4.2 VISUAL RESOURCES

This section includes definitions of visual resource management guidelines, a description of the existing visual condition in the project area, and an analysis of potential short- and long-term impacts associated with implementation of the action alternatives.

Much of the visual resource analysis that follows involves discussion of the project area's Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs); VQOs provide a tool for the Forest Service to define how a landscape will be managed, the level of acceptable modification permitted in the area, and under what circumstances modification may be allowed. VQOs direct visual resource management only on National Forest System (NFS) lands and are not applicable to portions of the project area that occur on private lands. Refer to Section 4.2.2.1 for a detailed description of VQOs and how they are incorporated into this analysis; if the reader is unfamiliar with VQOs and associated terminology, it is recommended to review this section first.

4.2.1 Affected Environment

4.2.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Regional Characteristic Landscape

The Squaw Valley Ski Area (Squaw Valley) and Alpine Meadows Ski Area (Alpine Meadows) are located in the eastern portion of the Sierra Nevada within the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) and unincorporated Placer County (see Exhibit 1-1 in Chapter 1, "Introduction"). Elevations in the TNF range from approximately 1,200 feet on the western edge of the forest to over 9,000 feet along the Sierra Nevada crest (U.S. Forest Service 1990). Lake Tahoe, an important scenic resource, is approximately 5 miles southeast of the ski areas along State Route (SR) 89, a scenic byway designated by the State of California. The region is generally characterized by high granite peaks, including alpine terrain, separated by forested lower elevations. Important natural features seen in the lower elevations include forests of pine trees, scattered scrub, and riparian vegetation communities that occupy the valley floor.

Project Area Characteristic Landscape

The existing conditions of the project area characteristic landscape are described below and are used as a basis of comparison for the viewpoint and viewshed analyses that follow (the viewpoint and viewshed analyses are described below in Section 4.2.2.1).

The project area for visual resources is defined as the project viewshed, which includes Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows, nearby residential areas, roadways, dispersed recreation trails, and the National Forest System-Granite Chief Wilderness (GCW).

Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows

The summit elevations of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows are approximately 9,050 feet and 8,640 feet, respectively. The topography and vegetation of the ski areas are composed of steep mountain slopes and basins at higher elevations, and valleys of conifer forests intersected by various commercial and residential developments at lower elevations in and around the ski areas. Ski area development, including ski runs, lifts, and other infrastructure, is highly apparent from within both ski areas and from surrounding NFS lands (see Exhibit 4.2-1). This type of development is particularly visible when viewed from the foreground distance zone; however, this type of development is also visible in the middleground and background distance zones (when not obstructed by existing vegetation or topography) (distance zones defined below, in Section 4.2.2.1). It is important to note the difference in visibility between ski runs and ski lift infrastructure such as towers, ropes, and terminals from the various distance zones. Ski runs are much more visible from the middleground and background distance zones than ski lift infrastructure because ski runs require the wholesale clearing of vegetation, which creates considerable contrast with the adjacent and undisturbed

natural landscapes. This contrast is particularly apparent during the winter when white snow-covered runs are surrounded by darker-colored trees and forest stands. Ski lift infrastructure is minimally visible from the middleground distance zone and is generally not noticeable from the background distance zone, because at these distances, installed infrastructure does not create substantial contrast with the surrounding and undisturbed landscape, and as a result is hardly discernable.

Exhibit 4.2-1 Highly Visible Ski Area Development (Existing Conditions), as Seen from Squaw Valley Base Area

<u>The Caldwell Property and National Forest System-GCW</u>

Between Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows is a private parcel referred to as the Caldwell property, and to the west of the Caldwell property lies the National Forest System-GCW, a federally designated wilderness area that is managed by the Forest Service (refer to Exhibit 1-2 in Chapter 1, "Introduction," for location). The topography found within the Caldwell property and National Forest System-GCW is very similar to the topography found at Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows; the landscape is characterized by steep, granite cliffs separated by heavily vegetated valleys (see Exhibit 4.2-2). The National Forest System-GCW is currently undeveloped and is particularly valued for its unrefined, scenic characteristics. No development associated with the project would occur on National Forest System-GCW land; however, portions of the project would be visible from these lands. The National Forest System-GCW offers excellent opportunities for backcountry skiing in the winter, but experiences much lighter use compared to the warmer months because of its remote location and the fact that the area is not immediately lift-served, but rather requires hiking to access. Additional information on the National Forest System-GCW can be found in Section 4.3, "Wilderness."

The Five Lakes Trail, which provides the public with access to the National Forest System-GCW via an access easement on the Caldwell property, is frequently used by recreationists for hiking and/or backpacking in the summer. The Five Lakes Trail is one of the most popular trails on the TNF. On the Five Lakes Trail, hikers ascend for about 1,200 feet over the span of less than 2 miles to access the National Forest System-GCW and enjoy expansive views of Alpine Meadows and the surrounding mountains along the way.

Exhibit 4.2-2 Looking Southwest onto Ridge That Separates Caldwell Property and National Forest System-GCW (Existing Conditions)

Viewpoint Locations

For this analysis, 16 viewpoint locations have been identified to provide a representative sampling of the views within the study area. These were selected from hundreds of viewpoints evaluated, as it would have been impractical to document visual impacts from every location in the viewshed. Selected viewpoints were chosen to provide vantage points from highly frequented or prominent public areas, visually sensitive vistas, and areas with a high frequency of viewers. Five of these (including one site along Alpine Meadows Road, two sites at the Alpine Meadows base terminal, and two sites along Squaw Valley Road) experience widely varying conditions between the winter and summer months. As a result, these five viewpoint locations were analyzed during both summer and winter conditions, which resulted in a total of 21 views being selected for detailed viewpoint analysis (i.e., five of the 16 viewpoints have both a summer view and a winter view provided from the same location).

Visual simulations of the project under each Alternative were then created for each of the 21 selected views (discussed in more detail below). The existing condition for each view is described here. Numeric viewpoint locations are presented in Exhibit 4.2-3. Existing condition photos for each of the views can be found in Appendix D.

Views 1 and 2 – Alpine Meadows Road (Winter and Summer, Facing West)

The Alpine Meadows Road viewpoint looks westward onto the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figures D-1a and D-2a). In the foreground, the only development that can be seen from this viewpoint is the road itself, and the power poles and power lines that run parallel to it. In the winter setting, most of the hills surrounding Alpine Meadows Road are covered in snow. In the summer, no snow is visible whatsoever from the Alpine Meadows Road viewpoint; viewers can see an undeveloped ridgeline and the sparsely vegetated hillside below it, and the road is visible as a grey linear feature that contrasts with the dark green of surrounding vegetation. Most of the viewers at this location would be driving or biking and would experience this view for only several seconds, depending on mode of travel.

