4.14 Visual/Aesthetic Resources

This section presents an analysis of potential impacts on visual/aesthetic resources that would result from implementation of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project. The analysis includes a description of visual/aesthetic resources in the project area, the associated regulatory framework, the significance criteria used to evaluate impacts on identified resources as a consequence of implementing the alternatives, the methods used in evaluating these impacts, and the results of the impact assessment based on the applied significance criteria.

4.14.1 Affected Environment

Regulatory Setting

State

California Scenic Highway Program

In 1963, the California legislature created the Scenic Highway Program to protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands next to the highways. The state regulations and guidelines governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq. A highway may be designated as “scenic” depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the travelers’ enjoyment of the view.

No state-designated scenic routes are in the project area. Contra Costa County contains two state-designated scenic highways (Interstate 680 and State Route [SR] 24) and Alameda County has Interstate 580. None of these three highways is near or within views of the project components. While Caltrans considers SR 4 within the Contra Costa County as eligible for state scenic highway designation, it has not been so designated (Caltrans, 2005).

Local

Contra Costa County General Plan

The Contra Costa County General Plan (Contra Costa County, 2005) presents goals and policies that are applicable to management and protection of scenic resources. These goals and policies include the following:

- Preservation and enhancement of identified scenic routes (Goal 5-R)
- Preservation of scenic qualities of the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River/Delta shoreline (Goal 9-12)
- Conservation and protection of scenic views from scenic routes (Policy 5-37)
- Protection of natural topographic features (Policy 5-43)
- New power lines shall be parallel to existing lines (Policy 9-20) (Contra Costa County, 2005)
The specific goals and policies related to visual/aesthetic resources are presented in Appendix E-2.

No designated (local, state, or federal) scenic vistas occur within the project area. However, as defined by the Contra Costa County General Plan, Section 9.6 Scenic Resources, “Contra Costa County is perceived by many as a desirable place to live and work. A major component in that is the scenic vistas that are available throughout the County…two main resources…are…(1) scenic ridges, hillsides and rock outcroppings; and (2) the San Francisco Bay Delta estuary system.” Contra Costa County has designated SR 4 and Vasco Road as scenic highways and expressways; Camino Diablo Road, Walnut Boulevard (to the North entrance of the Los Vaqueros Watershed) and Byron Highway as scenic routes: Old River and Clifton Court Forebay as scenic waterways; and the Black Hills ridgeline southwest of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir as a scenic feature. Additionally, Contra Costa County has many smaller, localized scenic resources such as isolated hilltops, rock outcroppings, mature stands of trees, lakes, reservoirs, and other natural features that, although not designated as scenic resources, should be treated as providing aesthetic opportunities, according to the General Plan.

East County Area Plan – A Portion of the Alameda County General Plan

Alameda County’s East County Area Plan (Alameda County, 2002) includes visual/aesthetic resource related policies that include the following:

- Minimizing the alteration of natural topography and vegetation (Policy 116)
- Protecting both individual and large stands of mature, healthy trees (Policy 110)
- Landscaping in both rural and urban areas to enhance the scenic quality of the area to screen undesirable views (Policy 114)
- Where grading is necessary, preserving the natural contours to blend with undisturbed slopes (Policy 117) (East County Area Plan, 2005)

Specific policies are listed in Appendix E-1. Alameda County has not identified or designated any scenic vistas or visually-sensitive ridgelines that are within the project area.

Environmental Setting

The project area for visual/aesthetic resources encompasses the landscapes directly affected by facilities proposed under each of the project alternatives and the surrounding areas that would be within view of the project actions. The visual/aesthetic analysis focuses on travel route views, views within parks, and recreational views.

Definitions Related to Visual/Aesthetic Resources

Visual/aesthetic resources consist of the landforms, vegetation, rock and water features, and cultural modifications that create the visual character and sensitivity of a landscape. A number of factors are documented for the existing visual/aesthetic resources of the project area to help determine the manner in which those resources or characteristic landscapes may be modified by the project. The primary existing visual/aesthetic condition factors considered in this EIS/EIR are defined below and include: Visual Quality, Viewer Types and Volumes, Viewer Exposure, and Visual Sensitivity.
Visual Quality is defined as the overall visual impression or attractiveness of an area as determined by the particular landscape characteristics, including landforms, rock forms, water features, and vegetation patterns. The attributes of variety, vividness, coherence, uniqueness, harmony and pattern contribute to the overall visual quality of an area. For the purposes of this EIS/EIR, visual quality is defined according to three levels:

- Indistinctive, or industrial — defined as generally lacking in natural or cultural visual resource amenities typical of the region
- Representative — defined as visual resources typical or characteristic of the region’s natural and/or cultural visual amenities
- Distinctive — defined as visual resources that are unique or exemplary of the region’s natural or cultural scenic amenities

Viewer Types and Volumes of use pertain to the types (i.e., public viewers including recreationalist and motorist) and amounts of use (i.e., number of recreational users or motorists) that various land uses receive. Land uses that derive value from the quality of their settings are considered potentially sensitive to changes in visual setting conditions. Land uses within the project area that may be sensitive to change in visual conditions include major transportation systems such as designated scenic highways, designated scenic roads, and designated park, recreation and natural areas.

Viewer Exposure addresses the variables that affect viewing conditions from potentially sensitive areas. Viewer exposure considers the following factors:

- Landscape visibility (the ability to see the landscape)
- Viewing distance (i.e., the proximity of viewers to the project)
- Viewing angle — whether the project would be viewed from above (superior), below (inferior) or from a level (normal) line of sight
- Extent of visibility — whether the line of sight is open and panoramic to the project area or restricted by terrain, vegetation and/or structures
- Duration of view

Visual Sensitivity is the overall measure of an existing landscape’s susceptibility to adverse visual changes. This analysis of visual sensitivity is based on the combined factors of visual quality, viewer types and volumes, and visual exposure to the project. Visual sensitivity is reflected according to high, moderate, and low visual sensitivity ranges.

Existing Visual Quality of the Region

The visual character of Eastern Contra Costa County is typified by the undulating hills of grassland typical of the northern San Joaquin Valley, agricultural and rural landscapes, and the Delta. The hills provide a backdrop to the agricultural landscape and the Delta, where open views
of distant horizons appear, generally unobstructed by local topography or tall vegetation. The agricultural landscape is dominated by crops (i.e., hay, oats, cherries, walnuts, tomatoes, corn, alfalfa, vineyards, and palm nurseries) and other ancillary facilities including outbuildings, tractors, irrigation, and drainage works.

The Delta, which is near the center of the valley at 25 feet mean sea level (msl), is composed of a network of about 700 miles of waterways and 1,100 miles of levees that protect the islands and tracts, most of which have ground surface elevations near or below sea level. Topography in the valley and Delta is uniformly flat; as a result, human-made features (including poles and lines for electricity and phones, blow-off and air valves for underground water pipelines, residential and agricultural structures, fencing, elevated roadway, bridges, levees, canals, highway and local road signage, and other commercial signage) are visible in both near-field and far-field distances. A distinct part of the area landscape is the wind farms, which include numerous wind turbines, outbuildings, and access roads within the Altamont Hills area.

Figure 4.14-1 is a viewpoint map that depicts photograph numbers and provides the location and direction from which photographs were taken. The photographs, presented together as a single group in Figures 4.14-2 through 4.14-9, were assigned numbers by order of mention in the following subsections which describe the existing visual character of the project area by component.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Area and Recreational Facilities

The Los Vaqueros Reservoir was created by establishing a dam on upper Kellogg Creek (Figure 4.14-2, Photograph 1); the majority of the reservoir is sited within two broad valleys that are about 0.5 mile wide each. The mountainous areas north of the reservoir are predominately grasslands interspersed with oak trees.

The landscape of the Los Vaqueros Watershed (i.e., those lands within the CCWD Los Vaqueros Watershed property line) is characterized by moderate-to-low elevation and northwest-southeast trending ridgelines, and separated by valleys of varying steepness and width. Ridgelines surrounding the reservoir rise to 2,550 feet msl, while the reservoir’s high water level is at 472 feet msl.

