3.1 AESTHETICS

3.1.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Visual resources are the natural and artificial features of the landscape that can be seen and that contribute to the public's appreciative enjoyment of the environment. Visual resources or aesthetic impacts are generally defined in terms of a project's physical characteristics and potential visibility, and the extent to which the project's presence would change the perceived visual character and quality of the environment in which it would be located. Exhibit 3.1-1 provides photographs of representative views of the SPA and surrounding area taken during site visits on June 7, 2007, July 30, 2010, and September 19, 2010, and Exhibit 3.1-2 shows the locations where the photographs were taken.

VISUAL ASSESSMENT AND VISUAL QUALITY CRITERIA

The aesthetic quality of an area is determined through the variety and contrasts of the area's visual features, the character of those features, and the scope and scale of the scene. The aesthetic quality of an area depends on the relationships between its features and their importance in the overall view. Evaluating scenic resources requires a method that characterizes visual features, assesses their quality in relation to the visual character of the surrounding area, and identifies their importance to the individuals viewing them. This process is derived from established procedures for visual assessment developed by Federal agencies, and is commonly used for a variety of project types.

Both natural and created features in a landscape contribute to its visual quality. Landscape characteristics influencing visual quality include geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreation, and urban features. Several sets of criteria have been developed for defining and evaluating visual quality. The criteria developed by the Federal Highway Administration in 1981, which are used in this analysis, include the concepts of vividness, intactness, and unity. According to these criteria, none of these is itself equivalent to visual quality; all three must be considered high to indicate high quality. These terms are defined as follows:

- "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.
- "Unity" is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole.

The analysis of visual resources for this project uses a qualitative approach for characterizing and evaluating the visual resources of the areas that could be affected by the project. The quality of views of areas that could be affected by the project is evaluated based on the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity apparent in views. Viewer sensitivity, also considered in relation to these criteria, is a function of several factors, including the following:

- visibility of the landscape,
- proximity of viewers to the visual resources,
- frequency and duration of views,
- number of viewers,
- types of individuals and groups of viewers, and
- viewers' expectations as influenced by their activity.

Viewpoint 1: View from the central portion of the SPA along Kiefer Boulevard toward Rancho Cordova Parkway. Power poles and scattered trees are visible in the background, and the Anatolia development and a culvert for Kite Creek are visible in the middleground.

Viewpoint 2: View from the southwestern edge of the SPA to the northeast. The Sierra Nevada mountains and foothills are clearly visible in the background.

Representative Photographs **Exhibit 3.1-1a**

Viewpoint 3: View from Sunrise Boulevard looking southwest from the approximate location of the proposed Crescent Drive. Quarry operations at Triangle Rock Products are clearly visible in the middleground.

Viewpoint 4: View from Sunrise Boulevard looking northwest from the approximate location of the proposed Crescent Drive. The Sacramento County Rendering Plant, located west of the intersection of Sunrise Boulevard and Kiefer Boulevard, is visible in the middleground.

Representative Photographs **Exhibit 3.1-1b**

Viewpoint 5: View of a portion of Blodgett Reservoir (located on the Arboretum project site) from the southern edge of the SPA, near the intersection of Kiefer Boulevard and the proposed Americanos Boulevard.

Viewpoint 6: View off-site to the southeast along Kiefer Boulevard at the approximate location of the proposed Americanos Boulevard. The building to the left of the photograph in the background is associated with Kiefer Landfill. A portion of Blodgett Reservoir runs below the bridge located in the middleground of the photograph.

Representative Photographs **Exhibit 3.1-1c**

Viewpoint 7: View of a pond on the eastern edge of the SPA. Note the vegetation on the right side of the photo, and general rural appearance in the middleground and background.

Viewpoint 8: View of a vernal pool in bloom, located near the eastern edge of the SPA.

Representative Photographs **Exhibit 3.1-1d**

Viewpoint 9: View of the central portion of the SPA from the Kite Creek culvert located on Rancho Cordova Parkway, looking east. Note the Kite Creek (i.e., Sun Creek) creek bed in foreground, scattered trees in the middleground, and the Sierra Nevada foothills in the background.

