

SECTION 11 AESTHETICS

This section presents the potential effects of the Water Authority's Proposed Project on aesthetic resources. These potential effects include any impacts to scenic vistas or resources resulting from construction or operation of the Proposed Project. This section begins with a description of the regional aesthetic setting, followed by a discussion of the applicable Federal, State and local regulations. An analysis of potential aesthetic effects associated with Proposed Project facilities is provided in Section 11.3. Mitigation measures to avoid, eliminate or reduce effects to a less than significant level are also provided where appropriate.

11.1 REGIONAL SETTING

The Water Authority service area is located in western San Diego County which is famous for its sandy beaches, scenic coastal cliffs and bluffs, fertile inland valleys, rolling hills, mesas, and rugged mountains. Following is a description of the regional setting for aesthetic resources, which is described in terms of both the natural and man-made features that define the region.

In general, the visual quality of an area is defined by its physical characteristics or elements, including landforms, vegetation, water features, color, and diversity. In addition, the perceived visual quality of the region is influenced by other factors including harmony, vividness, adjacent scenery, cultural modifications, and scarcity. Following is an overview of physical characteristics of the Water Authority's service area.

In terms of natural vegetation and landforms, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) characterizes the region as the "California Chaparral Province", which includes the California Coastal Range and other mountains of Southern California (USFS 1995). These mountains generally range in elevation from sea level to 2,500 feet, with some peaks reaching 5,000 feet. Slopes can vary from gentle to steep rugged slopes with rock outcrops. Coastal plains are generally narrow and discontinuous. Stream valleys are narrow and widely spaced.

Vegetation in the region consists primarily of forests of broadleaf evergreen trees and shrublands referred to as chaparral. Chaparral is the most common vegetative community in the region, usually on the drier south facing slopes, while forests of oaks, laurels, and madrones are usually found on the cooler north facing slopes. Various deciduous trees and shrubs are also present in the region. Within urban areas, groves of non-native eucalyptus and other ornamental trees are common. Coastal valleys and plains can include sagebrush and grassland communities. Riparian communities featuring willows and other trees and shrubs are found in the valley bottoms along drainages.

Water features consisting of reservoirs and streams are generally uncommon in inland parts of this semi-arid region, while the Pacific Ocean and coastal lagoons contribute greatly to the visual quality of the coastal areas.

Considerable portions of the Water Authority's service area are urbanized with man-made features that affect the visual setting of the region. Urban communities generally follow the coastal corridor along I-5 in the west from Oceanside south to San Diego, and are located along I-15 from Escondido south to San Diego, and along major east-west highways such as I-8 east to El Cajon and SR 78 from Oceanside to Escondido. Features of the built environment that influence the visual setting include residential, commercial, industrial, and utility-related structures; linear features, such as highways, roads, transmission lines, walls, fences, and ditches; and agricultural fields, orchards, parks, golf courses, and dispersed ornamental landscaping that have replaced natural vegetative patterns and colors with row or field crops, fields of grass, and non-native ornamental vegetation.

SR 75, 125, and 163 have been designated as Scenic Highways within the Water Authority's service area. In addition, several other State highways in the service area have been designated as eligible for California Scenic Highway status by Caltrans, including SR 52, 76, 79, and 94 as well as I-5 and I-8.

11.2 REGULATORY SETTING

11.2.1 Federal

Aesthetic resources are managed by the Federal government using various visual resource management programs, depending on the type of Federal land and/or the Federal agency involved with a given project. Examples of Federal visual resource management programs include the Visual Resource Management System utilized by the BLM, and the Visual Management System utilized by the USFS. Since there are no Federal lands or Federal agencies involved with the Proposed Project facilities, Federal visual resources management policies would not apply.

11.2.2 State

11.2.2.1 California Environmental Quality Act

CEQA requires that project proponents assess potential impacts to aesthetic resources, including:

- Impacts on scenic vistas;
- Impacts on State scenic highways;
- Visual character of the project area in general; and
- Potential for a project to emit light or glare that could affect nighttime views.

With few exceptions, CEQA requires the mitigation of all project impacts to less than significant levels. Standards of significance for all aesthetic resource impacts are described in Section 11.3.1.

