Visual Contrast Rating System

Objective

Students will be able to:

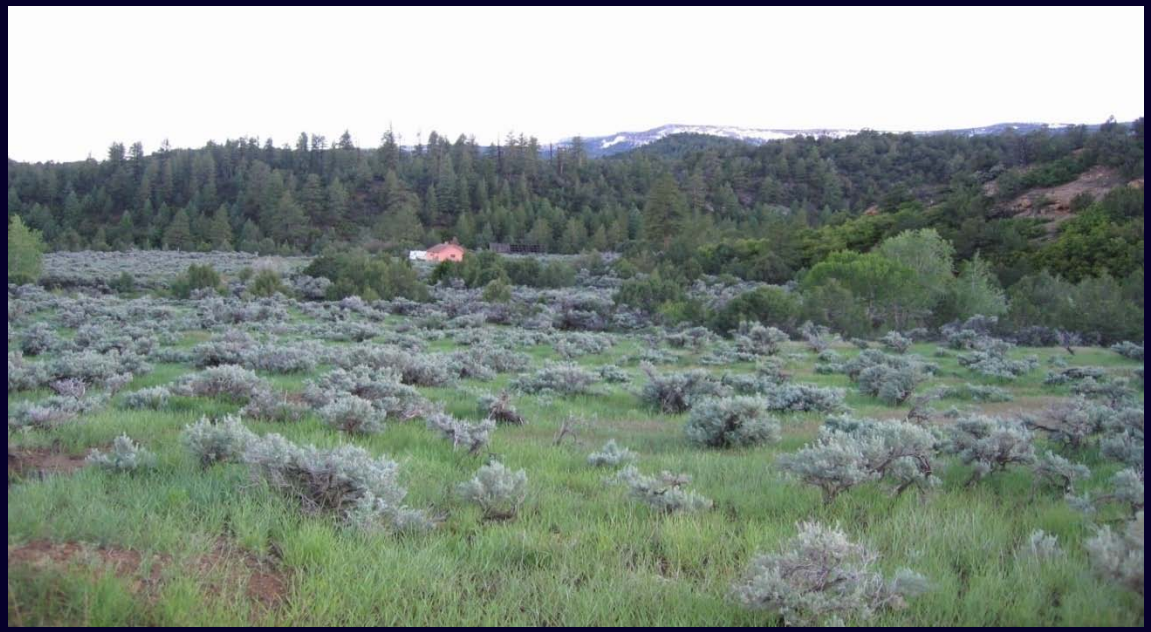
- Determine elements of a project that are inconsistent with VRM objectives
- Recommend measures to improve visual quality of a project

What is Contrast Rating?

- Systematic process to analyze potential visual impacts of proposed projects and activities

What is Contrast Rating?

- The degree to which a development adversely affects the visual quality of a landscape is directly related to the amount of visual contrast between it and the existing landscape character



What is Contrast Rating?

- The amount of contrast is measured by separating the landscape into major features
  - Land/Water, Vegetation, Structures
- Then predicting the amount of contrast in the *landscape character elements*
  - Form, Line, Color, Texture

What is Contrast Rating?

- Quickly reveals elements and features that cause the greatest visual impact
- A guide to methods to reduce the visual impact of a proposed project or activity

What is Contrast Rating?

