

7.0 VISUAL RESOURCES

This chapter summarizes the 2010 Hidden Falls Regional Park (HFRP) Certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) visual resources findings, describes the visual character of the proposed HFRP Trails Expansion Project, identifies pertinent regulations, evaluates project-related impacts associated with visual resources, and provides mitigation measures as necessary to reduce those impacts. The visual impact analysis considers existing scenic vistas, resources and character or quality of public views of the site and its surrounding, and changes in light and glare in the project area. The descriptions of the existing visual setting are accompanied by photographs of representative views, taken during site visits on May 15, 2017 and May 24, 2019.

7.1 SUMMARY OF COUNTY FINDINGS ON THE 2010 HFRP CERTIFIED EIR

Chapter 7, “Visual Resources” of the 2010 HFRP Certified EIR included a detailed discussion of the park environmental and regulatory setting, potential impacts associated with visual resources resulting from implementation of the park project, and any needed mitigation measures to reduce these impacts.

7.1.1 FINDINGS OF FACT

The following is a list of the 2010 HFRP Certified EIR findings.

- ▶ Construction activity, construction equipment, and areas of vegetation removal would be temporarily visible during and immediately after construction of park project facilities (e.g., bridges, trails, overlooks, roads, parking areas). However, these changes in views would be minimal and not visible from most off-site locations. In addition, all views of construction activities would be temporary. Therefore, the impact was considered **less than significant**.
- ▶ The park project would introduce new physical elements into the landscape; however, the proposed facilities of the park (e.g., bridges, trails, overlooks, restroom, picnic areas, expanded parking area) would be in remote locations, avoiding visually obtrusive effects, and therefore were determined to be a **less-than-significant** impact.
- ▶ The proposed project would widen Garden Bar Road which would require removal of existing mature oak trees. The removal of trees would result in a substantial physical change to the visual environment of the road and would occur within proximity of viewers, including adjacent residents. Implementing measures to revegetate and restore all disturbed areas to minimize visual quality impacts and to protect woodland habitat reduced the potentially significant impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. The impact remained **significant and unavoidable**.

7.1.2 HFRP MITIGATION MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE COUNTY IN 2010

Implementation of the following mitigation measures, which were adopted by Placer County when the HFRP EIR was certified in 2010, reduced impacts of the project on visual resources.

- ▶ **Mitigation Measure 7-3:** Revegetate and Restore All Disturbed Areas to Minimize Visual Quality Impacts.
- ▶ **Mitigation Measure 12-8:** Protect Oak Woodland Habitat.

7.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This section of the Subsequent EIR describes the physical environmental conditions of the proposed HFRP Trails Expansion Project. See Chapter 7.0 “Visual Resources” of the 2010 HFRP Certified EIR for information about the existing park.

7.2.1 REGIONAL AND LOCAL VISUAL CHARACTER

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE AREA

The HFRP Trails Expansion area is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills of western Placer County (see Exhibits 3-1 and 3-2 in Chapter 3.0, “Project Description”). The area has few roads and includes expansive undeveloped lands within the Raccoon Creek and Bear River watersheds. The area is characterized by blue oak woodland and oak-foothill pine woodland. Exhibit 3-4 in Chapter 3.0 shows the boundaries of the HFRP Trails Expansion area and the planned alignment of the proposed new trails.

Land proposed for inclusion in the expanded park boundary includes Harvego, Taylor Ranch, Kotomyan Preserve, Outman Preserve, easement through the Liberty Ranch parcel, Twilight Ride property, connectivity parcels between Taylor Ranch and the existing HFRP and the Garden Bar 40 parcel, along with the various easements connecting the parcels (Exhibit 3-4). The main vegetation types on Harvego are blue oak woodlands, blue oak – foothill pine, montane hardwoods, riparian and riverine habitat, and annual grassland habitat. Bald Rock mountain is the highest point in elevation at 1,694 feet above mean sea level (amsl). The Bear River forms the northern property boundary line, dividing Placer County from Nevada County and drains the northern part of Placer County. The property includes wildlife habitat, scenic open space, and agriculture and recreation uses.

