18 VISUAL RESOURCES

18.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides information relevant to visual resources and aesthetics impacts under NEPA and CEQA in connection with the Proposed Action and alternatives. This chapter includes: introduction, environmental and regulatory setting, impact analysis methods and assumptions, significance criteria, environmental effects of the action and alternatives, and mitigation measures to address effects that are identified as significant.

18.1.1 Data Sources

The following key sources of data and information were reviewed to prepare the aesthetics and visual resources chapter.

- Yolo County 2030 Countywide General Plan (Yolo County 2009a),
- Yolo County 2030 Countywide General Plan Environmental Impact Report (Yolo County 2009b),
- City of Davis General Plan (City of Davis 2007),
- City of West Sacramento General Plan 2035 Policy Document (City of West Sacramento 2016),
- City of Winters General Plan (City of Winters 1992),
- City of Woodland General Plan (City of Woodland 2017),
- Guidelines for the Visual Impact Assessment of Highway Projects (FHWA 2015), and
- Eligible (E) and Officially Designated (OD) State Scenic Highways (California Department of Transportation [Caltrans] 2011).

18.1.2 Definitions

The aesthetic value of an area is a measure of its visual character and quality, combined with the viewer response to the area. Scenic quality can best be described as the overall impression that an individual viewer retains after driving through, walking through, or flying over an area. Viewer response is a combination of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity. Viewer exposure is a function of the number of viewers, number of views seen, distance of the viewers, and viewing duration. Viewer sensitivity relates to the extent of the public's concern for a particular viewshed. These terms and criteria are described in detail below.

VISUAL CHARACTER

Natural and artificial landscape features contribute to the visual character of an area or view. Visual character is influenced by geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreational, and urban features. Urban features include those associated with development and landscape modifications, including roads, utilities, structures, earthworks, parks, and landscaping. The perception of visual character can vary significantly seasonally, as well as by time of day, as weather, light, shadow, and elements that compose the viewshed change.

VISUAL QUALITY

Assessment of quality of a view is inherently subjective and various methods and systems have been developed in an effort to standardize analysis. One approach to evaluating visual quality adopted by the Federal Highway Administration is to employ the concepts of vividness, intactness, and unity (Federal Highway Administration 1981), which are described below.

- Vividness is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns.
- Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements; this factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, and in natural settings.
- Unity is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole; it frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the landscape.

Visual quality is evaluated based on the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity, as modified by its visual sensitivity. High-quality views are highly vivid, relatively intact, and exhibit a high degree of visual unity. Low-quality views lack vividness, are not visually intact, and possess a low degree of visual unity.

VISUAL EXPOSURE AND SENSITIVITY

The measure of the quality of a view must be tempered by the overall sensitivity of the viewer. Viewer sensitivity or concern is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, proximity of viewers to the visual resource, elevation of viewers relative to the visual resource, frequency and duration of views, number of viewers, and type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

The importance of a view is related in part to the position of the viewer to the resource; therefore, visibility and visual dominance of landscape elements depend on their placement within the viewshed. A viewshed is defined as all of the surface area visible from a particular location (e.g., an overlook) or sequence of locations (e.g., a roadway or trail). To identify the importance of views of a resource, a viewshed is divided into distance zones of foreground, middle ground, and background. Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant it is and the greater its importance to the viewer. Although distance zones in a viewshed may vary between different geographic region or types of terrain, a common foreground zone is 0.25–0.5 mile from the viewer, the middle ground zone from the foreground zone to 3–5 miles from the viewer, and the background zone from the middle ground to infinity.

Visual sensitivity depends on the number and type of viewers and the frequency and duration of views. Visual sensitivity is also modified by viewer activity, awareness, and visual expectations in relation to the number of viewers and viewing duration. For example, visual sensitivity is generally higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure, people engaging in recreational activities such as hiking, biking or camping, and homeowners. Sensitivity tends to be lower for views seen by people driving to and from work or as part of their work. Commuters and non-recreational travelers have generally fleeting views and tend to focus on commute traffic, not on surrounding scenery; therefore, they are generally considered to have low visual sensitivity. Residential viewers typically have extended viewing periods and are concerned about changes in the views from their homes; therefore, they are generally considered to have high visual sensitivity. Viewers using recreation trails and areas, scenic highways, and scenic overlooks are usually assessed as having high visual sensitivity.

Judgments of visual quality and viewer response must be made based in a regional frame of reference. The same landform or visual resource appearing in different geographic areas could have a different degree of visual quality and sensitivity in each setting. For example, a small hill may be a significant visual element on a flat landscape but have very little significance in mountainous terrain.

18.2 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Setting

REGIONAL SETTING

Yolo County lies within California's Central Valley and the northern portion of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, directly west of Sacramento and northeast of Solano and Napa Counties. The Central Valley is predominantly flat, contrasting with California's Coast Ranges to the west and the Sierra Nevada to the east. The Sacramento River flows from north of Yolo County into the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta at the southern end of the County. The Delta includes interconnected canals, streambeds, sloughs, marshes, and islands with agriculture as the primary land use. Visual resources within the undeveloped portions of the Central Valley are predominantly agricultural in nature, with expansive vistas consisting of open farmland and rangeland, orchards, vineyards, and distant views to the surrounding mountains.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF PLAN AREA

For the purposes of this analysis, Yolo County may be divided into seven separate areas of distinct natural resource, geographic, or developed qualities to describe the varying visual and scenic resources found within the County: Capay Valley/Capay Hills, Sacramento River, Yolo Bypass/Delta, Putah Creek/Lake Berryessa, Cache Creek, Dunnigan Hills, and the Valley Floor. In addition, Yolo County contains four incorporated cities; Davis, West Sacramento, Winters and Woodland. The University of California Davis (UC Davis) lies adjacent to the City of Davis. Each of these areas is described in greater detail below.

Capay Valley/Capay Hills

The Capay Valley is a unique landform of low, flat alluvial soils that extends generally northwest from the community of Capay to the Colusa County border, following along Cache Creek. The valley and the adjoining Capay Hills, which form the eastern border of the valley, consist of a series of draws, canyons, and rangelands rising from the valley floor into the surrounding hills. Agriculture is the dominant land use within the valley, with large orchards and open rangeland contributing to the expansive vistas afforded from elevated viewpoints within the Capay Hills. Capay Valley is also the location of several small communities, including Capay, Guinda, and Rumsey, and is one of three designated American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) located within the County. The Capay Hills include a number of Yolo County's 20 mountain summits and peaks, including Bald Mountain, which is the prominent peak within the hills and affords uninterrupted views to the west and east.

Sacramento River

The Sacramento River area contains those lands within the County generally east of the Yolo Bypass and north of the City of West Sacramento, including the town of Knights Landing and the Elkhorn area. This area is predominantly alluvial plain resulting from the Sacramento River's meandering path and flood deposition, and is composed primarily of prime farmland. Walnut orchards dominate the landscape just north of West Sacramento; tomatoes and wheat fields are the most prominent vegetative features along the Sutter County border. Numerous canals, streambeds, sloughs, and marshes are intermixed with the agricultural lands. The Sacramento River area includes classic river vistas and other scenic resources typical of flat expanses dominated by riverine and wetland landscapes.

Yolo Bypass/Delta

Similar in landscape and visual character to the Sacramento River area, the Yolo Bypass/Delta area comprises those lands within the Yolo Bypass itself as well as the City of West Sacramento (described further below) and the lowland areas within the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta that lie to the south. This area contains the northern end of the Delta and is composed of both prime farmland surrounding Clarksburg as well as open grazing, agriculture, and wildlife habitat within the Yolo Bypass. This area also

contains the Clarksburg AVA, which includes approximately 11,000 acres of vineyards that dominate the landscape. The Yolo Bypass includes and lies adjacent to the Deep Water Ship Channel (DWSC), which affords unique visual character to the area and provides viewers with occasional glimpses of ship traffic from the San Francisco Bay traversing the surrounding agricultural landscape, a visual quality unique to this area and not typically seen elsewhere within the State. The downtown Sacramento city skyline is a prominent feature from many vantage points within this area, particularly at night.

