

## **7.0 VISUAL RESOURCES**

This chapter describes the existing visual characteristics of the project area and evaluates the visual impacts of the proposed project. The visual impact analysis considers existing scenic resources and the potential visibility of the proposed project from surrounding areas, including both the physical characteristics of project facilities 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 a site visit on July 28, 2007.

### **7.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

#### **7.1.1 REGIONAL AND LOCAL VISUAL CHARACTER**

##### **VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT AREA**

The project area is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills of western Placer County (Exhibits 3-2 and 3-3 in Chapter 3.0, “Project Description”). The project area is mostly undeveloped consisting primarily of oak woodland and chaparral vegetation, although several residences are located along Garden Bar Road and, in general, to the west and south of the Park. Additionally, an existing residence and ranch-related structures (e.g., storage building, corral) are located in the central portion of the project area. Coon and Deadman Creeks transect the project area. Garden Bar Road is the closest roadway to the project area; however, the Park is not visible from Garden Bar Road because of intervening vegetation and topography. The portion of the project that includes improvements to Garden Bar Road would be visible to many of the residences along this road. Ridgelines of the surrounding foothills dominate views from within the project area and are the nearest visually prominent landforms (Exhibits 7-1a and 7-1b).

##### **VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA**

The project area is located in a rural area approximately 5 miles northwest of Auburn. The project vicinity is highly vegetated and consists of rolling terrain. Although some of the surrounding areas are developed with rural residences, only one house is visible from within the facility development zone inside the Park, approximately 1,600 feet to the west, with views from the house’s location on top of a ridge (see Exhibit 7-2 and KOP 2 in Exhibit 7-3). Surrounding views include undulating topography and vegetation common in the foothills including pockets of chaparral, oak woodlands, and grasslands with extended views into and around Coon Creek.

#### **7.1.2 VISIBILITY FROM THE SURROUNDING AREA**

Key observation points (KOPs) are the primary focus of the visual analysis. KOPs are generally selected to represent the most critical locations from which a project area may be seen. KOPs are used to evaluate existing landscapes and potential impacts on visual resources with various levels of sensitivity, in different landscape types and terrain, and from various vantage points. The KOP images were developed using Google Earth Pro 2008 utilizing topography and satellite imagery.

The Park is not readily visible from any prominent off-site locations (e.g., Garden Bar Road, rural residences) and only one potential KOP (i.e., the house located on top of the ridge approximately 1,600 feet to the west) was identified as having potential views of proposed project facilities. The project lacks additional KOPs with views of proposed facilities because the project area is secluded, heavily vegetated, and protected from views from the outside by surrounding topography. For the analysis of potential visual impacts associated with the proposed project, 11 KOPs were selected (Exhibits 7-4 through 7-14) as public or private vantage points from which the project area would be potentially visible by residents or users. Refer to Exhibit 7-3 for specific locations of KOPs in relation to the project area. The surrounding landscape is primarily open grazing land, rural residential, or oak woodland.