Views from the Los Vaqueros Reservoir and the areas downstream of the dam are obstructed by ridgelines, which focus views on the natural character of the reservoir and hills. The visual character of the landscape downstream of the dam is a mixture of open grasslands, rolling hills with sparse oak savannah, and scrub habitat. The scenic Black Hills area to the west of the reservoir (Figure 4.14-2, Photograph 2) is characterized by woodland and scrub habitat. To the southeast of the reservoir, the grassland ridges, interspersed with oak woodlands and rock outcroppings, decline in elevation and steepness as they progress toward the San Joaquin Valley (Figure 4.14-3, Photograph 3). To the north, the ridges are grassland ridges interspersed with oak trees; the borrow area for the existing dam has re-vegetated with upland scrub habitat (Figure 4.14-3, Photograph 4).
Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project EIS/EIR, 2011

Figure 4.14-1
Viewpoint Map

SOURCE: USGS, 1993 (base map); ESRI, 2006; CCC, 2007; CCWD, 2007; MWH, 2007; and ESA, 2008
PHOTOGRAPH 1. View from Walnut Boulevard looking southwest at downstream face of the dam. (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 2. View from Vista Grande Trail looking southwest toward the Black Hills (October 2008)
PHOTOGRAPH 3. View from Vista Grande Trail looking southeast toward San Joaquin County (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 4. View from Eastside Trail looking northwest toward the dam and borrow area (July 2008)

SOURCE: ESA, 2006

Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project EIS/EIR  201110

Figure 4.14-3
Site Photographs
PHOTOGRAPH 5. View from Walnut Boulevard looking south toward the Watershed Office (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 6. View from Walnut Boulevard looking southwest toward 160 TAF Borrow Area (October 2008)

SOURCE: ESA, 2006
PHOTOGRAPH 7. View from Highway 4 looking east toward Old River Intake and Pump Station (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 8. View from Highway 4 looking southeast along Delta Transfer pipeline alignment (October 2008)
PHOTOGRAPH 9. View from Highway 4 looking southwest along Delta Transfer pipeline alignment (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 10. View from Vasco Road looking southwest along Delta Transfer pipeline alignment to Transfer Facility (October 2008)
PHOTOGRAPH 11. View from Camino Diablo Road looking northeast to backside of Transfer Facility (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 12. View from Camino Diablo Road looking south toward Transfer-LV pipeline alignment (October 2008)
PHOTOGRAPH 13. View from Vasco Road looking southeast toward Transfer-Bethany pipeline alignment (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 14. View from Walnut Boulevard looking west at valve structure of Los Vaqueros pipeline (October 2008)
PHOTOGRAPH 15. View from Byron Highway looking southeast toward Western potion of Power Option 2: PG&E & Western (October 2008)

PHOTOGRAPH 16. View from Walnut Boulevard looking southeast toward PG&E 69 kV distribution line and substation site associated with Power Option 2: PG&E & Western (October 2008)
Viewers of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir from the dam looking southward or upstream, including recreational facilities and borrow area, are limited to recreational users of the watershed such as hikers, boaters, and anglers. Views of the reservoir and associated recreation facilities (marina, fishing piers, and adjacent roads/trails) by recreational users on the trail network provided by the Morgan Territory and Round Valley Regional Preserves are generally obstructed by vegetation and topography.

The visual setting downstream of the dam is characterized by grassland hills interspersed with oak trees and the meandering Kellogg Creek and its associated riparian habitat (Figure 4.14-4, Photograph 5). Near the dam, a number of mitigation ponds are interspersed with Kellogg Creek. Utilitarian features dotting the landscape include Walnut Boulevard, power poles and lines, blow-off and air valves associated with the Los Vaqueros Pipeline, lattice transmission structures, wind generation facilities, fences, recreational trails, parking, picnic areas, the Interpretive Center, and other District facilities (i.e., Watershed Office and other support buildings). Additionally, as some of the lands surrounding the reservoir are used for livestock grazing, sheep, cows, and goats are often part of the visual landscape.

Viewers of the dam from downstream are generally limited to recreational users traveling via Walnut Boulevard to the Interpretive Center and to the area adjacent to the top of the dam. Views of the dam core borrow area for the 160-thousand acre feet (TAF) reservoir (160-TAF borrow zone) would generally be screened by the Kellogg Creek riparian vegetation (Figure 4.14-4, Photograph 6) but would be visible from hikers on portions of the Alkali Meadow Trail.

In summary, the visual quality of the watershed is considered distinctive because the natural foothills landscape has been largely preserved and unaltered.

**Delta Intake Facilities**

The visual character of the landscape surrounding the Old River Intake and Pump Station as well as the new Delta Intake and Pump Station is predominately agricultural. Views of Old River from the west are generally obstructed by the levee systems, and views from the east are generally limited to the SR 4 bridge across Old River.

Two “industrial-type” facilities already exist within the area: (1) CCWD’s Old River Intake and Pump Station (see Figure 4.14-5, Photograph 7) is characterized as industrial in nature featuring buildings, fencing, power poles and lines, pipelines and intake facilities; and (2) the Town of Discovery Bay’s Community Services District Wastewater Treatment Plant, consisting of buildings, fencing and three lagoons.

Viewers of the Old River Intake and Pump Station as well as the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would generally be limited to motorists on SR4, recreational users of Old River (generally used as a travel corridor to and from the south Delta), and one residence on the southeast side of Old River on Victoria Island. The visual quality of the area is representative of the largely agricultural areas next to the Delta.
Delta-Transfer Pipeline Area
The visual character of the landscape surrounding the Delta-Transfer pipeline area is agricultural, composed of crops (i.e., hay, oats, cherries, walnuts, tomatoes, corn, alfalfa, vineyards and palm nurseries), homes/farms and associated out buildings and infrastructure including farm roads (Figure 4.14-5 Photograph 8), three transmission lines with large steel lattice towers (Figure 4.14-6 Photograph 9), power poles and lines, and aboveground blow-off and air valves associated with the Old River Pipeline. Public viewers of the Delta-Transfer Pipeline area would generally be limited to motorist on SR 4 between Discovery Bay and Byron Highway, and Vasco Road near the Transfer Facility. Other local roads which would afford views of the area would be Bixler Road, Kellogg Creek Road, and Hoffman Lane. The visual quality of the area is representative of the agricultural area next to the Delta and throughout the southeastern county area.

Transfer Facility Expansion
The visual character of the landscape surrounding the existing Transfer Facility is generally open space characterized by rolling grassland hills (Figure 4.14-6 Photograph 10). To the west, the landscape is scarred, characterized by the surface mining activities taking place at Unimin’s Byron Sand Plant Quarry (Figure 4.14-7 Photograph 11). Views of the Transfer Facility are available from Vasco Road, Walnut Boulevard, and Camino Diablo Road. However, views from Vasco Road are generally limited because the surrounding topography provides screening. The visual quality of the area from Walnut Boulevard and Camino Diablo Road is indistinct due to the mining operations. From Vasco Road, the visual quality is representative of the rolling grassland hills in the valley.

Transfer-LV Pipeline
The visual character of the landscape of the Transfer-LV Pipeline alignment near the Transfer Facility is scarred due to surface mining activities taking place at Unimin’s Byron Sand Plant Quarry. As the pipeline alignment enters the watershed, the landscape is characterized by rolling grassland hills dotted with trees and evidence of mining activities (Figure 4.14-7 Photograph 12). Views within the watershed specific to the area downstream of the dam are described above under Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Area and Recreational Facilities. Generally, the visual quality of the area is distinctive because the natural foothills landscape has been largely preserved and unaltered.

Inlet/Outlet Pipelines
These pipelines are associated with the dam and would extend from the dam downstream to connect with the Transfer-LV Pipeline. Descriptions of the visual character and likely viewers of the inlet/outlet pipelines area are provided above under the discussion Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Area and Recreational Facilities. The visual quality of the area is distinctive because the natural foothills landscape has been largely preserved and unaltered.