Putah Creek/Lake Berryessa

Although it contains similar vistas and scenery to other areas discussed, the Putah Creek/Lake Berryessa area demonstrates a cross-section of visual resources typical within the County as rangeland gives way to crop fields, and riverine landscapes adjoin developed areas. Putah Creek forms the southern border of and separates Yolo County from Solano County, flowing to the east from Lake Berryessa's Monticello Dam. The Putah Creek/Lake Berryessa area includes those lands generally south of the Yolo County Airport from the western County border to the City of Davis. This area includes rolling hills and canyons along the eastern edge of Blue Ridge (used predominantly as rangeland) located west and north of the City of Winters. East of Interstate 505 (I-505), the landscape becomes flatter and views are dominated by walnut and almond orchards and various other crops. Toward the eastern end of the area, the City of Davis' skyline joins the eastern horizon, although the city's generally low profile prevents it from interrupting the expansive views afforded both from I-505 and State Road 128.

Cache Creek

The Cache Creek area extends generally east from the community of Capay through the center of the County to the Yolo Bypass, just east of the community of Woodland. Within this area, Cache Creek becomes braided past gravel mining operations and consists of several shallow channels. Riparian forest habitat can be found frequently along the creek. At the western end, the creek is restricted within levees before emptying into the Yolo Bypass. Adjoining the mining areas along the creek are a variety of crop fields, which give the landscape a diverse visual character where orderly crop plantings intermingle with natural settings. The Cache Creek area also contains Monument Hill, which is the dominant feature of the horizon and affords uninterrupted views across the County from all cardinal points.

Dunnigan Hills

The Dunnigan Hills area includes lands generally northwest of the community of Yolo, north of County Road 19 and to the west of I-5, including the towns of Dunnigan and Zamora. These hills extend northward to the Colusa County line, and are a series of rolling hills used predominantly as rangeland. The Dunnigan Hills area also includes the Dunnigan Hills AVA, although most of the 3,000 acres of vineyards are not visible from many public access points. As a result, this area evokes a visual character similar to other open rangelands within the County, with sparse vegetation (mostly grasses) and grazing animals giving the area a pastoral character throughout.

Valley Floor

The Valley Floor area comprises the remaining lands within the County not included in the previous six areas, and generally includes those lands south of the Cache Creek area and north of the Putah Creek/Lake Berryessa area as well as lands east of the Dunnigan Hills area and west of the Sacramento River area. The area includes the City of Woodland and the City of Davis, as well as the towns of Esparto and Madison and the Monument Hills community. These lands are almost entirely agricultural and include vast stretches of alfalfa, rice, and tomato fields as well as other varieties of field crops. The landscape within this area is predominantly flat, with expansive views of cultivated fields uninterrupted by natural or constructed land forms or significant development. Adding to the visual character of this area are intermittent farm implement storage and agricultural industrial buildings, including barns, processing facilities, and storage areas, which support the Valley Floor areas agricultural character.

Davis and UC Davis

Located in the southeastern portion of Yolo County, the City of Davis is 11 miles west of Sacramento and 70 miles northeast of San Francisco. The City of Davis is primarily an urban landscape within its City limits, dotted with parks and greenbelts within the urbanized areas. The UC Davis campus, located immediately southwest of the City of Davis but largely integrated with the City, is located on approximately 2,900 acres of unincorporated land and is one of the most visually prominent features in the area with relatively large buildings and a water tower visible from I-80 and many vantage points in the area. Land surrounding the City is primarily characterized by agriculture and open space land uses.

West Sacramento

West Sacramento is bounded by the Sacramento Bypass to the north, the Sacramento River to the north and east, and the DWSC and Yolo Bypass to the west. The northern portions of the City are already developed, and the natural and human-made waterways and bypasses prevent further development to the north, east, and west. Therefore, most major development is spreading southward into lands where the current use is primarily agriculture. Development that is occurring in the northern, eastern, and western portions of West Sacramento is either occurring on disjunct parcels of agricultural land or consists of redevelopment and infilling of vacant parcels in older portions of the city. Much of the city consists of urban landscapes, with distinct features being several high-rise buildings and bridges along the Sacramento River and industrial facilities at the Port of West Sacramento and nearby segments of the DWSC.

Winters

Scenic resources within the City of Winters consist largely of historic and tree-lined neighborhoods, architectural landmarks, as well as panoramic views of Mt. Vaca and the Vaca Mountains. Farmhouses and orchards that are scattered on the periphery of the City and the riparian corridor along Putah Creek are also considered valuable features within the visual landscape of the City. There are no designated State Scenic Highways in the Plan Area (California Department of Transportation 2015). However, Yolo County has designated State Route (SR) 128/Grant Avenue, beginning in the City of Winters at Interstate 505 (I-505) and extending west to Lake Berryessa, as a local “scenic highway corridor.” The City of Winters General Plan (General Plan) also designates SR 128 between I-505 and the urbanized area of the City as a scenic corridor.

Woodland

The City of Woodland is located in central Yolo County, approximately 20 miles northwest of the City of Sacramento on I-5 and 8 miles west of Sacramento International Airport. It is seven miles north of the City of Davis. The Yolo Bypass of the Sacramento River lies approximately 3 miles east of the City, and Willow Slough is located about one miles to southeast. The surrounding landscape is characterized by row crops, pastures, orchards, and vineyards, as well as natural landscapes such as annual grasslands, riparian forest, freshwater marsh and wetlands, and lake habitats. I-5 runs diagonally from the northwest to southeast across the city, dividing the community into two distinct areas, with most of the residential and commercial development on the southeast and industrial development in the northwest quadrant of the city.

VIEWER GROUPS AND VIEWER RESPONSES

Viewer groups in the Plan Area are primarily persons living or conducting business in Yolo County; travelers using the interstates, highways, and smaller local roads; and recreationists (boaters, anglers using canals, creeks, and rivers; hunters; trail users; equestrians; bicyclists; joggers; etc.). Each group is discussed below.

Residents

Urban and rural residents make up the largest viewer group in the Plan Area. Urban residences mostly orient their views inward within urbanized areas. Residences on the outer edge of existing cities and rural towns have the potential for middle ground and background views over agricultural fields in the surrounding area and beyond to the hills/mountains on the east and west sides of the Sacramento Valley. Rural residences are interspersed, at very low densities, between swaths of agricultural or undeveloped land that allows inhabitants to have views similar to those available at the edges of cities and towns. Both urban and rural

residents are likely to have a high sense of ownership over their adjacent views that include undeveloped lands and their inherent scenic quality. Because of their long-term exposure to such views and sense of ownership, these residents are considered to have high sensitivity to changes in the viewshed.

Businesses

Employees of the various job opportunities available in Yolo County, such as those associated with agricultural, industrial, recreational, commercial, governmental, and educational facilities have views from their respective facilities. Situated in different locations throughout the Plan Area, these facilities' views range from views limited by infrastructure, vegetation, or levees to sweeping views that extend out to the background. However, even where higher quality views may be available at work places, employees and users of these facilities are likely to be primarily occupied with their work activities and tasks at hand and, on the whole, only spend short periods looking beyond the immediate area. Because of their limited viewing times, their focus on tasks at hand, and the current use of their immediate viewing location as a business, this viewer group is considered to have moderate sensitivity to changes in views.

Roadway Users

Roadway users' vantage points differ based on the roadway they are traveling and elevation of that roadway. The majority of views are mostly limited to the foreground by urban, commercial, and industrial development; vegetation; and levees. Views to the middle ground and background are present but are limited to areas where structures that otherwise would conceal background views from the roadway are set back. However, if the vantage is elevated, as on bridges crossing over the Sacramento River, causeways over flood control bypasses (e.g., Yolo Bypass), and levee roads (e.g., South River Road), most views of the surrounding mountain ranges (e.g., Vaca Mountains, Coast Range, and Sierra Nevada), waterways (Sacramento River, DWSC, Yolo Bypass when flooded) and open space areas (agriculture, parkways) are clearly visible or only partially obstructed by rooflines and mature vegetation in the area.