The Kotomyan Preserve is located on New Hope School Road, just north of the City of Auburn and consists of oak-foothill pine woodland. The Kotomyan Preserve is one parcel removed (about 2,500 feet) from the existing park and adjacent to Taylor Ranch and Liberty Ranch. The topography of Liberty Ranch varies throughout, and the site is characterized by a variety of features including; perennial and ephemeral streams draining steep rocky outcroppings, oak woodland savannahs, and riparian corridors. Livestock seasonally graze Liberty Ranch. The Outman Preserve is characterized by a variety of features including; gently sloping blue oak woodlands, steep montane hardwood and foothill pine woodlands, an ephemeral stream, a perennial stream and a riparian corridor with native willow and alder. The Twilight Ride parcel is dominated by annual grasslands with scattered blue oak (*Quercus douglasii*) and patches of blue oak woodland. Topography is gentle with an elevation differential ranging from approximately 1,075 to 1,240 feet amsl from southwest to northeast. Ridgelines of the surrounding foothills dominate views from within the project area and are the nearest visually prominent landforms. The surrounding landscape is primarily open grazing land, rural residential, or oak woodland. (Exhibits 7-1a and 7-1b)

Land adjacent to the HFRP Trails Expansion area consists of rolling hills and is primarily private lands used for agriculture, grazing, and rural residences. Surrounding views include undulating topography and vegetation common in the foothills including pockets of chaparral, oak woodlands, and grasslands.



