

3.1 Aesthetics

This section addresses the aesthetic and visual quality impacts associated with construction and operation of the proposed Perris Dam Remediation Program. This section includes a description of existing visual conditions in the project area and an evaluation of potential effects on visual resources and public view corridors. Presumed views from public viewpoints are also discussed, based on existing visual conditions at the project site and surrounding area.

For purposes of this analysis, visual or aesthetic resources are generally defined as the natural and built landscape features that can be seen. 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.

The EIR 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 DWR, aerial and ground-level photographs of the project area, and computer-generated visual simulation from representative viewing locations.

3.1.1 Setting

Regional Setting

Riverside County encompasses 7,400 square miles of land from the Colorado River to within 14 miles of the Pacific Ocean. The western portion of the County is separated from the eastern portion 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 the County has experienced substantial urbanization that has altered the regional character from a rural, inland desert area to one of the major population centers of Southern California.

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

Project Area Setting

Much of the Lake Perris SRA consists of rocky desert mountains and alluvial fans with sparse vegetation. Lake Perris and its recreational improvements provide a contrast to the desert landscape. The original lake shoreline is bordered on the east by mature riparian vegetation. The developed areas west of the lake support non-native ornamental landscape vegetation. Tall shade trees exist within the Bernasconi picnic area east of the lake. **Figures 3.1-1** and **3.1-2** provide views of the park at the project construction locations. South of the dam, Ramona Expressway, a county eligible scenic route, is located adjacent to the proposed emergency outlet extension.



1. Existing outlet tower looking southwest



2. Location of proposed outlet tower



3. Location of proposed berm



4. View of rock quarry



5. Location of proposed borrow area



6. View of exposed lakebed and location of proposed haul road looking north



7. View of proposed haul road location looking southwest



8. View of proposed haul road location looking northeast

Residential homes are located just south of Ramona Expressway and the proposed emergency outlet extension.

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 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 to and visible to a motorist on the highway. There are several eligible state scenic highways in Riverside County, but only Highway 243 and a portion 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.

Local

Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area

The entire project area falls within 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 in order to allow the night sky to be viewed clearly. All areas within the 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. The project must adhere to the lighting requirements of Riverside County Ordinance No. 655 for standards that are intended to limit light leakage and spillage that may interfere with the operations of the Mount Palomar Observatory. The ordinance lists permitted lighting fixtures and uses. The ordinance requires that temporary uses of lights for construction obtain approval from the County.

3.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Significance Criteria

For the purposes of this EIR and consistency with Appendix G of the *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; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

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.

As part of this analysis, a set of computer-generated visual simulations have been produced to illustrate conceptual "before" and "after" visual conditions as seen from key public vantage points. The visual simulations provide a clear depiction of the location, scale, and general appearance of the proposed project changes. Digitized photographs and computer modeling and rendering techniques were used to prepare the simulation images. The simulations are based on the conceptual project drawings and technical data provided by DWR.

Designated Scenic Resources

Ramona Expressway is a county eligible scenic route. However, the project is not located within any designated scenic vista or scenic corridors, nor is it near designated scenic highways. Therefore, the project would not result in significant impacts to designated scenic resources and this issue is not discussed further.

Scenic Vistas and Visual Character

Impact 3.1-1: Construction activities would temporarily affect the visual quality of the Lake Perris SRA and northern frontage of Ramona Expressway.

Dam Remediation

Construction of the stability berm would be visible from the surrounding areas south of the Lake Perris SRA. South of the dam, excavation, stockpiled soils, and staging areas would be visible from Ramona Expressway. Cement mixing and injection facilities would be approximately 70 to 80 feet tall and would be visible from Ramona Expressway. The area is not within a designated scenic vista or scenic highway corridor. However, the construction activities would be visible from the south for a period of two years. Construction activities south of the dam would be temporary and would not cause a permanent significant degradation of the local character or visual quality south of the dam during the construction period.

The haul road, borrow area, staging areas, and stockpiled soils would directly impact the view from the western shore of the lake within the SRA. Large soil hauling vehicles would be seen moving on the haul roads continually. Chain-link fencing would be constructed around construction areas, degrading views from the western shore of the lake. Construction activities

would be visible for a period of two years. Long range views within the SRA are dominated by natural vistas and rocky desert mountains. Since the vistas would be restored following the temporary construction period, the impact would not be considered significant. (See Section 3.12 Recreation for a discussion of the impacts of temporary construction activities on recreational activities.)

