

**CHAPTER 4**  
**Visual Quality**

## CHAPTER 4 VISUAL QUALITY

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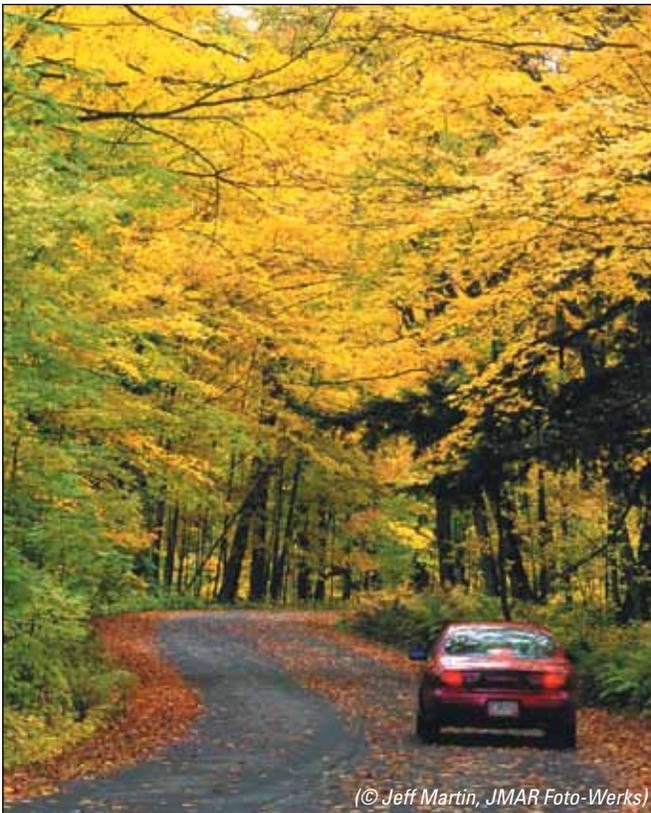
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## THE VALUE OF VISUAL QUALITY

### A Concern for Aesthetic Quality

Concern about the aesthetic quality of forested lands throughout the state is a great source of pride for Wisconsin citizens. Scenic beauty – or “visual quality” – is one of the primary reasons people choose to spend their recreation and vacation time in or near forested areas. They are also attracted by the peace and quiet of the outdoors – the serenity, the solitude, and a host of other emotional, spiritual and sensory responses that make up the richly aesthetic and deeply personal experience that is so closely tied to time spent in or near our forests.

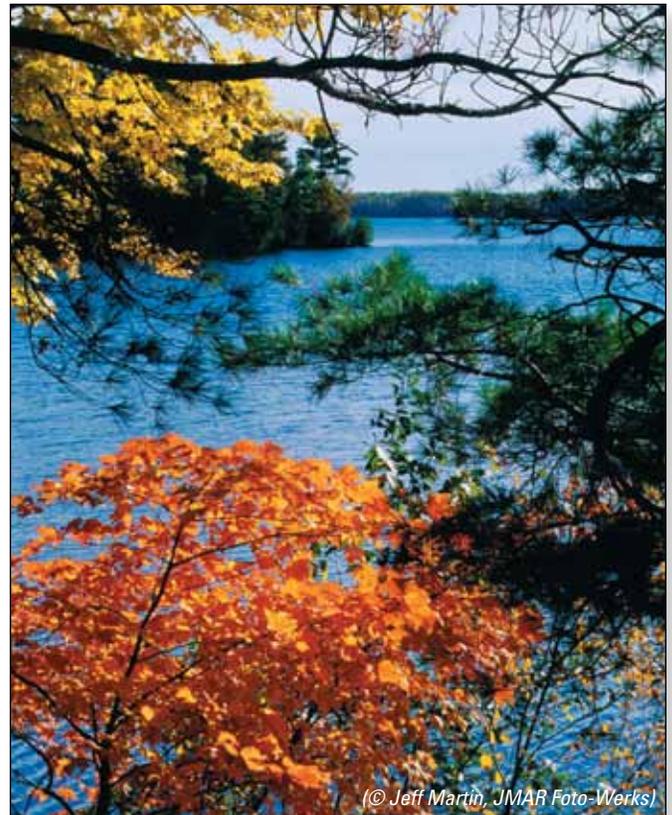
Wisconsin forests are particularly vital to the health of two industries: tourism and forest products. Many of the demands on the forests from these two industries are compatible and even complementary. **See Chapter 13: Timber Harvesting for specific techniques to balance timber harvesting and visual quality.**