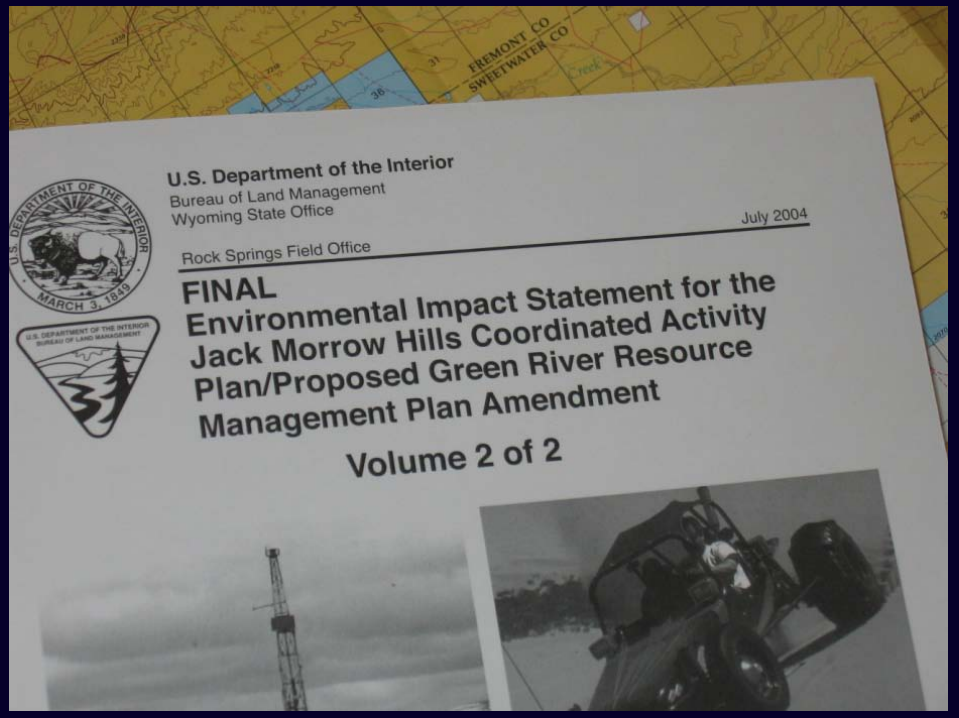
What is Contrast Rating?

Who Performs Contrast Ratings?

- Primarily intended to assist Bureau personnel not formally trained in the design arts to apply basic principles of design to resolve visual impacts
- Involve field office – not just visual resources
- Everyone!

When are they conducted?

- Emphasize early contact with the project proponent
  - Prior to project design being finalized (if possible)
  - Check RMP direction
  - Tied to NEPA



Where are ratings conducted

- Not by looking at photos or GIS on your computer!
- Emphasis on field evaluation
- Need to experience landscape to accurately perform contrast rating

Why are they conducted?

- Reduce visual impacts even if the proposed project meets VRM Objectives for the area

VRM Classes and Objectives

Class I

- Preserve the existing character of the landscape. Manage for natural ecological changes
- Change Allowed: Very Low
- Activities must not attract attention

Class II

- Retain the existing character of the landscape
- Change allowed: Low
- Activities may be visible but should not attract attention of the casual observer

VRM Classes and Objectives

Class III

- Partially retain the existing character of the landscape
- Change allowed: Moderate
- Activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer

Class IV

- Provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape
- Change allowed: High
- Activities may attract attention, may dominate the view, but are still mitigated

How are They Conducted?

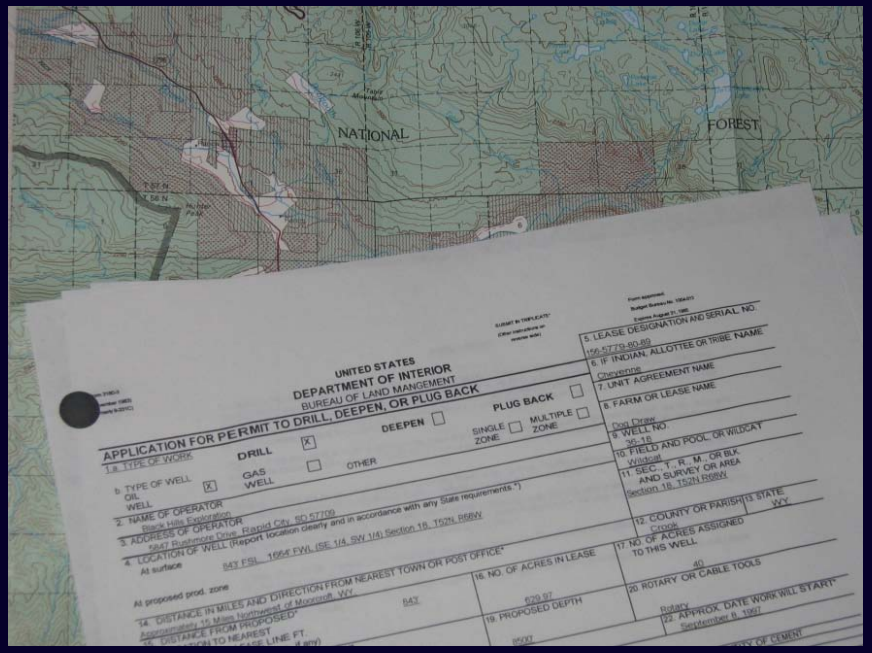
Five steps in process

1. Get a complete project description
2. Identify VRM Objectives from land use plan
3. Select Key Observation Points
4. Prepare Visual Simulations (optional)
5. Complete Visual Contrast Rating Worksheet

