

7.0 VISUAL RESOURCES

7.1 Environmental Setting

7.1.1 Regional and Local Setting

Placer County has a more rural atmosphere compared to Sacramento County, even with significant recent growth of urban areas. Much of the western part of the County is still in large lot residential and agricultural land uses. This is one of the characteristics that attract people to Placer County, but it is continually being changed by the expanding population and rapid development. Open space areas often have aesthetic value as well as biological and recreational value.

Perhaps the largest and most contiguous open space system within western Placer County is formed by Dry Creek and its tributaries. The Dry Creek watershed covers approximately 52,500 acres in Placer County including the southeastern half of Roseville, most of Rocklin and all of Loomis. The watershed within Placer County extends from the vicinity of Auburn and Lincoln towards the south/southwest to the Sacramento-Placer County line. The major streams within the Dry Creek watershed include Dry Creek, Cirby Creek, Linda Creek, Strap Ravine, Miners Ravine, Secret Ravine, Antelope Creek and Clover Valley Creek.

Physical characteristics are important elements of visual resources. These may include topography, vegetation, color, and diversity. The watershed topography ranges from relatively flat along Dry Creek in the southern and western portion of the watershed, to gently rolling hills in the mid-reaches of the watershed, to more prominent hills and varied terrain in the upper regions of the watershed. Watershed elevation is maximum near the headwaters of Secret Ravine, at approximately 1,230 feet above MSL, and lowest at the mouth of Dry Creek. At the downstream study area boundary, where Dry Creek crosses the Placer-Sacramento County lines, elevation is approximately 70 feet above MSL. Clover Valley Creek, Antelope Creek, Secret Ravine and Miners Ravine traverse similar topography, with headwaters in the upper elevations of the watershed and mouths in the broader and flatter valley. These streams have generally steeper average profiles than Dry Creek, Linda Creek, Cirby Creek and Strap Ravine, which lie mostly within the valley floor.

Oak woodlands, open grasslands, and foothill chaparral are prominent in the region and are important natural visual components. The woodlands are especially significant features when contrasted with a background of open grassland. Other visual elements within the region are the built environments of residences, streets and highways, office and commercial buildings, and industrial sites.

7.1.2 Site Characteristics

The proposed project areas are identified in Chapter 3.0 – Project Description and in Figure 3-4 — Proposed Project Areas (Greenway Boundaries). The project areas along Dry Creek, Linda Creek, Swan Stream, Strap Ravine, Miners Ravine, Secret Ravine, Antelope Creek, and Clover Valley Creek are significant riparian features within the Dry Creek watershed and are key visual components that are enjoyed by residents and visitors. The current types of land uses and development surrounding these features range from rural residential/agricultural to more intense

residential and commercial. There are also occasional industrial uses near the riparian areas, particularly near the Union Pacific railroad tracks. Many local and regional roads and highways cross the creeks and their riparian areas.

The waterways and their adjacent riparian areas support a variety of plants and animals and serve as migration corridors, particularly in the more developed portions of the watershed. Woodlands grow in bands along the stream channels and include oak, cottonwood, sycamore, and willow species. Due to their corridor-like concentration, the riparian areas can often be visually identified from significant distances, whether the background is a natural setting or is more developed.

The existing visual character and quality of the project areas varies significantly due to the variety of surrounding land uses and the degree of development setbacks from the creeks and streams.

7.2 Regulatory Setting

7.2.1 Federal

No federal regulations related to visual resources apply to the proposed project.

7.2.2 State

Section 15382 of the State CEQA Guidelines defines a substantial effect on the environment as “a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project, including . . . objects of . . . aesthetic significance.” State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064 (b) states that “the significance of an activity may vary with the setting . . . an activity which may not be significant in an urban area may be significant in a rural area.” While the Guidelines do not provide specific threshold criteria for visual impacts, the environmental checklist provided in Appendix A of this EIR identifies a number of evaluation criteria for visual impacts, including determination of substantial adverse effects to scenic vistas, resources (e.g., trees and rock outcrops), visual character and illumination (i.e., new light sources).

7.2.3 Local (Placer County)

Local policies and regulations relevant to the proposed project include Placer County regulations and requirements outlined in the Placer County General Plan, the Dry Creek-West Placer Community Plan, the Granite Bay Community Plan, and the Horseshoe Bar/Penryn Community Plan. The Greenway Vision and implementation recommendations were planned specifically to identify and emphasize common shared values as expressed in existing goals and policies of regional jurisdictions. As such, the Vision components are designed to be consistent with the goals and policies of Placer County and unincorporated community plan areas. When future projects are proposed for implementation, they will be individually evaluated for consistency with General Plan and community plans’ goals and policies. Although the cities of Roseville and Rocklin and the Town of Loomis are not adopting the Greenway Vision, those communities outside of the proposed project area have adopted many similar goals and policies.

The goals and policies listed below were excerpted from the Placer County General Plan, Dry Creek-West Placer Community Plan, Granite Bay Community Plan, and Horseshoe Bar/Penryn Community Plan. Because many of the policies found in the community plans are similar to those contained in the county-wide Placer County General Plan, only policies unique to particular community plans are listed.

