

4.1 AESTHETICS

This chapter discusses the existing visual character of the Parkway Plan Area and its surrounding area, and evaluates potential aesthetic impacts with implementation of future projects under the proposed Plan. The following evaluation assesses visual character, scenic vistas, scenic highways, lights, and glare.

4.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

4.1.1.1 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

This section summarizes State and local regulations and programs related to aesthetics in the Parkway Plan Area. There are no federal regulations pertaining to aesthetics that apply to the proposed Project.

State Regulations

California Scenic Highway Program

The California Scenic Highway Program, maintained by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), protects scenic State highway corridors from changes, which would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to the highways. Fresno and Madera Counties have Eligible State Scenic Highways; however, none are officially designated as a scenic highway.¹

Parkway Master Plan Policies

The Conservancy will implement its mission and the Parkway Master Plan in a manner consistent with its adopted Parkway Master Plan goals, objectives, policies, design guidelines, and best management practices (BMPs) to the extent practicable.

Local Regulations and Policies

The Conservancy is the lead agency responsible for preparing, approving, and implementing the proposed Parkway Master Plan. The Conservancy may assist other government agencies and nonprofit organizations in implementing elements of the proposed Plan. The Conservancy's authorities and jurisdiction are described in Chapter 3. Local land use policies relevant to Parkway development and implementation are discussed in this section.

¹ California Department of Transportation, California Scenic Highways Program, http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/scenic_hwy.htm, accessed April 21, 2017.

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Madera County General Plan

Adopted on October 24, 1995, the Madera County General Plan sets forth the goals, regulations, and vision to provide guidance to developers, decision-makers, and the general community. Part II, Section 1(H), Visual and Scenic Resources, of the Madera Plan contain several policies and goals protecting scenic and visual resources within Madera County. Additionally, Part II, Section 5(H), Open Space for the Preservation of Natural Resources, requires new development under the jurisdiction of the County to be designed and constructed to preserve such areas and features such as scenic and trail corridors, wildlife corridors, and streams and streamside vegetation, to name a few. Specific policies and goals relating to aesthetics can be found in Table 4.1-1.

TABLE 4.1-1 MADERA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN POLICIES RELEVANT TO AESTHETICS

Policy/Goal Number	Policy/Goal
Goal 1.H	<i>To protect the visual and scenic resources of Madera County as important quality-of-life amenities for county residents and a principal asset in the promotion of recreation and tourism.</i>
Policy 1.H.1	The County shall require that new development in scenic rural areas is planned and designed to avoid locating structures along ridgelines, on steep slopes, or in other highly-visible locations, except under the following conditions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Such a location is necessary to avoid hazards; or The proposed construction will incorporate design and screening measures to minimize the visibility of structures and graded areas.
Policy 1.H.3	The County shall require that new development on hillsides employ design, construction, and maintenance techniques that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Preserve and enhance hillsides; Ensure that development near or on portions of hillsides do not cause or worsen natural hazards such as erosion, sedimentation, fire, or water quality concerns; Include erosion and sediment control measures including temporary vegetation sufficient to stabilize disturbed areas; Minimize risk to life and property from slop failure, landslides, and flooding; and Maintain the character and visual quality of the hillside.
Goal 1.I	<i>To develop a system of scenic routes serving the needs of residents and visitors to Madera County and to preserve, enhance, and protect the scenic resources visible from these scenic routes.</i>
Policy 1.I.1	The County shall designate scenic routes within the county in order to preserve outstanding scenic quality within different geographic settings.
Policy 1.I.3	The County shall protect and enhance scenic corridors through such means as design review, sign control, undergrounding utilities, scenic setbacks, density limitations, planned unit developments, grading and tree removal standards, open space easements, and land conservation contracts.
Policy 1.I.4	The County shall coordinate scenic route programs among local, regional, and state jurisdictions, recognizing that scenic routes are a resource of more than local importance.

Source: Madera County General Plan Policy Document, October 24, 1995.

Madera County Municipal Code

Chapter 18.97, Parking Plan and Development Review, of the Madera County Municipal Code (Madera Code) establishes requirements for design review applicable to commercial, industrial, institutional, and any other projects requiring parking spaces. The code excludes residential uses and projects subject to review by the planning commission.

Chapter 16.06, Environmental Committee Review, allows for the establishment of an Environmental Review Committee consisting of directors from the road department, engineering department, environmental health department, fire marshal, and the planning department, to review entitlement permit applications, conduct initial studies, and to evaluate California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)-related documents for compliance.

Gunner Ranch Area Plan

Adopted in October of 1994, the Gunner Ranch Area Plan is intended to guide development in the southeastern portion of Madera County, specifically just west of Highway 41.² Gunner Ranch encompasses 1,135 acres west of Highway 41 and opposite of the Rio Mesa area. The Gunner Ranch Area Plan seeks to identify issues, objectives, and goals to ensure a balanced community, adequate utilities, services and infrastructure, adequate water supply, and establish an identity within its boundaries.³ Chapter 3.2.3, Community Design Plan, establishes design goals and policies for development occurring within its boundaries.

Rio Mesa Area Plan

The Rio Mesa Area Plan was adopted on March 21, 1995, and covers 15,000 acres just east of Highway 41, opposite of the Gunner Ranch Area Plan boundaries. The Rio Mesa Area Plan was drafted concurrently with the current Madera County General Plan and was designed to be integrated within the General Plan for consistency.⁴ The Rio Mesa Area Plan sets forth policies regarding land use, circulation, community design and infrastructure seeking to guide development in a cohesive and coordinated manner, while ensuring adequate public facilities and quality of design.⁵ Chapter 3.2.3, Community Design Plan, establishes design goals and policies to guide development occurring within its boundaries.