Step 1

Get a complete project description

- Emphasize early contact with project proponent
- Coach proponent on project design
- Proposal must be comprehensive



Step 2

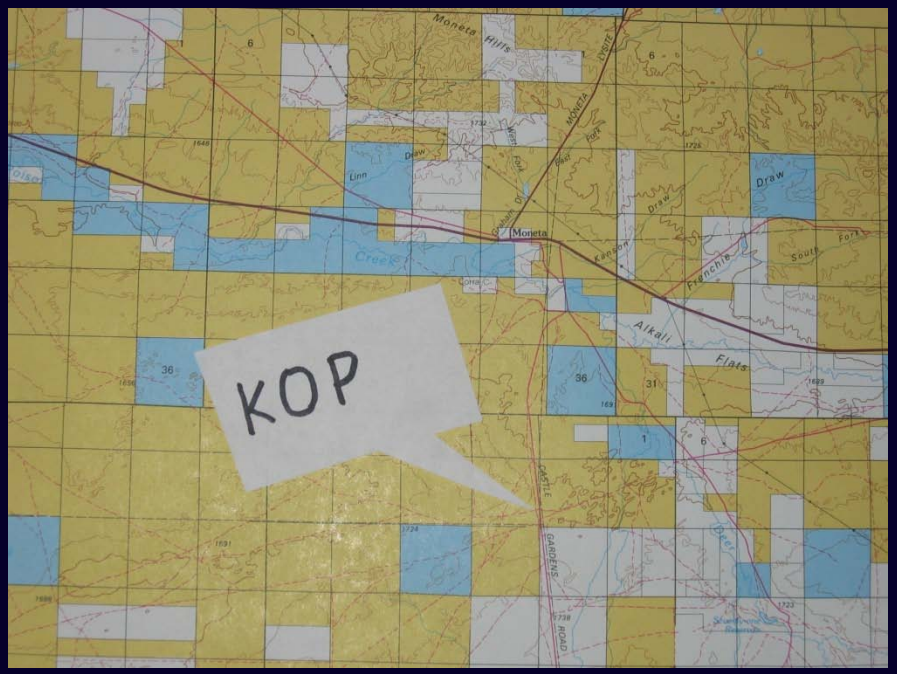
Identify VRM Objectives

- Familiarize yourself with land use plan
- Identify VRM objective
  - What is the existing management class for project location?
  - Does is specify if a contrast rating is required?
    - Do one anyway!
- Involve interdisciplinary team
- Understand what other resource issues are

Step 3

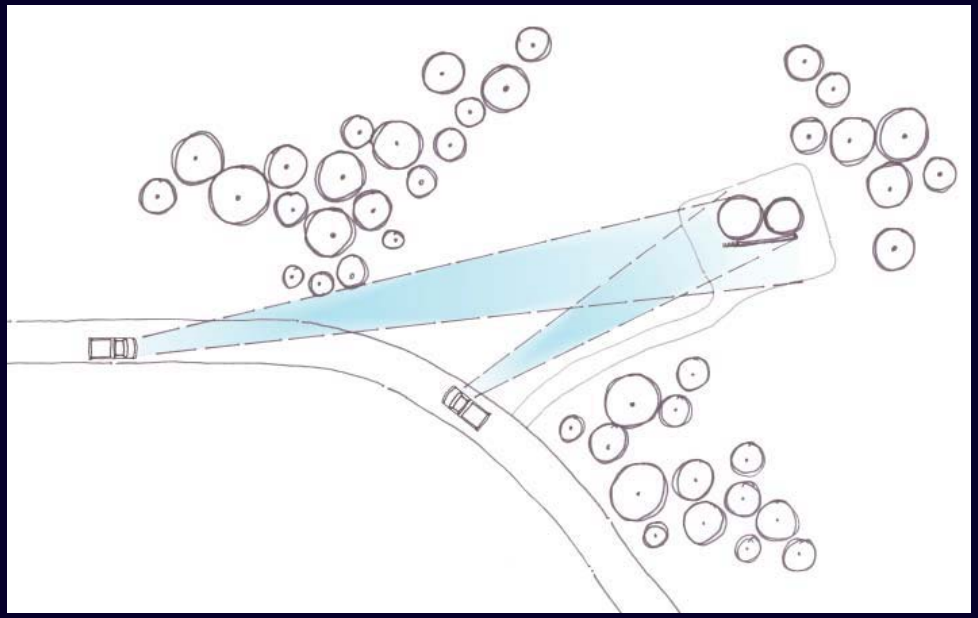
Select Key Observation Point (KOP)