Outlet Tower Replacement

Construction of the new outlet tower would require the use of heavy equipment on the eastern shore of the lake. Blasting would be required at the new outlet facility location. Haul trucks and construction activities would be visible from the western shore of the lake for the duration of the construction period. However, due to the temporary nature of the construction, the impact to vistas and local character would not be considered significant.

Emergency Outlet Extension

The proposed emergency outlet extension would run parallel to Ramona Expressway, a County eligible scenic route. Construction of the extension would create short-term visual impacts, as heavy equipment would be visible from the roadway. Construction of the emergency outlet extension would temporarily alter the visual landscape. Substantial construction activities are occurring in the area as the area is becoming urbanized. The outlet extension construction activities would be similar to other construction activities in the area. Due to the temporary nature of the construction, the impact to vistas and local character would not be considered significant.

Significance: Less than Significant.

Impact 3.1-2: Once constructed, the new elements would alter the appearance of the project site.

The aboveground changes proposed as part of the project would alter the long-term appearance of the project site as seen from views north and south of the dam. The new outlet tower and haul road would be visible from the lake surface, the Lake Perris camp grounds and Moreno beach area, and from recreational trails located within the Lake Perris SRA. The stability berm and emergency outlet extension would be visible from Ramona Expressway, which is a county eligible scenic route. The stability berm would also be visible from longer range views, from elevated ridges and from I-215. Figures 3.1-3 through 3.1-5 provide visual simulations of the stability berm, the outlet tower, and the haul road over Bernasconi Hills. The following discussions evaluate the potential visual impact for each new feature to be constructed.

Dam Remediation

The addition of the new stability berm would only slightly alter the overall appearance of the existing dam. The dam would be constructed of the same material and surfaced with similar erosion resistant grasses as the original dam, and therefore would be a similar color. As shown in

Figures 3.1-3 and 3.1-4, the berm would be visible from neighboring long-range and short-range views, but would look similar to the existing dam.

The height of the dam would not change. The berm would not be visible by visitors within the Lake Perris SRA. Though the new stability berm would extend southward further than the original dam, it would be constructed to match and blend into the existing dam profile.

Ramona Expressway has been designated by the County as eligible to be a county scenic route. The existing roadway is bordered by encroaching residential and roadside commercial land uses. Longer-range views from Ramona Expressway include Perris Dam. As discussed above, the stability berm would not alter the appearance of the dam substantially. Therefore, the effect to the eligible scenic route would not be significant.

Construction of the berm would remove native riparian habitat south of the dam. Some riparian habitat would remain and would therefore continue to soften views of the dam along Ramona Expressway. The existing mature riparian habitat completely obscures the toe of the dam from neighboring views. Following construction, views of the dam and stability berm would be less obscured than under current conditions. However, it is anticipated that water seepage that has produced the riparian area would continue following the construction project. Over years, new riparian habitat would likely be established that would serve to further soften the short-range views of the dam. Although the stability berm would be visible following construction, the character of the view would be similar to existing conditions. Since the stability berm would be constructed of the same material as the original berm and would only slightly alter the appearance of the dam from long and short-range views, the impact to visual resources in the region would be less than significant.

Outlet Tower Replacement

The proposed outlet tower would be visible to visitors of the Lake Perris SRA near the existing tower. **Figure 3.1-5** shows the view of the new outlet tower from the western lake shore. Portions of the lakebed would be excavated in order to accommodate the new outlet tower. Once all of the proposed construction is complete and the lake returns to its original operating level, the tower would protrude only a few feet above the existing ground surface. Most of the tower would be underwater. The proposed tower would not be visible from Ramona Expressway or residential areas. Since the tower would be mostly underwater and would only slightly alter the views from the lake and western shoreline, the impact to visual resources would be less than significant.

Emergency Outlet Extension

The outlet extension would parallel Ramona Expressway. If the underground alternative is implemented, the segments of the emergency outlet extension that would be underground would have no visual impacts. The portion of the channel which crosses over MWD's pipeline would extend approximately six feet above ground but would not disrupt long-range views in the area.