Source: Photograph provided by EDAW in 2007

**View of Surrounding Areas to the West from the Existing Ranch House**

**Exhibit 7-1a**



Source: Photograph provided by EDAW in 2007

**View of Surrounding Areas to the South from the Existing Ranch House**

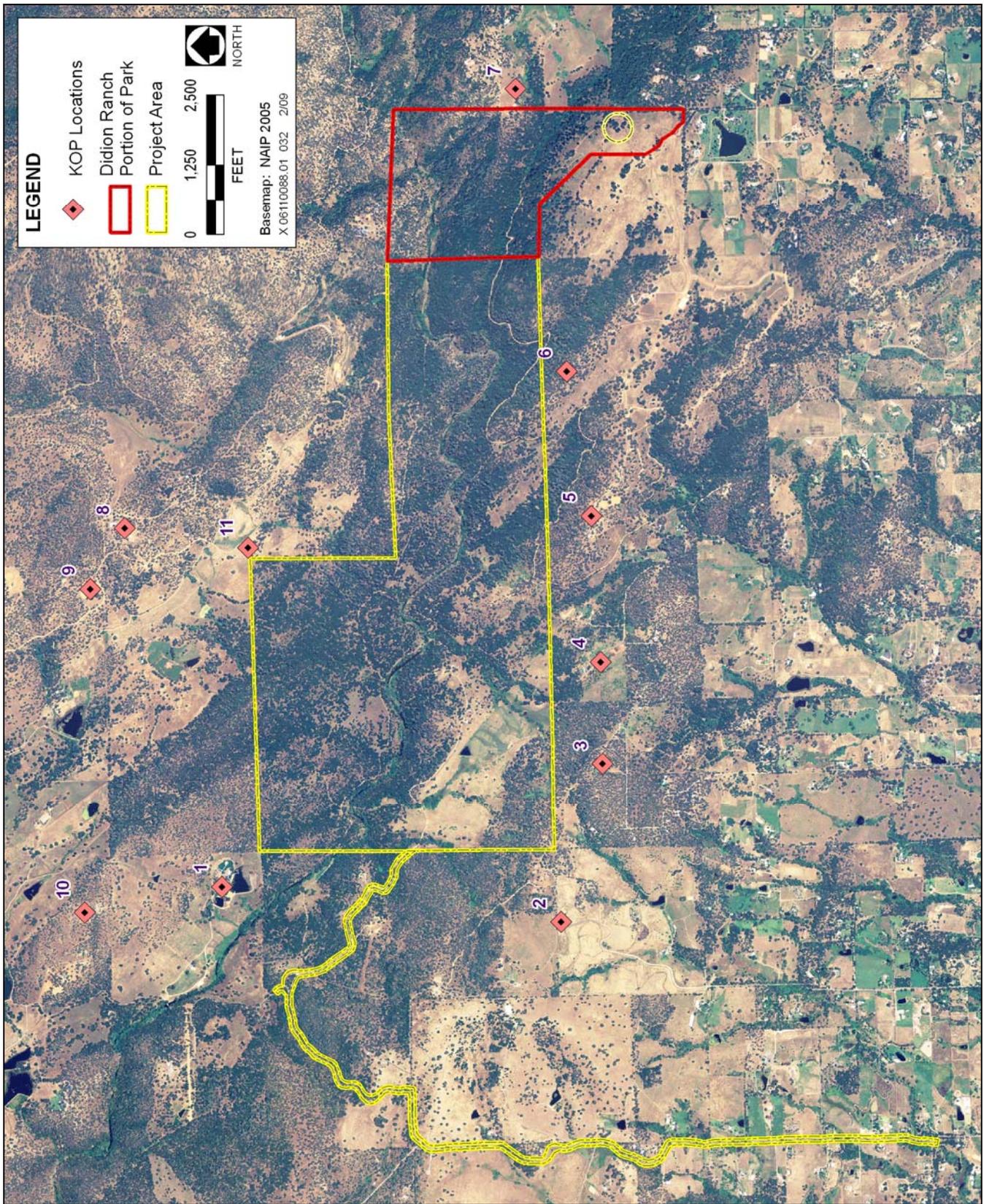
**Exhibit 7-1b**



Source: Photograph provided by EDAW in 2007

**Nearby Ridgetop Home with Views into the Project Area**

**Exhibit 7-2**



Source: Data provided by EDAW in 2008

**Key Observation Points Location Map**

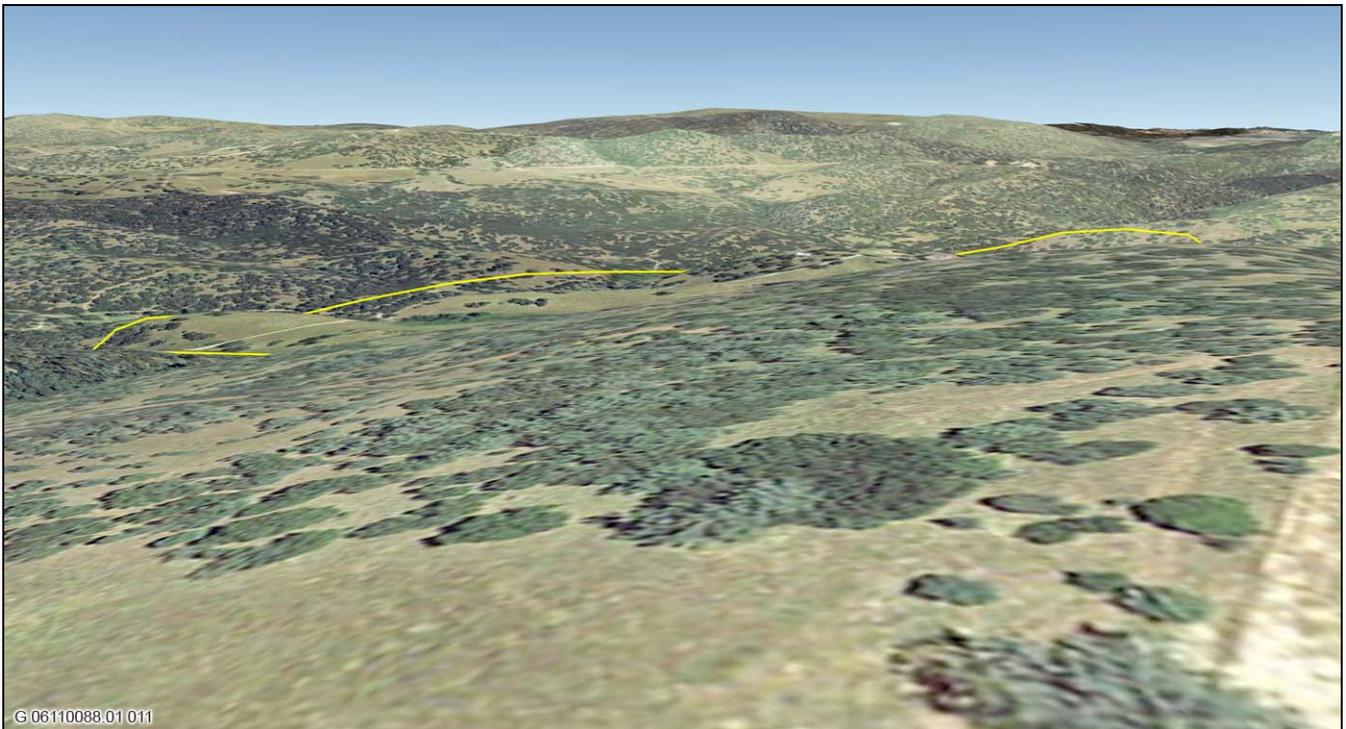
**Exhibit 7-3**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Southeast from Key Observation Point 1**