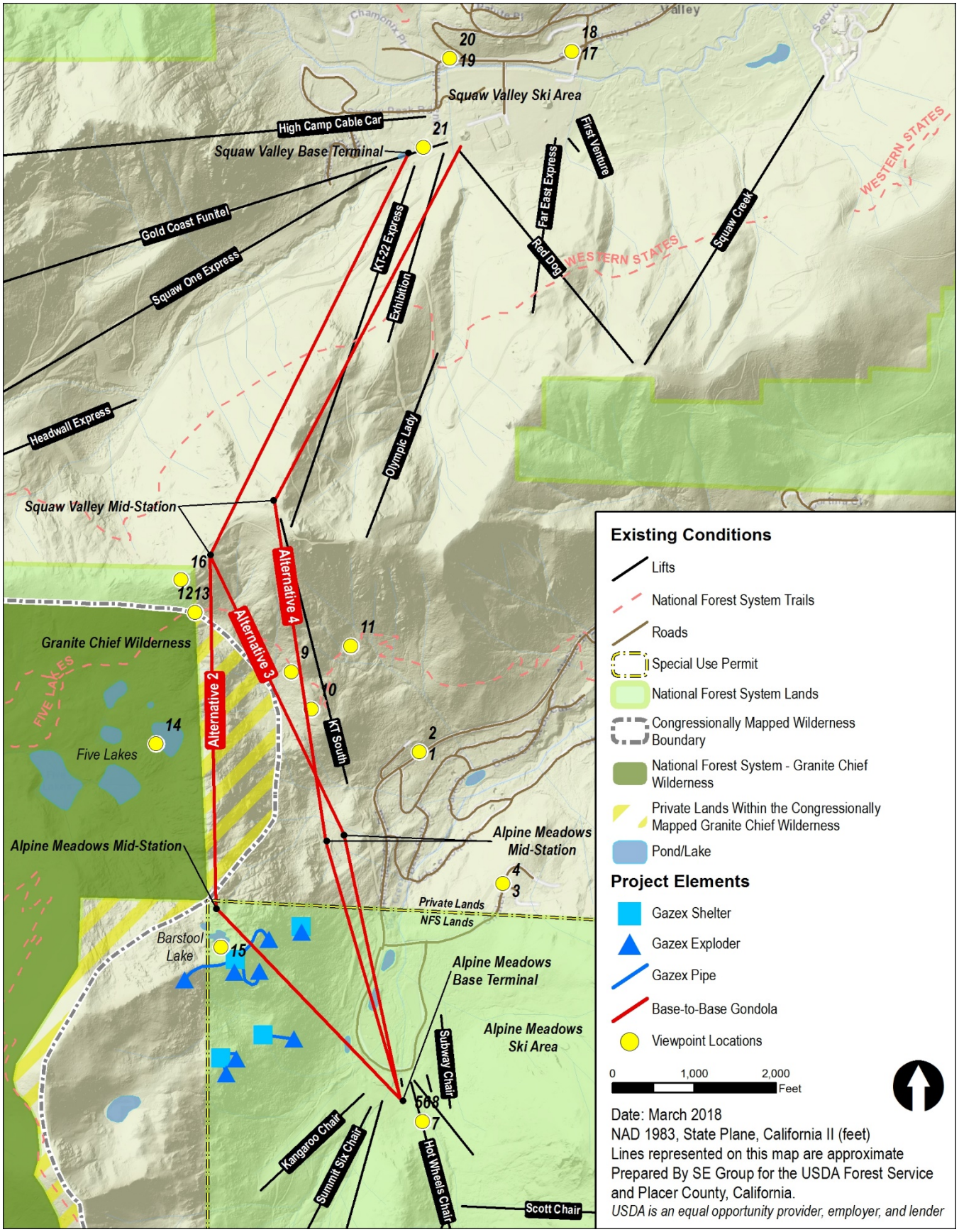

Exhibit 4.2-3 Viewpoint Locations

View 3 – Chalet Road (Summer, Facing West)
The Chalet Road (west) viewpoint looks westward onto the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-3a). Viewers can see extensive tree cover in the foreground. In the middleground, viewers can see an undeveloped ridgeline and the sparsely vegetated hillside below it. The only development that can be seen from this viewpoint are some electrical lines in the foreground. Most of the viewers at this location would be driving or biking and would experience this view for only several seconds, depending on mode of travel.

View 4 – Chalet Road (Summer, Facing Northwest)
The Chalet Road (northwest) viewpoint looks onto the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-4a). Viewers can see extensive tree cover in the foreground. In the middleground, viewers can see an undeveloped ridgeline and the sparsely vegetated hillside below it. Some power lines and associated infrastructure, along with a few residences situated along this road, can be seen in the foreground. Most of the viewers at this location would be driving or biking and would experience this view for only several seconds, depending on mode of travel.

View 5 – Alpine Meadows Base Terminal (Winter, Facing Northwest)
The Alpine Meadows base terminal (northwest) viewpoint looks onto the Alpine Meadows base area and the hillside behind it (see Figure D-5a). The terminals of the Summit Six, Kangaroo, and Roundhouse lifts, along with the main lodge and other base area infrastructure can be seen from this viewpoint in the foreground. In the middleground, viewers can see the beginning of the ridge that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. In the winter, most of the base area and surrounding topography is covered in snow, and visible ski trails readily contrast with the surrounding winter vegetation. Most of the viewers at this location would be skiers, and duration of their view would range from several minutes for those getting on a chairlift, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

View 6 – Alpine Meadows Base Terminal (Summer, Facing Northwest)
The Alpine Meadows base terminal (northwest) viewpoint looks onto the Alpine Meadows base area and the hillside behind it (see Figure D-6a). The terminals of the Summit Six, Kangaroo, and Roundhouse lifts, along with the main lodge and other base area infrastructure can be seen from this viewpoint in the foreground. In the middleground, viewers can see the beginning of the ridge that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. In the summer, the hills are heavily vegetated with exposed granite visible above. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers or bikers, and duration of their view would range from several minutes for those heading uphill, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

View 7 – Alpine Meadows Base Terminal (Winter, Facing North)
The Alpine Meadows base terminal (north) viewpoint looks onto the Alpine Meadows base area and the topography to its north side (see Figure D-7a). The Meadow Chair, the main lodge, the parking lot, and other base area infrastructure can be seen from this viewpoint in the foreground. In the middleground, viewers can see the beginning of the ridge that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. In the winter, most of the base area and surrounding topography are covered in snow, and visible ski trails readily contrast with the surrounding winter vegetation. Most of the viewers at this location would be skiers, and duration of their view would range from several minutes for those getting on a chairlift, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

View 8 – Alpine Meadows Base Terminal (Summer, Facing North)
The Alpine Meadows base terminal (north) viewpoint looks onto the Alpine Meadows base area and the topography to its north side (see Figure D-8a). The Meadow Chair, the main lodge, the parking lot, and other base area infrastructure can be seen from this viewpoint in the foreground. In the middleground, viewers can see the beginning of the ridge that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. In the summer, the topography is heavily vegetated with exposed granite visible. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers or bikers, and duration of their view would range from several minutes for those heading uphill, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