Transfer-Bethany Pipeline
The visual character of the landscape around this pipeline alignment from the Transfer Facility along Vasco Road to Armstrong Road is generally rolling grassland hills (Figure 4.14-8 Photograph 13). The area along Armstrong Road is rural residential, and is characterized by
small ranches, the Brushy Creek riparian corridor, utility poles/wires and the Byron Municipal Airport. South of Armstrong Road the area is again characterized by rolling grassland hills with occasional riparian zones along the local drainages. As the alignment approaches the California Aqueduct, the visual landscape contains more man-made features including wind generation facilities and associated buildings accessed via Byron Hot Springs Road, transmission lines and lattice towers, the California Aqueduct, Bethany Reservoir, and the South Bay Aqueduct and Pump Station.

Viewers of the Transfer-Bethany pipeline area would generally be limited to motorists traveling on Vasco Road, Armstrong Road, and Byron Hot Springs Road. Views south of Byron Hot Springs Road would not be accessible to the public as the area is secure and requires a key. There would be no public views of the project area from within the Bethany Reservoir State Recreation Area, because the southwestern area of the Bethany Reservoir is not open to the public. The visual quality of the area is representative of the rolling grassland hills in the valley interspersed with ranches and associated farming facilities.

Blow-off and Air Valves
Blow-off and air valves would be associated with the Delta-Transfer, Transfer-LV, and Transfer Bethany pipeline alignments. Blow-off and air valves are already elements of the visual landscape for the Delta-Transfer, and Transfer-LV pipeline areas. Figure 4.14-8 Photograph 14 shows a valve structure near the intersection of Walnut Boulevard and Camino Diablo Road.

Power Option 1: Western Only
The visual character of the landscape around the facilities to be constructed under Power Option 1 is generally the same as described in the preceding Delta intake facilities and Delta-Transfer Pipeline subsections. The area is dominated by agricultural lands crisscrossed with large lattice towers and transmission lines. Therefore, views generally encompass a rural, agricultural landscape characterized by crops (i.e., hay, oats, cherries, walnuts, tomatoes, corn, alfalfa, vineyards, and palm nurseries), homes/farms and associated out buildings and infrastructure including farm roads and distribution and transmission lines. Views of the proposed substation and distribution line would generally be limited to the stretch of SR 4 from Discovery Bay to Bixler Road. Local roads affording views include Kellogg Creek Road, Camino Diablo Road and Hoffman Lane; as well as at the crossing of Vasco Road. The visual quality of the area is representative of the agricultural areas next to the Delta and throughout the southeastern county area.

Power Option 2: Western & PG&E
The visual character of the landscape around the Western portion of the facilities to be constructed under Power Option 2 is generally agricultural. The view generally encompasses a rural, agricultural landscape characterized by crops, homes/farms and associated out buildings. The visual landscape is also interspersed with man-made features including two 500-Kilovolt (kV) and one 230-kV transmission lines that parallel the proposed transmission line alignment south to north (Figure 4.14-9 Photograph 15), Tracy Substation, the Delta Mendota Canal, California Aqueduct, Old River Intake and Pump Station, farm roads and other utility lines.
Views of the proposed transmission line would generally be limited to local roadways generally north of Kelso Road, east of Byron Highway, west of Clifton Court and Old River and south of SR 4 including: Kelso Road, Mountain House Road, Bethany Lane, Herdlyn Road, Bruns Road, Byron Highway, Clifton Court Road, and Western Farms Ranch Road. Views of the transmission line may be available to recreational users of Italian Slough (i.e., anglers); however, due to the levees in the vicinity of the Old River Intake and Pump Station, views from Old River would be obscured. The visual quality of the area is representative of the agricultural area next to the Delta and throughout the southeastern county area.

The visual character of the landscape around the Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) portion of Power Option 2 near the Transfer Facility is scarred due to surface mining activities taking place at Unimin’s Byron Sand Plant Quarry (See Figure 4.14-7 Photograph 12). Additionally, there are homes along Longwell Road where the alignment traverses before entering the watershed. Within the watershed, the landscape is characterized by rolling grassland hills dotted with trees and intermittent views of Kellogg Creek. Utility lines extend along the roadways and a 500kv PG&E transmission line on lattice towers crosses the area. The proposed substation would be in an area surrounded by steeper topography, limiting views from Walnut Boulevard and one residence on the western hilltop (Figure 4.14-9 Photograph 16). Although evidence of surface mining is apparent, in general, the visual quality of the area is representative.

Contra Costa County has designated SR 4 and Vasco Road as scenic highways and expressways; Camino Diablo Road, Walnut Boulevard (to the entrance of the watershed) and Byron Highway as scenic routes, Old River and Clifton Court Forebay as scenic waterways; and the Black Hills ridgeline southwest of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir as a scenic feature.

**Viewer Types and Exposures**

Viewer types and exposure conditions vary substantially in the project area. Public viewer groups evaluated include: motorists along SR 4 (a state eligible scenic highway and county-designated scenic highway/expressway); Vasco Road (county-designated scenic highway/expressway); Camino Diablo Road, Walnut Boulevard (to the entrance of the watershed), Byron Highway (county-designated scenic routes) and Los Vaqueros Road; and visitors to recreational areas including the watershed and Old River (county-designated scenic waterway).

For each of the viewer groups identified in the project area, viewer exposure conditions were determined based on knowledge of the project areas and a site visit conducted on October 10, 2008. Variables considered include the viewing distance, angle of view, the extent to which views are screened or open, and duration of view. Viewing distances are described according to whether the project activities would be viewed within a foreground (within 0.5 mile or 2,640 feet), middleground (0.5 to 2.0 miles), or background (beyond 2.0 miles) zone. Viewing angle and extent of visibility considers the relative location of the project facility to the viewer and whether visibility conditions are open or panoramic, or limited by intervening vegetation, structures or terrain.

Duration of view pertains to the amount of time the project facilities or area would typically be seen from a sensitive viewpoint. In general, duration of view would be less in instances where the project facility would be seen for short or intermittent periods (such as from major travel routes and
recreation destination roads) and greater in instances where the project facility would be seen regularly and repeatedly (such as from public use areas).

**Motorists on Major or Scenic Travel Routes**

Scenic highways and routes within the project area include SR 4, Byron Highway, Vasco Road, Camino Diablo, and Walnut Boulevard. In addition, Los Vaqueros Road is considered to be a major travel route to and from the southern portion of the reservoir. Views along SR 4, Byron Highway and Los Vaqueros Road (near the reservoir) are generally panoramic and open, while views along Vasco Road, Camino Diablo Road, and Walnut Boulevard are generally limited by the surrounding hilly terrain.

The Old River Intake and Pump Station and about 2.5 miles of the Delta-Transfer Pipeline alignment would be within the foreground view from SR4. The new Delta Intake and Pump Station as well as the Western facilities associated with Power Option 1 and Power Option 2 would be in the middleground. Traffic volumes on SR4 are high and views are generally panoramic and open but of short duration.

The Western facilities associated with Power Option 1 and Power Option 2 would generally be within background views along Byron Highway, with the exception of two areas where the transmission line would cross the highway. Traffic volumes are relatively high and views are generally panoramic and open but of short duration.

Portions of the Delta-Transfer Pipeline and Transfer-Bethany Pipeline would be within the foreground views along Vasco Road. Views of the Transfer Facility Expansion would be obscured due to the topography of the area. Traffic volumes are relatively high, and views are generally limited by the hilly terrain and of short duration.

The Transfer-Bethany Pipeline and Transfer-LV Pipeline would be within the foreground view of Camino Diablo Road at two locations where these pipeline alignments would cross the road. Traffic volumes are moderate and views are generally limited by the hilly terrain and of short duration. Views of the Transfer Facility from this road are obscured by the hilly terrain.

The Transfer-LV Pipeline, Power Option 2 PG&E transmission line, inlet/outlet pipelines, and dam modification would be within the foreground view from Walnut Boulevard. Traffic volumes are moderate and views are generally limited by the hilly terrain and of short duration.

The expanded Los Vaqueros Reservoir, dam modification, shell borrow area, and recreational facilities on the southern shore would be within the foreground view of Los Vaqueros Road. Traffic volumes are low and views are generally panoramic and open at the reservoir.