- **Tesoro Viejo Specific Plan:** The 2007 Tesoro Viejo Specific Plan is intended to provide an “orderly and efficient development of the Specific Plan area in accordance with the provisions of the Madera County General Plan and the Rio Mesa Area Plan.”⁶ The vision of the Tesoro Specific Plan is to develop a vibrant community that prioritizes social, economic, and environmental health through high-quality community design. The Tesoro Viejo Plan is within the boundaries of the Rio Mesa Area Plan, and covers approximately 1,580 acres overall. Chapter 3, Development Standards, contain policies and standards to guide overall design within Tesoro Viejo.

² County of Madera, 1994. Gunner Ranch Area Plan, October, page 1.

³ County of Madera, 1994. Gunner Ranch Area Plan, October, page 5.

⁴ County of Madera, 1995. Rio Mesa Area Plan, March 21, page 2.

⁵ County of Madera, 1995. Rio Mesa Area Plan, March 21, page 2.

⁶ County of Madera, 2007. Tesoro Viejo Specific Plan, November, page 1-1 of 5.

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- **North Fork Village Specific Plan:** In 2006, the North fork Specific Plan guides development in the northwest portion of the Rio Mesa Area Plan encompassing 2,238 acres. The vision of the North Fork Village is to maintain its historical heritage by permitting development that complements the character of the surrounding topography and vegetation.⁷ Chapter 4, Design Guidelines, provide design guidelines for development within the North Fork Village area.

River West Madera Master Plan

The River West Madera Master Plan is a plan adopted by the County of Madera for development of the Parkway within specific land owned and managed by the Conservancy. The plan includes habitat conservation and enhancement, public access and recreation, cultural and natural resources protection, and environmental education, consistent with the 1997 Parkway Master Plan.⁸ The River West Madera Master Plan will guide implementation of the Parkway Master Plan within the area.⁹ The area covered by the River West Plan begins immediately west of Hwy of 41 and extends west through Sycamore Island. Although elements of design standards can be found throughout the entire River West Madera Plan, specific goals relating to design and aesthetics can be found in the Recreation section of the document. The Conservancy, as responsible agency, also adopted the River West Madera Master Plan.

Fresno County General Plan

The 2000 Fresno County General Plan Open Space and Conservation Element establishes numerous goals, and policies aimed at protecting and enhancing scenic qualities of the area. Additionally, the Fresno County General Plan attributes an important role to scenic resources in the economic development of the region with respect to tourism and tourism based industries. As such, the Fresno County General Plan seeks to protect aesthetic values and scenic areas within its boundaries. Additionally, there are urban development components regulating the character of development within the jurisdiction of the County. Policies and goals, with respect to aesthetics, can be found below in Table 4.1-2.

Friant Ranch Specific Plan

The Friant Ranch Specific Plan was adopted on February 1, 2011 and encompasses 942 acres adjacent to the unincorporated Community of Friant, located in the north-central area of Fresno County.¹⁰ In addition to providing guidelines for developing a community for active adults, the Friant Ranch Specific Plan seeks to conserve environmental resources within the boundaries of the Specific Plan by dedicating more than half of the 942 acres as open space. The western boundary of the Friant Ranch Plan Area is adjacent to the San Joaquin River. Chapter 5, Community Design Element, sets forth design guidelines for development within the Friant Ranch area.

⁷ County of Madera, 2006. North Fork Specific Plan, page 20.

⁸ County of Madera, 2012. River West-Madera Master Plan, page 5.

⁹ County of Madera, 2012. River West-Madera Master Plan, page 6.

¹⁰ Friant Ranch Specific Plan, 2011, page 1.

TABLE 4.1-2 FRESNO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN POLICIES RELEVANT TO AESTHETICS

Policy/Goal Number	Policy/Goal
Goal LU-C	<i>To preserve and enhance the value of the river environment as a multiple use, open space resource; maintain the environment and aesthetic qualities of the area; protect the quality and quantity of the surface and groundwater resources; provide for long term preservation of productive agricultural land; conserve and enhance natural wildlife habitat; maintain the flood-carrying capacity of the channel at a level equal to the one (1) percent flood event (100-year flood).</i>
Policy OS-A.20	The County shall support the policies of the San Joaquin River Parkway Master Plan to protect the San Joaquin River as an aquatic habitat, recreational amenity, aesthetic resource, and water source.
Goal OS-D	To conserve the function and values of wetland communities and related riparian areas throughout Fresno County while allowing compatible uses where appropriate. Protection of these resource functions will positively affect aesthetics, water quality, floodplain management, ecological function, and recreation/tourism.

Source: Fresno County General Plan, October 2000.

Friant Community Plan

The Friant Community Plan set forth County policies for development within the community of Friant, located approximately five miles north of the cities of Fresno and Clovis, and referred to as Fresno County’s “Gateway to Recreation.”¹¹ At approximately 1,804 acres, the Friant Community Plan is bounded by the San Joaquin River and Madera County at its western border, Friant Dam and Millerton Lake at the north, and the Friant-Kern Canal to the east. The Friant Community Plan identifies appropriate areas for agricultural, residential, commercial, public facilities, and open space uses within its boundaries. The Environmental Resources Management Element, along with the Land Use Element contains goals and policies with regard to aesthetics and design.

