

Section 3.1

3.1 AESTHETICS

This section describes the existing conditions of the visual environment and the potential impacts on visual resources from construction and operation of the Proposed Project and alternatives.

3.1.1 Existing Conditions

3.1.1.1 Existing Project Setting

The Proposed Project is located in northwestern Riverside County and southwestern San Bernardino County. Elements of the Proposed Project are located in the incorporated Cities of Beaumont, Banning, Calimesa, Yucaipa, and Redlands, as well as unincorporated areas of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The area is described in the County of Riverside General Plan as "...a narrow gap between two of southern California's most spectacular mountain ranges - the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains. This gap provides an obvious physical gateway between the mountains and provides a passage between the desert areas to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west."¹

The proposed southerly 115 kV subtransmission line route does not cross federally or state owned lands. The communications site at Mill Creek is surrounded by the San Bernardino National Forest on land owned by SCE. The proposed fiber optic route travels along the southern border of the San Bernardino National Forest, but otherwise does not cross federally or state owned lands. The majority of the visual resources within the project impact area are characterized as desert areas interspersed with development (including privately owned suburban and rural residential land uses) and some active agricultural lands, surrounded by mountain ranges. Other nearby visual resources includes several regional city- or county-owned parklands or designated open spaces as well as the San Bernardino National Forest.

One designated State Scenic Highway, State Route 243, is located in the project area (see Figure 3.1-15). State Route (SR) 243 begins on 8th Street south of I-10 and runs south to Lincoln Street. It continues east on Lincoln Street to San Gorgonio Avenue to the City of Banning city limits, where it becomes the Banning-Idyllwild Panoramic Highway. SR 243 is designated a State Scenic Highway from the Banning city limits to SR 74, 28.2 miles south, near the community of Idyllwild.

In addition, one designated State Scenic Highway, State Route 38 may also be located within the project area near the Mill Creek Communications Site. Figure 3.1-15 depicts the locations of the State Scenic and Eligible State Scenic Highway.

¹ County of Riverside General Plan, 2003:1

3.1.1.2 Existing Project Viewshed

A viewshed is defined as the visual limits of the views located from a proposed project. The viewshed also includes the locations of viewers likely to be affected by visual changes brought about by project features. The viewshed includes all areas where physical changes associated with a proposed project can be seen from a sensitive viewpoint, and it is influenced by existing topography, vegetation, and the built environment. For this project, the viewshed analysis indicated that the most sensitive viewing areas within the visual limits of the Proposed Project are those areas immediately surrounding the substation site. However, for the Mill Creek Communications Site, the viewshed was much broader due to the location of the proposed tower on top of a foothill.

Principal travel corridors are considered in the analysis of visual resources because they define the vantage point for a large number of viewers. For the Proposed Project, the principal travel corridors and intersections assessed include: San Timoteo Canyon Road, State Highways 38 and 243, the intersection of Oak Glen Road and Bryant Avenue in Yucaipa, along with the residential streets Highland Springs Avenue and Laird Road in the City of Banning. These travel corridors include, in addition to vehicular traffic, both bicycle and pedestrian activity.

Other views taken into account include nearby residential views, notably the Oak Valley golf course communities currently in development near the proposed substation site and the existing homes at the intersection of Highland Springs Avenue and Laird Road in the City of Banning.

3.1.1.3 Existing Light/Glare

In addition to daytime views, CEQA requires nighttime views and changes to lighting and glare to be assessed. Currently, light and glare is produced in some project areas by existing facilities and activities, including but not limited to, lighting associated with the Banning Municipal Airport, existing roadways, and residential developments.

3.1.1.4 Key Viewpoints

Seven Key Viewpoints (KV) were chosen to help identify and assess potential visual resource concerns associated with the Proposed Project. These Key Viewpoints are representative of various viewer sensitivities in the project area. The views were chosen through review of existing land use data, planning documents, agency consultation, and during field reviews. The Key Viewpoints were developed into photo simulations showing existing and proposed conditions. The simulations are discussed in the project impact section (Section 3.1.4) of this PEA.