Travelers use roadways at varying speeds; normal highway and roadway speeds differ based on the traveler's familiarity with the route and roadway conditions (e.g., presence/absence of rain). Single views typically are of short duration, except on straighter stretches where views last slightly longer. Viewers who frequently travel these routes (e.g., business commuters) generally possess moderate visual sensitivity to their surroundings. The passing landscape becomes familiar to these viewers, and their attention typically is not focused on the passing views but on the roadway, roadway signs, and surrounding traffic. Viewers who travel local routes for their scenic quality generally possess a higher visual sensitivity to their surroundings because they are likely to respond to the natural environment with a high regard and as a holistic visual experience. Furthermore, there are scenic stretches of roadway passing through the Plan Area that offer sweeping views of the surrounding area that are of interest to motorists, especially when traveling on the bridges or levee tops and on clear days when background views are prominent. For these reasons, viewer sensitivity is moderate among most roadway travelers.

Recreationists

Recreational users may view the Plan Area from locations such as parks, waterways, roadways, trails, preserves, duck club lands, and levees. Recreational uses include boating and fishing, hunting in the bypasses, birding, walking, running, jogging, and bicycling along trails, levee crowns, and local roads. Recreational users have differing views based on their location in the landscape and are accustomed to variations in the level of industrial, commercial, urban, and recreational activities occurring within the Plan Area. Preserves and hunting lands are enjoyed for their recreational resources along with their scenic views. Users of the waterways are likely to seek out natural areas along waterways, such as sand and gravel bars and beaches, in addition to using the waterways as a resource. The amount of vegetation present along the levees and waterways creates a softened, natural edge that is enjoyed by recreationists. Local recreationists also have a high sense of ownership over the waterways, corridors, preserves, flyways, and hunting lands they use for recreation.

Viewer sensitivity is high among recreationists using the Plan Area because they are more likely to value the natural environment highly, may focus on their surroundings for extended periods, appreciate the visual experience, have a high sense of ownership, and be more sensitive to changes in views.

SCENIC HIGHWAYS

Yolo County has no designated federal or State Scenic Highways. A portion of State Route 16 (from approximately the town of Capay at County Road 85, north to the County line) is identified by Caltrans as "eligible" for designation as a State Scenic Highway but is not officially designated. Yolo County has, however, designated the following as local scenic highways:

- State Route 16: Colusa County line to Capay
- State Route 128: Winters to the Napa County line
- County Roads 116 and 116B: Knights Landing to the eastern terminus of County Road 16
- County Roads 16 and 117 and Old River Road: County Road 107 to West Sacramento
- South River Road: West Sacramento city limits to Sacramento County line

LIGHT AND GLARE

Unincorporated Yolo County is a predominantly rural, agricultural region with approximately 35 dispersed areas of existing development. Because of its rural character, night lighting and glare mostly occur within and around these developed communities, although individual areas supporting agriculture and other industries produce limited amounts of nocturnal lighting either on a nightly basis, or on an intermittent basis when evening activities require additional lighting. Existing sources of ambient nighttime lighting generally include neon and fluorescent signs in developed areas; exterior lighting along buildings for safety, architectural accent, or to illuminate nighttime operations; lights within buildings that illuminate the exteriors of buildings through windows; landscape and wayfinding signage lighting; street and parking lot lighting; and vehicle headlights. Glare is created by reflection of natural (i.e., sunlight) and artificial light off of existing windows and building surfaces. Glare occurs on a site or use specific, building by building basis, and there are no general trends related to glare in the County.

18.2.1 Regulatory Setting

FEDERAL REGULATIONS

There are no federally designated Scenic Byways or Wild and Scenic Rivers in Yolo County and no federal regulations related to visual resources relevant to the analysis of impacts from the Proposed Action and alternatives.

STATE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

California Scenic Highway Program

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The goal of this program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated "scenic" depending on how much of the natural landscape travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view (Caltrans 2011).

The program includes a list of eligible highways and officially designated scenic highways, and includes a process for the designation of official State or County Scenic Highways. As identified above, there are no designated scenic highways in or near the Plan Area. State Route (SR) 16 in Yolo County, from the SR 20 to

Capay is eligible for designation as a state scenic highway worthy of protection for maintaining and enhancing scenic viewsheds (Caltrans 2011).

California Wild and Scenic Rivers

Cache Creek is designated as a California Wild and Scenic River from "1/4 mile below Cache Creek Dam to Camp Haswell" (Public Resources Code 2010). The segments in the County are designated as follows:

- one mile downstream of Davis Creek confluence to western boundary of Section 6 T12N R4W designated as *Wild*,
- western boundary of Section 6 to the confluence with Bear Creek designated as *Scenic*, and
- Bear Creek confluence to Camp Haswell designated as *Recreational*.

These designations are defined by the act (PRC 5093.54) as "(a)*Wild* rivers, which are those rivers or segments of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail, with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted; (b)*Scenic* rivers, which are those rivers or segments of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads; and (c)*Recreational* rivers, which are those rivers or segments of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past."

These segments are protected under the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (California Public Resources Code (PRC) Sections 5093.50 et seq.). This act preserves certain designated rivers in their free-flowing state for the benefit and enjoyment of the public. These rivers must possess extraordinary scenic, recreational, fishery, or wildlife values. The Natural Resources Agency is responsible for coordinating activities of state agencies that may affect these designated rivers.

LOCAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Yolo County General Plan

The Plan Area encompasses all of Yolo County. Development in the unincorporated county is subject to the goals and policies of the Yolo County 2030 Countywide General Plan (Yolo County 2009), including visual resource and aesthetic policies, design guidelines, and ordinances such as tree preservation/removal ordinances. The General Plan identifies the following policies and actions related to visual resources and potentially relevant to the Plan.

- **Policy CC-1.2.** Preserve and enhance the rural landscape as an important scenic feature of the County.
- **Policy CC-1.3.** Protect the rural night sky as an important scenic feature to the greatest feasible extent where lighting is needed.
- **Policy CC-1.4.** Identify and preserve, where possible, landmarks and icons which contribute to the identity and character of the rural areas.
- **Policy CC-1.5.** Significant site features, such as trees, water courses, rock outcroppings, historic structures and scenic views shall be used to guide site planning and design in new development. Where possible, these features shall become focal points of the development.
- **Policy CC-1.6.** New freestanding off-site advertising along rural roads shall be limited. Existing non-conforming advertising shall be eliminated whenever possible.
- **Policy CC-1.8.** Screen visually obtrusive activities and facilities such as infrastructure and utility facilities, storage yards, outdoor parking and display areas, along highways, freeways, roads and trails.

- **Policy CC-1.9.** In communities, place both new and existing line utilities and telecommunications infrastructure underground where feasible. Where underground utilities are not feasible, minimize the aesthetic impact by co-locating new improvements within existing lines and facilities where possible.

- **Policy CC-1.10.** Protect existing ridgelines and hillsides from visually incompatible development.

- **Policy CC-1.11.** Require the development of open space corridors, bicycle paths and trails integrating waterways, scenic areas and County parks where appropriate, in collaboration with affected land owners as a part of project approval. The intent is to connect each community and city and other special places and corridors, throughout the County.

- **Policy CC-1.12.** Preserve and enhance the scenic quality of the County's rural roadway system. Prohibit projects and activities that would obscure, detract from, or negatively affect the quality of views from designated scenic roadways or scenic highways.

- **Policy CC-1.13.** The following routes are designated as local scenic roadways, as shown in Figure LU-3 (Scenic Highways):

  - State Route 16 (Colusa County line to Capay)
  - State Route 128 (Winters to Napa County line)
  - County Roads 116 and 116B (Knights Landing to eastern terminus of County Road 16)
  - County Roads 16 and 117 and Old River Road (County Road 107 to West Sacramento)
  - South River Road (West Sacramento City Limits to Sacramento County line)

- **Policy CC-1.14.** Designate other scenic roadways or routes where appropriate using the following criteria: the roadway or route traverses a scenic corridor, water feature, open space area or other interesting or unique areas, both urban and rural and may include bikeways, hiking and riding trails and pedestrian ways.

- **Policy CC-1.15.** The following features shall be protected and preserved along designated scenic roadways and routes, except where there are health and safety concerns:

  - Trees and other natural or unique vegetation
  - Landforms and natural or unique features
  - Views and vistas
  - Historic structures (where feasible), including buildings, bridges and signs

- **Policy CC-1.16.** The following features shall be stringently regulated along designated scenic roadways and routes with the intent of preserving and protecting the scenic qualities of the roadway or route:

  - Signage
  - Architectural design of adjoining structures
  - Construction, repair and maintenance operations
  - Landscaping
  - Litter control
  - Water quality
  - Power poles, towers, above-ground wire lines, wind power and solar power devices and antennae

- **Policy CC-1.17.** Existing trees and vegetation and natural landforms along scenic roadways and routes shall be retained to the greatest feasible extent. Landscaping shall be required to enhance scenic qualities and/or screen unsightly views and shall emphasize the use of native plants and habitat restoration to the extent possible. Removal of trees, particularly those with scenic and/or historic value, shall be generally prohibited along the roadway or route.

