

4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

This section of the EIR describes the existing visual resources of the Elk Grove Planning Area (Planning Area), summarizes the landscape characteristics of the surrounding area, and discusses the impacts associated with implementation of the land use plan options. The analysis focuses on the anticipated alteration of the landscape characteristics and potential visual resource impacts in the Planning Area.

4.13.1 EXISTING SETTING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

In general, the dominant visual features within the Planning Area are the open sections of the valley floor, urbanized land uses, agricultural land uses, rivers and creeks, and various species of trees. Because the entire Planning Area consists of relatively flat terrain, views of these resources are available from roadways throughout the Planning Area. Oak trees, streams, creeks, and rivers are among the most significant natural visual features in the Planning Area; in particular, the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, the Sacramento River, and the Cosumnes River. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coastal ranges can be visible under clear conditions.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES

Rivers and Creeks

Some of the most significant natural features are the rivers and creeks located in the Planning Area; such as the Sacramento River, the Cosumnes River, Deer Creek, and Laguna Creek and its associated tributaries. The stream and river corridors are also home to numerous riparian habitats that provide natural scenic views.

The Cosumnes River makes up the Planning Area's eastern boundary, stretching from the intersection with Jackson Highway down to the intersection with Twin Cities Road. The Cosumnes River is the only undammed river on the western slope of the Sierra, which creates a natural ecosystem that is home to a number of wildlife species. This type of riparian habitat provides textures and colors not commonly found in the urban environment.

Laguna Creek is also one of the Planning Area's most valuable aesthetic resources. Laguna Creek flows throughout the City of Elk Grove, as well as part of the Planning Area. Like Cosumnes River, it is also home to native habitat. It also provides recreational opportunities with existing and planned bicycle and pedestrian trails, which enables close interactions with this aesthetic resource.

Refer to Section 4.8 (Hydrology and Water Quality) for a more detailed representation of the area's waterways.

Tree Resources

The Planning Area is dominated by many native tree types, such as valley oak, blue oak, interior live oak, cottonwood, sycamore, and willow. These tree types found in rural and urban areas, propagate and grow under natural conditions. These trees also provide a visual break from the uniformity of urban development. Non-native trees are also found in the Planning Area, mostly planted because of ornamental value, shade production, resistance to particular pests, or proven adaptation to the urban environment.

4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

There are no woodland corridors in the Planning Area, except riparian woodland corridors along area waterways. There are also several roadways in the Planning Area that are lined with mature trees in the rural areas.

Scenic Corridors

Many state highways are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Its purpose was to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. A scenic corridor is the land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway and is identified using a motorist's line of vision. A reasonable boundary is selected when the view extends to the distant horizon.

Scenic corridors that extend 660 feet on each side of the right-of-way protect all freeways within Sacramento County. Specifically within the Planning Area, these scenic corridors protect Interstate 5 (I-5) from the Laguna Boulevard exit to Twin Cities Road, State Route 99 (SR 99) from the Calvine Road exit to the juncture of SR 99 and the Cosumnes River south of Grant Line Road, and the entirety of SR 160 (or River Road) that is within the Planning Area and parallels the Sacramento River. The purpose of the corridor is to beautify the freeways to make road travel more pleasant and to create a more attractive image of the urban areas in Sacramento County. Both I-5 and SR 99 provide views for travelers passing through the Planning Area or into the City of Elk Grove. State Route 99 is also designated as a Special Sign Corridor by the Elk Grove Zoning Code, which regulates the type, size and location of signs within the view of the traveling public.

Landscape Corridors

Landscape corridors are linear open space corridors that link natural features with human populations. In addition, landscape corridors provide visual diversity and interest by contrasting urban and natural elements of the visual environment. Examples of landscape corridors include riparian/stream buffers, grassed waterways, field borders, hedgerows and windbreaks. Many of the new residential neighborhoods in the City incorporate landscape corridors directly adjacent to the public right-of-way.

Historic Visual Resources

Historic visual resources are important features of a community's history, providing a link between the visual landscape of the past and the urbanized landscape that characterizes the present. Examples of historic visual resources include buildings, structures, landmarks, monuments and other visually prominent features. There are four sites listed on the California Register within the Planning Area including the site for the first library in Sacramento County, located at 9125 Elk Grove Boulevard in the City of Elk Grove. Murphy's Ranch is located near the southwest corner of Grant Line Road and State Route 99 and is the site for the United States' first conquest of California. Additionally, there are significant historical graves in the Planning Area from members of the Donner Party and the Lewis and Clark expedition. For additional discussion on historic resources within the Planning Area, including the federally registered Historic District and other historic structures, refer to Section 4.11 (Cultural and Paleontological Resources).