3.1.1.5 Visual Resources and Viewer Response

Visual resources are identified by assessing two factors: visual character and visual quality. Visual character is descriptive and non-evaluative and generally consists of landscape elements (e.g., water, vegetation, and man-made development).

Viewer response is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the public might react to visual changes brought about by a project. The level of viewer sensitivity to a proposed project is determined by assessing viewer activity, awareness, local values, and cultural significance of the visual resource. Viewer exposure is determined by assessing the number of viewers exposed to the resource change and the type of viewer activity, the physical location of the viewer, as well as the duration of their view.

For purposes of analysis, Proposed Project elements are described separately in the following sections (Sections 3.1.1.6 to 3.1.1.11). The numbered sections below also discuss the existing visual resources and viewer response for each element of the overall project. The Key Viewpoints correlating with each project element are found within the appropriate section below. The specific locations of the Key Viewpoints are indicated on Figures 3.1-1, 3.1-2, and 3.1-3. In addition, Figures 3.1-4 to 3.1-7 illustrate the existing visual character and quality of views for each Key Viewpoint.

3.1.1.6 El Casco Substation

The El Casco Substation would be constructed on Site 33, which is located just south of the border of the City of Calimesa and within the boundaries of the Norton Younglove Reserve. Surrounding hilly topography generally blocks views to the site, which is located in a valley. However, as a county reserve, hikers, birdwatchers, naturalists, and general recreationalists may be drawn to the 640-acre area and may have views of the substation site depending on their location in the Reserve (KV #1 and #2). The site would be intermittently visible to travelers along San Timoteo Canyon Road through the mature trees along the creek riparian corridor that parallels the road (KV #3). New development (the Oak Valley golf course communities) under construction just northeast of the proposed substation site may also have limited views of the Proposed Project (KV # 4).

San Timoteo Canyon Road runs to the north of El Casco Substation and is a County Eligible Scenic Roadway and also serves as a regional trail.² The Union Pacific Railroad runs adjacent and parallel to San Timoteo Canyon Road north of El Casco Substation.

The following substation design features, previously discussed in Section 2.0, Project Description, are particularly relevant to this visual resources analysis:

² Ibid

- The site is approximately 28 acres in size. Fourteen acres would be within the substation perimeter fence, and the remaining 14 acres would be disturbed during construction.
- Landscaping around the proposed substation would incorporate primarily native vegetation and would be designed to filter views of the substation site. The landscaping plan would be prepared by a certified licensed landscape architect in consultation with Riverside County agencies and would be consistent with county standards to the extent that consistency with these standards would not create unsafe conditions or facilitate unauthorized entry into the substation. Vegetation would be planted on graded side-slopes around the substation.
- The substation incorporates low-profile design features, which limit the height of electrical equipment and structures.
- Where possible, the substation would be fabricated using non-reflective materials.
- The substation would have maintenance lighting. Maintenance lights would be controlled by a manual switch and would normally be off. The lights would be directed downward and shielded to reduce glare outside the substation.
- The site would be altered by grading in order to achieve needed topography. Approximately 28 acres would be graded in order to create a relatively flat 14-acre pad.
- A minimum 24-foot-wide, 2,500-foot-long asphalt concrete paved entry road would be constructed to the north and west of the substation site.
- A combination of masonry block walls and chain link fences would be constructed around the perimeter of the substation. The block wall would be constructed along the north and east perimeters, and the fence would be installed along the south and west perimeters. This wall/fence would have a minimum height of eight feet. Access gates would be located along the north and east perimeters. A band consisting of several strands of barbed wire would be affixed near the top of the wall/fence and gates.
- An 85-foot-tall, self-supporting steel microwave antenna tower would be constructed within the El Casco Substation.
- To connect the new substation to the existing Devers-San Bernardino No. 2 220 kV transmission line, three new, double circuit, 130-foot-tall, lattice steel towers would be constructed just outside of the site perimeter to the north.

