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VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
(VRM)

• *BACKGROUND NOTES 1* •

JULY 1991

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (VRM) SYSTEM

1.0 BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Introduction

Over recent years Australians have developed an increasing awareness and perception of the quality of their visual environment.

Subsequently, these expressed landscape values have placed greater demand upon the multiple resources of public land and those responsible for its management.

In response to inter-state and international research efforts, various environmental agencies in Australia now recognise the visual resource as an essential component in environmental land use planning and management.

In specific land management terms, CALM is committed to managing the visual resource on an equal basis with all other resources as it continues to seek means of sustaining ecosystems and their associated values. Refer CALM's Policy Statement No: 34, attached.

Thus, set in context with other Strategic Planning responsibilities, Visual Resource Management essentially has dual program purposes: to quantify and predict the dimensions of the visual resource, and to manage the long and short term scenic qualities of the visual environment. In doing so, VRM identifies scenic areas that warrant protection and/or enhancement through specific management attention. As a planning and design tool VRM provides a lot more than just reducing the visual impacts of land management activities. The quantifiable visual resource values can now be managed alongside the other, perhaps more tangible resource values of the environment- flora, fauna, soil and water, for example.

VRM is a specific management process of which components can be mapped and incorporated into resource planning and design projects ranging from the protection of adequate scenic ecosystems, to the siting of recreation facilities, roads and transmission lines, to the harvesting of timber and provision of prescribed burning programs.

1.2 VRM Methodology

The Visual Management System is currently being developed throughout Western Australia for use at a Broad Scale Planning Level, 1:50,000 scale. A flow chart illustrating the Visual Management System follows (Figure 1). This system was formulated by the Victorian Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands, from models originally developed by the United States Forest Service (1974).

The System integrates a Resource Base (Figure 1 - Column 1) of:

1. Physical Landscape Elements (in total), and

2. Social Considerations (people's visual resource values).

From an Inventory (Column 2) and Assessment (Column 3) procedure, Recommendations (Column 4) are made with Landscape Management Zones mapped, depicting levels of concern for the visual resource. For each recommended Zone a Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is written providing standards for operations, outlining acceptable levels of alteration and techniques for measuring results. This data can then compliment other management techniques used when managing the many resources of the environment. This objective can then be monitored and reviewed according to the operational standards.

The VRM process is thus a valuable tool for a systematic identification, evaluation and management of the scenic resource. It now equips the land manager with means of developing rational arguments and predictive models to formulate policy for the management of the scenic resource.

1.3 Specific Project Level

The second component of the Visual Resource Management System provides a means of incorporating the broadscale VRM information into site specific projects. Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) are followed with further landscape analysis and the preparation of detailed working specifications for a range of land management practices. These specifications are prepared to ensure the Visual Management System is workable and effective and are integrated with other resource management objectives and prescriptions. This process of integrating resource specifications is critical to the success of the overall management of the project site. Refer Project Application Level (Figure 2) overleaf.

1.4 Summary

The Visual Resource Management System offers a detailed inventory and assessment of visual resources throughout the state of Western Australia, initially focussing on the southwest forest regions. The system focuses on both the Broad Scale Planning and Specific Project Levels. With reference to a Resource base of both Physical Landscape and Social Considerations (refer Figure 1) the System will provide objectives for varying Visual Landscape Management Zones. At the same time, it will recognise and compliment other vital strategies and methods of land management. At the project level it will consider different ecosystem values, offering specific guidelines for project management, planning, design and implementation.