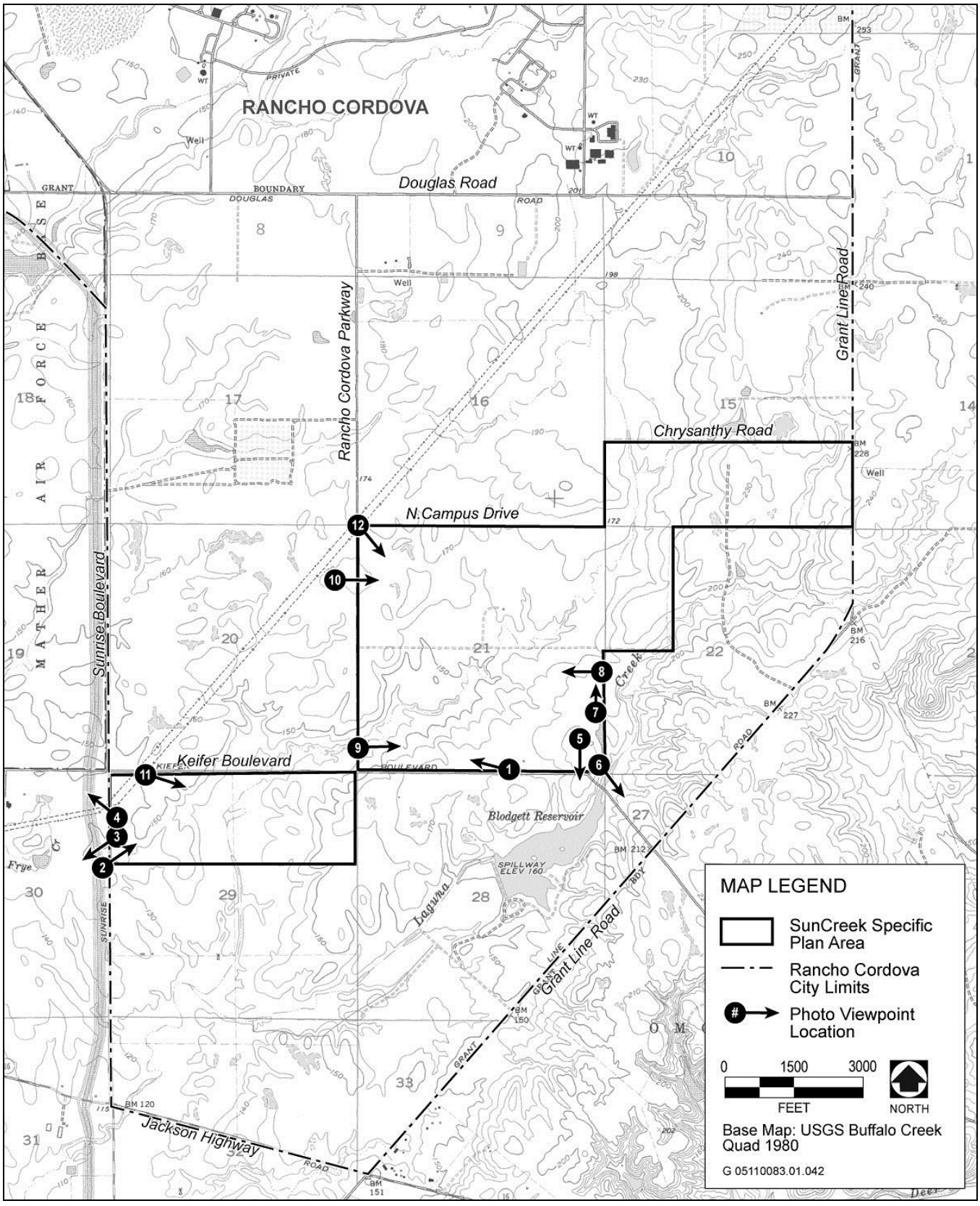
Viewpoint 10: View to the northeast from the intersection of North Campus Drive and Rancho Cordova Parkway.

Representative Photographs **Exhibit 3.1-1e**

Viewpoint 11: View of the SPA along Kiefer Boulevard, near the Sunrise Boulevard Intersection, looking southeast.

Viewpoint 12: View looking southeast from the intersection of North Campus Drive and Rancho Cordova Parkway into the central portion of the SPA. Note the dried creek bed in the middleground and scattered trees in the background.

Representative Photographs **Exhibit 3.1-1f**



Source: Data Compiled by AECOM in 2010

Viewpoint Locations **Exhibit 3.1-2**

The viewer's distance from landscape elements plays an important role in the determination of an area's visual quality. Landscape elements are considered higher or lower in visual importance based on their proximity to the viewer. Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant, and therefore visually important, it is to the viewer. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) methodology, which separates landscapes into foreground, middleground, and background views, has been used in this analysis. Although these three classifications should be considered on a case-by-case basis, in general, the foreground is characterized by clear details (within 0.25 or 0.5 mile from the viewer); the middleground is characterized by loss of clear texture within a landscape creating a uniform appearance (foreground to 3–5 miles in the distance); and the background extends from the middleground to the limit of human sight (USFS 1974).

