

# VISUALS / SCENERY

## Introduction

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The landscape in the Logan Creek area was formed by the continental ice mass, leaving behind a landform of scoured and rounded mountains. These mountains are mostly forested with dense stands of timber that offer limited natural texture, color, line, and variety in shape. Some natural openings occur on south and west aspects and along ridge tops. Wet areas near stream valley bottoms create other smaller openings. These landscapes are referred to as "common" landscapes where landforms and features are not of extraordinary or spectacular scenic quality. Unique features in the Logan Creek area include Tally Lake, Tally Mountain Gorge, Logan Creek from the falls to Tally Lake, and the Logan Creek portion of Star Meadows. Prior to European settlement, the greatest contributor to the variation in landscape character was fire. Stand replacement fires created large openings while mixed severity fires tended to create open stands of fire tolerant species. The most noteworthy fire occurred in 1919 in the headwaters of Logan Creek. This resulted in an opening of 21,726 acres (9858 in Logan area), which regenerated to dense stands of lodgepole pine. The last noteworthy fire occurred in 1940, which burned 3320 acres in the Sanko Creek drainage (3188 in the Logan area).

Since the early 1900s, man has modified the scenery of the Logan Creek area. The first logging began in the lower elevations on gentle terrain. Large Douglas-fir and western larch trees were harvested to meet the demand for railroad ties. Much of this timber was harvested from land that had recently burned over. More intensive timber management activities and associated roading began in the 1960s. Road construction and harvesting have taken place since then in nearly every drainage with the majority occurring in the 1970s and 80s in response to a mountain pine beetle epidemic. Fire suppression has also played a significant role in changes to the scenery.

The Logan Creek landscape can be viewed from an infinite number of viewpoints when traveling through the area on the many roads and trails. The entire area cannot be viewed as a whole from any one point; however, the area is viewed in succession while traveling through it.

### **Differences Between the DEIS and FEIS**

This Visuals/Scenery section of the FEIS differs from the same section in the DEIS in that analysis for the new Alternative F was included. Some sentences were changed or rearranged for reader clarity.

## Information Sources

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Information for the visuals and scenery resource were gathered systematically from established viewpoints. These viewpoints are described in greater detail below.

## Analysis Area

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The analysis area for the visual and scenic resources is the same as described for the vegetation resource. For this analysis, several potential viewing locations were considered. Three viewpoints were chosen as representative of the spectrum of views of the area and are the basis for analysis and modeling of the various alternatives. These viewpoints are described in detail below.

## Affected Environment

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### INTRODUCTION and REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Analysis and evaluation of the visual resource for this project applies a process described in Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management (USDA Forest Service 1995c). This system provides for the evaluation of physical features of the landscape called scenic attractiveness classes together with the levels of concern people have for scenery. This information is synthesized to develop Scenic Integrity Levels (SILs). The Flathead National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan established Scenic Integrity Levels for each Management Area (called Visual Quality Objectives or VQOs in the Plan). The proposed actions are within a variety of management areas. The following table shows Scenic Integrity Levels established in the Plan. The guidelines for meeting these levels are described in the Landscape Aesthetics Handbook.

Refer to the Forest Plan for locations of the various Scenic Integrity Levels. In general, the visible parts of the project area are specified as High, Moderate, Low, and Very Low SILs. The Forest Plan identifies the assigned scenery levels for each of the Management Areas. This information is displayed in the following table for the Management Areas present in the Logan Creek area.