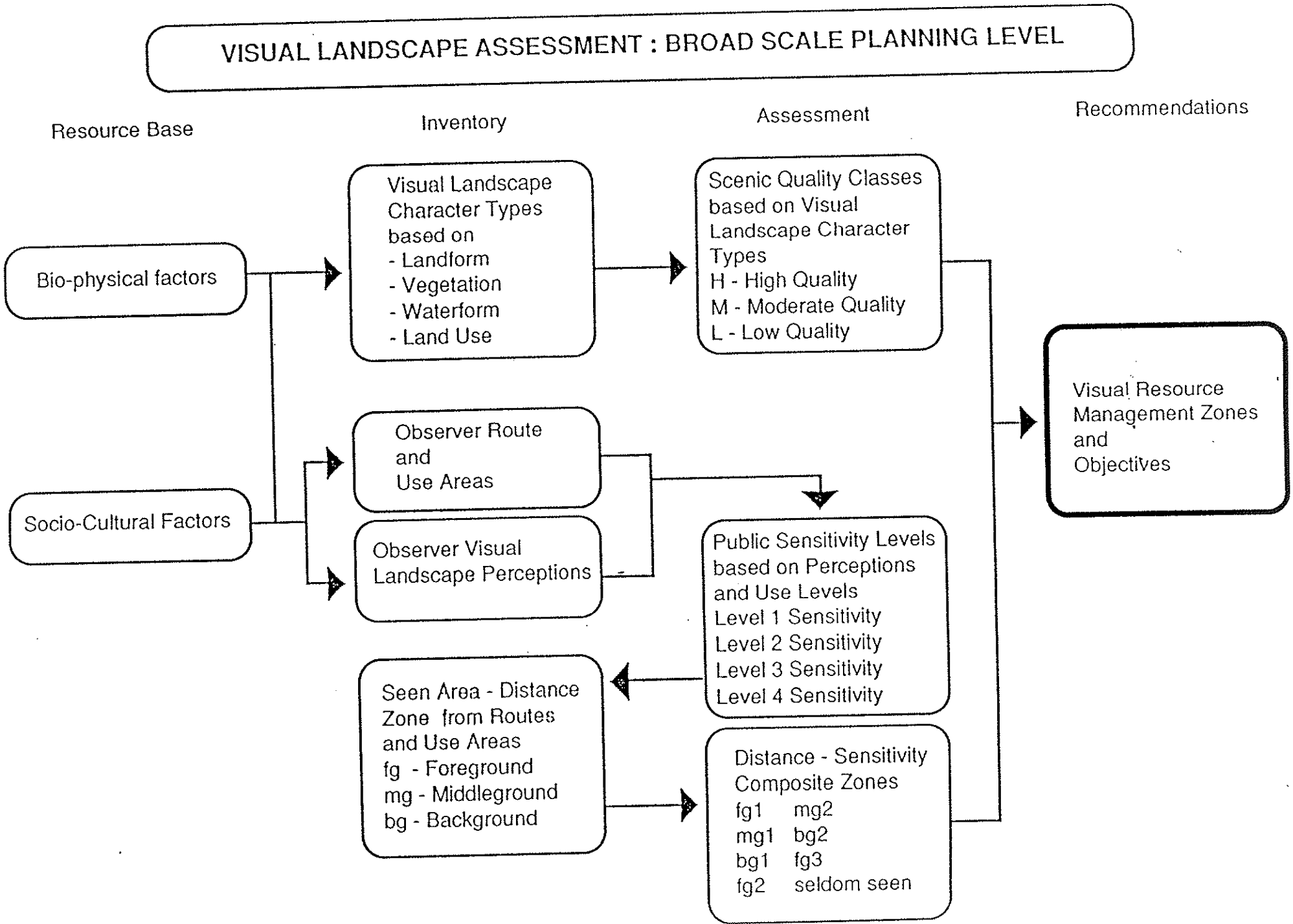
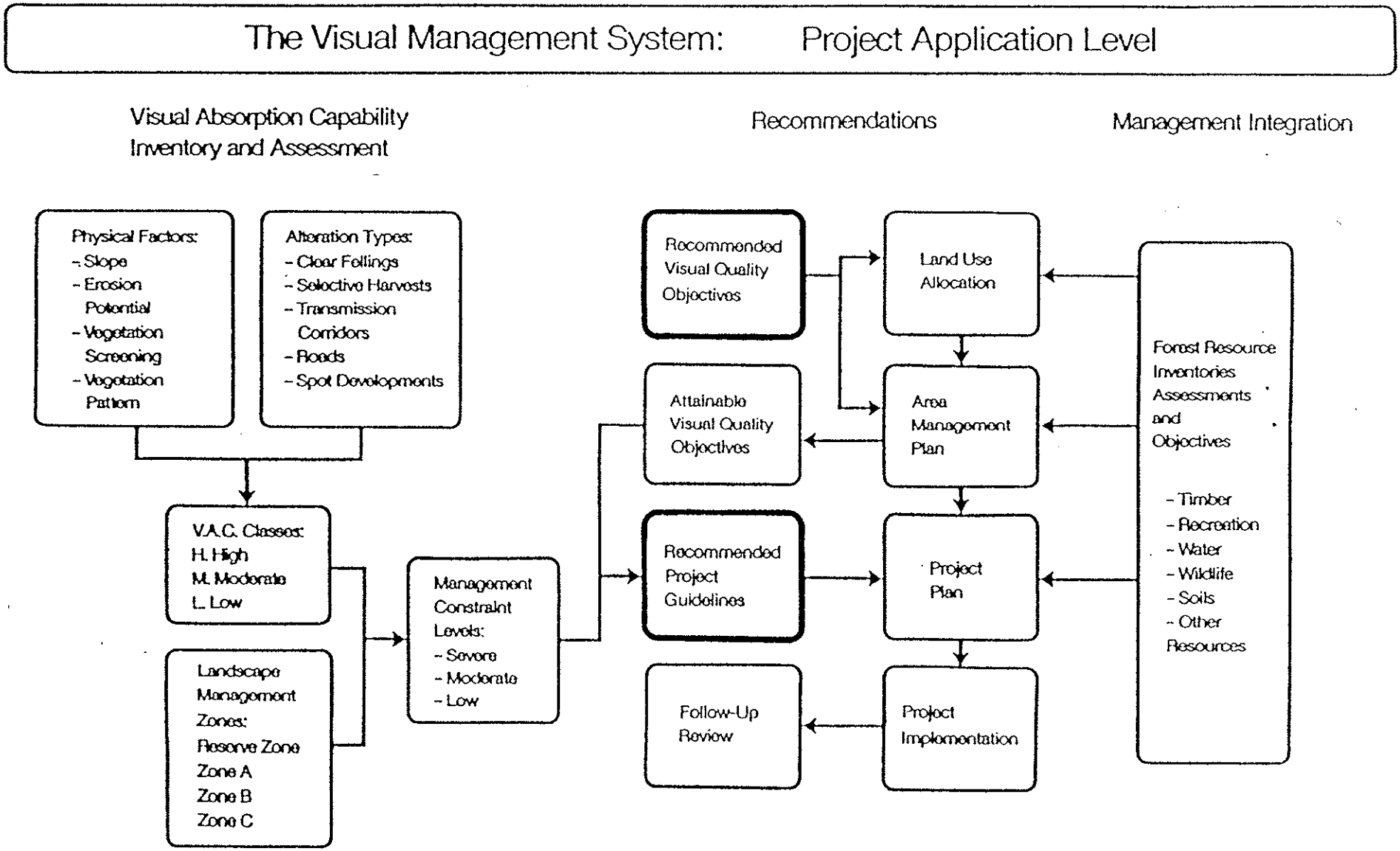