Key Viewpoints #1 and #2 (Figure 3.1-4) are of the proposed substation site from two different locations in the Norton Younglove Reserve. KV #1 is southeast of the site and next to San Timoteo Creek, while KV #2 is northwest of the site and also adjacent to San Timoteo Creek. The dirt road visible in the images would become the access road to the site. Existing

transmission lines are slightly visible in the background. The existing visual quality is moderate/high. The landscape is generally unified but it does not dramatically stand out as memorable or distinct from the overall visual aesthetic of the region. Because the existing transmission lines are not highly visible (particularly in KV #1), their impact on the overall visual resources is not substantial. Persons using the Norton Younglove Reserve as a recreational area would likely be more sensitive to views of the substation because it is assumed they are generally more focused on their visual environment as outdoor enthusiasts. However, viewer exposure for this Key Viewpoint is low due to the fact that the Reserve is large (640-acres) and viewers may not be in the location of the substation site, thus it would be visible to few people.

Key Viewpoint #3 (Figure 3.1-5) is of the proposed substation from a southeast bound traveler on San Timoteo Canyon Road when looking southwest. The view shows the Union Pacific Railroad tracks which run adjacent to the roadway. Existing transmission lines are also visible. The substation site is intermittently screened from roadway views by mature trees. Additionally, the existing visual quality is moderate. While the landscape is generally unified, it does not stand out as memorable or distinct from the overall visual aesthetic and the existing transmission lines degrade its integrity. Generally, viewers will be motorists traveling at moderate to high speeds along San Timoteo Canyon Road. Motorist exposure and viewing duration would be short lived and at moderate distance from the site. Persons using San Timoteo Canyon Road as a regional trail for either biking or walking would be exposed to views of the substation for a longer duration at the same moderate distance. It is assumed that bikers/walkers would be more sensitive to visual resource change than motorists because they are exposed to the visual environment for a longer duration than motorists.

Key Viewpoint #4 (Figure 3.1-5) is of the proposed substation site from the northwestern boundary of the area currently under development as a golf course/housing community. The existing overhead 220 kV Devers-Vista No. 1 and No. 2 transmission lines are also visible from this area. Like KV #3, the existing visual quality is moderate. The landscape's rural, natural character creates a cohesive and coherent visual aesthetic. However, the presence of transmission lines undermines its overall harmony and integrity. This view represents residential viewers who may have a constant view of the substation, yet at a moderate to long distance. Residential viewer sensitivity is generally assumed to be moderate to high, however the new homes are being constructed in an area in which visual quality has been diminished by the presence of transmission lines and residents may be more accustomed to views impeded by electric facilities.

3.1.1.7 Banning Substation

The Banning Substation is located in the City of Banning south of I-10 near the intersection of Lincoln and 4th Street. Construction activities at Banning Substation would consist of replacing and relocating electrical equipment within the existing substation perimeter.

Specifically, the existing 115 kV switchrack would be replaced with a low-profile rack, three existing transformers would be relocated, two of which would be replaced with new low profile racks, an existing capacitor bank would be relocated, and a new MEER would be installed. Some of these changes would require the construction of new foundations. Overall, it is not anticipated that any noticeable change to the visual environment (except for short-term construction activities) would result from the work at Banning Substation. Therefore, no key viewpoints were selected for this location. The existing visual quality of the substation area is low. Residential viewers and motorists would have views of the site, yet viewer sensitivity and exposure is considered negligible since area viewers are familiarized to the existing station and changes would be wholly within the existing site footprint.

3.1.1.8 Zanja Substation

The Zanja Substation is located in the City of Yucaipa southeast of the intersection of Bryant Street and State Route 38 off Juniper Avenue. It is tucked behind a sparsely populated residential area and generally screened from view due to the surrounding hilly topography and existing mature trees. Construction activities at Zanja Substation would all take place within the existing perimeter of the site. Specifically, construction at Zanja Substation involves the replacement of the existing switchrack with a new switchrack and installation of a new MEER. Existing poles, disconnects, and some other equipment previously installed for the interconnection of a mobile transformer unit would be removed. The height of the new 115 kV switchrack would be similar in height to the existing switchrack (approximately 42 feet) and the new MEER would be 12 feet high. No key viewpoints were selected for this location because there are limited views of the site and modifications are being made wholly within the existing site perimeter. The existing visual quality of the substation area is low to moderate. Existing views of Zanja Substation would remain virtually unchanged.

