INTERAGENCY
VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

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VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Desired Conditions Guidebook Primer

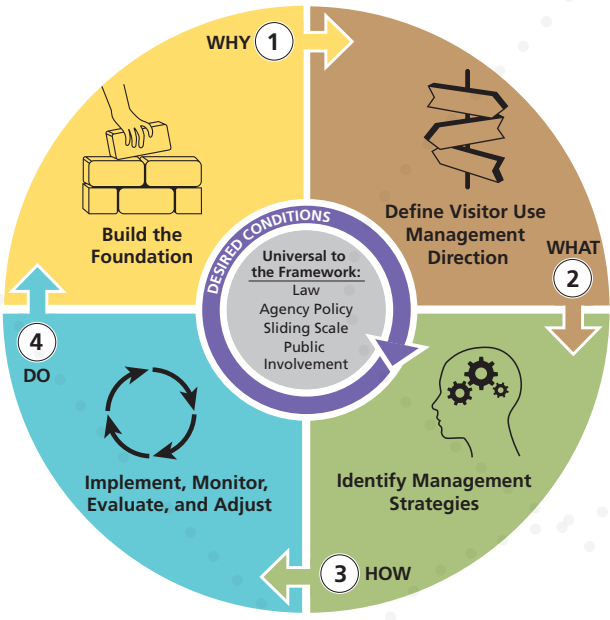
WHAT ARE DESIRED CONDITIONS?

Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services for a particular area. Variations of this term include desired future conditions, management direction, and recreation objectives.

Desired conditions statements provide long-term direction about resource conditions and visitor experiences. They are a critical component of the visitor use management (VUM) decision-making process because they guide other aspects of management. They allow managers to navigate changing visitor use, values, and financial, operational, and environmental dynamics while remaining true to a project area's ultimate vision or direction.

Desired conditions highlight those things that make a place special, unique, and distinct, such as sights, sounds, feelings, and functions.

Desired conditions integrated within the Visitor Use Management Framework



Desired conditions should:

- **Describe results or outcomes:** outline conditions rather than specific management actions.
- **Focus on visitor opportunities and resource conditions:** describe visitor opportunities and resource conditions that are relevant to and valued for the project area.
- **Consider the whole system:** describe resource conditions and visitor opportunities that contribute to ecological, social, and economic health and sustainability.
- **Look to the future:** describe future conditions, not necessarily what exists today.
- **Connect to the purpose or reason that an area was designated as a protected area:** align with the purpose or reason that an area was designated.
- **Reflect shared values:** reflect visitors', interested groups', and communities' values, needs, and desires.
- **Guide management action:** provide enough detail to guide management action.

WHY DEFINE DESIRED CONDITIONS?

Each area has unique resource conditions and experiences that should be highlighted and defined. Defining desired conditions guards against incremental or haphazard change and guides positive change; creates a consistent and agreed-upon future for those managing an area; and enables managers, interested groups, and communities to identify shared goals. Further benefits of desired conditions statements include:

- Guiding planning for the future.
- Clarifying relationships between purpose, resources, and experiences.
- Integrating resource conditions with visitor opportunities where appropriate.
- Allowing for comparison.
- Creating a forum for dialogue.
- Informing visitor capacity identification, as necessary.
- Guiding management action.
- Helping focus monitoring.
- Providing accountability, defensibility, and transparency.

HOW TO DRAFT DESIRED CONDITIONS?

Understanding the underlying values, beliefs, and preferences for an area and its resources is essential to crafting compelling and meaningful desired conditions statements. Key steps in drafting desired conditions include:

1. Review foundational information for the area. If there are already desired conditions for the area, determine whether they are sufficient to guide management or need to be refined.
2. Use the sliding scale of analysis to determine the level of specificity and complexity needed for the desired conditions statements.
3. Determine whether different desired conditions are needed for different areas or zones.
4. Incorporate values, beliefs, and preferences such as cultural significance, scenery, and experience.
5. Paint the picture, be creative, and seek inspiration.

Examples

- Recreation areas provide for a variety of developed and dispersed summer and winter recreation activities, accommodating a range of visitor skills and comfort levels. Developments and facilities generally are limited to those necessary to protect resources, provide for safety, enhance public benefit, and improve visitor experiences.
- Wildlife diversity in the corridor is recognized and managed as part of a healthy riparian ecosystem. High-quality habitat allows wildlife such as martens, fishers, bobcats, and white-tailed deer to disperse throughout the corridor
- Visitors experience an authentic historic landscape and can learn about changing land use, settlement patterns, and livelihoods. Visitors can explore historic districts, develop a sense of the past, and understand the unique stories of each district. Significant historic structures and features are protected to the extent possible.

For additional information and access to the full desired conditions guidebook, please visit https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/

Elements and steps of the Visitor Use Management Framework

1 WHY — Build the Foundation

Steps:

1. Clarify project purpose and need.
2. Review the area's purpose and applicable legislation, agency policies, and other management direction.
3. Assess and summarize existing information and current conditions.
4. Develop a project action plan.

Outcome: Understand why the project is needed, and develop the project approach.

2 WHAT — Define Visitor Use Management Direction

Steps:

5. Define desired conditions for the project area.
6. Define appropriate visitor activities, facilities, and services.
7. Select indicators and establish thresholds.

Outcome: Describe the conditions to be achieved or maintained and how conditions will be tracked over time.

3 HOW — Identify Management Strategies

Steps:

8. Compare and document the differences between existing and desired conditions, and, for visitor use-related impacts, clarify the specific links to visitor use characteristics.
9. Identify visitor use management strategies and actions to achieve desired conditions.
10. Where necessary, identify visitor capacities and additional strategies to manage use levels within capacities.
11. Develop a monitoring strategy.

Outcome: Identify strategies to manage visitor use to achieve or maintain desired conditions.

4 DO — Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, and Adjust

Steps:

12. Implement management actions.
13. Conduct and document ongoing monitoring, and evaluate the effectiveness of management actions in achieving desired conditions.
14. Adjust management actions if needed to achieve desired conditions, and document rationale.

Outcome: Implement management strategies and actions, and adjust based on monitoring and evaluation.