View 9 – Five Lakes Trail Switchback 1 (Summer, Facing North)
The Five Lakes Trail Switchback 1 viewpoint looks northwest onto the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-9a). In the foreground is the Five Lakes Trail itself, a hillside with large trees and scattered vegetation, with exposed granite visible near the ridgeline above. A small powerline on the very top of the ridgeline is visible from this viewpoint. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers heading into the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes, depending on hikers' ascent speed; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 10 – Five Lakes Trail Switchback 2 (Summer, Facing West)
The Five Lakes Trail Switchback 2 viewpoint looks west onto the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-10a). In the foreground, viewers can see large trees and scattered vegetation on the lower parts of the hillside, and a considerable amount of exposed granite with some scattered vegetation further up, just below the ridgeline. No development whatsoever is visible from this viewpoint. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers heading into the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes, depending on hikers' ascent speed; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 11 – Five Lakes Trail Water Break Hill (Summer, Facing Southwest)
The Five Lakes Trail Water Break Hill viewpoint looks southwest onto the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-11a). In the foreground, viewers can see large trees, scattered vegetation, and some exposed granite visible along the ridge and all over the hillside. In the middleground, viewers can see *the Buttress* area at Alpine Meadows and several of the lift towers that are part of the incomplete and private chairlift on the Caldwell property. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers heading into the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes, depending on hikers' ascent speed; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 12 – Five Lakes Trail Wilderness Boundary 1 (Summer, Facing South)
The Five Lakes Trail Wilderness Boundary 1 viewpoint looks south toward Alpine Meadows from the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-12a). In the foreground, viewers can see large trees, scattered vegetation, and some exposed granite visible along this ridge and all over the hillside. No development whatsoever is visible from this viewpoint. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers heading into the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes, depending on hikers' ascent speed; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 13 – Five Lakes Trail/Wilderness Boundary 2 (Summer, Facing East)
The Five Lakes Trail Wilderness Boundary 2 viewpoint looks east toward the Caldwell property from the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-13a). In the foreground, viewers can see large pine trees, scattered vegetation, and some exposed granite visible all over the hillside. No development whatsoever is visible from this viewpoint. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers heading into the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes, depending on hikers' ascent speed; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 14 – Five Lakes Granite Chief Wilderness (Summer, Facing East)
The Five Lakes Granite Chief Wilderness viewpoint looks east toward the Caldwell property and Squaw Valley (see Figure D-14a). In the foreground, viewers can see one of the Five Lakes, and large pine trees, scattered vegetation, and some exposed granite surrounding the lake. No development whatsoever is visible from this viewpoint. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers in the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would range from several minutes to several hours; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 15 – Barstool Lake (Summer, Facing Northeast)
The Barstool Lake viewpoint looks northeast from the top of the ridge that separates the Caldwell property and the National Forest System-GCW (see Figure D-15a). This viewpoint is located on NFS lands that are within the Alpine Meadows special use permit (SUP) boundary. In the foreground, viewers can see Barstool Lake, and large trees, scattered vegetation, and some exposed granite surrounding the lake. No development whatsoever is visible from this viewpoint. Most of the viewers at this location would be hikers within Alpine Meadows or who have just exited the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would range from several minutes to several hours; these hikers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

View 16 – Squaw Saddle (Winter, Facing Southeast)
The Squaw Saddle viewpoint looks southeast from the saddle that separates the National Forest System-GCW and Squaw Valley (see Figure D-16a). Viewers can see large trees, scattered vegetation, and some exposed granite all over the hills in the foreground and middleground. In the background, viewers can see some parking and base area infrastructure for Alpine Meadows. Most of the viewers from this location would be skiers at Squaw Valley, and duration of their view would likely range from seconds to minutes, depending on how long viewers remain before skiing back down to the Squaw Valley base area; these skiers generally have a high sensitivity toward the natural appearing and undeveloped landscape visible from this viewpoint.

Views 17 and 18– Squaw Valley Road (Winter and Summer, Facing Southwest)
This Squaw Valley Road viewpoint looks southwest onto the base area of Squaw Valley (see Figures D-17a and D-18a). In the foreground, viewers can see various residences, powerlines, and Squaw Valley Road itself. In the middleground, viewers can see lifts extending out of the base area. In the winter, most of the valley is covered in snow with large trees visible throughout the hillsides. In the summer, the valley is characterized by large trees, scattered vegetation, and exposed granite in the upper reaches of the hillsides. Compared to winter, when snow-covered ski trails contrast with the surrounding green vegetation, ski trails in the summer comprise various shades of green that exhibit less contrast with the darker green of surrounding vegetation. Most of the viewers at this location would be driving or biking and would experience this view for only several seconds, depending on mode of travel.

Views 19 and 20 – Squaw Valley Road (Winter and Summer, Facing South by Southwest)
This Squaw Valley Road viewpoint looks south/southwest onto the base area of Squaw Valley (see Figures D-19a and D-20a). In the foreground, viewers can see various residences, powerlines, Squaw Valley Road itself, the parking lot. In the middleground, viewers can see chairlifts like KT-22 Express Exhibition Chair, and the Gold Coast Funitel extending out of the base area. In the winter, most of the valley is covered in snow with large trees visible throughout the hillsides. In the summer, scattered vegetation and exposed granite is visible all over the hillsides. Most of the viewers at this location would be driving or biking and would experience this view for only several seconds, depending on mode of travel.

View 21 – KT Sundeck/Condo Area (Summer)
The KT Sundeck/Condo Area viewpoint looks west from the base area of Squaw Valley (see Figure D-21a). In the foreground, viewers can see the area cleared and paved for the deck, powerlines, several lifts, large trees, scattered vegetation, and exposed granite higher up on the hillsides. Most of the viewers at this location would be guests at the Squaw Valley base area, and duration of their view would likely range from minutes to hours, depending on guests' activities.

4.2.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

Federal

Built Environment Image Guide
The Built Environment Image Guide (BEIG) is a manual for the "thoughtful design and management" of the built environment contained within the National Forests (U.S. Forest Service 2001). The Forest Service defines the built environment as "the administrative and recreation buildings, landscape structures, site

furnishings, structures on roads and trails, and signs installed or operated by the Forest Service, its cooperators, and permittees" (U.S. Forest Service 2001). All relevant guidelines in the BEIG must be referenced and adhered to for any development occurring on NFS lands. The BEIG divides the U.S. into eight provinces and combines common elements from the ecological and cultural contexts over large geographical areas; the TNF is within the North Pacific Province. Site development, sustainability, and architectural character should conform to BEIG guidelines described for this Province. The architectural guidelines for this Province include siting, massing and scale, base, walls, windows and openings, roofs, structure, materials, color, sustainability and synthesis of structures with their settings. Refer to the BEIG for design guidelines relevant to the North Pacific Province (and those that are applicable to all provinces).

Tahoe National Forest Plan and Resource Management Plan and Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment

The Tahoe National Forest Plan and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (U.S. Forest Service 1990) directs management of the TNF. The Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Record of Decision Final Supplemental EIS (SNFPA) (U.S. Forest Service 2004) amended the LRMP in 2004. The LRMP and SNFPA, collectively referred to as the Forest Plan, established standards and guidelines related to visual resources. As part of the analysis conducted for this Draft EIS/EIR, these standards and guidelines were applied and evaluated for consistency.

The Forest Plan subdivides the TNF into numerous management areas to provide management strategies that are well-tailored to specific areas. The project area for the Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows Base-to-Base Gondola Project lies within management area 086 – Scott (Scott Management Area). For the Scott Management Area, one of the provided policies under standards and guidelines directly relates to the established VQOs in the area:

> Visual Quality Objective – Partial retention [applies] for upslope facilities and ski runs. Modification [applies] for base facilities, campgrounds, [and within the developed sites]. The sites will, however, meet the partial retention VQO when viewed as middleground from travel routes and other occupancy sites. Partial retention [applies] for acres seen in the foreground from subdivisions.

