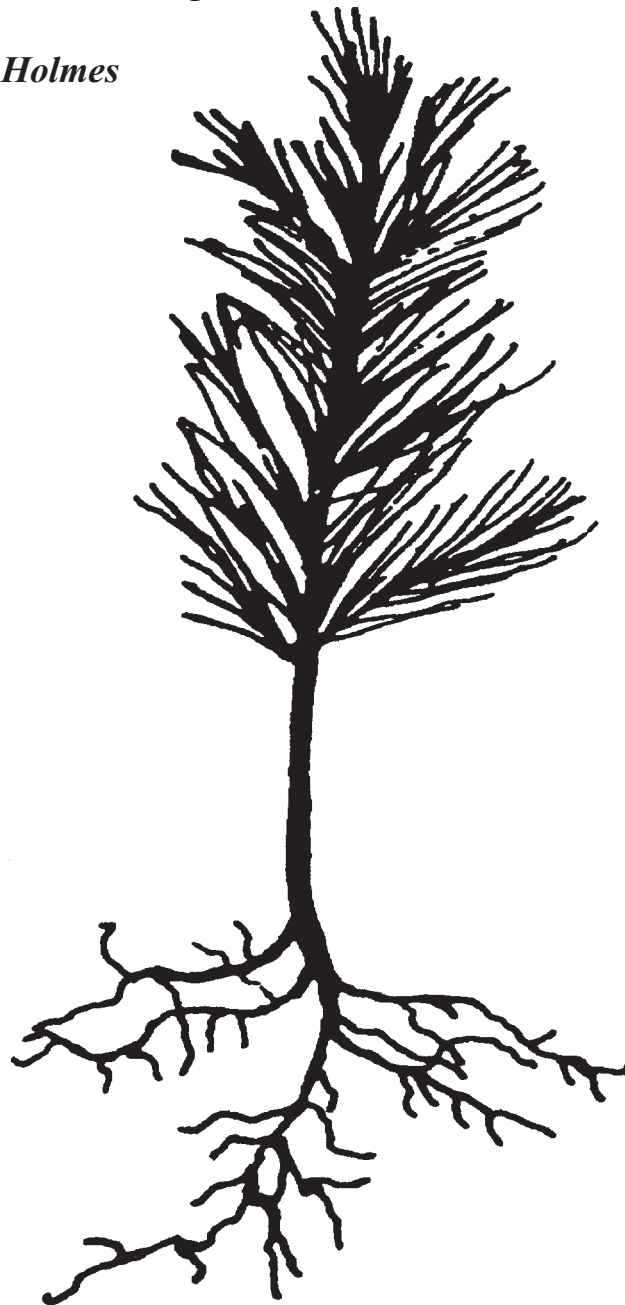


DESIRED

*"The great thing
in the world is not so much
where we stand, as in
what direction we are moving."*

Oliver Wendell Holmes



CONDITIONS

Goals and Desired Conditions

This unit will focus on writing goal statements that describe the conditions to be achieved. Concepts inherent in applying an ecosystem approach will be incorporated. The importance of maintaining a diversity of Wilderness settings through zoning will also be discussed. Ideas will be presented for blending citizens' values, scientific information and manager expertise so that conflicts are worked out up front. In the past, there has been a tendency to write management direction that prescribed management actions without adequately describing what these actions were trying to achieve. Other management direction has suffered from being too general—describing “motherhood” goals which are just restatements of national policy applicable to any Wilderness. Still other management direction has presented desired conditions for individual resources which conflict with each other so that issue resolution is pushed down to the implementation level.

Objectives

1. Participants can define the term “desired conditions” and understand that “condition” statements must reflect the dynamic character of natural systems.
2. Participants can explain why it is important to develop desired condition descriptions.
3. Participants can explain why it is important to describe a spectrum of desired conditions within the Wilderness and can identify how many different “zones” might be appropriate in their Wilderness.
4. Participants can write a description of desired conditions for one issue that specifically describes what is to be achieved. The description must meet the intent of the Wilderness Act, enabling legislation, agency national policy, and reflect what is known about citizen desires, resource stewardship, and managerial experience.