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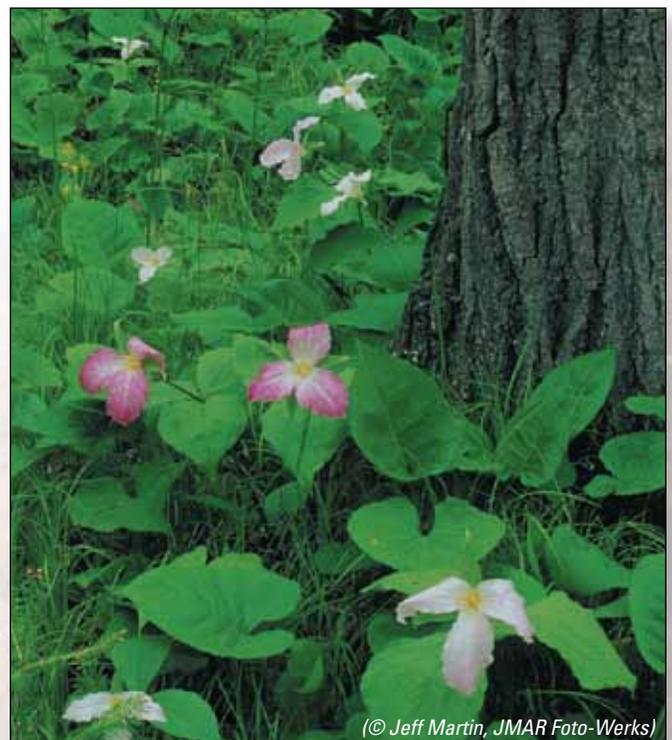
*Figure 4-1: The “most sensitive” level applies to those travel routes where significant public use occurs, and where the visual quality is of high concern to all typical users.*

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*Figure 4-2: Scenic quality is one of the primary reasons people choose to spend their recreation time in or near forested areas.*



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*Figure 4-3: Trilliums in Oneida County.*

## Benefits of Visual Quality Management

Visual quality is one important aspect of the broad, multi-faceted concept of integrated forest resource management. Visual quality management can:

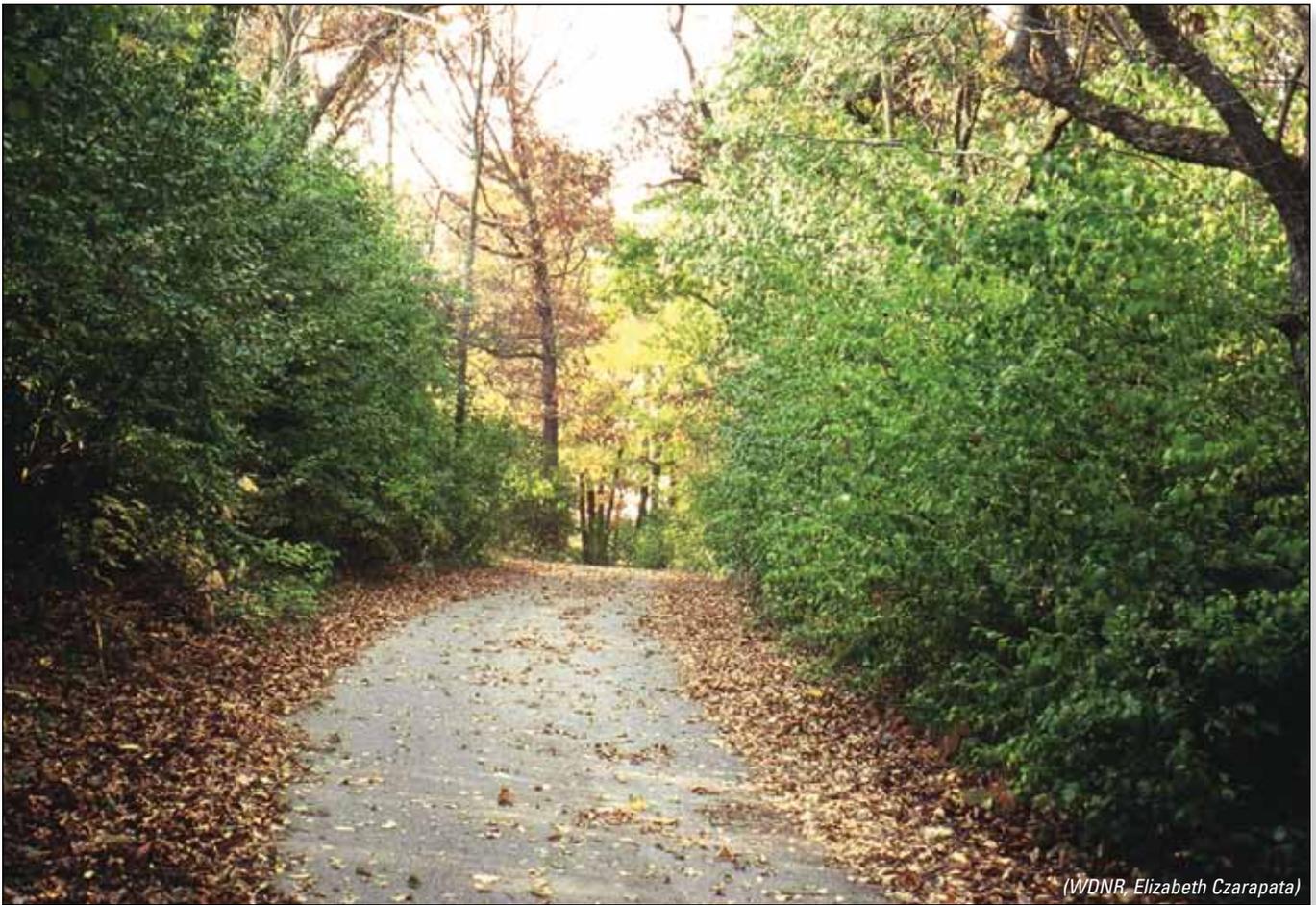
- Enhance visual quality of forested lands for recreational users which results in a healthy tourism economy.
- Enhance public acceptance of forest management and timber harvesting, therefore, helping to sustain a healthy forest products industry.
- Minimize the visual and audible impacts of forest management activities on tourists and other recreational users.
- Minimize visibility of harvest areas by limiting apparent size of harvest.
- Minimize visual impact of slash.
- Minimize the impact of landing operations on recreational viewers and users.



*Figure 4-4: Careful planning and control of the logging operation can have a major impact on the visual quality following a timber harvest.*



*Figure 4-5: Slash from pine harvests is much smaller in size than hardwood tops and limbs. Slash from mechanical harvesting, commonly used in pine, aspen and birch, is usually compacted by the processing machine.*



(WDNR, Elizabeth Czarapata)

*Figure 4-6: This “hedge” of common buckthorn creates a solid wall of vegetation completely disrupting any view of the forest. Consider non-native invasive plants during management activities as they can greatly decrease visual quality of forests.*

- Minimize visual contrast created by broken or leaning trees or extensive areas of dead trees.
- Reduce visual impacts associated with the design and use of forest access roads.
- Reduce the visual impact of site preparation practices, and reduce the time that the effects of these practices are visible.
- Promote more natural-appearing stands.
- Enhance the aesthetics of visual management areas by minimizing visual impacts of timber stand improvement activities.
- Reduce visual impacts of treated vegetation.
- Reduce noise and unsightliness related to gravel pits.