**Table 3-95. Scenic Integrity Levels for Management Areas**

VQOs - Scenic Integrity Levels	Description
Retention - High	Refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears" intact. Deviations may be present but must repeat form, line, color, texture, and pattern common to the character so completely that they are not evident.
Partial Retention - Moderate	Refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears slightly altered." Noticeable deviations must remain visually subordinate to the landscape character being viewed.
Modification - Low	Refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character "appears moderately altered." Deviations begin to dominate the valued landscape character being viewed but they borrow valued attributes such as size, shape, edge effect and pattern of natural openings, vegetative type changes or architectural styles outside the landscape being viewed. They should be compatible or complementary to the landscape character.
Maximum Modification - Very Low	Scenic Integrity "appears heavily altered." Deviations may strongly dominate the landscape character. They may not be appropriate in shape, edge effect, or patterns. However, deviations must be shaped and blended with landforms so that elements such as unnatural edges or landings do not dominate the composition.
Unacceptable Modification - Unacceptably Low **	This scenic integrity level refers to landscapes where the valued landscape character being viewed appears extremely altered. Deviations are extremely dominant and borrow little if any form, line, color, texture, pattern, or scale from the landscape character. Landscapes at this level of integrity need rehabilitation. This level should only be used to inventory existing integrity. It must not be used as a management objective.

\*\* There are no areas in Logan Creek classed at this Scenic Integrity Level.

**Table 3-96. Scenic Integrity Level by Management Area (i.e., visual goals for Management Areas as outlined in the Forest Plan).**

Management Area	Emphasis/Location	Scenery Integrity Levels
2A	Area Adjacent to Tally Lake	High
2C	Dispersed Recreation (trail corridors)	High
4	Tally Lake Campground	Maintained to the Extent Possible
5	Scenic Area North of Tally Lake	High
7	Roaded Timber Lands in Visually Sensitive Areas	Moderate
9	Whitetail Deer Winter Range	Moderate
12	Riparian Areas	Moderate
13 and 13A	Elk and Mule Deer Winter Range	Low
15	Timber Production with Roads	Low to Very-Low
15B	Timber Production w/ consideration for X-C skiing	Low

**Historical Conditions and Existing Conditions**

The area has been subject to natural wildland fires for the last several thousand years. Fire history studies indicate much of this landscape burned in a series of large stand-replacing

wildland fires. Over time, these areas have become densely forested. Currently, patterns or modifications to the landscape due to fire are not evident to the average visitor. According to the Logan Creek fire history described in the vegetation and fire and fuels sections, no large wildland fires have occurred in the project area in the last 62 years.

Timber harvesting over the last 20 to 30 years has created some obvious alterations to the landscape. In most areas the effects of timber harvesting meet the scenery intent of the Forest Plan. The Scenic Attractiveness Class is rated as typical (common) to the Forest. Based upon review of the Forest Plan, the concern or sensitivity level for the scenery is rated as moderate to low.

### **Viewpoint Descriptions**

Viewpoints used for this analysis were selected based on the number of viewers and opportunities for viewing the area. These points are all located on roads that are open to public use yearlong. Existing vegetation adjacent to roads plus topography combine to screen views of much of the project area.

The following describes the viewpoints that will be used for further analysis of the effects of proposed management activities on the scenery in the area. A viewpoint location map is available for review in Exhibit I-1.

*Viewpoint One* - This viewpoint consists of the Tally Lake Campground and the area along the north shore road (2895) of Tally Lake. These areas have concentrated public use, and there is a high concern for scenery. The campground vegetation is dominated by large Douglas-fir and western larch trees (old growth). The understory is mostly saplings and brush that provides some privacy screening between campsites. Many man-made features are visible, but because of their location, color and size, they are visually dominated by the main attractions of Tally Lake, Logan Creek, and the large trees in the area. The north shore road provides for a pleasant drive with views of the lake, hardwoods below the road, and large Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine trees above the road. Views above the road are mostly of the immediate foreground because of the dense understory and the steepness of the slope.

