APPENDIX I.

Visual Analysis Resource Report

United States
Department of
Agriculture
Forest Service

OCT 2015

Lookout Pass Ski Area Expansion Environmental Impact Statement

Scenery Resource Report

Coeur D'Alene Ranger District, Idaho Panhandle and Lolo National Forests, Shoshone County, Idaho, and Mineral County, Montana

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Contents

Introduction 1
Proposed Action 1
Scope and Area of Analysis 1
Methodology 2
Affected Environment 2
  Introduction 2
  Inherent Scenic Attractiveness 2
  Travel Ways and Use Areas and Concern Levels 2
  Landscape Visibility 3
  Existing Scenic Integrity 3
  Scenic Classes 3
  Management 4
Scenery Effects 5
  Effects under the No Action Alternative 5
  Effects under the Proposed Action 5
  Preliminary Consistency Determination 6
Literature Cited 8

Attachments

Attachment A: Scenery Maps

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Introduction

This resource report describes the existing condition of and potential effects to scenery resources in the area surrounding Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area. The United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (Forest Service) has prepared this report in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. Considered alternatives are described, and the direct and indirect effects of those alternatives on scenery are disclosed.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would expand the Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area, which is located in two national forests: the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNFs) in Idaho and the Lolo National Forest (LNF) in Montana. Expansion would include approximately 100 acres of new ski trails and gladed terrain, and would include the installation of two new lifts (Lifts 5 and 6); an upgrade of Lift 1; construction of a new restroom, maintenance shop, and ski patrol building; and the addition of 130 new parking spaces. Also included would be 2.8 miles of new or reconstructed permanent road for administrative and maintenance use by the Forest Service and Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area, as well as 1.2 miles of temporary roads for timber harvest and construction access. The Proposed Action would increase Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area's special-use permit boundary by approximately 654 acres, requiring amendment of the LNF Forest Plan to assign and change management area allocations in the proposed expanded boundary.

Scope and Area of Analysis

The purpose of this resource report is to identify general existing conditions for scenery resources in the area surrounding Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area (referred to as the visual analysis area). The visual analysis area for the scenery report is the combined area of the existing and proposed expanded special-use permit boundaries, with assumptions made regarding the potential visibility of the project from adjacent visual priority routes and use areas.

At the request of the Forest Service, no fieldwork was conducted to verify the existing data provided by the Forest Service, and no visualizations were generated to explore the visibility or verify the expected visual impacts of the project. This report therefore uses best professional judgment based solely on existing geospatial data and relevant management documents to identify conceptually the potential environmental effects that could result from the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative.

Although the Forest Service has developed an additional action alternative—Alternative 3—for consideration, all visual impacts from this alternative would be captured in the analysis of the Proposed Action. Therefore, Alternative 3 is not carried forward for additional discussion in this report.

Methodology

The Forest Service requires potential impacts on scenery resources to be inventoried, evaluated, and analyzed based on the Handbook for Scenery Management (Forest Service 1996) and on the *Land Management Plan, 2015 Revision, Idaho Panhandle National Forests* (Forest Service 2015) and *Lolo National Forest Plan* (Forest Service 1986). (The two plans are referred to collectively as the "Forest Plans" in this report). The framework for the Scenery Management System includes three phases of work: 1) inventory, 2) develop management standards, and 3) determine the effects of the Proposed Action on scenery.

Per Forest Service direction, an on-site scenery inventory was not completed for this project. Instead, geospatial data provided by the Forest Service were used to establish current conditions in the visual analysis area for scenery elements. Data for visual absorption capacity were not available, and therefore it was excluded from analysis. Management standards have been established in both Forest Plans; these are further discussed in subsequent sections. Potential project-related effects were evaluated using best professional judgment to determine conceptually the expected visual impacts to the existing landscape and whether these impacts would be consistent with scenery objectives.

Affected Environment

Introduction

The visual analysis area covers portions of the IPNFs and the LNF and is located along the Interstate 90 (I-90) corridor 6 miles southeast of the community of Mullan, Idaho, and 6 miles northwest of the community of Taft, Montana. The Proposed Action is located in the southeastern region of the Coeur d'Alene Geographic Area of the Bitterroot Mountains (U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station 2015). This area has moderate-elevation, rolling mountains that are largely unglaciated. Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area is identified as a unique feature within this geographic area (Forest Service 2015). The canopy within this geographic area is predominantly cedar-hemlock-pine forest with some Douglas fir forest at higher elevations.

Inherent Scenic Attractiveness

Inherent scenic attractiveness is the primary indicator of the intrinsic beauty of a landscape. It helps determine which landscapes are important for scenic beauty, as well as those that are of lesser value, based on commonly held perceptions of the beauty of landform, vegetation pattern, composition, surface water characteristics, and land use patterns and cultural features (Forest Service 1996). Each landscape character type is subdivided into three scenic attractiveness classes: distinctive (Class A), typical (Class B), and indistinctive (Class C).

The majority of the visual analysis area occurs within a typical (Class B) landscape, with the remaining landscape designated distinctive (Class A) (see Figure 1 in Attachment A).

Travel Ways and Use Areas and Concern Levels

The Forest Service has identified travel ways and use areas from which a casual observer may gain visual or physical access to National Forest System lands. These areas are also known as visual priority routes and use areas (VPRs) and include hiking trails, public use roads, communities, private resorts, and dispersed recreation areas. The public provides input on the importance of these landscapes as viewed from VPRs, and this input is known as concern levels. A landscape with high

concern indicates that the public is very sensitive to the importance of that landscape (Forest Service 1996; Forest Service 2003).

The visual analysis area may be visible from the following six VPRs, which have low to high concern levels for public sensitivity (see Figure 2 in Attachment A).

- Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area and Lookout Pass Trail (high sensitivity)
- I-90 (high sensitivity)
- Northern Pacific Trail (low sensitivity)
- St. Regis Lakes Trail (high sensitivity)
- Stevens Peak Recreation Area - St. Joe Divide/Idaho Centennial Trail (sensitivity undetermined)

Landscape Visibility

Landscape visibility is based on the concern level and the distance of the landscape from the viewer at designated VPRs. Distance is subdivided into the following zones: foreground (up to 0.5 mile from the viewer), middle ground (0.5 mile to 5.0 miles from the viewer), and background (5.0 miles from the view to the horizon). The visual analysis area is primarily visible in the middle ground (0.5 mile to 5.0 miles from a VPR), where individual elements can still be perceived if unique to the surroundings. The proposed parking lots and maintenance shop are located within the foreground distance zone along a portion of the I-90 corridor and Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area. It should be noted that the Forest Service data use a shorter distance to delineate the foreground than the typical 0.5-mile offset from the center of a travel route or use area, and therefore more of the visual analysis area is in the middle ground and less is in the foreground than typical (see Figure 3 in Attachment A).

Existing Scenic Integrity

Existing scenic integrity (ESI) is a measure of the degree to which the landscape is perceived as whole, complete, or intact without any alterations or modification to the scenery by human activities (Forest Service 1996). Landscapes with a High ESI are perceived as whole or complete.

All of the visual analysis area within the IPNFs is classified as Moderate ESI where the landscape may appear slightly altered. Within the LNF, most of the visual analysis area is classified as Very Low ESI (heavily altered) with patches of Moderate ESI (slightly altered) and High ESI (appears unaltered). ESI classifications for the LNF were not available. The data used were obtained from a larger district-level data set. These data are very coarse at the level of the national forest and contain significant gaps at the project level. A site inventory would be necessary to verify and complete an evaluation of ESI for the LNF portion of the visual analysis area (see Figure 4 in Attachment A).

Scenic Classes

Scenic classes are used to measure the value and importance of scenery resources and are determined from scenic attractiveness (inherent scenic attractiveness and concern levels) and landscape visibility (concern levels and distance zones). Those landscapes with a scenic class of 1 and 2 have very high public value, while those with a class of 6–7 are considered to have a low scenic value.

Scenic classes for the LNF are predominately rated as extremely high (Class 1) importance and very high (Class 2) importance with a small patch of moderately high importance approximately 1,000 feet north of the proposed restroom. Scenic classes for IPNFs are primarily rated as very high (Class 2) with a small band of extremely high (Class 1) importance along the I-90 corridor at the east end of the visual analysis area (see Figure 5 in Attachment A).

Management

After the initial phase of inventorying the affected environment, the second phase of the Scenic Management System establishes the management requirements including the development of scenery goals and objectives. This phase references the established guidelines, goals, and objectives in the Forest Plans to set standards and thresholds for acceptable levels of modifications to scenery.

The management areas within the visual analysis area consist of primary recreation for the IPNFs, and concentrated public use, timber and retention, and riparian areas for the LNF (see Figure 6 in Attachment A).

Management Objectives

Visual quality objectives (VQOs) and scenic integrity objectives (SIOs) are used to establish the degree to which the landscape may be perceived as modified by human activities (Forest Service 1974; Forest Service 1996). VQOs are part of the original Visual Management System, which was replaced in 1995 by the Scenery Management System. Therefore, as management plans are updated and converted to the Scenery Management System, VQOs are also typically replaced with SIOs.

SIOs were adopted in the 2015 IPNFs Forest Plan revision, while the LNF Forest Plan continues to use VQOs. These objectives provide direction for the management of landscape scenery (see Figure 7 in Attachment A). The applicable objectives for this visual analysis area consist of the following:

- High SIO (IPNFs): The characteristic landscape appears intact. Deviations may be present but must repeat form, line, color, texture, and pattern common to the landscape character so completely and at such a scale that they are not evident.
- Moderate SIO (IPNFs): The characteristic landscape appears slightly altered. Noticeable deviations must remain visually subordinate to the landscape character being viewed.
- Retention VQO (LNF): The characteristic landscape appears intact. Deviations may be present but must repeat form, line, color, texture, and pattern common to the landscape character so completely and at such a scale that they are not evident.
- Partial Retention VQO (LNF): Management activities are visually evident but subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape, but changes in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, and pattern, etc., remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape.
- Modification VQO (LNF): Management activities may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. However, activities of vegetative and land form alteration must borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture so completely and at such a scale that its visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area or character type. Other activities (e.g., structures and roads) must remain visually subordinate to the proposed composition.

- Undefined VQO (LNF): This objective applies to portions of the visual analysis area without a defined VQO. These portions are located in areas managed for concentrated public use.

Scenery Effects

Effects under the No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not occur and there would be no new visual effects within the visual analysis area. The existing ski area and recreation area includes numerous buildings, ski-related facilities, and large areas of clearing for ski trails. It is expected that these would have a scenery effect equivalent to a moderate SIO or partial retention VQO.

Effects under the Proposed Action

The following expected effects under the Proposed Action are based on best professional judgment and, at the request of the Forest Service, were not developed through the typical generation of visual simulations. For this reason, findings are general, and areas of concern should be further analyzed through the use of visual simulations and other methods.

I-90 VPR

Under the Proposed Action, timber harvest associated with construction of the ski trails and gladed area and the vegetation clearing and terrain disturbance associated with construction of the ski patrol building, Lifts 5 and 6, parking areas, maintenance shop, and permanent and temporary roads would be visible to users traveling east or west on I-90. For the vast majority of users on I-90, the Proposed Action would be in view for 1 minute or less due to the existing rolling terrain, high travel speeds (75 miles per hour) and limited travel distance within view of the ski area (approximately 2 miles).