**Park and Recreation Areas**

Parks and recreational areas in the project area include the Los Vaqueros Watershed, Round Valley Regional Preserve, Morgan Territory Regional Preserve, and Old River.
The expanded Los Vaqueros Reservoir, dam modification, shell borrow area and recreational facilities would be visible to recreation users in the watershed. Recreational use is relatively low within the watershed. Boaters and anglers generally enjoy panoramic and open views of the reservoir and associated recreational facilities. Hikers’ views can range from open and panoramic to obstructed by vegetation and terrain, depending where the recreational users are in the watershed. Viewer exposure is considered moderate due to the low number of views, high view duration and open visibility.

The expanded Los Vaqueros Reservoir would not be visible to hikers using trails that traverse the Round Valley Regional Preserve and Morgan Territory Regional Preserve and connect to the watershed. Recreational use is relatively low where these trails connect with the Los Vaqueros trail system. Views of the reservoir area are limited by the vegetation and hilly terrain.

The intake structure associated with the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be visible to recreational users on Old River. Recreational use within the vicinity of the Delta intake facilities is relatively low, as this area of the river is used primarily to traverse from Discovery Bay to other parts of the southern Delta; no marina or other recreation facilities exist along this stretch of Old River. However, views of the other facilities at the proposed intake and pump station would generally be obstructed by the levees. Viewer exposure is considered low due to the low number of views, low view duration, and limited visibility.

**Visual Sensitivity**

Visual sensitivity is a composite measurement of the overall susceptibility of an area or viewer group to adverse visual or aesthetic impacts, given the combined factors of landscape visual quality, viewer types, and exposure conditions. Table 4.14-1 summarizes the visual sensitivity of the major viewer types that would be affected by the project facilities.

**4.14.2 Environmental Consequences**

**Significance Criteria**

The thresholds for determining the significance of impacts for this analysis are based on the environmental checklist in Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. These thresholds also encompass the factors taken into account under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to determine the significance of an action in terms of its context and the intensity of its effects. An alternative was determined to result in a significant effect on visual/aesthetic resources if it would do any of the following:

- Have a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, scenic waterways, 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 that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area
### TABLE 4.14-1
SUMMARY OF VISUAL SENSITIVITY FINDINGS
VIEWER TYPES, VISUAL EXPOSURES, AND VISUAL QUALITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viewer Type</th>
<th>Visual Quality</th>
<th>Viewer Exposure and Volumes</th>
<th>Visual Sensitivity</th>
<th>Project Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel Routes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 4</td>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Foreground Distance</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Delta Intake Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unobstructed Views</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delta-Transfer Pipeline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High Number of Viewers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Western Power Facilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low View Duration</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byron Highway</td>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Background Distance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Western Power Facilities</td>
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<td>(except two crossings)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unobstructed Views</td>
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<td></td>
<td>High Number of Viewers</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Low View Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vasco Road</td>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Foreground Distance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Delta-Transfer Pipeline</td>
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<td>Unobstructed Views</td>
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<td>Transfer-Bethany Pipeline</td>
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<td>High Number of Viewers</td>
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<td>Low View Duration</td>
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<td>Camino Diablo</td>
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<td>Foreground Distance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Transfer-LV Pipeline</td>
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<td>Obstructed Views</td>
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<td>Moderate Number of Viewers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transfer-LV Pipeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Number of Viewers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inlet/Outlet Pipelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low View Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td>PG&amp;E Transmission Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>160 TAF Borrow Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Vaqueros</td>
<td>Distinct</td>
<td>Foreground Distance</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unobstructed Views</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dam Modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Number of Viewers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shell Borrow Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High View Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recreational Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Park/Recreation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Vaqueros</td>
<td>Distinct</td>
<td>Fore, Middle and Background</td>
<td>Moderate to High</td>
<td>Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watershed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Distances</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dam Modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Obstructed/unobstructed</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shell Borrow Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Views</td>
<td></td>
<td>Recreational Facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Number of Viewers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High View Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old River</td>
<td>Representative</td>
<td>Foreground Distance</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>New Delta Intake and Pump Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partially obstructed Views</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Number of Viewers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Low View Duration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because no state-designated scenic highways run near or through the project area, no potential exists for project impacts related to substantially damaging scenic resources within a state scenic highway. As such, impacts to scenic resources within a state scenic highway are not discussed below.

**Definition and Use of Significance Criteria**

An adverse impact to visual/aesthetic resources may occur when: (1) an action perceptibly changes the existing physical features of the landscape that are characteristic of the region or locale; (2) an action introduces new features to the physical landscape that are perceptibly uncharacteristic of the region or locale, or become visually dominant in the viewshed; or (3) an action blocks or totally obscures aesthetic features of the landscape. The degree of visual impact depends on how noticeable the adverse change is. The noticeability of a visual impact is a function of the project features, context, and viewing conditions (angle of view, distance, and primary viewing directions). The key factors in determining the degree of visual change are visual contrast, project dominance, and view blockage.

**Visual Contrast**

Visual contrast is a measure of the degree of change in line, form, color, and texture that the project will create, when compared to the existing landscape. Visual contrast ranges from none to strong, and is defined as:

- **None** – The element contrast is not visible or perceived
- **Weak** – The element contrast can be seen but does not attract attention
- **Moderate** – The element contrast begins to attract attention and begins to dominate the characteristic landscape
- **Strong** – The element contrast demands the viewer’s attention and cannot be overlooked

**Project Dominance**

Visual dominance is a measure of a project feature’s apparent size relative to other visible landscape features in the viewshed, or seen area. A feature’s dominance is affected by its relative location in the viewshed and the distance between the viewer and feature. The level of dominance can range from subordinate to dominant.

**View Blockage or Impairment**

View blockage or impairment is a measure of the degree to which project features would obstruct or block views to aesthetic features due to the project’s position and/or scale. Blockage of aesthetic landscape features or views can cause adverse impacts, particularly in instances where scenic or view orientations are important to the use, value or function of the land use.
**Overall Adverse Visual Impact**

Overall adverse impacts to visual/aesthetic resources reflect the composite visual changes to both the directly affected landscape and from sensitive viewing locations. The visual impact levels referenced in this EIS/EIR indicate the relative degree of overall change to the visual environment that the project alternatives would create, considering visual sensitivity, visual contrast, view blockage, and project dominance.

In general, the determination of impact significance is based on combined factors of Visual Sensitivity and the Degree of Visual Change that the project would cause. The inter-relationship of these two overall factors in determining whether adverse visual impacts are significant is shown in Table 4.14-2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Visual Change</th>
<th>Overall Visual Sensitivity</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Low to Moderate</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Moderate to High</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low to Moderate</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to High</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Adverse, but Not Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td>Adverse and Potentially Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Not Significant** impacts may or may not be perceptible but are considered minor in the context of existing landscape characteristics and view opportunity.

**Adverse, but Not Significant Impacts** are perceived as negative but do not exceed environmental thresholds.

**Adverse and Potentially Significant Impacts** are perceived as negative and may exceed environmental thresholds depending on project- and site-specific circumstances.

**Significant impacts** with feasible mitigation may be reduced to less-than-significant levels or avoided altogether. Without mitigation or avoidance measures, significant impacts would exceed environmental thresholds.

**Impact Summary**

Table 4.14-3 provides a summary of the impact analysis for issues related to visual/aesthetic resources.
TABLE 4.14-3
SUMMARY OF IMPACTS – VISUAL/AESTHETIC RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Alternative 1</th>
<th>Alternative 2</th>
<th>Alternative 3</th>
<th>Alternative 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.14.1: The project alternatives would not have a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect on a scenic vista or from a county-designated scenic highway or route.</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14.2: The project alternatives would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, except Alternative 4 due to the borrow area in Kellogg Valley.</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14.3: The project alternatives would not create a new source of substantial light but Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 could create a new source of substantial glare that could adversely affect views in the area.</td>
<td>LSM</td>
<td>LSM</td>
<td>LSM</td>
<td>LS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14.4: The project alternatives would not make a cumulatively considerable contribution to adverse effects on visual/aesthetic resources in the project area or broader region.</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
<td>LS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES:
SU = Significant and Unavoidable
LSM = Less-than-Significant Impact with Mitigation
LS = Less-than-Significant Impact
NI = No Impact

Impact Analysis

**No Project/No Action Alternative**

Under the No Project/No Action Alternative, no new facilities would be constructed, and existing facilities would not be altered, expanded, or demolished. Implementation of this alternative would not affect scenic vistas, scenic resources, or the existing visual character of the surrounding area, and would not create any additional source of light or glare.