The Forest Plan provides additional detail for the *Partial Retention* and *Modification* VQOs that is specific to the TNF (U.S. Forest Service 1990):

> Partial Retention: Duration of visual impact reduction in form, line, color, and texture to meet Partial Retention VQO should be accomplished as soon after project completion as possible or at a minimum within the first year.
>
> Modification: Duration of visual impact reduction in form, line, color, and texture should be accomplished in the first year or at a minimum should meet existing regional guidelines.

Full definitions of these applied VQOs are provided below, in Section 4.2.2.1.

State

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 (Caltrans). 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 how much of the natural landscape travelers can see, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view (Caltrans 2011).

The California Scenic Highway Program includes a list of highways eligible to become, or designated as, official scenic highways; and includes a process for designation of official state or county scenic highways. SR 89, which runs parallel to the Truckee River east of the project site, is an "Eligible" route under the

Scenic Highway Program (see Exhibit 1-2 in Chapter 1, "Introduction," for the land ownership breakdown of the project area) (Caltrans 2018).

Local

Placer County General Plan

The relevant goals and policies of the *Placer County General Plan* (Placer County 2013), with respect to visual resources, are listed below.

Visual and Scenic Resources

The overarching Goal 1.K for visual and scenic resources in the *Placer County General Plan* is 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" (Placer County 2013). The relevant policies intended to carry out this goal are listed below:

- **Policy 1.K.1.** The County shall require that new development in scenic areas (e.g., river canyons, lakes 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.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.3.** The County shall require that new development in rural areas incorporates landscaping that provides a transition between the vegetation in developed areas and adjacent open space or undeveloped areas.
- **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:
  - limit cuts and fills;
  - limit grading to the smallest practical area of land;
  - limit land exposure to the shortest practical amount of time;
  - replant graded areas to ensure establishment of plant cover before the next rainy season; and
  - create grading contours that blend with the natural contours on site or with contours on property immediately adjacent to the area of development; and,
  - 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:
  - 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;
  - include erosion and sediment control measures including temporary vegetation sufficient to stabilize disturbed areas;
  - minimize risk to life and property from slope failure, landslides, and flooding; and
  - maintain the character and visual quality of the hillside.

Scenic Routes

The project is in proximity to SR 89 and Squaw Valley Road, both of which were designated as scenic routes in the 1977 *Placer County General Plan Scenic Highway Element*. The goal for scenic routes in the *Placer County General Plan* is 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" (Placer County 2013). The relevant policies intended to carry out this goal are listed below:

- **Policy 1.L.2**. The County shall use scenic routes to link major points of historical and cultural interest and recreational activity within the County.
- **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.8.** The County shall include aesthetic design considerations in road construction, reconstruction, or maintenance for all scenic routes under County jurisdiction.

Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance

The *Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance* (SVGPLUO) (Placer County 2006) is a combined community plan and implementing document that was adopted in 1983 and last amended in 2006. The policies, objectives, recommendations, and standards contained in the SVGPLUO are intended to guide the development of Squaw Valley during the life of the SVGPLUO.

Purposes, Principles, and Goals of the Squaw Valley General Plan and Land Use Ordinance

According to the SVGPLUO, the purpose of the plan is to "establish a planning framework to ensure that Squaw Valley is developed into a top quality, year-round, destination resort. The Plan area shall have the capacity to serve and house the optimum number of tourists, visitors, and residents set forth in this Plan without adversely impacting [sic] the unique aesthetic and environmental assets of Squaw Valley" (Placer County 2006).

The SVGPLUO notes that the visual characteristics of the plan area can be divided into two categories of equal importance: natural features and human-made features.

The natural features are primarily the mountain slopes, peaks, the meadow and adjoining area, and the water courses. The SVGPLUO states that the "mountainous slopes, particularly those visible from the commercial village, Squaw Valley Road, and the single-family home subdivision along the north side of Squaw Valley Road, must be carefully managed to preserve their general forested appearance. Development should not be visually dominant in any area outside the commercial core" (Placer County 2006). The analysis notes that transition zones between two distinct landforms or visual features are important to preserve; these transition zones include meadow edges where forested slopes meet the Valley floor, and the transition area between stream and upland zones.

The SVGPLUO incorporates the protections afforded to scenic routes in the *Placer County General Plan*, as described above under "Scenic Routes."

Height Restrictions

The SVGPLUO contains the following height restrictions for these land use districts pertaining to buildings (Placer County 2006):

- Section 137.10. The maximum permitted height of structures within the Low Density Residential, Forest Recreation and Conservation Preserve Land Use districts shall be 30 feet; measured as the vertical distance from the highest point of the structure (excluding chimneys) to the average of the highest and lowest points where the exterior walls touch the natural grade.

- Section 137.12. The maximum average height of a building within the HOR, EC, AC, and HC Land Use districts shall not exceed 35'. To encourage sloped roofs, the average height shall be measured at the mid-point between the eave and ridge. The height shall be measured from the average finished grade under the building and parking levels contained within a structure shall not be counted in calculating height. (Advisory Comment: The intent of this regulation is to encourage sloping roofs, normally with a pitch greater than 5:12, it is not intended to permit tall, flat-roofed structures with low portions of the building used to average the overall height. The design review process can result in lower height limits being established where the intent of this section is not being met).

- Section 220.16. There will be no specific height limitations in this [Village Commercial] district, but height limits shall be set for particular developments through the design review process where other developed or developable parcels are affected by a proposed building.

Alpine Meadows General Plan

The *Alpine Meadows General Plan* serves as a master plan for future growth at the ski area. It includes plans for conservation, economics, housing, land use, public buildings, public services and facilities, recreation, and other plans relating to future development of the area. General goals, objectives, and procedures of the *Alpine Meadows General Plan* that are relevant to visual resources in the project area include the following (Placer County 1968):

- Maintain the open, natural, mountain-recreation character. All aspects of the vast, unique and outstanding physical beauty of the area must be consciously and continuously preserved.

In addition to this general goal, the *Alpine Meadows General Plan* addresses visual character of the area under Section B – Specific Approaches, Principles and Standards:

> Appearance: The outward manifestation of a successful planning program can best be observed in the environment that is created… The appearance of the total area must be as thoughtfully considered as the relationship of land uses. Since the basic "reason" for the area is still largely dependent on residential values, appearance is vital. In fact, the continuing quality of the overall appearance may dictate the degree of continuing attraction and prosperity. Special attention should be given to "little things" like directional signs, litter cans, fences, dead trees and signs. Architectural controls, as administered through both the County and Home's Association, must be established and maintained.

While this language does not establish any concrete standards that must be adhered to and instead offers recommendations for maintaining the quality of visual resources at the ski resort, it makes clear that maintenance of the area's stunning visual character is a priority for the managers of Alpine Meadows.