Key points

- Desired conditions are statements of conditions to be achieved in the future. They provide a target to shoot for.
- Desired conditions need to be specific enough so people can visualize a picture of the particular wilderness (provides a "sense of place," and thus couldn't be applied to any wilderness).
- Desired conditions need to be written to reflect the dynamic nature of ecosystems, not a static picture,
- Desired conditions can be written at varying scales, e.g., desired conditions for campsites can be more site-specific than desired conditions for fire (landscape level).
- Reflect future conditions, not existing conditions.
- Use pictures and language citizens use. Can be spiritual.

Desired Conditions

Purpose

Desired conditions help managers envision what the state of the Wilderness should be in the future. It helps paint a clear picture of what is to be achieved so managers can focus their management effort toward a specific goal (i.e. it defines what to shoot for). As the saying goes—“If you don’t know where you are going, then it doesn’t matter which road you take.”

Desired conditions are based on outcomes, not outputs. Put another way, they describe how the land will function and appear, and what experiences will be provided, rather than what will be produced. The following excerpt articulates the need for land-based desired conditions:

“It has been very difficult to implement many [programmatic] plans, because they are frequently the object of appeals and lawsuits from public interests. The issues vary, but a common theme prevails. . . . The plans, and the public involvement process used to develop them, related primarily to the kinds and amounts of things to be yielded from the land. . . . For many people, projections of what can be removed from an area are no more important, or even less important, than what will be left on the land. People are very concerned about the condition of the land that will result from planned activities” (Kessler 1993).

Definition

Desired conditions are timeless, potentially measurable descriptions of Wilderness conditions to be achieved in the future (in terms of physical/biological conditions, natural processes, and wilderness experiences). Basically, the descriptions should paint a picture of what conditions will result from effective management and proper human use. Desired conditions are expressed in terms that describe intent, thus they are not necessarily attainable in the foreseeable future. Goals reflect broad intent and are more general than desired conditions.

Desired conditions blend citizen values, scientific information about land capability/stewardship requirements, and managerial expertise to develop direction for a particular Wilderness within the context of the Wilderness Act.

Depending on the issues, desired conditions might include descriptions of:

- Potential natural condition for rangelands
- Natural fire regime
- Water quality
- Air quality
- Riparian conditions
- Diversity of wildlife
- Cultural resources
- A spectrum of wilderness experiences
- A spectrum of campsite conditions
- A spectrum of trail conditions

The term “desired conditions” is subject to much interpretation, thus a few notes of caution are in order..

Social desires

As a society, we have placed value on the existence of Wilderness to provide benefits both to humans and to the other living creatures that inhabit the area. In practice, desired conditions are developed by integrating citizen’s desires, scientific information on resource stewardship, and managerial expertise. This balancing act is all done within the parameters of the Wilderness Act and national Wilderness policy. In doing this, we also must incorporate the potential desire of future generations to have the opportunity to obtain benefits from Wilderness.

Dynamic “conditions”

The word “condition” implies one static picture. However, we know that ecosystems are dynamic. There are two problems with defining a static picture for topics such as fire, landscape vegetation, and wildlife/fish populations. First, we know very little about how natural systems function, thus to assume that we can describe precisely what conditions will result from minimum interference with natural processes is arrogant and probably impossible. Secondly, what happens if we find that current conditions do not meet our picture of “desired conditions”? Are we implying that we will actively interfere to “manipulate” conditions? Clearly, such a course of action would not meet the intent of the Wilderness Act. Thus, rather than define a desired “condition” for topics involving natural processes, it is better to describe how much human interference is acceptable to achieve other goals (e.g. minimize risk to property outside the Wilderness).

If an issue relates to localized site conditions, then the desired condition description should be written at the site scale. Examples of this would include descriptions for campsites or trails. However, if an issue relates to landscape conditions or processes, then the desired condition description should be written at the landscape level. Examples of this would include descriptions for fire management.

Future conditions

The word “desired” implies that the condition will exist sometime in the future. Guard against the tendency to write descriptions that just reflect current conditions. Desired condition descriptions should reflect current conditions only where there is agreement that there are no problems with current conditions and these conditions are desired in the future.

