

Section 3.1

Aesthetics/Visual Resources

This section describes the character of the landscape in the project area, as well as the local government planning and policy guidelines that are relevant to the physical appearance of project components for the project. This section also describes whether the project would be compatible with local scenic highways and byways, and the measures and methods available for reducing visual impacts.

Environmental Setting

Landscape Character

The project area is located in southeast Solano County, about halfway between San Francisco and Sacramento in a rural agricultural area in the Montezuma Hills. Positioned south of Scenic Highway 12, north of the Sacramento River, and east of Suisun Bay, the project area is approximately 6 miles west of Rio Vista and 7 miles southeast of Fairfield. The area is sparsely populated, with two small communities: Birds Landing at the intersection of Shiloh and Birds Landing Roads, and Collinsville at the south end of Collinsville Road.

The project region is characterized by low rolling hills, separated by valleys and intermittent drainages. The hills are relatively constant in elevation, with ridge crests range from 100 to 272 feet above mean sea level. Vegetation in the area is dominated by wheat grass and other grasses planted by landowners for agricultural and livestock grazing. There are few trees and shrubs, except for eucalyptus and other trees adjacent to Shiloh Road. The area is a county-designated Wind Resource Area, and the hundreds of wind turbines that dot the hills are prominent features of the landscape. In addition, because the project area has been utilized for natural gas storage and transport for many years, there are several existing facilities and structures related to natural gas transmission and distribution systems in the area.

Sensitive Viewers

Sensitive viewers in the project area include occupants of the few rural residences, travelers on State Highway 12, land and business owners in the Suisun Marsh area, and temporary visitors. State Highway 12 from Fairfield to Rio Vista has been designated as a Scenic Roadway by the Solano County Board of Supervisors (Solano County 1977). Approximately 15,000 vehicles travel on Highway 12 per day (Solano County 2005). The Western Railroad Museum offers scenic railroad trips through the project region. The railroad crosses the gas pipeline alignment, just east of Shiloh Road.

Regulatory Setting

The following state and local plans and policies have been developed to preserve visual resources and protect scenic values within the project area.

California Department of Transportation Scenic Highway Program

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has implemented a statewide scenic highway program to preserve and enhance the beauty of California. There are currently no officially designated State Scenic Highways in Solano County (Caltrans 1996).

Solano County General Plan

The Scenic Roadways Element of the Solano County General Plan identifies the components of foreground and distant views from various vantage points within the county and assigns specific policies, depending on the type of component. Foreground views in the project area consist primarily of rolling grassland. Distant views consist primarily of rolling grassland and open fields, with marshland views from some vantage points. The following policies are applicable to the proposed project:

- C. Rolling Grassland
 - 1. Allowable building construction or road construction which overlaps such a foreground component and is in view of the designated scenic roadway should be subject to site and design review by qualified county or city staff or by an urban design consultant to the staff.

4. Since rolling grassland is highly vulnerable to visual disruption by development activity, grading of a development site should be restricted to minimize alteration of the natural terrain. Padding should be prohibited and the use of adaptable foundation should be encouraged to accommodate topographic variations while minimizing cut and fill.

Impact Analysis

The visual character of a facility is determined by how the facility blends with other facilities and the visual character of the area. For example, a mirrored-glass office building does not blend well with the visual character of a predominantly agricultural or rural area. An industrial building that is similar in appearance to a hay barn, packing facility, or milking house could be consistent with the visual character of an agricultural area.

The level of significance of impact on visual resources was assessed primarily by the exposure of sensitive viewers to permanent changes in the quality or character of the landscape. Structures with limited visibility or that are consistent with other structures or land uses in the sensitive viewing area were not considered to cause a significant impact. Temporary aesthetics impacts related to the presence of construction equipment or temporary earthwork were not considered significant.

Significance Criteria

Criteria for determining the significance of visual resources impacts were developed based on questions contained in the environmental checklist form in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. Based on the checklist questions, a project may have a significant effect on the environment if it would result in:

- A substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantial damage to scenic resources along a scenic highway, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings;
- Degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- Creation of a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.

For the purposes of assessing the significance of visual resource impacts associated with the proposed project and project alternatives, an impact was considered significant if the project would result in a conflict with the goals and policies of the Solano County General Plan.

Impacts

IMPACT 3.1-1: POTENTIAL TO DEGRADE THE EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SITE

The metering station would be visible to people who access their property from, or otherwise use Birds Landing Road. The station would be located next to an existing site that has been developed with similar uses (i.e., the Calpine metering and dehydration station). A short section of new roadway would connect the station site to the existing access road off of Birds Landing Road. Although electric pole lines would be visible from existing traveled roads and some residences—like the existing gravel access roads, these are common elements of the landscape. The gas and flow pipelines would be buried features and would not be permanent components of the landscape. The compressor station would be located on a 10-acre site at the eastern base of the Kirby Hills. The site is behind a low hill and therefore generally will be screened from view. The existing well pad sites are located at the top of the Kirby Hills and are not visible from surrounding areas.

Most elements of the project would not be visible or would be similar in type and view to existing elements. As described in Chapter 2, under “Aesthetics/Visual Resources Measures,” Lodi Gas Storage has committed to implement measures as part of the project to minimize disturbance of the visual character of the site. Consequently, potential impacts related to degradation of the existing visual character of the site are considered less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

IMPACT 3.1-2: POTENTIAL TO CREATE NEW SOURCES OF SUBSTANTIAL LIGHT AND GLARE THAT WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT NIGHTTIME VIEWS IN THE PROJECT AREA

Except for the compressor facility, all aboveground facilities will have low-pressure sodium or similar low-glare lights (5 foot-candles). The lights will be shielded and directed downward, and likely will be unnoticeable from distances greater than 0.25 mile. In addition, the lights will be illuminated only when nighttime activities are necessary.

The proposed compressor facility will have three light poles with low intensity lights (5 foot-candles). These lights will illuminate the facility at all times. The facility will also have high-intensity floodlights (30 foot-candles) for nighttime servicing. These lights, however, will be illuminated only when necessary. The site is behind a low hill and therefore generally will be screened from view.

Although the project would introduce several new light sources into the area, these lights are similar to those commonly used for farm or rural residential lighting. Because these facilities would be located in areas with existing low-

density residential development, they would not substantially alter nighttime views. Therefore, this impact is considered less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

IMPACT 3.1-3: POTENTIAL TO AFFECT SCENIC VISTAS AND DAMAGE SCENIC RESOURCES ALONG A SCENIC HIGHWAY

Because of the intervening rolling grassland and hills, the project components would not be visible to travelers on Highway 12, a County-designated scenic roadway. There is no state-designated scenic highway in the vicinity. There is no impact, and therefore no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

Lodi Gas Storage will implement BMPs (described in Chapter 2, under “Aesthetics/Visual Resources Measures,”) as part of the proposed project to avoid and minimize potentially significant impacts on aesthetics/visual resources in the project area. Therefore, no mitigation is required.