4.2.2 Analysis Methods

4.2.2.1 METHODS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Visual Management System

Since the mid-1970s, the Forest Service has utilized the Visual Management System (VMS) to measure the inherent visual quality of NFS lands. The VMS helps Forest Service managers evaluate the degree of alteration of NFS lands for use in inventory and management (U.S. Forest Service 1974). The Scenery Management System (SMS) was published in 1995 and is the most recent Forest Service system for managing scenery resources. However, the LRMP, discussed above, was published in 1990, so it utilizes the VMS to measure and manage inherent visual quality. For this reason, the VMS is used for this scenery analysis instead of the SMS.

Existing visual quality and changes to this condition are measured and assessed through a number of indicators related to the characteristic landscape, distance zones, and viewer sensitivity levels. The VMS describes these indicators as follows (U.S. Forest Service 1974):

- The characteristic landscape is the naturally established landscape being viewed. It visually represents the basic vegetative patterns, landforms, rock formations, and water forms which are in view. Dominance elements (form, line, color, and texture) are the simplest visual recognition elements which make up the characteristics landscape; an observer sees landscapes in terms of form, line, color, and texture.

- Distance zones are divisions of a particular landscape being viewed. The three distance zones are:

  - Foreground: the limit of this zone is based upon distances at which details can be perceived. Individual leaves, flowers, twigs, bark texture, and other details are visible closest to the observer, and individual boughs of trees form texture. For this analysis, foreground is defined as the area within 0.5 mile of the observer.

  - Middleground: Texture in this zone is normally characterized by the masses of trees in stands of uniform tree cover. Individual tree forms are usually discernible only in very open or sparse stands. For this analysis, middleground is defined as the area between 0.5 and 4.3 miles of the observer. Use of the Snellen eye chart helped to determine that a viewer would not be able to recognize project components from a distance greater than 4.3 miles.[1]

  - Background: This zone extends from middleground to infinity. Texture in stands of uniform tree cover is generally very weak or nonexistent. In this distance zone, line, form, and texture are generally not discernable or recognizable to the viewer. For this analysis, background is defined as the area beyond 4.3 miles of the observer.

- Viewer sensitivity levels are incorporated into the VMS as a measure of a person's concern for the scenic quality of the landscape. Sensitivity is determined based on the type of use (a visitor driving on a road may have less sensitivity than a visitor recreating on a trail or water body), volume of use (higher numbers of users correspond to increased sensitivity), and duration of view (longer view durations correspond to increased sensitivity.

[1] The Snellen eye chart is a standardized method used to determine at what distance a person with 20/20 vision is no longer able to recognize a feature. At a distance of approximately 20 feet, a person with 20/20 vision can recognize a standard shape (the Snellen eye chart uses letters with specific proportions) with a height of 0.35 inch. Beyond 20 feet, the viewer would no longer be able to recognize the letter.

Visual Quality Objectives

VQOs, as defined in the VMS, are based on the physical characteristics of the land and the sensitivity of the landscape setting as viewed by humans (described above). VQOs define how the landscape will be managed, the level of acceptable modification permitted in the area, and under what circumstances modification may be allowed. VQOs range from *Preservation* (untouched environment) to *Maximum Modification* (major disturbance). VQOs guide management of visual resources only on NFS lands. Within the project area, portions of Alpine Meadows located on NFS lands are the only portions of the project area managed to be consistent with assigned VQOs. Squaw Valley and the Caldwell property are privately owned and are not managed to be consistent with any VQO, but rather are subject to the visual standards implemented by state and local jurisdictions (see below).

Variety class and sensitivity levels are two tools incorporated by the Forest Service to determine which VQO will be assigned to a certain area. Variety classes are obtained by classifying the landscape by degree of diversity to determine the most important landscapes from the standpoint of scenic quality; sensitivity levels are a measure of people's concern for the scenic quality of a certain landscape (U.S. Forest Service 1974). These factors contributed to the Forest Service's determination in the LRMP that Alpine Meadows is assigned VQOs of *Partial Retention* and *Modification* at the upslope facilities and base area, respectively. The VMS provides the following definitions for these VQOs (U.S. Forest Service 1974):

> Partial Retention: Management activities remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape when managed according to the partial retention visual quality objective. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape but changes in their qualities or size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc., remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. Activities may also introduce form, line, color, or texture which are found infrequently or not at all in the characteristic landscape, but they should remain subordinate to the visual strength of the characteristic landscape.
>
> Modification: Under the modification visual quality objective management activities may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. However, activities of vegetative and land form alteration must borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture so completely at such a scale that its visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area or character type. Additional parts of these activities such as structures, roads, slash, root wads, etc., must remain visually subordinate to the proposed composition.
>
> Activities which are predominately introduction of facilities such as buildings, signs, roads, etc., should borrow naturally established form, line, color and texture so completely and at such scale that its visual characteristics are compatible with the natural surroundings.

While the line and form of existing ski trails and installed infrastructure both contrast noticeably with natural landscape characteristics, they do not violate the *Partial Retention* VQO because they do not dominate the characteristic landscape and are therefore visually subordinate to it. A short-term negative impact on visual resources associated with the construction phase of a project may be permitted by the deciding Forest Service official.

A project or activity on NFS lands cannot create any permanent conflicts with applicable VQOs if it is to be consistent with relevant Forest Service management direction as it pertains to visual resources.

The analysis that follows utilizes the methodology put forward by the VMS to characterize visual impacts associated with the action alternatives (U.S. Forest Service 1974). Consistency of the alternatives with federal, state, and local regulations is discussed in Impact 4.2-1 under each alternative. Two primary methods are used in this analysis: viewshed analysis and viewpoint analysis.

Viewshed Analysis

A broad scale viewshed analysis of the regional visibility of the project was conducted as a means of analysis for the visual impacts that may occur outside of the immediate project area. The overall project "viewshed" is defined as the entire area from which the project could be potentially visible and may extend to surrounding mountain tops and adjacent valleys.

Geographic Information Systems were used to calculate the potential visibility of the project based on digital terrain data and project data. The analysis uses point data for towers based on current engineered tower locations and heights. The analysis used Digital Elevation Model data acquired from the TNF at 3.3-foot resolution based on LiDar[2]. For this "line of sight" assessment, all surrounding areas which were not specifically blocked by natural topography but had potential to have visibility were identified as being within the "Zone of Potential Visibility." This viewshed analysis provides a quantitative assessment of the visual impacts associated with the project through calculation of the acreage of the Zone of Potential Visibility associated with each action alternative.

The Zone of Potential Visibility was further refined for the project based on the maximum distance from which a person, with average vision, would be able to physically recognize the form and structure of the proposed lift infrastructure. The mean height of the proposed gondola towers (as designed at the time of analysis) is 53.74 feet. The relative proportions from the Snellen eye chart were extrapolated to determine the maximum distance from which a person with 20/20 vision could recognize an average-height lift tower for each alternative. Through this method it was determined that a viewer would not be able to recognize/identify project infrastructure at a distance greater than 6.9 miles. Therefore, the Zone of Potential Visibility was defined as a 6.9-mile buffer area from the alignment of each alternative. While the definition provided above for the background distance zone states that line, form, and texture of landscapes are generally not discernable or recognizable to the viewer beyond 4.3 miles, the upper range for potential visibility was increased due to the large mean height and mass of the proposed gondola towers, their cross-arms and sheave assemblies.[3] Exhibits 4.2-4, 4.2-5, and 4.2-6 represent the Zone of Potential Visibility associated with each action alternative.