Fresno County Municipal Code

Chapter 17.48, Design and Improvements Standards, of the Fresno County Municipal Code (Fresno County Code) establishes regulations for designing and improving infrastructure within the County’s jurisdiction.

City of Fresno General Plan

The City of Fresno is currently updating its General Plan; however, for purposes of this Draft EIR the existing adopted General Plan must be used for analysis. The existing 2025 Fresno General Plan was adopted on February 1, 2002. Chapter 4(C), Urban Form Element, Chapter 4(G), Resource Conservation Element, and Chapter 4(F), Open Space and Recreation Element set forth the guidelines and policies to guide development activity under the jurisdiction of the City with respect to design, aesthetics, and scenic resources protection and enhancement. Specific General Plan policies and objectives relating to aesthetics can be found in Table 4.1-3.

¹¹ Friant Community Plan, 2008, page UCP 4-1.

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TABLE 4.1-3 CITY OF FRESNO GENERAL PLAN POLICIES RELEVANT TO AESTHETICS

Policy/Objective Number	Policy/Objective
Policy F-3-g	<p>Promote safety, attractiveness, and compatibility between parks and adjacent residential areas through proper design, adequate maintenance, and supervision to enforce park regulations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide adequate staffing during hours that the city's neighborhood, community, and regional parks are open; and consider after-hours supervision of city parks with measures that may include staffed remote monitoring equipment, on-site security personnel, and/or routine law enforcement patrols. ▪ Require the installation of security lighting for parking, points of access, and building areas at all public recreation and park sites. ▪ Locate noisy park facilities and those which require intensive night lighting (such as outdoor basketball courts) at an appropriate distance from adjacent residential uses with visual barriers to stop glare and protect privacy.
Policy F-9-b	<p>"Recreational areas" of the parkway proper will be defined as areas that are managed predominantly for human activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvements should be kept to the minimum needed to serve the visiting public and to meet sanitation, security, and safety needs. ▪ Types of activities that ultimately could be accommodated at parkway recreational areas include hiking/jogging; canoeing/kayaking; bicycling; fishing; horseback riding; nature observation/study; outdoor education/interpretive programs; picnicking; swimming; informal play at playgrounds and on turf areas; golfing; and camping (tents, trailers, and RVs) in environmentally resilient areas with adequate services such as vault toilets and drinking water. ▪ Consistent standards will be established to unify elements of the parkway into a recognizable unit and to coordinate improvements with other parkway objectives (such as minimizing impacts on wildlife). These standards should cover all aspects of recreational facility construction/improvement, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering - Design - Signage - Drainage controls and treatment of runoff - Lighting - Landscaping ▪ Landscapes (existing or restored) should feature native vegetation. ▪ Irrigated turf will be provided only to the extent needed to accommodate intensive activities that require an improved surface (such as ball fields). ▪ Commercial activities to serve visitors' parkway-related needs (such as camping and fishing supplies; books, maps, and guides) may be provided in, or adjacent to, intensive recreational areas under special use permits when such activities are consistent with other objectives and policies applicable to the riverbottom and parkway.
Policy W-7-g	<p>Within an area 100 feet wide abutting property zoned, planned, or otherwise approved for residential use, nonresidential developments' exterior lighting for parking, access drives, and loading areas shall be shielded and directed so as to prevent the residential properties from having line-of-sight visibility of the light source.</p>

Source: City of Fresno 2025 General Plan, February 1, 2002.

Woodward Park Community Plan

The Woodward Park Community Plan was adopted in December of 1989, and seeks to guide development within the Woodward Park Community located in the northern portion of the City of Fresno, and adjacent to the San Joaquin River at its northern and portions of its western boundary, encompassing 8,290 acres. Although mostly built out today, at the time of the Community Plan, the area was a rapidly developing suburban community characterized by single-family homes, along with large office developments. Once dominated by orchards, farms, and rural-residential development, the area is now urbanized. The Land Use and Open Space and Conservation Elements within the Plan include policies, goals, and guidelines relative to aesthetics and design within the Woodward Park Community.

Bullard Community Plan

Originally adopted in 1988, with subsequent amendments in 1989, 1990, and most recently 1991, the Bullard Community Plan covers 15,500 acres (24 square miles) in the northern part of the City of Fresno, and is situated west of the Woodward Park Community. The northern border runs along the San Joaquin River. Chapter 5, Special Issues, Policies, and Standards, along with Chapter 6, Specific Plans and Land Use Policies within the Bullard Community Plan Area, contain design guidelines for development within the Bullard Community neighborhood.

Sierra Sky Park Land Use Policy Plan

Adopted August 1985, and amended in 1998, the Sierra Sky Park Land Use Plan (Sky Park Plan) sets forth policies for development within the vicinity of the Sierra Sky Park Airport, which is located just north of West Herndon Avenue, adjacent to the San Joaquin River, and within the Bullard Community of the City of Fresno. The Sierra Sky Park Plan sets forth safety regulations within the air space surrounding the airport. Aesthetically, policies governing tree height, building height, and other development-related issues are included to maintain safety for inbound and outbound flights.

City of Fresno Municipal Code

Article 5, Environmental Quality, also known as the Environmental Quality Ordinance of the City of Fresno, requires that reviews of projects under CEQA shall be integrated with the planning and environmental review procedures otherwise required by law.