**Impact 4.14.1: The project alternatives would not have a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect on a scenic vista or from a county-designated scenic highway or route. (Less than Significant)**

Contra Costa General Plan states that a major component to the perception that Contra Costa County is a desirable place to live and work is the scenic vistas that are available throughout the County. Noting that the County has many localized features, the General Plan, 9.6 Scenic Resources focuses on two main resources (1) scenic ridges, hillsides, and rock outcroppings; and (2) the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system. Therefore, for purposes of this CEQA analysis, “scenic vista” encompasses scenic resources as designated by the Contra Costa County General Plan.

Within the project area, Contra Costa County has designated the Black Hills ridgeline southwest of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir as a scenic ridgeline; SR 4 and Vasco Road as scenic highways and
expressways; Camino Diablo Road, Walnut Boulevard (to the entrance of the watershed) and Byron Highway as scenic routes; and Old River and Clifton Court Forebay as scenic waterways. In addition to evaluating effects on scenic vistas and views of scenic resources, this section evaluates views from scenic highways and routes.

**Alternative 1**

**Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion**

Reservoir expansion would result in an increase in the inundation area of the reservoir and some recreational facilities (i.e., marina, boats, and docks) that are currently on the southern shore would be moved to the northern shore near the dam. Currently, the reservoir high-water level is about 472 feet msl and with inundation it would rise to a height of 560 feet msl. Although this increase in inundation would be perceptible to anglers, boaters and hikers on trails within the watershed, it would result in a weak visual contrast. Further, this change would not dominate the views of the Black Hills Ridgeline, a county designated scenic ridgeline about 1 to 5 miles southwest of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir, and would not obstruct views of the Black Hills Ridgeline.

Moreover, removal of some recreational facilities on the south end would decrease the number of man-made features within the view of the Black Hills Ridgeline. Therefore, the relative change in the views of the Black Hills Ridgeline as viewed by recreational users of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir would be low.

**New Delta Intake and Pump Station**

The views from SR 4, a county designated scenic highway, of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station are generally agricultural and industrial in the foreground. Middle and background views are obscured by the levee systems along Old River, a county designated scenic waterway. For instance, when driving west on Highway 4, views of Old River are within the foreground, but views of the Old River Intake and Pump Station and the new Delta Intake and Pump Station site would be obstructed by the natural bend in Old River and the levees. When driving east on Highway 4, views of Old River are completely obscured by the levee system. Views of the new intake would be within the foreground of recreational users of Old River as they travel from Discovery Bay to the south Delta.

Views from Old River are also generally obscured by levees. However, similar to the existing Old River Intake and Pump Station, many new structures associated with the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be placed inside a ring levee, which surrounds the site and creates a visual barrier of the site.

Since the new structures would be similar to those already existing at the Old River Intake and Pump Station, the visual contrast would be weak, would not cause a substantial visual contrast to existing views, and would not dominate nor obstruct the view. Therefore, the relative change in the views from SR4 would be low.
**Delta-Transfer Pipeline**

Permanent structures associated with the Delta-Transfer Pipeline would include blow-off valves and air valves that extend about 2 feet above the ground (See Figure 4.14-8, Photograph 14). Blow-off and air valves associated with the Old River Pipeline already appear along SR4. Blow-off and air valves associated with the Delta-Transfer Pipeline would be installed about every 2,000 and 1,000 feet, respectively.

Although drivers along SR4 could see these structures in the foreground views, because the blow-off valves and air valves structures would be similar to existing structures, the visual contrast would be weak. Additionally, as some blow-off valve structures would be in low-lying areas and some would be screened by intermittent vegetation along SR4, the introduction of these new structures would not cause a substantial visual contrast to existing views and would not dominate or obstruct the views from SR4. Therefore, the relative change in the views from SR4, a county designated scenic route, would be low.

**Transfer Facility Expansion**

Views of permanent structures associated with the Transfer Facility Expansion would be obstructed from viewers traveling along Vasco Road, a county-designated scenic highway, by the existing topography around the site. Thus, there would no change in view from this road and no scenic vista would be obstructed.

**Transfer-LV Pipeline**

Permanent structures associated with the Transfer-LV Pipeline would include blow-off valves and air valves. Blow-off and air valves associated with the Los Vaqueros Pipeline already appear along Walnut Boulevard. Although drivers along Walnut Boulevard would see these structures in foreground views, because these structures would be similar to existing structures, the visual contrast would be weak. Moreover, as some blow-off valve structures would be in low-lying areas and some would be screened by the intermittent vegetation and topography along Walnut Boulevard, the introduction of these new structures would not cause a substantial visual contrast to existing views and would not dominate or obstruct the views from Walnut Boulevard. Therefore, the relative change in the views from Walnut Boulevard, a county designated scenic route, would be low.

**Inlet/Outlet Pipelines**

Permanent structures associated with the inlet/outlet pipelines would not obstruct views of any scenic vistas.

**Transfer-Bethany Pipeline**

Like the Delta-Transfer Pipeline, the only aboveground structures associated with the Transfer-Bethany Pipeline would include blow-off valves and air valves that stand about 2 feet aboveground. Drivers from Vasco Road, a county-designated scenic highway/expressway, could see these valves in the foreground. However, some of these blow-off valves would be placed in low-lying areas along the pipeline alignment and would generally be obscured by the natural
topography. Regarding air valves that may be placed at a higher elevation, these structures are generally small and would blend in with other structures in the viewshed including, but not limited to wire and wood post fencing, small lattice windmills and associated ranching equipment. Therefore, the introduction of these new structures would not cause a substantial visual contrast to existing views and would not dominate or obstruct the views from Vasco Road. Accordingly, the relative change in the views from Vasco Road would be low.

**Power Infrastructure**

**Power Option 1: Western Only.** A new substation, access road to the facility and 69 kV transmission line to the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be constructed about 2,500 feet south of SR4 and 1 to 1.5 miles east of Byron Highway. The substation and access road would be constructed next to three large existing transmission lines installed on lattice towers.

Views of the substation site are generally obstructed by existing vegetation and development from SR4 and Byron Highway, respectively. Moreover, the substation would be fenced and a landscaping plan to add visual screening would be implemented. Therefore, the new substation and access road would not cause a substantial visual contrast to existing views and would not dominate or obstruct the views from SR4 or Byron Highway. Accordingly, the relative change in the views from SR4 or Byron Highway would be low.

For the portion of the transmission line from the substation east to the new Delta Intake and Pump Station and west to the Transfer Facility wooden poles and conductors already exist within most of the proposed alignment. Therefore, installation of a new transmission line or replacement of the existing transmission line would not result in a substantial visual contrast since the new poles and conductors would be similar to those that currently exist. Moreover, the transmission facilities would not dominate or obstruct views from SR4 or at the Byron Highway and Vasco Road crossings. Accordingly, the relative change in the views from SR4, Byron Highway, and Vasco Road would be low.

**Power Option 2: PG&E and Western.** Western’s new wooden power poles and transmission line from the Tracy Substation to the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be visible from Byron Highway. Views from SR4 for the portion of the transmission line that would be in the same alignment as proposed under Power Option 1 were discussed previously.

In general, the views of the alignment vary from foreground to background views depending on one’s location on Byron Highway. However, these new, approximately 50-foot poles would be within an existing transmission line corridor that contains three transmission lines: two 500 kV lines and one 230 kV line on lattice towers. Therefore, installation of a new transmission line would not result in a substantial visual contrast because the new poles and conductors would be substantially smaller than the existing facilities. Moreover, views of the facilities would be intermittently obstructed by topography and man-made features including farm buildings and houses.

The new transmission line would not dominate or obstruct views from Byron Highway. Therefore, the relative change in the views from SR4 and Byron Highway would be low.
A portion of the PG&E transmission line would be visible in foreground views from Walnut Boulevard and at the crossing of Camino Diablo Road. Because existing wooden poles and conductors already line these local roadways, installation of a new transmission line would not result in a substantial visual contrast because the new poles and conductors would be similar to what currently exist. The proposed substation would be in an area surrounded by steeper topography, limiting views from Walnut Boulevard. Therefore, the transmission facilities would not dominate or obstruct views from Walnut Boulevard or Camino Diablo Road. Accordingly, the relative change in the views from Walnut Boulevard and Camino Diablo Road would be low.

