

5.14 AESTHETICS

5.14.1 INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the existing visual setting and potential impact of the proposed project upon the aesthetics of the plan area, including scenic resources, visual character, light, and glare.

5.14.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The visual appearance of the plan area is dominated by dairies and related agriculture uses, and other open space in varying degrees these practices and characteristics have determined the aesthetic qualities of the area's visual resources. The visual analysis completed for the area included the initial step of identifying elements that either add to or detract from the quality of the area. The subsequent step evaluated the role those elements play in the range of views from public areas, including foreground, middle distance, and far distant views.

Positive features that enhance the area's visual resources relate to the current agricultural operations and the accompanying sense of a rural setting. In developed urban landscapes, public views are often limited to foreground features. The lower building density within the existing agricultural setting allows for more extensive views across and through dairy operations or cropland areas.

Negative features that adversely affect the area's visual resources include the lack of adequate infrastructure to provide for current dairy operations and physical spaces to define and separate uses. Examples of this include a lack of curb, gutter, and sidewalks along existing streets and the close proximity of dairies to one another. This latter characteristic provides a visual density and intensity that reduces the area's visual aesthetics. In addition, regional air quality may negatively affect visual resources by reducing the visibility of area hills and mountains and their associated range of color, form, and contrast of scenery.

Scenic Resources

The proposed plan area is located within the Chino Valley, which is a large and generally flat subportion of the larger San Bernardino Valley. The plan area is generally flat with a gentle south-southwest trending slope. Elevations in the area range from about 500 to 600 feet above sea level.

Chino and Mill Creeks traverse the southern part of the area. These creeks have inherent scenic value, although the aesthetics have been diminished in numerous locations by trash deposition and debris. Two other smaller drainage courses (e.g. earthen swales) extend south from the Chino Airport through the plan area, before entering Prado Lake. These drainages have very little vegetation and

scenic value. Approximately 2,197 acres of the plan area lie within the high water inundation area created by the proposed raising of the Prado Dam. Prado Dam is not a visual presence in the area due to its height, distance from the plan area, and the southerly slope of the land toward the dam.

The most visible distant features from the plan area are the hills of the Cleveland National Forest to the south, and the Chino Hills to the west. San Juan Hill, located to the west of the plan area within the Chino Hills is approximately 1,780 feet high. San Juan Hill is located just south of the westerly extension of the major Edison transmission lines. Peaks visible to the distant south of the plan area within the Cleveland National Forest include Sierra Peak and Pleasants Peak, which reach 3,045 and 4,005 feet elevation, respectively.

Within the plan area, middle and foreground views can vary and intermingle depending on the vantage point, topography and vegetation. For example, visibility in the southerly half of the project area is significantly reduced due to an increased level of vegetation. However, visibility increases in the open dairy pasture within the plan area, and cropland portions of the project area due to the relative lack of structures and vegetation.

Visually, the project area can be divided into two (2) distinct areas. The northerly portion, generally identified as that area north of the 556' dam inundation area, is primarily dairy use-related. Significant portions of this area contain facilities for the care and feeding of cows. Little vegetation exists within the area, except for that portion related to feed crops for existing dairy operations.

The southerly portion contains a greater level of vegetation due to the reduced number of dairies, seasonal inundation from Prado Dam and existing water features and recreational areas. The natural vegetation associated with Chino and Mill Creeks, the topographic relief and fallow farmlands combine to create a significant visual resource. This visual and aesthetic appeal is also enhanced by Prado Regional Park and Prado Lake.

Bisecting the plan area in the vicinity of Pine Avenue is a major electrical transmission line operated by the Southern California Edison Company. Electrical facilities located along this alignment include 2-200 kv lines, plus 2-500 kv lines. The electrical towers are estimated to be approximately 125 feet high and represent the most visible man-made feature in the project area.

