



Visitor Use Management on Federally Managed Lands and Waters:

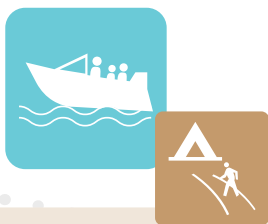
A POSITION PAPER TO GUIDE POLICY

Prepared by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council
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IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT

Outdoor recreation is fundamental to American culture. It connects people with nature and history, builds healthier minds and bodies, enhances bonds between family and friends, contributes to the quality of life and resiliency of local communities, and inspires and rejuvenates our spirits. Additionally, recreating outdoors helps visitors develop an understanding and sense of belonging to a real place and, thus, to act as citizen stewards of our collective natural and cultural heritage. Recreation and tourism also contribute greatly to local and regional economies.

Every year, more and more people seek out public lands and waters to pursue a growing variety of recreational experiences. To ensure that we all can continue to benefit from expanding recreational uses, visitors, managers, and citizens need effective ways to manage those uses so these special places, and the benefits they generate, persist for this and future generations. Visitor use management (VUM) is a flexible set of tools and strategies for managing recreational uses that supports appropriate public access to these valued places, while ensuring long-term viability of ecological and cultural conditions that make quality visitor experiences possible.



The council defines **visitor use management** as the proactive and adaptive process for managing characteristics of visitor use and the natural and managerial setting using a variety of strategies and tools to achieve and maintain desired resource conditions and visitor experiences.



COUNCIL BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND MISSION

The Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (the council) was chartered in 2011 and consists of representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and US Fish and Wildlife Service in the US Department of the Interior; the US Forest Service in the US Department of Agriculture; the US Army Corps of Engineers in the US Department of Defense; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the US Department of Commerce. Combined, these agencies manage millions of acres of federally owned public lands and waters and coastal estuaries.

The council is a collaborative forum for federal member land and water agencies created to develop, share, and leverage practical, science-based tools for managing outdoor recreation on America's most iconic and valued public lands and waters.

The council is designed to build a common language and institutional knowledge of management techniques, while efficiently sharing tools, training, technical assistance, and best practices.

During the past three decades, the federal agencies charged with managing our nation's lands and waters have gained substantial experience in balancing often-competing objectives of resource protection and providing high quality visitor opportunities; however, challenges remain. To meet these challenges, the council helps the agencies to share, enhance and leverage best practices, and to improve interagency consistency of approaches, cost-effectiveness, and the defensibility of decisions about how these treasured areas should be sustainably used.

Vision Statement: To Provide a unified voice for excellence in visitor use management on our nation's federally managed lands and waters to sustain resources and quality visitor experiences.



Mission Statement: To provide guidance on VUM policies and to develop legally defensible and effective interagency implementation tools for visitor use management. This includes guidance for planning, management, and monitoring specific to visitor use.

The council's primary purposes are to:

1. Develop interagency guidance for effective visitor use management programs that are efficient and legally defensible.
2. Identify strategies for improving institutional capabilities and professional competencies, including partnerships.
3. Develop shared tools and training, including a unified visitor use management framework, and monitor their effectiveness.
4. Improve internal and external communication strategies.

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

The primary position of the council is visitor use management is fundamental for maximizing benefits for visitors while achieving and maintaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences on federally managed lands and waters. Proactive planning for visitor use helps management agencies encourage access, improve experiences, and protect resource conditions and values. Responsive and effective visitor use management requires managers to:

- Identify desired conditions for resources, visitor experiences, and facilities/operations;
- Gain an understanding of how visitor use influences achievement of those goals; and
- Commit to active / adaptive management and monitoring of visitor use to meet those goals.

The process for visitor use management, outlined in the VUM framework, is conceptually consistent with existing frameworks for doing land management and planning, including *Visitor Experience and Resource Protection*, *Limits of Acceptable Change*, and *the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum*. The framework

provides cohesive guidance on four major elements for analyzing and managing visitor use on federally managed lands and waters. It is also intended to provide a legally defensible, transparent decision-making process that meets law and policy requirements, ensures agency accountability, and provides sound rationales upon which to base management decisions and actions.

Visitor capacity is a component of visitor use management and is the maximum amounts and types of visitor use that an area can accommodate while achieving and maintaining the desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that are consistent with the purposes for which the area was established. Since visitor capacity focuses on the amount of use, identifying and implementing visitor capacities is just one of many visitor use management strategies available to maintain or achieve desired conditions. Therefore, visitor capacity decisions are part of a more holistic approach to visitor use management and can only be made after desired conditions and other management strategies have been identified.

Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services that an agency strives to achieve and maintain in a particular area.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please see council website

<http://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov>

OVERVIEW OF COUNCIL RESOURCES



Communication

Outreach to share information on the council and visitor use management.



**Position Paper,
Volume One: Visitor
Use Management**



**Position Paper,
Volume Two:
Visitor Capacity**

Guidance for policy and the basic positions that inform council products and activities.



Visitor Use Management Framework

A planning process for visitor use management, which can be incorporated into existing agency planning and decision-making processes.

How-to guidebooks that support the framework in greater detail.



**Monitoring
Guidebook**

Helps managers work through the process of establishing key indicators and thresholds and setting up an effective program to monitor the indicators.



**Visitor Capacity
Guidebook**

Provides information that can help managers establish visitor capacity and identify strategies to manage use levels within capacity.



Training

On the key elements of these various guidance documents and contemporary visitor use management issues.