Exhibit 7-1a. View within HFRP Expansion Area – Twilight Ride Parcel



Exhibit 7-1b. View within the HFRP Expansion Area – Harvego Preserve

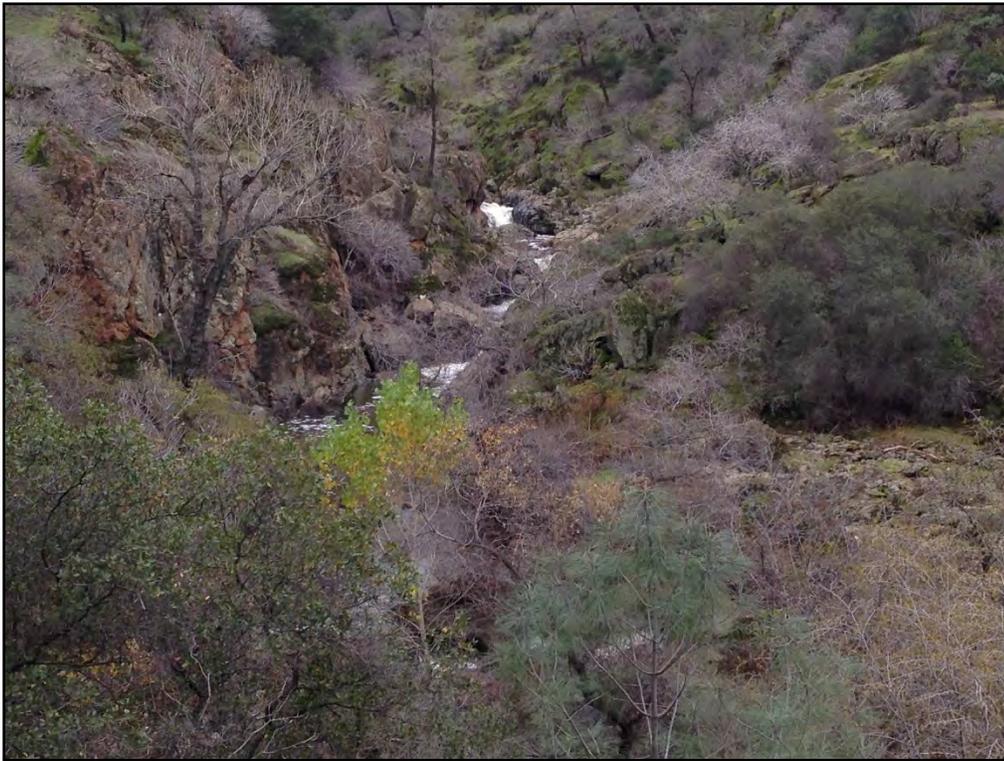


Exhibit 7-1c. View of Racoon Creek from Trail Connection to Existing HFRP

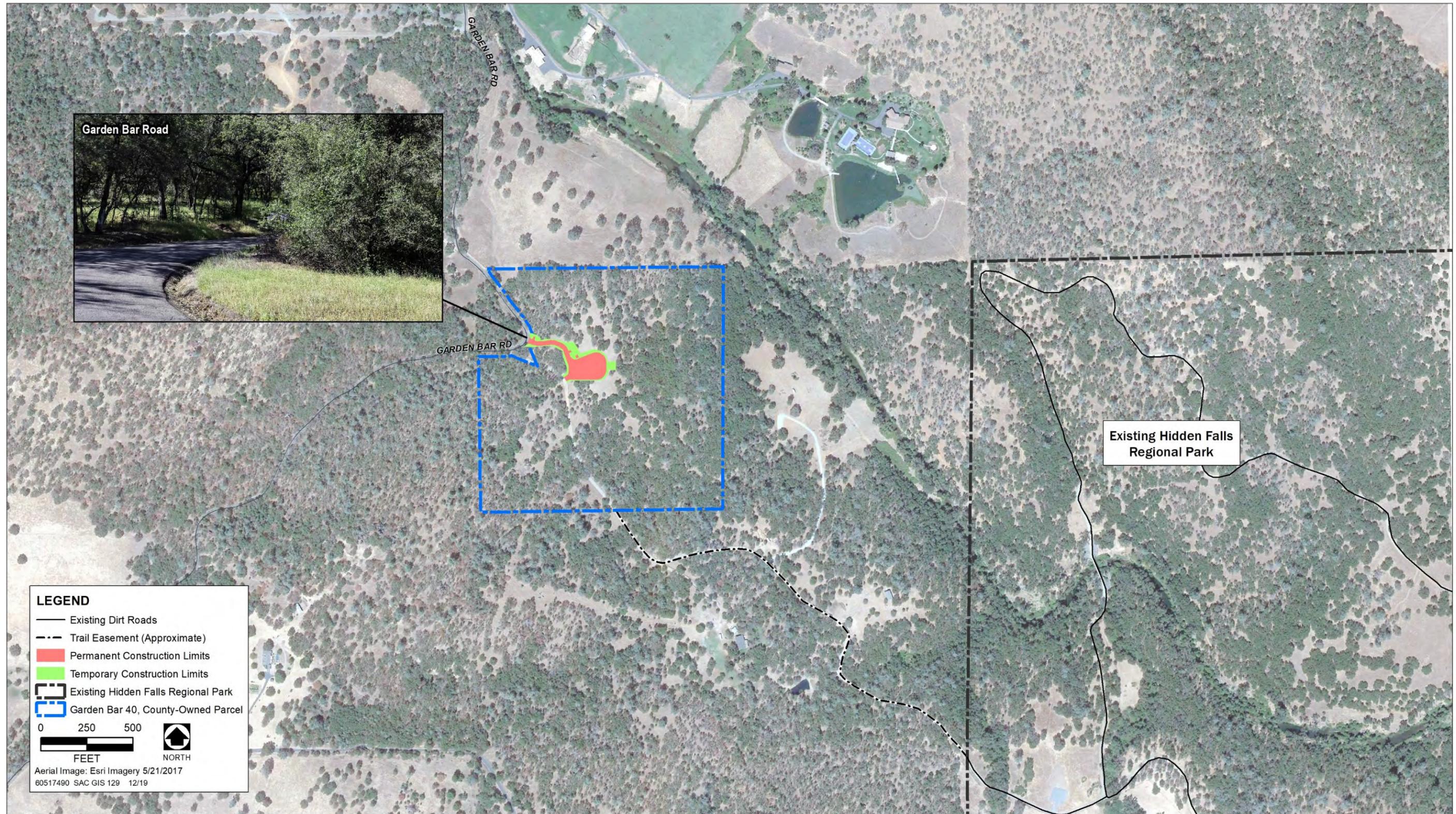
7.2.2 VISIBILITY FROM THE SURROUNDING AREA

The majority of the HFRP Trails Expansion area (i.e., trail network and parking areas) are not readily visible from any public roadways. Most of the project lacks key observation points (KOPs) that offer views of proposed trails, parking or restrooms because the project area is secluded, heavily vegetated, and protected from views from the outside by surrounding topography. However, a few private residences located near the Mears Place, Garden Bar Road, Curtola Ranch Road, and Twilight Ride parking areas are identified as having potential views of proposed project facilities. For the analysis of potential visual impacts, 4 KOPs were selected (Exhibits 7-2 through 7-5).

7.3 REGULATORY SETTING UPDATE

7.3.1 FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws related to visual resources are applicable to the proposed project.



Source: Google Earth Pro 2018

Exhibit 7-2. Aerial View of Garden Bar Road Parking Area and Access Road

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Source: Google Earth Pro 2018

Exhibit 7-3. Aerial View of Mears Place Parking Area

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Source: Google Earth Pro 2018

Exhibit 7-4. Aerial View of Curtola Ranch Road Access Road and Parking Areas

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Source: Google Earth Pro 2018

Exhibit 7-5. Aerial View of Twilight Ride Parking Area

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7.3.2 STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the California Legislature in 1963 and is managed by the California Department of Transportation. The goal of this program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated "scenic" depending on the amount of the natural landscape that travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view.

There are no state-designated highways within the viewshed of the project area. State Route 49, which is located approximately 1/2 mile east of the project area, has been deemed eligible for listing as a scenic highway but has not been officially designated (Caltrans 2019). No portions of the project area are visible from State Route 49.

7.3.3 LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The County's General Plan describes assumptions, goals, and planning principles that provide a framework for land use decisions throughout the County. The following are the relevant goals and policies identified in the 2013 General Plan for visual resources.