If the open channel alternative is implemented, the portion of the outlet extension from the outlet tower to Perris Valley Drive would be constructed as an unlined trapezoidal channel. Under either

alternative, the open channel portion of the outlet extension to the Perris Valley Storm Drain would result in permanent visual impacts. The new extension would appear similar to a large flood control channel. The extension would be visible from local land uses including residences and along the Ramona Expressway. Fencing would be constructed along the open channel. Local views and the local character of the Ramona Expressway frontage would be affected. Views across the flood control channel would be of the local land uses that would include residential communities now under development. Trash and debris could collect in the open portion of the emergency outlet extension and the structure could become an eyesore if not maintained. Vandalism and graffiti could impact the visual character of the Ramona Expressway frontage. To ensure that the channel was maintained to minimize visual impacts or degradation of the local character DWR would implement Mitigation Measures 3.1-2a through 3.1-2c. These measures would ensure that this potential impact would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1-2a: If an open channel is constructed for any portion of the emergency outlet extension, DWR shall prepare and implement a maintenance plan which shall include scheduled trash removal, graffiti removal, general facility upkeep, and placing a fence around the emergency outlet extension to reduce trash deposition .

Mitigation Measure 3.1-2b: DWR shall ensure that a DWR maintenance contact is provided to the City of Perris for direct communication if immediate action regarding maintenance of the extension is needed.

Mitigation Measure 3.1-2c: DWR shall coordinate with the City of Perris to develop site access control fencing and landscaping to be consistent with the City guidelines.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Rock Outcroppings

Impact 3.1-3: Construction of the haul road within the Bernasconi Hills would permanently alter the granite rock formations just east of the dam.

A portion of the haul road, located along the Bernasconi Hills, would become a permanent addition to the landscape surrounding the lake (refer to Figure 3.1-4). The new haul road would be visible to visitors within the Lake Perris SRA and from Ramona Expressway. Effects on long range views are unsubstantial as shown in Figure 3.1-4. Although the road would be visible from across the lake, it would appear as a small scar, and would be consistent with surrounding recreational roads and trails within the area. The long-range view would be only slightly modified. The road would become part of the recreational facilities at the Lake Perris SRA providing hiking, biking, and equestrian use around the perimeter of the lake. Although a portion of the hillside would be permanently altered, the majority of the Bernasconi Hills would remain intact including the granite cliffs and boulders on either side of the road. The dominant stature of the hills within the region would not be diminished.