This viewshed analysis accurately accounts for topographic features, but, does not incorporate potentially obscuring features such as vegetation or existing structures. Spatial data for these features, such as vegetation height, was not available at this scale and may vary greatly based on seasonality. It is expected that existing vegetative screening would have the effect of considerably reducing the overall potential visibility of the project. dependent upon the specific location and vantage of the viewer. Because it does not take into account potentially obscuring vegetation, the viewshed analysis is a conservative approximation of the Zone of Potential Visibility.

In addition, the viewshed analysis does not explicitly consider the visibility of the proposed Gazex infrastructure or the gondola cable/cabins, but it is assumed that this would be contained within the viewshed of the gondola towers because these structures would be considerably smaller than the gondola towers. The visibility of the base terminals and mid-stations is represented by the visibility of adjacent towers (i.e., there is not a separate point for the terminals and mid-stations themselves).

In Section 4.2.3, "Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences," this viewshed analysis is addressed under "Other Regional Viewpoints."

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[2] LiDar (Light Detection and Ranging) is a surveying method that measures distance to a target by illuminating that target with pulsed laser lights.

[3] The letters used in the Snellen eye chart have an overall width equal to their height, which contributes additional "mass" to the object in question. Because the towers would likely have a diameter of approximately 3.3 feet and the cross-arm would have similarly low mass, the mass of the structures would be relatively lower than the standard features used in the Snellen eye chart. It is therefore probable that the towers would cease to be recognizable by the average viewer from less than 6.9 miles. Thus, the Zone of Potential Visibility is a conservative estimation.