- What is a KOP?
  - A critical viewpoint or place from which we analyze the visual impact of a Proposed Project



Step 3

- Types of KOPs
  - Single points
    - Trailheads, campgrounds, scenic overlook, parking lots, subdivisions
  - Linear
    - Roads, trails, rivers

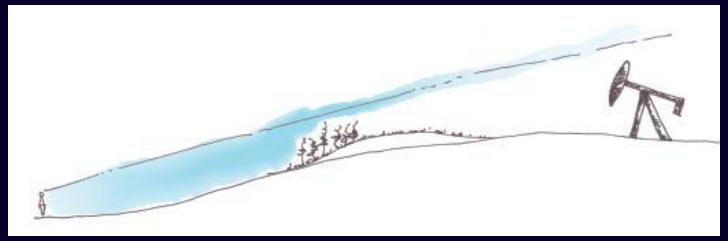


Step 3

- Examples of KOPs
  - Views From Communities or Subdivisions
  - Scenic Overlooks, Rivers & Roads
  - Important Vantage Points
  - Historic Trails
  - Point where view of proposed project is most revealing
  - Places from which a proposed project is seen by large numbers of viewers or critical viewers

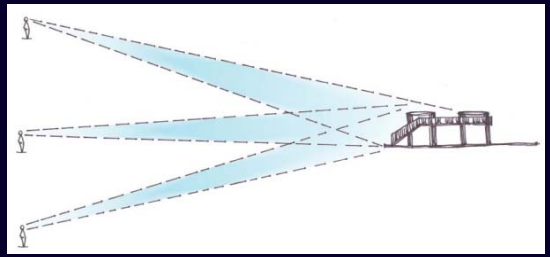
Step 3

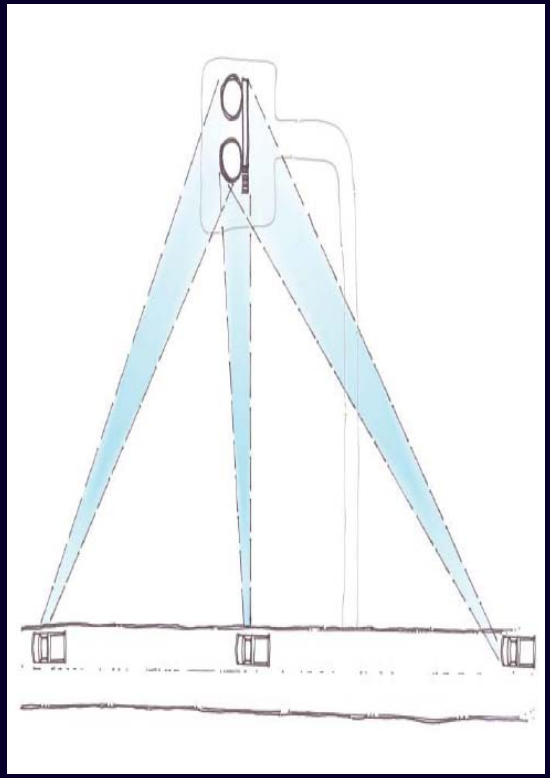
- How many are needed?
  - Linear projects should have more than one
  - Dependent on:
    - Size of project
    - Land use plan direction
    - Where it's visible from