(WDNR, Jeff Martin)

*Figure 4-7: Untreated logging slash, such as these walnut tops, takes longer to decay and is often objectionable to landowners. Lopping of tops or harvesting firewood may provide a solution.*



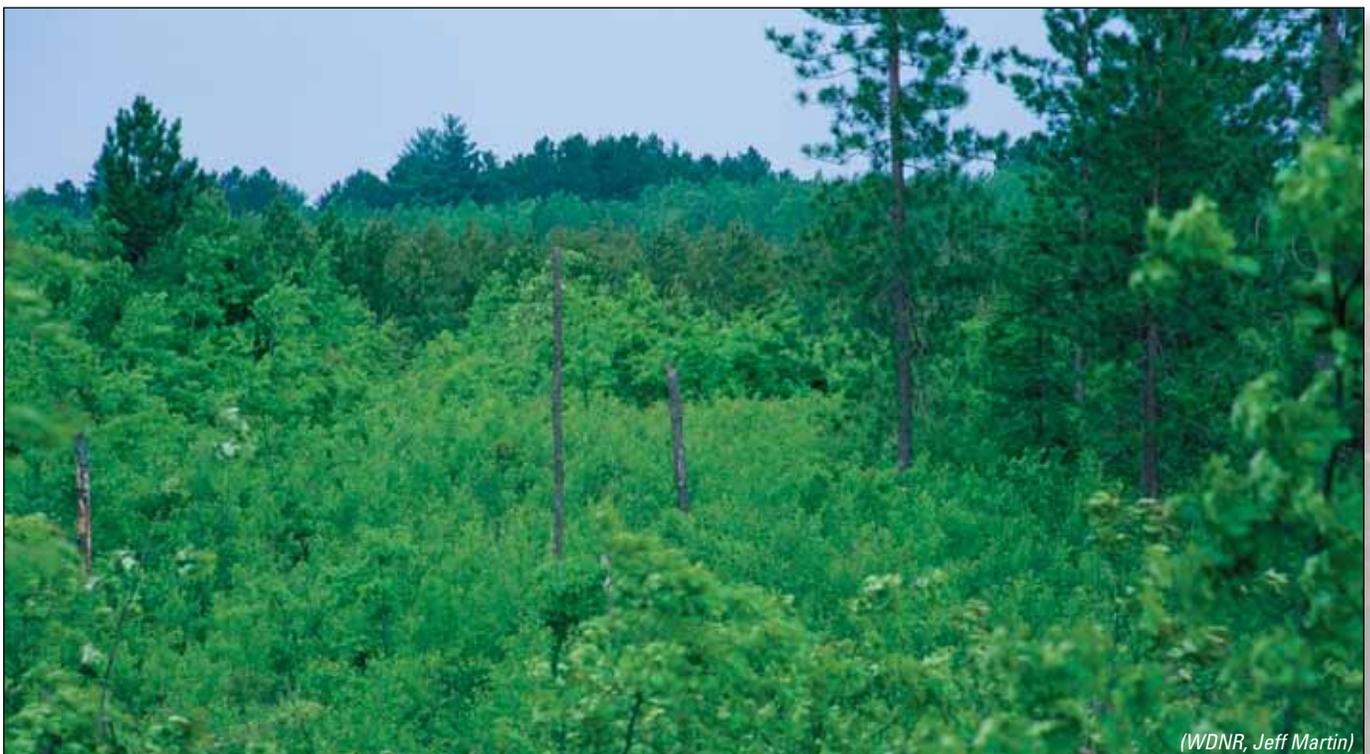
(WDNR, Jeff Martin)