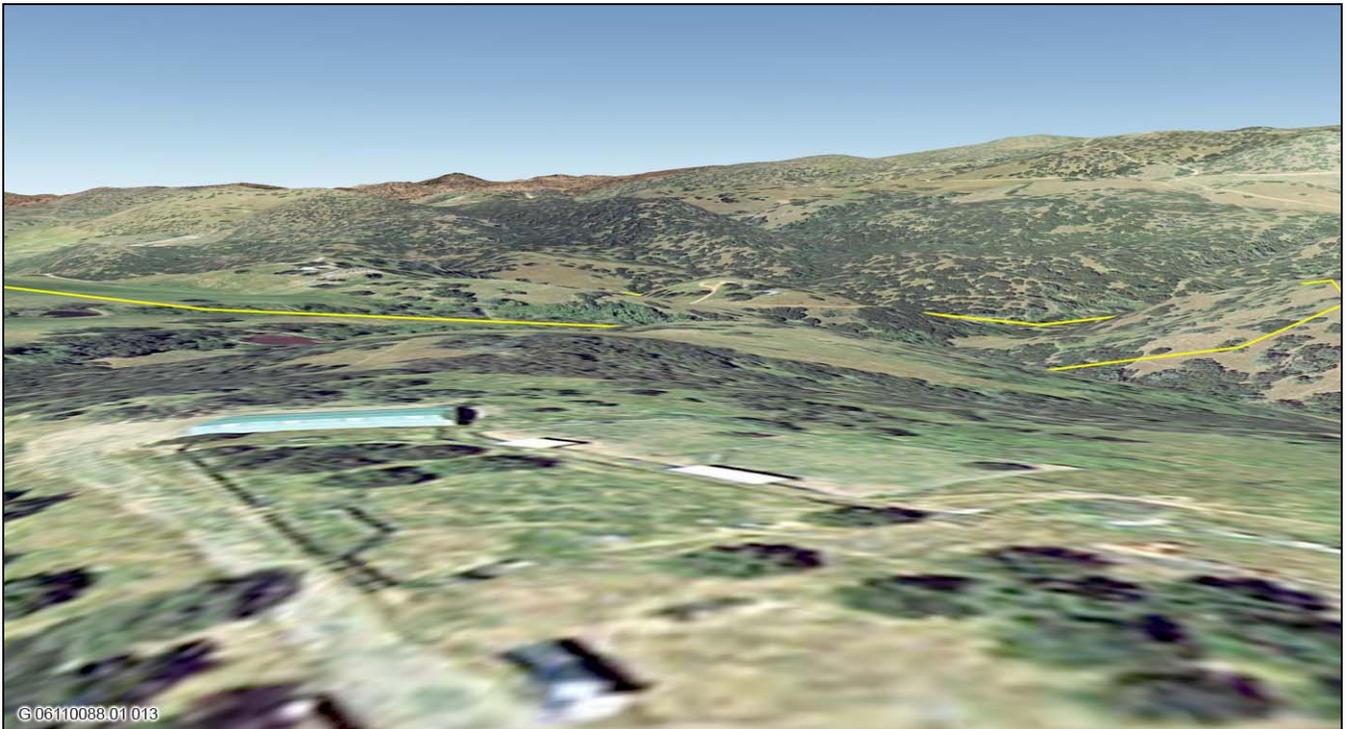
**Exhibit 7-4**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Northeast from Key Observation Point 2**

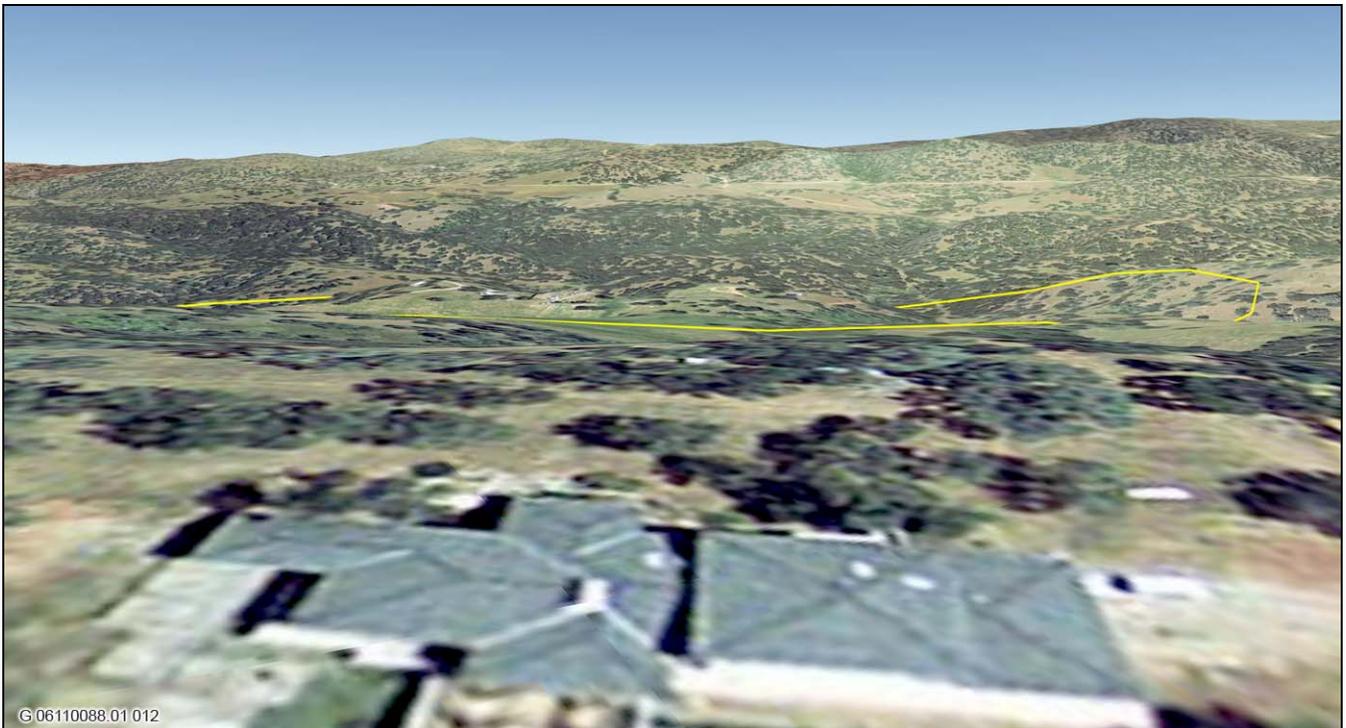
**Exhibit 7-5**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking North from Key Observation Point 3**