*Viewpoint Two* - This is a Forest Plan monitoring viewpoint located at the junction of Highway 93 and the Farm to Market road. Highway 93 is the route from Whitefish to Eureka and north into Canada, so the numbers and sensitivity of viewers is high. Also many winter recreationists use this route to access the Round Meadows cross-country ski trails west of this junction. Seen from here looking west is Johnson Peak, Adams Mountain, Keith Mountain to the northwest (background), and the lower ridges of the Round Meadows area (middle ground). Foreground viewing consists of agricultural land and the mixed conifer/deciduous forested area along the Stillwater River corridor. The existing visual condition of this area is characterized by rolling topography and some vegetative variety in a texture-dominated landscape. The ridges of Johnson and Adams Mountains create the dominant horizontal lines and patterns found in the area seen from this viewpoint. The natural openings on the lower slopes of Johnson add some variety to the scenery. Past timber management activities are obvious from here as well as other places in the Stillwater Valley. Because of the lodgepole

pine component, much of the area was subject to the effects of the mountain pine beetle and subsequent roading and timber harvesting, especially on Adams Mountain.

*Viewpoint Three* - This viewpoint is located on the Bill Creek road (2942). This road is open to public use year round and is a popular loop road connecting to the Logan Creek road and going over Reid Divide down to Mountain Meadows/Tally Lake and also connecting to the Farm to Market road near Kalispell. This wide spot in the road at the top of a skyline yarded clear cut makes it possible to safely pull off and enjoy a panoramic view of Ashley Divide, the Bill Creek drainage, and the Meadow Creek drainage. Seen in the immediate foreground are pine grass and tree seedlings. Many harvested areas are evident in all viewing distance zones, but are mostly subordinate in the overall view. Some geometrically shaped harvest units on Ashley Mountain are likely to attract viewers' attention, but do not dominate the view nor hold the viewers attention for long. Areas of private land on Ashley Mountain have been harvested leaving straight-line edge effects along the property boundaries (section lines). These edge effects are softened where they are adjacent to other harvested areas, but it is still obvious where the different ownerships border.

*Management Area 2A and 2C Trails* - The trails in the Logan Creek area offer a wide range of diverse viewing opportunities. Views vary from spectacular scenery such as the rock cliffs in the Tally Mountain Gorge located in Management Area 2A to views of timber management and roads (Management Area 2C) in the Bill and Meadow Creek areas. Views along the trails can vary from little evidence of man's influence on the scenery (except for trail clearing activities) to the trails using and crossing existing roads and passing through timber harvest units. Views of timber management can be seen in the foreground where trails pass through harvested areas as well as in the back and middle ground where removal of vegetation has created openings and vistas.

The following table shows the existing conditions for the viewpoints in the project area.

**Table 3-97. Viewpoint existing conditions.**

Locations	Existing Visual Condition Rating
Viewpoint One	Moderately Altered
Viewpoint Two	Heavily Altered
Viewpoint Three	Heavily Altered

### **Other Viewpoints**

The existing visual condition of other portions of the project area, as viewed from many travel routes, meets the Scenic Integrity Levels as shown in the LRMP. A variety of silvicultural practices from clear cuts to partial cuts have been implemented throughout much of the area.

The option of using the upper slopes of Big Mountain as a viewpoint was considered and some analysis was done using maps, digital photography, and aerial photography. The main viewing attraction from this point consists of the Flathead Valley and Whitefish Lake. From Big Mountain, portions of the Logan Creek area seen include Johnson Peak and Tally

Mountain. The Logan Creek drainage itself is not visible. Many harvest units are evident during the winter months when blanketed by snow that would not be readily seen during summer months. In general, most of the harvesting seen from Big Mountain meets Forest Plan Scenic Integrity Levels (SILs) of low/very low for Management Area 15. Some contrasting horizontal and vertical lines created by roads and geometrically shaped harvest units are evident.

The viewpoint from Big Mountain was not carried forward into the analysis primarily due to the long viewing distance (approximately 14 to 20 miles), the small amount of the Logan area seen from Big Mountain, and the variety of changes to the vegetation form proposed over the entire landscape in the Logan Creek project. Changes to the scenery in the Logan Creek area as seen from Big Mountain would, for the most part, be unnoticed even under the Proposed Action Alternative that removes the most vegetation from the landscape.

