

## 8 VISUAL RESOURCES

### 8.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This chapter describes laws, ordinances, regulations, and policies applicable to visual resources, and existing conditions regarding visual quality. Potential short-term and long-term visual impacts that could result from project construction and operation are discussed and mitigation measures are recommended as necessary to reduce potentially significant adverse effects.

#### 8.1.1 Concepts Related to Scenic Resources

Scenic or visual resources are generally defined as both the natural and built features of the landscape that contribute to the experience and appreciation of the environment by the general public. Depending on the extent to which a project would adversely alter the perceived visual character and quality of the environment, a visual or scenic impact may occur.

Visual changes and whether they are considered adverse are highly subjective. One person may conclude that any change in a pleasing visual setting is adverse. Others may find the same changes to be acceptable or even an improvement. Further, there are few formal tools available to evaluate changes to the visual environment and conclude significance. This EIR uses certain terms and concepts to aid the reader in understanding the content of this chapter. These terms and definitions are general in nature; however, they draw upon the methodologies of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) (USFS 1995, FHWA 1981), two of the relatively few public agencies that have formalized visual resource assessment.

#### VIEWER GROUPS

Viewer groups are differentiated in large part by physical factors that modify perception (primarily the viewer exposure characteristics described below). For this project, viewer groups include residents of existing housing in the Valley, visitors using lodging facilities, motorists (and bicyclists) on roadways within the Valley, golf course users, hikers accessing trails in the Valley, cross-country skiers, and downhill skiers.

#### VIEWER EXPOSURE

Viewer exposure addresses the variables that affect viewing conditions from potentially sensitive areas. Viewer exposure considers the following factors:

- ▲ landscape visibility – the ability to see the landscape;
- ▲ viewing distance – the proximity of viewers to the project;
- ▲ viewing angle – whether the project would be viewed from above (superior), below (inferior), or from a level (normal) line of sight;
- ▲ extent of visibility – whether the line of sight is open and panoramic to the project area or restricted by terrain, vegetation, and/or structures;
- ▲ duration of view – the elapsed time the project area would be visible to a particular viewer; and
- ▲ viewer numbers – whether the view is publicly accessible with large numbers of viewers or the view is a private view and experienced by small numbers of viewers.

Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant, and thus the more visually important it is to the viewer. For purposes of analysis, landscapes are typically separated into foreground, middleground, and background views (USFS 1995). In general, the foreground is characterized by clear details (within 0.25 or 0.5 mile of the viewer); the middleground is characterized by the loss of clear detail in a landscape, creating a uniform appearance (from the foreground to 3 to 5 miles in the distance); and the background extends from the middleground to the limit of human sight (Bacon 1979). The project site is located within a narrow valley, which is enclosed on three sides by mountain peaks. Therefore, near foreground (within 1,500 feet of the viewer), foreground (1,500 feet to 0.5 mile) and middleground views (0.5 mile to 3 miles) are possible. Background views are constrained by terrain.

## VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Viewer sensitivity is the overall measure of the variable receptivity of viewers to adverse visual changes in an existing landscape. People in different visual settings, typically characterized by different land uses in the vicinity of a project, have varying degrees of sensitivity to changes in visual conditions, often depending on the overall visual characteristics of the place. In areas of more distinctive visual quality, such as designated scenic highways, designated scenic roads, parks, and recreation and natural areas, viewer sensitivity is characteristically more pronounced. In areas of more indistinctive visual quality or visual quality that is generally representative of the setting, sensitivity to change tends to be less pronounced. This analysis of viewer sensitivity is based on the combined factors of visual quality before and after project implementation, viewer types and numbers of viewers, and visual exposure to the project. Viewer sensitivity is described as high, moderate, or low, depending on these factors.

## VISUAL QUALITY

Visual quality is defined as the overall visual impression or attractiveness of an area as determined by the particular landscape characteristics, including landforms, rock forms, water features, and vegetation patterns. The attributes of line, form, and color combine in various ways to create landscape characteristics whose variety, vividness, coherence, uniqueness, harmony, and pattern contribute to the overall visual quality of an area. The visual quality rating for this analysis is a qualitative rating system based on the system used by FHWA (1981) and defines seven visual impact levels from very low to very high (very low, low, moderately low, average, moderately high, high, and very high).

The rating system is based on evaluative criteria using three primary components identified as vividness, intactness, and unity. These three criteria are described as follows:

- ▲ Vividness is the visual power or memorability of the landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual pattern.
- ▲ Intactness is the visual integrity of the landscape and its freedom from nontypical encroaching elements. If all of the various elements of a landscape seem to “belong” together, there will be a high level of intactness.
- ▲ Unity is the visual harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. Unity represents the degree to which the visual elements maintain a coherent visual pattern.

## SCENIC VISTA

A scenic vista is generally considered to be a location from which the public can experience unique and exemplary high-quality views, including panoramic views of great breadth and depth, often from elevated vantage points.