During ski area operation, the maintenance shop and the parking lot would create highly visible scenery effects in the foreground for those traveling I-90, although the time they would be visible would be short. The restroom, the ski patrol building, lift terminals, and associated improvements would have a very short duration of visibility, if they could be seen at all. Cleared ski trails, gladed areas, permanent roads, and ski resort–related structures and lift corridors would be visible to road travelers during the 20-year special-use permit. Visual impacts associated with the temporary roads and other temporary construction-related terrain disturbances would be expected to diminish over time during the special-use permit period.

Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area and Lookout Pass Trail VPR

All project components would be visible in the foreground to ski area visitors from various locations within this VPR. It is expected that users of the ski area would have a lower concern for scenery impacts within this VPR because the landscape would support their recreation activity. Therefore, these scenery effects would likely be consistent with expected visual impacts associated with the operation of a ski area by these users. Cleared ski trails, gladed areas, permanent roads, and ski resort–related structures and lift corridors would be visible during the 20-year special-use permit. Visual impacts associated with the temporary roads and other temporary construction-related terrain disturbances would be expected to diminish over time during the special-use permit period.

Northern Pacific Trail VPR

Under the Proposed Action, scenery impacts related to construction and ski area operation would largely be unseen from this VPR due to the winding route of the trail and the close proximately of

screening vegetation along the trail. The one area of scenery impact would be the 0.7-mile segment of the 25.6-mile trail that transects the lower ski area and its road and parking lot. With a long duration of viewing due to non-motorized use of this trail, the expanded parking lot and maintenance shop would create highly visible scenery effects in the foreground. These lower-mountain, ski resort–related facilities would be visible during the 20-year special-use permit.

St. Regis Lakes Trail VPR

Users of this motorized use trail would have limited exposure to construction- and operation-related scenery impacts due to the winding nature of the trail, its low elevation, and the screening vegetation along the route. Scenery impacts associated with the Proposed Action would be limited to the lower portions of the trail itself along the St. Regis River where the existing motorized trail corridor would be upgraded to a permanent road corridor. Of the total 1.5-mile length of the trail, approximately 0.5 mile would be upgraded through widening the existing road/trail and clearing limits, and this wider area would be highly visible in the foreground. Limited viewing of Lift 5 could be possible where the permanent road would leave the existing trail. The duration of exposure to scenery impacts is expected to be low due to the speed of motorized vehicles, and the scenery impacts would be of less concern for motorized users because the expected impacts support the users' recreation activity. The wider corridor would be visible during the 20-year special-use permit.

Stevens Peak Recreation Area - St. Joe Divide/Idaho Centennial Trail VPR

Located to the south of the Lookout Pass Ski and Recreation Area, this ridge trail within the Stevens Peak Recreation Area comes within approximately 1.25 miles of the area; it is not shown on the map due to this distance. Users of this trail would be expected to have visual exposure to Lift 5, the ski patrol building, the lift terminal, some of the associated roads, some ski resort–related structures and lift corridors, and timber clearing in the middle ground. Because users of the Stevens Peak Recreation Area are non-motorized, they would likely experience greater scenery effects due to the longer duration of exposure to scenery changes. However, topography and existing vegetation could break up this exposure. Concern levels have not been determined, but this user group, although small, would be expected to have a high concern for scenery. Cleared ski trails, gladed areas, permanent roads, and ski resort–related structures and lift corridors would be visible to trail users during the 20-year special-use permit. Visual impacts associated with the temporary roads and other temporary construction-related terrain disturbances would be expected to diminish over time during the special-use permit period.

Preliminary Consistency Determination

Potential visual impacts to the landscape under the Proposed Action would be expected to be consistent with a Moderate SIO or Partial Retention VQO and would not initially meet the IPNFs' High SIO or the LNF's Retention VQO established for much of the visual analysis area. Visual impacts cannot be assessed for areas with undesignated VQOs without an updated site inventory.

However, the Proposed Action is located within a visual analysis area that provides motorized and non-motorized recreation activities; a typical user would expect to see existing developed recreation facilities in this area. Landscape visibility—consisting of viewer context, duration of view, and degree of detail—strongly influences the extent of scenery effects. In this case, viewer expectations to see ski area terrain and related facilities should lessen the visual impact of the proposed ski area expansion actions and would likely move the Proposed Action toward compliance with the IPNFs' High SIO and LNF's Retention VQO, although additional study and analysis are recommended. Implementation of

the following scenery resources design features would also reduce deviations to the landscape form, line, color, texture, and pattern and would move impacts toward compliance with the management objectives.

Scenery Resources Design Features:

- Straight edges should be avoided where trees are removed. A variable-density cutting (feathering) technique must be applied to the edges of lift lines, trails, and structures where the vegetation is removed to create a more natural edge that blends into the existing vegetative cover. Edges should be non-linear, and changes in tree heights along the edges of openings should be gradual rather than abrupt. Hard edges should be softened through the selective removal of trees of different ages and heights to produce irregular corridor edges where possible (Forest Service 1984). Lynx habitat values and quantity take priority, when applicable.
- All disturbed areas shall be revegetated after the site has been satisfactorily prepared. Seeding should be repeated until satisfactory revegetation is accomplished. Reseed with a native seed mixture using a variety of native seed grasses, wildflowers, and forbs.
- To reduce the visual impact of activities as viewed from key viewpoints identified in the Forest Plans, the appropriate concepts and techniques identified in the *Northern Region Scenic Resource Mitigation Menu and Design Considerations for Vegetation Treatments* (Cooley et al. 2009) would be utilized during layout and implementation to ensure harvest activities remain subordinate to the existing landscape character. Units are designed so that treatment units and associated openings are asymmetrical in shape. Treatments should follow natural topographic breaks and changes in vegetation, edges should be feathered to the extent feasible, and canopy retention should be maximized to the greatest extent possible while still meeting silvicultural needs.
- The following Forest Service Manual guidelines (Section 2380) (Forest Service 2003) and Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG) (Forest Service 2001) guidelines should be followed: The scenic character would be protected through appropriate siting of buildings and the use of low-impact materials and colors (e.g., indigenous construction materials, such as stone and wood, as well as low-reflective glass and roofing materials). Remain in context with the landscape (e.g., rustic, craftsman, or country lodge styles). Architecture, materials, and colors should follow the BEIG guidelines. Additionally, *Forest Service Handbook No. 617, National Forest Landscape Management for Ski Areas, Volume 2, Chapter 7*, recommends colors for ski areas on page 37. Darker colors are suggested, especially greens, browns, navy blue, grays, and black (Forest Service 1984).
- Stumps should be cut as low to the ground as possible to minimize safety hazards and to meet scenery objectives.
- The ground should be re-graded to restore a natural terrain appearance. Grading disturbance should be blended into the existing topography to achieve a natural appearance and to minimize cuts and fills at the transition with proposed grading and existing terrain.

Literature Cited

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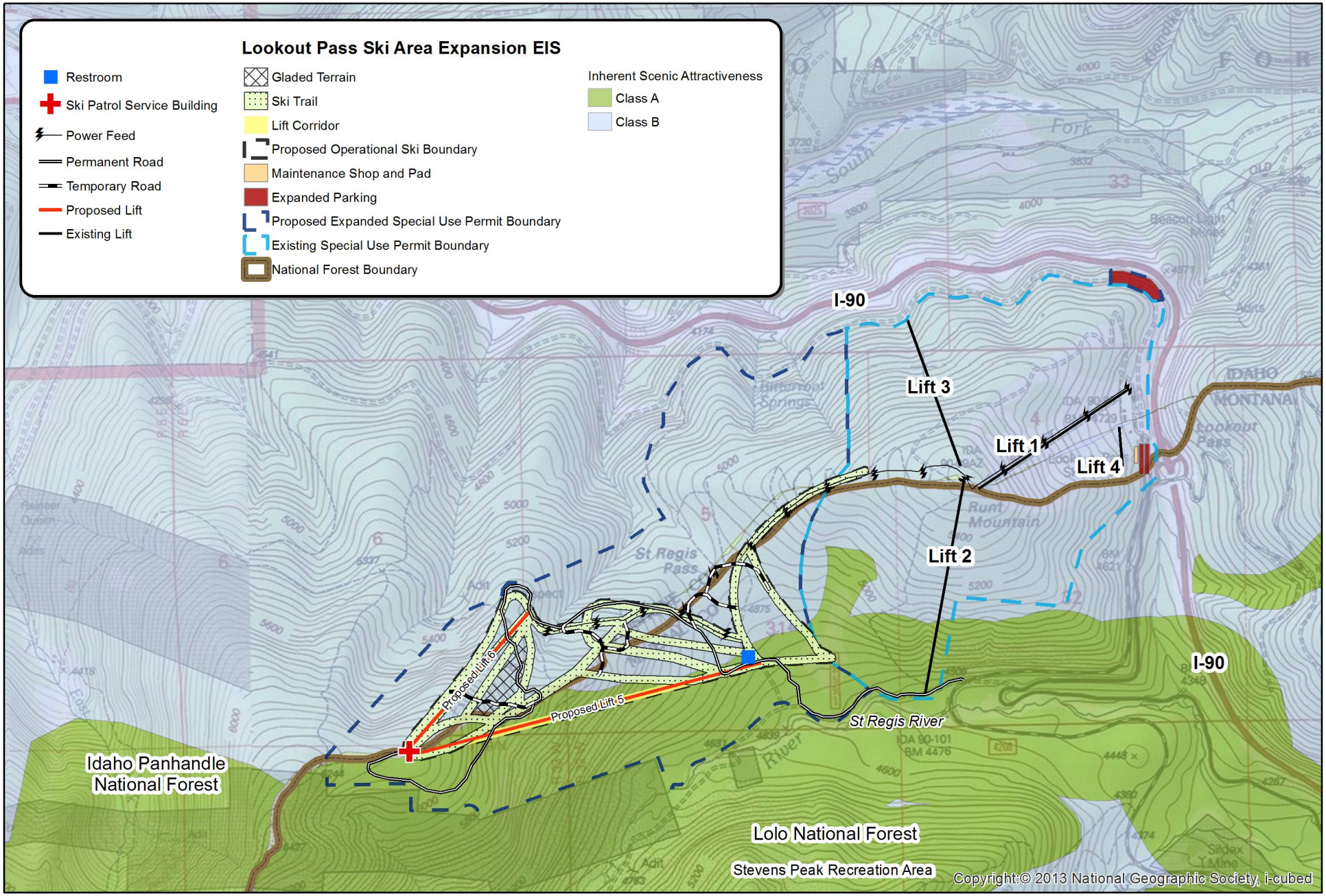
Attachment A

SCENERY MAPS



Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 1: Inherent Scenic Attractiveness