GOAL 1.K: To protect the visual and 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.

- ▶ **Policy 1.K.1.** The County shall require that new development in scenic areas (e.g., river canyons, lake watersheds, scenic highway corridors, ridgelines and steep slopes) is planned and designed in a manner which employs design, construction, and maintenance techniques that:
 - a. Avoids locating structures along ridgelines and steep slopes;
 - b. Incorporates design and screening measures to minimize the visibility of structures and graded areas; and
 - c. Maintains the character and visual quality of the area.
- ▶ **Policy 1.K.2.** The County shall require that new development in scenic areas be designed to utilize natural landforms and vegetation for screening structures, access roads, building foundations, and cut and fill slopes.
- ▶ **Policy 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. Replant graded areas to ensure establishment of plant cover before the next rainy season;

- e. Create grading contours that blend with the natural contours on site or with contours on property immediately adjacent to the area of development; and,
 - f. Provide and maintain site-specific construction Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- ▶ **Policy 1.K.5.** The County shall require that new roads, parking, and utilities be designed 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.
 - ▶ **Policy 1.K.6.** The County shall require that new development on hillsides employ design, construction, and maintenance techniques that:
 - a. Ensure that development near or on portions of hillsides do not cause or worsen natural hazards such as erosion, sedimentation, fire, or water quality concerns;
 - b. Include erosion and sediment control measures including temporary vegetation sufficient to stabilize disturbed areas;
 - c. Minimize risk to life and property from slope failure, landslides, and flooding; and,
 - d. Maintain the character and visual quality of the hillside.

GOAL 1.L: To develop a system of scenic routes serving the needs of residents and visitors to Placer County and to preserve, enhance, and protect the scenic resources visible from these scenic routes.

- ▶ **Policy 1.L.3.** The County shall protect and enhance scenic corridors through such means as design review, sign control, undergrounding utilities, scenic setbacks, density limitations, planned unit developments, grading and tree removal standards, open space easements, and land conservation contracts.
- ▶ **Policy 1.L.5.** The County shall encourage the development of trails, picnicking, observation points, parks, and roadside rests along scenic highways.
- ▶ **Policy 1.L.7.** The County shall encourage the use of bicycles as an alternative mode of travel for recreational purposes in scenic corridors.
- ▶ **Policy 1.L.10.** The County shall coordinate scenic route programs among local, regional, and state jurisdictions, recognizing that scenic routes are a resource of more than local importance.

7.4 IMPACTS

7.4.1 ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The focus of this analysis is visual resource impacts to public vantage points that would result from project implementation. This analysis also considers how the HFRP trail expansion areas would or would not change the conclusions of the prior environmental review. This visual impact analysis is based on a field survey, and review of aerial photographs (Exhibits 7-2 through 7-5) in relation to the surrounding vicinity. The elements of the proposed project were compared to existing views of the area to determine how the project area would change from existing conditions.

7.4.2 THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

CEQA THRESHOLDS

Based on the Placer County CEQA checklist and the State CEQA Guidelines, the proposed project would result in a potentially significant impact on visual resources if it would:

- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- ▶ substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- ▶ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings;
or
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

CRITERIA USED IN VISUAL ASSESSMENT

The aesthetic quality of an area is determined through an assessment of the variety and contrasts of the area's visual features, the character of those features, and the scope and scale of the scene. The aesthetic quality of an area depends on the relationships between the area's features and their importance in the overall view. Visual images dominate observers' impressions of the aesthetic qualities of an area. Therefore, evaluating scenic resources requires a method that objectively characterizes visual features, assesses their quality in relation to the visual character of the surrounding area, and identifies their importance to the individuals viewing them. This process is derived from established federal procedures for visual assessment and is commonly used for a variety of project types.

Both natural and created features in a landscape contribute to the perceived visual quality of that landscape. Landscape characteristics influencing visual quality include geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreation, and urban features. A commonly used set of criteria for defining and evaluating visual quality includes the concepts of vividness, intactness, and unity. None of these is itself equivalent to visual quality; all three must be high to indicate high quality. These terms are defined as follows (FHWA 1983):

- ▶ "Vividness" is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns.
- ▶ "Intactness" is the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements.
- ▶ "Unity" is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole.

The quality of views of areas that could be affected by the proposed project is evaluated based on the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity apparent in the views, and also on viewer sensitivity. Viewer sensitivity is a function of several factors:

- ▶ visibility of the landscape,

- ▶ proximity of viewers to the visual resources,
- ▶ frequency and duration of views,
- ▶ number of viewers,
- ▶ types of individuals and groups of viewers, and
- ▶ viewers' expectations.