REGIONAL SETTING

The various components of the SunCreek Specific Plan would be developed within the city limits of Rancho Cordova, which is located on the eastern edge of the Sacramento Valley. The SunCreek Specific Plan Area is bounded by Grant Line Road to the east and Sunrise Boulevard to the west, and is located within the Sunrise Douglas Community Plan area. Most of the SPA is undeveloped land used sporadically for dry land farming and grazing on spring grasses. Nearby land uses include the Anatolia development under construction to the west (Viewpoint 1) and generally undeveloped land to the north, east, and south (Viewpoint 2). Industry located adjacent to the SPA includes quarry activities to the southwest (Viewpoint 3); and the Sacramento County Rendering Plant to the west (Viewpoint 4). Blodgett Reservoir is located south of the SPA (Viewpoint 5), and Kiefer Landfill is located southeast of the SPA (Viewpoint 6). In addition to the SunCreek Specific Plan, various developments are planned for surrounding lands. Proposed projects to the north of the SPA include Anatolia III, the Ranch at Sunridge, and Arista Del Sol. The Arboretum Specific Plan area is located to the south, and would be bounded by Sunrise Boulevard to the west, Jackson Highway to the south, Kiefer Road to the north, and Grant Line Road to the east. The Cordova Hills development is proposed on the east side of the SPA (on the east side of Grant Line Road in Sacramento County). The Kiefer Landfill Special Planning area is located southeast of the project, and is planned to be used as a habitat preserve in areas surrounding the landfill. For more information related to surrounding development, see Section 3, "Chapter Organization, Introduction to Analysis, and Cumulative Context."

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SPA AND IMMEDIATE VICINITY

The SunCreek SPA includes approximately 1,253 acres and consists of undeveloped grasslands that contain very little topographic variation; seasonal wetlands and drainages (Exhibit 3.1-1, Viewpoints 7, 8, and 9), including Kite Creek; and a few scattered trees (Exhibit 3.1-1, Viewpoints 3, 4, and 5). Prominent features of the SPA are limited to Kite Creek, a few residences, a few scattered trees, barbed-wire fencing, and utility towers (Exhibit 3.1-1, Viewpoints 10, 11, 12). In the background, on clear days, the Sierra Nevada mountain range is visible to the east and Mount Diablo is visible to the southwest. As described below, the vividness, unity, and intactness are considered to be of high value.

Housing developments are currently under construction to the north and west of the SPA (Exhibit 3.1-1, Viewpoint 3), while views to the south and west are undeveloped and contain similar characteristics as the SPA. Blodgett Reservoir which is used for recreational purposes, is located directly south of the SPA (Exhibit 3.1-1, Viewpoint 4).

VISUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT SITE

- **Vividness:** The SPA is characterized by a relatively flat area covered with annual grasses and a few scattered trees. There are relatively few encroachments on site, consisting of barbed-wire fencing, utility lines, and a few scattered rural residences. These items do not constitute a substantial distraction to the landscape as a whole. While views to the west and north are blocked by housing developments, views to the south and east are generally undeveloped. Certain vantage points in this area offer a rare opportunity to view undisturbed

open space with a clear view of the Sacramento Valley to the south, and the undeveloped foothills of the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains to the east.

- **Intactness:** As described above, few encroachments exist on site. The majority of this area provides views of undeveloped grasslands, which most people consider to be aesthetically pleasing. Because the SPA is generally undisturbed, the SPA is considered to have a highly intact landscape.

- **Unity:** The SPA is exemplary of California's Central Valley rangeland, including gently rolling hills, which contrasts with development in the area. Although there are a few encroachments within the SPA, they are few in number and do not detract from the overall sense of unity.

Viewer Sensitivity

As described above, viewer sensitivity is related to the values and opinions of a particular group and can be generally characterized by the viewer activity, awareness, and local significance of a site. Viewers of the SPA include travelers along Sunrise Boulevard, Grant Line Road, and Kiefer Boulevard, and residents living in adjacent developments to the west and north. In general, motorists in the area are driving past the site on Grant Line Road to use Kiefer Landfill (located southeast of the SPA), or to nearby homes (in the Anatolia development west of Rancho Cordova Parkway) and businesses along Sunrise Boulevard. In addition, the section of Sunrise Boulevard that borders the SPA is a Special Sign Corridor, which places design restrictions on signs within 500 feet of the roadway. The existence of such a regulation indicates that the aesthetics of this area are appreciated and an attempt has been made to keep them intact. Furthermore, the SPA provides a view of a generally undisturbed rural landscape, which has become an increasingly rare site in the areas surrounding the SPA. Thus, viewer sensitivity is considered to be high.

3.1.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No Federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws are applicable to the Proposed Project or alternatives under consideration.

STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

California Department of Transportation

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to designated highways. However, there are no state-designated scenic highways in the vicinity of the SPA (Caltrans 2008).

REGIONAL AND LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

City of Rancho Cordova General Plan

Goals and policies from the *City of Rancho Cordova General Plan* (City General Plan 2006) relating to aesthetics that are applicable to the Proposed Project and alternatives under consideration are listed in Appendix K.

City of Rancho Cordova Lighting Standards

Title 1 (General Provisions) of the City of Rancho Cordova Zoning Code contains standards requiring that illumination of buildings, landscaping, signs, and parking and loading areas be shielded and directed so that no

light trespasses onto adjacent properties. Title III (Use Regulations and Development Standards) requires that lighting shall be directed away from residential areas and public streets so that glare is not produced that could impact the general safety of vehicular traffic and the privacy and well-being of residents.