**Summary**

In all cases, construction of proposed facilities under Alternative 1 would not dominate or obstruct views of scenic vistas from any of the county-designated scenic resources including highways, expressways, routes, or waterways. Therefore, the project effect on scenic vistas would be less than significant.

**Alternative 2**

Impacts related to scenic vistas resulting from implementation of Alternative 2 would be the same as analyzed under Alternative 1 because Alternative 2 includes implementation of the same facilities as does Alternative 1. Therefore, impacts to scenic vistas would be less than significant.

**Alternative 3**

Impacts related to scenic vistas from implementation of Alternative 3 would be less than Alternative 1 because the Transfer-Bethany Pipeline would not be constructed, thereby reducing visual impacts to viewers along Vasco Road, a county designated scenic highway. Moreover, Alternative 3 would not include construction of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station.

Construction activities at the existing Old River Intake and Pump Station would take place inside the fenced property and ring levee, which surrounds the site and creates a visual barrier of the site, therefore limiting impacts to viewers along SR4 and recreational users of Old River. Installation of a new fish screen within an existing bay, next to an existing screen, would not result in a substantial visual contrast to existing views from Old River. Moreover, the new screen would not dominate or obstruct views from Old River. Accordingly, the relative change in the views from SR4 and Old River would be low, and overall impacts to scenic vistas would be less than significant.

**Alternative 4**

Impacts to scenic vistas resulting from implementation of Alternative 4 would be less than Alternative 1 because this alternative involves a smaller reservoir expansion (160 TAF) and most of the project components associated with Alternative 1 would not be implemented under this alternative. The following components would not be constructed: Delta Intake and Pump Station, Delta-Transfer Pipeline, Transfer Facility Expansion, Transfer-LV Pipeline, Transfer-Bethany Pipeline, Power Supply Option 1 or 2, or the Marina Complex on the northern shoreline.
Recreation facilities would be relocated or constructed in different locations compared to Alternative 1; for example, the Westside Access Road would be lower in elevation than proposed under Alternative 1 and recreational facilities including the Marina would generally be constructed upslope of the existing facilities under Alternative 4 rather than in new locations as under Alternative 1. No impacts to scenic vistas would result from the 160-TAF borrow area as it is not within the viewshed of any scenic vistas. The following paragraphs discuss impacts resulting from the expansion of Los Vaqueros Reservoir, Westside Access Road and relocated recreational facilities associated with Alternative 4.

Reservoir expansion to 160 TAF would result in an increase in the inundation area of the reservoir and some recreational facilities (i.e., marina, boats, docks, and western hiking trail/access road) that are currently on the southern shore would be moved upslope. Currently, the reservoir high water level is about 472 feet msl and with inundation it would rise to a height of 510 feet msl.

Although this increase in inundation and relocated recreational facilities (i.e., marina, boat docks, picnic area, Westside Access Road, etc.) would be perceptible to anglers, boaters and hikers within the watershed, the changes would result in a weak visual contrast. These changes would not dominate the views of the Black Hills Ridgeline, a county-designated scenic ridgeline about 1 to 5 miles southwest of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir, and would not obstruct views of the Black Hills Ridgeline. Therefore, the relative change in the views of the Black Hills Ridgeline as viewed by recreational users of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir would be low.

Therefore, the effect on scenic vistas under Alternative 4 would be less than significant.

Mitigation: None required.

Impact 4.14.2: The project alternatives would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, except Alternative 4 due to the borrow area in Kellogg Valley. (Less than Significant for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3; Less than Significant with mitigation for Alternative 4)

Alternative 1

Construction

During the 3-year construction period associated with construction of the 275-TAF reservoir, the Los Vaqueros Watershed would be closed to public access. However, during the 1-year period before the start of construction activities when the reservoir would be drawn down, the public would have access. Because the reservoir area is not visible from trails associated with Morgan Territory and Round Valley Regional Preserves, construction-related impacts that could degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings would not be visible to the

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1 The Miwok Trail, to maintain connectivity between Round Valley and Morgan Territory Regional Preserves, would remain open; however, this trail offers no views of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir. See Figure 4.15-2.
public or recreational users. Moreover, increased visibility of the lands beneath the water as the reservoir is drawn down would be temporary in nature.

Outside the watershed, construction equipment, excavated stockpiled soils, sections of pipe, and other materials along pipeline corridors and at project sites could degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. However, as discussed below, many construction activities would not be visible to the public and recreational users because project sites would be screened by topography, vegetation, and existing man-made features. Moreover, this impact would be temporary.

**Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion**

As discussed above, reservoir expansion would result in an increase in the inundation area of the reservoir. After construction, the reservoir would be filled over an estimated 1-year period. Therefore, the inverse would be experienced as decreased visibility of the lands beneath the water would occur as the reservoir is filled. Although this increase in inundation would be perceptible to anglers, boaters, and hikers within the watershed, it would result in a weak visual contrast, and would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the reservoir and its surroundings from boats and existing/proposed trails.

The maximum water level associated with Alternative 1 would be 560 feet, and the minimum water level would be 460 feet. This fluctuation in water level would occur at certain times of year and leave an exposed strip around the water’s edge up to 100 feet thick. This anticipated level of fluctuation is equivalent to fluctuations of the existing reservoir and would be visible to recreational users of the reservoir. Therefore, it would result in a weak visual contrast, and would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the reservoir and its surroundings from boats and existing/proposed trails.

As part of the dam construction, a site of about 36 acres, just upstream of the left abutment of the dam, would be excavated to harvest materials for construction of the dam. This borrow area would be an extension of the borrow area (i.e., roughly triangular-shaped area of the hillside near the dam face) developed for construction of the existing dam (see Figure 4.14-3, Photograph 4). After excavation, grading and contouring of the borrow area to blend with existing and planned topography, a portion of the hillside from an elevation of 600 feet to 1,060 feet msl would remain a flat, rocky surface. A marina complex and its associated parking and other facilities would be built on this flat, rocky surface and to the west. Therefore, the marina complex would generally shield views of the borrow area from boaters, anglers, and hikers. However, views of the marina complex itself would be new to recreational users and would result in a moderate visual contrast.

Because the marina complex would be similar to other watershed buildings in appearance, situated near the water level and tucked into the borrow area and surrounding hills, it would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the reservoir and its surroundings from boats and existing/proposed trails. Moreover, removal of some recreational facilities on the south end would decrease the number of man-made features visible from the eastside trail to the west, improving the visual quality of the south end of the reservoir.
Additionally, installation of connections (i.e., approximately 12-foot-wide dirt/gravel trails) between existing maintenance roads to create the eastside trail would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the reservoir and its surroundings from boats and existing/proposed trails.

**New Delta Intake and Pump Station**

As previously discussed, views of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station from westbound lanes on SR 4 would be obscured. Views from eastbound lanes on SR 4 would be within the foreground. However, in similar fashion to the existing Old River Intake and Pump Station, many new structures associated with the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be placed inside a ring levee, which surrounds and creates a visual barrier of the site. Moreover, since the new structures would be similar to those already existing at the Old River Intake and Pump Station, the visual contrast would be weak.

In addition, although views of the new intakes would be within the foreground for recreational users of Old River, intakes already exist next to the site, and views are short in duration as recreational users travel Old River from Discovery Bay to the south Delta. Therefore, the relative change in the views of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station from SR 4, and associated intakes from Old River, would result in a weak visual contrast that would neither dominate nor obstruct the views of Old River and its surroundings from SR4.

**Transfer Facility Expansion**

As previously discussed, the existing topography around the Transfer Facility Expansion site would obstruct views of its permanent structures from surrounding roadways. Therefore, there would be no changes in the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

**Pipelines**

After installation of the pipelines, the sites would be restored to preconstruction conditions (i.e., reestablishing existing topography and reseeding with a native seed mix typical of the immediately surrounding area). The proposed pipelines (i.e., Delta-Transfer, Transfer-LV, and Transfer-Bethany) would be belowground; blow-off and air valves extend about 2 feet above the ground (See Figure 4.14-8, Photograph 14). Currently blow-off and air valves appear along portions of SR4 and Walnut Boulevard from the Transfer Facility to the dam. New blow-off and air valves would be installed about every 2,000 and 1,000 feet, respectively.