3.1.1.9 Southerly 115 kV Subtransmission Line Route

The southerly 115 kV subtransmission line route would begin in Riverside County within the boundaries of the Norton Younglove Reserve at the site of the El Casco Substation and would follow the route of an existing 115 kV line towards the City of Beaumont. The new line would replace both the existing San Bernardino-Maraschino 115 kV line and the Banning-Maraschino-Windfarm 115 kV line. The existing single-circuit wood pole structures would be replaced with new double-circuit steel poles to carry all necessary subtransmission lines along the existing right-of-way. This route runs along the southern extent of the City of Beaumont and the City of Banning with portions of the route in unincorporated Riverside County. Approximately 0.72 miles south of the existing Banning Substation, the proposed line would turn to the north where it would connect to the existing substation. Near the line's terminus with the Banning Substation it passes through the Banning Municipal Airport Influence Policy Area. Along the right-of-way, views consist of a mixture of undeveloped and some developed lands. Hilly topography is present in many areas and natural foliage is sparse due to the desert terrain. Because much of the land along this route is undeveloped,

there are sufficient opportunities for expansive views, yet viewers are few, particularly those with long/constant viewing duration. For example, Figure 3.1-6 illustrates the typical views and visual character along the existing right-of-way. This particular photo was taken on Bobcat Road looking east toward Sunset Avenue. While most of the area through which the new line would travel is sparsely populated, there is one fairly dense residential area as well as areas proposed for development (KV #5 and KV #6).

Key Viewpoint #5 is from Highland Springs Avenue at Laird Road looking east down the existing and proposed right-of-way for the proposed subtransmission line route. Both north and south of the line are single family residential housing units. The development on the north has foliage and mature trees screening the view of the subtransmission line. The southern development has a direct, constant view of the lines with a high exposure rating. However, although the exposure is high, sensitivity may only be moderate because residents are accustomed to the existing subtransmission lines. Although there are well-groomed grass and trees, visual quality is low to moderate due to the highly engineered, un-natural environment. Existing views are generally of neighboring man-made development and subtransmission lines. There are no expansive, vivid, intact scenic vistas.

Key Viewpoint #6 is from Laird Road near its intersection with Highland Springs Avenue looking west down the existing and proposed right-of-way for the proposed subtransmission line route. This view is illustrative of backyard views from a new development that would have direct, partially screened, and constant views of the subtransmission line. The area south (left) is currently being cleared and graded for residential development that would also have direct, constant views of the subtransmission lines. While the development on the north has trees and attractive landscaping, visual quality is low to moderate. Existing views are generally of subtransmission lines and soon to be developed housing.

3.1.1.10 Mill Creek Communications Site

The Mill Creek Communications Site would be located at the existing SCE facility on the top of a foothill of the San Bernardino Mountains to the north of the City of Yucaipa. The property is an SCE in-holding within the San Bernardino National Forest. An existing lattice structure, which sits atop the roof of a building at the communications site, is not tall enough to facilitate communication with the microwave antenna installed at El Casco Substation. A new 110-foot self-supporting steel lattice antenna tower would be constructed adjacent to the existing communication building. The San Bernardino foothills provide a backdrop view from the City of Yucaipa. However, they compete with manmade elements (i.e., utility lines, street lights, signage) when viewed from the City.

Key Viewpoint #7 is from the corner of Oak Glen Road and Bryant Avenue in the City of Yucaipa looking northeast to the Mill Creek Communications Site. The image illustrates motorist views at a heavily trafficked, main intersection in the city. Motorist exposure to the view from this location would be direct but at a great distance away and of a short duration

while stopped at the traffic signal or traveling through at a moderate speed. The overall visual quality is moderate.