The sensitivity of a view of the landscape is also determined by the extent of the public's concern for a particular view. Areas of high visual sensitivity are highly visible to the general public. Scenic highways, tourist routes, and recreation areas are considered more visually sensitive than more urbanized locations. A determination finding that a potential visual impact has significance would be based on a change in visual character as determined by the obstruction of a public view, creation of an aesthetically offensive public view, or adverse changes to objects having aesthetic significance. The distance of a view from landscape elements plays an important role in the determination of an area's visual quality. Landscape elements are considered higher or lower in visual importance based on their position relative to the viewer. Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant, and therefore visually important, it is to the viewer.

ISSUES NOT ANALYZED FURTHER

The proposed project would have no impact associated with the following issues, and these issues will not be analyzed further in this chapter:

- ▶ **Scenic vistas or scenic highways:** There are no designated scenic vistas or scenic highways in the project area that could be affected by the proposed project. Therefore, these issues are not discussed further.

7.4.3 IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 7-1 **Visual Resources—Short-Term Changes in Visual Resources Associated with Project Construction.** *Construction activity, construction equipment, and areas of vegetation removal would be temporarily visible during and immediately after construction of park and proposed project facilities (e.g., bridges, trails, overlooks, roads, parking areas). However, these changes in views would be minimal and not visible from most off-site public locations. In addition, all views of construction activities would be temporary.*

Significance *Less than Significant (Consistent with prior analysis in the 2010 HFRP certified EIR)*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

2010 HFRP CERTIFIED EIR IMPACT SUMMARY

The 2010 HFRP certified EIR indicated that the project would result in changes to the visual character of the site. Construction activity, equipment, and subsequent vegetation removal would be visible during and immediately after construction of facilities (e.g., bridges, trails, overlooks, roads, parking areas). Planned improvements to Garden Bar Road were identified as particularly prominent because the HFRP improvements would place construction vehicles and workers within visual range of residences located near Garden Bar Road and motorists. The 2010 HFRP certified EIR determined that views of specific construction activities would be partially or completely obscured from rural residences near the project area (within 0.5-mile) because of dense vegetation surrounding and within the project area and the number of viewers would be relatively small because of the remote location. These impacts were found to be temporary in nature and views of the improvements would be partially obscured by topography and vegetation. For these reasons, this impact was considered to be **less than significant**.

2019 HFRP TRAILS EXPANSION PROJECT IMPACT ANALYSIS

Construction of structures associated with the Trails Expansion project (e.g., picnic areas, bridges, overlooks, restrooms and parking areas) would result in changes to the visual character of the area. Construction of the Trails Expansion project would place construction vehicles and worker crews within visual range of residences located adjacent to the expansion boundaries. Along the Curtola Ranch Road entry road, two residences along Curtola Ranch Road and three residences that back up to Curtola Ranch Road would have unobstructed views of construction related activities occurring at the Curtola Ranch Road entry. Residences along Auburn Valley Road would be able to observe construction vehicles traveling between Bell Road and Curtola Ranch Road.

Additionally, travelers and residences would have unobstructed views associated with road improvements such as construction of a turn pocket on Bell Road and creation of the new Twilight Ride access road. Although views of construction activities are not a common occurrence along Curtola Ranch Road, the number of viewers would be relatively small because of the remote location. Neither the parking area at Harvego nor the Twilight Ride parcel would be visible from the roadways. Further, construction activities would be short term and cease upon completion of the improvements.

Construction of structures at the Mears Place parking lot would be more visible as the area is currently accessible to the public (see Exhibit 7-3). Mears serves as a point of access to the existing HFRP so views of workers constructing additional parking would be readily visible. Views from Mears would be temporary and cease upon completion of the parking lot expansion.

The existing Curtola Ranch Road parking area (which would be utilized for Phases 1 and 2 of the proposed project) is currently inaccessible to the public except for small docent-led tour groups who are escorted by the Placer Land Trust (PLT) staff (see Exhibit 7-4). Some vegetation would be cleared during construction of structures and parking areas at the Garden Bar Road, Curtola Ranch Road and Twilight Ride entrances. However, these facilities and improvements would avoid trees when possible, particularly native oaks greater than 5 inches dbh. Any cut vegetation would be chipped and broadcast to the area surrounding the structures and parking areas.

Visual impacts to Garden Bar Road were discussed in the 2010 Certified EIR. It was determined that there would be significant and unavoidable impacts to the visual resources associated with the improvements to Garden Bar Road at full build-out, as road widening, and corresponding oak tree removal would be required. With the current

Trails Expansion project, the Garden Bar Road access driveway and parking area would be modified from the originally-approved EIR, as the Garden Bar 40 parcel has been acquired by the County in the meantime. This parcel would allow for a parking area closer to Garden Bar Road than originally anticipated. However, due to the topography, the parking area would not be visible from either Garden Bar Road or any other adjacent rural residence.