## LIGHT POLLUTION

Light pollution refers to all forms of unwanted light in the night sky, including glare, light trespass, sky glow, and over-lighting. Views of the night sky can be an important part of the natural environment, particularly in communities surrounded by extensive open space, such as mountain communities in the Tahoe-Truckee region. Excessive light and glare can also be visually disruptive to humans and nocturnal animal species.

Electric lighting also increases night sky brightness and is the human-made source of sky glow. Light that is either emitted directly upward by luminaires or reflected from the ground is scattered by dust and gas molecules in the atmosphere, producing a luminous background. It has the effect of reducing one's ability to view the stars (National Lighting Product Information Program [NLPIP] 2007). Sky glow is highly variable depending on immediate weather conditions, quantity of dust and gas in the atmosphere, amount of light directed skyward, and the direction from which it is viewed. In poor weather conditions, more particles are present in the atmosphere to scatter the upward-bound light (NLPIP 2007).

### 8.1.2 Regional Landscape Character

#### TRUCKEE-TAHOE REGION

The region in which the project site is located generally includes the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in Placer County, north of the Lake Tahoe Basin and south of the Town of Truckee and the Donner Lake area. This region's population is concentrated in towns and small communities, and the landscape character is defined by the dominant natural features made up of striking geologic formations, varied terrain, lakes, streams, forests, and meadows. The terrain is generally defined by gently sloping to moderately steep plateaus and mountain valleys (Martis Valley, Squaw Valley) with some steep mountainous areas. The plateaus, valleys, and mountains are dissected by streams in moderately steep-sided canyons, including the Truckee River Canyon and Shirley Canyon. Elevation ranges from about 5,000 feet above mean sea level (msl) along the Truckee River to over 9,000 feet above msl on the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. The Sierra Nevada crest rises steeply to the west of the Truckee River canyon with numerous peaks between 8,000 feet and 9,000 feet above msl, including Granite Chief, Mount Lincoln, Mount Andersen, and Tinker Knob. Natural water features in the region include Donner Lake, located at the foot of Donner Pass and the Lower Truckee River, which drains from Lake Tahoe, flows north parallel to State Route 89, then turns east at Truckee to flow toward Reno Nevada.

Vegetation is characterized by plant communities dominated by Jeffrey pine, ponderosa pine, mixed conifer associations, and sagebrush at lower elevations, and white fir and red fir at higher elevations. Mountain meadows are interspersed within the forested areas, black cottonwoods are common in streamside areas, and aspen groves are scattered among the forests and woodlands. Dominant man-made features in the region include regional and interregional transportation corridors (Union Pacific Railroad, I-80, and Donner Pass Road, which cross Donner Pass, SR 89, and SR 267), local roadways, the Town of Truckee, ski resorts (Alpine Meadows, Squaw Valley, Northstar), and associated resort communities.

#### TOPOGRAPHIC AND NATURAL SETTING OF SQUAW VALLEY

The Specific Plan area is situated in Squaw Valley, an east-west trending alpine valley located in the Squaw Creek drainage/watershed on the east side of the Sierra Nevada crest. The eastern end of the Valley is enclosed by a low terminal glacial moraine (approximately 6,150 feet msl) between the eastern end of the meadow and the Truckee River. This area is vegetated with coniferous forest and wetlands. The Valley floor has a mix of natural and man-made features, with forested land, residences, a broad meadow, golf course, and resort facilities including hotels, commercial establishments, and large parking areas. Squaw Creek, which is channelized in the developed western portion of the project area, flows the length of the Valley, cuts through the terminal moraine, and crosses under SR 89 to join the Truckee River.

The Valley is approximately 3 miles east to west and a relatively narrow, 0.3 mile north to south, with a slight northward curve at the western end. Elevation of the Valley floor ranges from approximately 6,235 feet msl at the west end to approximately 6,179 feet msl on the east end of the meadow (California Department of Fish and Wildlife 2014). The Valley is bordered by steep slopes on the south, west, and north sides, with peaks that rise approximately 1,700 feet above the Valley floor. The mountain slopes are vegetated with coniferous forests, and are natural appearing with the exception of the areas that have been cleared of trees to accommodate ski runs and lift facilities. The upper portions of the peaks show exposed granite, and the western end of the Valley is dominated by a rocky cliff face. In general, Squaw Valley has a high degree of visual quality.