Zoning concept

There is not just one desired condition for Wilderness. As discussed in the introduction to planning and evolution of planning concepts, a diversity of conditions and experiences should be provided within Wilderness. Defining 3-4 different zones within Wilderness and writing desired condition descriptions for each zone is often done for campsite conditions, trail conditions, wilderness experiences, and structures, however the concept could be applied to other issues such as defining different fish zones (e.g. fishless, wild (self-sustaining populations of native fish), and stockable (suitable habitat for stocking native species)). By planning for a diversity of settings, managers can meet the needs of a variety of visitors as well as provide additional protection for especially sensitive areas.

One desired condition statement covering all of the issues and attributes/values will end up being very long and hard to track. Most managers find it easier to write a description for each topic of concern (e.g. fire, air, campsites). In taking this approach, managers must make sure that the descriptions for individual topics are compatible (i.e. direction is integrated).

7 Desired Conditions

Ecosystem context

To begin describing desired conditions in an ecosystem context, develop an overview of the region and its overriding values. This will help identify specific values or attributes that the Wilderness contributes to the larger landscape. Each Wilderness has its own unique range of settings, depending on its location, specific attributes, land capability, and relationship to nearby lands. For example, a readily accessible Wilderness within an hour of Los Angeles will probably offer a different range of settings compared with a very remote Wilderness in Alaska, even though both Wildernesses are managed to meet the intent of the Wilderness Act. Each must strive to minimize human influence and provide opportunities for solitude or “primitive,” unconfined types of recreation to the maximum extent possible. By considering the Wilderness as part of a region with certain attributes, values, and capabilities, we can better define the range of desired conditions in terms of what the Wilderness is best able to offer. Reviewing the history of designation for the particular Wilderness will often yield this type of information.

Example

The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is known for its geothermal features, abundant wildlife and native fish, the headwaters of several rivers of national importance, a destination for international visitors, and large, remote wildlands. A review of the history of designation for the Gros Ventre Wilderness (which lies within the Greater Yellowstone) revealed the following attributes:

- abundant wildlife habitat including winter range for bighorn sheep, elk, and deer. The Gros Ventre is a summer concentration area for elk before they disperse in the fall to the adjacent Elk Refuge and feed grounds.
- spectacular geological features have inspired numerous studies and lead to locating a permanent University summer field geology camp adjacent to the Wilderness.
- sagebrush and spruce/fir/Douglas fir plant communities which are not typically found in Wilderness within the Greater Yellowstone.
- providing primitive settings in contrast with more developed land to the west (Jackson) and to the east (upper Green River/Union pass). This undeveloped setting provides a link between the Wind River range and the Wilderness lands to the north (Teton, Washakie, Absaroka) important for “primitive” types of recreation as well as wildlife movement.
- proximity to Jackson—the Wilderness is within a 1/2 mile of a major destination for both national and international visitors, which creates opportunities to educate many people about the Wilderness System.

Consider the regional supply of wilderness, park, and backcountry settings and opportunities provided by other federal and state agencies and private lands, to determine how they fit together and enhance one another. For example, maybe your Wilderness provides the only opportunity for horse riders to go on long trips without running into motorcycles or mountain bikes. Or maybe it is the only place people can travel on trails without getting a permit or asking for permission from private landowners.

A few questions to ask to view Wilderness in an ecosystem context:

- What questions about natural conditions and processes are we trying to answer at the landscape scale? What can this particular Wilderness contribute to this effort? (e.g.

can the Wilderness provide clues to understanding the range of natural variation in patterns and distribution of particular vegetation communities? Can the Wilderness help understand disturbance regimes—floods, fires).

- Are there specific areas within the Wilderness that could provide relatively undisturbed “benchmarks” to compare conditions in more managed areas? (e.g. are there streams that offer relatively undisturbed fish habitat that might be useful to understand how to restore fish habitat in areas outside Wilderness? Are there meadows which offer clues into what constitutes potential natural plant communities?)
- Does this Wilderness provide particular habitats (both terrestrial and aquatic) that help maintain the diversity of species and the viability of populations, especially those with large home ranges?
- Does this Wilderness provide relatively undisturbed corridors for wildlife movement that might reduce the effects of fragmentation between isolated habitats?
- What does this Wilderness contribute to people’s quality of life in the region? What benefits do the air and water contribute to local communities?
- Does this Wilderness help contribute to the diversity and sustainability of local economies?

References: Evenden, Landres, and Watson 1993, Sprugel 1991, Landres 1994, Landres 1992.

Getting started

Developing meaningful desired condition descriptions is difficult. Here are a few ideas that might help you get started.