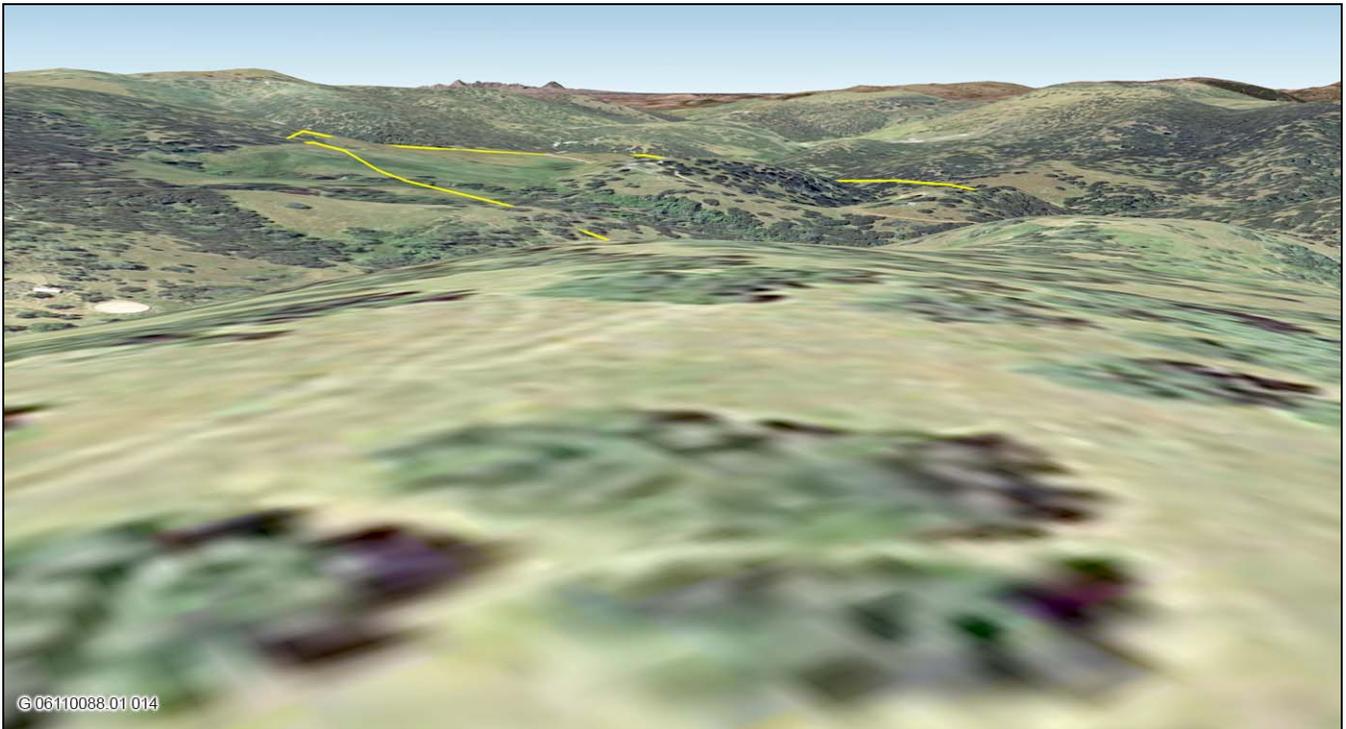
**Exhibit 7-6**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking North from Key Observation Point 4**

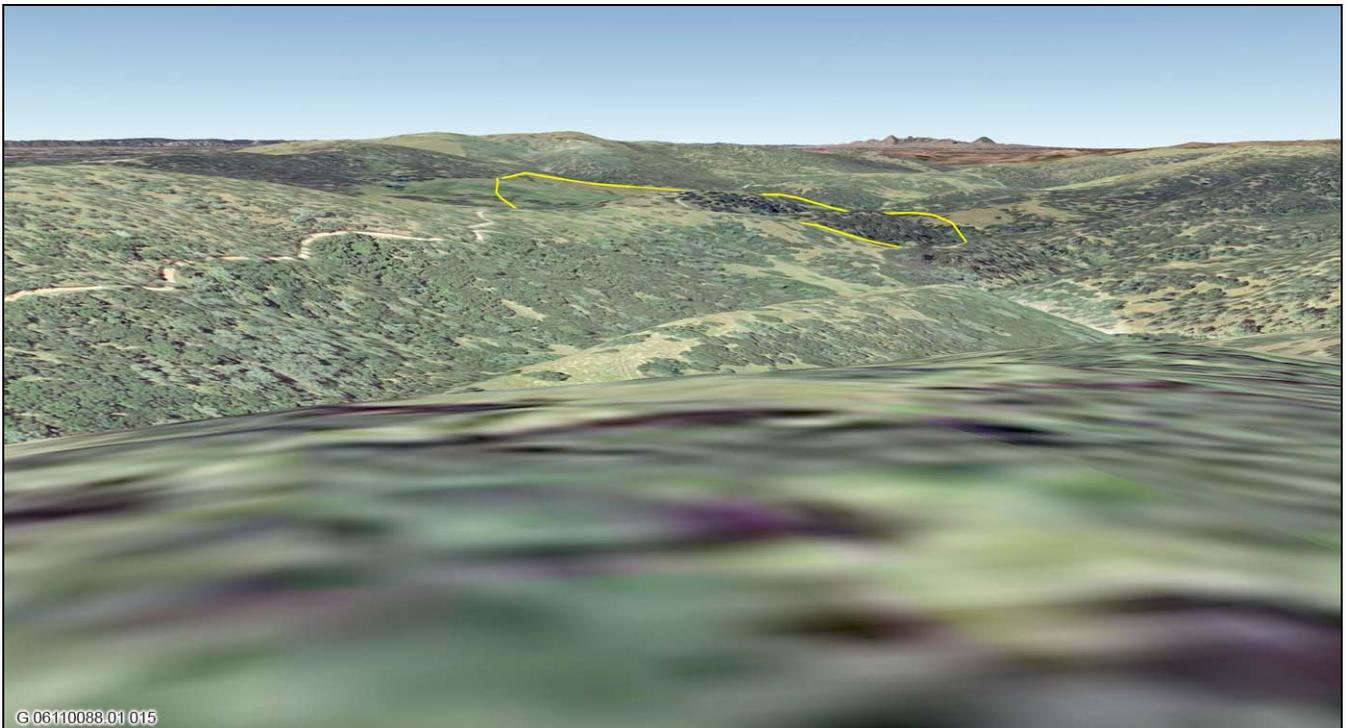
**Exhibit 7-7**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Northwest from Key Observation Point 5**