Agricultural Land

Agricultural lands offer a break from the urban landscape by providing an open space visual resource, characterized by no form, line, color or textural features. The majority of the agricultural land in the Planning Area is located in the area's southern portion. The Planning Area contains a variety of agricultural uses. Currently, the main agricultural uses in the Planning Area include row crops, field crops, orchards, vineyards, and dairies, as well as grazing land for cattle. There are approximately 50,527 acres of agricultural lands within the Planning Area. For a detailed description and analysis of agricultural resources within the Planning Area, refer to Section 4.1 (Agriculture).

Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

The Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1994 with a goal of protecting 18,212 acres of natural habitats and valuable agricultural lands in southern Sacramento County. The NWR straddles Interstate 5 (I-5) from the town of Freeport and extends southward for 14 miles between the abandoned Southern Pacific Railroad to the west and Franklin Boulevard to the east, until Lost Slough (see **Figure 4.2-3**). Refer to Section 4.2 (Land Use) for further information regarding the Stone Lakes NWR.

4.13.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

LOCAL

Sacramento County General Plan

The Sacramento County General Plan is used as the "blueprint" to guide future development in unincorporated portions of the County, including sections of the Planning Area that are outside the Elk Grove city limits. The following Sacramento County visual resource policies are applicable to the Planning Area outside the existing city limits of Elk Grove.

- LU-22 Exterior building materials on nonresidential structures shall be composed of a minimum of 50 percent low-reflectance, non-polished finishes.
- LU-23 Bare metallic surfaces such as pipes, flashing, vents, and light standards on new construction shall be painted so as to minimize reflectance.
- LU-24 Require overhead light fixtures to be shaded and directed away from adjacent residential areas.
- LU-25 Require exterior lighting to be low-intensity and only used where necessary for safety and security purposes.

City of Elk Grove Zoning Code

The City of Elk Grove Zoning Code provides standards for lighting in each land use zone. The code also provides development standards for industrial properties within scenic corridors along a freeway right-of-way and a county road. Finally, zoning regulations include development and design standards for the location of signs along roadways to achieve an aesthetically pleasing appearance.

4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

City of Elk Grove Design Guidelines

In September 2002, City Council directed the preparation of a Design Review Ordinance and corresponding Citywide Design Guidelines. The Design Review Ordinance establishes an expanded design review process. The first phase of Design Guidelines for single-family residential development was adopted in March 2003. The City is currently reviewing design guidelines for non-residential and multi-family development.

The overall purposes of the design guidelines within the City are:

- To encourage high quality land planning and architecture;
- To encourage development in keeping with the desired character of the City;
- To ensure physical, visual, and functional compatibility between uses; and
- To ensure proper attention is paid to site and architectural design, thereby protecting land values.

The guidelines include design provisions for site planning, architecture, lighting, and landscaping. Adopted guidelines also include provisions regarding the preservation of significant natural features and compatibility with surrounding property.

4.13.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

An aesthetic or visual resource impact is considered significant if implementation of the project would result in any of the following:

- Have a substantial adverse affect 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 introduce a feature that is out of character that dominates the view;
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The visual resource analysis is based on field review of the Planning Area, review of topographic conditions, and review of the proposed land use map options. The visual quality standards of the Sacramento County General Plan and City of Elk Grove General Plan were used for guidance for this visual analysis. In addition, staff performed a visual field study from several vantage points within the City and public view areas in the Planning Area. This analysis is based on anticipated changes within the Planning Area from implementation of the proposed land use map as well as other anticipated development in the Planning Area.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Alteration of Scenic Resources

Impact 4.13.1 Implementation of the proposed General Plan would result in the alteration of scenic resources. This is considered a **significant** impact.

The implementation of the proposed City of Elk Grove General Plan would result in alterations to existing landscape characteristics of the City (agricultural land, rural residential areas, and tree-lined streets). There would be a significant change from agricultural land to urban land uses in the southern portion of the City, specifically in the approved East Franklin Policy Area, and the proposed Laguna Ridge Policy Area and Southeast Policy Area.

According to the Scenic Highways Element of the Sacramento County General Plan, State Highway 160, or River Road, is the only state designated scenic highway in the Planning Area. This highway lies outside the boundaries of the City of Elk Grove, so remains under the jurisdiction of Sacramento County.

General Plan Policies and Action Items

CAQ-8 *Large trees (both native and non-native) are an important aesthetic (and, in some cases, biological) resource. Trees which function as an important part of the City's or a neighborhood's aesthetic character or as natural habitat should be retained to the extent possible during the development of new structures, roadways (public and private, including roadway widening), parks, drainage channels, and other uses and structures.*

If trees cannot be preserved onsite, offsite mitigation or payment of an in-lieu fee may be required by the City. Where possible, trees planted for mitigation should be located in the same watershed as the trees which were removed.