- Identify shared values or attributes. One way to do this is to ask—imagine it is the year 2050. You are visiting the Wilderness with your children or a friend. What are three things you want to find or experience?
- Make a list of the key values/attributes and significant issues. For each item, ask people to help you paint a picture of what they would like to see in the future. You might ask people to brainstorm things that occur in the Wilderness which serve to define the Wilderness resource and the experience. Just have people use single words or phrases. You might even get people to draw pictures.
- Write out the key phrases from the Wilderness Act (including enabling legislation) and ask a diversity of people—citizens, scientists, resource managers—to write up their individual vision for Wilderness conditions.
- Beware of the tendency for people to identify management actions instead of desired conditions. If this happens, ask people to describe what the action would achieve. For example, someone might say that their desired condition is to have toilets in the Wilderness. Ask—what would putting in toilets achieve? One would hope the response would be—I wouldn’t see human waste under the rocks and toilet paper everywhere. Ask—what would not seeing human waste and toilet paper achieve? The response might be something like—I’d have a much better experience and feel better about the water quality. From this, you can identify that the goal is to protect drinking water quality plus prevent littering and improper sanitation that reduces the quality of the experience.

7 Desired Conditions

- For each significant issue and attribute/value, describe the “ideal” “unconstrained” desired condition from a variety of perspectives. (Note: this is probably impossible to do for natural processes, due to the “chaotic” nature of ecological systems which defy attempts to define one ideal condition). Identify the potential conflicts that exist between goals (e.g. desire for completely undisturbed meadow conditions and desire to graze cows or between desire to let fire burn completely unhindered and desire to protect adjacent property). Begin negotiation process to find “optimum” balance between conflicting goals within interpretation of Wilderness Act.

Desired condition description examples

Wildlife

Goal: Maintain the natural abundance and diversity of wildlife indigenous to the area.

Genetically diverse populations of native wildlife species are maintained, with special emphasis on the protection of Federally listed threatened and endangered species and their habitats. Animal populations and distribution are affected by natural processes, thus numbers and distribution may fluctuate from year to year. Human disturbance does not displace wildlife from crucial areas such as wintering and calving areas. Hunting is allowed under State Game and Fish regulations and has temporary effects on population abundance and distribution that are within the range of natural variability. The remoteness means that hunters have to work harder to get an animal but there is a sense of adventure and hunters pursue game much as a predator might.

For an issue regarding human disturbance in bighorn sheep lambing areas, a desired condition description might read: Bighorn sheep are not disturbed by humans entering the historic lambing areas during the lambing season so that they reproduce at a rate that allows the population to regain and maintain its historic numbers.

Fire

Goal: Allow lightning-caused fires to play a natural role.

The fire regime (number, size, and intensity) is similar to what would be expected if the natural process operated freely (i.e. no suppression activities). Frequent (5-15 years between fires), light intensity fires, ranging in size from 50 to 100 acres dominate the fire regime. Occasionally (50-100 years between fires), high intensity, stand-replacing fires (averaging 500 acres) occur. Less than 5% of natural ignitions are suppressed. Fires that are suppressed are these likely to threaten property or resource values outside Wilderness. Human-caused fires are suppressed. The effects of suppression activities are not noticeable within one year of the fire. Management-ignited fires may occur along the northern boundary to reduce fuels and increase the ability to allow fire to burn within the Wilderness without threatening property north of the Wilderness.

Air

Goal: Maintain clean air. The air contains only the scents of nature, free from the odors and airborne contaminants of human activity. The night sky is free of artificial light and provides outstanding opportunities to view the heavens.

The Wilderness is protected from air pollution effects to the full extent possible given its status as a Class I Area under the Clean Air Act. Natural visibility conditions prevail, with occasional smoke or haze from natural fires. Standard visual range is

typically 100 miles when no natural fires are present in the area, as it was at the time of baseline measurements. Ecological processes such as nutrient cycling and population dynamics are unaffected by air pollution. The sensitive receptors for each air quality related value indicator are well within the limits of acceptable change. In particular, very sensitive receptors such as lichen species affected by sulfur deposition and acid neutralizing capacity of surface waters, show no effects of air pollution.

Cultural Resources

Goal: Protect cultural resource values.

