Material prepared for Mt. Lesueur report but which was not included in the final version

Appendix 1 : Outline of CALM's Visual Resource Management System

The Department of Conservation and Land Management Visual Resource Management (VRM) System was initiated in 1987 as a response to its strategic role and responsibilities in landscape management, namely:

> "To ensure that activities on CALM lands are planned and carried out in ways that compliment rather than detract from the inherent visual qualities of the natural environment. Outstanding scenic landscapes will be protected from impairment of visual amenity"
> (Source : Forest Region Management Plans)

The basic objectives of the VRM system are twofold: to manage the quality of the visual environment and reduce the visual impact of development and management activities and secondly, to identify scenic areas that warrant protection through reservation and/or special management attention. The system provides a systematic process by which visual resource values can be identified, mapped and incorporated into design planning for projects ranging from the siting of recreation facilities, roads and utility corridors to the harvesting of timber and rehabilitation of degraded areas.

Overview of Methodology

The VRM system is initially being used at a broad scale planning level for resource assessments. This particular system was formulated by the Victorian Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands (formerly the Forests Commission) from models originally developed by the United State Forest Service (1974).

As indicated in the accompanying flow diagram (refer to Figure 1), the system integrates a Resource Base consisting of:

1. Physical landscape elements.

2. Social considerations (people's concern for visual resource values)

Inventory and assessment procedures are then utilised to enable the identification and mapping of Landscape Management Zones, depicting levels of concern for the visual resource. For each recommended zone, a Visual Quality Objective is prepared so as to provide standards for operations and outline levels of landscape alteration and techniques for measuring results. This information can subsequently be combined with other resource data in identifying and assessing land use planning options and developing more detailed plans and management prescriptions. A brief description of the various inventory and assessment stages and procedures involved in this system follows:

1. CLASSIFYING SCENIC QUALITY

1.1 Measuring Scenic Quality

Landscape Character Types are areas of relatively homogenous landscape in which comparison of Scenic Quality are possible. Descriptive criteria called frames of reference define a range of scenic quality components which exist within each character type. While all landscapes have some value, some are of greater scenic value and importance than others. Three classes of relative scenic quality are used - High, Moderate and Low. Descriptions are written for each type in terms of diversity of primary landscape components - landform, vegetation and waterform.