4.1.1.2 EXISTING SETTING

This section describes the existing visual character of the Parkway Plan Area and its vicinity, the scenic resources present in the surrounding area, and the light and glare conditions in the Parkway Plan Area.

The 23-mile-long Parkway Plan Area varies in topography and visual character as the surrounding area transitions from rural to urban. In general, as shown in Figure 4.1-2a and Figure 4.1-2b, the area north and east of the Parkway Plan Area in Madera County and in Fresno County is characterized by open agricultural orchards and rangelands, and rural residences, and the southern side in Fresno city is developed with one and two story residential and commercial structures, occasionally punctuated with taller buildings near the center of the Parkway

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Plan Area. Views of the Parkway Plan Area and vicinity are described below as the San Joaquin River flows from Friant Dam to State Route 99.

Views of the Parkway Plan Area

From its headwaters in the Sierra Nevada, the San Joaquin River flows from Friant Dam near the community of Friant in northeastern Fresno County. Rolling hills and open expanses of grassland typify the views from within the Friant community. The development pattern of the area is predominantly single-family homes, typically one-story in height.

Throughout the Parkway Plan Area, the riverbottom and adjoining flood plain are typically framed by relatively steep hillsides and often near-vertical bluffs. Throughout the course of the river between Friant Dam and State Route 99, riparian vegetation includes large, mature trees and shrubs varying in density. The river, riverbanks, and bluffs present important aesthetic and scenic values in the Parkway Plan Area.

Large aggregate mining pits and agricultural orchards and rangelands dominate the visual character of the Parkway Plan Area from Lost Lake Park to Highway 41, creating large expanses of flat terrain and far field views of the river and vegetation lining the banks. The operational mining areas vary in size but generally contain large excavated pits. Large flat roof structures and towers are associated with processing and storing gravel. Mining pits that are no longer in operation are typically filled with water at least seasonally, creating large ponds and wetlands.

The Parkway Plan Area around the Highway 41 Bridge includes two mobile home communities, recreational Parkway trails, and mature vegetation along the river banks. West of the Highway 41 Bridge, the area includes open expanses of grasslands, former mining operations, and is ringed by bluff-top homes in Fresno City and a few in Madera County.

Reclaimed gravel mines, including excavated ponds, occur on both sides of the river between Highway 41 and State Route 99. Agricultural fields and manicured landscapes of three golf courses are located on the south bank of the river. Rangeland dominates the Madera County side.

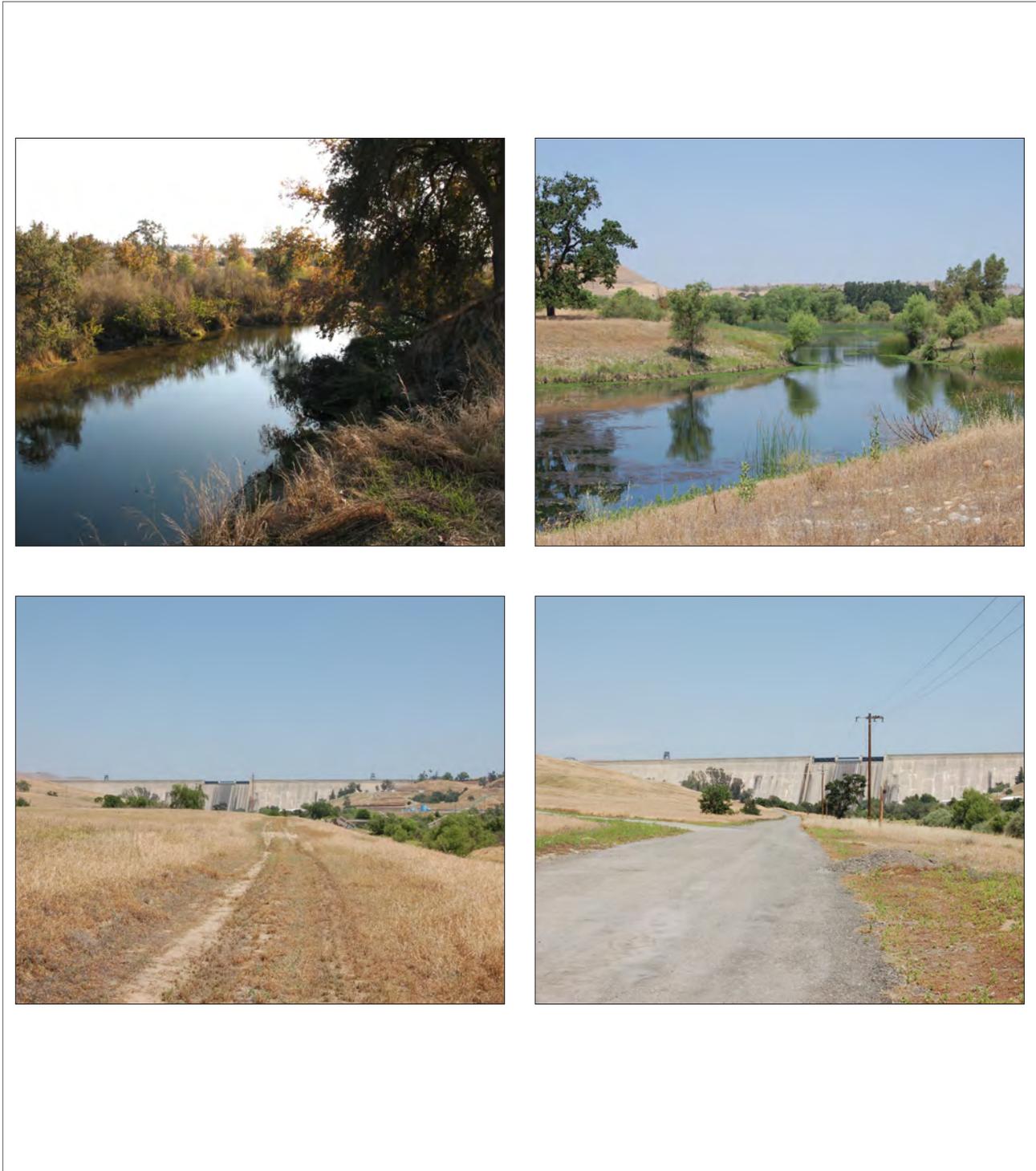
A series of views of the Parkway Plan Area are shown in Figures 4.1-1a and 4.1-1b.