Table 3.1-1 summarizes the existing visual resources (visual character and quality) and viewer response (viewer sensitivity and exposure) for the different project elements and Key Viewpoints.

3.1.1.11 Fiber Optic System

The fiber optic route from the San Bernardino Substation to the Banning Substation would follow existing subtransmission line routes (Figures 2-3.1 through 2-3.4). The fiber optic route would begin in the City of San Bernardino at the site of the San Bernardino Substation and travel east through the City of Redlands to the Mentone and Zanja Substations. From the Zanja Substation, the route would head primarily south through the City of Yucaipa to the Yucaipa Substation. From the Yucaipa Substation the fiber optic route would travel west for approximately 8 miles, cross the border into Riverside County, and then travel approximately 6 miles southeast to the El Casco Substation. From the El Casco Substation, the fiber optic route is similar to the southerly 115 kV subtransmission line route, traveling through the Cities of Beaumont and Banning to connect with both the Maraschino and Banning Substations, and finally to the M17 T1 Transmission Tower located approximately 5 miles north of the Banning Substation. The total length of the proposed fiber optic route is approximately 55 miles.

Along the proposed fiber optic route, views range from the urban residential and commercial areas of the incorporated cities to agricultural lands to undeveloped rural lands. Hilly topography is present in many areas and natural foliage is sparse due to the desert terrain. Because much of the land along this route is undeveloped, there are sufficient opportunities for expansive views, yet viewers are few, particularly those with long/constant viewing duration.

**TABLE 3.1-1
SUMMARY OF EXISTING VISUAL ENVIRONMENT**

Project Component	Key Viewpoint	Visual Character	Visual Quality	Viewer Sensitivity	Viewer Exposure
Proposed Substation	KV 1	Undeveloped, hilly, existing T/L	Moderate/High	High	Low
	KV 2	Undeveloped, hilly, existing T/L	Moderate/High	High	Low
	KV 3	Undeveloped, hilly, existing T/L	Moderate	Low/Mod	Low/Mod
	KV 4	Undeveloped, hilly, existing T/L	Moderate	Moderate	Low/Mod

TABLE 3.1-1 (Continued)
SUMMARY OF EXISTING VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

Project Component	Key Viewpoint	Visual Character	Visual Quality	Viewer Sensitivity	Viewer Exposure
Zanja Sub	N/A	Developed, existing power plant	Low/Mod	Low	Low
Banning Sub	N/A	Developed, existing power plant	Low	Low	Low
115 kV Transmission	KV 5	Residential, landscaped	Low/Mod	Mod/High	Mod/High
	KV 6	Residential, landscaped	Low/Mod	Mod/High	Mod/High
Mill Creek CS	KV 7	Urban development, hills	Moderate	Low/Mod	Low/Mod
Fiber Optic System	N/A	Urban, rural, undeveloped, hilly	Varies	Varies	Varies

3.1.2 Significance Criteria

Impacts to visual resources are considered potentially significant if the project:

- Has a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damages scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway
- Substantially degrades the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings
- Creates a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

3.1.3 Proposed Project Impacts

3.1.3.1 Construction Impacts

Evaluation of construction impacts focuses on the short-term visual impacts resulting from project construction and the presence of equipment, materials, and work force. It is not anticipated that construction of any of the Proposed Project elements would significantly affect visual resources within the area.

Vehicles, heavy equipment, and workers may be visible during project construction activities. However, project construction is not anticipated to have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings for the following three reasons:

1. Much of the visual quality at the various project sites and scenic vistas in the area is degraded due to the presence of existing utility lines.
2. Construction activities, related to the extensive residential development in the region, are currently taking place in many areas adjacent to Proposed Project sites (e.g., the Oak Valley golf course communities). Therefore, project construction activities would be consistent with existing conditions, which are currently diminished due to the presence of construction equipment and materials.
3. Construction impacts are short-term in nature and for that reason considered temporarily adverse, but less than significant.