City of Rancho Cordova Design Guidelines

On September 6, 2005, the Rancho Cordova City Council adopted the City's first comprehensive Design Guidelines document (Resolution 108-2005) (City of Rancho Cordova 2005). The Design Guidelines apply to all types of development and reflect the City's desire for quality development. The Design Guidelines were created using input and direction from Urban Design workshops held in the spring/summer of 2004, the visual preference survey and General Plan survey conducted in the summer of 2004, visioning workshops and land use map discussions for the City's General Plan, and the guiding principles of the City's Design Review Ordinance. These provisions provide a framework to evaluate new development projects against the City's adopted vision and are intended to reflect the City's desires relative to land planning, as well as individual site design and architecture. The guidelines and standards set forth in Chapter 2 of the Design Guidelines, "Community Design," are applicable to all project types and cover a wide range of topics from general circulation and project signage to landscaping and sustainable development. The subsequent chapters provide additional provisions that are applicable to unique project types, including commercial and commercial mixed use, office and office mixed use, residential (all types from single family detached to residential mixed use), community facilities, and industrial. The determination of whether a project is consistent with the overall intent of the guidelines ultimately rests with the designated Approving Authority.

Specific Design Guidelines that are related to visual resources potentially affected by development of the site include the following:

Site Design – Screening and Service Areas

Design Objective: Screen on-site activities that detract from overall appearance of the site or otherwise create undesirable noise.

Design Guidelines:

- Appropriate locations for loading, outdoor storage, refuse collection shall be located behind buildings or in areas not designated for pedestrians or as primary vehicular circulation routes through the site.
- Screening of service functions shall be incorporated into overall design of buildings and landscaping.
- Rooftop equipment shall be entirely screened from public view.

Site Design – Sustainable Development

Design Objective: Preserve and protect natural features of the environment.

Design Guideline:

- Significant natural features from the environment shall be included in all new development. This can include the use of native plantings and restoration and protection of creeks, swales, and vernal pools.

Architecture – Massing, Scale, Form

Design Objective: Design buildings at a human scale to ensure a desirable pedestrian environment with variety and visual richness that enhances the public realm and the pedestrian experience.

Design Guidelines:

- Large building volume should be broken into a number of smaller components to decrease its apparent mass and volume, to thus reduce visual impacts.
- Large buildings should tier or taper to reduce their scale along the edges of the site.

Proposed SunCreek Specific Plan Development Regulations

Section 2.12.7, "General Lighting Standards" of the proposed SunCreek Specific Plan (attached as Appendix C to this DEIR/DEIS) Development Regulations provide the following guidance for light installations.

A. Nuisance Prevention

All outdoor lighting shall be designed, located, installed, directed downward or toward structures, shielded, and maintained in order to prevent glare, light trespass, and light pollution.

B. Maintenance

Fixtures and lighting shall be maintained in good working order and in a manner that serves the original design intent.

C. Shielding

Except as otherwise exempt, all outdoor lighting shall be constructed with full shielding and/or recessed to reduce light trespass to adjoining properties. Each fixture shall be directed downward and away from adjoining properties and public rights-of-way, so that no light fixture directly illuminates an area outside of the site.

D. Level of Illumination

Outdoor lighting shall be designed to illuminate at the minimum level necessary for safety and security and to avoid the harsh contrasts in lighting levels between the project site and adjacent properties. Illumination standards are as follows:

1. Public, civic and religious buildings are permitted to be fully illuminated.
2. Parking lots, driveways, trash enclosures/areas, public phones, and group mailboxes shall be illuminated with a minimum maintained one foot-candle of light and an average not to exceed four foot-candles of light. The following uses shall provide additional lighting as described below:
    a. Convenience stores, card rooms, and check cashing establishments shall provide a minimum level of illumination of one and one-half foot-candles across the parking lot during business hours.
3. Pedestrian walkways shall be illuminated with a minimum maintained one-half foot-candle of light and an average not to exceed two foot-candles of light.

4. Entryways and exterior doors of nonresidential structures shall be illuminated during the hours of darkness, with a minimum maintained one foot-candle of light, measured within a five-foot radius on each side of the door at ground level.

5. In order to minimize light trespass on abutting residential property, illumination measured at the nearest residential structure or rear yard setback line shall not exceed the moon's potential ambient illumination of one-tenth foot-candle.

E. Maximum Height of Freestanding Outdoor Light Fixtures

The maximum height of freestanding outdoor light fixtures abutting residential development shall be 18 feet. Otherwise, the maximum height for freestanding outdoor light structures shall be 24 feet. Height shall be measured from the finish grade, inclusive of the pedestal, to the top of the fixture.