- **Policy CC-1.18.** Electric towers, solar power facilities, wind power facilities, communication transmission facilities and/or above ground lines shall be avoided along scenic roadways and routes, to the maximum feasible extent.

- **Policy CC-1.19.** Unscreened outdoor storage of industrial and commercial parts and materials, salvage or junk, dismantled vehicles, used or new vehicle sales or, building materials for sale and similar materials, uses and things along designated scenic roadways and routes shall be prohibited.

- **Policy CC-2.16.** Require the following sustainable design standards as appropriate for projects located within the growth boundaries of the unincorporated communities:

  Q. Homes that do not back onto roads, parks, schools, greenbelts, trails, or water bodies. Instead, homes that front on these features shall access by way of single-loaded streets or other designs to improve public aesthetics and neighborhood security.

  U. Except for parking provided onsite for individual residential lots, parking shall be located to the rear of the facility being served and screened from public view. Parking shall be landscaped to achieve a minimum of 50 percent shading.

- **Policy CC-3.11.** Achieve the following within the Elkhorn Specific Plan growth boundaries:

  B. The Specific Plan shall emphasize aesthetic standards that recognize the importance of this site as the "visual gateway" to Yolo County along Interstate 5.

- **Policy CC-4.28.** Design highway service commercial uses at identified rural interchanges to preserve surrounding agriculture, rural character, scenic quality and the natural environment.

- **Policy CC-4.12.** Require "green" design, construction and operation including:

  L. Light pollution reduction to protect "dark skies."

- **Policy CC-4.15.** Reflect a human scale in architecture that is sensitive, compatible and distinctive to both the site and the community.

- **Policy CC-4.17.** Avoid the repetition of residential facades/designs within subdivisions and abrupt changes in facades between adjoining developments.

  Action CC-A26. Update the County Zoning Code to prohibit the location of new homes on or near the top of ridgelines, where they would adversely affect nearby views. (Policy CC-1.10). Responsibility: Planning and Public Works Department; Timeframe: 2010/2011.

  Action CC-A34. The discretionary review of development proposals shall evaluate and address impacts on the rural landscapes and views. This review shall also evaluate the potential for land use incompatibilities and require incorporation of design features to reduce potential impacts, to the greatest extent feasible. (DEIR MM LU-2c) (Policies CC-1.1 through CC-1.19). Responsibility: Planning and Public Works Department; Timeframe: 2009/2010.

  Action CC-A36. Pursue designation of State Route 16 as a scenic highway. (Policy CC-1.14). Responsibility: Planning and Public Works Department; Timeframe: 2012/2013.

- **Policy PF-2.3.** Design new stormwater facilities to enhance recreational, habitat, and/or aesthetic benefits, as well as to integrate with existing parks and open space features.

- **Policy PF-5.10.** Reduce vegetation and other wildland fuels on County-owned land within the State Responsibility Area to reduce the intensity of fires, consistent with biological, scenic, and recreational considerations.

- **Policy ED-3.5.** Improve downtown street corridors to protect historic aesthetics and stimulate economic activity.

  Action ED-A16. Offer incentives to business and property owners to improve the appearance of aging retail space while maintaining established historic aesthetics. (Policy ED-3.2)

- **Policy CO-1.1.** Expand and enhance an integrated network of open space to support recreation, natural resources, historic and tribal resources, habitat, water management, aesthetics, and other beneficial uses.

- **Policy CO-3.1.** Encourage the production and conservation of mineral resources, balanced by the consideration of important social values, including recreation, water, wildlife, agriculture, aesthetics, flood control, and other environmental factors.

  Action CO-A20. Develop and implement a system of open space corridors and trails that connects each community and city by integrating waterways, scenic areas, significant habitat areas, County parks, and other special resource areas. (Policy CO-1.1, Policy CO-1.2, Policy CO-1.3, Policy CO-1.12, Policy CO-1.25, Policy CO-1.26). Responsibility: Parks and Resources Department; Timeframe: 2010/2011.

Yolo County Oak Woodland Conservation and Enhancement Plan

Many residents and visitors enjoy the oak woodlands in Yolo County for their scenic beauty while recreating and driving through the county. The *Yolo County Oak Woodland Conservation and Enhancement Plan* promotes voluntary efforts to conserve and enhance the county's oak woodlands, which provide significant aesthetic, ecological, and economic benefits (Yolo County 2007).

City of Davis General Plan

The following applicable goals and policies related to aesthetics are taken from the Land Use and Growth Management; Urban Design and Neighborhood Preservation; and Habitat, Wildlife, and Natural Areas Elements of the City of Davis General Plan.

- **Policy LU A.5.** Require neighborhood greenbelts in all new residential development areas. Require that a minimum of 10 percent of newly-developing residential land be designated for use as open space primarily for neighborhood greenbelts.

- **Policy LU N.** Urban Agricultural Transition Area Intent: 1] To provide a buffer and minimize conflicts between urban and agricultural areas. 2] To provide public open space. 3] To define the planned **urbanized** edge of the City, as one of many useful growth management tools. Allowable Uses: Passive open space recreation such as trails and bikeways, wildlife and habitat preservation, drainage ways, community gardens, plant stock portions of nurseries, agriculture

Goal UD 2: Maintain an aesthetically pleasing environment and manage a sustainable community forest to optimize environmental, aesthetic, social, and economic benefits.

- **Policy UD 2.1:** Preserve and protect scenic resources and elements in and around Davis, including natural habitat and scenery and resources reflective of place and history.

- **Policy UD 2.2:** Maintain and increase the amount of greenery, especially street trees, in Davis, both for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitat, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.

- **Policy UD 2.5:** Ensure attractive functional signs.

Goal UD 6: Strengthen the city's neighborhoods to retain desirable characteristics while allowing for change and evolution, promoting public and private investments, and encouraging citizen involvement in neighborhood planning.

- **Policy UD 6.1:** Recognize the existence of individual neighborhoods with general boundaries and facilitate the development of neighborhood strategies in partnership with residents and property owners. The strategies should recognize the unique characteristics of the individual neighborhood and the potential for change, within the context of a well-planned city. The strategies should be directed toward solving unique neighborhood problems and implementing neighborhood priorities and enhancing livability.

Goal HAB 1. Identify, protect, restore, enhance and create natural habitats. Protect and improve biodiversity consistent with the natural biodiversity of the region.

- **Policy HAB 1.1** Protect existing natural habitat areas, including designated Natural Habitat Areas.
- **Policy HAB 1.2** Enhance and restore natural areas and create new wildlife habitat areas.
- **Policy HAB 1.3** Commit adequate City resources and staff time so as to protect habitat and other natural resources.
- **Policy HAB 1.4** Preserve and protect scenic resources.

Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance

The City enacted the Outdoor Lighting Control Ordinance in 1998. The ordinance, commonly referred to as the City's "Dark Sky Ordinance," provides standards for outdoor lighting in an effort to minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass caused by inappropriate or misaligned light fixtures, while improving nighttime public safety, utility, security, and preserving the night sky as a natural resource and thus facilitating people's enjoyment of stargazing. This ordinance does not apply to interior lighting, including lighting at greenhouse facilities. Single-family and duplex properties are exempted.

City of West Sacramento General Plan

The City of West Sacramento General Plan contains the following goal and policy that relate to visual resources that may be applicable to the analysis of the HCP/NCCP:

Goal NRC-8. To protect significant scenic resources.

- **Policy NCR-8.1. Protecting Scenic Vistas.** The City shall protect scenic vistas from obstructions and visual clutter where it would negatively affect the public's reasonable use and enjoyment of the resource.

City of Winters General Plan

The following applicable goals and policies that relate to aesthetic conditions are taken from the Natural Resources Element of the City of Winters General Plan.

Goal VI.C: To protect sensitive native vegetation and wildlife communities and habitat.