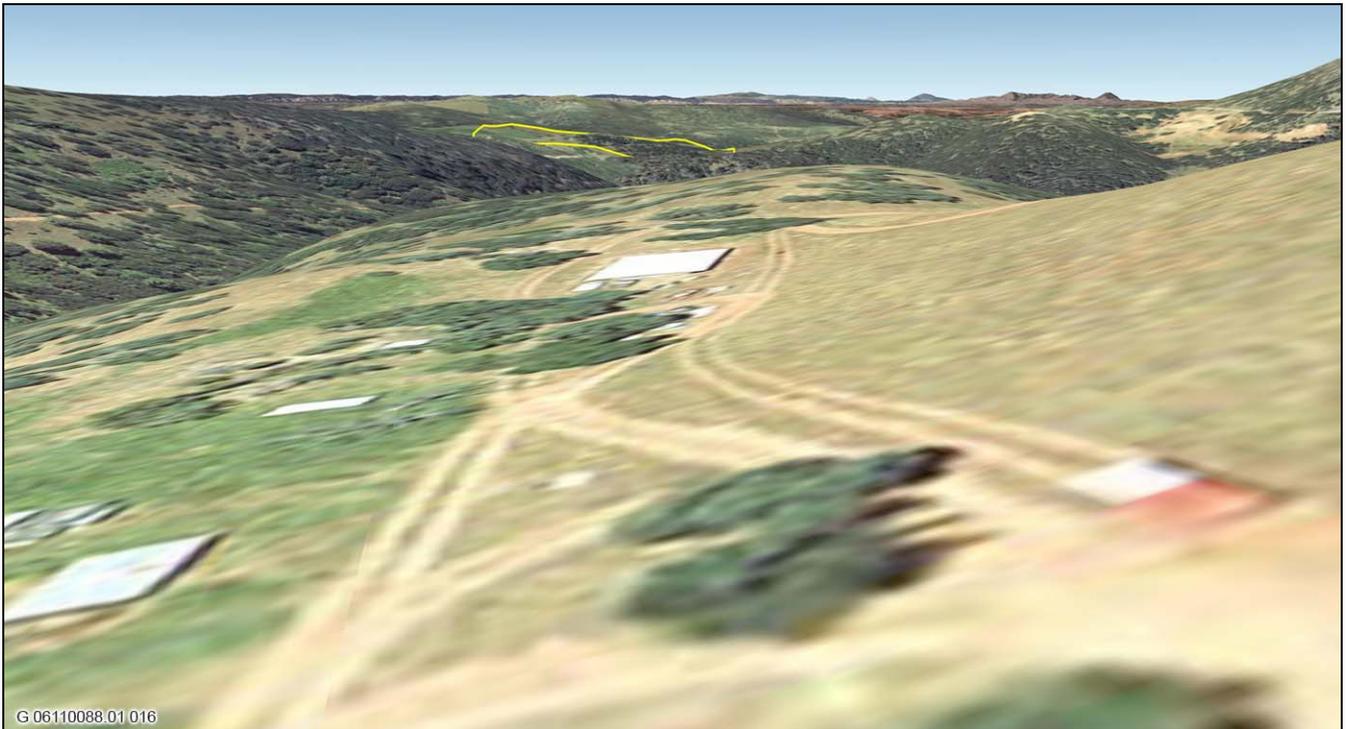
**Exhibit 7-8**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Northwest from Key Observation Point 6**