Step 3

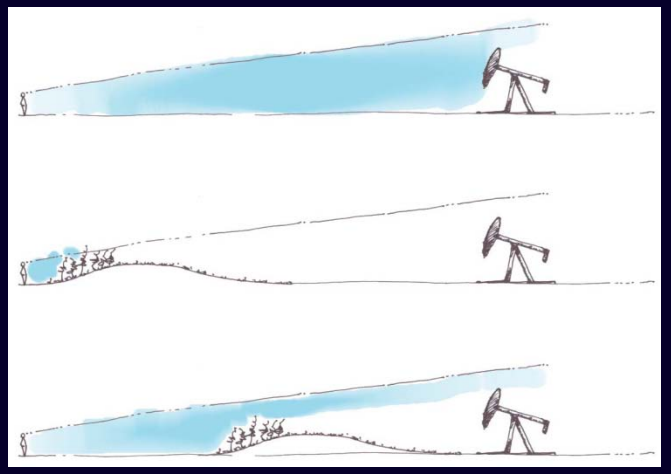
- When are they selected?
  - Early in the process
- Who selects them?
  - Interdisciplinary team
  - Input from proponent
  - Coordination with agencies
- Accuracy is important!
  - Location can sway results

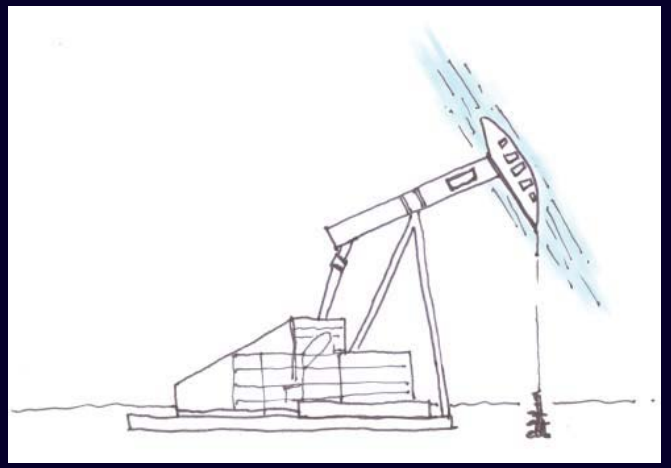




Step 3

- Factors to consider
  - Angle of observation
  - Number of viewers
  - Length of time the project is in view
  - Relative project size or scale
  - Season of use
  - Light conditions
  - Distance of view from project
  - Atmospheric conditions
  - Recovery time
  - Motion
  - Spatial relationships
  - What your eye can see





Project Area at a Distance

Project Area Close to Viewer

High Angle of Observation

Low Angle of Observation

Large Number of Viewers

Relative Project Size

Relative Project Size

Season of Use

Season of Use

Step 4

Prepare Visual Simulations (optional)

- Complex projects may benefit from visual simulations
- Provides visual picture of before and after
  - Prior to project being built
  - Highlights impacts and potential mitigation measures
  - Great way to illustrate impacts in EA
  - Seeing an image of the project is much more powerful than trying to imagine it
  - Helps eliminate bias
  - Allows all team members to see the project the same