F. Energy-Efficient Fixtures Required

Outdoor lighting shall utilize energy-efficient (high pressure sodium, metal halide, low pressure sodium, hard-wired compact fluorescent, or other lighting technology that is of equal or greater efficiency) fixtures and lamps. All new outdoor lighting fixtures shall be energy-efficient with a rated average bulb life of not less than 10,000 hours.

G. Accent Lighting

Architectural features may be illuminated by uplighting; provided, that the lamps are low intensity to produce a subtle lighting effect and no glare or light trespass is produced. Wherever feasible, solar powered fixtures shall be used.

In addition, Section 2.12.8, "Outdoor Lighting Plans Required" of the proposed SunCreek Specific Plan Development Regulations provide the following.

A. When Required

A preliminary outdoor lighting plan shall be submitted as part of each planning permit application, and a final plan shall be submitted as part of an application for a building permit for a new structure or an addition of 25 percent of the gross floor area, seating capacity, or parking spaces. A final outdoor lighting plan is required for all new outdoor lighting installations on commercial, mixed-use, multi-unit residential, industrial, and institutional properties. The director may request outdoor lighting plans from applicants for other types of projects due to location, size, or proposed use, as necessary.

B. Plan Content

At a minimum, an outdoor lighting plan shall include the following:

1. Manufacturer specifications sheets, cut sheets, and other manufacturer-provided information for all proposed outdoor light fixtures to show fixture diagrams and outdoor light output levels.

2. The proposed location, mounting height, and aiming point of all outdoor lighting fixtures.

3. If building elevations are proposed for illumination, drawings of all relevant building elevations showing the fixtures, the portions of the elevations to be illuminated, the illumination level of the elevations, and the aiming point for any remote light fixture.

4. Photometric data including a computer-generated photometric grid showing foot-candle readings every 10 feet within the property or site and 10 feet beyond the property lines.

3.1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The thresholds for determining the significance of impacts for this analysis are based on the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, as amended. These thresholds also encompass the factors taken into account under NEPA to determine the significance of an action in terms of its context and the intensity of its impacts. The Proposed Project or alternatives under consideration were determined to result in a significant impact related to aesthetic resources if they would do any of 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 which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

This visual impact analysis is based on field observations conducted by AECOM on June 7, 2007, July 30, 2010 19, and September 19, 2010 and a review of maps and aerial photographs. Analysis of the project's impacts was based on evaluation of the changes to the existing visual resources that would result from project implementation. In making a determination of the extent and implications of the visual changes, consideration was given to:

- specific changes in the visual composition, character, and valued qualities of the affected environment;
- the visual context of the affected environment;
- the extent to which the affected environment contained places or features that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration; and
- the numbers of viewers, their activities, and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by the project-related changes.

It should be noted that an assessment of visual quality is a subjective matter, and reasonable people can disagree as to whether alteration in the visual character of the SPA would be adverse or beneficial. For this analysis, a conservative approach was taken, and the potential for substantial change to the visual character of the SPA is generally considered a significant impact.

ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER IN THIS EIR/EIS

Scenic Resources within a State Highway—There are no roadways designated as scenic in, or within view of, the SPA. Thus, there would be no impact, and issues related to substantial damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway are not discussed further in this EIR/EIS.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

Impacts that would occur under each alternative development scenario are identified as follows: NP (No Project), NCP (No USACE permit), PP (Proposed Project), BIM (Biological Impact Minimization), CS (Conceptual Strategy), and ID (Increased Development). The impacts for each alternative are compared relative to the PP at the end of each impact conclusion (i.e., similar, greater, lesser).

IMPACT 3.1-1 **Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista.** *Project implementation would result in the degradation of the visual quality of a scenic vista.*

NP

Under the No Project Alternative, no project-related development would occur; thus there would be no project-related impacts and no project-related construction that would affect views of the SPA. Therefore, there would be **no direct** or **indirect** impacts. ***[Lesser]***

NCP, PP, BIM, CS, ID

A scenic vista is generally considered an expansive view of a unique or remarkable landscape, which is observable from a location accessible to the public. The open grasslands of the SPA and adjacent undeveloped lands provide a pleasing rural view that is enhanced, on clear days that occur primarily in the winter and spring, with scenic views of the snow-covered peaks of the Sierra Nevada mountain range to the east. The grasslands and vernal pools on the SPA are a unique landscape, which in the spring provide views of green expanses, with vernal pools ringed by colorful wildflowers. This landscape, which is indigenous to the east side of the Central Valley, is becoming rare in close proximity to urbanized areas that are expanding onto these areas.

Implementation of the Proposed Project and the other four action alternatives would convert the SPA into an urban area, generally consisting of housing units and commercial development. Views from adjacent roadways toward the site would be permanently altered, substantially degrading the existing viewshed. Because the quality of the site is contingent on expansive views, all action alternatives, regardless of the level of proposed development, would have a similar effect on scenic resources. This area would become of similar visual quality to nearby developed land, and would no longer be considered a unique or scenic vista. Because the project-related alterations would have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, this **direct** impact is **significant**. **No indirect** impacts would occur. ***[Similar]***

Mitigation Measure: No feasible mitigation measures are available.