### 8.1.3 Study Area Visual Context and Viewsheds

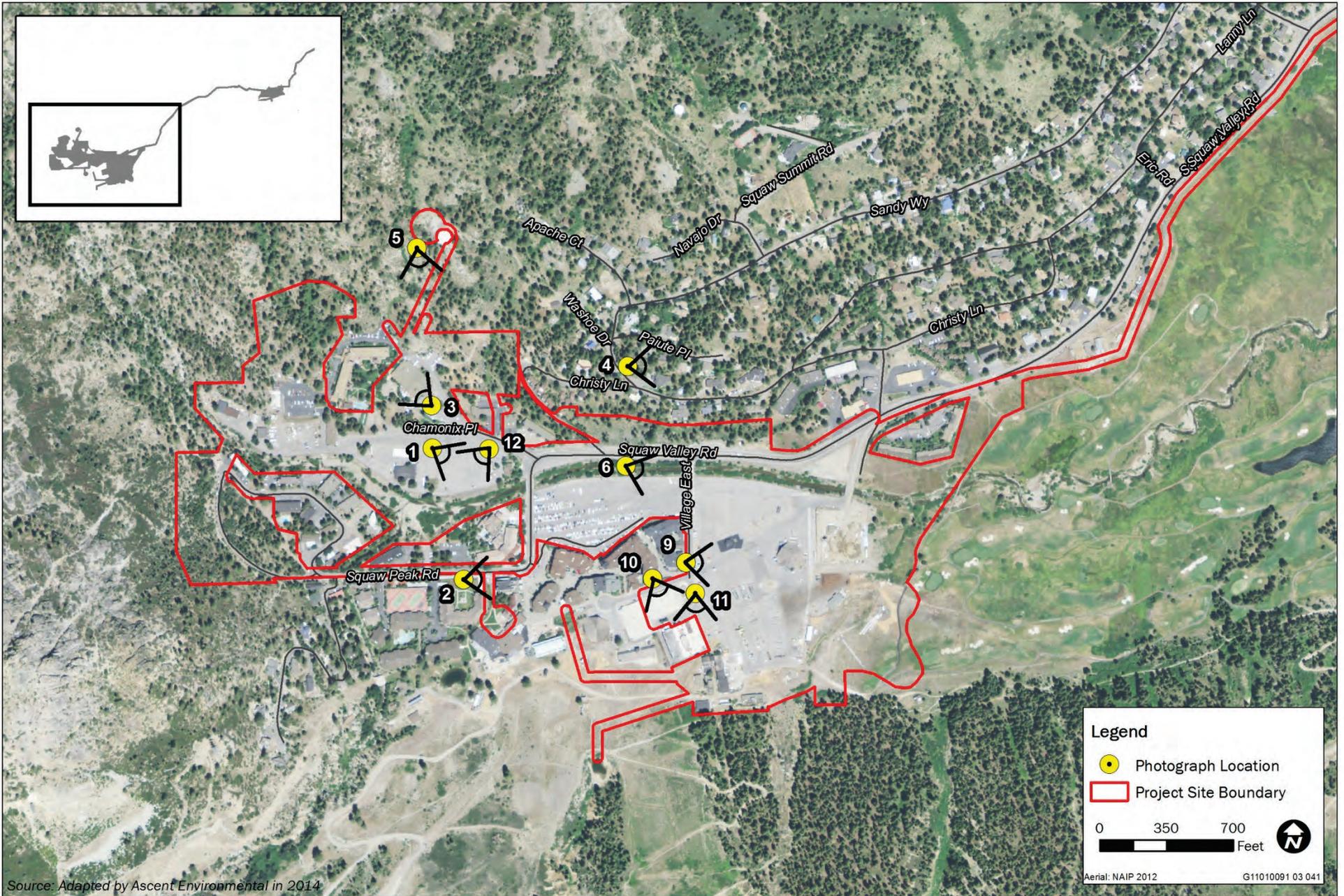
#### STUDY AREA CONTEXT

The project site is located at the west end of the Valley. The surrounding area is primarily developed with resort and ski support services. Primary access through the Valley is provided by Squaw Valley Road. Views along the road are dominated by highly scenic forested slopes with granite outcrops intermixed with resort, commercial, and residential development. In some instances, development is complementary to the visual character of the Valley; in other instances, it detracts, but the overall impression is of a high quality and dramatic viewshed. Some residential neighborhoods are located to the northeast of the project site north of Squaw Valley Road. The visual character changes as one travels east of the site along Squaw Valley Road. Mountain slopes on either side of the Valley dominate the middleground views. The south side of Squaw Valley Road includes riding stables, a bike path, a golf course, meadows, Squaw Creek, and some residential uses. The Resort at Squaw Creek, located on the southeast side of the Valley, is the most dominant man-made feature in this part of the viewshed. The north side of Squaw Valley Road includes low density commercial structures as one departs the ski resort, with single-family residences set within the forested area, dominating the foreground as one travels east. Other features visible along Squaw Valley Road include office buildings (SVPSSD), a fire station, a school, and various other buildings. Development density diminishes closer to the intersection of Squaw Valley Road/SR 89.

