



INTERAGENCY
VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

VISITOR CAPACITY GUIDEBOOK
Managing the Amounts and
Types of Visitor Use to Achieve
Desired Conditions

Edition 1



WHAT IS VISITOR CAPACITY?

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 desired resource conditions and visitor experiences that are consistent with the purposes for which the area was established. There are two parts to visitor capacity:

- identification of visitor capacities, and
- identification of management strategies and actions to implement visitor capacity.

WHY IDENTIFY VISITOR CAPACITY?

- Managers of federal lands and waters strive to maximize benefits for visitors while achieving and maintaining desired conditions.
- Managing visitor access and use for recreational benefits while protecting resources is inherently complex.
- Managers must analyze not only the number of visitors but also where and when they go, what they do, and the impacts they leave behind.
- Proactive visitor use management, including addressing visitor capacity, continues to grow in importance as trends in outdoor recreation and visitor use are continually changing.

The council's *Visitor Capacity on Federally Managed Lands and Waters: A Position Paper to Guide Policy* states, "Federal managers need to address visitor capacity in many situations when required by law or when visitor use levels threaten the desired conditions of an area."

<https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/WhatGuidesIt>

WHAT IS THE VISITOR CAPACITY GUIDEBOOK?

This “Visitor Capacity Guidebook” is intended to expand on guidance from the council’s framework and to provide specific direction for identifying and implementing visitor capacity on federally managed lands and waters. This guidebook focuses on Element 3, Step 10 from the framework.

Chapter. 1: Introduction

Chapter. 2: When and Where to Identify Visitor Capacity

Chapter. 3: What is Visitor Capacity?

Chapter. 4: How to Identify Visitor Capacity

Chapter. 5: Implementing Visitor Capacity Management Strategies and Actions

Chapter. 6: Visitor Capacity Case Studies

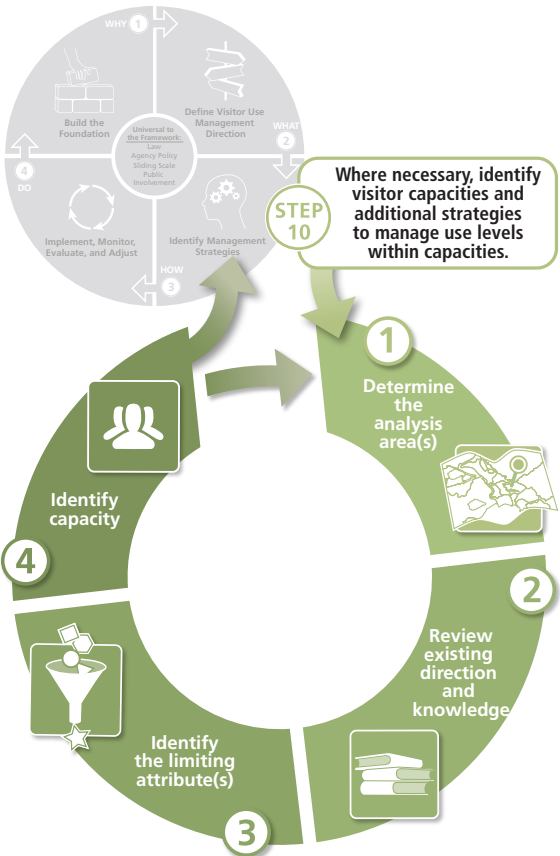


A lone rider with pack mules descend a trail.

VISITOR CAPACITY GUIDELINES

The framework and the visitor capacity guidebook discuss four guidelines to identify and implement visitor capacity (see graphic below). Visitor capacity is an outcome and component of visitor use management and unique to each project area.

Visitor Capacity Guidelines integrated within the Framework



Managers may need to determine appropriate allocations between a variety of uses or opportunities. Allocation is the process of distributing that capacity among a variety of uses or opportunities to achieve or maintain desired conditions. Information about the types of use to be allocated should be considered as the visitor capacity is being identified.



Visitors await the eruption of Old Faithful, Yellowstone National Park.

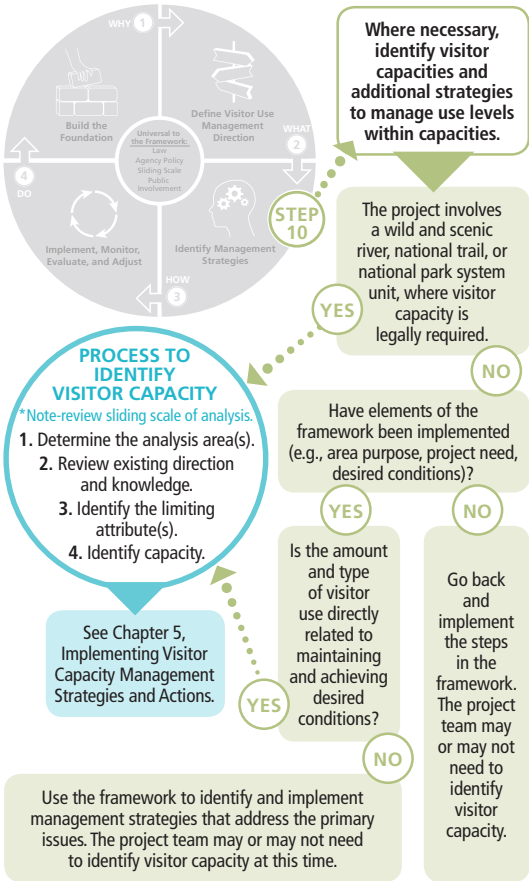
HOW TO IMPLEMENT VISITOR CAPACITY?

Once visitor capacity has been identified, the next step is to identify the management strategies and actions that will be most effective to implement the visitor capacity. Management strategies are general approaches for addressing visitor use management issues, while actions are specific ways of implementing management strategies. Management strategies and actions to implement visitor capacity exist along a continuum. From influencing to regulating visitor behavior, subtle to obvious and direct to indirect, the management strategies or actions should maintain or achieve desired conditions within the identified capacity.



A dogsledder rides across a snowy landscape.

Visitor Capacity Decision Tree



The council’s recommendations are designed to provide managers with flexibility to identify, interpret, and implement visitor capacities based on site-specific conditions. The visitor capacity decision tree can assist managers with navigating visitor capacity decisions . The major tenets of the council’s recommendations are:

- Managers should identify and implement visitor capacities when managing the amounts and types of visitor use directly related to effectively achieving and maintaining desired conditions.
- Managers must identify and implement visitor capacities when legally required.
- Decisions on visitor capacity should be based on the desired conditions of a specific area and should be directed by pertinent laws and agency policies.