There are no feasible mitigation measures available that could fully reduce impacts associated with alteration of a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista (degradation of and obstruction of a vast expanse of open area) to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, this impact is considered to be **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT 3.1-2 **Substantial Degradation of Existing Visual Character or Quality of the Site and its Surroundings.** *Project implementation would substantially degrade the visual character of the SPA to developed urban uses.*

NP

Under the No Project Alternative, no project-related development would occur; thus there would be no project-related impacts and no project-related construction that would affect the visual character of the SPA. Therefore, there would be **no direct** or **indirect** impacts. ***[Lesser]***

Implementation of any of the five action alternatives would alter the visual character of the approximately 1,253-acre SPA from an open rural landscape to an urbanized landscape, which includes multi-storied residential and commercial structures and roadways, paths, and other paved surfaces. As shown in Table 2-15 (Section 2, "Alternatives"), all action alternatives would include project characteristics that are contrary to the existing visual quality of the site. This development would permanently alter the foreground and middleground views from within the SPA and from viewers outside the SPA looking in. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountain range would no longer be visible, because they would be blocked by structures. The visual character of the site would be substantially altered. The vast expanse of open area would be obstructed by project development.

Reasonable people may differ as to the aesthetic value of undeveloped grasslands, and whether development of urban uses in the SPA would constitute a substantial degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. However, given the large scale of this urban development and the rural nature of its setting, a conservative approach has been taken for this analysis, and the degradation of visual character at the SPA is considered to be substantial, and impacts on visual resources from project implementation are considered to be **direct** and **significant. No indirect** impacts would occur. ***[Similar]***

Mitigation Measure 3.1-2: Require Development to Conform with Design Standards Identified in the SunCreek Specific Plan.

The project applicants for any particular discretionary development application shall implement design, architectural, development, and maintenance standards identified in *the SunCreek Specific Plan*. The following shall be implemented:

- Design standards regarding building design, massing, scale, and orientation shall be applied at the interface between the open space preserve and residential and commercial development in order to ensure that project design is compatible with open space preservation and to minimize the visual impacts of the built environment on the open space.
- Automobile, pedestrian, and bicycle trails shall be designed to minimize visual impacts by providing for landscaping, and by keeping streets and paved trails to minimum required widths, where feasible.
- Landscaping shall be compatible with adjacent preserved areas by emphasizing landscapes that use non-invasive plants native to the region.

Implementation: Project applicants for any particular discretionary development application.

Timing: Before approval of building permits for all structures within all project phases.

Enforcement: City of Rancho Cordova Planning Department.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-2 would partially reduce impacts related to the degradation of the local visual resources through conversion of undeveloped rural lands to large-scale urban development as proposed by the No USACE permit, Proposed Project, Biological Impact Minimization, Conceptual Strategy, and Increased Development Alternatives. This measure, however, would not fully reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level. Because of the scale of the project and location of the SPA, there are no feasible mitigation measures available to address aesthetic impacts associated with the conversion of a large expanse of rural land to urban development. Although development in the SPA would conform to design, architectural, development, and maintenance standards identified in the SunCreek Specific Plan, there is no mechanism to allow implementation of the project while entirely avoiding conversion of the existing visual environment from a rural landscape to an urban landscape. Therefore, the impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT 3.1-3 **Temporary, Short-Term Degradation of Visual Character for Developed Project Land Uses During Construction.** *Project implementation would involve the temporary and short-term use of staging areas for construction equipment and materials, which would be visible to adjacent project land uses that have already been developed.*

NP

Under the No Project Alternative, no project-related development would occur; thus there would be no project-related impacts and no project-related construction that would affect views of the SPA. Therefore, there would be **no direct** or **indirect** impacts. ***[Lesser]***

NCP, PP, BIM, CS, ID

The presence and movement of heavy construction equipment and staging areas could temporarily degrade the existing visual character and/or quality of the SPA and surrounding area for existing developed land uses. Buildout of the project is anticipated to occur over a 20-year period, with construction anticipated to begin in 2012 and end in 2032. During this time, adjacent project development, including sensitive land uses such as residential housing, schools, and parks, would be occupied while construction is occurring in a different phase.

Construction activities would require the use of various types of equipment, such as scrapers, graders, dozers, and trucks as well as signs, cones, and trash receptacles. Project construction would involve the temporary use of fenced staging areas for construction equipment and materials. Although these staging areas would be located in disturbed areas, construction equipment and materials would be visible to residents, employees at existing businesses, and at parks and school sites over a 20-year duration.

Thus, construction activities would temporarily degrade the existing visual character of the SPA in the vicinity of developed areas. This temporary and short-term impact is **direct** and **significant**. **No indirect** impacts would occur. ***[Similar]***

Mitigation Measure 3.1-3: Screen Construction Staging Areas.