N

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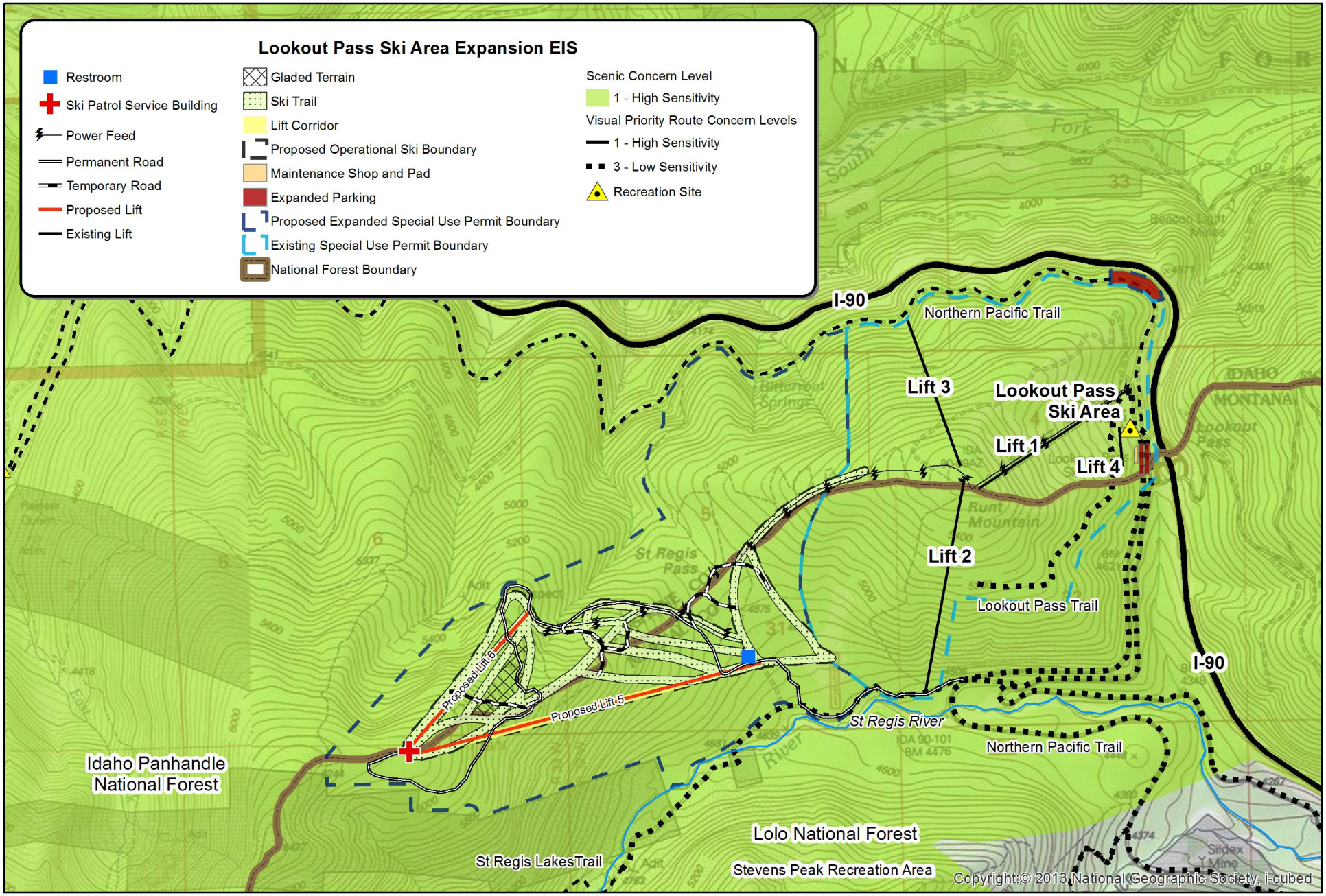

Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 2: Scenic Concern Level

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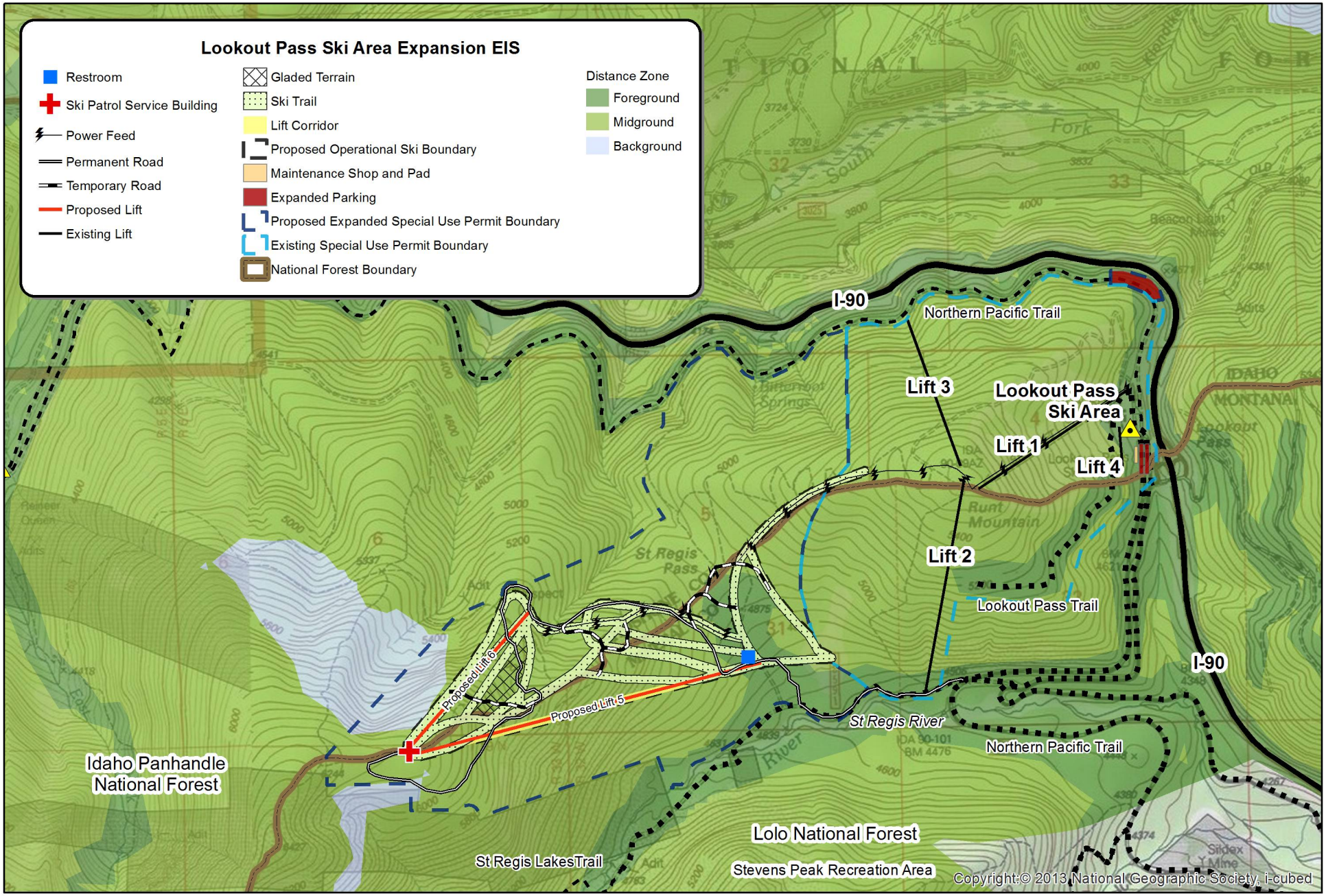

Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 3: Landscape Visibility

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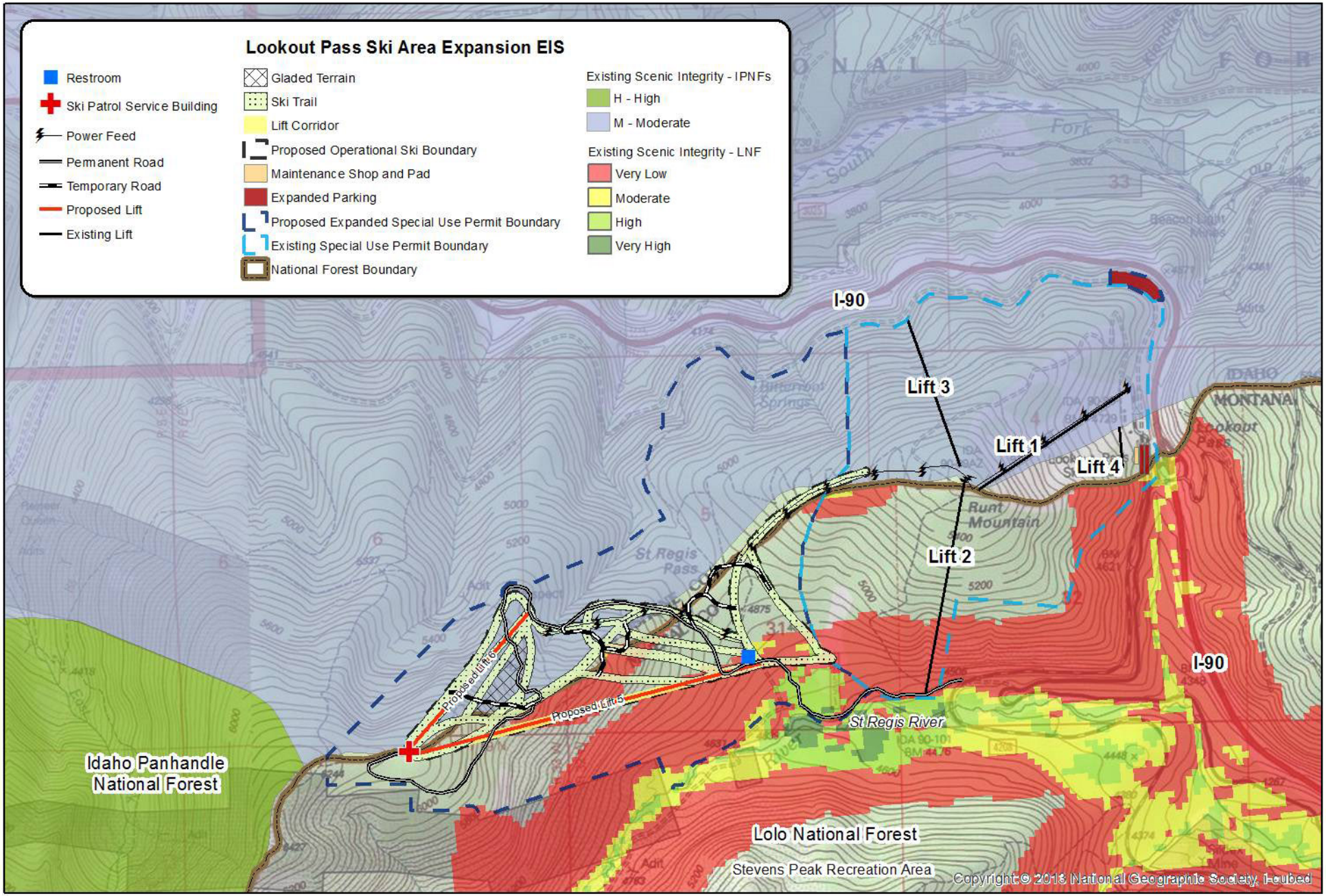

Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 4: Existing Scenic Integrity

