

Parks Division **Landscape classification system for visitor management**

Operational policies provide a framework for consistent application and interpretation of legislation and for the management of non-legislative matters by the Environmental Protection Agency, which incorporates the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Operational policies will not be applied inflexibly to all circumstances. Individual circumstances may require an alternative application of policy.

Purpose

This policy establishes a standard classification system for characterising the biophysical, social and management attributes of sites and areas within QPWS managed areas, from a visitor management perspective.

Background

There is considerable variation in the naturalness of landscapes across QPWS managed lands. At some sites there is significant evidence of human modification of the environment while at others the natural condition appears unaltered. QPWS managed lands also host a diverse range of visitor activities, and the people undertaking these activities have different preferences in terms of the biophysical, social and managerial characteristics (or settings) of the sites and areas they use.

The Master plan for Queensland's Parks System emphasises that the parks system is to be managed to support a range of styles of nature-based visitation, and that management should provide a variety of settings catering for different visitors without compromising conservation outcomes. Policies for management of the forest estate have also sought to provide a range of settings catering for different visitor activities.

To meet the goal of providing a diversity of settings a standard system for assessing the key attributes of sites and areas for visitors is required. Use of the landscape classification system (LCS) allows QPWS to characterise the settings at all QPWS managed sites and areas, providing important resource information for a range of management and planning decisions.

The LCS framework systematically describes settings on the basis of three sets of criteria for assessing a site or area-biophysical, social and management. Assessment is made on the proportion of natural and human-modified elements in the landscape. The nine settings established by the system range from 'wild' through to 'urban' settings, and assessment of a site or area using the LCS essentially provides a relative measure of its naturalness or level of human modification.

The LCS is a tool for assessing landscape settings from a visitor use and management perspective, not a system for describing the nature conservation or other values of sites or areas. It does not replace or compromise existing assessment and planning frameworks, including state and regional coastal management plans and World Heritage Area management plans, and it does not infer that any particular management strategy, work program or other action ought to be implemented at a particular site or area. While the LCS will be used to characterise existing settings, planning prescriptions for sites and areas will generally be expressed in terms of the four setting categories identified in the Master Plan for Queensland's Parks System (high profile; popular; explorer and self-reliant). These broad categories provide scope for more detailed site/area planning to appropriately address the particular circumstances and characteristics of individual sites/areas.

Classification of sites using the LCS allows managers and planners to consider the implications of proposed activities and other changes that may alter the biophysical, social or managerial attributes of a site or area, and to assess and monitor more gradual change such as increasing visitation. However decisions about desired management outcomes and changes to the physical, social or managerial environment at sites and areas must take a range of additional matters into consideration.

Definition

'QPWS managed areas' (for the purposes of this operational policy) include the following areas:

- protected areas (State land) under the *Nature Conservation Act 1994*;
- State forests and other lands managed under the *Forestry Act 1959*;
- Recreation Areas under the *Recreation Areas Management Act 1988*;
- Brisbane Forest Park under the *Brisbane Forest Park Act 1977*; and
- other areas where QPWS has control, trusteeship or otherwise manages the land.

For the purpose of this policy, QPWS managed areas do not include Marine Parks under the *Marine Parks Act 1982*.

Determination

The attached landscape classification system (LCS) is the QPWS standard for determining the existing landscape class, or setting at any given site or area for visitor management purposes within QPWS managed areas.

Other issues to consider

Other policy documents and procedural guides relevant to QPWS managed areas, for example those relating to provision and design of built infrastructure, will reference the landscape classification system for visitor management.

Attachment

Table: Landscape classification system for visitor management.

Disclaimer:

While this document has been prepared with care it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Environmental Protection Agency should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

Approved by:

Alan Feely

Signature

13/ 8/2003

Date

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Queensland Recreation Areas Management Board