Step 4

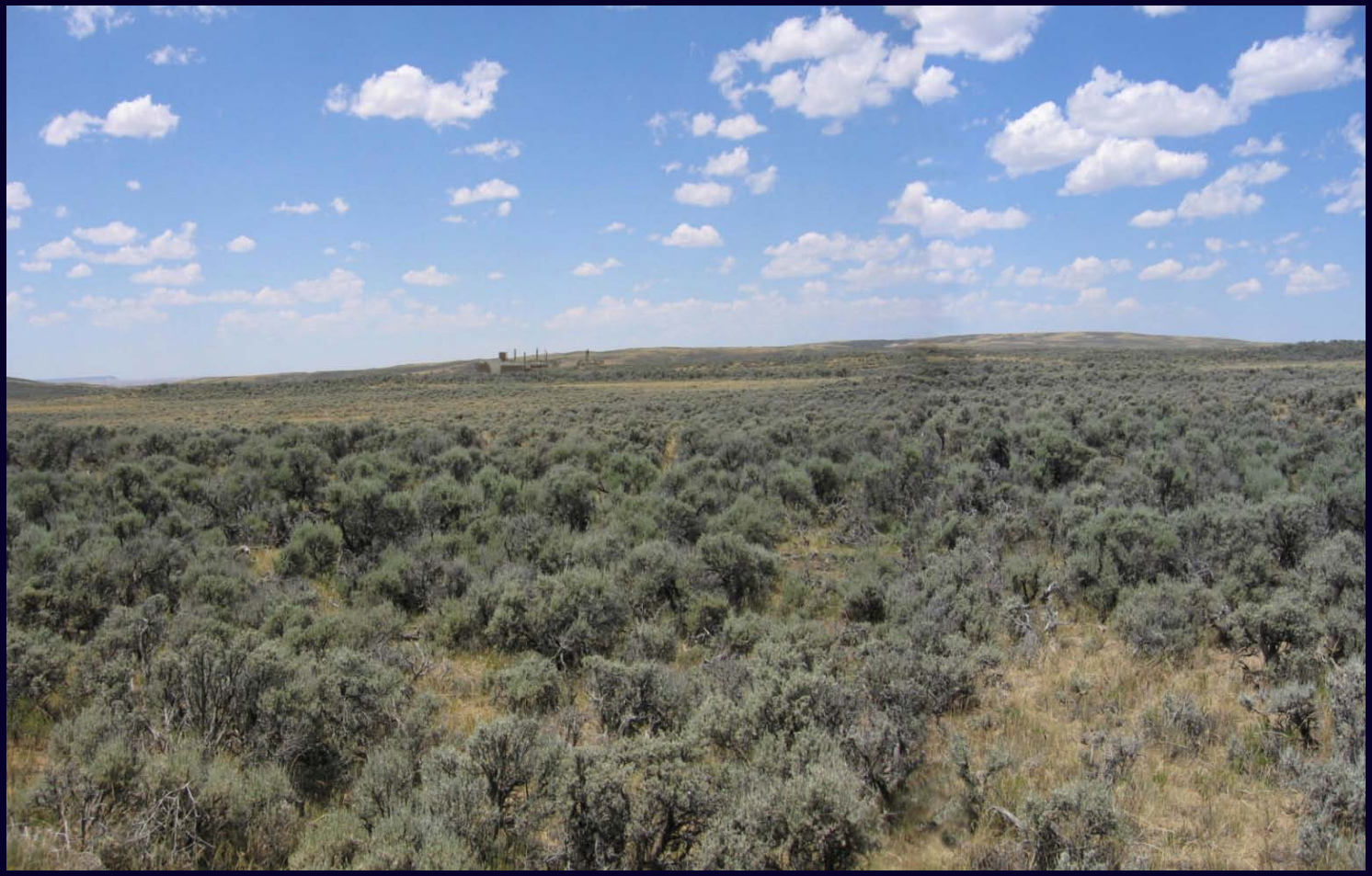
Proposed Project Site - Existing

Step 4

Proposed Project Site - Simulated

Step 4

Proposed Project Site - Mitigated



Step 5

Complete Contrast Rating Worksheet

- See Manual Handbook H-8431-1
- Quickly reveals elements and features that cause the greatest visual impact
- Not a pass/fail exercise
- Provides documentation for NEPA or project analysis
- Record for future action
- Specify potential redesign and mitigation measures

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Form 8400-4
(September 1985)

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

VISUAL CONTRAST RATING WORKSHEET

Date
District
Resource Area
Activity (program)

SECTION A. PROJECT INFORMATION

1. Project Name
2. Key Observation Point
3. VRM Class
4. Location
Township _____
Range _____
Section _____
5. Location Sketch

SECTION B. CHARACTERISTIC LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION

	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM			
LINE			
COLOR			
TEXTURE			

SECTION C. PROPOSED ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM			
LINE			
COLOR			
TEXTURE			

SECTION D. CONTRAST RATING ☐ SHORT TERM ☐ LONG TERM

1. DEGREE OF CONTRAST

ELEMENTS	FEATURES: LAND/WATER BODY (1)				VEGETATION (2)				STRUCTURES (3)			
	Strong	Moderate	Weak	None	Strong	Moderate	Weak	None	Strong	Moderate	Weak	None
Form												
Line												
Color												
Texture												