Placer County General Plan

Goals:

- 1.K. To protect the visual scenic resources of Placer County as important quality-of-life-amenities for county residents and a principal asset in the promotion of recreation and tourism.
- 1.O. To promote and enhance the quality and aesthetics of development in Placer County.

Policies:

- 1.K.4. The County shall require that new development incorporates sound soil conservation practices and minimizes land alterations. Land alterations should comply with the following guidelines:
 - a. Limit cuts and fills.
 - b. Limit grading to the smallest practical area of land.
 - c. Limit land exposure to the shortest practical amount of time.
 - d. Create grading contours that blend with the natural contours on site or with contours on property immediately adjacent to the area of development.
- 1.K.5. The County shall require that new roads, parking, and utilities be designated to minimize visual impacts. Unless limited by geological or engineering constraints, utilities should be installed underground and roadways and parking areas should be designed to fit the natural terrain.
- 1.O.1. The County shall require all new development to be designed in compliance with applicable provisions of the Placer County Design Guidelines Manual.
- 1.O.9. The County shall discourage the use of outdoor lighting that shines unnecessarily onto adjacent properties or into the night sky.

Dry Creek West Placer Community Plan

Goals:

- 1. This plan strives to preserve the natural land forms, natural vegetation, and natural resources of the area as much as possible, while also recognizing the deleterious effects of intense development in the surrounding areas.

8. A major goal of the plan is to utilize and improve the Dry Creek environs as a focal point of existing and new neighborhoods to be created in the area through the placement of park facilities, roadways, trails, interpretive areas, visibility etc.

Policy:

10. Projects within the Plan area will comply with: the Placer County Landscape Guidelines, the Placer County Design Guidelines, and the specific design guidelines contained in the Plan. Where more specific and/or more stringent guidelines are found herein, these shall apply.

Granite Bay Community Plan

Conservation Element

Policy:

4. Removal of vegetation shall be minimized and where removal is necessary, replanting erosion, maximize reoxygenation, and retain the aesthetic qualities of the community.

Open Space Element

Goal:

7. To conserve the visual resources of the community, including the important vistas, such as those of the hillsides as seen from the valley below, and those of the valley as seen from the hillsides.

Policies:

10. The scale of building, the siting of structures, and the design of materials of construction shall be harmonious with the natural setting so that the visual quality of open space will not be unreasonably impaired.
16. A variety of vistas shall be provided and preserved, ranging from the small enclosed private views to the more distant views shared by many people.

Horseshoe Bar/Penryn Community Plan

Community Design Element

Goal:

3. Preserve, enhance, and protect the scenic resources visible from scenic routes in the plan area.

7.3 Environmental Impacts

The analysis of potential impacts to visual resources is based on a review of proposed improvements depicted in the Vision in light of the visual resource settings in the project area. Due to the wide geographic area of the proposed project area and the fact that project amenity locations are approximate for this program level analysis, no site-specific visual surveys were conducted during preparation of this EIR. More detailed assessments of potential impacts to

visual resources, including conducting site-specific field assessments, will be necessary as part of the future environmental review processes for specific project elements identified in the Vision.

7.3.1 Criteria for Significance

Goals and guidelines for visual impact assessment have been established in accordance with the County of Placer General Plan, the Placer County Landscape Design Guidelines Manual and the Placer County Tree Ordinance.

Adverse visual impacts will be assessed if the project would:

- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and the surroundings, or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

7.3.2 Impacts to Visual Resources

Impact 7-1:	The project would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and the surroundings.
Significance:	Potentially Significant
Mitigation Measures:	Mitigation Measure 7-1, Conduct project specific visual impact analysis for each project or phase implemented as part of the Greenway.
Significance after Mitigation:	Less than Significant

Due to the narrow width and minimal height that is associated with trail design and use, construction and use of trails is generally expected to have a minimal impact on the existing visual character and quality of project sites and their surroundings. However, exact trail locations must be determined with multiple constraints considered. Setbacks from riparian areas, public safety, avoidance of waters and wetlands, avoidance of special status plant or wildlife populations or their habitat, grading impacts, tree preservation, and aesthetics must all be considered. To accomplish these sometimes conflicting goals, trail locations that require vegetation removal, including trees subject to mitigation requirements under the Placer County Tree Ordinance, may create potentially significant impacts to the existing visual character and quality of the site. In addition, the construction of node/connection facilities, including parking lots and rest rooms, may have a significant impact on visual resources. Mitigation Measure 7-1 is proposed to conduct site specific visual assessments for future projects. This mitigation would lessen impacts to the visual character and quality of sites to a less than significant level.

Impact 7-2:	The project would create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.
Significance:	Less than significant
Mitigation Measures:	None required.

It is expected that minimal lighting will be utilized for Greenway elements. Lighting would generally be located at parking areas and nodes for safety purposes. All lighting will meet the

Placer County Design Guidelines and be directed away from residences and will face downward to the maximum extent possible.

7.4 Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 7-1: Conduct project specific visual impact analysis for each project or phase implemented as part of the Greenway. This will include an assessment of the existing visual character and quality, projected viewer response relative to viewer sensitivity and exposure, and level of assessed impact and recommended mitigation if required. Mitigation Measure 7-1 applies to Impact 7-1.