Table – Landscape classification system for visitor management						
Physical	'Wild' 1	2	3	4	5	6
Prevalence and permanence of visitor impacts	No impact on natural condition.	Minimal evidence of visitor impacts. Impacts which have occurred recover quickly. (e.g. temporary loss of local native vegetation, scuffing of leaf litter, etc. in small areas which recover to pre-impact condition seasonally).	Temporary to minor visitor impacts evident. (e.g. temporary loss of local native vegetation, scuffing of leaf litter, minor soil disturbance, etc.). Impacts not permanent, However, recover to pre-impact condition unlikely.	Moderate visitor impacts evident in heavily used areas. Some permanent loss of local native vegetation (e.g. herbs and forbs), loss of leaf litter, soil disturbance evident. Impacts persist at nodes and along walking tracks. Sensitive local native fauna may be displaced as a result of use. Behaviour of other local native fauna is occasionally modified. Native fauna population changes are noticeable.	Physical changes as a result of visitor use are obvious and widespread with little chance of recovery. Some altering of vegetation characteristics/structure A significant proportion of the local native fauna displaced. Local native fauna behaviour and population changes are obtrusive.	Physical changes as a result of visitor use are obvious, widespread and permanent-little chance of recovery. Vegetation characteristics and floral structure altered. Native fauna behaviour and population changes are obtrusive. The natural condition is unlikely to recover.
Viewscape (360°)	0% of visual landscape modified from natural condition.	<1% of visual landscape modified from natural condition. Little, if any, evidence of modification.	1-5% of visual landscape modified. Minimal evidence of modification to natural condition. Some structures may be evident.	5-10% of visual landscape modified. Some evidence of modification to natural condition. Some structures are/maybe evident.	10-25% of visual landscape modified. Modification of natural condition evident. Structures are evident.	25-50% of visual landscape modified. Modification of natural condition is very evident. Structures are plainly evident.
Indicative appearance	A totally natural site or landscape that has not been affected by post-1788 use. A wild, natural, remote area.	An almost totally natural site or landscape with very few modifications. Modifications are temporary, small/minor and very dispersed.	A very natural site or landscape. Modifications are semi-permanent, small/minor and restricted to a few dispersed nodes. Natural elements dominate away from nodes.	A very natural appearing site or landscape. Modifications are permanent, small/minor and restricted to a few dispersed nodes. Natural elements dominate outside these nodes. Built structures are very rare unobtrusive and rustic (e.g. graded walking tracks, narrow infrequently used vehicle tracks, timbered picnic tables).	A somewhat natural appearing site or landscape. Modifications may be permanent, moderately large and obvious. Large blocks of native vegetation interspersed with small areas of cleared land. Built structures are dispersed but readily apparent (e.g. walking tracks with hardened surfaces, well maintained unsealed roads, timbered picnic areas, unobtrusive facilities)	A somewhat natural appearing site or landscape. Natural elements just dominate over other elements in the landscape. For example, rural areas with large areas of remnant native vegetation separated by grassland. Built structures may be obvious and quite common (e.g. roads are sealed, picnic areas paved and facilities are in harmony with surroundings)
Prevalence and durability of impacts from non-visitor land uses	Totally natural landscape. No history of post-1788 land use.	Predominantly natural landscape with some evidence of past post-1788 land use limited to a few isolated small sites that are regenerating. None of these land uses are active.	Predominantly natural landscape with evidence of past post-1788 land use limited to some small sites that are regenerating. None of these land uses are active.	Regenerating natural landscape with obvious evidence of past land use (e.g. regenerating mineral exploration, selective logging, grazing, flower harvesting). Some of these land uses may be still active (covering up to 5% of the area).	Regenerating natural landscape with obvious evidence of past and present land use. Current land uses (e.g. small scale mineral exploration, quarrying, selective logging, grazing, flower harvesting, apiculture) currently active in a small proportion (5-20%) of the landscape.	Part natural landscape. Land uses (e.g. mineral exploration, quarrying, selective logging, grazing, flower harvesting, apiculture) currently active in a large proportion (20-50%) of the landscape.
Naturalness of overstorey	100% of natural vegetation intact.	97-100% of natural vegetation intact. <3% regenerating.	90-97% of natural vegetation intact. <7% cleared or regenerating.	85-90 % intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	70-85% intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	50-70 % intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.
Naturalness of understorey	100% of natural vegetation intact.	97-100% of natural vegetation intact. <3% cleared or regenerating.	90-97% of natural vegetation intact. <7% cleared or regenerating.	85-90 % intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	70-85% intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	50-70 % intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.
Water quality	Completely natural aquatic ecosystem	No detectable effect/change in water quality or aquatic ecosystem.	Short-term and relatively minor changes to natural stream dynamics and/or water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is substantially natural.	Short-term and relatively minor changes to natural stream dynamics and/or water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is substantially natural.	Long-term and/or permanent changes to natural stream dynamics and/or water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is substantially modified.	Long-term and/or permanent changes to natural stream dynamics and/or water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is substantially modified.

