planning and design.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306128

BUILDING IN THE SCENIC AREA — SCENIC RESOURCES IMPLEMENTATION HANDBOOK

This handbook is geared toward landowners and developers proposing projects in the New River Gorge. It provides good conceptual information on site selection and design, screening, color selection, and architectural design. Though specifically focused on the River Gorge landscape the ideas are presented in simple and easy to understand ways and can be applied to many types of landscapes. A joint publication of the US Forest Service and the Columbia River Gorge Commission.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306131

Federal Aviation Administration

ADVISORY CIRCULAR – 70/7460-1L

This Advisory Circular (AC) describes the standards for marking and lighting obstructions that have been deemed to be a hazard to air navigation. It provides guidance for lighting obstructions during daytime and nighttime.

https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2306132

Online Resources

NATURAL SOUNDS AND NIGHT SKIES DIVISION — INTERNAL SHAREPOINT SITE

https://doimspp.sharepoint.com/sites/nps-nrss-nsnsdiv

NATURAL SOUNDS AND NIGHT SKIES DIVISION — PUBLIC SITE

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nightskies/index.htm

DARK SKY INTERNATIONAL (WEBSITE)

DarkSky International restores the nighttime environment and protects communities from the harmful effects of light pollution through outreach, advocacy, and conservation.

https://darksky.org/



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Natural Resource Stewardship and Science — Air Resources Division
Lakewood, CO 80225