Views from the Parkway Plan Area

Views from the Parkway Plan Area can be generally described as far field views of agricultural fields, riparian vegetation, single-family homes on bluff tops, commercial buildings near the Highway 41 corridor, and the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east.

Near the community of Friant, views from the area are dominated by the Friant Dam to the northeast, nearby bluffs on the north bank of the river and rolling hills and the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the distance. As the view moves in a westerly direction, views from the Parkway Plan Area gradually transition from open expanses and rolling hills to views of an urban environment with contemporary, single-family homes lining the Parkway primarily on the south side.

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Source: PlaceWorks, 2014.

Figure 4.1-1a
Views of the Parkway 1

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Source: PlaceWorks, 2014.

Figure 4.1-1b
Views of the Parkway 2

West of the Highway 41 bridge, views south from the Parkway Plan Area include urban forms such as modern multi-story office buildings, large format shopping centers, and two-story single-family homes. Manicured lawns and landscapes can be seen at various points. The Valley Children's Hospital complex is highly visible to the north.

A series of views from the Parkway Plan Area are shown in Figures 4.1-2a and 4.1-2b.

Light and Glare

Light generated within the Parkway Plan Area is emitted from a variety of uses. Most light sources are confined to illuminating areas directly around the emission point. However, large flood-lights and security lighting illuminate the mining facilities, golf practice ranges, and other locations within the area.

Glare is generated by light (typically sunlight) reflecting off a surface. Examples of glare in the Parkway Plan Area include light reflected from water in the river and adjacent ponds, vehicle windows, building windows, and metal roofs.

4.1.2 STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The proposed Project would result in a significant visual quality impact if it would:

1. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
2. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
3. Substantially degrade the view from a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings.
4. Expose people on- or off-site to substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

4.1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT DISCUSSION

AES-1	The proposed Project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
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The proposed Project would result in a significant impact if development and implementation under the plan would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Parkway Plan Area and its surroundings.

The proposed project includes the acquisition of lands for conservation and open space purposes. The proposed Project includes revegetation of degraded areas for habitat enhancement. The proposed Project includes the development, operation and maintenance of low-intensity public access and recreational uses and associated facilities, such as trails, picnic benches and tables, visitor centers, restroom facilities, boat and canoe launches, natural reserves, parking areas, and camp sites. Vista points, scenic overlooks, and nature observation points are

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Source: PlaceWorks, 2014.

Figure 4.1-2a
Views from the Parkway 1

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Source: PlaceWorks, 2014.

Figure 4.1-2b
Views from the Parkway 2

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included in the proposed Plan. The proposed Plan includes policies to integrate future facilities into the existing aesthetic character of the Parkway Plan Area.

The proposed Plan (Chapter 3, and Figure 3-3) proposes future facilities throughout the Parkway Plan Area, including a multiple-use Parkway trail, bridges and crossings, campgrounds, ancillary facilities, visitor centers and offices, as well as implementation of habitat restoration and conservation measures (e.g., revegetation and control of invasive species). Portions of the Parkway have been developed to date. The proposed Plan identifies planned projects on existing Parkway lands and opportunities for a variety of Parkway features, if lands are acquired by the Conservancy from willing sellers. Future development and implementation under the proposed Project would be subject to future CEQA analyses to identify potential project-level impacts and mitigation measures.

The type of proposed improvement with the greatest potential for visual change would be habitat restoration, where large areas along the river could be contoured and vegetated to improve habitat value and function. The potential for vegetation removal, grading, and planting could produce short-term visual impacts, which would improve once the vegetation is established. As noted in Chapter 3, Project Description, the exact location of the habitat restoration areas as well as other facility improvements will be determined subsequent to adoption of the Parkway Master Plan. Therefore, discussion of environmental impacts focuses on steps the Conservancy will take to minimize changes to visual character as projects are identified, phased, and constructed.

As described in the Existing Conditions section of this chapter, the Parkway Plan Area is characterized, in general, by typical views associated with agricultural fields, open expanses of grasslands, ponds, gravel pits, recreational areas, and woodlands, transitioning to views of residential, commercial, and recreational uses near the urban area. The river, riverbanks, ponds, bluffs, and hillsides are prominent in the viewshed. Existing portions of the Parkway are typically characterized by open space, habitat conservation areas, and low intensity recreational uses and associated facilities, such as trails, picnic benches and tables, fishing areas, vistas and scenic overlooks, a visitor center, restroom facilities, non-motorized boat and canoe launches, and parking areas.

