

APPRECIATING NEVADA’S LANDSCAPES

This section is designed primarily to serve as a guide for evaluating roadways that have been nominated for designation as scenic byways under the Nevada Scenic Byways Program. Through illustrations and descriptions, it presents the concepts and criteria that state evaluators will use in assessing the scenic qualities of a particular roadway. In addition, this section should be useful to local groups, by helping them to understand the approach to the scenic assessment that is used in the Program, and thereby to incorporate this approach early in the process of identifying potential roadways for nomination.

What is it that is “Scenic” about Nevada’s roadways and landscapes? The answer to this question is not always readily apparent. Nevada has a wide variety of dramatic and inviting vistas, and these different landscapes cannot be directly compared with each other. A basin-and-range vista and a secluded canyon may strike different observers differently, and one could not conclude that one type of landscape is intrinsically more “scenic” than another.

However, it is possible to identify some of the elements and features in a landscape that contribute to its beauty or interest to the beholder. By analyzing and evaluating these elements individually, one may gain an understanding of those aspects of a particular view that elicit positive or negative responses. These individual “scores” can then be combined into a composite scenic quality rating that may be used as the basis for comparing widely different landscapes.

How can these scenic elements be identified? In the case of the Nevada Scenic Byways Program, these elements have been developed by combining the analytical and descriptive tools of landscape architecture – themselves the product of many years of development – with personal evaluations of sample views by participants at several public meetings held across the state.

These scenic elements are illustrated and described on the following pages. These features are grouped into three broad categories: “positive scenic features”, which by their presence contribute to the scenic quality of a landscape; “negative scenic features”, which detract from scenic quality; and aspects of “visual sensitivity”, that is, the vulnerability of a landscape to degradation as a result of change or alteration. For each scenic feature, illustrations and descriptions are provided to depict “high”, “medium”, and “low” visual quality.