Dairy Operations and Visual Character

While dairy uses can provide an open rural type setting, the plan area contains a high density of such uses, which places them in close proximity to area roadways and each other. This lack of separation between uses reduces the open rural character normally associated with such uses and therefore, detracts from the area's appearance. In addition, structures built with reflective metal roofing and siding contribute to a stark industrial appearance of storage or production related facilities. Outdoor

storage yards containing obsolete or seldom used agriculture objects or machinery about some of the area's residences and agriculture facilities. Operational components of the dairies, such as waste water retention lagoons and animal waste also diminish the visual appeal of the area, especially during the summer months when water is minimal and mud is exposed in ponds and lagoon bottoms. The existence of such uses can adversely affect the area's visual resources.

Inland Empire Utility Agency's Co-Composting Facility is a 93-acre facility in the center of the plan area with stockpiled manure and wastewater sludge for compost. Stockpiles typically reaching up to 20 feet high are partially screened from surrounding views by perimeter berms.

The California Institution for Women-Chino (CIW-Chino) is highly visible along Chino-Corona Road and within adjacent portions of Prado Regional Park, but the facility is not readily visible from the surrounding major roadways (i.e. SR 71, Euclid Avenue (SR 83), Pine Avenue). Lighting of this women's correctional facility and grounds, and the barbed wire high perimeter fences, are existing adverse aesthetic and visual elements. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' plans to create a dike around the western and southern perimeters of the facility for flood inundation protection may have either an adverse or beneficial impact on nearby views, depending upon the design and landscaping of the proposed dike.¹

The plan area contains a number of existing uses that will either remain or relocate as new development occurs. The plan area is located within a portion of the Chino Basin Dairy Area (CBDA) that is home to one of the largest dairy herd populations in the world. An additional portion of the plan area is devoted to pasture land and agricultural uses. Due to the existing agricultural uses the area is primarily rural in nature with minimal streetlights and no curbs, gutters or sidewalks. Visibility is generally uninterrupted due to the lack of structures within the area.

Light and Glare

Light and glare sources are very limited within the plan area due to the lack of structures, streetlights, and hard surfaces typically found with urban/suburban development. The most significant areas illuminated at night are the California Institution for Women and the industrial buildings on the north side of Merrill Avenue, southeast of the Chino Airport. Portions of various dairy operations within the area are also illuminated at night. However, the nature of the existing nighttime lighting, in areas other than the Institute for Women and the industrial area identified above, more resembles a rural setting due to the non-uniformed spacing of the lighting and the lack of well illuminated gathering spaces normally associated with an urban setting.

¹ Supplemental EIS and Project EIR for Prado Basin and Vicinity, Including Stabilization of the Bluff Toe at Norco Bluffs; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (7/2000).

Surrounding Views

The land uses immediately surrounding the plan area are generally low lying and do not represent significant visual features. The Chino Airport is located along the northerly project boundary. Although a number of large buildings exist on the Airport property they are separated from surrounding properties and uses by a significant distance due to existing Airport safety zones. Euclid Avenue/State Route 83 is the westerly project boundary and is designated a scenic highway by the County for that portion within the unincorporated area of the County south of Riverside Drive. Euclid Avenue is not significant visually since it is at the same elevation as the surrounding area. Adjacent to the northwest corner of the project area is the California Institution for Men. The Institution is illuminated at night, but does not represent a significant light source due to its distance from the project area.

The plan area is generally screened from view along State Route 71, a state designated scenic highway, by low hills along the east side of SR 71. The site appears as part of a low, distant horizontal visual plane along SR 71 north of Pine Avenue (see Exhibit 5.14-1). The site is more readily visible from higher elevations in the Chino Hills to the west of SR 71

5.14.3 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

In evaluating potential aesthetics impacts of a proposed project, Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the Environmental Checklist, indicates a potentially significant affect could occur if the project would result in 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.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.



