

# APPENDIX C

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## Aesthetics Methodology

This appendix presents the methodology used by ESA in this Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for evaluating potential impacts of the Proposed Project on visual resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines.

The study area for visual resources encompasses the landscapes directly affected by Proposed Project facilities and the surrounding areas that would be within view of the project components. The visual analysis focuses on potential impacts to views from public vantage points, including travel routes, parks and recreational areas. Impact significance is determined as a function of the Visual Sensitivity of a location, and the Degree of Visual Change created by the project (discussed below).

## Definitions Related to Visual Resources

Visual resources consist of the landforms, vegetation, rock and water features, and cultural modifications that create the visual character and sensitivity of a landscape. A number of factors are documented for the existing visual resources of the study area in order to determine the manner in which those resources or characteristic landscapes may be modified by the Proposed Project. The primary existing visual condition factors considered in this analysis are defined below and include: Visual Quality, Viewer Types and Volumes, Viewer Exposure, and Visual Sensitivity.

*Visual Quality* is defined as the overall visual impression or attractiveness of an area as determined by the particular landscape characteristics, including landforms, rock forms, water features, and vegetation patterns. The attributes of variety, vividness, coherence, uniqueness, harmony and pattern contribute to the overall visual quality of an area. For the purposes of this analysis, visual quality is defined according to three levels:

- *Indistinctive, or industrial* – defined as generally lacking in natural or cultural visual resource amenities typical of the region
- *Representative* – defined as visual resources typical or characteristic of the region’s natural and/or cultural visual amenities
- *Distinctive* – defined as visual resources that are unique or exemplary of the region’s natural or cultural scenic amenities

*Viewer Types and Volumes* of use pertain to the types and amounts of use that various land uses receive. Land uses that derive value from the quality of their settings are considered potentially sensitive to changes in visual setting conditions. Land uses within the study area that may be sensitive to change in visual conditions include major transportation systems such as designated scenic highways, designated scenic roads, and designated park, recreation and natural areas.

*Viewer Exposure* addresses the variables that affect viewing conditions from potentially sensitive areas. Viewer exposure considers the following factors:

- landscape visibility (the ability to see the landscape)
- viewing distance (i.e., the proximity of viewers to the project)

- viewing angle – whether the project would be viewed from above (superior), below (inferior) or from a level (normal) line of sight
- extent of visibility – whether the line of sight is open and panoramic to the project area or restricted by terrain, vegetation and/or structures
- duration of view

**Visual Sensitivity** is the overall measure of an existing landscape’s susceptibility to adverse visual changes. This analysis of visual sensitivity is based on the combined factors of visual quality, viewer types and volumes, and visual exposure to the proposed project and alternatives. Visual sensitivity is reflected according to high, moderate and low visual sensitivity ranges.

## Viewer Types and Exposures

For each of the viewer groups identified in the study area, viewer exposure conditions are determined based on knowledge of the project areas and site visits. Variables considered include the viewing distance, angle of view, the extent to which views are screened or open, and duration of view. Viewing distances are described according to whether the project activities would be viewed within a foreground (within one-half mile or 2,640 feet), middleground (one-half mile to two miles), or background (beyond two miles) zone. Viewing angle and extent of visibility considers the relative location of the project facility to the viewer and whether visibility conditions are open or panoramic, or limited by intervening vegetation, structures or terrain.

Duration of view pertains to the amount of time the project facilities or area would typically be seen from a sensitive viewpoint. In general, duration of view would be less in instances where the project component would be seen for short or intermittent periods (such as from major travel routes and recreation destination roads) and greater in instances where the project facility would be seen regularly and repeatedly (such as from public use areas).

For motorists on regional or scenic travel routes, traffic volumes are classified as low (less than 10,000 vehicle trips per day), moderate (10,000 to 20,000) and high (over 20,000 vehicle trips per day). Because local roadways in the study area generally experience low traffic volumes, they are not evaluated individually, unless formally designated as “scenic” by a City or County.

## Significance Criteria

Using the criteria above, this analysis evaluates the impact of implementation of the proposed project on the scenic resources and visual character of the study area. The evaluation of potential impacts is based on the potential to change the visual character of the area if implementation of the proposed project would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway;

- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; and
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

## Definition and Use of Significance Criteria

An adverse visual impact may occur when: (1) an action perceptibly changes the existing physical features of the landscape that are characteristic of the region or locale; (2) an action introduces new features to the physical landscape that are perceptibly uncharacteristic of the region or locale, or become visually dominant in the viewshed; or (3) an action blocks or totally obscures aesthetic features of the landscape. The degree of visual impact depends on how noticeable the adverse change is. The noticeability of a visual impact is a function of the project features, context, and viewing conditions (angle of view, distance, and primary viewing directions). The key factors in determining the *Degree of Visual Change* are visual contrast, project dominance, and view blockage.

### Visual Contrast

Visual contrast is a measure of the degree of change in line, form, color, and texture that the project will create, when compared to the existing landscape. Visual contrast ranges from none to strong, and is defined as:

- None –The element contrast is not visible or perceived
- Weak –The element contrast can be seen but does not attract attention
- Moderate –The element contrast begins to attract attention and begins to dominate the characteristic landscape
- Strong – The element contrast demands the viewer’s attention and cannot be overlooked

### Project Dominance

Visual dominance is a measure of a project feature’s apparent size relative to other visible landscape features in the viewshed, or seen area. A feature’s dominance is affected by its relative location in the viewshed and the distance between the viewer and feature. The level of dominance can range from subordinate to dominant.

### View Blockage or Impairment

View blockage or impairment is a measure of the degree to which project features would obstruct or block views to aesthetic features due to the project’s position and/or scale. Blockage of aesthetic landscape features or views can cause adverse visual impacts, particularly in instances where scenic or view orientations are important to the use, value or function of the land use.

## Overall Adverse Visual Impact

Overall adverse visual impact reflects the composite visual changes to both the directly affected landscape and from sensitive viewing locations. The visual impact levels indicate the relative degree of overall change to the visual environment that the project alternatives would create, considering visual sensitivity, visual contrast, view blockage, and project dominance.

In general, the determination of impact significance is based on combined factors of Visual Sensitivity and the Degree of Visual Change that the proposed project would cause. The inter-relationship of these two overall factors in determining whether adverse visual impacts are significant is shown in Table Appendix 1-1.

**TABLE APPENDIX 1-1  
GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING AESTHETIC IMPACT SIGNIFICANCE**

Overall Visual Sensitivity	Overall Visual Change				
	Low	Low to Moderate	Moderate	Moderate to High	High
<b>Low</b>	Not Significant	Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant
<b>Low to Moderate</b>	Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant
<b>Moderate</b>	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse and Potentially Significant	Adverse and Potentially Significant
<b>Moderate to High</b>	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse and Potentially Significant	Adverse and Potentially Significant	Significant
<b>High</b>	Adverse, but Not Significant	Adverse and Potentially Significant	Adverse and Potentially Significant	Significant	Significant

**Not Significant** impacts may or may not be perceptible but are considered minor in the context of existing landscape characteristics and view opportunity.

**Adverse but Not Significant Impacts** are perceived as negative but do not exceed environmental thresholds.

**Adverse and Potentially Significant Impacts** are perceived as negative and may exceed environmental thresholds depending on project- and site-specific circumstances.

**Significant impacts** with feasible mitigation may be reduced to less than significant levels or avoided all together. Without mitigation or avoidance measures, significant impacts would exceed environmental thresholds.