The educational, scientific, and cultural values associated with Shoshone Indian use, fur trapping, sheep herding, and fire detection are protected (although not necessarily the site itself). Visitors leave the area with a greater appreciation of the cultural history.

Wilderness Recreation Experience

Goal: Provide a diversity of wilderness recreation experiences to provide opportunities for solitude, self-reliance, discovery, and reconnection with nature.

Zone A Solitude is not an essential part of most visitors' experience but visitors feel like they are in an unconfined, natural area where the risk and challenge associated with adverse weather, physical hazards, "primitive" travel methods and lack of rapid communication may be present. Visitors leave with a greater appreciation of wilderness including a sense of renewal and connection to the land. Visitors are courteous to each other and take personal responsibility to reduce their impact on other visitor's experience.

Zone B Visitors are able to find solitude with few encounters with groups. Visitors feel like they are in a remote, relatively undisturbed area where they must rely on their own skills. Resourcefulness is required for stream crossings. Competence in map reading is important. Visitors leave with a greater appreciation of wilderness including a sense of renewal and connection to natural landscapes. Visitors are courteous to each other and take personal responsibility to reduce their impact on other visitor's experience.

Zone C Visitors find superb opportunities for solitude free from signs of human use. A high degree of wilderness travel competence is needed due to the remoteness and terrain. Visitors leave with a greater appreciation for wilderness including a sense of renewal and connection to wilderness.

Campsite Conditions

Goal: Minimize the impact associated with campsites.

Zone A Campsites show some evidence of concentrated human use. Vegetation may be lost but mineral soil and tree roots are not exposed. The number and distribution of sites is such that campers can hear other groups but cannot see them.

Zone B Campsites show little perceptible evidence of past human use. Vegetation is lost only around the fire ring or center of activity. The number and distribution of sites is such that campers may only occasionally hear another group in the distance.

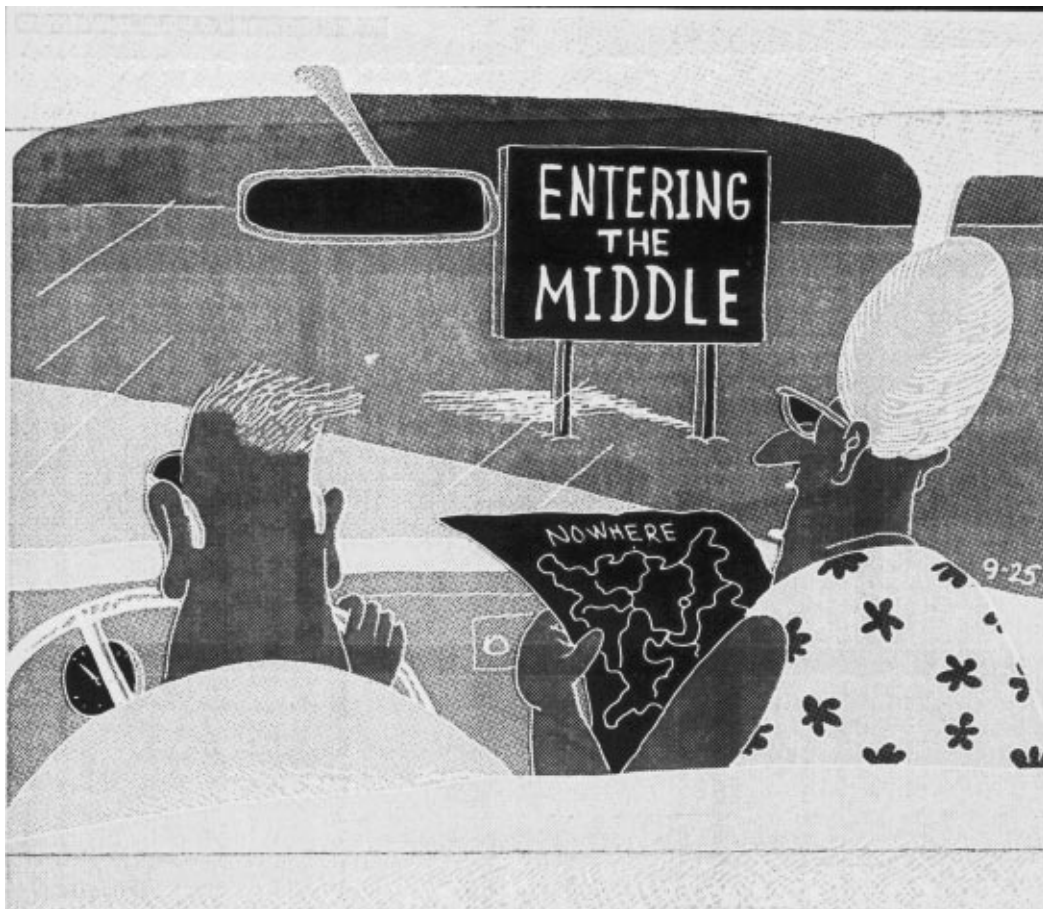
Zone C Campsites show no perceptible evidence of human use. Vegetation may be temporarily flattened but is not lost. There are no fire rings or other structures. Campers cannot see or hear other groups.