One State Scenic Highway, SR 243, which runs north/south into the City of Banning, has views of the southerly 115 kV subtransmission line route. Therefore, during construction activities, equipment and associated materials may be visible from SR 243. However, construction activities would be short term and create a less than significant impact.

Project construction may also include the use of nighttime lighting during construction for security purposes. This impact would be minimized because any nighttime lighting would be directed away from the visual field of potential viewers, most notably residents and motorists.

In summary, project construction impacts related to visual resources would be less than significant.

3.1.3.2 Operational Impacts

3.1.3.2.1 El Casco Substation. The operation of the substation would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas but would potentially degrade the existing visual character/quality of the site and its surroundings. However, impacts are less than significant when analyzed in the context of various design features included in the project description that serve to minimize and/or avoid visual impacts. These design features are listed in Section 3.1.1.6 and include the use of low-profile designs which limit the height of electrical equipment and structures, construction of a perimeter wall/fence, and landscaping.

The El Casco Substation would be seen by potential Norton Younglove Reserve users (KV #'s 1 and 2), travelers (motorists and bikers/walkers using San Timoteo Canyon Road as a Regional Trail) (KV #3), and nearby residents (KV #4). Views of the site currently consist of multiple transmission line corridors as well as the surrounding hilly topography of the Reserve. Four photo simulations showing existing and proposed conditions for the El Casco Substation (Figures 3.1-8 through 3.1-11) have been developed. The simulations represent three viewer groups. The first two (3.1-8 and 3.1-9) are views from within the Norton Younglove Reserve and are representative of potential recreationalists' views. From these vantage points inside the Reserve, the substation is clearly visible. The simulation depicted in

Figure 3.1-10 illustrates views from travelers on San Timoteo Canyon Road (KV #3). The substation would be visible but obscured by mature vegetation and surrounded by rolling topography thereby blocking the majority of views to the site. Lastly, Key Viewpoint #4 is from the new residential development taking place northeast of the site (Figure 3.1-11). The simulation shows that the site would be visible, yet rather far in the distance.

Operation of the facility would not damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

Occasional maintenance lighting associated with the operation of the El Casco Substation would not create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. Maintenance lights would normally be off and would be directed downward and shielded to reduce light and glare.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the El Casco Substation would be less than significant.

3.1.3.2.2 Banning Substation. Changes to the substation would be viewed in the context of the existing substation equipment and would be essentially imperceptible. Therefore, operational visual impacts would be less than significant for all four CEQA significance thresholds.

3.1.3.2.3 Zanja Substation. Changes to the substation would be viewed in the context of the existing substation equipment and would be essentially imperceptible. Therefore, operational visual impacts would be less than significant for all four CEQA significance thresholds.

3.1.3.2.4 Southerly 115 kV Subtransmission Line Route. The southerly 115 kV subtransmission line route follows an existing 115 kV right-of-way throughout its entire length. The area with the most viewers along the route is the residential development at Highland Springs Avenue and Laird Road. Two visual simulations (Figures 3.1-12 and 3.1-13) show existing and proposed views (KV #s 5 and 6). The simulations illustrate the limited visual impact due to the fact that the proposed subtransmission line is simply replacing an existing subtransmission line. Because of this, operation of the 115 kV subtransmission line would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project sites and their surroundings.

The 115 kV subtransmission line route would cross the Eligible State Scenic Highway portion of State Route 243 but would only be replacing an existing 115 kV subtransmission line. In addition, because the only State Designated Scenic Highway in the area (State Route 243) begins further south, outside the Banning city limits, the 115 kV subtransmission line would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

Finally, the subtransmission line would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the 115 kV subtransmission line would be less than significant.

3.1.3.2.5 Mill Creek Communications Site. At the Mill Creek Communications Site, a new 110-foot self-supporting steel lattice antenna tower would be constructed adjacent to the existing communication building. While the San Bernardino foothills provide a backdrop view from the City of Yucaipa, they compete with manmade elements (i.e., utility lines, street lights, signage) when viewed from the city. KV #7 was simulated to show existing and proposed views (Figure 3.1-14). The simulation illustrates that the Mill Creek Communications Site would be developed at such a great distance from viewers and would only be remotely visible. Therefore, operation of the Mill Creek Communications Site would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and surroundings.