VISUAL LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT : BROAD SCALE PLANNING LEVEL
Resource Base
Inventory
Assessment
Recommendations
Bio-physical factors
Socio-Cultural Factors
Visual Landscape Character Types based on
- Landform
- Vegetation
- Waterform
- Land Use
Observer Route and Use Areas
Observer Visual Landscape Perceptions
Scenic Quality Classes based on Visual Landscape Character Types
H - High Quality
M - Moderate Quality
L - Low Quality
Public Sensitivity Levels based on Perceptions and Use Levels
Level 1 Sensitivity
Level 2 Sensitivity
Level 3 Sensitivity
Level 4 Sensitivity
Seen Area - Distance Zone from Routes and Use Areas
fg - Foreground
mg - Middleground
bg - Background
Distance - Sensitivity Composite Zones
fg1 mg2
mg1 bg2
bg1 fg3
fg2 seldom seen
Visual Resource Management Zones and Objectives

Figure 2


The Visual Management System: Project Application Level
Visual Absorption Capability Inventory and Assessment
Recommendations
Management Integration
Physical Factors:
- Slope
- Erosion Potential
- Vegetation Screening
- Vegetation Pattern
Alteration Types:
- Clear Fellings
- Selective Harvests
- Transmission Corridors
- Roads
- Spot Developments
V.A.C. Classes:
H. High
M. Moderate
L. Low
Landscape Management Zones:
Reserve Zone
Zone A
Zone B
Zone C
Management Constraint Levels:
- Severe
- Moderate
- Low
Recommended Visual Quality Objectives
Attainable Visual Quality Objectives
Recommended Project Guidelines
Follow-Up Review
Land Use Allocation
Area Management Plan
Project Plan
Project Implementation
Forest Resource Inventories Assessments and Objectives
- Timber
- Recreation
- Water
- Wildlife
- Soils
- Other Resources

1.5 Glossary of Terms .

•*VISUAL LANDSCAPE* - refers to the appearance or visual expression of the environment. It combines the visual elements of both the natural and built environs to include - landform, vegetation, waterform, land use, architecture, etc. It is fundamental to consider the general public user of the visual landscape, and how such landscape elements combine to contribute to the overall effect on public perceptions.

