WHY MANAGE RECREATION?

Outdoor recreation is fundamental to American culture. Every year, more and more people travel to public lands and waters to pursue a growing variety of recreational activities. To continue to benefit from the opportunities created by expanding recreational use, this nationwide trend requires that all of us—visitors, managers, and citizens—adopt more effective ways to manage visitor access and use that ensure these special places, and the benefits they generate, persist for this and future generations.

Backpackers getting oriented before their hike

Enjoying a guided horseback riding opportunity

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.

INTERAGENCY
VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT
C O U N C I L

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

A Guide to Providing Sustainable Outdoor Recreation

Edition 1

WHAT IS THE VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK?

The Visitor Use Management Framework (the framework) is a process designed for federal managers to collaboratively develop, implement, and monitor strategies and actions to provide sustainable access to lands and waters. The intent, and ultimate desired outcome, is to provide high quality visitor experiences, while protecting natural and cultural resources. Responsive and effective visitor use management requires managers to:

- Identify desired conditions for resources, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services;
- 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 framework can be incorporated into existing federal agency planning and decision-making processes and is applicable across a wide spectrum of situations that vary in complexity and spatial extent from site-specific to large-scale planning efforts. The framework is a legally defensible and transparent planning and decision-making process that:

- Integrates applicable laws and policy requirements;
- Provides sound rationale upon which to base management decisions; and
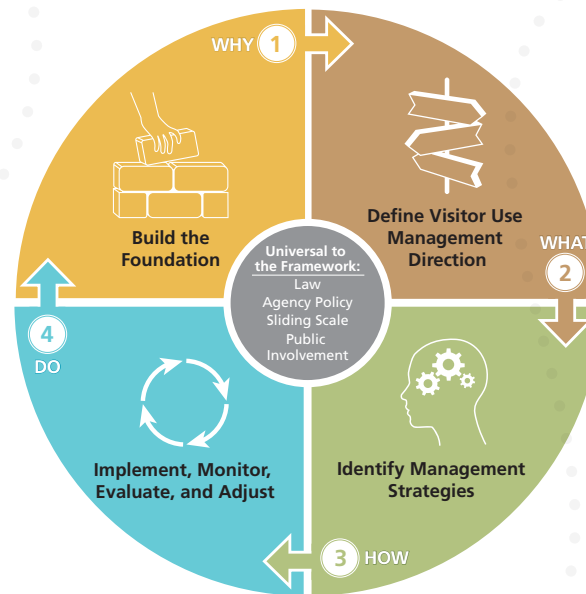- Facilitates adaptive management.
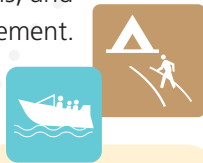
For more information, please see website visitorusemanagement.nps.gov

FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS, STEPS, AND OUTCOMES

The framework identifies four overarching elements with discrete steps under each. The graphic below illustrates the sequence (with a more detailed diagram on the back) and outcomes of these elements as well as the necessary steps in achieving each of the elements. It is important to note, these elements and steps are highly iterative in nature. The framework is intended to be applied in a flexible manner using the sliding scale concept. The strengths of this framework are that it is iterative, adaptable, and flexible.

Overview of the Visitor Use Management Framework

1 WHY — Build the Foundation

Universal to the Framework: Law, Agency Policy, Sliding Scale, Public Involvement

2 WHAT — Define Visitor Use Management Direction

3 HOW — Identify Management Strategies

4 DO — Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, and Adjust

Family exploring a trail

THE SLIDING SCALE APPROACH

A sliding scale is used to ensure the investment of time, money, and other resources for the planning effort is commensurate with the complexity of the project and the consequences of the decision. Issues with clearly small impacts usually require less depth and breadth of analysis than those with impacts of greater significance. Applying this 'sliding scale of analysis' seeks to match the investment made in analysis with the level of uncertainty and risk associated with the issues being addressed. The sliding scale is used in each element of the framework. Regardless of the significance of the situation, all framework steps still apply. That is, the process does not vary with project complexity, rather the investment of time and resources varies.

Use the following criteria to determine the level of analysis for an issue:

- Issue uncertainty: What is the level of uncertainty about the issue?
- Impact risk: Are there considerable threats to the quality of resource conditions and visitor experiences?
- Stakeholder involvement: What is the level of stakeholder interest in the issue?
- Level of controversy/potential for litigation: What is the level of controversy/potential for litigation?

Once the sliding scale of analysis level has been determined, it is then used to determine the amount of effort needed for each element and step.

Issue Complexity

Impact Risk

Stakeholder Involvement

Level of Controversy/Potential for Litigation