- **Policy VI.C.4:** The City shall support and participate in local and regional attempts to restore and maintain viable habitat for endangered or threatened plant and animal species. To this end, the City shall work with surrounding jurisdictions and state and federal agencies in developing a regional Habitat Management Plan. Such plan shall provide baseline data for the Winters area on special-status plant and animal taxa, including Swainson's hawk and the valley elderberry longhorn beetle, and provide guidelines and standards for mitigation of impacts on special-status taxa.
- **Policy VI.C.10:** The City shall encourage and support development projects and programs that enhance public appreciation and awareness of the natural environment.

City of Woodland General Plan

The Woodland General Plan includes the following policies related to aesthetic conditions that are potentially relevant to the Plan.

Goal 2.N: Open Space System. Create a comprehensive and connected system of parks, greenbelts and open space.

- **Policy 2.N.1:** High-Quality Park System. Provide a high-quality, diversified public park system that provides a variety of recreational opportunities for all City residents.

- **Policy 2.N.2:** Greenways and Greenbelts. Develop a system of greenways and greenbelts that link existing and future parks and open space where possible and provide the opportunity for linear, multi-use trails. Require a system of greenways and/or greenbelts as a component of new Specific Plan areas.

Goal 7.B: Maintain and Protect Biological Resources. Maintain and protect natural habitats throughout the Planning Area, especially types that are considered sensitive by the Yolo HCP/NCCP. Protect sensitive wildlife and plant species.

- **Policy 7.B.5:** Open Space for Conservation. Where appropriate, permanently protect as open space areas of natural resource value, including sensitive habitat types (e.g. alkali sink and prairie, freshwater wetlands, freshwater marsh, riparian forest, drainages). Maintain connectivity between open space areas designated for habitat conservation values within the Planning Area as well as linkages to adjacent habitats outside the Planning Area, such as Willow Slough, Cache Creek, and habitat preserves to the east.

- **Policy 7.B.6:** Open Space Buffer. Continue to work with Yolo County and the City of Davis to maintain the permanent open space buffer between County Roads 27 and 29 and its existing wildlife habitat values.

- **Policy 7.B.7:** Woodland Regional Park. Protect and maintain Woodland Regional Park as an important wildlife preserve and habitat for special-status plants and allow for public access that is compatible with and promotes public education of the site's habitat value.

- **Policy 7.B.8:** Native and Compatible Non-Native Plant Species. Require developers to use native and compatible non-native species, especially drought-resistant species, to the extent possible in order to preserve the visual integrity of the landscape, provide benefits for native wildlife, and ensure that a variety of plants suited to the region are maintained.

Goal 7.C Preserve Farmland. Promote preservation and economic viability of agricultural land surrounding the ULL.

- **Policy 7.C.5:** Agricultural Buffer. Require new development that occurs at the edge of the ULL to be set back a minimum of 150 feet from adjacent agricultural land where possible. Equivalent means of providing agricultural buffers may be considered by the Planning Commission on a case by case basis for parcels where development potential would be precluded or severely limited as a result of the required buffer size. The buffer shall be landscaped/vegetated and may include public right of way.

18.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

18.3.1 Methodology and Significance Criteria

METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The analysis of the visual effects of the alternatives is based on:

- direct familiarity with the study area, including urban and rural areas and local roadways; and
- review of the alternatives in regard to compliance with State and local ordinances and regulations and assessments of changes in visual character and quality.

An assessment of visual resource impacts involves consideration of both the visual character and quality of the resource affected, and the value given the resource by viewers. Viewer valuation or response is a combination of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity. Viewer exposure is a function of the number of viewers, number of views seen, distance of the viewers, and viewing duration.

Changes in foreground views from a position where large numbers of viewers are relatively stationary for extended periods would generate greater viewer exposure than changes in a background view seen by a limited number of viewers driving rapidly past the viewing site. Viewer sensitivity relates to viewer expectations and the extent of the public's concern for a particular viewshed. Viewers undertaking recreational activities in a location known for high quality aesthetic resources is expected to have higher expectations and express greater concern relative to preservation of scenic conditions than workers in an industrial setting in an urban area. Further information on these topics is provided above in Section 18.1.2, Definitions.

The assessment of potential effects on visual resources in the Plan Area is based on the anticipated changes in land cover and land uses over 50 years, corresponding to the permit term under the Proposed Action. Anticipated changes in land cover/land use for each alternative are described in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*. Potential purchase of conservation easements along the Putah Creek corridor in Solano County, as described in Chapter 2, is also considered.

As described in Section 3.3, the issuance of ITPs by the Wildlife Agencies for take of 12 covered species associated with five categories of covered activities—together with subsequent adoption and implementation of the Plan by the Applicants consistent with the Permits—is the Proposed Action considered in this EIS/EIR. Issuance of permits by the Wildlife Agencies only provides compliance with the FESA and NCCPA.

All covered activities are subject to the approval authority of one or more of the Applicants with jurisdiction over such projects, and HCP/NCCP approval and permit issuance for take of covered species does not confer or imply approval from any entity other than the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) or California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to implement the covered activities. Rather, as part of the standard approval process, individual projects will be considered for further environmental analysis and generally will receive separate, project-level environmental analysis review under CEQA and, in some cases, NEPA for those projects involving federal Agencies.

Anticipated changes in land cover/land use for each alternative are described in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*. See Chapter 3, *Approach to the Analysis*, for a description of the methodology used across all resource chapters for the analysis of cumulative effects.

As described in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*, the Conservancy has proposed a number of changes to the HCP/NCCP since the release of the Draft on June 1, 2017. These changes are described and Characterized in Section 2.3.2, *Alternative B – Proposed Action Alternative (Permit Issuance/Plan Implementation)*, of Chapter 2.

These proposed changes fall into several categories;

- Copy edits such as correction of spelling errors,
- Minor text clarifications and corrections such as providing or correcting cross references to other parts of the document,
- Minor numeric corrections, such as small adjustments to acreages of particular land cover types,
- Providing updated information since publication of the Draft HCP/NCCP such as including information from the City of Woodland General Plan Update 2035, which was adopted after the Draft HCP/NCCP was published,
- Clarifications or enhancements to particular plan elements such as new or updated Avoidance and Minimization Measures (AMMs),
- Increased details on plan implementation such as providing additional information on the content of the Implementation Handbook, and
- Changes in assumptions regarding costs and funding to reflect updated information.

These proposed changes have been analyzed to determine whether they would result in any changes to the impact analysis or conclusions reached in the Draft EIS/EIR. This analysis is provided in Section 24.2, *Evaluation of Proposed Modifications to the Draft HCP/NCCP*. The analysis substantiates that the proposed changes to the HCP/NCCP do not alter the analysis or impact conclusions provided in the Draft EIS/EIR for visual resources. Therefore, no changes to the analysis provided below are merited.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

Effects would be significant if an alternative would result in the following:

- 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; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime public views.

18.3.2 Effects of Proposed Action and Alternatives

ALTERNATIVE A—NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE (NO PERMIT/NO PLAN IMPLEMENTATION)

Environmental Consequences/Environmental Effects

As described previously in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*, under the No Action Alternative (Alternative A), take associated with development would occur over the 50-year study period consistent with the local general plans and other applicable planning documents (e.g., community plans, specific plans, recreation plans). As also described in Chapter 2, for purposes of this analysis, development and related activities (e.g., operations and maintenance) under the No Action Alternative are considered using the same organizational categories identified in the Yolo HCP/NCCP; urban projects and activities; rural projects and activities, which includes rural public services, infrastructure, and utilities, agricultural economic

development, and open space; and public and private operations and maintenance. Under the No Action Alternative, the Plan would not be approved and implemented and no Endangered Species Act authorizations would be issued by the USFWS or CDFW related to the Plan. Endangered species permitting and mitigation would continue on an individual project-by-project basis.

Urban projects and activities would be concentrated within the cities of Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and Woodland. Rural projects and activities would primarily occur within and around the existing communities within the unincorporated county (primarily Elkhorn, Madison, Clarksburg, Dunnigan, Esparto, and Knights Landing). Activities associated with the rural public services, infrastructure, and utilities and agricultural economic development and open space categories would occur in various locations in the unincorporated county. Public and private operations and maintenance activities would occur both in the incorporated cities and the unincorporated county.