The Mill Creek Communications Site would not damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

It is not anticipated that the Mill Creek Communications Site would create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. Any lighting proposed for the facility would be designed to minimize lighting impacts to a less than significant level while maintaining safety. Lighting elements would be shielded and directed downward. Where feasible, low voltage lighting would be installed.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the Mill Creek Communications Site would be less than significant.

3.1.3.2.6 Fiber Optic System. The proposed fiber optic route follows existing subtransmission line rights-of-way throughout its entire length. With the exception of the four new 35-foot-tall wooden poles that would need to be erected within the vicinity of the Fishermans Village community several miles west of the El Casco Substation, the construction of the fiber optic route would only involve the addition of a fiber optic cable to existing subtransmission line facilities. Because the new fiber optic cable would be barely discernable, the operation of the fiber optic system would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project sites and their surroundings.

The fiber optic route would be located in the vicinity of several eligible State Scenic Highways, but would only involve the addition of a fiber optic cable to an existing subtransmission line route. Therefore, the fiber optic system would not substantially damage

scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within the vicinity of a State Scenic Highway.

Finally, the fiber optic system would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to operation of the fiber optic system would be less than significant.

3.1.3.3 Applicant Proposed Mitigation Measures

Because impacts to visual resources would be less than significant, no mitigation measures are required.

3.1.4 Alternatives

3.1.4.1 Northerly 115 kV Subtransmission Line Route Alternative

The northerly 115 kV line route alternative would pass through the Cities of Calimesa, Beaumont and Banning. The route is a northerly east-west route when compared to the proposed line arrangement, which utilizes a southerly east-west route. Small sections of the route would pass through unincorporated Riverside County. Most of the route would follow existing subtransmission line rights-of-way and existing lines. Existing views consist of a mixture of developed and undeveloped lands along the route. The proposed alternative from mile-marker 0 to mile-marker 1.2 within the City of Calimesa would not be located within an existing utility easement. After crossing Interstate 10, the northerly alternative runs through the northern portion of the City of Beaumont. The existing utility easement passes through Noble Creek Regional Park operated by the City of Beaumont. In general, visual quality is low to moderate due to the presence of the existing subtransmission lines which impede unified views of surrounding topography. Viewer exposure varies throughout, as the line travels through populated areas. However, sensitivity to the visual resource change may only be moderate because viewers are accustomed to the presence of the existing subtransmission lines.

The alternative would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project sites and their surroundings because it is merely a replacement of an existing line. In addition, because the only State Designated Scenic Highway in the area (State Route 243) is not located near this proposed route, the route would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. Finally, the route would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to the construction and operation of the subtransmission line route alternative would be less than significant.

3.1.5.3 Site 38 (Alternate Site)

Site 38 is located in the City of Calimesa in a privately owned undeveloped area currently used for livestock grazing. An abandoned farm house which dates to the 1800's is located on the property. Existing views to the site are generally blocked by surrounding topography to the north and, although visible from travelers along San Timoteo Canyon Road, are also blocked by mature trees.

If Site 38 were to become the preferred site, it would be developed using the same general design features described in the bulleted discussion of the El Casco Substation (Section 3.1.1.6), incorporating much of the same lighting, fencing, and landscaping, etc.

The Site 38 site alternative would not significantly affect visual resources within the area. Although the site itself is undeveloped, existing utility lines are already in place in the area. Therefore, construction of the substation on this site would not create a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings.

The Site 38 location is currently surrounded by rolling topography thereby blocking the majority of views to the site. Only those viewers traveling along San Timoteo Canyon Road or the Union Pacific Railroad corridor would have clear views of the substation. Because San Timoteo Canyon Road is not a Designated State Scenic Highway, operation of the facility would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

In addition, the substation would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

In summary, impacts to visual resources due to the construction and operation of the substation at the Site 38 site alternative would be less than significant.