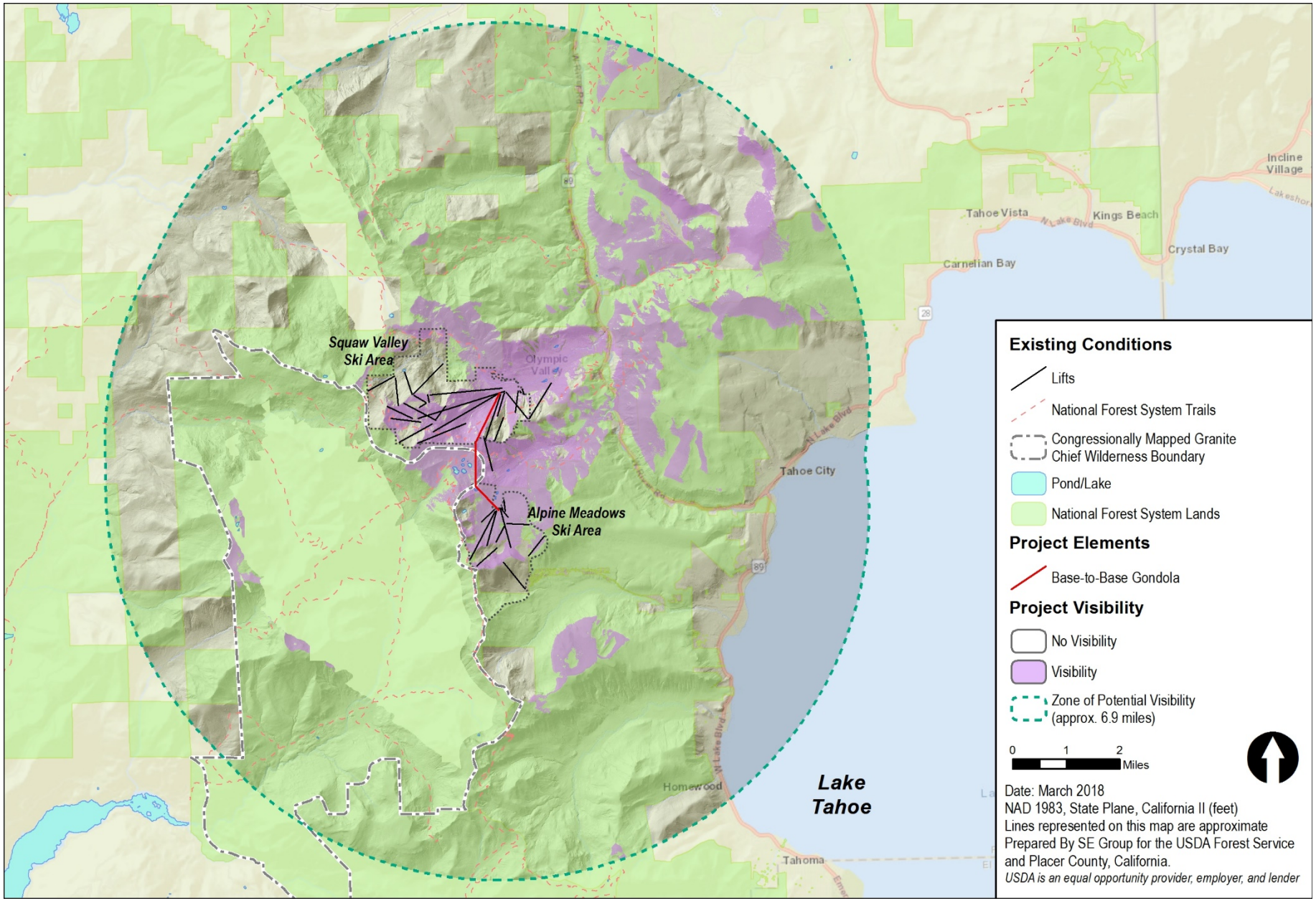

Exhibit 4.2-4 Viewshed Associated with Alternative 2

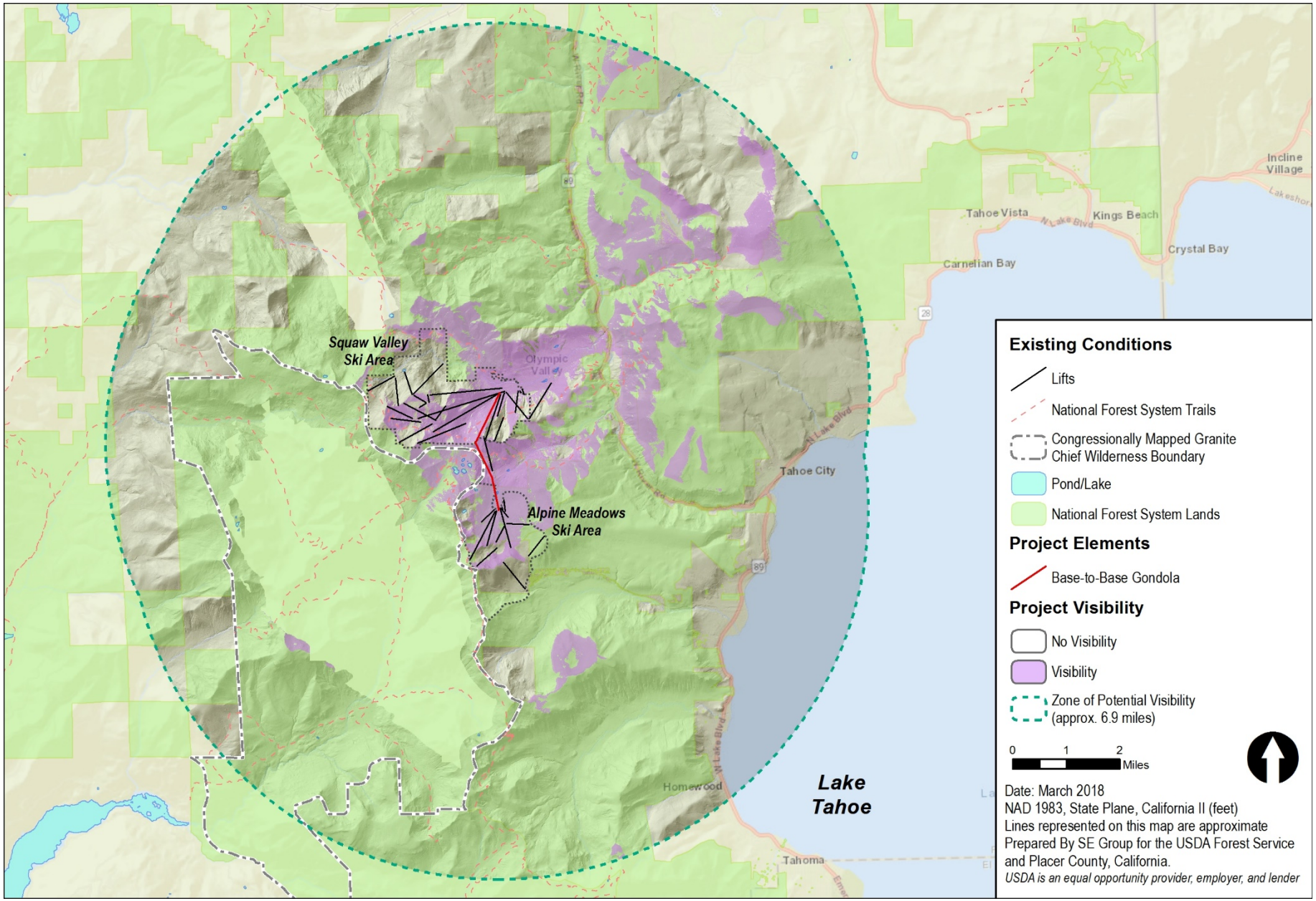

Exhibit 4.2-5 Viewshed Associated with Alternative 3

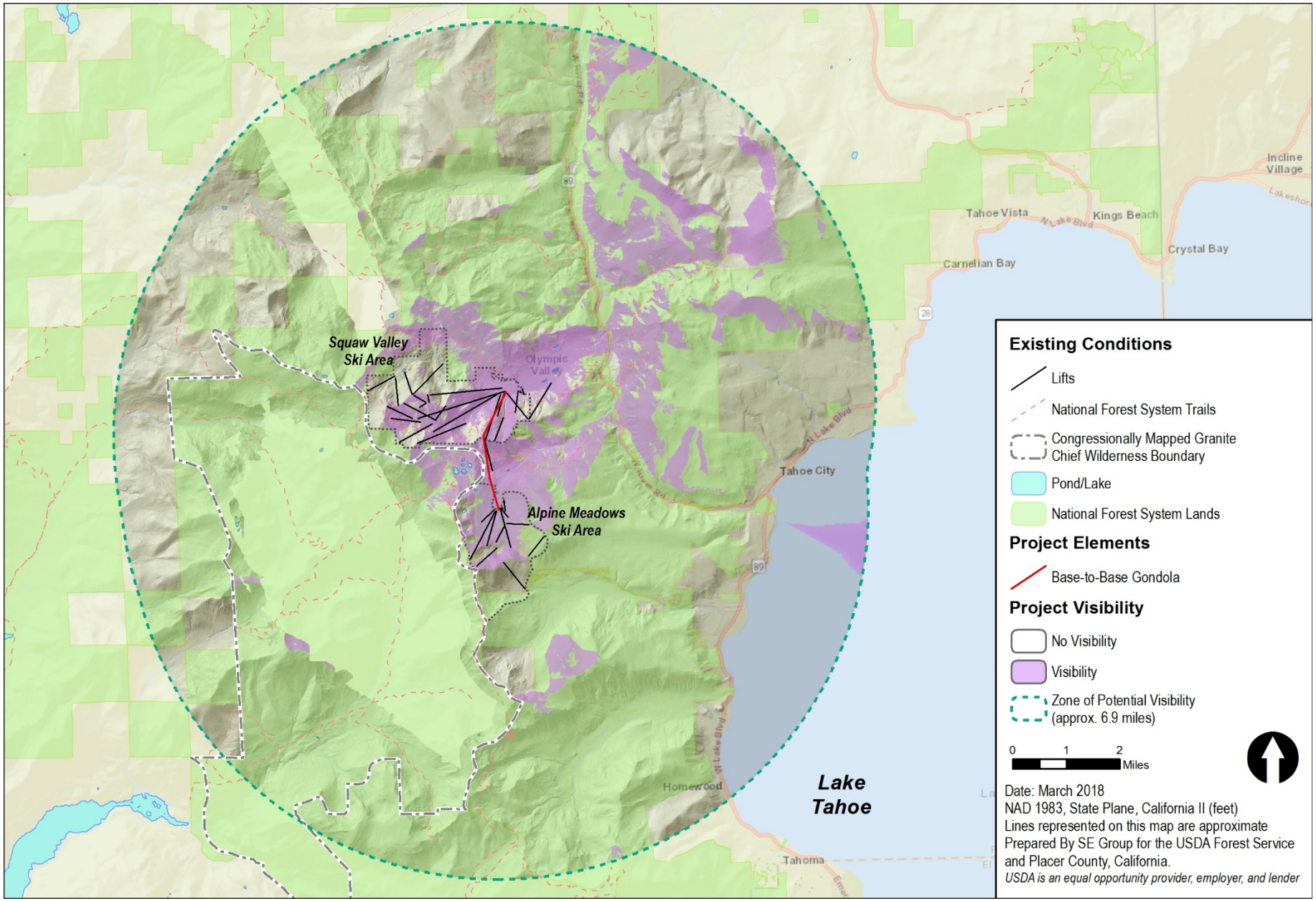

Exhibit 4.2-6 Viewshed Associated with Alternative 4

Viewpoint Analysis

In addition to the viewshed analysis of the Project's regional visibility, 16 viewpoints were selected for analysis of the foreground, middleground and background views (see discussion of viewpoint locations above in Section 4.2.1.1). This allowed for comparison of the existing condition at these locations with the condition expected to result from implementation of the action alternatives. The 16 viewpoints were identified to provide vantage points from highly frequented or prominent public areas, visually sensitive vistas, and areas with a high volume/frequency of viewers. Five of these viewpoints experience widely varying conditions between the winter and summer months, so existing conditions for these five viewpoint locations were analyzed during both winter and summer conditions. This resulted in a total of 21 views of existing conditions being selected for detailed viewpoint analysis. Exhibit 4.2-3, above, represents the locations of each of the 16 viewpoints (and the 21 views analyzed from these locations) within the study area.