Although future projects would be developed throughout the Parkway Plan Area, several policies in the proposed Plan would ensure that the existing visual character and quality of the site and its surroundings would not be substantially degraded. The multi-use trail and associated recreational structures, such as picnic shade structures, restrooms, and kiosks, are envisioned to be small-scale structures that would not degrade the visual character of the Parkway, but would be integrated into the Parkway Plan Area using appropriate siting, landscaping, buffers, colors, and materials. Future improvements would be designed to minimize the impact to the existing visual character and/or improve the aesthetic character through the implementation of several policies in the proposed Plan, including the following.

Parkway Master Plan Policies:

Habitat and Conservation and Management

Policies:

- HABITAT.3 Establish, through purchase, easements, or other mutually satisfactory arrangements, natural resource conservation areas, open space, and a continuous wildlife corridor along the river to facilitate the movement of large mammals between habitat areas, to provide a variety of nesting and foraging areas, and to enhance and protect the aquatic habitats of the river and associated wetlands.
- HABITAT.7 Enhance, restore, and maintain native vegetation, riparian, wetland, woodland, and grassland habitats within natural reserves, open spaces, and wildlife corridors.
- HABITAT.9 Incorporate natural features (e.g., wetlands, grasslands, woodlands, and other native vegetation) and integrate supporting artificial features (e.g., existing access roads, ponds on reclaimed mined lands) into Parkway development.
- HABITAT.18 Site new facilities in disturbed, reclaimed, or previously developed areas to avoid intrusion into sensitive habitat areas and to avoid habitat fragmentation, to the extent feasible.
- HABITAT.24 Reestablish to the extent possible a continuous corridor of riparian vegetation on both sides of the river to provide for the movement and migration of wildlife, as well as the restoration and improvement of in-stream shaded habitat.
- HABITAT.33 Enhance existing ponds, swales, and other features to increase habitat diversity.
- HABITAT.35 Incorporate a habitat enhancement component into all Parkway projects.

Floodplain and Water Resource Management

Policies:

- WATER.1 Design Parkway bridge crossings to minimize impacts on the natural environment, be pleasing aesthetically, meet safety requirements for cyclists and other users, and to withstand and pass flood flows as determined by regulatory agencies.

Public Access and Recreation

Goal:

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- Encourage trail corridors of sufficient width (varying with terrain, vegetation, and land) to preserve a scenic environment for users and to minimize impacts of trail use on wildlife and their habitats and on adjacent land uses.

Policies:

- ACCESS.2 Minimize potential impacts to sensitive natural resources by grouping facilities and intensive uses, or siting facilities and intensive uses in areas that are already disturbed or developed, where feasible.
- ACCESS.19 Provide sufficient on-site parking at each public recreational facility for the desired usage level during peak periods and to meet the parking recommendations of the affected local jurisdiction.
- Include landscaping to limit parking areas' visual impacts on the adjacent natural areas and residences, while ensuring safety and security for users
- ACCESS.24 Maintain Parkway areas, access, and facilities in good condition and repair.

Environmental Education, Interpretation, and Outreach

Policy:

- INTERP.4 Establish unified Parkway facility design elements for the purposes of branding the Parkway.

In addition to the policies established in the proposed Plan, applicable design guidelines and policies of the local jurisdictions would be incorporated for projects under local jurisdiction to ensure the existing visual character would not be substantially degraded, including: the provisions of the Madera County General Plan's Goal 1.H, and Policy 1.I.3, which protect the visual character of Madera County; Fresno County Goal LU-C, Policy LU-F.19, Policy LU-F.24, and Policy OS-A.20; and City of Fresno General Plan policies and objectives, including Objective C-20, Policy C-20-b, Policy C-20-e, and Objective C-22. Additionally, the applicability of municipal codes would be considered, including the Madera County Municipal Code Chapter 16.06, Fresno County Municipal Code Chapter 17.48, and the City of Fresno Municipal Code Article 5.

The proposed Plan includes the acquisition of lands for conservation purposes, thus maintaining much of the existing non-urbanized landscape and associated aesthetics. Furthermore, the proposed Plan includes revegetation of degraded areas for habitat enhancement, improving the aesthetic quality of the area. The proposed Plan also proposes development of low-impact recreational facilities with appropriate policies to integrate these future facilities into the existing aesthetic character of the Parkway Plan Area. Vista points, trails, and nature observation points included in the proposed Plan will provide new opportunities for the public to experience the aesthetic qualities of the river landscape and of nature.

Given the nature of future activities under the proposed Plan, which emphasize open space conservation, habitat restoration and low-impact facilities providing support to Parkway users, implementation would not substantially change the visual character of the area. Furthermore, several policies under the proposed Plan as well as policies under the local agency plans would protect and enhance the visual quality of the Parkway Plan Area by

incorporating design guidelines that focus on context-sensitive design considerations. Therefore, the proposed Project would result in a *less-than-significant* impact on the visual character and quality of the planning area.

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Permits, Relevant Local Land Use Policies:

- Madera County General Plan (Goal 1.H, and Policy 1.I.3)
- Madera County Municipal Code, Chapter 16.06
- Fresno County General Plan (Goal LU-C, Policy LU-F.19, Policy LU-F.24, and Policy OS-A.20)
- Fresno County Municipal Code, Chapter 17.48
- City of Fresno General Plan (Objective C-20, Policy C-20.b, Policy C.20.e, and Objective C-22)
- City of Fresno Municipal Code, Article 5

Significance Without Mitigation: Less than significant.