Development in rural and urban areas may result in the complete removal of natural and agricultural land cover types within a given project site, which could involve tree removal, vegetation clearing, and grading. This would alter the visual character of the existing landscape within a site; however, it is assumed that locations of new developments and infrastructure in urban areas would be in close proximity to urban centers and would not substantially alter the existing visual character or affect scenic vistas or other scenic resources. In addition, the various County and city policies related to visual resources would minimize the potential for new development to result in drastic changes in visual character from existing or nearby development. County and city policies, ordinances, and design guidelines would also minimize the generation of substantial light or glare in urbanized areas. Viewer groups in urban areas are expected to contain a higher proportion of employees, commuters, and residents who do not have views outside the urban area; groups that are less sensitive to changes in visual conditions.

Under the No Action Alternative, developments in rural areas associated with rural projects and activities may be more likely to result in localized changes to the visual character of a site if new structures and facilities are placed in locations where few, or none, currently exist. Larger scale residential or commercial developments that either significantly expand an existing rural community or create a new community where one did not previously exist could be viewed as a substantial degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings as rural agricultural land or other open space is converted to development. Whether such development would adversely affect a scenic vista or damage a scenic resource would depend on the site-specific conditions. Applicable policies, ordinances, and design guidelines would prevent substantial generation of light or glare.

Many activities under the rural public services, infrastructure, and utilities category would result in minimal changes to visual conditions, such as road and bridge improvements, installation of trails and bikeways, and underground utilities. Other activities under this category, such as stormwater drainage and retention/detention facilities, levees, and flood control facilities may be visible as a new or modified element from certain vantage points, but would be consistent with the expectations for a rural setting. Other larger facilities, or facilities with a more industrial character, such as those involving wastewater treatment, energy generation, solid waste management, and airports, depending on the scale and location, could have effects similar to those described above for residential and commercial development in rural areas.

Although activities under the agricultural economic development category could result in relatively large structures being constructed in a rural/agricultural area (e.g., processing plants), these would be considered consistent with the visual character of the area as a facility that supports the prevailing land use. Such a structure could conceivably disrupt a view of a scenic vista from certain vantage points, or introduce a new source of nighttime lighting, but a majority of viewers would be expected to be associated with the agricultural industry and would find the facility consistent with expectations for a farming area.

Open space areas are typically considered a visual amenity and would be unlikely to result in adverse visual/aesthetic impacts. New open space parks may contain facilities to support recreation-related activities (e.g., camp sites, picnic areas). Such areas would require supporting infrastructure (e.g., roads, support buildings). In some cases, this may result in some land use conversion; however, these types of

projects are likely to maintain the existing visual character of individual project sites. Users of the facilities, recreationists, who are typically considered a sensitive viewer group, would typically find development of facilities supporting recreational use consistent with their expectations of visual conditions in the area.

Also included in the agricultural economic development and open space category is the continued operation of, or development of new, mining sites. Development, use, and reclamation of a mining site typically follows a phased plan, which entails clearing of surface vegetation, removal and stockpiling of topsoil for future use in reclamation activities, mining of material (e.g., construction aggregate), processing of mined material at the mine area, and reclamation of the mined lands to such uses as agricultural, lake, habitat, and open space uses. These activities may include reclamation to agriculture, habitat and open space, and open water lakes with habitat and/or recreational uses. Ongoing mining activities at existing facilities would be a continuation of existing conditions. However, development of new mining lands would result in a decline in visual quality of a site until reclamation is ultimately completed sometime in the future.

The impact descriptions provided above, other than for mining operations, relate to the permanent change in visual conditions resulting from development of new structures and facilities. Temporary effects on visual conditions would also be associated with construction activities as sites are graded; equipment and personnel enter and leave, and move within the construction site; materials and equipment are stored in staging areas; and structures move through various stages of the construction process. Most viewers would identify construction activities as temporary and their response to changed visual conditions (whether positive or negative) would focus on the anticipated, and then realized, final outcome. Although construction activities can result in an undesirable visual condition (e.g., ground disturbance, material stockpiles), most viewers would not be expected to respond strongly to this temporary portion of individual projects and activities.

Under the No Action Alternative, development and other activities described above would occur as planned by the plan participants, and impacts to threatened and endangered species and other biological resources would occur, requiring mitigation. Mitigation measures are likely to include on-site areas of preservation within a specific project site, and smaller, non-contiguous areas of preservation lands throughout Yolo County, or nearby sites outside the County with authorization from the permitting agencies. Generally, these required mitigation actions under the No Action Alternative would either retain lands in their existing condition (i.e., preserve habitat), or convert lands to a more natural state (i.e., habitat establishment/re-establishment), which would generally be considered to have a neutral or beneficial effect on scenic conditions.

Further, as discussed in Chapter 2, under the No Action Alternative, it is assumed that there would primarily be a continuation of existing conditions in the expanded Plan Area along the south side of Putah Creek in Salona County. The land is primarily used for agriculture and would continue. There is also valley foothill riparian along Putah Creek that could be considered forest land as well. Some agricultural land in this area is currently under agricultural or other conservation easements, such as those purchased through the City of Davis Open Space Program, and it is anticipated that some additional landowners would also place their land under easement in the future, which would enhance the quality of the rural agricultural landscape. Additionally, it is expected that under the No Action Alternative, the riparian forest along Putah Creek would continue to be protected via various laws and regulations (see Chapter 4, *Biological Resources* and Chapter 6, *Agricultural and Forest Resources*) and enhanced through activities such as those implemented by the Lower Putah Creek Coordinating Committee. Therefore, allowing the existing land-uses of area within the expanded Plan Area under the No Action Alternative would not have an adverse effect on scenic and aesthetic resources.

Cumulative Effects

Past conversions of natural habitat to agricultural use has changed the visual character in parts of the County such that non-agricultural vegetation and trees have been removed and replaced. Prior to adoption of agrarian practices, Yolo County supported grasslands, forests, wetlands and marshlands, and riparian communities characteristic of the Central Valley. Before the implementation of California's flood management system, flood regimes influenced the ecology and topography of the County. Artificial systems designed to mitigate and control river systems combined with widespread conversion to agriculture altered

the character of much of the County from wild grasslands to rural agriculture. Additionally, expansion of development in urban areas in the past century (i.e., Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and Woodland) has resulted in land use conversions from natural habitat and/or agricultural use to commercial, industrial, residential, and mixed use. The visual character of such areas has been transformed from rural agrarian to urban and/or developed. Thus, there is an existing cumulative alteration to the visual character in the Plan Area that some could perceive as adverse.

Consistent with the general plans of Yolo County, West Sacramento, Davis, Winters, and Woodland, further land use conversions will occur as planned development proceeds under the No Action Alternative. Projects and activities included within the categories of urban and rural projects and activities, above ground infrastructure and utilities, and agricultural economic development activities could all continue the trend of transforming portions of Yolo County from rural agrarian to an urban and/or developed visual character. However, cumulative impacts require the interaction of multiple projects or actions that together alter the environment more than the individual projects or actions do alone. Aesthetic conditions for a viewer in the southwest portion of Yolo County are not affected by activities in the northeast corner of the County as this location is not visible from the vantage point. Therefore, the extent of cumulative effects on visual resources is dependent in large part on the location of the viewer, and not all portions of Yolo County would be affected equally by future modifications to visual conditions under the No Action Alternative. Locations on the periphery of areas with more extensive planned future development/activities would be most likely to observe a cumulative change in visual character from multiple projects being completed within view of the vantage point. Although effects on night sky views from cumulative increases in lighting typically have a farther geographic reach than daytime views, locations on the periphery of areas with more extensive planned future development/activities would also be expected to experience the greatest cumulative change in night sky views.

It is anticipated, however, that future development implemented under the No Action Alternative would comply with the policies set forth in city and County General Plans. Development in rural areas would be limited to preserve the rural landscape as established by Policy CC-1.2 of the *Yolo County General* Plan. Further, sources of nighttime lighting in rural areas would be minimized to comply with Policy CC 1.3 which targets protection of the rural night sky and Policy CC-4.12 which instructs future development to require reductions in light pollution. Additional policies from the Land Use and Community Character Element (provided in the setting of this section) of the *Yolo County General Plan* establish standards and goals to mitigate visual impacts to scenic resources. In addition, the general plans of the Davis, West Sacramento, Winters, and Woodland contain policies applicable to maintenance of visual resources. It is expected that compliance with general plan policies, described above under Section 18.2.2, would direct future development to adhere to aesthetically pleasing design that would be consistent with existing nearby development.