**Exhibit 7-9**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking West from Key Observation Point 7**

**Exhibit 7-10**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Southwest from Key Observation Point 8**

**Exhibit 7-11**

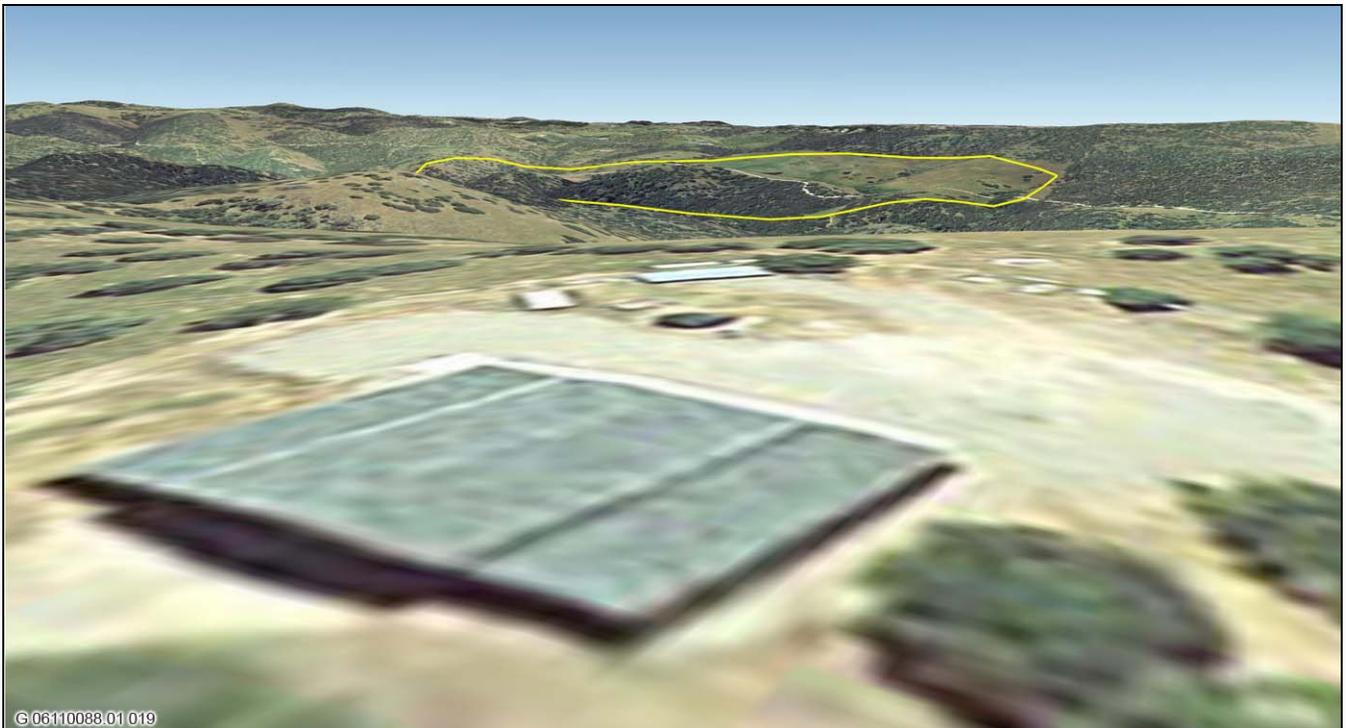


G 06110088.01 018

Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Southwest from Key Observation Point 9**

**Exhibit 7-12**

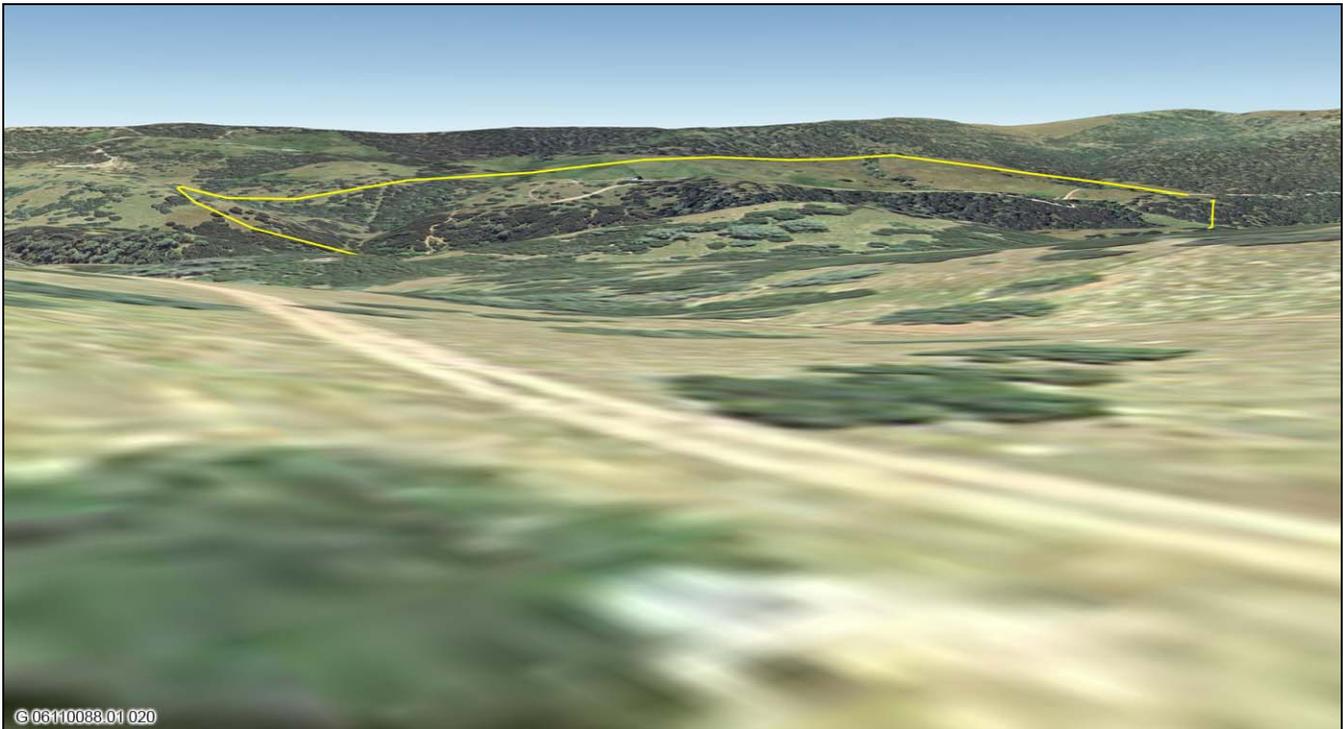


G 06110088.01 019

Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Southeast from Key Observation Point 10**

**Exhibit 7-13**



Source: Google Earth Pro 2008

**Simulated View of Facility Development Zone –  
View Looking Southwest from Key Observation Point 11**

**Exhibit 7-14**

For each of the KOPs shown above, the facility development zone is outlined in yellow. The facility development zone is the location where major facility development within the Park is proposed to occur. As shown in the KOPs, the facility development zone in the Park can be viewed from off-site locations, which primarily include rural residences located at a higher elevation than the project area. However, views from these KOPs are from a minimum 0.25-mile distance and include varying, rolling topography. The exhibits simulating the potential visibility from the KOPs show a digital representation of the surrounding topography, but do not show the surrounding vegetation (e.g., trees) or buildings in three-dimensional images. Intervening vegetation plays an important role in screening potential views of the facility development zone from surrounding homes.