## Environmental Consequences

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Each of the action alternatives involves prescriptions and management activities that would result in a change from the existing character of the area. All of the activities of the proposed action alternatives are designed to meet the scenery levels as allocated in the Flathead LRMP.

The following information describes the short-term effects or changes as a result of implementation of the action alternatives as seen from the viewpoints.

Techniques to lessen visual impacts would be applied to meet the guidelines of the various levels of scenic integrity as shown in the Forest Plan. These measures are also employed to manage the landscape in order to meet the scenery goals for the short-term (up to four years) and long-term time frames.

Openings created by timber harvest and road construction have impacts on scenery. These impacts are brought about by contrasts created between natural forested landscapes and managed landscapes. These contrasts consist of changes in color, form, line, and texture of the soil and vegetation that have effects that are based on human perception. Past human activity has affected the scenery in the Logan Creek area to varying degrees.

Effects on scenery from timber harvest and related activities would vary in duration and intensity corresponding to the tree cover left on site after harvesting. Clearcutting and seed tree reserve (light retention) silvicultural methods leave the least amount of vegetation and therefore create contrasts between natural and managed landscapes. This can vary depending on the viewers' location, steepness of the slope, and the position of the harvested area on the slope. Shelterwood, group selections, and commercial thinnings (moderate to heavy retention) leave more vegetation and appear more natural over time and add variety to the scenery. This is especially true when these methods are used adjacent to older harvested areas.

Definitions of tree retention levels, such as light dispersed or moderate dispersed, are presented in the vegetation section of this document.

The longest lasting visual disturbance is caused by soil exposure and displacement from road construction, tractor skid trails, and skyline corridors. The appearance of road construction depends upon topography, presence or lack of screening vegetation, the color contrast between soil and undisturbed areas, and the ability to restore or revegetate road cuts and fill areas. Roads constructed through or along the tops of clearcuts typically stand out when viewed in the foreground or middle ground viewing zones. Given time, revegetation of visible road cut and fill slopes, as well as trees growing in the clearcuts or openings, can ameliorate the soil/vegetation contrast situation. Opportunities to minimize impacts to the scenery are greatest on tractor ground (slopes 40 percent and less) because unit size, configuration, and silvicultural prescriptions can be manipulated more effectively to screen disturbances.

The effects of harvest on scenery can also be influenced by the seasonal changes in vegetation condition and seasonal color contrast. Viewing opportunities can exist in winter months when deciduous plants have shed their foliage, while these same opportunities would not exist in the summer months when dense foliage can obstruct views. Changes in autumn color patterns draw attention to harvested areas that may not contain the same colors as surrounding timber stands. This is especially true in stands that have been regenerated with western larch. Harvested areas with less than 30 percent tree cover draw attention when snow covered. Harvest units that are inconspicuous other times of the year can totally dominate a landscape during the winter months.

Disturbances to vegetation and soil begin to recover almost immediately. The duration of this process is directly related to the extent of disturbance. In two or three years, herbaceous vegetation would cover most sites. Within 25 to 30 years, tree cover would grow to the point where many roadside views are screened and the impact on the scenery would be generally unnoticed except for variances in tree heights. While harvested areas would rehabilitate over time, roads would continue to impact the scenery.

### **Direct and Indirect Effects of Alternative A (No Action)**

Due to no removal of vegetation or prescribed burning, the process of forest succession would continue. The areas that have been heavily to moderately altered by past timber harvesting would blend into the landscape over time, but they would retain much of their current form and line for several decades. This is assuming the area remains unaffected by wildfire. Tree mortality from insects and disease would be more evident in much of the area than if one of the action alternatives were implemented. Trees killed by insects, other hazard trees, and wind thrown trees in the Tally Lake Campground would be evaluated and removed on a yearly basis. Alternative A would not reduce the risk of stand-replacing wildfire. Fuels would continue to build up from tree mortality and undergrowth creating a higher risk of catastrophic fire than the action alternatives. In the event of such an occurrence, visual change to the landscape would be dramatic. This change may be naturally appearing, but fires of large magnitude may be visually unappealing to some viewers, and could create vast expanses of even-aged stands with little visual diversity that would exist for many decades.