As noted in the description above, the study area is characterized by three different landscape types: low intensity and medium intensity resort development, low intensity residential neighborhoods and commercial development in forested settings, and natural appearing open space areas with little modification to the landscape. The landscapes are described in more detail below. The location of referenced photographs used in the following discussion is provided in Exhibits 8-1 and 8-2, and Exhibits 8-3 through 8-6 include the images themselves.

#### Intensive Resort Development within Modified Landscapes

The visual character of the project site and its immediate surroundings is of a moderately/intensely developed area with resort facilities (see Exhibit 8-3, Photograph 1). The most intensive resort development is located on, and in the immediate area of, the project site at the west end of the Valley where existing base facilities for the ski resort are concentrated. The Intrawest Village, consisting of 4-story overnight lodgings (hotels and condominiums), with ground floor restaurants and commercial uses, are adjacent to the site, along with skier services, other overnight accommodations, and support facilities. The structures are surrounded by large, paved ground level parking lots on the site and structured parking. The existing height of condominium structures in the Intrawest Village varies between approximately 60 and 70 feet, with chimneys and decorative towers between 70 and 80 feet on some structures. Structural architectural styles and materials vary on the existing resort structures, including dark colored gabled roofs and exterior treatments consisting of a combination of dark wood and lighter colored stucco finish, and large windows located high on the structures. Expansive surface parking lots are located east of the Intrawest Village in the vicinity of the Olympic Village Inn.



**Exhibit 8-1**

**Photo Locations Map 1 of 2, Main Village Area**



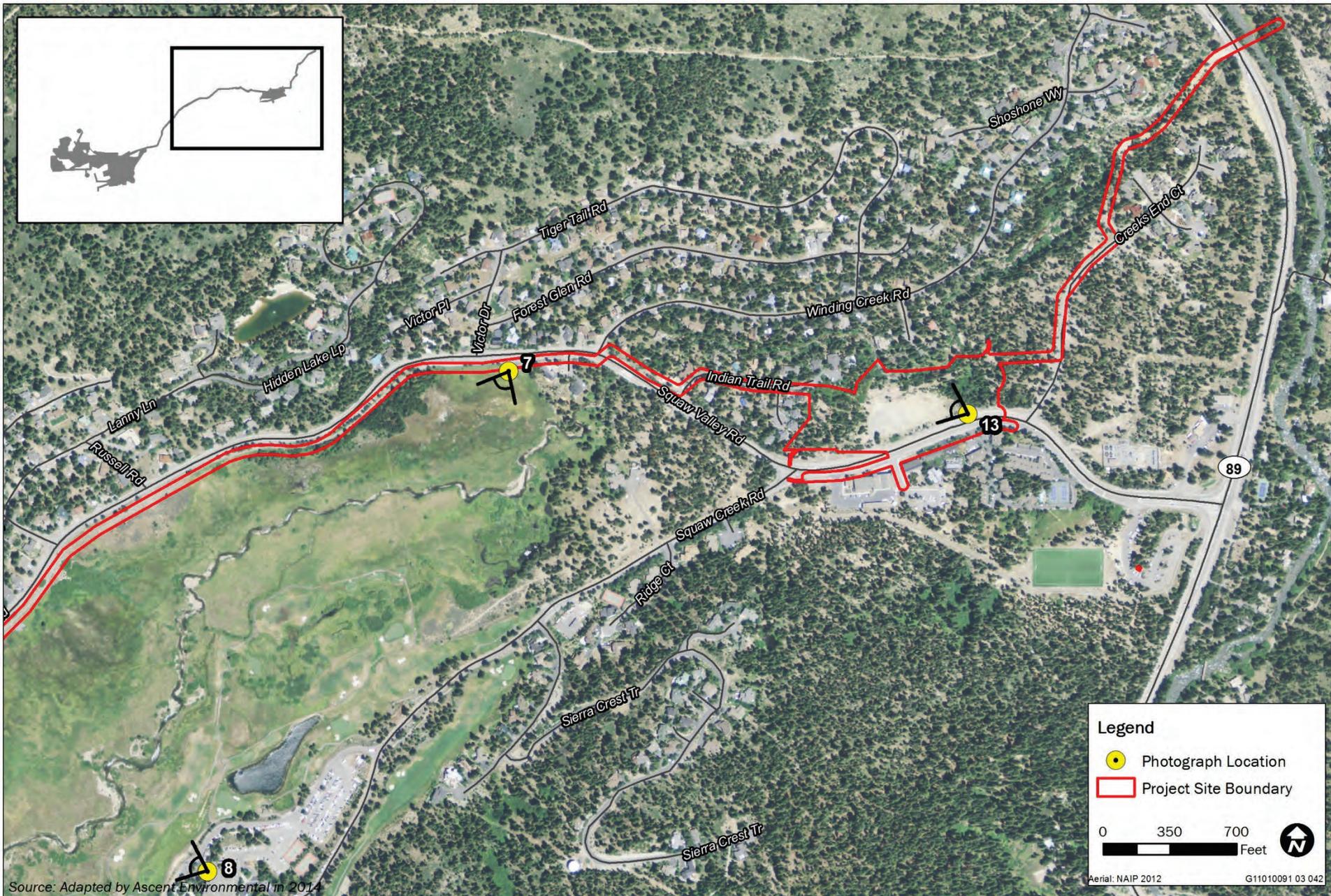


Exhibit 8-2

Photo Locations Map 2 of 2, East Parcel





Photograph 1: Existing condominiums in Intrawest Village as viewed from the project site west parking lot