As mentioned previously, only one residence is visible from the Spears Ranch portion of the Park because of the heavy vegetation within and surrounding the project area, including near the homes in some cases. Line of sight to a home from within the facility development zone is a good indicator of visibility from the home back to the zone. The 11 KOPs show the facility development zone in the Park as being potentially visible, because the depiction only takes into account the topography. However, vegetation adjacent to a KOP, between a KOP and the project area, and within the project area would partially or completely obscure views of the project area. Several rural residences have views of the existing facilities within the Didion Ranch portion of the Park including the existing parking area. However, these views are also largely obscured by vegetation and diminished by the view distance.

Construction activities occurring along Garden Bar Road would be visible at numerous locations along Garden Bar Road, including from residences along the road. Therefore, specific KOPs were not identified. Improvements to Garden Bar Road would also require removal of trees adjacent to the roadway. Potential impacts to the overall visual character along Garden Bar Road are analyzed in Impact 7-3 below.

## 7.2 REGULATORY SETTING

### 7.2.1 FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

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

### 7.2.2 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 20 miles northeast of the project area, has been deemed eligible for listing as a scenic highway but has not been officially designated (Caltrans 2007). No portions of the project area are visible from State Route 49.

### 7.2.3 LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

#### PLACER COUNTY GENERAL PLAN

The following are the relevant goals and policies identified by the *Placer County General Plan* (General Plan) (Placer County 1994) for visual resources, including scenic routes.

**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:
  - avoids locating structures along ridgelines and steep slopes;
  - incorporates design and screening measures to minimize the visibility of structures and graded areas; and
  - maintains the character and visual quality of the area.
- ▶ **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.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.

## 7.3 IMPACTS

### 7.3.1 ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

This visual impact analysis is based on a field survey, review of aerial photographs, and a review of existing KOPs of the area (Exhibit 7-2) 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. A site reconnaissance of the study area was conducted on July 28, 2007.

### 7.3.2 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 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 scenic vistas or scenic highways in the project area that could be affected by the proposed project. Therefore, these issues are not discussed further.

### 7.3.3 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 proposed project facilities (e.g., bridges, trails, viewing boardwalk, 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.*

**Significance**    *Less than Significant*

**Mitigation Proposed**    *None Warranted*

**Residual Significance**    *Less than Significant*

Construction of the proposed project facilities would result in minor changes to the visual character of the project area and the Didion Ranch portion of the Park as a result of vegetation removal and other construction activities. Specifically, construction activities occurring along and associated with improving Garden Bar Road would place

construction vehicles and workers within visual range of residences located near Garden Bar Road. Construction activities would also be visible to travelers along Garden Bar Road.

Residences and travelers along Garden Bar Road would have unobstructed views of construction activities occurring along Garden Bar Road because of their close proximity (within 200 feet). Although views of construction activities are not a common occurrence along Garden Bar Road, the number of viewers would be relatively small, because of the remote location. In addition, construction activities would not occur along the entire stretch of Garden Bar Road at the same time, but would occur at a specific location for a temporary time period then move to another specific location and time period. Construction activities would most likely exceed viewers' expectations for Garden Bar Road; however, construction activities would result only in a short-term change of views along Garden Bar Road. Therefore, construction impacts associated with improving Garden Bar Road would be less than significant.

Specific to the Park, crew members and their vehicles would be present on-site along with a Sweco trail dozer and/or other construction equipment during project construction. Some vegetation would be cleared during construction of trail and road alignments. The proposed trail and road alignments would bypass as many trees as possible, particularly native oaks greater than 6 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh). All cut vegetation would be chipped or lopped and broadcast to the area surrounding the proposed trail and road alignments.

Similar to the construction of trails and roads, construction of site-specific structures (e.g., picnic areas, bridges, viewing boardwalk, information kiosk, restrooms), parking areas, and improvements to the access road from Garden Bar Road would place construction crew members and equipment in the project area. Construction crew members and equipment would also be present near the existing parking area within the Didion Ranch portion of the Park. Some vegetation would be cleared during construction of structures and parking areas. However, these facilities and improvements would avoid trees when possible, particularly native oaks greater than 6 inches dbh. Any cut vegetation would be chipped and broadcast to the area surrounding the structures and parking areas.

Views of construction activities occurring within the Spears Ranch portion of the Park 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. Although occupants of nearby residences, as shown in KOPs exhibits above (see Section 7.1.2), appear to have clear views of the project area, the topography, trees, and dense foliage surrounding these residences and located between the residences and the project area obstruct views towards the project area. However, one KOP (refer to Exhibit 7-2 and KOP 2 in Exhibit 7-3) would have a clear view of the facility development zone within the Park and several residences would have views of expansion of the Didion Ranch parking area and associated helistop relocation. Although there would be some views of construction activities in the Park, the number of viewers would be relatively small because of the remote location and dense vegetation. 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 period then move to a different location for another time period. Construction activities would alter the short-term views of the project area. However, because visibility of construction activity is a temporary impact and the views are at least partially obscured by topography and vegetation, this is considered to be less than significant.