### **Direct and Indirect Effects Common to All Action Alternatives**

The direct and indirect effects to scenery for Alternatives B, C, D, E, and F as seen from the critical viewpoints are discussed below. In the short term, implementation of these alternatives would create changes to the visual condition of the project area. Openings in the canopy of various sizes resulting from seed tree and shelterwood harvests would be visible. The prescriptions call for leaving a range of 5 to 180 trees per acre, thus softening the changes from existing conditions. The proposed treatment areas would be interspersed throughout the canopy of the forested areas.

Depending on burning conditions, the results of prescribed burns may change the color of the overstory canopy from green to red and then later to shades of gray. Low intensity fires have short-term effects, while a high-intensity fire requires greater healing time in tree ecosystems. Those different vegetation structures would occur in a mosaic pattern across the project area. In the long term, the combination of proposed harvesting with the prescribed burns would add diversity and interest to the vegetation patterns of the area because the burning and harvesting would result in a mosaic of openings and forested areas of different ages, densities, and size classes. This would reduce the artificial appearance caused by sharp contrasts from clear cuts to adjacent uncut areas, plus raise the level of scenic integrity. These activities would create a more open park-like appearance for people traveling through the area. Short-term changes may include views of stumps, red slash, and changes in soil color and reduction of the understory vegetation. Over time, those short-term disturbances would be softened due to vegetation growth. By removing trees and vegetation from the foreground, viewing of the middle ground and background would be enhanced.

All of the action alternatives involve harvesting up to 235 acres in Management Area 2-C. Harvest units or portions of harvest units 20, 71, 72, 73A, 75, 110, 137, and 137A have trails running through them. New road construction is proposed for access to units 99, 99A (0.1 mile), 137, and 137A (0.46) miles within MA 2C. Trail #800 is located on an existing closed road (313U) that is proposed for lengthening to access units 100 and 100A through 99 and 99A. This road would be a temporary road (#13) that would be obliterated after it has served its purpose as a log haul route. This road would not affect the trail visually, but may create conflicts between logging traffic and trail users during project implementation.

Road 10437A is proposed to be extended (temp road #18) to access harvest units 137 and 137A. This road would cross trail #800 in the proposed units. There would be a short-term impact on the scenery where the road crosses the trail and where new timber harvest activities can be seen from the trail corridor. Safety of trail users would be a concern until harvesting is completed and the road has been obliterated. The trail users would see bare mineral soil where the road was located until the area has re-vegetated. Stumps and logging debris would also be visible until the grasses, shrubs, and tree regeneration have grown enough to provide screening. In the long term the viewing opportunities would be enhanced. Open park-like conditions would be created offering longer views into the middle and background distance zones. Large trees (20 to 25 per acre) would be left in all harvest units located in Management Area 2C except for unit 20. Due to tree species and size there is not an opportunity to leave large character trees in this unit. Foreground viewing would suffer a short-term impact as described earlier, but a positive feature would be the creation of vistas and background

viewing opportunities of the Whitefish Divide. This would be an improvement over the existing tunnel effect the viewer feels while hiking this trail.

During the analysis it was found that some of the harvest activities would improve the scenery. This was due to the elimination of straight lines along roads and contrasting edges where proposed harvesting is adjacent to older harvested areas. Irregularly-shaped proposed units and the variety of numbers of retention trees seem to maximize the amount of edge which results in a more textured landscape with horizontal and vertical diversity. As the level of diversity increases, the visual absorption capability increases. In other words, the more acres treated, the more natural it appears from long viewing distances.