11.2.2.2 California Coastal Act

The California Coastal Act of 1976 was enacted to regulate development projects within California's Coastal Zone. The act includes requirements that protect views and aesthetic resources through siting and design control measures which are typically implemented at the local planning level through LCPs. For local jurisdictions that do not have an approved LCP, regulation of development projects remains under the jurisdiction of the CCC (CCC 2003).

11.2.2.3 State Scenic Highway Program

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of land adjacent to those highways. When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must adopt ordinances to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. These ordinances make up the scenic corridor protection program.

Scenic corridor protection programs include policies intended to preserve the scenic qualities of the highway corridor, including regulation of land use and density of development, detailed land and site planning, control of outdoor advertising (including a ban on billboards), careful attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping, and careful attention to design and appearance of structures and equipment (California Streets and Highways Code § 260 et seq.). As mentioned previously, SR 75, 125, and 163 have been designated as California Scenic Highways within the Water Authority's service area.

11.2.3 Local

11.2.3.1 City and County General Plans

The geographic area addressed in the Master Plan includes numerous cities and unincorporated communities in San Diego County. Each of these cities and the County has prepared a general plan which is the primary document that establishes local land use policies and goals. Many of these general plans also establish local policies related to aesthetics and the preservation of scenic resources within their communities or sub-planning areas, and may include local scenic highway programs.

11.2.3.2 Local Coastal Programs

The CCC and the local governments along the coast share responsibility for managing the State's coastal resources. Through coordination with the CCC, coastal cities and counties develop LCPs. These programs are the primary means for carrying out the policies of the California Coastal Act at the local level. In general, these policies are intended to promote public access and enhance recreational use of the coast as well as protection of natural resources in the coastal zone.

Following approval by the CCC, an LCP is certified and the local governments implement the programs. LCPs include two main components, a Land Use Plan and an Implementation Plan. These components may include policies or regulations that apply to preservation of visual and scenic resources within the coastal zone (CCC 2003). Typically, these policies relate to preservation of views of the coast.

11.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

11.3.1 Standards of Significance

The significance of potential aesthetic impacts were determined based on relevant CEQA guidelines (CCR §§ 15000-15387, Appendix G) and other relevant considerations. Using these thresholds, Proposed Project facilities would be considered to have significant aesthetic impacts if they were to:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project sites and their surroundings;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway; and
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

To assess aesthetic impacts, the analysis focuses on the degree to which a project impacts the visual quality of an area. This depends on the visual contrast created between a project and the existing landscape. Visual contrast is measured by comparing the project's features with the major features in the existing landscape. The basic design elements of form, line, color, and texture are used to make this comparison and describe the visual contrast created by the project.

11.3.2 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section identifies the potentially significant adverse program-level impacts and required mitigation measures for implementation of the Proposed Project. **Table 11-1** presented at the end of this section identifies the potential program-level impacts of each of the Proposed Project facilities. This program-level analysis is not intended to describe or address the impacts in detail; detailed evaluations of the impacts of specific projects will be conducted as part of a site-specific CEQA review.

Unless otherwise noted, all identified impacts are considered to be potentially significant adverse impacts. Corresponding mitigation measures, unless otherwise noted, are expected to be sufficient to reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

Aesthetics Impact 1: *Permanent structures in the Proposed Project could have an adverse impact on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project sites and their surroundings.*

The visual contrast that would be created by the Proposed Project facilities varies by type of project. Pipelines would be buried and would not be visible to observers once the disturbed pipeline corridors are resurfaced or revegetated. Other facilities, such as FRSs and FCFs, would be primarily buried with only a small portion of the facility visible on the surface. Alternatively, treatment plants, treatment plant expansions, the seawater desalination facility, and pump stations are more visible facilities that would be built on the surface. These facilities would have a more conspicuous and industrial appearance and would generally degrade the visual quality of an area to a larger extent than buried and partially buried facilities.

Another important consideration, however, is whether the projects would be constructed in relatively undisturbed settings versus adjacent to existing facilities. The majority of treatment plant projects, for instance, would constitute expansion of existing facilities. The expansion of treatment capacity would simply increase the size and visibility of existing facilities, rather than place new facilities with industrial appearances in relatively undisturbed natural settings. In general, where projects would be constructed adjacent to existing facilities, the resulting visual contrast with the surrounding setting would likely be less than significant. Other projects would be located in relatively undisturbed natural settings or residential areas, which would result in greater visual contrasts and potentially significant aesthetic impacts.

