

3.1 Aesthetics

This section addresses the aesthetic and visual quality impacts associated with construction of the proposed project. The aesthetics analysis includes a description of existing visual conditions in the project area and an evaluation of potential effects on visual resources and public view corridors. For purposes of this analysis, visual or aesthetic resources are generally defined as both the natural and human-built landscape features that can be seen by the public. The overall visual character of a given area results from the combination of natural landscape features, including landform, water, and vegetation patterns, as well as the presence of built features such as buildings, roads, and other structures.

3.1.1 Environmental Setting

Regional Setting

Riverside County encompasses approximately 7,200 square miles stretching from the Colorado River to the Santa Ana Mountains. At its westernmost point, Riverside County is less than 10 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The western half of the County is separated from the eastern half by the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains. Several man-made lakes are located in the western portion of the County, including Lake Matthews, Lake Perris, Lake Skinner, Vail Lake, and Diamond Valley Lake. These lakes provide water storage and recreational uses. In recent years, Riverside County has experienced substantial urbanization that has altered the regional character from that of a rural, inland desert area to one of the major population centers of Southern California.

The City of Perris covers approximately 31 square miles of land, stretching from the Lake Perris area in the north to the Roy W. Kabian Memorial Park in the south. The Perris Valley Channel runs almost the entire north-south distance of the City of Perris from East Oleander Avenue in the north and exiting near Observation Hills in the south.

Topographic features in the project region include the Bernasconi Hills southeast of Lake Perris and Mount Russell to the north. Major roadway corridors in the project vicinity include the Ramona Expressway, a county eligible scenic route, and State Route 215, located approximately 3 miles west of Lake Perris.

Project Area Setting

The project is located within the Lake Perris State Recreation Area (SRA), the Lake Perris Fairgrounds, and the City of Perris. The eastern portion of the proposed project, located in the Lake Perris SRA, is mostly undeveloped and primarily consists of non-native grasslands between the base of the Perris Dam and the Ramona Expressway. The entire southeastern portion of the project area contains a system of compacted dirt roads that provide access to various points on the Perris Dam. A small area of riparian habitat is located at the base of the southern reach of Perris Dam. Adjacent to the Ramona Expressway are two graded staging and storage sites.

The Lake Perris Fairgrounds Segment of the proposed project is adjacent and parallel to the Ramona Expressway. The eastern half of this segment includes a portion of the Lucas Oil/Starwest Motocross Park, a dirt racetrack designed for motocross use. The western half is a parking lot for the Lake Perris Fairgrounds. There are two roadways, Avalon Parkway and Lake Perris Drive, that provide access to the Lake Perris Fairgrounds. Both roadways would cross the channel in this segment.

The Perris Valley Channel Segment is located between Lake Perris Drive and the Perris Valley Channel. This area is flat, undeveloped agricultural land that contains ruderal vegetation. This segment also runs adjacent and parallel to the north side of the Ramona Expressway. Evans Road would cross the channel in this segment.

Figures 3.1-1 through 3.1-4 provide views of the Lake Perris SRA and portions of the city of Perris at the project construction locations. South of the dam, Ramona Expressway, a county-eligible scenic route, is located adjacent to the proposed release channel.