### **Effects Specific to Alternatives B, C, D, E, and F**

*Viewpoint 1 (Tally Lake Campground Area)* - Views in the campground are not expected to change appreciably. Some dispersed small openings will be visible throughout the area, and some individual trees would be removed. Tree stumps would be visible, but slash would be removed or treated immediately. A negative impact would be the short-term loss of some screening vegetation between individual campsites reducing camper's seclusion until the openings created by selective harvest would encourage the growth of young trees. Along road 2895, burn #200 would be seen in the foreground. Short-term effects would be visible to drivers along the road, which include hand piles, blackened tree boles, and red needles from scorching and blackened duff layer. Thistle and mullan would be expected to grow where hand piles were burned. In the long term, burning would enhance the viewing opportunities by increasing visual penetration into the timber stand and maintaining a dominance of mature forest character and vegetative texture. The foreground would have an open park-like appearance. Ground vegetation that depends on fire for regeneration would be rejuvenated adding color and diversity.

*Alternatives B, E, and F - Viewpoint 2 (Highway 93 and junction with Farm to Market Road)* - Several proposed units are visible from this viewpoint and have varying degrees of tree retention. Depending on the viewer's location along the road, many different views are possible. Proposed harvest units and portions of units visible from or near this viewpoint in Alternatives B and E include 17, 17A, 19A, 20, 107 and 108 (17, 19A, 107, and 108 in Alternative F). Light dispersed tree retention in units 17, 17A, 19A, and 20 would cause a dramatic change to the scenery on Johnson Peak (background viewing). These units would create large openings that would attract the viewer's attention. Some straight-line edge effects would also be visible, especially on the southern boundaries of units 17A and 19A. The new system road #18 would also be visible where it passes through these two units. These effects would be even greater during the winter months when snow creates more contrast between cut and uncut stands of trees. Because more trees are retained in units 107 and 108 (moderate dispersed retention) and they are adjacent to three older harvest units, the views would be enhanced from the existing condition. This combination of units breaks up straight lines and increases vegetative texture.

*Alternative C – Viewpoint 2 (Highway 93 and junction with Farm to Market Road)* - Units 107, 108, and 20 would be seen under this alternative. As described under alternative B, units 107 and 108 would improve the visual landscape by blending together old cutting units and lessening the line edge effect. Also, system road #18 would not be constructed to access the

units dropped from this alternative. Unit 20 would appear in the farthest background and would form a straight-line edge effect along the ridge top. Due to the long viewing distance, the remainder of the unit edge would not be as noticeable.

Alternative D – Viewpoint 2 (Highway 93 and junction with Farm to Market Road) - Units 107 and 108 are the only units visible under this alternative. These units would improve the views as described earlier by connecting the existing units to each other, thus reducing the negative impacts of straight boundary edges.

Alternatives B, C, D, E, and F - Viewpoint 3: (Bill Creek Road) - Numerous proposed harvest units would be visible from this viewpoint in all viewing distance zones. All of the proposed harvest units will have approximately 20 to 25 large leaf trees per acre (moderate dispersed retention). By leaving this amount and size of tree cover, texture is retained, especially in the middle ground viewing zones. The existing dense tree cover would have a more open look thus having a feathering effect adjacent to existing harvested units. These harvested areas would be of sufficient density and height to subdue soil color contrast and tree bole edge effect. Changes to the scenery would vary only slightly from one alternative to another. Alternatives C and D would remove less vegetation than do alternatives B, E, and F. The differences between alternatives to the scenery would be very difficult to distinguish by the average viewer. In 10 to 15 years, tree growth would limit views to the immediate foreground at this viewpoint.

## **REGULATORY CONSISTENCY**

The No Action alternative and the proposed activities in the action alternatives would comply with the visual resource objectives in the Forest Plan for all Management Areas in the long term.