Photograph 2: Existing base facility and lodging in Olympic Village



Photograph 3: Olympic Village Inn in the northwest portion of Olympic Valley

Source: Ascent Environmental 2014



Photograph 4: Residence on the north slope of Squaw Valley above the project site

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Photograph 5: Ski slopes on the south side of Squaw Valley



Photograph 6: Squaw Creek on the southside of Squaw Valley Road within the project site



Photograph 7: View to the west from the meadow near the east end of Squaw Valley

Source: Ascent Environmental 2014



Photograph 8: View to the west of the meadow from the Resort at Squaw Creek

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Ski runs, lifts, and lift houses are located on the west and southwest portions of the Valley at the base of the slopes that rise above the resort facilities (Exhibit 8-3, Photographs 2 and 3). These structures are of varying architectural styles; some dating from the 1960 Winter Olympics (see Chapter 7, “Cultural Resources,” for a detailed description of architectural styles). Additional lodging (Olympic Village Inn) and a former fire station (the building is no longer in use as an active fire station) are also clustered at the northwestern end of the Valley.

The Resort at Squaw Creek is located on the southeast edge of the Valley, approximately 0.5-mile to the east of the main Village area, at the edge of the meadow and golf course. Facilities at this 195-acre resort include a two-to-three-story lobby and conference facility with restaurants, balconies, and common areas with large vertical windows facing the west end of the Valley, a 405-room, 108-foot-tall, multi-story hotel structure (Guest House), swimming pool, and parking lots. The golf course is located to the west side of the Resort at Squaw Creek, in the meadow.

### **Low Intensity Residential and Commercial Development**

In the more westerly end of the Valley, single-family residential development is situated along the north side of Squaw Valley Road and on the forested north slopes above the Valley (Exhibit 8-3, Photograph 4). Traveling east, some residential neighborhoods are located to the northeast of the project site, among the coniferous forest on the north slopes off of Squaw Creek Road, and on either side of Squaw Creek and along Squaw Valley Road. A small area of condominiums is also located on the Valley floor, north of Squaw Valley Road in this area.

Low-intensity commercial development in the west end of the Valley, outside of the main Village area, is located on the north side of Squaw Valley Road near the intersection with Far East Road. The riding stables are located on the south side of Squaw Valley Road in the same area. Located at the east end of the Valley are low-intensity commercial (single-story construction) and office development, including the SVPSD offices, a fire station, and motels.

### **Natural Appearing Open Space Areas**

Views in the study area are dominated by the mountain slopes above the Valley and the open rock faces of the cliffs at the west end of the Valley. The slopes on the north and south sides of the Valley are vegetated with mixed coniferous forests consisting primarily of lodgepole pine, white fir, and Jeffrey pine. However, the slopes on the southwest side of the Valley have a more modified appearance because sections of forest have been cleared to create ski runs, maintenance access roads, and cleared areas for lift facilities (Exhibit 8-4, Photograph 5). The visual character of the extreme northwest portion of the project site, beyond the resort structures, is somewhat natural, being forested and undeveloped.

Squaw Creek within the main Village area has been channelized, but a narrow band of riparian vegetation lines either side of the channel (Exhibit 8-4, Photograph 6). Black cottonwood, mountain alder, and shining willow are the most common trees and shrubs that occur in association with Squaw Creek in this area.

Squaw Valley Meadow to the east of the project site is the dominant naturalized feature on the Valley floor where Squaw Creek meanders in a natural channel through the meadow (Exhibit 8-4, Photograph 7). A major portion of the meadow is modified by a golf course with tees, fairways, and greens that are interspersed among the meadow’s natural wetland and riparian areas; the golf course features are connected by paved cart paths (Exhibit 8-4, Photograph 8). The golf course features extend primarily along the south side of the Valley from the project site on the west end of the valley to the Resort at Squaw Creek on the southeast edge of the meadow.

## **STUDY AREA VIEWSHED**

For the purpose of describing the visual setting and analyzing project impacts, the study area is defined as the project’s viewshed; that area visible from a fixed vantage point, and more specifically, the portion of its viewshed from which the public could perceive changes in the landscape caused by the project. Any other

location or viewer group not exposed to visual effects of the project (i.e., outside the study area) is not relevant to this analysis.