AES-2 The proposed Project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

The proposed Project would result in a significant impact if it would have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

As described above, the proposed Plan includes the acquisition of lands for conservation purposes, thus maintaining much of the existing non-urbanized landscape and associated aesthetics. Furthermore, the proposed Plan includes revegetation of degraded areas for habitat enhancement, improving the aesthetic quality of the area. The proposed Plan also proposes development of low-impact recreational facilities with appropriate policies to integrate these future facilities into the existing aesthetic character of the Parkway Plan Area. Vista points, trails, and nature observation points included in the proposed Plan will provide new opportunities for the public to experience the aesthetic qualities of the river landscape and of nature. Therefore, the proposed Project will result in a beneficial impact by providing opportunities to enjoy scenic views and vistas of the river, bluffs, and far fields of the Sierra Nevada.

Furthermore, many of the policies under the proposed Plan, including those listed below, would ensure that development would not result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. The policies under the proposed Plan would include:

Parkway Master Plan Policies:

Habitat and Conservation and Management

Policy:

HABITAT.9 Incorporate natural features (e.g., wetlands, grasslands, woodlands, and other native vegetation) and integrate supporting artificial features (e.g., existing access roads, ponds on reclaimed mined lands) into Parkway development.

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Floodplain and Water Resource Management

Policy:

- WATER.1 Design Parkway bridge crossings to minimize impacts on the natural environment, be pleasing aesthetically, meet safety requirements for cyclists and other users, and to withstand and pass flood flows as determined by regulatory agencies.

Agricultural Resources

Goal:

- Design, construct and manage the Parkway in a manner that is compatible with agricultural uses (crops, livestock, orchards, and nurseries).

Public Access and Recreation

Goal:

- Encourage trail corridors of sufficient width (varying with terrain, vegetation, and land) to preserve a scenic environment for users and to minimize impacts of trail use on wildlife and their habitats and on adjacent land uses.

Policies:

- ACCESS.2 Minimize potential impacts to sensitive natural resources by grouping facilities and intensive uses or siting facilities and intensive uses in areas that are already disturbed or developed where feasible.
- ACCESS.19 Provide sufficient on-site parking at each public recreational facility for the desired usage level during peak periods and to meet the parking recommendations of the affected local jurisdiction.
- Include landscaping to limit parking areas' visual impacts on the adjacent natural areas and residences, while ensuring safety and security for users.
- ACCESS.26 Provide recreation facilities, programs, and visitor services compatible with the environment of the recreation area. The types of uses potentially accommodated on public Parkway lands shall be primarily: hiking, jogging, bicycling, wading/swimming, canoeing, picnicking, fishing, golfing, equestrian riding, nature observation, nature study and educational interpretive programs, camping (tent, trailer, and RV), turf areas for informal and educational play, a limited number of visitor centers, ancillary facilities, and supporting retail and services. Playgrounds, turf areas, and sports facilities should be retained, and provided in areas designated for more intensive uses if warranted by demand. Large-scale, high-intensity use facilities, such as waterslides, amusements zones, or any recreational pursuit involving motor vehicles or motorized watercraft, other than electric trolling motors on fishing boats generally are not compatible with the Parkway or other uses currently found in the riverbottom. Spectator events or other large assemblies should be limited to an occasional basis.

- ACCESS.27 Utilize the Design Guidelines for San Joaquin River Parkway Public Access and Recreation Improvements (as adopted and refined over time), California State Parks design guidelines and trail classification system, and the project operator’s design guidelines, as applicable.
- BUFFER.11 Use existing vegetation or new plantings of native vegetation to buffer Parkway uses from adjacent land uses.

The County of Fresno, County of Madera, and the City of Fresno have not identified protected scenic vistas within their jurisdictions; however, recognizing that scenic vistas are an important part of the economy and quality of life to their residents, each jurisdiction has expressed the interest and commitment to protecting its landscape and scenic resources, which include views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, agricultural and farm lands, and open space. Their respective General Plans, and associated Specific, Master, and/or Area Plans, contain numerous policies and goals to protect such scenic resources. Moreover, each jurisdiction has specifically identified policies and goals dedicated to the preservation of scenic resources of the San Joaquin River and the San Joaquin River Parkway.

In addition to the policies established under the proposed Project, applicable policies of the local jurisdictions would be incorporated to ensure scenic vistas would be protected, including: provisions of the Madera County General Plan’s Goal 1.H, Policy 1.H.1, Goal 1.I, Policy 1.I.3, and Policy 1.I.4 which protect the character of Madera County; Fresno County General Plan Policy LU-F.19, Policy LU-F.24, Policy OS-A.20, and Goal OS-D; and City of Fresno General Plan policies and objectives including Policy C-18-j, Policy C-20-e, and Objective C-22.

Scenic views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains from areas around the Parkway Plan Area would not be substantially altered by the addition of Parkway recreational facilities, since much of the surrounding area is elevated well above the Parkway Plan Area. In addition, it is not anticipated that specific structures proposed under the Project would be of the height or bulk to adversely affect far field views of the surrounding areas.

The proposed Project will conserve the open space, rural character of much of the Parkway Plan Area, restoration projects will enhance scenic qualities, and vista points will allow the public additional opportunities to experience scenic views. The proposed Project seeks to serve the recreational needs of the visitors and community, while ensuring that new facilities be as minimally invasive or obstructive to the extent feasible to preserve existing and improve future scenic resources. The policies and goals under the proposed Project, and consistency with local plans and design guidelines, would ensure that future development under the proposed Plan would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic resources and, therefore, the impact would be *less than significant*.