As identified above in the alternative specific impact discussion, required biological resources mitigation actions under the No Action Alternative would either retain lands in their existing condition (i.e., preserve habitat), or convert lands to a more natural state (i.e., habitat establishment/re-establishment), which would generally be considered to have a neutral or beneficial effect on scenic conditions. On a cumulative basis, in situations where two or more mitigation sites would be visible from one vantage point, these activities would have a similar neutral or beneficial effect.

ALTERNATIVE B—PROPOSED ACTION (PERMIT ISSUANCE/PLAN IMPLEMENTATION)

Environmental Consequences/Environmental Effects

The Proposed Action Alternative (Alternative B) incorporates the same development-related activities identified for the No Action Alternative (urban projects and activities; rural projects and activities; rural public services, infrastructure, and utilities; agriculture economic development and open space; and public and private operations and maintenance), with the HCP/NCCP providing a mechanism for the Wildlife Agencies to provide incidental take authorization for these lawfully undertaken covered activities. Visual resource impacts as a result of these activities would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative.

Where the Proposed Action Alternative differs from the No Action Alternative is in the implementation of the Yolo HCP/NCCP, including its conservation strategy and neighboring landowner protection program, as well as the required use of Avoidance and Minimization Measures (AMMs) during implementation of covered activities. The following impact discussions focus on these elements of the HCP/NCCP that differ from the No Action Alternative. Components of the conservation strategy include but are not limited to habitat assessment surveys and population surveys; habitat management; restoration, enhancement, and creation of habitats; conversion of agricultural lands to create habitat; construction of facilities necessary for management and maintenance; monitoring; and control of invasive nonnative species. However, the primary result of the neighboring landowner protection program, from a scenic resources perspective, would be the general preservation of existing conditions on lands adjacent to reserve system lands. The voluntary neighboring landowner protection program is described in more detail in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*. Because the program does not change visual conditions, it would not have an effect on visual resources, and is not evaluated further in the impact discussions below.

All covered actions implemented under the Proposed Action Alternative, including both development and conservation actions, would be subject to AMMs required by the HCP/NCCP, some of which would reduce visual resource effects. The AMM that would reduce the likelihood of visual resource effects is shown in Table 18-1 and is discussed in detail in Appendix C. AMM7, *Control Night-Time Lighting of Project Construction Sites.* AMM7 would require workers to direct all lights for night-time lighting of project construction sites into the project construction area and minimize the lighting of natural habitat areas adjacent to the project construction area.

Table 18-1 Yolo HCP/NCCP Avoidance and Minimization Measure Applicable to Visual Resources

General Construction and Operations and Maintenance
AMM7, Control Night-Time Lighting of Project Construction Sites

Effect VIS-1: Potential for substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas.

A scenic vista is generally considered to be a location from which the public can experience unique and exemplary high-quality views, including panoramic views of great breadth and depth, often from elevated vantage points. While much of the Plan Area is generally flat, some locations afford sweeping views of the landscape that provide scenic vistas. Implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative would involve natural resources conservation through the preservation of natural and seminatural landscapes and maintenance of ecological integrity of large habitat blocks, ecosystem function, and biological diversity. The conservation strategy included in the Proposed Action Alternative also includes habitat enhancement, where existing habitat conditions and values to covered species would be improved in an area, and habitat establishment/re-establishment where an existing natural or seminatural land cover type would be converted to a different natural land cover type (e.g., re-establishment of riparian habitat on land that once supported riparian habitat, but currently contains annual grassland vegetation). These elements of the conservation strategy designed to preserve and augment existing ecosystem health and biological diversity would produce visual benefits to scenic vistas because existing areas containing natural habitat or agricultural lands would be preserved, and in some cases improved or expanded. Vegetation and tree growth would be encouraged in locations where such habitat would benefit target covered species, such as along the Putah Creek corridor. Because a coordinated system of a linked reserves would be established for habitat preservation, enhancement, and establishment/re-establishment, scenic vistas would be effectively extended compared to the No Action Alternative because continuous areas of land, rather than smaller discrete sites, would be established as mitigation sites.

In the context of effects associated with scenic vistas, potential effects from establishment and management of a reserve system as result of implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative would be considered beneficial relative to the No Action Alternative.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is **beneficial**.

Potential effects from establishment and management of a reserve system under the Proposed Action Alternative would result in an enhancement in quality of scenic vistas.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to Existing Conditions, this impact is **beneficial**.

No mitigation is required.

Effect VIS-2: Potential damage to scenic resources.
Implementation of the various elements of the HCP/NCCP conservation strategy would primarily involve the preservation, enhancement, and establishment/re-establishment of existing land covers. It is highly unlikely that these activities, which are intended to preserve and enhance natural communities, would adversely affect trees, rock outcroppings, or similar natural features of sufficient size or prominence to considered scenic resources. If a historical structure were to occur on lands acquired as a part of the reserve system, it would be evaluated as described in Chapter 12, *Cultural Resources*, and avoided by reserve activities if it was found to be a significant historic resource. Therefore, historic buildings of sufficient quality and stature to be considered a scenic resource would not be damaged by reserve activities.

Yolo County contains a segment of SR 16, which is considered an Eligible State Scenic Highway by Caltrans, but is not officially designated as a State Scenic Highway; therefore, effects to scenic resources along a State Scenic Highway would not occur as a result of implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative. However, there are several segments of highways that are designated as local scenic highways:

- State Route 16: Colusa County line to Capay
- State Route 128: Winters to the Napa County line
- County Roads 116 and 116B: Knights Landing to the eastern terminus of County Road 16
- County Roads 16 and 117 and Old River Road: County Road 107 to West Sacramento
- South River Road: West Sacramento city limits to Sacramento County line

Implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative would result in the preservation and enhancement of natural and semi natural areas to promote habitat and ecosystem health and biological diversity. The existing visual character of these sites would be retained, or lands could be modified towards a more natural state (i.e., habitat establishment/re-establishment), which would generally be considered to have a neutral or beneficial effect on scenic conditions. In particular, portions of the reaches of County Roads 116, 116B, 16, and 117 that are considered scenic cross through locations identified as HCP/NCCP priority acquisition areas (see Exhibit 2-5, *Reserve System Priority Acquisition Areas*, in Chapter 2). Reserve system lands would be more likely to be established at locations visible from these road segments. Areas along scenic highways would not be adversely altered as a result of preservation and enhancement of agricultural lands and habitats. It cannot be determined whether the Proposed Action Alternative would result in more or less reserve system lands within view of scenic highway segments.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is **less than significant**.

Potential effects from establishment and management of a reserve system under the Proposed Action Alternative would not result in significant adverse effects to views from a scenic highway.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to Existing Conditions, this impact is **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.

Effect VIS-3: Potential degradation of visual character and quality.
As described above under Section 18.2.1, *Environmental Setting*, Yolo County lies within California's Central Valley and the northern portion of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, directly west of Sacramento and northeast of Solano and Napa Counties. Visual resources within the undeveloped portions of the Central Valley are predominantly agricultural in nature, with expansive vistas consisting of open farmland and rangeland, orchards, vineyards, and distant views to the surrounding mountains. In addition, there are

various developed areas, including four incorporated cities in the Plan Area. Implementation of the conservation strategy associated with the Proposed Action Alternative would result in the preservation, enhancement, and establishment/re-establishment of natural and semi natural areas to promote habitat and ecosystem health and biological diversity. The existing visual character of reserve system sites would generally be maintained. Any sites that incorporate habitat enhancement or establishment/re-establishment would typically be perceived as an improvement to visual character as the extent and quality of native habitats is improved. Lands included in the conservation system would not be adversely altered by preservation, enhancement, and establishment/re-establishment activities, and these activities would not substantially affect the character and quality of the Plan Area and surroundings from a viewer's perspective. Because a coordinated linked reserve system would be established under the Proposed Action Alternative, any enhancements to visual character and quality would be effectively extended compared to the No Action Alternative because continuous areas of land, rather than smaller discrete sites, would be established as mitigation sites.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is **beneficial**.