7 Desired Conditions

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DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

DFCs tell you "where you want to end up." Without clear and specific DFCs, how will you know when you've arrived?



"Well, this is just going from bad to worse."

7 Desired Conditions

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DESIRED CONDITIONS

Definition

Timeless, yet potentially measurable descriptions of conditions to be achieved in the future (physical/biological conditions, natural processes, wilderness experiences). What will result from effective management and proper human use?

They are developed by blending citizen values, land stewardship requirements, and managerial expertise to develop specific goals for a particular Wilderness within context of the Wilderness Act.

Purpose

Paint a clear picture so managers know what they are shooting for. "If you don't know where you are going, then it doesn't matter which road you take."

Clarifications

- * Desired by whom?
- * Dynamic nature
- * Scale
- * Reflect future

Zoning

Diversity is important to maintain

Ecosystem Context

- * What are the unique attributes of this Wilderness within regional Context?
- * What can this Wilderness contribute to larger landscape?
 - Knowledge of landscape patterns and processes
 - Ecological benchmark
 - Valuable habitats or corridors
 - Quality of life
 - Sustainable economics

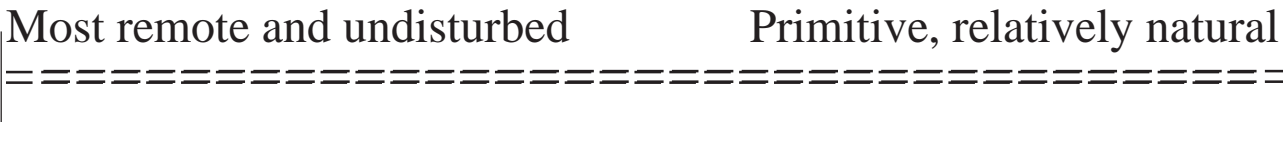


7 Desired Conditions

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RANGE OF DESIRED CONDITIONS IN WILDERNESS

Wilderness Act



Ecosystem or Regional Context

Overriding values, features, attributes

What is offered elsewhere in the region

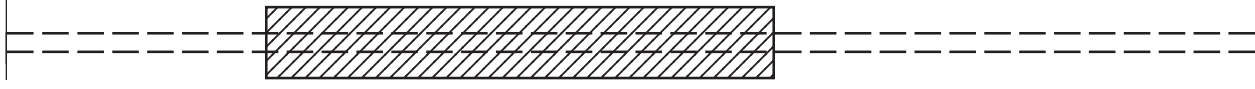
Contribution to larger landscape

Land capability

Public desires

Narrower Range of Potential Desired Conditions

Based on key values/attributes and significant issues



7 Desired Conditions

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WORKSHEET

GOALS & DESIRED CONDITIONS

1. Select a key Wilderness stewardship issue from your Need for Change worksheet, and write it below.

2. Review the history of designation and existing condition information. Identify key values for this Wilderness, especially its significance in a regional context. (Consider the ecoregion and what this wilderness contributes to the larger landscape—ecologically and socially, quality of life, sustainable economies.)

3. Write a goal to describe in general terms what you want to achieve relative to your issue. Draw on the key values of the area.

4. Does it make sense to provide a diversity of settings relative to this issue? If so, decide how many zones you want to write and write a couple of words to state the theme of each zone.

5. Given the info on existing conditions, write a description of desired conditions for the issue you selected (either one description or a description for each zone). Refer to notebook for examples.
