

## **7.5 VISUAL RESOURCES (NEW)**

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### 7.5.1 INTRODUCTION

#### 7.5.1.1 Content

*The proposed project analyzed in the Monterey Plus EIR was the Monterey Amendment and the Settlement Agreement. The Monterey Plus EIR considered five “elements” of the Monterey Amendment as follows:*

- *Changes in the procedures for allocation of Table A water and surplus water among the SWP contractors;*
- *Approval to permanent transfers of 130,000 acre feet and retirement of 45,000 acre-feet of SWP long-term water supply contracts’ Table A amounts;*
- *Transfer of property known as the “Kern Fan Element property” in Kern County;*
- *Water supply management practices; and*
- *Restructured water rates.*

*This REIR has changed the description of the Kern Fan Element property transfer to be:*

- *Transfer of property known as the “Kern Fan Element property” in Kern County and its development and continued use and operation as a locally owned and operated groundwater banking and recovery project.*

*There are no revisions to the other elements of the Monterey Amendment or of the Settlement Agreement, and no changes have been made relating to them in this REIR. (See discussion in Introduction/Executive Summary.)*

*This REIR does not supersede the analysis of the Monterey Plus EIR but supplements the Monterey Plus EIR. The Monterey Plus EIR focused on the transfer of the KFE property, which was fully analyzed in the Monterey Plus EIR. This REIR did not identify any new impacts or changes to impacts caused by the transfer of the KFE property. Therefore, this REIR focuses on the development and continued use and operation of the KWB as a locally owned and operated groundwater banking and recovery project (“KWB activities”).*

*The Monterey Plus DEIR Section 7.5 identified potential impacts to visual resources as a result of the transfer of the Kern Fan Element. Substantial new information is presented in this section, however, that replaces text from DEIR Section 7.5 that discusses KWB activities. All other text in DEIR Section 7.5 remains unchanged. In addition to the impacts discussed below, to the extent they apply, indirect impacts as a result of population growth are presented in Chapter 8, Growth-Inducing Impacts, and indirect impacts from potential cropping changes are presented in Section 10.1, Cumulative Environmental Impacts.*

Table 7.5-1A identifies the potentially affected environmental resources from impacts of KWB activities on visual resources.

**TABLE 7.5-1A****IMPACTS OF KWB ACTIVITIES ON VISUAL RESOURCES**

<b>Proposed Project Element</b>	<b>Potentially Affected Environmental Resources</b>	<b>Impact Number</b>
Transfer of Kern Fan Element lands, and KWB activities	Changes in visual character associated with construction and operation of groundwater storage facilities	7.5-3

During public review of the Notice of Preparation for the Monterey Plus EIR, interested parties submitted no comments on visual resources.

### **7.5.1.2 Analytical Method**

Qualitative assessment of impacts on visual resources was conducted in accordance with standard professional practices for documents prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents. Factors considered in the analysis included:

- the nature and magnitude of changes in visual character;
- the number and importance of vantage points from which changes would be viewed;
- the number of viewers who would be affected; and
- likely reactions to changes in visual character.

Substantial changes are defined as changes beyond those normally observed because of historical variation of fluctuation, changes that are disproportionate to any previously experienced, or irreversible changes that would negatively affect an average person's impression of an area. Site visits to the facilities were used to record the visual character of the facilities.

This analysis included a review of the environmental setting, impacts, and mitigation measures related to visual resources, to the extent they apply, presented in the 1997 Monterey Initial Study and Addendum (see Appendix 7-6a).

### **7.5.1.3 Standards of Significance**

The following standards of significance are based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. For the purposes of this REIR, impacts to visual resources would be considered significant if KWB activities would:

- 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 corridor;
- substantially degrade the visual character of any area; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

KWB activities would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views. Development projects are distant from KWB Lands and would not overlap visually with KWB activities. KWB activities would also not contribute to skyglow and KWB lands are mostly open lands with limited lighting at a few facilities. Therefore light, glare, or skyglow are not discussed further.

## **7.5.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

### **7.5.2.1 Physical Setting in 1995**

Prior to the California Department of Water Resources' (Department's) purchase of the KFE property in 1988, approximately 17,068 acres of the property was under extensive cultivation (see Revised Appendix E). The remaining property contained 1,515 acres of isolated sensitive native plant communities (valley saltbush scrub, Great Valley Mesquite scrub, and valley sacaton grassland) and 1,317 acres of non-native grassland, which had been leased for oil recovery facilities.

The KFE property included a number of agricultural wells and conveyance facilities that had been constructed primarily to deliver irrigation water for the agricultural activity occurring then and historically on the property. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Department and KCWA on March 25, 1987, that provided for the phase-out of all agricultural production in the KFE by the end of 1993. In fact, one of the tenants' leases was terminated in 1989. Then in 1991, at the peak of the drought, all the remaining tenant leases were terminated, and thereafter all agricultural lands owned by the Department were fallowed and introduced annual grasses and forbs colonized the KFE property.

Several tenants with active oil and gas extraction wells, brine disposal wells, and oil storage tanks were also on the property. One oil and gas lease tenant, Grayson Services Inc., had a residence with an equipment repair and storage yard on the property. The Kern County Fire Department operated a firefighting training facility on a portion of the KFE property (see Revised Appendix E). The property acreage lies on both sides of the Kern River but does not include the river itself, or the lands within the river levees. The terrain is flat with no more than a few feet of topographical relief. In 1995, there were no major structures on the KFE property except for Interstate 5 (I-5), the Cross Valley Canal, and some abandoned tanks and other oil field equipment, and about 3,000 acres of recharge ponds.