The project's viewshed is divided into two distinctive areas: the main Village area and the East Parcel. The viewsheds for each of these areas are determined by a combination of topography and vegetation that may restrict visibility of the project site.

## VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT SITE

The main Village area is located on 85 acres at the west end of Squaw Valley; the East Parcel is located on 8.8 acres on at the east end of Squaw Valley. The west end of the Valley is dominated by existing resort developments described above. Built environment features on the project site at the western end of the Valley include expansive paved parking areas with various types of structures scattered at the edge of or surrounded by the parking lots. The structures on the project site do not generally have unity of appearance; they were constructed in various styles, at different times, and with various types of materials.

The most visible features in or near the eastern portion of the project site include:

- ▲ The Far East Center, a three-story building with triangular roof lines on three sides in an isolated location in the eastern parking lot (Exhibit 8-5, Photograph 9);
- ▲ The Red Wolf Timeshare, a four-story fractional ownership lodging facility located near the south edge of the eastern parking lot (Exhibit 8-5, Photograph 10);
- ▲ The snow making building, a one story concrete constructed utility building located at the south edge of the eastern parking lot at the base of the ski slopes (Exhibit 8-5, located among the buildings in the background of Photograph 10);
- ▲ The lift maintenance building, a two-story wood-frame construction utility building located at the base of the ski slopes; and
- ▲ A two-story parking structure located on the western edge of the eastern parking lot.

Structures in or near the western portion of the project site include:

- ▲ The clock tower, a two-story wood-frame commercial building with a clock tower located at the northern edge of the western parking lot;
- ▲ The Olympic Valley Lodge, a two-story split level commercial building of wood-frame construction located on the north side of the western parking lot (Exhibit 8-3, Photograph 3); and
- ▲ The former reception building, a one-story wood-frame building located on the south edge of the western parking lot just above Squaw Creek (Exhibit 8-6, Photograph 12).

The center of the East Parcel has been cleared of trees and graded; it is used for snow storage (Exhibit 8-5, Photograph 9). The east, west, and north sides are forested, with the north and west side having residential development beyond the trees, and the east side transitioning to a forest area. Squaw Valley Road forms the southern boundary.



Photograph 9: View to the east of the Project Site from Intrawest Village with Far East Center in across the parking lot



Photograph 10: View to the south from Intrawest Village showing Squaw Kids, Red Wolf Lodge, Maintenance, Far East Express lift and preferred parking

Source: Ascent Environmental 2014

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Photograph 11: View of Red Dog Maintenance with ski slopes in background



Photograph 12: View to the southwest from the project site west parking lot showing Reception Building



Photograph 13: View to the northwest of the East Parcel from Squaw Valley Road

Source: Ascent Environmental 2014

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## REPRESENTATIVE VIEWPOINT DESCRIPTIONS

The following is a description of viewpoints that provide representative views of the project site from nearby locations. The selected views include those typically seen by the public, as well as those from residential areas that would be seen most frequently by the relatively few residents in the area. The location of the viewpoints is shown in Exhibits 8-7 and 8-8, and photographs from these viewpoints are provided in Exhibits 8-9 to 8-20.

### **Viewpoint 1: Daylight View of Private Residence on Christy Lane (Exhibit 8-9, Existing View)**

This viewpoint is representative of daytime private views from the residential area located on the north side of Squaw Valley overlooking the project site to the south. Views include utility lines in the near foreground and conifers growing on the slope that partially block views of the mountain slopes across the Valley. Views from other residences would have more or less obstructions (e.g., other homes, more vegetation) depending on individual conditions. The foreground views include the existing parking lot on the Valley floor, vehicles, and various structures, including the Far East Center, pumphouse, and sheds. The mountain slopes visible in the middleground across the Valley are forested with cleared ski runs and lift towers also visible; peripheral views of distant mountain peaks are partially obstructed by trees in the foreground.

### **Viewpoint 2: Night/Evening View of Private Residence on Christy Lane (Exhibit 8-10, Existing View)**

This viewpoint is representative of evening and nighttime private views from the residential area located on the south side of Squaw Valley overlooking the project site. Features visible during the daytime are still visible in reduced light conditions or on moonlit nights. In winter the snow covered ski runs stand out in contrast to the adjacent trees. In the evening, these features are no longer visible and light emanating from the Far East Center and from buildings to the west of the parking lot in the near foreground become more visible.

### **Viewpoint 3: Squaw Valley Road between Far East Road and Village East Road in Winter (Exhibit 8-11, Existing View)**

This viewpoint is representative of the panoramic views in the winter of the project site at the west end of Squaw Valley as viewed from Squaw Valley Road. In the winter, near foreground views of the project site can be interrupted by snow banks created by snow plowing/blowing of the road. The near foreground includes the paved road area and the existing parking lot. The existing Intrawest Village and Far East Center are visible in the foreground with mountains peaks in foreground and middleground. Cleared ski slopes are visible on the lower slopes of the mountains to the south and west of the resort area.