Photo 1 Approach to Prado Regional Park - Northbound Euclid Avenue



Photo 2 View of Chino Subarea 1 From Elevated Vantage Point Above State Route 71 (Sub Area 2 Visible at Horizon)



5.14.4 PROJECT IMPACTS

The impacts associated with implementation of the proposed plan are primarily derived from the change in land use from a rural to urban condition. This transformation will significantly change the character of the project area. While the land use change is significant it may not represent a significant change from an aesthetic perspective since rural and urban settings may each have positive and negative attributes. Development of the proposed plan area will result in a change from a rural to urban character, incorporating a variety of residential, commercial, industrial, recreation, and open space uses. The open space character and scenic values of the site below the 566-foot elevation would remain largely unaltered.

Scenic Resources

As noted within the existing setting section above, most significant scenic resources are located off-site. The proposed project will not affect these particular resources or vicinity characteristics. Visual resources within the project area are primarily located at or below the existing 566' dam elevation inundation area. The proposed project does not intend to change that condition. Land uses below the 566-foot elevation will retain a mix of open space, recreation and agricultural uses. The Preserve Specific Plan identifies the area below the 566-foot dam inundation elevation as one of the more significant and unique open space opportunities in the region. The land use concept builds upon this opportunity and provides a natural oasis for active and passive recreational opportunities. The area below the 566-foot dam inundation elevation is envisioned as a dynamic combination of active and passive recreation, habitat and agricultural uses.” (p. 32) Consistent with this objective, the Plan further provides that “The open space land use designations address a specific range of uses intended to help preserve the historic, rural character or Chino. The majority of these designations are incorporated within the 566-foot dam inundation elevation.” (p. 82)

The proposed specific plan contains the following five (5) open space land use designations:

- Agriculture: To provide for agricultural uses, including farming, stables, pastures, and grazing.
- Open Space-Recreation: To provide for open space areas for active and passive recreation and to provide protection from environmental hazards.
- Agriculture/Open Space-Natural: To provide for agricultural and open space uses, including passive recreation, equestrian uses, farming, pastures, grazing, permanent open space, wildlife preserves, multi-purpose trails, and water retention basins.
- Open Space-Natural: To provide permanent natural open space, wildlife preserves, natural drainage and stream courses, cultural and historic resources, and protect natural

plant and animal habitats. This designation also permits the use of open space areas for passive outdoor recreational uses.

- Open Space-Water: To provide for the preservation of water resources, such as watercourses and lakes.

The proposed specific plan land uses within the southerly half of the plan area will be consistent with existing land uses and compatible with the land uses proposed within the balance of the planning area to the north. The development of the northerly portion of the project area will substantially change the existing character and nature of the area. Although no scenic resources have been identified within this area, the proposed project will change the area from a rural agricultural related setting to an urban setting with a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial uses.

The proposed specific plan responds to the County's scenic highway designation for Euclid Avenue by defining both an Urban Expressway and Rural Expressway roadway design and cross-section for different segments of the route adjacent the plan area (i.e. north of Pine Avenue and south of Pine Avenue). To respond to existing scenic resources that can be viewed from area roadways, such as Euclid Ave., the Preliminary Draft Specific Plan "will tailor the design of an Expressway to that of the surrounding character, two street sections are provided: an Urban and Rural street section. In urban areas, an Expressway [Euclid Avenue] is an eight-lane, high capacity roadway with a 200-foot right-of-way and a curb-to-curb width of 160-feet, including a 64-foot median. In rural areas, an Expressway maintains the same right-of-way width but the design can be altered to reflect the open character by eliminating or reducing the median, eliminating curbs, and providing a wide, paved/or shoulder." The Specific Plan also indicates that "Between Kimball and Pine Avenues, Euclid Avenue is the urban cross section...Between Pine Avenue and the 71 Freeway, Euclid Avenue reflects the rural cross section." (p. 101) This theme is further delineated in the Specific Plan through specific treatments. That portion north of Pine Ave. is required to provide "A lush understory and groundcover..." South of Pine Avenue. "Informal groupings of native landscaping should be used." (p. 139).

Due to the proposed land use pattern, the impact upon existing land uses and scenic resources within the project area will be less than significant.