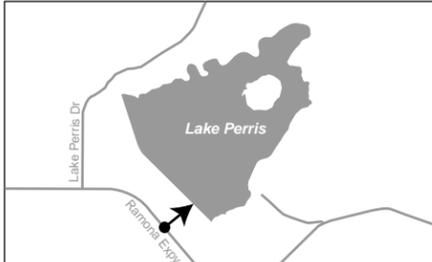


Existing Conditions



Proposed Conditions

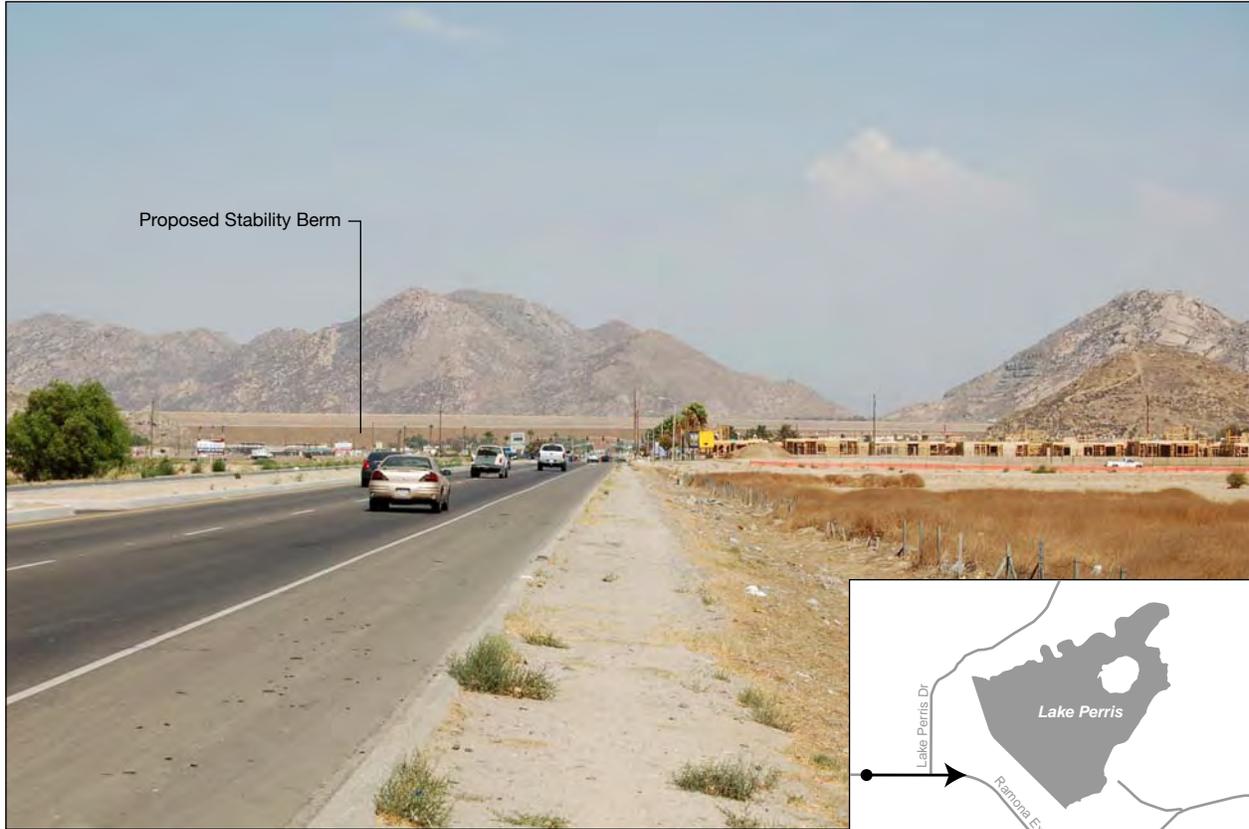
Disclaimer: Visual simulation is an approximate depiction of expected conditions based on preliminary engineering documents. Final design could slightly vary.



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Existing Conditions



Proposed Conditions

SOURCE: Psomas

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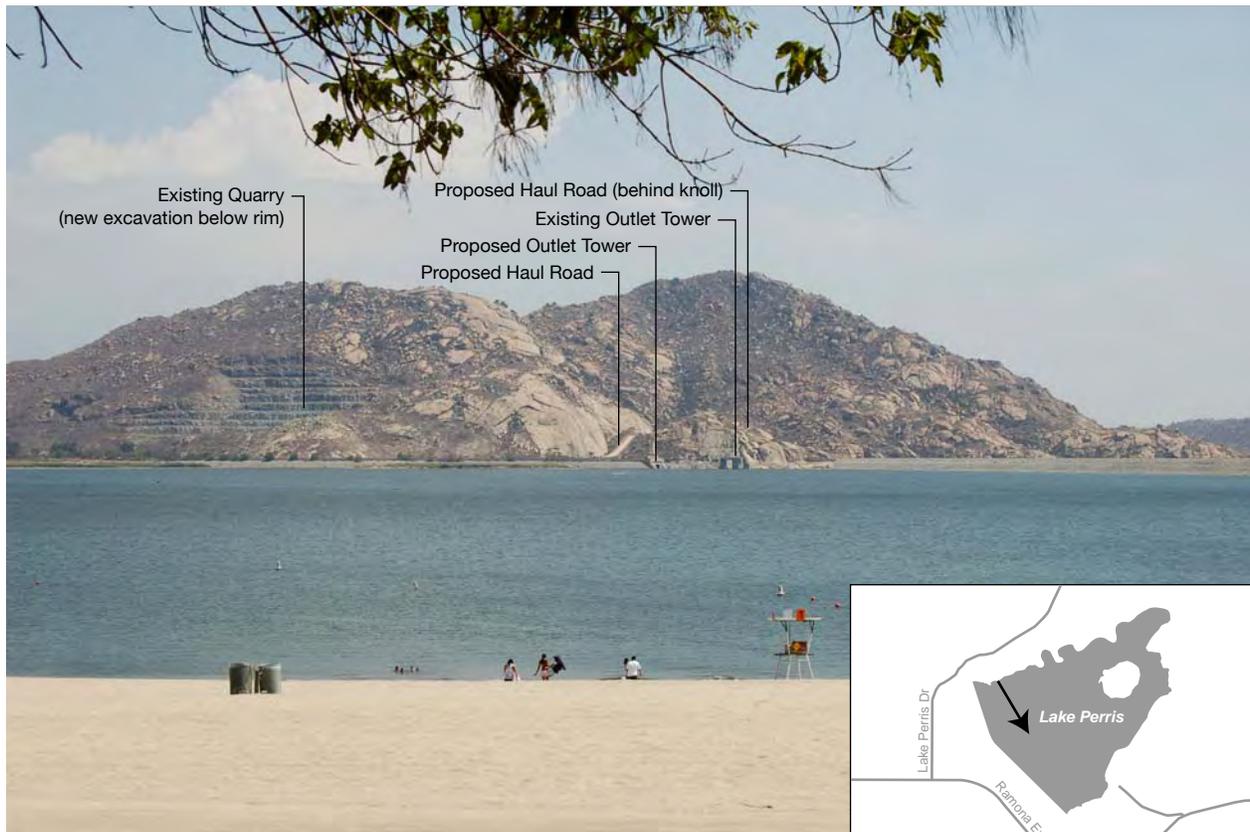
Figure 3.1-4

