



VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT Fact Sheet

Land and water managers from across the United States and Canada have similar goals: Providing high-quality outdoor recreation experiences and protecting natural and cultural resources as visitor use increases and public expectations change. Managing people and places requires a comprehensive approach that considers community vitality, individual and collective connections to the outdoors, and the resilience of natural and cultural resources.

DEFINITIONS

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT

Visitor use management is 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.

VISITOR CAPACITY

A component of visitor use management, is the maximum amounts and types of visitor use that an area can accommodate while achieving and maintaining desired resource conditions and visitor experiences consistent with the purposes for which the area was established.

VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK (VUMF)

The Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (IVUMC) is made up of six federal land and water management agencies: BLM, NPS, USFS, NOAA, USFWS, and USACOE. Representatives from these agencies work together to develop guidance for consistent planning and implementation of visitor use management regardless of jurisdiction. The council published the 2016 Visitor Use Management (VUM) Framework that outlines four core elements and associated steps for visitor use management planning regardless of scale. They also published associated guidebooks on desired conditions, visitor capacity, and monitoring.



VUMF Applicability beyond U.S. Federal Lands

While the elements, steps, definitions, and resources in the VUM Framework were developed specifically for the agencies involved in the IVUMC, the concepts are applicable in a variety of settings and at different scales.

The VUM Framework is an approach grounded in research for proactive and adaptive recreation planning to connect people to the outdoors and protect important natural and cultural resource values. The elements and steps in the VUM Framework can be thought of as best practices for visitor use management planning. While the VUM Framework was developed specifically for recreation planning on federal lands and waters, the concepts are applicable to any type of outdoor recreation setting. Several state, provincial, and local agencies and Parks Canada have adopted the VUMF to guide visitor experience and conservation planning.

RESOURCES

- VUM “Quick” Guide: A concise guide that outlines the key points of visitor use management and helps practitioners formulate an approach that works for their situation.
- VUM Community of Practice: A semi-structured virtual gathering for practitioners to connect, share examples, and get advice from each other. Community of practice meetings are quarterly and open to anyone.
- VUM Discussion Forum: A SORP member forum where practitioners can ask questions, share resources, and learn from each other.
- VUM Foundations Training: Virtual or in-person 12-hour training that outlines the concepts of VUM and uses real-world scenarios to practice applying the VUMF. The next virtual training is scheduled for Feb. 2-4, 2027.

QUICK TIPS

- One of the first - and most important steps - in visitor use management is building a coalition and gaining buy-in for visitor use management needs. Outdoor recreation and conservation groups are a great resource for beginning this step and remember to consider underrepresented voices and perspectives.
- The VUMF is adaptable to the planning processes and documents of federal and non-federal organizations. Many organizations follow the framework or aspects of it without explicitly using the terminology. Use language that resonates with the people and communities in your area.
- Communicating expectations for visitor experiences and amenities goes a long way in helping people enjoy their trip! Visitor use management planning can help create a shared vision and approaches for the type, location, and availability of visitor experiences and resources.



Interested in learning more about visitor use management?

The IVUMC website has a lot of great resources including the VUMF and guidebooks. SORP has a VUM Resources page and a technical resource library for members with webinar recordings, case studies, research, and examples of visitor use management plans.