Where new facilities are proposed that would be visible from scenic vistas, sensitive viewpoints, or would occur in visually sensitive areas, these projects could result in significant aesthetic impacts. Examples of these types of projects include those proposed within parks, vacant land, or open space areas in locations that are otherwise natural and generally undisturbed. Proposed Project components that would be visible from highly traveled roads or would be visible on prominent hills or landmarks would have significant aesthetic impacts unless adequate mitigation measures were implemented.

Aesthetics Mitigation Measure 1:

- a) Where possible, projects shall be sited in topographically screened locations, in locations screened by vegetation, or adjacent to existing facilities and surface disturbance to reduce visual contrast with adjacent undisturbed areas.
- b) Design elements of the facility will incorporate surrounding architecture and topographical features and blend with the surrounding vegetation and colors.
- c) Project facilities shall be painted inconspicuous colors that match the natural color scheme of the adjacent vegetation, rock formations, or exposed soils to reduce visual contrast.
- d) Landscaping and/or fencing that screens project facilities from the view of adjacent residences and roads could also reduce the severity of aesthetic impacts.

Implementation of these mitigation measures will likely reduce this type of aesthetic impact to less than significant levels. However, the site-specific CEQA review will evaluate those measures and determine if more detailed mitigation measures are required.

Aesthetics Impact 2: *Proposed Project facilities could substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway corridor.*

In general, the Proposed Project would be built adjacent to existing water supply facilities, such as WTPs, dams and reservoirs, and pipeline routes. Based on preliminary review of Proposed Project facilities at the program level, no aesthetic impacts to scenic resources or designated scenic highways would occur. However, SR 52 just north of MTRP has been determined to be eligible for scenic highway designation. Similarly, I15 from SR 76 north to the Riverside County line is also eligible for scenic highway designation. Should these roads become designated scenic highways, various Proposed Project facilities would be subject to applicable scenic corridor protection programs intended to preserve the scenic qualities of those highway corridors.

Since the specific location and design of Proposed Project facilities have yet to be determined, it is possible that adverse impacts to scenic resources could occur as a result of one or more projects. More detailed evaluations of the visual impacts of specific projects may be required as part of the site-specific CEQA review.

Aesthetics Mitigation Measure 2:

- a) Avoid scenic resources, such as mature trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings, if possible. Where unavoidable, the removal of these resources will be minimized to the extent practical.
- b) Should any of the Proposed Project facilities be constructed within the viewshed of a designated State or County scenic highway, the mitigation measures described above for Aesthetic Impact 1 will be implemented to reduce the severity of the aesthetic impacts to less than significant levels.
- c) Any Proposed Project facilities within the coastal zone will be subject to design requirements and mitigation measures that protect coastal views and aesthetics as outlined in the applicable LCP and/or the requirements of the CCC.

Mitigation of impacts to historic resources is discussed further in Section 13, Cultural Resources.

Aesthetics Impact 3: *Proposed Project facilities could create new sources of light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in surrounding areas.*

Various types of Proposed Project facilities would require night lighting for worker safety and security reasons. These facilities would include WTPs, FRSS, pump stations, and the seawater desalination facility.

Proposed Project facilities could add to existing light and glare if constructed adjacent to existing water supply facilities and in urban areas, although this additional light may be insignificant in magnitude. Where projects would be sited in less-developed rural or park areas, the addition of light and glare has the potential to have significant adverse aesthetic impacts.

Aesthetics Mitigation Measure 3:

- a) Proposed Project facilities that will require night lighting will include a lighting plan at the time of final design that will identify the location of lights, how they will be aimed and types of shielding that will be utilized to avoid the production of glare, minimize uplighting and light spill, and avoid the spread of stray light across site boundaries.
- b) To reduce daytime glare, concrete or metal surfaces and structures will be constructed with materials that minimize reflection of light or sunshine.

Implementation of these mitigation measures will reduce light and glare-related aesthetic impacts to less than significant levels.