Although drivers along SR4 and Walnut Boulevard as well as recreational users of the Walnut Trail in the watershed could see these structures in foreground views, since these structures would be similar to existing structures, the visual contrast would be weak. Furthermore, as some would be in low-lying areas and vegetation provides intermittent screening along SR4 and Walnut Boulevard, the introduction of these new structures would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct views from local roadways or trails.

The valves associated with the Transfer-Bethany Pipeline would be within the foreground view of the public traveling on Vasco Road. However, some of these valves would be placed in low-lying...
areas along the pipeline alignment and would generally be obscured by the natural topography. Therefore, the introduction of these new structures would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct the views from Vasco Road.

Lastly, the inlet/outlet pipelines would not have associated blow-off and air valves. Therefore, since the pipelines would be underground, there would be no changes in the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

**Power Supply**

**Power Option 1: Western Only.** A new substation, access road to the facility and 69 kV transmission line to the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be constructed about 2,500 feet south of SR4 and 1 to 1.5 miles east of Byron Highway. The substation and access road would be constructed next to three large existing transmission lines installed on lattice towers. Views of the site are generally obstructed by existing vegetation and development from SR4 and Byron Highway, respectively. Moreover, the substation would be fenced and a landscaping plan to add visual screening would be implemented.

For the portion of the transmission line from the substation east to the new Delta Intake and Pump Station and Old River Intake and Pump Station, existing wooden poles and conductors appear within the alignment. For the portion west to the Transfer Facility, numerous existing electrical facilities including lattice towers, tubular steel poles, wooden poles and conductors appear within a portion of the alignment and within the entire viewshed. Therefore, installation of a new substation, access road, and a new/replacement transmission line would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct the views from SR 4 or Byron Highway.

**Power Option 2: PG&E and Western.** Western’s new wooden power poles and transmission line from the Tracy Substation to the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be visible from Byron Highway. Views from SR 4 for the portion of the transmission line that would be in the same alignment as proposed under Power Option 1 are discussed above. In general, the views of the alignment vary from foreground to background views depending on one’s location on Byron Highway. However, these new, approximately 50-foot poles and associated conductors would be within an existing transmission line corridor that contains three transmission lines: two 500 kV lines and one 230 kV line on large lattice towers.

Views of the facilities are intermittently obstructed by topography and man-made features, including farm buildings and houses. Therefore, installation of a new transmission line would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct views from SR 4 or Byron Highway.

A portion of the PG&E transmission line would be visible in foreground views from Walnut Boulevard and at the crossing of Camino Diablo Road. Because wooden poles and conductors already exist along these local roadways, installation of a new transmission line would not result in a substantial visual contrast because the new poles and conductors would be similar to what currently exists. Moreover, the proposed substation would be in an area surrounded by steeper topography, limiting views from Walnut Boulevard. Therefore, installation of a new substation
and transmission line would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct views from Camino Diablo Road or Walnut Boulevard.

**Summary**
Under Alternative 1, project construction activities and facility siting would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the public or recreational users; therefore, Alternative 1 would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. This would be a less-than-significant impact.

**Alternative 2**
Under Alternative 2, construction activities and facility siting impacts would be the same as analyzed under Alternative 1 because Alternative 2 includes construction of the same facilities as Alternative 1 does. Therefore, Alternative 2 would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. This would be a less-than-significant impact.

**Alternative 3**
Under Alternative 3, construction activities and facility siting impacts would be less than Alternative 1 because neither the new Delta Intake and Pump Station nor the Transfer-Bethany Pipeline would be constructed, thereby reducing changes to the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Construction activities at the existing Old River Intake and Pump Station would generally take place inside the fenced property and ring levee, which surrounds and creates a visual barrier of the site from SR4.

Installation of a new fish screen within an existing bay, next to an existing screen, would not result in a substantial visual contrast to existing views from Old River. Therefore, construction-related activities and a new fish screen at the Old River Intake and Pump Station would result in a weak visual contrast and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. This would be a less-than-significant impact.

**Alternative 4**
Impacts to the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings resulting from implementation of Alternative 4 would be less than from Alternative 1 because this alternative involves a smaller reservoir expansion (160 TAF only) and most of the project components associated with Alternative 1 would not be implemented under this alternative. The following components would not be constructed: Delta Intake and Pump Station, Delta-Transfer Pipeline, Transfer Facility Expansion, Transfer-LV Pipeline, Transfer-Bethany Pipeline, Power Supply Options 1 or 2, or the Marina Complex on the northern shoreline.

Other recreation facilities would be relocated or constructed in different locations compared to Alternative 1; for example, the Westside Access Road would be lower in elevation than proposed under Alternative 1 and recreational facilities would generally be constructed upslope of the existing facilities under Alternative 4, rather than in new locations as under Alternative 1. The following paragraphs discuss impacts resulting from the shell borrow area west of the dam,
160-TAF borrow area, Westside Access Road and relocated recreational facilities associated with Alternative 4.

Reservoir expansion to 160 TAF would result in an increase in the inundation area of the reservoir and some recreational facilities (i.e., marina, boats, docks, and western hiking trail/access road) that are currently on the southern shore would be moved upslope. Currently, the reservoir high water level is about 472 feet msl and with inundation it would rise to a height of 510 feet msl. Although this increase in inundation and relocated recreational facilities would be perceptible to anglers, boaters, and hikers within the watershed, it would result in a weak visual contrast and would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the reservoir or its surroundings from the dam, boats and existing/proposed trails.

Under Alternative 4, the shell borrow area just upstream of the left abutment of the dam would be about 14 acres smaller than under Alternative 1. Moreover, the Marina Complex would not be sited within the borrow area. After excavation, the borrow area site would be graded and contoured to blend with existing and planned topography.

In addition, it is likely that, as occurred with the existing Los Vaqueros Reservoir, the borrow area would naturally revegetate with upland scrub habitat. Therefore, the roughly triangular-shaped area of the hillside near the dam face would become larger, and would result in a weak visual contrast. Moreover, it would not dominate nor obstruct the views of the reservoir or its surroundings from the dam, boats, and existing/proposed trails.

About 270,000 cubic feet of naturally occurring alluvial clay deposits would be excavated from the 160-TAF borrow area in Kellogg Valley. Views from Walnut Boulevard of the 160-TAF borrow area generally would be screened by the Kellogg Creek riparian vegetation; however, it would be visible to hikers on portions of the Alkali Meadow Trail. This would result in a moderate visual contrast and dominate the viewshed of the recreational trail users; however, as the area is in a low-lying valley, it would not block middleground and background views of the valley and surrounding hills.

Generally, under Alternative 4, construction and operations would result in a weak visual contrast and would neither dominate nor obstruct the views of the public or recreationalists. However, impacts associated with excavating the 160-TAF borrow area would substantially degrade the existing visual character and quality of the site and its surroundings and therefore represent a significant impact.

Mitigation Measures

**Measure 4.14.2a:** CCWD shall develop and implement a site restoration plan specifically for the 160-TAF borrow area that shall provide for finished topography that, while not restored to prior condition, shall blend in with the surrounding landscape, minimizing the visual contrast. The plan shall include a revegetation plan that includes a native seed mix typical of the surrounding area. While these site restoration steps are similar to those that will be required at all project sites, this specific project area requires its own restoration plan because of the extent of ground disturbance that will occur here.
Impact Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Impact 4.14.3: The project alternatives would not create a new source of substantial light but Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 could create a new source of substantial glare that could adversely affect views in the area. (Less than Significant with Mitigation for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3; Less than Significant for Alternative 4)

Alternative 1

Construction
During the 3-year period associated with construction of the 275-TAF reservoir, the Los Vaqueros Watershed would be closed to public access. Moreover, because the reservoir area is not visible from trails in and around Morgan Territory and Round Valley Regional Preserves, creation of a new source of substantial light or glare from lighting and equipment used during nighttime construction would not be visible to the public or recreational users, and would therefore not result in construction-related impacts.