Visual Character

The visual character of the project area will change substantially as land uses transition from one dominated by agriculture to an urban setting. This change will disrupt the open and rural condition represented by existing uses and reduce visibility due to the construction of buildings and other structures.

The highly visible existing major electrical transmission lines traversing the plan area will remain, but are placed within an Open Space-Recreation designation that will respect their existence and separate permanent uses from their location. The electrical towers do not significantly impair visibility or views within and through the plan area. The towers, however, represent a highly visible man-made feature that will remain with development of the plan area.

Light and Glare

The affect of existing light and glare within the plan area is currently minimal due to the lack of structures and other physical improvements. Development of the project area will add to the amount of physical improvements and associated hard surfaces that reflect light, including buildings, parking areas, and signs. However, proposed development must comply with landscaping criteria contained within the Specific Plan that will “help unify the street scene, orient travelers and create a memorable image.” (p. 138) The Plan also contains landscape and streetscape design guidelines “to establish a unified landscape framework that provides continuity throughout the public portions of the project area, including public roads, easements, parkways, medians, and development edges.” (p. 138) Individual project landscaping must comply with both the specific plan standards and guidelines, and the existing Chino Zoning Ordinance.

Although additional light and glare sources would be created, the use of landscaping, directional lighting criteria, and building design criteria incorporated into the specific plan would reduce the impact to a level that is less than significant.

Surrounding Views

The plan area is relatively flat and views from off-site locations will not be significantly affected, except those from elevated portions of Chino Hills, located approximately one (1) mile to the west. Views from the Chino Hills area are generally more distant and lack perspective due to minimal height variation when measured against the distance to the site. These views are also occasionally obscured by the general visibility conditions found in the area. Closer views of portions the plan area are obtained from the Butterfield Ranch area in Chino Hills near the intersection of SR 71 and Euclid Avenue. These are largely views of Prado Regional Park and other open space within the plan area that will not be substantially altered.

The more urbanized areas of the site are located to the north and east of the open space areas. Buildings within the urban areas proposed closest to the Chino Hills are 40 and 45 feet for residential and commercial uses, respectively, and are located over a mile away. The height in commercial areas can increase to 65 feet for non-habitable structures.

Due to the distance to urban related uses and proposed building heights, the quality of the views from surrounding vantage points including SR 71 and the Chino Hills will not significantly change.

5.14.5 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The plan area represents one of the last remaining, large non-urban land units in southwestern San Bernardino County. Areas surrounding the project site have been or are proposed for development. However, the project area's scenic resources are to be preserved through open space, recreation and agriculture designations for the enjoyment of residents of the project area and surrounding region.

The visual character of the project area will change to reflect the urbanizing pattern of the surrounding region. Light and glare will increase within the plan area similar to that found within the existing and proposed development pattern surrounding the project site. These changes are not considered to be cumulatively significant and adverse.

Surrounding views of the project area are primarily limited to that available from the Chino Hills area to the west. Portions of the Chino Hills area have already developed and development within the plan area will not change that condition nor reduce area visibility due to the distance to the project site. As such, the change in the surrounding views of the plan area will not be cumulatively significant and adverse.

5.14.6 MITIGATION MEASURES

No mitigation measures are necessary for impacts associated with the transition of rural to urban uses within the planned development areas of the site. The proposed specific plan includes design guidelines and criteria to create an attractive and positive visual condition for future development. These guidelines and criteria include:

- Landscape & Streetscape Guidelines
- Paseo Treatments
- Gateway Treatments
- Landscape Planting Criteria
- Non-Residential Design Guidelines
- Community Core Design Guidelines
- Lighting Guidelines

These elements, when implemented through Design Review are essentially project design features. They represent features that will both assure a quality urban visual environment, and minimize the visual impact associated with a significant change in land use.

5.14.7 LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE AFTER MITIGATION

The components of the specific plan described above will reduce the level of impact to less than significant.