*Figure 4-8: Large, unbroken clearcuts along well-traveled roads are often viewed by the public as unsightly, at least until the new regeneration becomes established on the site.*



(WDNR, Jeff Martin)

*Figure 4-9: This aerial view shows a mosaic of pine and aspen stands with scalloped boundaries in a portion of the Northern Highland State Forest that is managed to enhance aesthetic quality.*



(WDNR, Jeff Martin)

*Figure 4-10: This ground-level photo was taken in the center of the aerial view shown in Figure 4-9 while looking toward the lower left. This area, managed for aesthetic quality, shows oak sprouts and young aspen in the foreground, young Jack pine and older aspen in the middle, and mature red and Jack pine in the background.*

## VISUAL SENSITIVITY LEVELS

### Recognizing Different Levels of Visual Sensitivity

Some of the factors important in the determination of visual sensitivity include:

- The perceived degree of sensitivity of users of that travel route or recreation area concerning landscape aesthetics.
- The volume and type of use the travel route or recreation area receives.
- The speed of travel within the route or area.



Figure 4-11: This major highway, a “most sensitive” example, carries a high traffic load through scenic hill country in Wisconsin.



Figure 4-12: An example of a “moderately sensitive” area, this narrow blacktop road winds alongside scenic Otter Creek in the Baraboo Hills.

### Visual Sensitivity Levels

#### MOST SENSITIVE

Applies to travel routes and areas where significant public use occurs, and where visual quality is of high concern to typical users. Examples of such routes may include public highways, local roads, recreational lakes and rivers, and designated recreational trails and areas that provide a high level of scenic quality.

#### MODERATELY SENSITIVE

Applies to travel routes or recreation areas, not identified as “most sensitive,” where visual quality is of moderate concern to typical users. Examples of these routes and areas may include public highways and local roads, recreational lakes and rivers, and designated recreational trails that provide moderate to high scenic quality but less significant public use.

#### LESS SENSITIVE

Applies to travel routes or recreation areas, not identified as “most sensitive” or “moderately sensitive,” where visual quality is of less concern to typical users. Examples of these routes may include public highways and low-volume local forest roads, non-designated trails, and non-recreational lakes and rivers.



Figure 4-13: Example of a “less sensitive” area along this back road that receives very little traffic.

### The Value of Recognizing Different Levels of Visual Sensitivity

Recognizing the level of visual sensitivity helps the landowner, resource manager and logger to choose the visual quality guidelines that help fulfill the landowner's expectations.

Timber sale contracts should reflect differences in visual sensitivity. An area classified as "most sensitive" would normally have different contract specifications than those used in an area classified as "less sensitive." Landings, for example should be avoided within view of travel routes or recreation areas classified as "most sensitive," while they might be visible in areas classified as "less sensitive," but located outside the travel route right-of-way.



*Figure 4-14: The selective thinning in this red pine stand was designed to mimic natural changes that occur over time. Trees were removed from all size classes, so that the remaining stand has a mix of sizes, quality, and tree spacing, therefore, providing a more "natural" and less "plantation" look.*

## RESOURCE FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

*This resource is specific to the information in this chapter only. Refer to the Resource Directory for additional resources related to this chapter.*



*Figure 4-15: Autumn scenery in the Baraboo Hills showcases the diversity found in a mixed pine and hardwood forested landscape.*

*Woodland Visions – Appreciating and Managing Forests for Scenic Beauty*, L. Klessig, UW-Extension Publ. No. G3762, 2002. Woodland owners prize their property for its wildlife habitat and natural beauty as much as for its timber value. This 36-page, softcover book considers this important – and often overlooked – perspective in woodland management planning. According to the

author, Lowell Klessig, “Good forest management can enhance scenic benefits not only for woodland owners, but also for the surrounding community.” This publication is available in hardcopy or electronic form online at <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Forest-Management-C324.aspx>.