Physical	7	8	'Urban' 9
Prevalence and durability of visitor impacts	Physical changes as a result of visitor use are obvious, widespread and permanent. Vegetation characteristics and floral structure completely altered. Native fauna dominated by one or two species. Fauna behaviour may be intimidating. Some species may display signs of aggressiveness. The natural condition exists only in very small remnant areas.	Physical changes as a result of visitor use are obvious, widespread and permanent. Vegetation characteristics and floral structure completely altered. Native fauna dominated by one or two species. Introduced species common. Fauna behaviour intimidating. Some species may display signs of aggressiveness. The natural condition exists only in very small remnant areas.	Physical changes as a result of visitor use are obvious, widespread and permanent. Vegetation characteristics and floral structure completely altered. Introduced species compete with native fauna. Some species may display signs of aggressiveness. The natural condition is non-existent.
Viewscape (360°)	50-75% of visual landscape is modified. Modification of natural condition is plainly evident. Structures are clearly evident in landscape but do not dominate.	76-99% of visual landscape is modified. Modification of natural condition is plainly evident. Structures may or may not dominate the visual landscape.	100% of visual landscape is modified. Modification of natural condition is plainly evident. Structures dominate the visual landscape.
Indicative appearance	Managed parkland with small to large areas of open space. Built structures and other modifications to the natural landscape dominate. Natural elements exist as scattered remnants, some of which may be quite large.	Managed urban parkland with large areas of open space/playing fields. Built structures and other modifications to the natural landscape dominate. Natural elements exist only as small scattered remnants.	Managed urban parkland with playing fields. Built structures and other modifications to the natural landscape dominate. Natural elements are more-or-less non-existent.
Prevalence and durability of impacts from non-visitor land uses	A wide range of land uses that modify the natural landscape are active. Impacts are widespread, pervasive and permanent. Part of the natural landscape remains but most of this is modified to some extent.	A wide range of land uses that modify the natural landscape are active. Impacts are widespread, pervasive and permanent. Very small areas of the natural landscape remains but most are obviously modified.	Impacts are widespread, pervasive and permanent. Land use has completely changed the natural landscape.
Naturalness of overstorey	25-50 % intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	10-25% intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	<10% intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.
Naturalness of understorey	25-50 % intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	10-25% intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.	<10% intact or regenerating. Remainder cleared or non-endemic species.
Water quality	Permanent changes to natural stream dynamics, structures and/or water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load, channelisation or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is substantially modified.	Permanent changes to natural stream dynamics, structures and/or water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load, channelisation or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is substantially modified.	Permanent changes to natural stream dynamics, structures and water chemistry (e.g. increased turbidity, nutrient load, channelisation or sediment load). Aquatic ecosystem is completely modified.

Social	1	2	3	4	5	6
Evidence of other people (e.g. sights, sounds and smells)	Non-existent. No evidence present	Short-term and relatively minor evidence at nodes and along main routes. Nodes small, low impact and dispersed. No evidence (sights, sounds, smells) elsewhere.	Minor permanent evidence at nodes and along main routes. Nodes small low impact and dispersed. Negligible evidence (sights, sounds, smells) of use elsewhere.	Substantial permanent evidence at nodes and along main routes. Nodes may be moderate in size and concentrate activities and people. Some evidence (sights, sounds, smells of people) elsewhere.	Readily apparent evidence of use (i.e. sights, sounds, and smells) pervades use of nodes, main routes and their surrounds. Nodes may be extensive with heavy concentrations of people and activities.	
Sense of isolation and opportunity for solitude	Total	High	Moderate	Moderate to low	Low	Very low
Interparty encounters while travelling	Very few. <1 group a day	Low. < 5 groups a day	Low to Moderate, 5-10 groups a day	Moderate to high 10-20 groups a day.	High. 20-50 groups a day	Very high >50 groups a day
Interparty encounters while at nodes and destinations	Non-existent. Chance encounters with others are rare and usually avoidable.	Low. Users are most often alone and should be surprised to have to share locations with others.	Low to moderate Frequent opportunities for solitude. Contact with others should be expected, however, it may be avoided.	Moderate to high. Frequent opportunities for solitude. Contact should be expected and usually cannot be avoided.	High. Infrequent opportunity for solitude during the day. Frequent contact should be expected and unlikely to be avoided.	Very high. Almost no opportunity for solitude during the day. Frequent and unavoidable contacts should be expected.
Dependence upon outdoor skills	Total	Very high	High	Moderate	Moderate to low	Low
Density/ha PAOT*	< 1	1-2	3-5	5-10	10-60	60-150

- *A group constitutes, on average, 4 people or the equivalent to one car.
- PAOT is the acronym for 'persons at one time'.