**IMPACT**      **Visual Resources—Long-Term Changes in Visual Resources Associated within the Proposed**  
**7-2**              **Regional Park.** *The proposed project would introduce new physical elements into the landscape; however, the proposed facilities of the Park (e.g., bridges, trails, viewing boardwalk, restroom, picnic areas, expanded parking area) would be in a remote location, avoiding visually obtrusive effects.*

**Significance**    *Less than Significant*

Mitigation *None Warranted*  
Proposed

Residual *Less than Significant*  
Significance

The Park is located in a remote area and visibility from off-site locations is limited because of intervening, dense vegetation and topography. As shown in KOPs (see Section 7.1.2 above), the project area may be viewed from off-site locations that primarily include rural residences located at a higher elevation than the proposed facilities. However, views from these KOPs include rolling topography, and do not show the existing vegetation. Several residences have views of the Didion Ranch parking area; however, a parking area exists in this area and expansion of this area would be small (i.e., 0.35 acre) and would be consistent with existing views. Relocation of the existing helistop on the Didion Ranch portion of the Park to adjacent to the parking area would cause a change in views; however, it would be consistent with existing views of the parking area. The area disturbed by construction would be revegetated following construction and views of the Didion Ranch facilities would be partially screened by vegetation and/or distance. In addition, only one residence has a line of sight into the facility development zone of the Park, because of the heavy vegetation within and surrounding the project area. Therefore, the proposed Park would not be prominently visible from off-site locations and would not cause a substantial change in long-range views from the surrounding area. Park facilities would not be located near any scenic rock outcrops and would incorporate natural colors and materials such as stone, rock, and wood, consistent with the natural character of the project area.

The one KOP (i.e., residence) with an unobstructed view of the Spears Ranch portion of the Park (refer to KOP 2 in Section 7.1.2) has a distant view of the existing ranch house because an open field is located between this KOP and the Park and the intervening topography descends. This building and several other existing structures in the project area would be retained and converted to Park facilities (e.g., caretaker's residence) and several new structures (i.e., bunkhouses) would be constructed in this area. The use of existing buildings on-site and construction of several new buildings would not significantly change the overall views from any of the KOPs. Other facilities associated with the Park (e.g., bridges, information kiosk, restrooms, trails) would not be easily visible from KOPs primarily because of distance and intervening vegetation. Specifically, the viewing boardwalk, caretaker residence, Didion Ranch parking area and helistop, information kiosk, and vehicle crossing located in the central portion of the project area (see Exhibit 3-3) would be the only structures or facilities visible to off-site KOPs, because these structures or facilities would be located in an open area of the Park. Structures constructed outside of the facility development zone including picnic pavilions and vault toilets would be placed in such a manner as to provide visual screening from neighboring homes.

Although facilities and structures associated with the project may be partially visible from several off-site locations, structures and facilities associated with the proposed project would be constructed of similar material types and of similar size as currently found in the project area and, therefore, would be similar-in-nature to the type of structures viewers expect to see in the project area. 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 similar to existing views of structures (i.e., expectations) in the project area, implementation of the project would have a less-than-significant impact on long-term views of the project area.

**IMPACT**      **Visual Resources—Long-Term Changes in Visual Resources Associated with the Improvements to**  
**7-3**              **Garden Bar Road.** *The proposed project would widen Garden Bar Road which would require removal of existing trees. The removal of trees would result in a substantial physical change to the visual environment of the road and would occur within close proximity of viewers, including adjacent residents.*

Significance *Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *Mitigation Measure 7-1: Revegetate and Restore All Disturbed Areas to Minimize Visual Quality Impacts; and Mitigation Measure 12-8 in Chapter 12.0, "Biological Resources": Protect Oak Woodland Habitat*

Residual Significance *Significant and Unavoidable*

Widening of Garden Bar Road would change the visual character of the project area as a result of vegetation removal from construction activities. Specifically, widening associated with improving Garden Bar Road for access to the Park would require removal of numerous existing trees. The widening is 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, a large number of trees would need to be removed (between 100 and 250, depending on the final roadway design). The precise number of trees to be removed is not yet known, because detailed engineering design would be required before a specific inventory of affected trees could be conducted. The majority of potential oak tree removal would be within the Spears Ranch portion of the Park and the densely-vegetated area within 0.5-mile of the Spears entrance along Garden Bar Road. Although Garden Bar Road is not a scenic highway or scenic vista, existing views from adjacent residences and travelers along Garden Bar Road would change. The views of trees lining Garden Bar Road are important in creating the aesthetic character of the project area for travelers on the road and local residents. These views could be changed indefinitely. Therefore, changes to the scenic character of Garden Bar Road would be a significant impact. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 7-1 and 12-8 would reduce this impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. This impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

IMPACT 7-4 *Visual Resources—Increased Light and Glare. The proposed Park would include some security lighting and lighting at the caretaker's residence. However, the lighting in the project area would not change substantially compared to existing lighting.*

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation Proposed *None Warranted*

Residual Significance *Less than Significant*

The proposed Park would include lighting at buildings, including the caretaker's residence, restrooms, bunkhouses, and existing ranch house. Security lighting would also be included at the parking area located at the western-most portion of the Park (see Exhibit 3-3, "Project Description"). No other lighting would be included as part of the project. Security lighting and lighting used at the caretaker's residence is anticipated to be similar to lighting that has been used by the previous resident at the existing ranch house. Similarly, lighting provided as part of the project is anticipated to be similar to the brightness and scale of lighting currently used at the rural residences in the surrounding area. The County would use lighting that is low wattage and directed downward to minimize excess glare or skyglow. Occasional campfires may also create localized nighttime lighting; however, the lighting would be minimal and would be limited to the camp area within the facility development zone.

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.

## **7.4 MITIGATION MEASURES**

*Mitigation Measure 7-1 applies to Impact 7-3*

### **Mitigation Measure 7-1: Revegetate and Restore All Disturbed Areas to Minimize Visual Quality Impacts.**

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.

Implementation of Mitigation Measures 7-1 and 12-8 would reduce the impact related to visual resources, but not to a less-than-significant level. This impact would remain significant and unavoidable.