Aesthetics Impact 4: *Construction-related ground disturbance would result in short-term aesthetic effects.*

Construction of the various projects of the Proposed Project will require removal of vegetation, grading, and surfacing. This ground disturbance will have a short-term aesthetic impact as this disturbance will visually contrast with adjacent undisturbed areas. Since these disturbed areas will be revegetated or in some cases landscaped, the short-term nature of this effect is considered to be less than significant.

Aesthetics Mitigation Measure 4:

During construction, removal of vegetation and grading shall be minimized to reduce visible disturbance. Following completion of construction, pipeline corridors and other disturbed areas shall be graded to follow the natural landform and revegetated to reduce visual contrast (Water Authority's Conditions and Standard Specifications Section 02940, Revegetation). Since these disturbed areas will be revegetated or in some cases landscaped, the short-term nature of this effect is considered to be less than significant.

11.4 EFFECTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

None identified.

Table 11-1					
Potential Program-Level Aesthetics Impacts of Proposed Project Facilities					
#	Project	Impact			
		1 ^a	2 ^b	3 ^c	4 ^d
Expand Internal System Capacity					
<i>Flow Regulatory Storage</i>					
1	Hubbard Hill FRS	X	X	X	X
2	Slaughterhouse Terminal Reservoir	X	X	X	X
3	North County Distribution Pipeline FRS	X		X	X
4	Mission Trails FRS II	X	X	X	X
	➤ Mission Trails Tunnel Pipeline and Vent Demolition		X		X
<i>Projects to Increase Regional Untreated Water Conveyance Capacity</i>					
5	Restore Untreated Water Delivery in La Mesa-Sweetwater Extension				
6	Second Crossover Pipeline	X	X		X
7	San Diego 24/25/26 FCF	X		X	X
8	San Diego 12 FCF Expansion	X		X	X
9	Lower Otay Pump Station	X	X	X	X
10	Convert Pipeline 3 to Untreated Water from Crossover to Miramar				
Additional Water Treatment Capacity					
<i>Projects to Supplement Treated-Water Aqueducts</i>					
11	Padre Dam Pump Station Expansion	X		X	X
12	Pipeline from Otay FCF 14 to Regulatory Reservoir	X			X
13	Poway Pump Station and Treated Water Connection	X		X	X
14	Escondido-Vista WTP Connection				
	a) Escondido-Vista Pipeline Conversion				
	b) Escondido-Vista Pump Station	X		X	X
	c) Escondido-Dixon Pipeline	X			X
<i>Projects to Expand Regional Water Treatment Capacity</i>					
Options for Expanding Regional Treatment Capacity					
15a	Olivenhain WTP – 50 mgd Expansion	X		X	
15b	Weese WTP – 50 mgd Expansion	X		X	X
15c	Red Mountain WTP – new 50 mgd plant	X	X	X	X
15d	Diversion Structure WTP – new 100 mgd plant	X	X	X	X
Additional Seasonal/Carryover Storage					
16	Additional San Vicente Dam Raise Beyond ESP	X	X		X
New Conveyance and Supply					
17	Phase I – Seawater Desalination: Project at Encina (50 mgd)				
	➤ Desalination Plant	X	X	X	
	➤ Desalinated Water Conveyance Facilities	X	X	X	X
18	Expand Existing or Site New Seawater Desalination Plant*				
	Phase II – Seawater Desalination: Expand Capacity up to 100 mgd				
	Phase III – Seawater Desalination: Expand Capacity up to 150 mgd				
Seawater Desalination Site Options for Phases II and III:					
	a) San Onofre – at San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station	X	X	X	X
	b) Carlsbad – at Encina Power Station	X	X	X	X
	c) South Bay – at South Bay Power Plant	X	X	X	X
	d) Encina Water Pollution Control Facility	X	X	X	X
	e) South Bay Ocean Outfall Site	X	X	X	X

Table 11-1 (continued)	
Potential Program-Level Aesthetics Impacts of Proposed Project Facilities	
*	The ultimate level of seawater desalination development in the region would depend largely upon actual regional population growth, economics, availability of other high quality water sources, as well as an evaluation of the performance of the Encina seawater desalination facility, should it be approved and constructed.
a	Permanent structures in the Proposed Project could have an adverse impact on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project sites and their surroundings.
b	Proposed Project facilities could substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway corridor.
c	Proposed Project facilities could create new sources of light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in surrounding areas.
d	Construction-related ground disturbance would result in short-term aesthetic effects.