Construction crew members and their vehicles would be present on-site to create the trail network but would largely remain out of site due to the remote location of the trail alignment and presence of intervening topography and vegetation. Equipment used by the crews to construct the trail systems may include a Sweco trail dozer, hand tools like pruners and rakes, and a chipper to lop and broadcast vegetation removed for construction of improvements. Final siting for the proposed trail alignment would route the trail to avoid removal of as many trees as possible, particularly native oaks greater than 5 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). Retaining larger trees would help maintain the existing visual character of the land.

Views of construction activities occurring within the trail expansion area would be partially or completely obscured from rural residences near the project area (within 0.5-mile) because of the topography and vegetation surrounding and within the project area. In addition, construction activities would not occur at one location and at the same time but would occur at different locations for a temporary time then move to a different location for another time. Construction activities would alter short-term views of the project area. However, because most of the project area is not currently viewable from the public streets, visibility of construction activity is a temporary impact, and views of most construction related activity would be at least partially obscured by topography and vegetation, this impact is **less than significant**.

Short-term changes in visual resources associated with construction of the proposed trails expansion would not result in new significant environmental effects or substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant effects based on changes in the project, circumstances or new information.

IMPACT 7-2 **Visual Resources—Long-Term Changes in Visual Resources Associated with amenities for the Proposed HFRP Trails Expansion Project.** *The park and proposed project would introduce new physical elements into the landscape; however, the proposed facilities of the park and proposed project (e.g., bridges, trails, overlooks, restrooms, picnic areas, parking areas) would be in remote locations, avoiding visually obtrusive effects from public vantage points.*

Significance *Less than Significant (Consistent with prior analysis in the 2010 HFRP certified EIR)*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

2010 HFRP CERTIFIED EIR IMPACT SUMMARY

The 2010 HFRP certified EIR found that the project area was in a remote part of the County and visibility from off-site locations was limited because of intervening, dense vegetation and topography. Although several residences had views of the Didion Ranch parking area, expansion of this area was considered small (i.e., 0.35 acre) and the presence of an existing lot nearby ensured views at this location would be consistent with existing views. Relocation of the helistop adjacent to the parking area was also found consistent with views of the existing parking area. The 2010 HFRP certified EIR found that the use of the existing ranch house and related structures (e.g., caretaker's residence) and introduction of several new structures (i.e., bunkhouses) would not significantly change the visual character of the area because only one residence had an unobstructed view of the Spears Ranch portion of the Park and a distant view of the existing ranch house. Further, the analysis determined that areas of proposed grading would be revegetated following construction and views of those improvements would be partially screened by vegetation and/or distance. Other facilities associated with the park (e.g., bridges, information kiosk, overlooks, restrooms, trails) would not be easily visible because of distance and intervening vegetation. The 2010 HFRP certified EIR concluded the HFRP and related facilities would not be prominently visible from off-site locations and would not cause a substantial change in long-range views from the surrounding area. Structures were to be constructed of similar material types and at similar size to existing structures found in the project area to maintain visual continuity. Because of the limited visibility of the project area (i.e., limited viewers), far distance to viewers, and views of structures and facilities would be like existing views of structures (i.e., expectations) in the project area, the 2010 HFRP certified EIR found that implementation of the project would have a **less-than-significant** impact on long-term views of the project area.

2019 HFRP TRAILS EXPANSION PROJECT IMPACT ANALYSIS

The Trails Expansion project is proposed in a remote area of the County where visibility of the site from off-site locations is limited because of intervening vegetation and topography, and the long distance from public areas/roadways. Structures proposed as part of the Trails Expansion may be visible from specific off-site locations such as rural residences and motorists traveling along roads located at a higher elevation where views are not subject to obstructions (rolling hills/topography, vegetation). These intermittent, long-distance views of the Trails Expansion area would mostly consist of the new parking and amenities such as restrooms and picnic areas at the trailheads. Introduction of the parking lot expansion at Mears Place would be visible to visitors since public parking at this location already exists. The planned parking expansion at Mears would be small (25 new parking spaces) and views of the gravel lot would be consistent with those of the existing parking area. The Garden Bar 40, Harvego, and Twilight Ride parking lots require access roads to reach them, in some instances at a substantial distance from public roadways used to access the entry (see Exhibit 7-2 through 7-5). Therefore, the proposed improvements would not be prominently visible from off-site public locations and would not cause a substantial change in long-range views from the surrounding area.