Simulated View with Project from Ramona Expressway

Disclaimer: Visual simulation is an approximate depiction of expected conditions based on preliminary engineering documents. Final design could slightly vary.



Existing Conditions



Proposed Conditions



DWR - Perris Dam Remediation Program . 206008.02

SOURCE: Psomas

Figure 3.1-5
Simulated View with Project
from Moreno Beach

Disclaimer: Visual simulation is an approximate depiction of expected conditions based on preliminary engineering documents. Final design could slightly vary.

Local views and access to natural areas would be altered. Several of the large, weathered granitic boulders currently on the pass would be destroyed. The foot trail that currently traverses these boulders would be replaced with a wide paved road. The impact would be limited to the haul road. The granitic formations, rock cliffs, and surrounding open space would otherwise remain essentially a natural, unaffected area. The haul road would be constructed to avoid affecting the sheer cliff face bordering the pass. The character of the trail over the pass would change, but the hills themselves would remain intact from long-range and short-range views. As a result, the installation of the road and removal of some of the granitic boulders along the pass would not significantly affect significant rock outcroppings or views of the Bernasconi hills.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1-3: DWR shall ensure that the construction contractor retain some of the large naturally weathered boulders currently within the Bernasconi pass to adorn the finished road to retain some of the original character of the trail.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Light and Glare

Impact 3.1-4: Construction of the project components would result in additional light and glare impacts during nighttime construction.

Exterior lighting along the pipeline alignments during the construction period could be used occasionally if nighttime construction is necessary. The project would not result in any new permanent nighttime lighting fixtures. The Riverside County Ordinance No. 655 requires that the county is notified of temporary lighting for nighttime construction. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1-4 would reduce the temporary impacts of construction lighting to less than significant.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1-4a: DWR shall ensure that lighting used for nighttime construction is shielded and directed downward to minimize impacts to neighboring residential areas.

Mitigation Measure 3.1-4b: DWR shall notify Riverside County Planning Director prior to use of nighttime lighting. The notice shall include the location of lighting, the schedule, and total lumens.

Significance after Mitigation: Less than Significant.

Mitigation Measure Summary Table

Table 3.1-1 presents the impacts and mitigation summary for Aesthetics.

**TABLE 3.1-1
 AESTHETICS IMPACTS AND MITIGATION SUMMARY**

Proposed Project Impact	Mitigation Measure	Significance after Mitigation
Visual Quality: Construction activities would temporarily affect the visual quality of the Lake Perris SRA and northern frontage of Ramona Expressway.	None required	--
Site Appearance: Once constructed, the new elements would alter the appearance of the project site.	3.1-2a through 3.1-2c	Less than Significant
Rock Outcropping: Construction of the haul road within the Bernasconi Hills would permanently alter the granite rock formations just east of the dam.	3.1-3	Less than Significant
Light and Glare: Construction of the project components would result in additional light and glare impacts during nighttime construction.	3.1-4a and 3.1-4b	Less than Significant