Social	7	8	9
Evidence of other people (e.g. sights, sounds and smells):	Clearly apparent evidence of other people at nodes, along main routes and their surrounds except in relatively small remnant areas. Open areas may be extensive with heavy concentrations of people and activities.	Widespread, all-encompassing and permanent.	Widespread, pervasive and permanent.
Sense of isolation and opportunity for solitude:	Infrequent and usually short opportunities for solitude during daylight hours.	Rare opportunities for solitude	No or very rare opportunities for solitude
Interparty encounters while travelling:	Usually constant.	Always constant	Always constant
Interparty encounters while at nodes and destinations:	No opportunity for solitude during the day. Frequent and unavoidable contacts should be expected.	Continuous and unavoidable contacts should be expected.	Continuous and unavoidable contacts should be expected.
Dependence upon outdoor skills:	Very low	N/A	N/A
Density/ha PAOT*:	150-250	>250	Unlimited

- *A group constitutes, on average, 4 people or the equivalent to one car.
- PAOT is the acronym for 'persons at one time'.

Management	1	2	3	4	5	6
Access:	No motorised access what so ever. No tracks or roads. Some unmarked trails may exist.	Trails exist. Some formed and maintained trails may exist. Some evidence of vehicle tracks may exist but these are regenerating.	Rough, unsurfaced and infrequently maintained vehicle roads may exist. Formed trails present. Some unformed tracks may be present.	Well-maintained roads and tracks. Gravel roads following natural features with some steep grades and tight corners. Some formed tracks may be present.	Unsealed roads with engineered and modified alignments. Mostly one lane, however, some two-lane sections may exist. Some narrow sealed roads may be present. Formed tracks present.	Most roads and tracks are sealed and regularly maintained. Two lane roads are common.
Evidence of management personnel:	Infrequent, usually only to monitor resource conditions.	Minimum management presence-only as necessary to achieve minimum management obligations.	Minimum management presence. Infrequent construction and maintenance activity. Infrequent patrols by enforcement staff.	Some management presence. Occasional construction and maintenance activity. Occasional patrol by enforcement staff.	Management presence active. Common construction and maintenance activity. Regular patrol by enforcement staff.	
Presence and extent of signage:	None	Unlikely, however, signs may be present for resource protection-few and dispersed.	Minimum road and track names, regulatory notices and directional signage.	Regulatory and directional signs located at key points. Minimum interpretation signage.	Interpretation, regulatory notices, boundary, and directional signs sufficient to orientate and inform all visitors.	
Rules, regulations and law enforcement:	Communicated off site. Users unaware of management.	Communicated off site. Infrequent patrol for sustainability monitoring and life preservation. Users mostly unaware of management.	Predominantly communicated off site. Minimum patrol for sustainability monitoring and life preservation. Users occasionally aware of management.	Some on-site communication. Signage and supervision as required for safety and sustainability. Users occasionally aware of management.	A strong and visible management presence. Frequent on-site communication. Users commonly aware of management.	
Presence of management and visitor infrastructure:	None	Only constructed where no other alternative can be found (e.g. communication towers). Structures are inconspicuous and widely dispersed.	Only constructed where no other alternative can be found (e.g. communication towers). Structures are unobtrusive and dispersed.	Structures are small but apparent. However, they are dispersed and blend into natural background.	Structures are readily apparent and can be quite large but blend in to natural background.	

Management	7	8	9
Access:	Roads and tracks are usually sealed. Some use of paving may be present. Unsealed roads and tracks are maintained at a high standard. Two lane roads are common.	All roads, tracks, and paths are sealed or paved. Motorised access available in all places.	All roads, tracks, and paths are sealed or paved. Motorised access available in all places.
Evidence of management personnel:	Management presence active. Regular construction and maintenance activity. Frequent and regular patrol by enforcement staff.	Management and enforcement personnel are obvious and permanent.	Management and enforcement personnel are obvious and permanent.
Presence and extent of signage:	Interpretation signs and regulatory notices common. Boundary and directional signs at all intersections and along roads and tracks. Advertising signs may be present.	Interpretation signs and regulatory notices frequently encountered. Boundary and directional signs at all intersections and along roads and tracks. Advertising signs present.	Unlimited.
Rules, regulations and law enforcement:	A strong and visible management presence. Frequent and regular on-site communication. Users commonly aware of management, rules and regulations.	Frequent and regular education, reinforcement or enforcement.	Constant education, reinforcement or enforcement
Presence of management and visitor infrastructure:	Built structures are large and readily apparent. They may be designed to blend into the surroundings. However, some may stand out. Some infrastructure may be provided as a focus for visitor activity.	Built structures are readily apparent and often designed to stand out. Infrastructure is usually provided in all public spaces and may be the focus of visitor activity.	Large, obvious and attention grabbing. Built structures dominate all senses. Unavoidable.