Potential effects from establishment and management of a reserve system under the Proposed Action Alternative would not result in significant adverse effects to visual quality or character. The creation of a reserve system would enhance the visual quality and character of discrete preserve sites established as mitigation for covered activities.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to Existing Conditions, this impact is **beneficial**.

No mitigation is required.

Effect VIS-4: Potential for substantial light or glare.

As discussed above, the Proposed Action Alternative would entail the conservation and enhancement of natural and semi natural areas for the protected of covered species in the County. Construction materials known to produce glare or permanent lighting structures that could generate substantial sources of nighttime lighting would not be required. It is highly unlikely that any activities associated with establishment and maintenance of reserve sites or habitat enhancement, establishment, re-establishment would require nighttime construction; although if earth moving is required, equipment and materials could be stored overnight in staging areas with security lighting. However, AMM number 7 (AMM7) from the HCP/NCCP requires construction workers to direct all lights for night-time lighting of project construction sites into the project construction area and minimize the lighting of natural habitat areas adjacent to the project construction area (all AMMs are described in Chapter 2, *Proposed Action and Alternatives*). This AMM would be applicable to construction associated with all covered activities, including preserve development, operations, and maintenance.

AMM7 provides an additional mechanism for impact avoidance and oversight related to construction lighting at preserve locations not included in the No Action Alternative.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is **less than significant.**

Further, potential effects from establishment and management of a reserve system under the Proposed Action Alternative would not result in the introduction of new sources of glare or nighttime lighting, and would therefore not contribute adverse effects to aesthetic resource.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to Existing Conditions, this impact is **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.

Cumulative Effects

The existing cumulative condition in the Plan Area resulting from past and present projects is described above for the No Action Alternative and remains the same for the Proposed Action Alternative.

The contribution of the Proposed Action Alternative to cumulative visual conditions would essentially be the same as compared to the No Action Alternative. Implementation of urban projects and activities, rural projects and activities, rural public services (infrastructure and utilities, agriculture economic development and open space), and public and private operation and maintenance receiving incidental take authorization under the Proposed Action Alternative would occur at generally the same intensity as the same categories of activities under the No Action Alternative. Ground disturbance associated with these activities could alter the quality of existing viewsheds and visual resources.

However, establishment of the reserve system would include enhanced viewsheds and landscapes from in the Plan Area as compared to the No Action Alternative. These enhancements to visual resources would result from the enhancement and establishment/re-establishment of habitats and would be retained through the ongoing maintenance and monitoring of conservation areas. As described above, visual resources would be improved as a result of the implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative through preservation and enhancement of large areas of habitat and agricultural lands compared to the existing conditions. In addition, any benefits to visual resources would be effectively extended compared to the No Action Alternative because continuous areas of land, rather than smaller discrete sites, would be established as mitigation sites. Also, AMM7 provides an additional mechanism for impact avoidance and oversight related to construction lighting at reserve system sites not included in the No Action Alternative. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action Alternative would not result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to the combined effects of past, current, and probable future projects on visual resources. The Proposed Action Alternative would make less of a contribution to any potential adverse cumulative effects compared to the No Action Alternative, and therefore would not result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative effect relative to the No Action Alternative.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is **less than significant**.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to Existing Conditions, this impact is **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE C—REDUCED TAKE ALTERNATIVE

Environmental Consequences/Environmental Effects

The Reduced Take Alternative (Alternative C) would include the same categories of development-related activities as the Proposed Action Alternative (Alternative B); however, under the Reduced Take Alternative there are eight areas designated for development under the Proposed Action Alternative in which activities that would result in take of covered species would not be permitted. See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3, *Alternative C-Reduced Take Alternative* for more information on this alternative.

Effects related to hazardous materials as a result of implementation of the Reduced Take Alternative would be similar to those discussed above for the No Action and the Proposed Action Alternatives. The Reduced Take Alternative would have the same potential to disturb known sites of contamination (as identified in Appendix F) as the Proposed Action Alternative. The alternative would also be near, or include, the same airports as the Proposed Action Alternative. However, activities that could result in take (e.g., development) would not be allowed on approximately 1,335 acres within the Plan Area in general, and in specific areas in the vicinity of existing development (such as Clarksburg, West Sacramento, and the Woodland Elkhorn Specific Plan area). The Reduced Take Alternative includes implementation of the Yolo HCP/NCCP and associated conservation strategy and AMMs (including AMM7). Overall, under the Reduced Take Alternative, Effects VIS-1, VIS-2 and VIS-4 would not be appreciably different from what is described for the Proposed Action Alternative. Beneficial effects would be slightly less than under both the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative but still very similar.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to the Proposed Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.

Cumulative Effects

The existing cumulative condition in the Plan Area resulting from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects is described above for the No Action Alternative and remains the same for the Reduced Take Alternative. The individual effects on visual resources under the Reduced Take Alternative are not substantially different from those described for the Proposed Action Alternative. Therefore, implementation of development and related activities receiving incidental take authorization could adversely affect visual resources. While laws and policies would help reduce potential effects, the potential remains for development and related activities provided incidental take authorization by the Plan to make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative visual impact.

However, as described for the Proposed Action Alternative, establishment and management of a reserve system has substantially less potential to adversely affect visual resources, and because of the natural of reserve system activities, there is great opportunity to avoid and otherwise mitigate for effects on resources that are present. Therefore, established and management of a reserve system under the Reduced Take Alternative would not make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant impact related to visual resources.

Since there is the potential for less development to occur under the Reduced Take Alternative, there is also the potential for fewer effects on visual resources associated with development (e.g., introduction of new structures, ground disturbing activities). Therefore, any cumulative contribution to a significant cumulative impact to visual resources under the Reduced Take Alternative could be slightly less than both under the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to the Proposed Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

ALTERNATIVE D—REDUCED DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE (ALTERNATIVE D)

Environmental Consequences/Environmental Effects

The Reduced Development Alternative (Alternative D) would include the same categories of covered activities as the Proposed Action Alternative (Alternative B), but under the Reduced Development Alternative, development within a portion of the west side of the Dunnigan area, and the Elkhorn Specific Plan Area, would not be covered activities under the Yolo HCP/NCCP and therefore, would not be provided incidental take authorization through the Plan. (See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.4, *Alternative D-Reduced Development Alternative* for more information on this alternative.) Impacts to visual resources as a result of implementation of the Reduced Development Alternative would be similar to those discussed under the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative.

Overall, under the Reduced Development Alternative, effects VIS-1, VIS-2, and VIS-3 would not be appreciably different from what is described for the Proposed Action Alternative. Effects due to development could be slightly less than under both the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative if the two areas are not developed during the permit term, but overall, impacts would be similar.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to the Proposed Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

No mitigation is required.

Cumulative Effects

The existing cumulative condition in the Plan Area resulting from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects is described above for the No Action Alternative and remains the same for the Reduced Development Alternative. The individual effects on visual resources under the Reduced Development Alternative are not substantially different from those described for the Proposed Action Alternative or the No Action Alternative. Implementation of development and related activities receiving incidental take authorization could adversely affect visual resource through development-related activities (e.g., introduction of new structures, ground disturbing activities). While laws and policies would help reduce potential effects, the potential remains for development and related activities provided incidental take authorization by the Plan to make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact related to visual resources.

However, as described for the Proposed Action Alternative, establishment and management of a reserve system has substantially less potential to adversely affect visual resources, and because of the nature of reserve system activities, there is a greater opportunity to avoid and otherwise mitigate for effects on resources that are present. Therefore, the establishment and management of a reserve system under the Reduced Development Alternative would not make a cumulatively considerable contribution to a significant cumulative impact related to visual resources.

Since there is the potential for less development to occur under the Reduced Development Alternatives (i.e., if the two areas not covered by the Plan under the alternative are not developed during the 50-year permit term), there is also the potential for less disturbance to visual resources. Therefore, any contribution to a cumulative impact related to visual resources under the Reduced Development Alternative could be slightly less than under both the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative but overall, impacts would be similar.

NEPA Level of Significance: As compared to the No Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.

CEQA Level of Significance: As compared to the Proposed Action Alternative, this impact is similar and is **less than significant**.