Trees which cannot be protected shall be replaced either on-site or off-site as required by the City

CAQ-8-Action 1 *When reviewing native or non-native trees for preservation, considering the following criteria:*

- *Aesthetic value*
- *Biological value*
- *Health of the tree(s)*
- *Suitability for preservation in place*
- *Safety hazards posed by the tree(s)*

CAQ-8-Action 2 *Develop a list of trees which shall be considered generally exempt from preservation. These may include trees which pose a threat to public safety, to native trees, or to natural habitat.*

CAQ-8-Action 3 *Develop a list of trees which may be used when providing replacement trees for the loss of native and non-native trees.*

4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

- CAQ-8-Action 4 *Implement the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance.*
- CAQ-8-Action 5 *Amend the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance to conform with the policies of this General Plan and to expand protection to non-native trees.*
- CAQ-8-Action 6 *Develop a list of trees that should not be planted due to their invasive nature (that is, their ability to escape cultivation or to dominate natural areas) and provide this information to the public and the development community.*
- CAQ-8-Action 7 *Retain the services of a qualified arborist(s) under contract to the City to provide information to decision-makers and staff on the suitability of trees for preservation.*
- CAQ-8-Action 8 *Consider the use of revised standard roadway cross-sections which do not require the removal of trees in order to provide additional roadway capacity.*
- CAQ-8-Action 9 *Provide funds for education, programs, and materials emphasizing the value and importance of trees. Support private foundations with local funds for their tree planting efforts.*
- LU-34 *The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.*
- LU-34-Action 1 *Prepare and adopt Design Guidelines for residential and non-residential development.*

Mitigation Measures

Policy CAQ-8 and Policy LU-34 with corresponding action items would reduce the impacts to the alteration of scenic resources. However, land uses and the visual character of Elk Grove would change with the implementation of the proposed General Plan. Therefore, this impact is considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Daytime Glare

Impact 4.13.2 Implementation of the proposed General Plan could result in the introduction of a substantial amount of daytime glare sources to the area. This is considered a **potentially significant** impact.

The main sources of daytime glare are generally sunlight reflecting from structures and other reflective surfaces and windows. Implementation of the proposed City of Elk Grove General Plan would introduce new sources of daytime glare into the City and increase the amount of daytime glare in existing developed areas. The proposed land uses consist of various densities of commercial, office, recreation and other public uses. Daytime glare impacts would not be substantial in developed areas due to the large amount of recent growth and construction activities. Daytime glare would result in greater adverse impacts on any undeveloped portions of the City.

General Plan Policies and Action Items

LU-34 The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.

LU-34-Action 1 Prepare and adopt Design Guidelines for residential and non-residential development.

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measure shall be incorporated into the City of Elk Grove General Plan as an action item under Policy LU-34 in the Land Use Element.

MM 4.13.2 The Design Guidelines shall include a provision to minimize the use of reflective materials in building design in order to reduce the potential impacts of daytime glare.

Implementation of Policy LU-34 and its associated action item, as well as mitigation measure MM 4.13.2 would reduce the impacts to daytime glare to **less than significant**.

Nighttime Lighting

Impact 4.13.3 Implementation of the proposed General Plan would increase the amount of nighttime lighting in developed portions of the City and create new sources in undeveloped areas. These increased nighttime lighting levels could have an adverse affect on adjacent areas and land uses. This is considered a **potentially significant** impact.

Planned development and growth proposed in the General Plan would introduce new light sources into undeveloped portions of the City. Nighttime lighting levels would increase substantially over current levels in undeveloped portions of the City and incrementally with future projects in developed areas. New light sources would include, but not be limited to, new residential developments, street lighting, parking lot lights, and security related lighting for non-residential uses. These new light sources could result in adverse affects to adjacent land uses through the "spilling over" of light into these areas and "sky glow" conditions. In addition, implementation of the proposed General Plan would result in intensified nighttime lighting levels associated with increased traffic levels and further residential and commercial development.

General Plan Policies and Action Items

LU-34 The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.

LU-34-Action 1 Prepare and adopt Design Guidelines for residential and non-residential development.

4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measure shall be incorporated into the City of Elk Grove General Plan as an action item under Policy LU-34 in the Land Use Element.

MM 4.13.3 The Citywide Design Guidelines shall include provisions for the design of outdoor light fixtures to be directed/shielded downward and screened to avoid adverse nighttime lighting spillover effects on adjacent land uses and nighttime sky glow conditions.

Implementation of Policy LU-34 and its associated action item, as well as mitigation measure MM 4.12.3 would reduce the impacts to nighttime lighting to **less than significant**.

