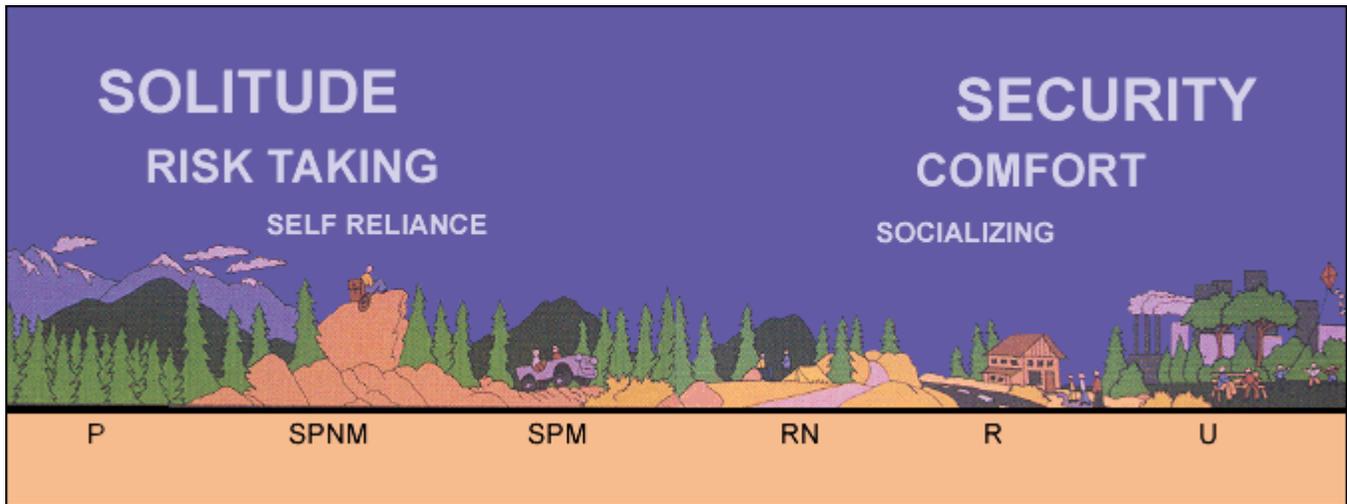


United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



ROS Primer and Field Guide



The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum
Recreation on our National Forests is more than just camping, fishing, and hiking. Research has shown that people choose a specific setting for each of these activities in order to realize a desired set of experiences. For example, camping in a large undeveloped setting with difficult access and few facilities offers a sense of solitude, challenge, and self-reliance. In contrast, camping in a setting having easy access and highly developed facilities offers more comfort, security, and social opportunities.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) offers a framework for understanding these relationships and interactions. The Spectrum has been divided into six major classes for Forest Service use: Urban (U), Rural (R), Roaded Natural (RN), Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM), Semi-primitive Motorized (SPM), and Primitive (P). Maintaining a broad spectrum of these classes is very important to provide

 [Access](#)

 [Remoteness](#)

 [Naturalness](#)

 [Facilities and Site Management](#)

 [Social Encounters](#)

people with choices. ROS is also flexible; it can be further subdivided into subclasses as the need arises.



[Visitor Impacts](#)



[Visitor Management](#)

You will find that ROS is an indispensable tool for recreation planning on your Forest. ROS can be used to:

- Inventory existing opportunities.
- Analyze the effects of other resource activities.
- Estimate the consequences of management decisions on planned opportunities.
- Link user desires with recreation opportunities.
- Identify complementary roles of all recreation suppliers.
- Develop standards and guidelines for planned settings and monitoring activities.
- Help design integrated project sets for Forest Plan implementation

The end product of recreation management is the experience people have. The key to providing most experience opportunities is the setting and how it is managed. As a land manager, you can facilitate (or hamper) many desired experiences by the way you manage such "setting indicators" as access, remoteness, naturalness, facilities, social encounters, visitor impacts, and the visitors themselves.

ROS offers a unique way of thinking about recreation opportunities—they are more than just activities or areas. Clearly, ROS can play an integral role in all aspects of recreation planning on your Forest. You can use it to inventory recreational resources, to estimate the consequences of management decisions, and to match experiences desired by recreationists with available opportunities.

The matrices presented in this brochure will help you perform many of the ROS planning steps, including integrated project design. The matrices establish limits of acceptable change for each indicator in a given setting. The "norm" in the matrices describes normal conditions found in the setting. "Fully compatible" describes conditions that meet or exceed the norm. "Inconsistent" (INCON) represents conditions that are not generally compatible with the norm, but may be necessary under some circumstances to meet management objectives. "Unacceptable" defines conditions that, under any circumstance, do not permit the creation or maintenance of a given setting. Where unacceptable conditions are unavoidable, a change in setting will often result, which must be handled appropriately in the Forest planning NEPA process.

For inventory guidelines and additional details on evaluating inconsistencies, consult Chapter 20 of the USDA ROS Users Guide. The complete process for using ROS in plan implementation can be found in Chapter 60 Other ROS references are listed in the red 1986 ROS book on pages 111-59-76.