### **Viewpoint 4: Squaw Valley Road between Far East Road and Village East Road in Spring (Exhibit 8-12, Existing View)**

This viewpoint is representative of the panoramic views in the spring of the project site at the west end of Squaw Valley as viewed from Squaw Valley Road. During the spring and summer, the near foreground views of the project site include willows and aspens growing along the channelized section of Squaw Creek. The foreground includes the paved road area, existing parking lot, sheds, and the Far East Center. The existing Intrawest Village is in the foreground with mountains peaks in foreground and middleground. Cleared ski slopes are visible on the lower slopes of the mountains to the south and west of the resort area.

### **Viewpoint 5: Views near the Resort at Squaw Creek in Winter (Exhibit 8-13, Existing View)**

This viewpoint is representative of the panoramic views in the winter of the western end of Squaw Valley as viewed from the area east of the project site near The Resort at Squaw Creek. Foreground views are of the snow-covered golf course and meadow. The existing Intrawest Village structures are visible in the middleground. The ski resort support facilities (snow making building, maintenance buildings) are in shadow to the south of the resort buildings. Snow covered slopes of the mountains enclosing the west end of the Valley are in the middleground behind the resort.

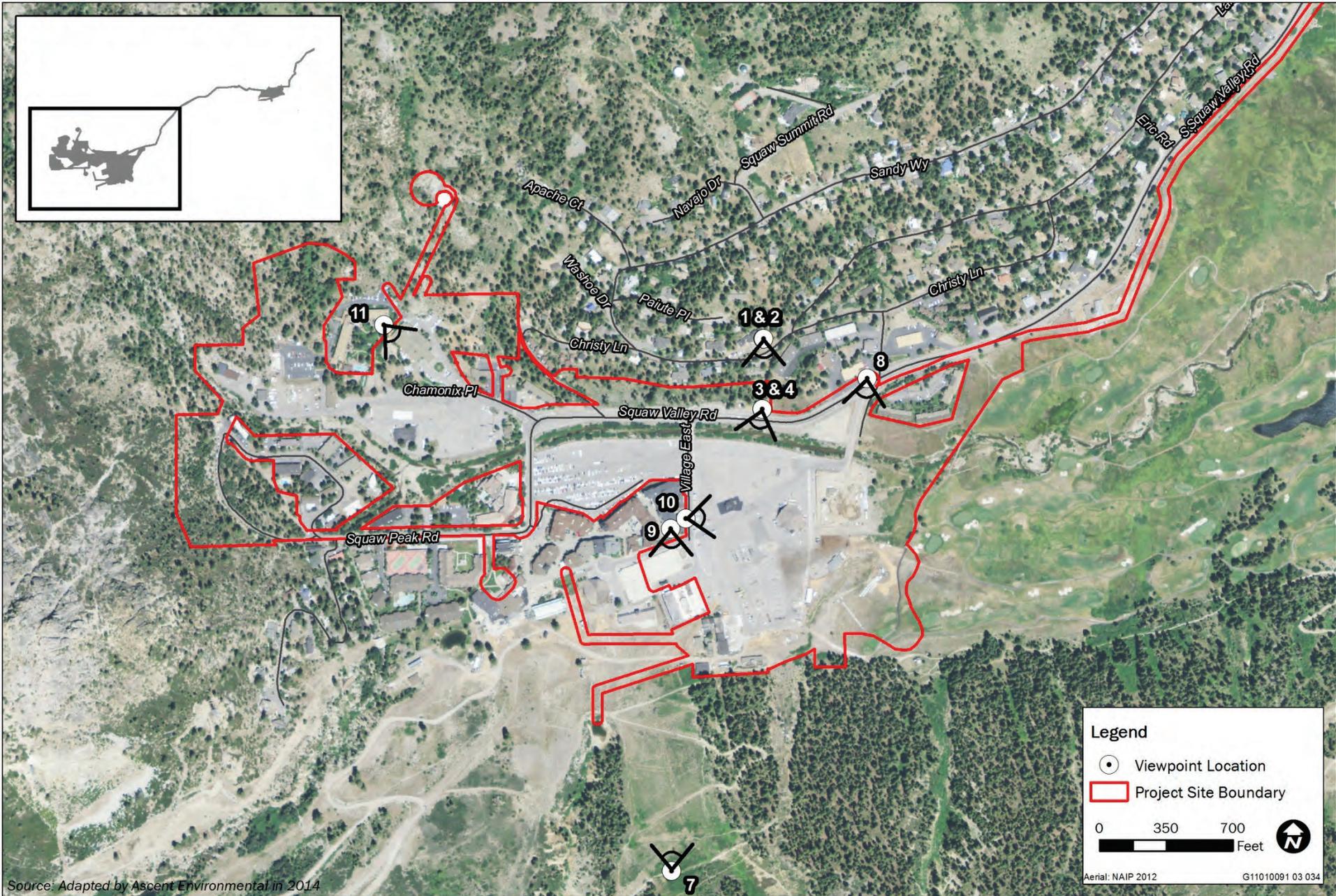


Exhibit 8-7

Viewpoint Locations, Main Village Area



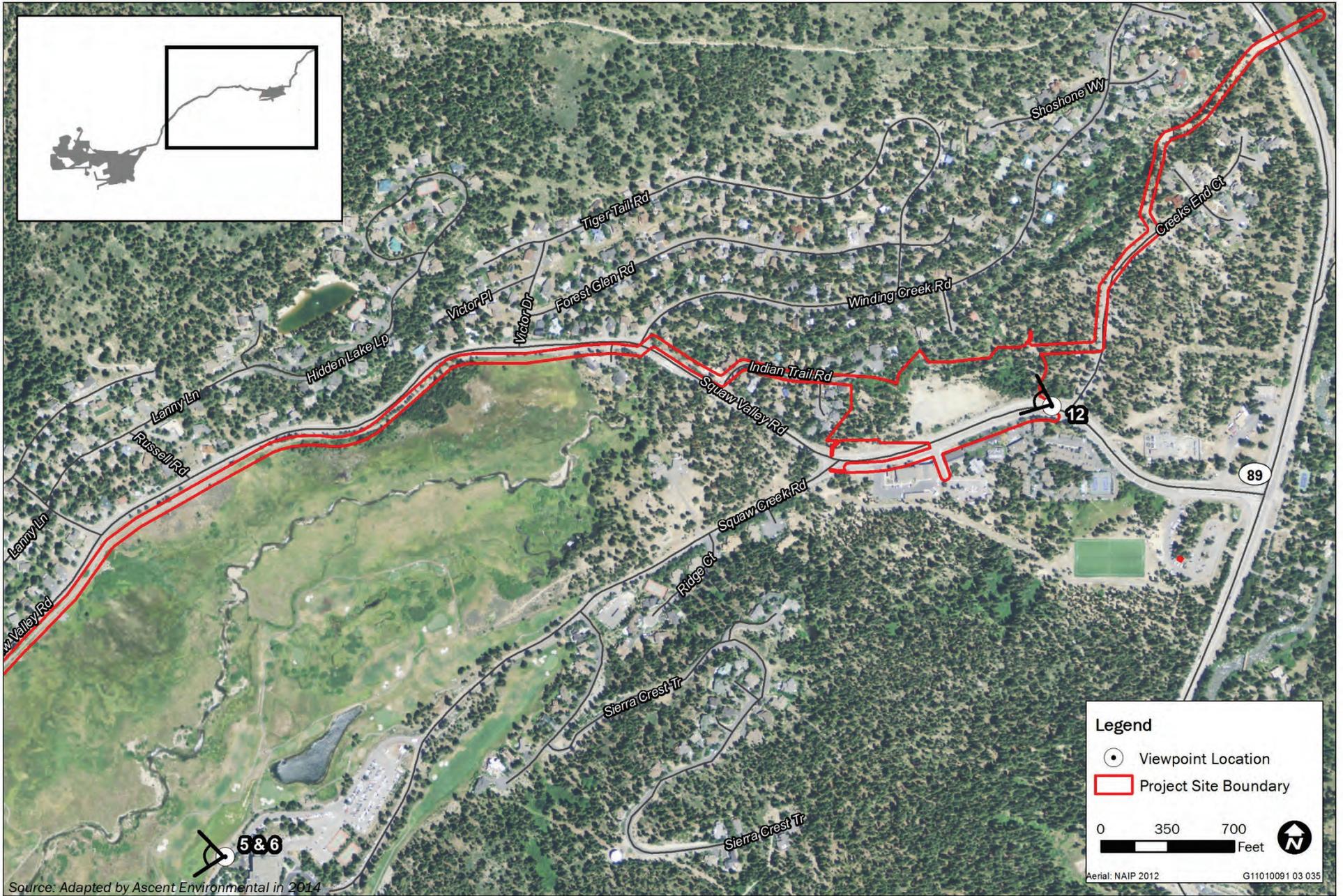


Exhibit 8-8

Viewpoint Locations, East Parcel



**Existing view of the project site from residence located on the northern slope of the valley**



Source: Ascent Environmental 2014

**Simulated view of condominiums and parking garage from residence on the north slope of the valley**



Source: Field of Vision 2015

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Existing night view of the project site from residence located on the northern slope of the valley



Source: Ascent Environmental 2014

Simulated night view of condominiums and parking garage from residence on the north slope of the valley



Source: Field of Vision 2015

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Existing view to the southwest from Squaw Valley Road of the project site in winter



Source: Ascent Environmental 2014

Simulated view to the southwest from Squaw Valley Road of the project site in winter



Source: Field of Vision 2015

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