### **7.5.2.2 Changes in Physical Setting between 1996 and 2014<sup>03</sup>**

The KWB facilities include approximately 7,200 acres of recharge ponds, 85 recovery wells, an extensive network of monitoring wells, 36 miles of pipeline, and the 6-mile-long KWB Canal. The ponds consist of low earthen berms that pond water to depths of a few feet. The ponded water infiltrates into the alluvial fan for recharge into the aquifer. Water flows between the ponds in small channels; Kern Water Bank Authority (KWBA) operators control the flow with small weir boxes. The recovery wells average about 750 feet deep and produce as much as 5,000 gallons per minute of water. They are distributed throughout KWB Lands and are spaced approximately one-third mile apart. The 16- to 20-inch-diameter wells are powered with electric motors. Small diameter (15- to 36-inch-diameter) PVC pipelines transport water recovered from wells to existing canals or, in some cases, to large diameter (> 36-inch-diameter) pipelines. Approximately 31 miles of small-diameter and 5 miles of large-diameter pipeline have been constructed.

The KWB Canal was constructed to convey water both to the water bank ponds for recharge purposes and from the water bank wells for recovery purposes. The canal extends 6 miles from the Kern River on the east to the California Aqueduct on the west. Associated structures include headworks at the Kern River, a 100 cubic feet per second (cfs) pump station serving the Kern River area, a crossing under Enos Lane, a check structure, a 545 cfs pump station serving the eastern portions of the KWB, and diversion facilities at the California Aqueduct.

Most of the changes in visual resources on KWB Lands between 1996 and 2014 are attributable to the construction and operation of recharge ponds and the KWB Canal and are described above. Conservation Bank Areas have also been established pursuant to the KWB Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan (KWB HCP/NCCP). KWBA manages KWB Lands in

accordance with KWB HCP/NCCP, which allows developed uses on about 4,000 of KWB Lands (see Appendix 7-7a). Developed uses included farming, permanent facilities for the KWB, and commerce. Approximately 490 acres of land adjacent to Interstate 5 (I-5) is designated for possible commercial use. Between 1995 and 2014, no development occurred on the 490-acre parcel. After 2003, the development of this parcel was prohibited by the Settlement Agreement.

### **7.5.2.3 Regulatory Setting in 1995**

The regulatory setting covering KWB Lands pertinent to visual resources consists of several provisions of the Kern County General Plan and Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan that do not affect the analysis of visual impacts on KWB Lands.

### **7.5.2.4 Changes in Regulatory Setting between 1996 and 2014<sup>03</sup>**

#### **Kern County General Plan**

There have been no substantial changes in the regulatory framework since 1996 that would affect the analysis of visual resources impacts, except for the adoption in 2004 of the Scenic Route Corridors (Section 2.3.9) in the Kern County General Plan. Highways in Kern County that provide access to existing and potential groundwater bank areas are not officially designated as scenic routes by Caltrans or in the County General Plan.

#### **Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan**

The *Metropolitan Bakersfield General Plan*, adopted in 2002, did not include any substantial changes that would affect the analysis of visual resources on KWB Lands.

## **7.5.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

### **7.5-3 Implementation of KWB activities could potentially affect visual resources.**

#### **1996 — 2014**

In 1995, under the Kern County Water Agency (KCWA) flood emergency program and prior to the formation of the KWBA, KCWA and the other future participants of the KWBA constructed approximately 3,034 acres of recharge ponds. From 1998 through 2002, KWBA constructed an additional 4,290 acres of recharge ponds, some of which overlapped earlier constructed ponds, for a total net pond area of 7,114 acres. An additional 70 acres of ponds were constructed in 2009 for a total pond area of 7,184 acres. KWBA subsequently constructed the KWB Canal and several wells and pump stations. The KWB Canal has a uniform cross-section and is confined between earthen berms. It is a prominent feature in the landscape but is visually consistent with other waterways in the area including the Cross Valley Canal and the California Aqueduct.

Although these land use changes have altered the appearance of KWB Lands, they did not alter the overall visual character of the area or cause any substantial visual resource impacts. The visual changes are primarily seen by travelers on I-5, and the changes are consistent with other water facility features common in the area.-

Therefore, the impact of KWB activities from 1996 to 2014 with regard to alteration of visual resources was ***less than significant***.

Mitigation Measures

*None required.*

**2015 — 2030**

Near-term future KWB activities include construction of approximately 190 acres of recharge ponds and three wells under the ongoing Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) program (Kern Water Bank Recharge and Recovery Project). Longer-term future construction of approximately 862 acres of additional recharge ponds and associated facilities is anticipated as part of full build-out. The IRWM program ponds have been sited. The locations of additional ponds are approximate but consistent with KWB HCP/NCCP requirements; final locations and areas will be determined as these facilities are designed.

The KWB HCP/NCCP allows developed uses on about 4,000 acres of KWB Lands (see Appendix 7-7a). Developed uses included permanent KWB facilities, farming, and commerce. Approximately 490 acres of land adjacent to Interstate 5 (I-5) is designated for possible commercial use. Between 1995 and 2014, no development occurred on the 490-acre parcel. Since 2003, the Settlement Agreement prohibits development of this parcel.

As a consequence of KWB activities, approximately 1,052 acres of additional lands would be converted to recharge ponds on KWB Lands. Although these changes would alter the appearance of KWB Lands, the alteration in appearance would be minimally visible and consistent with other water facility and visual features common in the area.

Therefore, the impact of KWB activities from 2015 to 2030 with regard to alteration in visual resources would be ***less than significant***.

Mitigation Measures

*None required.*

## ENDNOTES

None.