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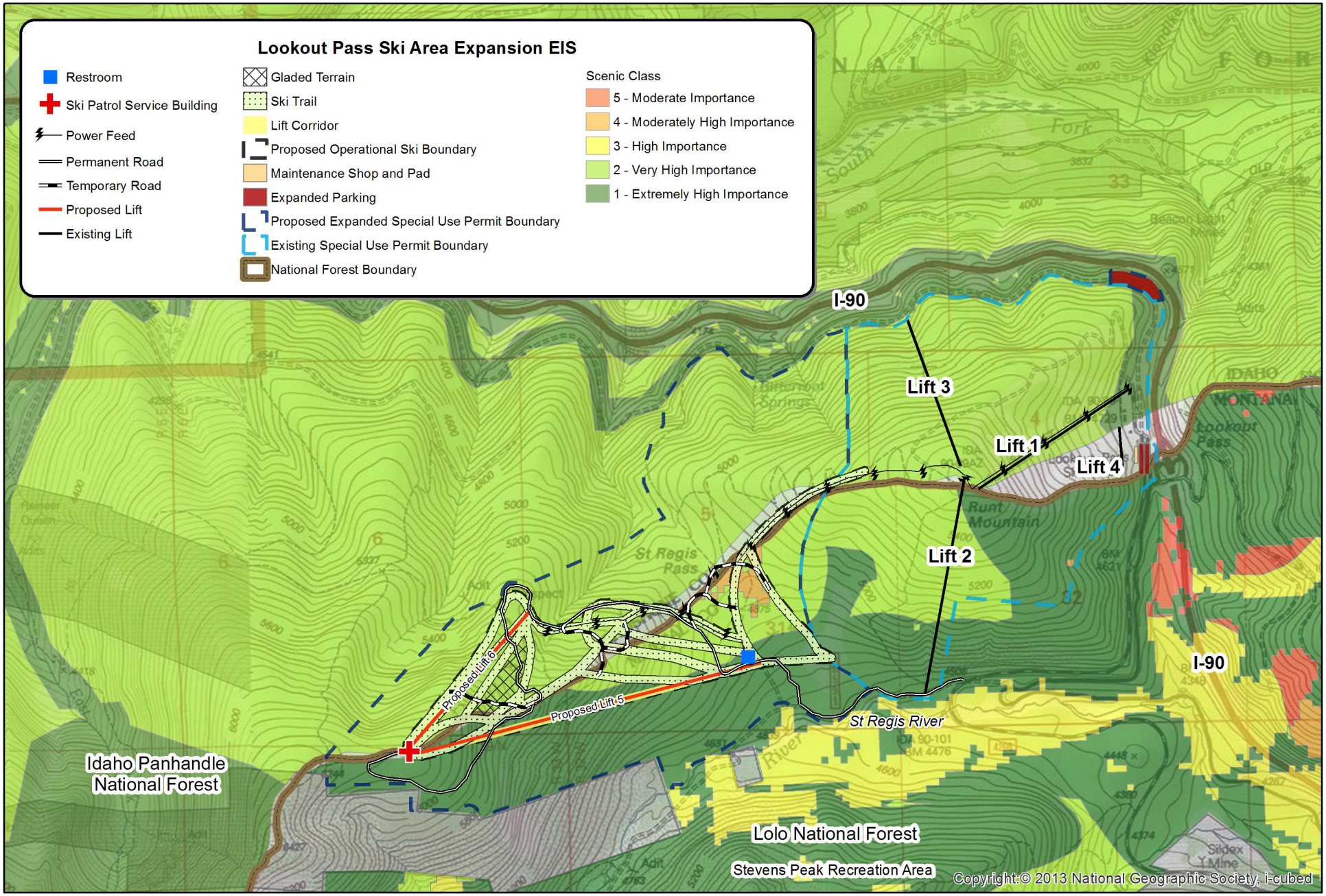

Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 5: Scenic Classes

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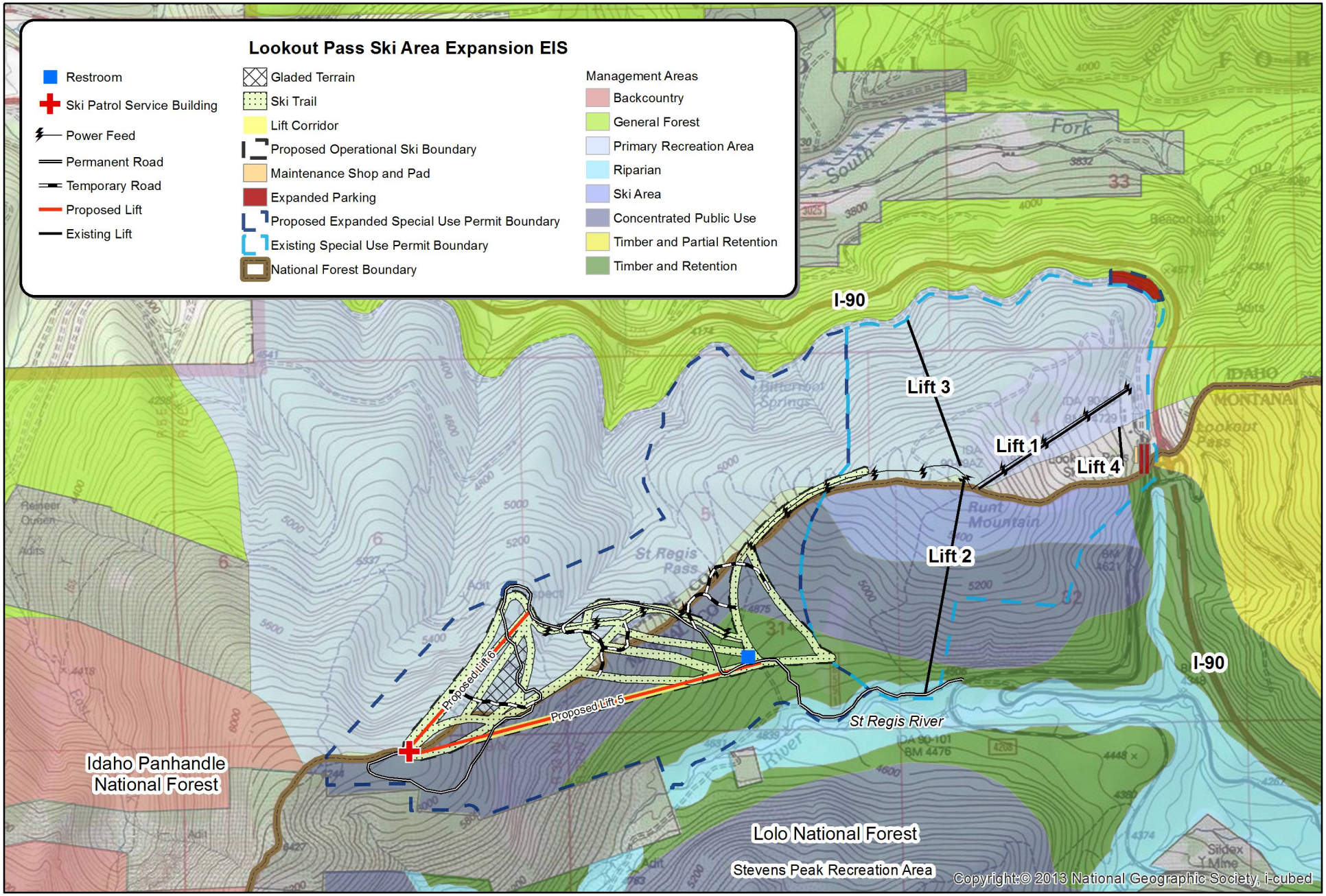

Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 6: Management Areas

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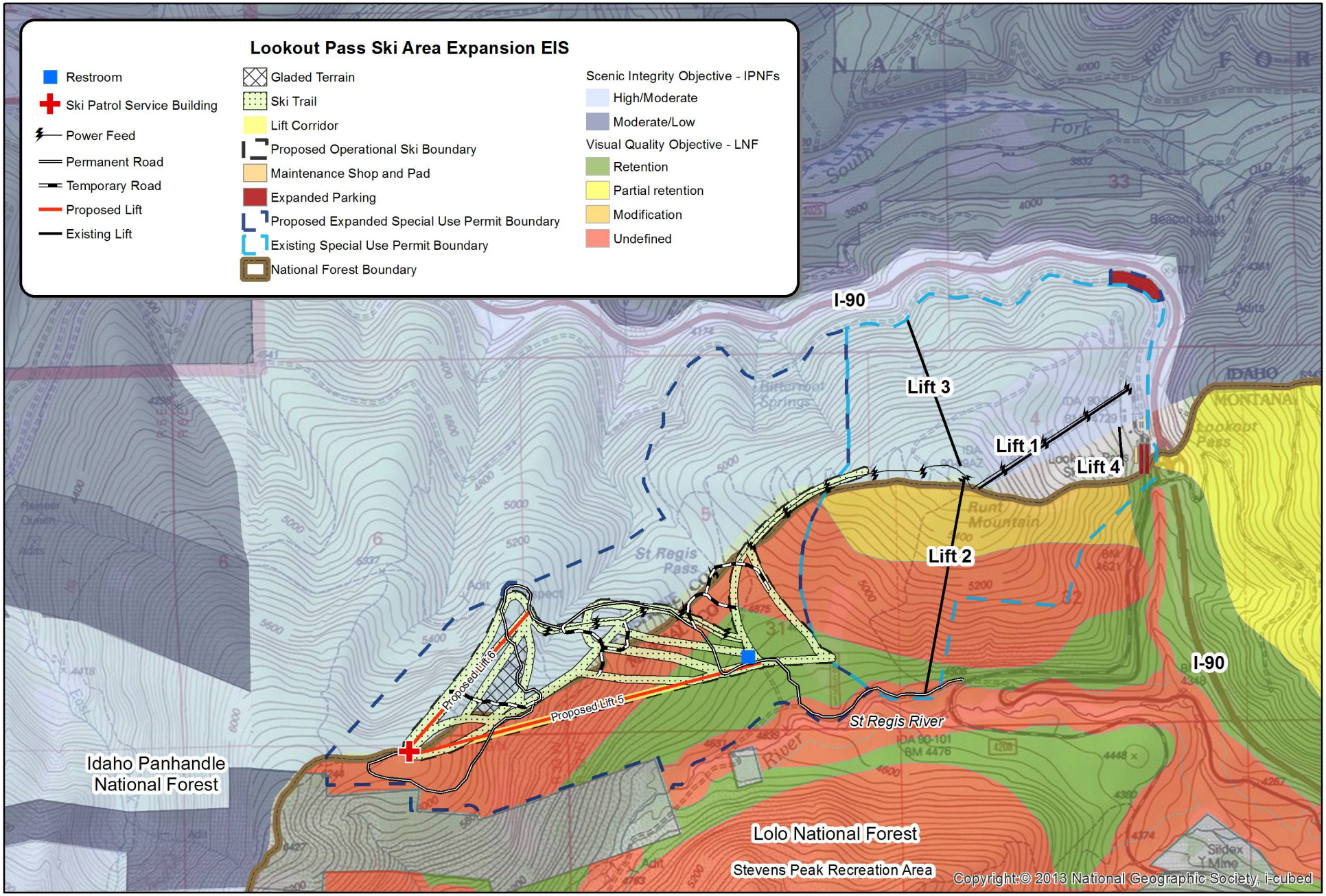

Lookout Pass: Scenery Resources

Figure 7: Scenic Integrity Objective / Visual Quality Objective

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