The project applicants for any particular discretionary development application shall locate staging and material storage areas as far away from sensitive land uses (e.g., residential areas, schools, parks) as feasible. The location of staging and material storage areas shall be approved by the City of Rancho Cordova before the approval of grading plans and building permits for all project phases and shall be screened from adjacent occupied land uses in earlier development phases to the maximum extent practicable. Screens may include, but are not limited to, the use of visual barriers such as berms or fences. The screen design shall be approved by the City of Rancho Cordova to further reduce visual effects to the extent feasible.

Implementation: Project applicants for any particular discretionary development application.

Timing: Before approval of building permits for each project phase.

Enforcement: City of Rancho Cordova Planning Department.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-3 would reduce significant impacts associated with temporary and short-term visual-quality degradation for developed land uses from concurrent construction activities under the No USACE permit, Proposed Project, Biological Impact Minimization, Conceptual Strategy, and Increased Development Alternatives to a **less-than-significant** level by providing visual screening.

IMPACT 3.1-4 **Creation of a New Source of Substantial Light or Glare that would Adversely Affect Day or Nighttime Views in the Area.** *Project implementation would require lighting of new development, which would cause new and increased sources of light and glare.*

NP

Under the No Project Alternative, no project-related development would occur; thus there would be no project-related impacts resulting in new sources of light or glare that would adversely affect day and nighttime views in the area. Therefore, there would be **no direct** or **indirect** impacts. ***[Lesser]***

NCP, PP, BIM, CS, ID

Light associated with urban development can result in spillover lighting and glare effects. Spillover lighting is artificial lighting that spills over onto adjacent properties and could cause an annoyance to neighboring residents by disturbing sleep patterns. Glare is intense light that shines directly, or is reflected off a surface, into a person's eyes. Use of building materials such as reflective glass and polished surfaces can cause glare. During daylight hours, the amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight. Glare is particularly acute at sunrise and sunset because of the low angle of the sun in the sky.

Currently, the SPA consists of grasslands, with a few utility-related structures (e.g., electrical transmission towers and lines), and a few scattered rural residences. Implementation of proposed development would require lighting for roadways; commercial, office, and industrial buildings; parking lots; residences; and other public facilities such as schools and parks. In addition, nighttime lighting or the presence of reflective surfaces on buildings in the commercial, office, and industrial areas (e.g., reflective window glazing) may result in light and glare shining onto motorists on adjacent roadways. Therefore, project implementation would substantially increase light and glare in the SPA and adjacent areas. Thus, this impact would be **direct** and **significant. No indirect** impacts would occur. ***[Similar]***

Mitigation Measure 3.1-4: Prepare and Implement a Lighting Plan.

To reduce impacts associated with light and glare, the project applicants of all project phases shall:

- Shield or screen lighting fixtures to direct the light downward and prevent light spill on adjacent properties.
- Place and shield or screen flood and area lighting needed for construction activities, nighttime sporting activities, and/or security so as not to disturb adjacent residential areas and passing motorists.
- For public lighting in residential neighborhoods, prohibit the use of light fixtures that are of unusually high intensity or brightness (e.g., harsh mercury vapor, low-pressure sodium, or fluorescent bulbs) or that blink or flash.
- Use appropriate building materials (such as low-glare glass, low-glare building glaze or finish, neutral, earth-toned colored paint and roofing materials), shielded or screened lighting, and appropriate signage in the office/commercial areas to prevent light and glare from adversely affecting motorists on nearby roadways.
- Design exterior on-site lighting as an integral part of the building and landscape design in the SPA. Lighting fixtures shall be architecturally consistent with the overall site design.
- Lighting of facilities as proposed in the lighting plan shall be consistent with the City's General Plan standards.

A lighting plan for all project elements shall be submitted to the City for review and approval, which shall include the above elements. The lighting plan may be submitted concurrently with other improvement plans, and shall be submitted before the installation of any lighting or the approval of building permits for each phase. The project applicants of all project phases shall implement the approved lighting plan.

Implementation: Project applicants for any particular discretionary development application.

Timing: Before approval of building permits for each project phase.

Enforcement: City of Rancho Cordova Planning Department.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-4 would reduce significant impacts associated with effects from new sources of light and glare to a **less-than-significant** level under the No USACE Permit, Proposed Project, Biological Impact Minimization, Conceptual Strategy, and Increased Development Alternatives by requiring the project applicants of all project phases to prepare and implement lighting plan and by requiring conformance with established City General Plan standards.