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Permits, Relevant Local Land Use Policies:

- Madera County General Plan (Goal 1.H, Policy 1.H.1, Goal 1.I, Policy 1.I.3, and Policy 1.I.4)
- Fresno County General Plan (Policy LU-F.19, Policy LU-F.24, Policy OS-A.20, and Goal OS-D)
- City of Fresno General Plan (Policy C-18-j, Policy C-20-e, and Objective C-22)

Significance Without Mitigation: Less than significant.

AESTHETICS

AES-3 **The proposed Project would not substantially degrade the view from a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings.**

The proposed Project would result in a significant impact if it substantially degraded views from a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings; however, there are no officially designated scenic highways in Fresno or Madera Counties,¹² therefore, no impact would occur.

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Permits, Relevant Local Land Use Policies:

- N/A

Significance Without Mitigation: No impact.

AES-4 **The proposed Project would not expose people on- or off-site to substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.**

The proposed Project would have a significant impact if it exposed people on- or off-site to substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

As a result of the implementation of the proposed Project, new facilities would be introduced that have the potential to introduce new sources of light and glare including, but not limited to, security lighting for parking areas and structures, and reflection of light and glare from surfaces of vehicles in parking areas and signs during daytime hours. Through the proposed Project, major portions of the Parkway Plan Area would remain in an undeveloped condition with no new sources of light or glare.

Policies under the proposed Project to minimize impacts on day and nighttime views with respect to light and glare include:

Buffer Zones and Adjacent Land Uses

Policies:

BUFFER.16 Minimize lighting associated with Parkway development and encourage land use policies that minimize light impacts in the floodplain. With the exception of public safety, preclude lighting in the vicinity of the wildlife corridor or a natural reserve, to the extent possible.

BUFFER.17 Require all Conservancy-funded projects to reduce light pollution and intrusion; exterior luminaries should emit no light above horizontal or be Dark Sky certified.

¹² Caltrans, California Scenic Highway Mapping Program, http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/, accessed on April 21, 2017.

Additionally, consistency with policies such as F-3-g, F-9-b, and W-7-g in the City of Fresno General Plan would further reduce impacts of lighting on nighttime views for development occurring in the city. The counties of Fresno and Madera do not have general plan policies that would specifically reduce light and glare.

The policies listed above would ensure that the proposed Project, with respect to light and glare, would not substantially adversely affect day or nighttime views. Due to the overall size of the Parkway Plan Area, density of development, and the types of improvements that could be constructed under the proposed Plan, an increase in glare from implementation of the project would not be considered a substantial impact.

Although day-use facilities along the Parkway would close at sundown, nighttime views could be affected by security lighting on Parkway facilities such as restrooms, picnic areas, and campgrounds. However, with implementation of the proposed Plan policies Buffer 16 and 17, Parkway projects would be required to reduce light pollution and trespass, and exterior luminaries would emit no light above horizontal or be Dark Sky certified. The direction and focus of the lighting would be concentrated on a facility, therefore, reducing impacts to nighttime views. Because of policies and goals aimed at reducing light and glare included in the proposed Project, along with project-level review for future development which would further identify project-specific impacts and mitigation measures to the extent necessary to comply with CEQA, the impacts would be *less than significant*.

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Permits, Relevant Local Land Use Policies:

- City of Fresno General Plan (Policy F-3-g, Policy F-9-b, and Policy W-7-g)

Significance Without Mitigation: Less than significant.

4.1.4 CUMULATIVE IMPACT DISCUSSION

AES-5 The proposed Project, in combination with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects, would result in less than significant cumulative impacts with respect to aesthetics.

Implementation of the proposed Project would secure 5,900 acres in open space, conservation, and low-intensity recreational uses. The proposed Project will result in revegetation of disturbed areas. The proposed Project will introduce new structures and enhance existing facilities to support low-impact recreational activities. The new structures and the enhancement of existing facilities would be sited at various locations throughout the Parkway Plan Area, encompassing lands in Madera County, Fresno County, and the City of Fresno. As discussed in the impact discussions above, there are no officially designated scenic resources in either jurisdiction; however, each jurisdiction has policies reinforcing the importance of maintaining scenic views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and other scenic resources.

Although development would occur as a result of implementation of the proposed Project, specific projects have yet to be identified and, therefore, the specific locations of future improvements and facilities are unknown. Due to the topography of the Parkway Plan Area below the surrounding bluffs, the Parkway is within the viewshed of the surrounding area. However, the proposed Project contains several policies that aim to enhance, preserve, protect, and maintain scenic resources and aesthetics within the Plan Area, identified throughout the individual

AESTHETICS

impact discussions above. Consistency with each jurisdiction's general plan would further ensure protection of aesthetic resources within each jurisdiction.

Further, future development under the proposed Project would be subject to independent CEQA review which would analyze project-specific environmental impacts and mitigation measures to the extent necessary to comply with CEQA. Therefore, the proposed Project would result in a *less-than-significant* cumulative impact in relation to aesthetics.

Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Permits, Relevant Local Land Use Policies:

- Madera County General Plan
- Madera County Municipal Code, Chapter 18.97, Parking Plan and Development Review, and Chapter 16.06, Environmental Committee
- Fresno County General Plan
- Fresno County Municipal Code, Chapter 17.48, Design and Improvements Standard
- City of Fresno General Plan
- City of Fresno Municipal Code, Article 5, Environmental Quality, and Article 14

Significance Without Mitigation: Less than significant.