The watershed would be open to the public during the 1-year reservoir draw down and approximately 1-year reservoir filling period. No new equipment or lighting would be required to drawdown or fill the reservoir; therefore no new source of substantial light or glare would result from drawdown or refilling of the reservoir.

Outside the watershed, site lighting and construction equipment could result in creation of a new source of substantial light or glare. However, as discussed below, many construction activities would not be visible to the public and recreational users due to screening of project sites by topography, vegetation, and existing man-made features. Moreover, this impact would be temporary.

For information on potential impacts to wildlife from the use of lighting during project construction and operation, see Section 4.6, Biological Resources.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion
When construction is completed, the expanded reservoir, dam, and recreational facilities would have nighttime lighting for safety and security. This lighting would not vary substantially from what is currently used at existing facilities, which is generally shielded light or lamps installed such that the light is directed downwards. Moreover, the Los Vaqueros Watershed is a day-use facility which closes at sunset or earlier and, as discussed previously, is obscured from public views from other recreational facilities. Therefore, operational impacts that could result from creation of a new source of substantial light or glare from the use of lighting for safety and security in the watershed would not be visible to the public or recreational users.

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2 The Miwok Trail would remain open during construction to maintain connectivity between Round Valley and Morgan Territory Regional Preserves; however, this trail offers no views of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir to recreational users. See Figure 4.15-2.
New Delta Intake and Pump Station
During construction, site lighting and construction equipment could be required at night for safety and security. As discussed in Impact 4.14-1, views of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station when driving west on SR 4 would be obscured. Views from SR 4 when driving east would be within the foreground. However, after construction of the ring levee, the majority of the construction activities would be taking place inside the ring levee, which would surround the site and create a visual barrier. Therefore, construction activities associated with the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would not result in a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

The permanent structures associated with the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would be similar to the structures currently at the Old River Intake and Pump Station, which are generally painted in light earth tones and are non-reflective. For safety and security, lighting similar to that currently used at the Old River Intake and Pump Station would be installed. Current lighting is generally shielded or installed such that the light is directed downwards. Therefore, the structures and lighting would generally be obscured from view, and operation of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station would not result in a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public.

Transfer Facility Expansion
During construction, site lighting and construction equipment could be required at night for safety and security. When construction is completed, the Transfer Facility Expansion would have nighttime lighting for safety and security. This lighting would not vary substantially from what is currently used at this site, which is generally shielded, or lamps installed such that the light is directed downwards. Moreover, as discussed previously, public views of the Transfer Facility Expansion would be obstructed from surrounding roadways by the existing topography around the site. Therefore, construction and operation of the Transfer Facility would not result in a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

Pipelines
During construction of the Delta-Transfer, Transfer-LV, and Transfer-Bethany Pipelines, site lighting and construction equipment could be required at night for safety and security for the duration of construction. However, because the pipeline construction area moves continuously along the alignment, lighting at any one location would be of limited duration. After completion of construction, no lighting would be required because the pipelines would be underground. Therefore, construction and operation of the pipelines would not result in a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

Power Supply
During construction of the transmission lines associated with either Power Option 1: Western Only or Power Option 2: Western and PG&E, lighting could be required at night for safety and security for the duration of project construction. However, because the construction area would move continuously along the transmission line alignment, lighting at any one location would be
limited in duration. After completion of construction, no lighting would be required along the transmission lines. Therefore, construction of the transmission line would not result in a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

However, installation of new conductor specifically associated with Power Option 1, within an area where no transmission lines currently exist (i.e., along the Delta-Transfer Pipeline corridor) could result in a noticeable visual change during the daytime. The new conductor could be reflective and could cause glare. This effect could result in the new conductor appearing visible or prominent and would therefore result in a potentially significant impact.

**Power Option 1: Western Only.** A lighting plan to provide security and exterior lighting would be developed for a new substation that would be constructed west of the new Delta Intake and Pump Station. Additionally, structures associated with the new substation could introduce potentially reflective, metal surfaces that could create glare effects. However, views of the site are generally obstructed by existing vegetation and development from SR4 and Byron Highway, respectively. Moreover, the substation would be fenced and a landscaping plan to provide additional visual screening would be implemented. Therefore, operations of the new substation would not result in a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

**Power Option 2: PG&E and Western.** For the proposed substation within the Los Vaqueros Watershed, a lighting plan to provide security and exterior lighting would be developed. Additionally, structures associated with the new substation could introduce potentially reflective, metal surfaces that could create glare effects. However, the substation would be in an area surrounded by steeper topography, limiting views from Walnut Boulevard. Moreover, at night, the substation would not be visible to the public or recreational users as it would be within the watershed, which closes at sunset or earlier. Therefore, construction and operation of a new substation would not result in creation of a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

**Summary**

Under Alternative 1, project construction and operations would not result in creation of a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users. However, a conductor within an area where no transmission lines currently exist could result in a noticeable visual change during the daytime. Therefore, operation of Power Option 1 could result in a new source of substantial glare that would be visible to the public from SR 4. This would be a significant impact.

**Alternative 2**

Under Alternative 2, construction and operational impacts would be the same as analyzed under Alternative 1 because Alternative 2 includes implementation of the same facilities as does Alternative 1. Therefore, Alternative 2 could result in a new source of substantial glare that would be visible to the public. This would be a significant impact.
Alternative 3

Under Alternative 3, construction and operational impacts would be less than Alternative 1 because neither the new Delta Intake and Pump Station nor the Transfer-Bethany Pipeline would be constructed, thereby eliminating the need for construction and safety/security lighting at either location. Construction activities at the existing Old River Intake and Pump Station would take place inside the fenced property and ring levee, which surrounds the site and creates a visual barrier of the site. Because safety and security lighting are already in place; additional lighting would not likely be required and there would be no additional light impacts. However, as described for Alternative 1, the new conductor associated with Power Option 1 could be a substantial source of glare, representing a significant impact.

Alternative 4

Impacts from implementation of Alternative 4 would be less than from Alternative 1 because this alternative involves a smaller reservoir expansion (160 TAF only) and most of the project components associated with Alternative 1 would not be implemented under this alternative. The following components would not be constructed: Delta Intake and Pump Station, Delta-Transfer Pipeline, Transfer Facility Expansion, Transfer-LV Pipeline, Transfer-Bethany Pipeline, Power Supply Option 1 or 2, or the Marina Complex on the northern shoreline.

Impacts resulting from the construction and operations of the shell borrow area west of the dam, 160 TAF borrow area, Westside Access Road, and relocated recreational facilities associated with Alternative 4 would be the same as those discussed under Alternative 1. All construction and operations would require site and safety lighting as described for Alternative 1, and all the facilities would be within the Los Vaqueros Reservoir area. Therefore, Alternative 4 would not result in creation of a new source of substantial light or glare that would be visible to the public or recreational users.

Mitigation Measures

Measure 4.14.3: Non-specular conductors shall be installed to reduce the potential glare effects and the level of visual contrast between the transmission line and its landscape setting.

Impact Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Impact 4.14.4: The project alternatives would not make a cumulatively considerable contribution to adverse effects on visual/aesthetic resources in the project area or broader region. (Less than Significant)

The geographic scope considered for potential cumulative impacts to visual/aesthetic resources is the viewshed of the public and recreational users common to the project alternatives. Within the viewshed of the project alternatives, the Vasco Road and Camino Diablo Intersection Improvements Project, in combination with the proposed project, could contribute to cumulative impacts to the visual/aesthetic resources. Specifically, construction activities and equipment
could obstruct views from Vasco Road, a county-designated scenic highway/expressway, and Camino Diablo Road, a scenic route. Impacts from construction would be limited in duration and therefore would not result in significant impacts.

After construction, the road widening would be visible within foreground views; however, it would not obstruct or dominate the views of the public. Moreover, as discussed above, within this viewshed, permanent impacts from Alternatives 1 and 2 would be limited to air valves and blow-off valves that would generally not be visible to the public. Some air valves and blow-off valves may be visible; however, as discussed above, due to the existing character of the viewsheds, installation of air valves and blow-off valves would result in a weak visual contrast to the existing viewsheds. Therefore, the project’s contribution to cumulative impacts to visual/aesthetic resources would not be cumulatively considerable. This would be a less-than-significant cumulative impact.

**Mitigation:** None required.