3.1.2 Regulatory Framework

State

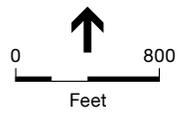
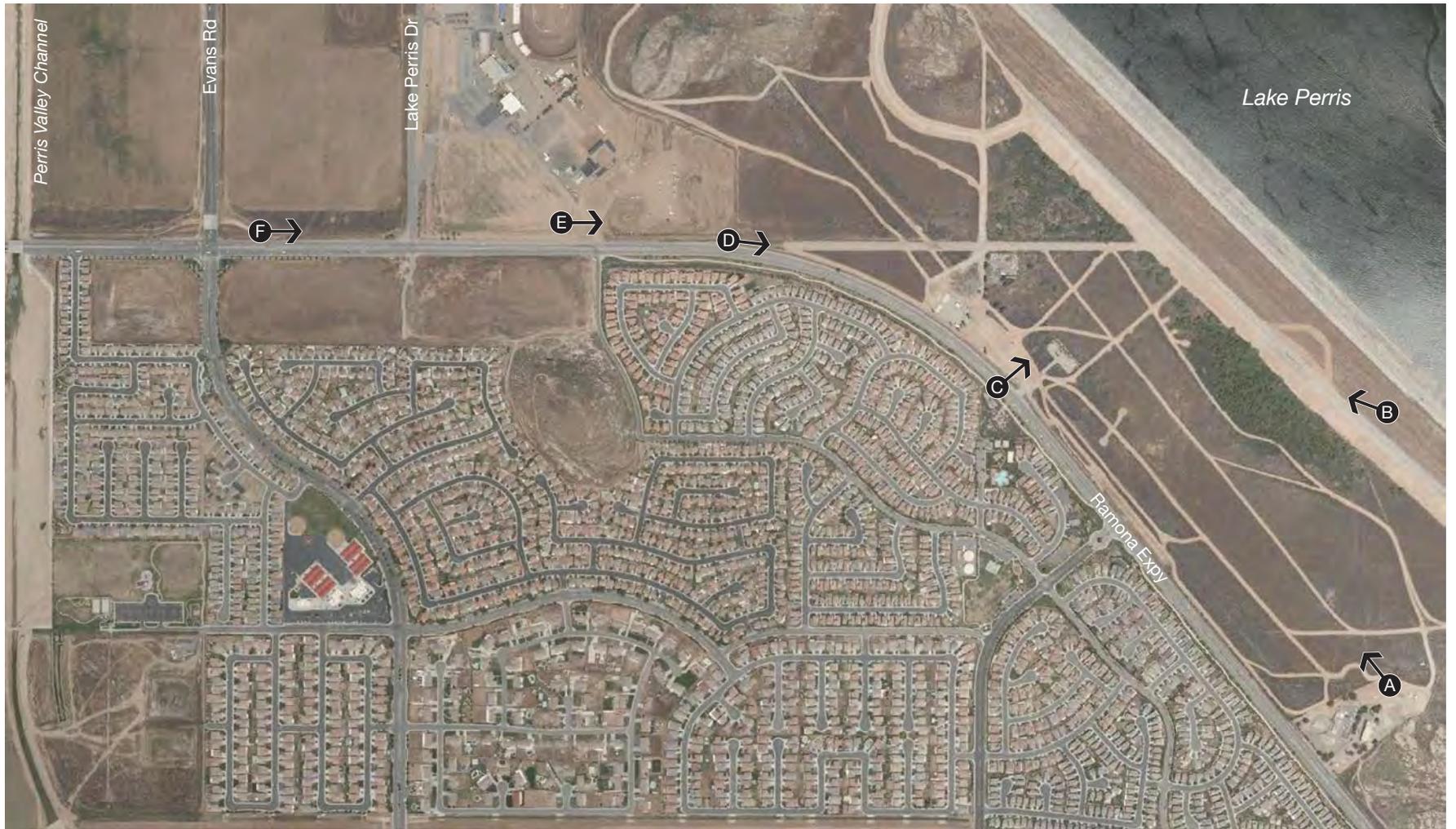
State Scenic Highway Program

The State Scenic Highway Program, created by the California Legislature in 1963, was established to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to the highways. A highway is designated under this program when a local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for scenic highway approval, and receives notification from Caltrans that the highway has been designated as a scenic highway. When a City or County nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it defines the scenic corridor, which is land generally adjacent and visible to a motorist on the highway. There are several eligible state scenic highways in Riverside County, but only Highway 243 and portions of Highway 74 and Highway 62 are officially designated state scenic highways at this time. These designated scenic highways are well outside of the project area (Caltrans, 2015).

Local

Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area

The entire project area falls within Zone B of the Mount Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area. The Mount Palomar Observatory is located approximately 38 miles from the project in San Diego County. The observatory requires unique nighttime lighting standards to allow the night sky to be viewed clearly. All areas within a 15- to 45-mile radius of the observatory must conform with the nighttime lighting regulations that apply to Zone B in the Riverside General Plan. Riverside County Ordinance No. 655 identifies lighting fixtures and uses that limit light leakage and spillage to minimize interference with the operations of the Mount Palomar Observatory. The ordinance also identifies lighting fixtures and uses to be implemented for projects that require County approvals.



SOURCE: Bing Maps

Perris Dam Emergency Release Facility . 120083.02

Figure 3.1-1
Photopoint Locations



Photo A: View from existing facility looking northwest



Photo B: View of proposed project area looking northwest from the dam's left abutment



Photo C: View from Ramona Expressway looking northeast towards dam



Photo D: View from Ramona Expressway looking east toward the dam's left abutment



Photo E: View looking east across Motocross



Photo F: View from the Perris Valley Channel looking east along DWR's right-of-way toward Bernasconi Hills

3.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Significance Criteria

For the purposes of this EIR and consistency with Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, applicable local plans, and agency and professional standards, the project would have a significant impact on aesthetics if it 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
- 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 daytime or nighttime views in the area

Methodology

The significance determination is based on several evaluation criteria, including the extent of project visibility from sensitive viewing areas such as designated scenic routes, public open space, or residential areas; the degree to which the various project elements would contrast with or be integrated into the existing landscape; the extent of change in the landscape's composition and character; and the number and sensitivity of viewers.