To enhance the visitor experience, overlooks are proposed along the trail alignment. These structures are to be placed at select locations that offer prominent views of the region. Consequently, these structures may be visible from surrounding locations if they were to be placed along a ridge or at a prominent rock outcrop. The overlooks would incorporate natural colors into the design and the materials used would include stone, rock, and wood, which is consistent with the natural character of the project area.

Although facilities and structures associated with the project may be partially visible to the public from off-site locations, they would be constructed of natural material and colors so they would appear similar-in-nature to the type of structures viewers expect to see in a rural setting. Because of the limited visibility of the project area (i.e., limited number of viewers), the large distance between the park structure to the observer, and the incorporation of natural materials and color palettes, the post project views would appear like views of existing structures (i.e., expectations) in the project area. Implementation of the project would have a **less-than-significant** impact on long-term views.

The proposed trails expansion would not result in new significant environmental effects or substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant effects with regards to long-term changes in visual resources associated with the Project's amenities based on changes in the project, circumstances or new information.

IMPACT 7-3 **Visual Resources—Long-Term Changes in Visual Resources Associated with the Improvements to Garden Bar Road and Curtola Ranch Road.** *The park and proposed project would remove vegetation including trees to widen Garden Bar Road, Curtola Ranch Road, and a short section of Bell Road. The removal of trees would result in a substantial physical change to the visual environment of Garden Bar Road because of the large numbers of mature oak trees which would require removal.*

Significance *Potentially Significant (Consistent with prior analysis in the 2010 HFRP certified EIR)*

Mitigation Proposed *Mitigation Measure 7-1: Revegetate and Restore All Disturbed Areas to Minimize Visual Quality Impacts; and Mitigation Measure S12-7 in Chapter 12.0, "Biological Resources": Protect Oak Woodland Habitat*

Residual Significance *Significant and Unavoidable*

2010 HFRP CERTIFIED EIR IMPACT SUMMARY

The proposed widening Garden Bar Road during Phase 2 and 3 of the HFRP was determined to result in the removal of numerous existing, mature oak trees. The widening was deemed necessary to provide room for safe curves, appropriate lines of sight for drivers, and space for vehicles traveling in opposite directions to pass each other. Although construction activities would avoid native trees larger than 6 inches dbh to the extent possible and the roadway would remain a two-lane road, numerous large trees would require removal (between 100 and 250, depending on the final roadway design). The 2010 HFRP certified EIR indicated most oak trees that required removal were within 0.5-mile of the entrance at Garden Bar Road. Although Garden Bar Road is not a scenic highway or scenic vista, the removal of trees along the road would have altered existing views from adjacent residences and travelers along Garden Bar Road. Existing views of trees lining Garden Bar Road were found to be an important element in defining the aesthetic character of the project area and the HFRP project would have altered the views along this roadway segment permanently. Therefore, changes to the scenic character of Garden Bar Road were determined to be a significant impact. The 2010 HFRP certified EIR indicated that revegetation of the roadway and payment of in-lieu fees for any removal of oak trees over 6" in diameter reduced the impacts, but not to a less-than-significant level. This visual impact was determined to be **significant and unavoidable**.

2019 HFRP TRAILS EXPANSION PROJECT IMPACT ANALYSIS

Widening of Curtola Ranch Road and Bell Road (near the entrance to Twilight Ride), and introduction of ranger booths and gates to control access to all the parking areas would alter views of the project area, particularly if large trees require removal. Very few mature oak trees exist near the proposed Bell Road entrance, therefore any trees to be removed along Bell Road would be limited in number and would take place at defined locations where the road alignment cannot be changed to avoid them. Improvements for the trail expansion project, including overlooks, bridges, restrooms, picnic tables, benches, etc. would be sited during final design to avoid native trees larger than 5 inches dbh when feasible.

At full buildout of the Harvego trailhead, the aesthetics along segments of Curtola Ranch Road would be changed permanently from a narrow, gravel road to a 20-foot wide, paved road in order to safely accommodate vehicles. The widening would require encapsulation of a small canal, select tree and brush removal where necessary to accommodate the roadbed, and placement of soil to create a fill slope to support the expanded road width. While these changes would be a permanent change to the visual component of the road, the State CEQA Guidelines state that the proposed project would result in a potentially significant impact on visual resources if it would:

- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- ▶ substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- ▶ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings;
or
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Curtola Ranch Road is not a scenic vista nor a state scenic highway, and although private views of the roadway may change substantially, this is not a threshold used by the CEQA Guidelines for determining level of impact. The improvements would not alter a ridgeline, remove large boulders, or substantially alter any prominent physical feature that defines the viewshed experienced by the motorist traveling along a public road. Therefore, while the trail expansion may result in changes to the visual character of the area, any such change would be limited in scope because the number of viewers with direct line of site to project modifications is limited, and proposed structures would be designed using natural materials and colors. Impacts at these locations are less than significant.