4.13.4 CUMULATIVE SETTING, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

CUMULATIVE SETTING

The cumulative setting for the Planning Area includes approved and proposed developments in the City limits of Elk Grove, the proposed Sphere of Influence and the entire Planning Area. Currently, there are a number of projects proposed in Elk Grove that would result in increased daytime glare and nighttime lighting over existing levels, and would contribute to cumulative conditions.

As mentioned in Section 4.0 (Introduction to the Environmental Analysis and Assumptions Used), potential development of the Urban Study Areas could have an affect on scenic resources in those areas. This would also contribute to the visual resource impacts of the larger Planning Area as well as to the larger Sacramento region, including Sacramento County, Yolo County, Sutter County, and the western portion of Placer and El Dorado counties.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Cumulative Impacts to Visual Resources

Impact 4.13.4 Implementation of the proposed General Plan along with potential development of the Urban Study Areas would result in the further conversion of the region's rural landscape to residential, commercial, and other land uses. This would contribute to the alteration of the visual resources in the region. This is considered a **cumulative significant** impact.

Approximately 5,900 acres of the City are anticipated to be substantially altered with urban levels of development under the implementation of the proposed General Plan, proposed projects such as the Laguna Ridge Specific Plan, the South Pointe Policy Area, Calvine Pointe, as well as the potential development of the Urban Study Areas. Other potential projects in the region include the Florin Vineyard Community Plan and the Sunrise-Douglas Community Plan in the City of Rancho Cordova. Development of any of these areas would cause increased impacts to visual resources in the region, by the conversion from agricultural land to urban land uses.

General Plan Policies and Action Items

CAQ-8 *Large trees (both native and non-native) are an important aesthetic (and, in some cases, biological) resource. Trees which function as an important part of the City's or a neighborhood's aesthetic character or as natural habitat*

should be retained to the extent possible during the development of new structures, roadways (public and private, including roadway widening), parks, drainage channels, and other uses and structures.

If trees cannot be preserved onsite, offsite mitigation or payment of an in-lieu fee may be required by the City. Where possible, trees planted for mitigation should be located in the same watershed as the trees which were removed.

Trees which cannot be protected shall be replaced either on-site or off-site as required by the City

CAQ-8-Action 1 *When reviewing native or non-native trees for preservation, considering the following criteria:*

- *Aesthetic value*
- *Biological value*
- *Health of the tree(s)*
- *Suitability for preservation in place*
- *Safety hazards posed by the tree(s)*

CAQ-8-Action 2 *Develop a list of trees which shall be considered generally exempt from preservation. These may include trees which pose a threat to public safety, to native trees, or to natural habitat.*

CAQ-8-Action 3 *Develop a list of trees which may be used when providing replacement trees for the loss of native and non-native trees.*

CAQ-8-Action 4 *Implement the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance.*

CAQ-8-Action 5 *Amend the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance to conform with the policies of this General Plan and to expand protection to non-native trees.*

CAQ-8-Action 6 *Develop a list of trees that should not be planted due to their invasive nature (that is, their ability to escape cultivation or to dominate natural areas) and provide this information to the public and the development community.*

CAQ-8-Action 7 *Retain the services of a qualified arborist(s) under contract to the City to provide information to decision-makers and staff on the suitability of trees for preservation.*

CAQ-8-Action 8 *Consider the use of revised standard roadway cross-sections which do not require the removal of trees in order to provide additional roadway capacity.*

CAQ-8-Action 9 *Provide funds for education, programs, and materials emphasizing the value and importance of trees. Support private foundations with local funds for their tree planting efforts.*

LU-34 *The City of Elk Grove shall require that new development including commercial, office, industrial, and residential development is of high quality and reflects the City's desire to create a high quality, attractive, functional, and efficient built environment.*

4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES/LIGHT AND GLARE

LU-34-Action 1 Prepare and adopt Design Guidelines for residential and non-residential development.

Mitigation Measures

The proposed City of Elk Grove General Plan Policies CAQ-8 and LU-34 listed above with their associated action items, as well as implementation of mitigation measures MM 4.13.2 and MM 4.13.3, would partially reduce impacts to scenic resources within the City. The Sacramento County General Plan provides policies that reduce impacts to visual resources within the remainder of the Planning Area, which includes the Urban Study Areas as discussed in Section 4.0. However, with implementation of the proposed General Plan, increased development would occur and changes to existing scenic resources would be inevitable. Therefore, this impact is considered **significant and unavoidable**.

REFERENCES

City of Elk Grove Development Services. 2003. *City of Elk Grove General Plan*. Elk Grove, CA.

Sacramento County Planning Department. 1993. *County of Sacramento General Plan*. Sacramento, CA.