This impact analysis considers view obstruction, negative aesthetic effects, and light and glare effects. This visual assessment is based on field observations of the project site and surroundings in addition to a review of topographic maps, project drawings, and technical data supplied by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and aerial and ground-level photographs of the project area.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.1-1: The project could have a significant impact if it would have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

For purposes of the threshold of significance, a viewpoint that is accessible only from private property is not considered a scenic vista. Scenic vistas are points accessible to the general public that provide a view of the countryside (County of Riverside, 2006). No scenic vistas have been designated in the vicinity of the project site and, as a result, the project would not have an effect on a scenic vista.

Significance Determination: No Impact.

Impact 3.1-2: The project could have a significant impact if it would substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

The project is not located within or near a designated scenic highway. The nearest scenic highway is a portion of State Route 74 located approximately 20 miles northeast of the proposed project site. The project would not be visible from that highway. Therefore, the project would not impact scenic resources within a designated scenic highway.

Significance Determination: No Impact.

Impact 3.1-3: The project could have a significant impact if it would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Implementation of the proposed project would change the visual character of the surrounding area. Short-term visual impacts associated with construction of the proposed project are expected to occur over the 3-year construction period. During this period, construction activities will dominate the local views from Ramona Expressway. Once construction activities are completed, the views of trucks and earthmoving would cease. However, the temporary impacts associated with project construction equipment, material laydown, and excavation would be considered significant and unavoidable.

Long-term local views of the project site would be affected by the new emergency release facility. The new facility includes upgrades to the existing emergency release structure, new berms, and a new channel. The release structure upgrades would not substantially change the look of the existing facilities and would be internal to the facility, and typically not seen by people visiting or passing by the project site. As a result, upgrades to the emergency release structure on the dam will not impact existing views or aesthetic character of the project site.

The proposed project would represent a change in the visual character within all segments of the project site, primarily due to the construction of the Main Levee, which would be 6,000 feet long, up to 10 feet high, and up to 87 feet wide at the bottom with 3:1 slopes. The conveyance facilities would have a similar appearance as a large flood control channel, like the Perris Valley Channel, which the project will discharge to in the event of an emergency. The new levee would be visible from the Ramona Expressway but would not block views of the surrounding landscape from roadway vantage points. After construction the levee would also be vegetated with native grasses and forbs so it would be consistent with the existing vegetation that remains on the rest of the proposed project site, and blend in with the surrounding grassland on adjacent properties. Figure 2-3, Figure 2-7, and Figure 2-8 in Section 2.0 *Project Description* depict the proposed view changes, levee elevations, and design features associated with the project. Therefore, although the proposed project would change the visual character of the site, that change would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, and would thus have a less than significant impact.

There is a potential for trash and debris to collect in the open portion of the emergency outlet channel, and the structure could appear unpleasant if it is not maintained. Vandalism and graffiti could impact the visual character of the Ramona Expressway frontage. Prior to construction, DWR will either enter into a maintenance agreement with the RCFCD for the joint use of the facility as an emergency release facility and stormwater runoff channel, or develop an operation and maintenance plan for the channel. Adherence to the maintenance agreement or operation and maintenance plan would reduce any potential impacts to less than significant during the operational phase of the project.

Significance Determination: Significant and Unavoidable during construction.

Impact 3.1-4: The project could have a significant impact if it would create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.

Exterior lighting during the construction period could be used for nighttime construction as necessary. The construction activities would be located approximately 200 feet from the nearest residential area across Ramona Expressway. The residents are shielded from Ramona Expressway by a landscaped sidewalk and 8-foot-tall sound wall. Furthermore, streetlights on Ramona Expressway light the road and sidewalk at night. Although temporary nighttime construction may be visible from the neighboring areas, the shielding of lights downward and the proximity to a well-lit roadway minimizes the effect of nighttime lighting during construction.

As a state agency, DWR is exempt from Riverside County Ordinance 655. However, DWR will work with the County to minimize light leakage and comply with the lighting fixture requirements as outlined in the ordinance to minimize interference with the operations of the Mount Palomar Observatory. DWR would also notify the County of any temporary lighting and nighttime construction, when feasible, as required by the ordinance. In addition, per DWR standard specification requirements, at a minimum, construction lighting would be shielded and directed downward away from the neighboring residential areas located just south of Ramona Expressway. The project would not result in any new permanent nighttime lighting fixtures. As a result, impacts related to light and glare would be less than significant.

Significance Determination: Less than Significant.

References

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Updated 2011. California Scenic Highway Mapping System. Accessed January 13, 2015. /www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm, on January 13, 2015.

County of Riverside. *Ordinance No. 655, An Ordinance of the County of Riverside, Regulating Light Pollution*. 1988. Accessed March 28, 2013. www.clerkoftheboard.co.riverside.ca.us/ords/600/655.htm.

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