IMPACT 3.1-5 **New Skyglow Effects.** *Project implementation would require lighting of new development that would result in the generation of new and increased skyglow effects, obscuring views of stars, constellations, and other features of the night sky.*

NP

Under the No Project Alternative, no project-related development would occur; thus there would be no project-related impacts resulting in a new skyglow effect. Therefore, there would be **no direct** or **indirect** impacts. ***[Lesser]***

NCP, PP, BIM, CS, ID

Skyglow is artificial lighting from urbanized uses that alters the rural landscape and, in sufficient quantity, lights up the nighttime sky, thus reducing the visibility of astronomical features. The SPA consists primarily of undeveloped agricultural grazing land. Existing lighting sources are associated with a few scattered rural residences, and lighting on utility towers to provide airspace security. The existing land uses are not a substantial source of nighttime lighting. Therefore, these areas generate no substantial sources of skyglow into the night sky. However, a substantial increase in the amount of nighttime light would result from the development of the SPA with urban land uses including residences, commercial and industrial land uses, and schools and parks over approximately 1,265 acres, which would obscure views of the stars, constellations, and other features of the night sky. Because project implementation would introduce a substantial quantity of nighttime light over a large area of a rural landscape that is essentially dark under existing conditions, overall skyglow effects are considered a **significant** and **direct** impact. **No indirect** impacts would occur. ***[Similar]***

Mitigation Measure: Implement Mitigation Measure 3.1-4.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-4 would partially reduce significant impacts associated with effects from skyglow under the No USACE Permit, Proposed Project, Biological Impact Minimization, Conceptual Development, and Increased Development Alternatives, but not to a less-than-significant level. Mitigation Measure 3.1-4 would require the development and implementation of an on-site lighting plan and conformance with City General Plan standards. However, because of the scale and location of the SPA, screening or shielding of light fixtures to direct light downward or the use of low-pressure sodium or other lighting would not reduce the effects of new skyglow on the night sky to a less-than-significant level, and there are no other feasible mitigation measures available. Therefore, impacts would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

3.1.4 RESIDUAL SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Impacts related to substantial alteration of a scenic vista would be significant and unavoidable because no feasible mitigation measures are available to fully reduce these impacts to a less-than-significant level.

Although implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-2 would require that design, architectural, development, and maintenance standards identified in the SunCreek Specific Plan are followed, impacts resulting from the substantial degradation of existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings would remain significant and unavoidable because there are no additional feasible mitigation measures available to fully reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level based on the size of the proposed development.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-4 would help to reduce the impacts from skyglow because a lighting plan with components specifically designed to reduce skyglow would be implemented. However, because of the scale and location of the SPA, screening or shielding of light fixtures to direct light downward or the use of low-pressure sodium or other lighting would not reduce the effects of new skyglow on the night sky to a less-than-significant level, and there are no other feasible mitigation measures available. Therefore, impacts would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

3.1.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The geographic scope of visual impacts consists of the City of Rancho Cordova and eastern Sacramento County south of U.S. 50. Development is increasingly changing the visual character along roadway corridors in both the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County, from grazing/rural lands and vast areas of open space to urban uses, thus altering and limiting the views available to motorists along these roadways and residents living in the area. This trend will continue as future projects are implemented in the region and in Rancho Cordova as a whole, consistent with growth planned in the City General Plan, and community plans and specific plans, including the Anatolia III, Arboretum, Arista Del Sol, and the Ranch at Sunridge, which border the SPA. In addition, the Cordova Hills project immediately east of the SPA (on the east side of Grant Line Road in Sacramento County) would also alter and limit available views. Substantial changes in visual conditions will continue as agricultural lands and open space are replaced by urban development in the City of Rancho Cordova and Sacramento County. These projects are planned for build-out over the next few decades and will result in substantial adverse effects to the existing visual character of eastern Sacramento County, both during construction activities and on a permanent basis. As described above, the SPA is considered to be a scenic vista because it is characterized as undeveloped lands with far-reaching views, which would no longer exist once the land in the vicinity of the SPA is developed. Thus, implementation of the project would result in a cumulatively considerable incremental contribution to significant cumulative impacts on the scenic vista and degradation of the visual character of Rancho Cordova and southeastern Sacramento County, during construction activities and project operation.

Increased urban development would also lead to increased daytime and nighttime light and glare and subsequent skyglow in the region and more limited views of the night sky. This is especially the case in the southern area of Rancho Cordova, which is planned to undergo a large-scale change from open space to urban uses. The cumulative effect of these changes on aesthetic resources from past and planned future projects, as well as the contribution from the project, is considered a significant impact. Although these cumulative impacts can be minimized to a degree through vegetative and topographic screening of structures and appropriate building design, as well as implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-4 that requires implementation of a lighting plan (e.g., use of non-reflective building surfaces, use of outdoor lighting that limits light spillover, and other measures), the significant cumulative impact cannot be fully mitigated. Therefore, the cumulative change of agricultural and open-space views in the project region to urban land uses and the associated increase in daytime glare and nighttime light and subsequent skyglow are considered direct, adverse, and significant and unavoidable impacts. In addition, the project's incremental contribution to these impacts is cumulatively considerable.