2. Does project design meet visual resource management objectives? ☐ Yes ☐ No (Explain on reverse side)

3. Additional mitigating measures recommended? ☐ Yes ☐ No (Explain on reverse side)

Evaluators' Names Dates

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Section A

Form 8400-4 (September 1985) UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT **VISUAL CONTRAST RATING WORKSHEET**	Date: Feb 24, 2004 District: N/A Resource Area: Lander Activity: Oil & Gas

SECTION A. PROJECT INFORMATION

1. Project Name: Well No 136	4. Location Township 29N Range 91W Section 21	5. Location Sketch
2. Key Observation Point 29/91 Sec 21: SESE		
3. VRM Class VRM Class IV		

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Section B

SECTION B. CHARACTERISTIC LANDSCAPE DESCRIPTION			
	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM	Gently rolling terrain, low hills	Low, continuous sagebrush cover, smooth, regular pattern	None noted in view toward the project from the KOP
LINE	Mostly horizontal undulating lines. A horizontal landscape	Weak horizontal lines created by changes in vegetative patterns	None noted in view toward the project from the KOP
COLOR	Light brown to buff where visible	Gray-green of sagebrush is dominant, mostly continuous	None noted in view toward the project from the KOP
TEX-TURE	Smooth, continuous	Medium to slightly coarse in immediate foreground to smooth/fine in middleground	None noted in view toward the project from the KOP

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Section C

SECTION C. PROPOSED ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION			
	1. LAND/WATER	2. VEGETATION	3. STRUCTURES
FORM	Flat, leveled pad(s), curvilinear road(s), narrow, linear form	Veg removed from pad, road(s), reclaimed veg low, sparce	Cylindrical tanks, rectangular separator unit. A dominant visual element
LINE	Where seen, pad appears as a distinct horizontal line, same with roads	Sharper line(s) where veg removed	Structures have vertical alignment and are visible
COLOR	Light brown to buff-colored pad(s) & road surfaces.	Tan to light buff most of year, light green in spring.	Carlsbad Canyon contrasts with darker gray of sagebrush
TEX-TURE	Smooth texture on pad(s) & road(s)	Smooth where re-established (grasses) Sage may re-establish in 20 years	Smooth texture of facilities a dominant feature of project

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Section D

SECTION D. CONTRAST RATING		SHORT TERM X LONG TERM												
ELEMENTS	1.Degree of Contrast	FEATURES												2. Does Project Design meet visual resource management objectives? Yes __X_ No ____ (explain on reverse)
		Land/Water Body				Vegetation				Structures				
		Strong	Moderate	Weak	None	Strong	Moderate	Weak	None	Strong	Moderate	Weak	None	3. Additional mitigating measures recommended. Yes __X_ No ____ (explain on reverse)
	Form			X				X			X			Evaluator's Names Date:
	Line		X				X			X				
	Color			X				X		X				Cimarron Chacon 7/16/04
	Texture			X				X		X				Allysia Angus

Degree of Contrast Criteria

None	Contrast no visible or perceived *Corresponds to VRM Class I*
Weak	Contrast seen but does not attract attention *Corresponds to Class II*
Moderate	Contrast attracts attention but does not dominate view *Corresponds to Class III*
Strong	Contrast demands attention and is dominant in the landscape *Corresponds to Class IV*

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Section D - Description

SECTION D. (Continued)
Comments from Item 2. The line created by the clearing for the road and drill pad creates a contrast that will attract attention. The installation of storage tanks and the separator unit will introduce vertical-aligned forms that contrast with the characteristic landscape. The structures will have a smooth texture as opposed to the coarse texture of surrounding sagebrush. The facilities introduce vertical lines which will contrast with the predominately horizontal landscape. The color of the tanks as proposed will contrast with the darker color of the dominant sagebrush.

Contrast Rating Worksheet

Section D – Additional Mitigation

Additional Mitigating Measures (See item 3)

1. As per agreement with company representatives, relocate drill pad 250 feet northwest behind/between low stabilized sand dunes.
2. Relocate access road behind/between stabilized dunes
3. Use low profile tanks a maximum of 12 feet high rather than the standard 18 foot tanks
4. Paint facilities a color compatible with sagebrush, the dominant veg species in the area

Visual Contrast Rating System

Conclusion/wrap-up

- Who
- What
- When
- Why
- How
- Where

Class Exercise