•*VISUAL RESOURCE* - that portion of the visual landscape falling within a person's view.

•*VISUAL LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE* - is a broadscale area of land with common distinguishing visual characteristics based on an amalgamation of landform, climate, vegetation, waterform and land use pattern.

•*SCENIC QUALITY* - is the relative visual character of a landscape, expressed as an overall visual impression or value held by society after perceiving an area of land.

•*FRAMES OF REFERENCE* - are the guideline criteria by which to judge the physical features of a visual landscape as high, moderate or low scenic quality.

•*VISUAL LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT ZONE* - is a specific parcel of land within a defined Visual Landscape Character Type which has common visual assessment classification.

•*VISUAL QUALITY OBJECTIVE (VQO)* - is a written guideline which provides a measurable standard, acceptable degree of character retention, for the designated Visual Resource Management Zone. For example:

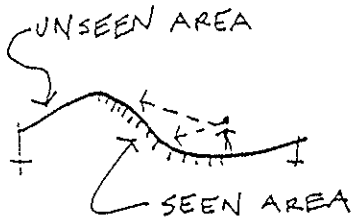
Visual Resource Management Zone A :
VRM Priority- **High**
VRM Objective- **Maximum Retention:**
Avoid landscape alterations which will lead to a discernible deterioration in scenic quality in the short term. Focus on the maximum protection and retention of all existing visual attributes of the characteristic landscape.
The recommended alteration level would be low, least accommodating to visual change.

•*SENSITIVITY LEVELS* - each travel route/road or use area is classified according to their level of viewer sensitivity. This relates specifically to the extent of *how many* and *what type* of public viewers are seeing the state's landscapes. The classifications are Level 1, 2, 3 & 4. Specific criteria is set for determining these levels.

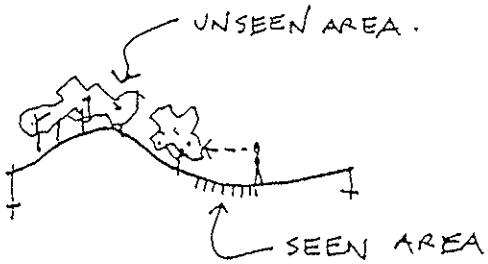
•*SEEN AREA* - that part of the landscape that can be seen from a given road or use area. Seen Area can be mapped in two ways:

(1) Relating to the visible landform of the landscape, assuming that no vegetation exists, and

(2) Relating to the visible vegetation of the landscape, assuming that vegetation exists. Vegetation screening criteria are prepared to assist in determining levels of visibility.



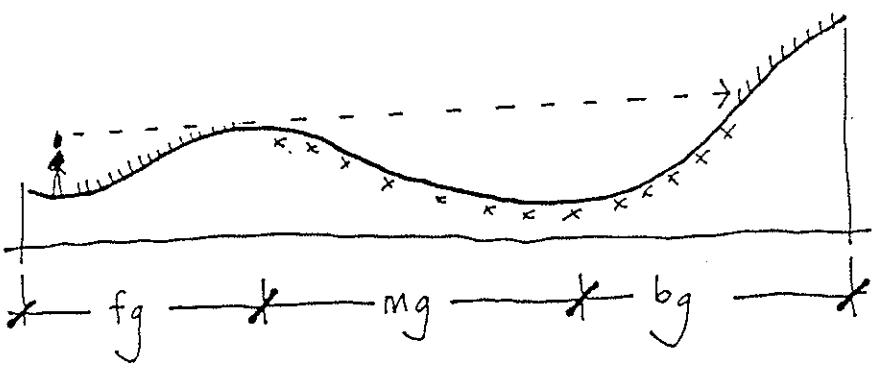
• WITHOUT VEGETATION



• WITH VEGETATION

•*DISTANT ZONES* - these zones refer to the following portions of the Visual Resource or Seen Area:

Foreground (fg)	0-0.5 km:	Evident textural detail
Middleground (mg)	0.5-6.5 km:	Evident textural patterns
Background (bg):	6.5-16 km:	Mainly mass colour patterns



|||| SEEN AREA

xx UNSEEN AREA