

Wilderness Tourism Association



BRITISH COLUMBIA | CANADA

Wilderness Tourism Association, PO Box 423, Cumberland BC, V0R 1S0, 250-336-2862, www.bcwta.ca

Background Paper -Understanding Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs)

Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) are resource management objectives established for visually sensitive landscapes. Visually sensitive landscapes are those landscapes that (1) are visible from communities, public use areas, or travel corridors, (2) possess inherent scenic value, and (3) are important to the viewing public and visitors.

VQOs are the means by which the Forest Service identifies the level of alteration that would be acceptable on a viewscape. Five classes of VQOs are prescribed. These are described below:

Preservation — The preservation VQO requires that no visible alterations occur in the landscape from forest development practices.

Retention — The retention VQO requires that management activities or alterations not be visually apparent (visible but not evident). The goal is to repeat the line, form, colour and texture of the characteristic landscape.

Partial retention — The partial retention VQO requires that alteration remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Repetition of the line, form, colour and texture is important to ensure a blending with the dominant elements.

Modification — The modification VQO allows alterations to dominate the original characteristic landscape. However, alterations must borrow from natural line and form to such an extent and on such a scale that they are comparable to natural occurrences.

Maximum modification — The maximum modification VQO permits a dominant change to the original landscape, particularly in the foreground and middle ground. Alterations may be out of scale or show detail quite different from natural occurrences. In the background, changes should appear to be natural occurrences.

As noted, harvesting is allowed in every level of VQO with the over-all objective being maintained. Each VQO has a corresponding (rule of thumb) percentage of forest cover that can be harvested or that must be retained. Generally speaking, if it isn't visible, it can be logged. If it is visible, the viewscape can only be altered by logging according to the classification.

VQOs are established by the district manager via Government Actions Regulation Orders under the Forest and Ranges Practices Act (FRPA), or contained in a higher level plan (Land and Resource Management Plan - LRMP) that reflects the desired level of visual quality based on the physical characteristics and social concern for the area.