As discussed in the 2010 Certified EIR and summarized above in Section 7.1 “Findings of Fact”, the previously-approved second and third phases of the Garden Bar parking area (which have yet to be constructed) required widening of Garden Bar Road to 18 feet and 20 feet, respectively, with the associated removal of oak trees along Garden Bar Road. Although mitigation was to be implemented, the impact to visual resources along Garden Bar Road was determined within the 2010 Certified EIR to be significant and unavoidable. Because Phases 2 and 3 are included within the proposed 2019 HFRP Trails Expansion project, there would still be a **significant and unavoidable** impact to visual resources along Garden Bar Road with the currently proposed project. The proposed trails expansion project would not result in new significant environmental effects or substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant effects based on changes in the project, circumstances or new information.

IMPACT 7-4 **Visual Resources—Increased Light and Glare.** *Proposed parking could include lighting near the restrooms, maintenance buildings and the ranch house at the west end of HFRP. Lights at the existing residence on the Twilight Ride property would remain. However, the lighting in the proposed new parking areas would be minimal and would be consistent with the existing surrounding lighting.*

Significance *Less than Significant (Consistent with prior analysis in 2010 HFRP Certified EIR)*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

2010 HFRP CERTIFIED EIR IMPACT SUMMARY

Lighting associated with the HFRP project was considered in the 2010 HFRP certified EIR. That analysis covered lighting at buildings, including the caretaker’s residence, restrooms, bunkhouse, and existing ranch house. Security lighting was also proposed at the parking lot. No other lighting was to be constructed as part of the HFRP project. Security lighting and lighting used at the caretaker’s residence was determined to be like that used by the previous occupant of the ranch house. All lighting introduced by the HFRP was anticipated to be like the brightness and scale of lighting currently used at existing nearby residences. The analysis indicated the lighting to be used on the HFRP was low wattage and would be directed downward to minimize excess glare or skyglow. Occasional campfires at the ranch house site were also identified as a new source of nighttime lighting; however, the lighting was considered minimal and would be limited to the camp area within the facility development zone. While recognizing operation of the HFRP would introduce a small amount of lighting, the application of low wattage lights and fixtures that meet glare-minimizing design criteria would reduce the potential for nighttime glare and skyglow in the project area to **less than significant**.

2019 HFRP TRAILS EXPANSION PROJECT IMPACT ANALYSIS

Like the existing HFRP, the expansion areas would close at dusk and the entrance gates to the parking areas would be closed and locked nightly. The trail system would not include any lighting and the parking lots would not contain lighting except for minimal security lighting near the restrooms. The single-family residence on Twilight Ride currently receives power service and uses lighting for residential occupancy and security. The HFRP Trails Expansion project would use lighting sources similar in brightness and scale to that used by existing rural residences in the surrounding area. All lighting used at the proposed parking areas would be low wattage and directed downward to minimize excess glare or skyglow. Recognizing the small amount of additional lighting and the glare-minimizing design criteria, the potential for nighttime glare and skyglow in the project area would be **less than significant**.

The proposed trails expansion would not result in new significant environmental effects or substantially increase the severity of previously identified significant effects based on changes in the project, circumstances or new information.

7.5 MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation Measure 7-1: Revegetate and Restore All Disturbed Areas to Minimize Visual Quality Impacts (*applies to Impact 7-3*)

To address the potential degradation of visual quality resulting from tree removal, the County shall revegetate and restore all disturbed areas. Revegetation undertaken between April 1 and October 1 shall include regular watering to ensure adequate initial growth. To the extent feasible, restoration of trees and shrubs shall reduce visual impacts for affected properties. Revegetation of disturbed areas shall promote restoration of vegetation over time that is as consistent as feasible with the surrounding natural landscape, recognizing constraints of the right-of-way and available space. The County shall prepare a restoration and revegetation plan that implements actions intended to mitigate the impacts on trees and vegetation removed along Garden Bar Road. The plan will be prepared in conjunction with detailed roadway engineering design, so that precise areas of disturbance are known, and the revegetation process can be coordinated with roadway implementation. Portions of the revegetation plan may be implemented on adjacent property outside the County road right-of-way by agreements with willing property owners.

Mitigation Measure S12-7: Protect Oak Woodland Habitat (see Section 12.1.2 in Chapter 12.0, "Biological Resources") (*applies to Impact 7-3*)

If removal of native trees larger than 5 inches dbh is required during construction of the proposed project, the County shall compensate for removal of those trees by paying in-lieu fees into the County approved oak woodland preservation fund as stipulated in the Placer County Tree Ordinance and in consultation with a certified arborist.