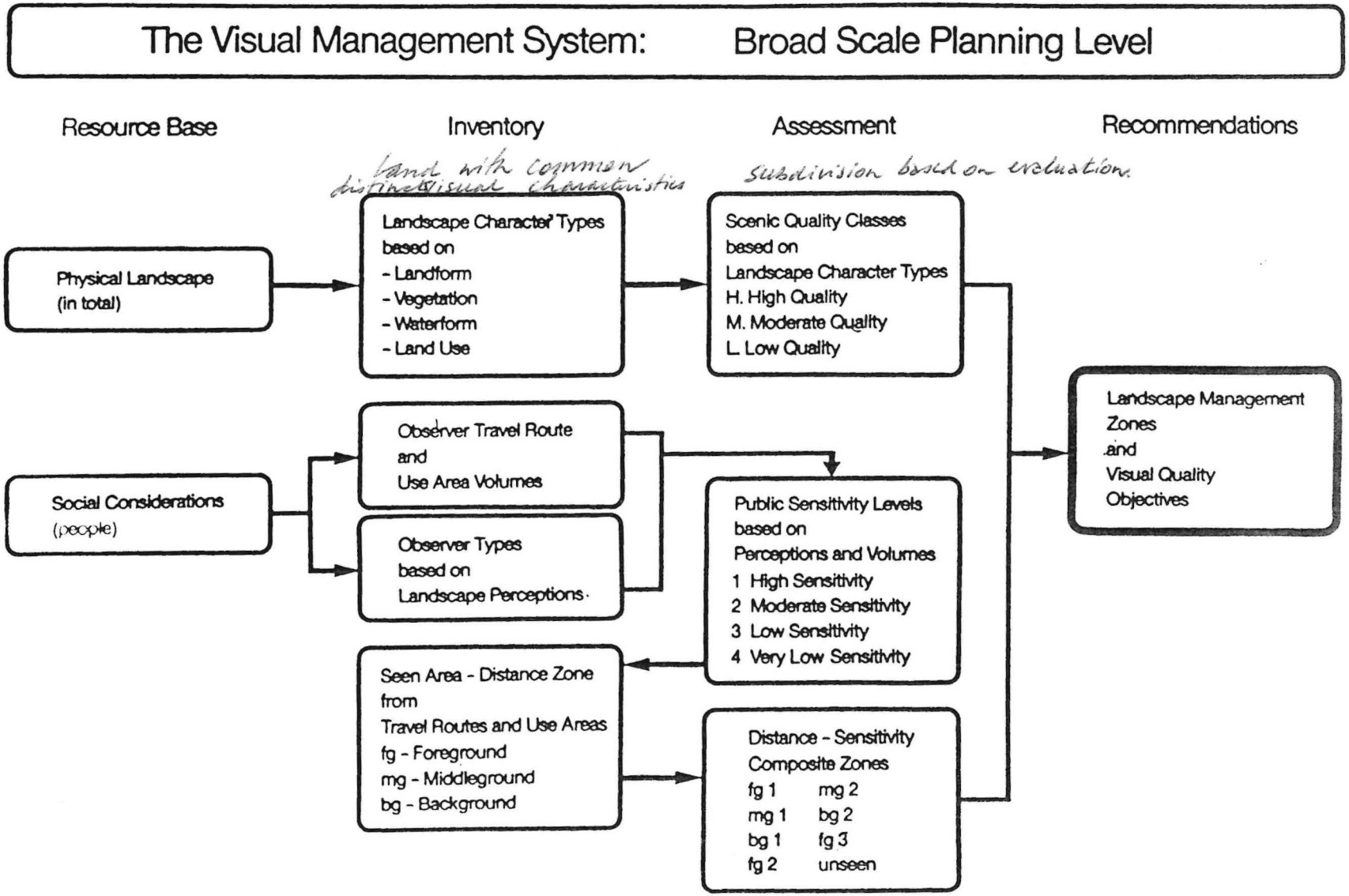

Figure 1. (Source: Victorian Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands)

Visual Resource Management assumptions are that scenic quality increases with:

- greater degrees of uniqueness in rock outcropping, water and other natural features.

- greater degrees of naturalness and lesser degrees of human alteration.

- greater degrees of relative topographic relief and ruggedness.

- greater degrees of vegetative diversity and general landscape variety.

- greater degrees of vegetative diversity and green crop patchwork effects in agricultural landscapes.

- greater degrees of vegetative mixture and edge diversity in coniferous plantations.

1.2 Mapping Scenic Quality

Mapping of landscape scenic quality follows establishment of descriptive frames of reference for each character type and subtype.

Features are rated for scenic quality by interpreting the appropriate frame of reference and delineating classes on aerial photos. Vertical photos, particularly in stereo pairs, and oblique photos are effective tools in judging and classifying land zones.

Each frame of reference is presented in chart form for ease of interpretation.

Areas exhibiting the features and diversity normally present in the character type are assessed as a **moderate scenic quality class,** those areas with more outstanding, unusual diverse features are classified as **high scenic quality,** and those areas limited or lacking in features and diversity area assigned to a **low scenic quality.**

Finally scenic quality class determinations are transferred to a contour base map at a scale appropriate to planning needs.

2. SEEN AREA AND DISTANCE ZONE MAPPING

Seen Area Mapping requires identification of Seen Areas and Distance Zones - Foreground (0-.5km), Middleground (.5-6.5km) and Background (6.5-16km) from all travel routes and use areas by field reconnaissance and topographic map interpretation.

These travel routes and use areas are also evaluated in terms of viewer sensitivity. Four sensitivity levels - high, moderate, low and very low - have been established according to prescribed criteria.

3. CLASSIFYING LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT ZONES

Landscape Management Zones and their associated Visual Quality Objectives are derived by an overlay process between Scenic Quality Class and Distance Zones - Sensitivity Level.

4. VISUAL QUALITY OBJECTIVES

The Visual Quality Objectives provide measurable standards or objectives for the visual management of CALM lands. The Landscape Management Zones and the corresponding Visual Quality Objectives currently used in managing visual resources on CALM lands are as follows:

Zone A - Inevident Alteration VQO

Management alterations should range from being visually inevident to temporarily apparent. When evident, the period of impact (contrast) should not exceed one year. The recommended alteration level would be low, least receptive to change.

Zone B - Apparent Alteration VQO

Management alterations should range from visually apparent and yet subordinate to established landscape characteristics to visually dominant. The period of visual dominance should not exceed two years. The recommended alteration level would be moderately accommodating to change.

Zone C - Dominant Alteration VQO

Management alterations may be visually dominant but should borrow from naturally established form, line, colour and texture to be in harmony with natural occurrences within the surrounding area. The recommended level would be highly accepting of change.

Reserve VQO

The recommended alteration level for these special management zones would allow for little more than natural change or low visual impact changes which are carefully planned to accommodate and/or enhance the special qualities of the Reserve.

Reserves include Nature Reserves, National Parks, Conservation Parks and other conservation and recreation areas.

Rehabilitation VQO

Landscape modifications which have resulted from past management practices, and do not meet the desired Visual Quality Objective, fall into this category.

Short-term management activities should attempt to upgrade visual quality to the desired level. Long-term visual management may require development and/or rehabilitation plans. Where priorities for rehabilitation must be established the higher Quality Objective Zones should received priority.