Photo-simulations were prepared for each of the 21 selected views to illustrate the anticipated view under each action alternative. The photo-simulations were created by overlaying the latest project planning/design details onto Digital Elevation Models and rendering the anticipated changes to the view using several software programs (more detail on process of creating visual simulations below).

In addition to the 16 viewpoints selected for detailed analysis, hundreds of locations throughout the project area were visited and are photographically documented in the project file.

Effects Analysis Methodology

Visual Simulation Process

The objective of creating visual simulations is to provide an accurate representation of how the action alternatives are anticipated to appear if constructed. As described above, sixteen representative viewpoint locations around the project area were selected as locations that would accurately represent the overall visual impacts that may occur with implementation of any of the action alternatives. Viewpoint locations that generally experience a high viewing frequency or viewing duration were determined to be most representative. For example, five views along the Five Lakes Trail were analyzed because of its popularity; it is the most used trail on the Truckee Ranger District, it provides quick access to the National Forest System-GCW and provides the shortest access to the Pacific Crest Trail between the Barker pass and Donner Summit. These locations along the Five Lakes Trail are some of the locations from which the development could be visible and are also commonly used by relatively large numbers of people.

Local professional photographer Grant Kaye captured over 4,000 photographs of the project area from dozens of locations using GPS enabled equipment. All photos were taken with a focal length of 42mm to represent perspective of the human eye. Multiple photos were taken at each site to ensure that the best vantage points were captured. As five of the viewpoint locations would experience visual impacts in both the winter and summer, photographs were taken at these locations during both seasons.

The project design information used to create the visual simulations was provided by SE Group and Leitner Poma of America. SE Group provided information on specific alignments of each action alternative, clearing limits, terminal site plans and grading; Leitner Poma of America provided information on lift profiles, tower locations, tower heights, declination, number of gondola carries and their spacing, and rope sag between towers.

A 3D model was created for each alternative alignment using SketchUp and 3D Studio Max software, which incorporates the spatial information of each model and relates it to real world coordinates. A perspective image was then created by using the parameters of the photograph for each.

Ultimately, the 21 visual simulations created for each alternative allowed for a qualitative analysis of the visual changes that are anticipated to occur with implementation of any of the action alternatives. Visual simulations and existing conditions images are provided in Appendix D.

An online Story Map has been created to provide an opportunity for readers to examine the distribution of the selected viewpoints around the study area and the related views associated with each alternative. Follow this link to access the Story Map.

All images in the Story Map are also contained within Appendix D; the Story Map simply provides an alternative method of viewing these images.

Analysis of Visual Simulations

Analysis of the visual simulations was then broken into three categories: consistency with federal, state, and local regulations; visual character; and night lighting and glare. These topics are addressed in the analysis provided for each alternative in Section 4.2.3.

Consistency with federal, state, and local regulations is a metric of analysis that discusses project components and ensures consistency with all relevant plans and policies, at various governmental levels.

Visual character is a broad metric of analysis and considers visual impacts on scenic vistas and scenic roads, along with general changes to visual quality caused by development; the viewpoint analysis contained in the visual character section is qualitative in nature, whereas the viewshed analysis component of the visual character section is quantitative. Analysis of impacts on visual character were further divided into the different types of landscapes through which the proposed gondola would pass; the landscapes chosen were "base areas," "ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides," and "highly utilized roads." This approach was taken because potential visual impacts vary greatly depending on the type of landscape through which the Project would occur. For example, presence of gondola infrastructure would constitute a negligible change to scenery at the ski area base areas in comparison to the middle sections, which pass through previously undisturbed and natural-appearing landscapes. This methodology allowed for in-depth analysis of the wide spectrum of impacts on visual character that could potentially result from this development; analysis includes a statement of the anticipated visual character impacts' consistency or inconsistency with the area's established VQOs.

Night lighting and glare is a binary category of analysis. Analysis for this category simply includes discussion of whether lighting fixtures, for maintenance and emergencies, would be installed on infrastructure within the viewshed, and whether glare from installed infrastructure could possibly be present within the study area.[4]

Resource Protection Measures

As described in Section 2.2.6, "Resource Protection Measures," the project incorporates a number of Resource Protection Measures (RPMs) designed to avoid and minimize environmental effects. These RPMs are considered part of the project by the Forest Service and will be included in the Mitigation Monitoring Reporting Program for the purposes of CEQA and imposed as conditions of approval of the Placer County conditional use permit (CUP). The text of all RPMs is provided in Appendix B. The potential effects of implementing the action alternatives are analyzed as follows: As it relates to NEPA, the effect of the action alternatives was determined, relevant RPMs were applied, and the effectiveness of reducing adverse effects was determined. If additional measures were needed to further reduce effects, they were identified.

As it relates to CEQA, the significance of impacts is determined before RPMs are implemented. The analysis then determines whether the RPMs would reduce significant impacts to a less-than-significant level. If significant impacts would remain, mitigation measures are added, as feasible, to further reduce the significant impact. All RPMs, as well as additional mitigation measures, would be included in the Placer County mitigation monitoring and reporting program, and their implementation would be ensured by the

[4] For clarity, no lighting fixtures would be installed at either ski resort to provide for night-skiing beyond that which already exists on the Squaw Valley Mountain Run (which is not a part of this project). This component of the analysis refers exclusively to the potential installation of night lighting fixtures on gondola infrastructure, such as mid-stations, terminals, and cabins.

CUP's conditions of approval. All RPMs are considered roughly proportional and have an essential nexus to the impacts they reduce.

4.2.2.2 EFFECTS ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

NEPA Indicators

An environmental document prepared to comply with NEPA must consider the context and intensity of the environmental effects that would be caused by or result from the action alternatives. Under NEPA, impacts should be addressed in proportion to their significance (40 CFR 1502.2[b]), meaning that severe impacts should be described in more detail than less consequential impacts. This is intended to help decision makers and the public focus on the project's key effects. The evaluation of effects considers the magnitude, duration, and significance of the changes. Changes that would improve the existing condition if they occur are noted and considered beneficial, and detrimental impacts are characterized as adverse. Where there would be no change, a "no effect" conclusion is used. The Forest Service has determined that the action alternatives could affect visual resources. The following analytical indicators are used to inform the Forest Service's determination of impacts:

- Discussion of the existing visual quality of the project area by distance zone **(Impact 4.2-2)**. Include narrative discussion of:
  - Landscape features/variety/dominance elements (form, line, color, texture)
  - Viewer sensitivity levels
- Discussion of proposed changes to visual quality **(Impact 4.2-2)**. Include discussion of:
  - Changes to landscape dominance elements (form, line, color, texture) and degree of contrast that results from the presence of the project compared to the existing condition
  - View duration
  - Number of viewers (approximate)
- Discussion of potential visibility of the action alternatives (calculation of viewshed) **(Impact 4.2-2)**
- Compliance with Forest Plan standards and guidelines for visual resources within the SUP area and from established viewpoints by meeting Visual Quality Objectives **(Impact 4.2-1)**
- Compliance with the intent of the BEIG for all proposed structures on NFS lands. Structures should meet Forest Plan scenery guidelines for materials, colors and reflectivity **(Impact 4.2-1)**
- Compliance with *Squaw Valley General Plan* direction for visual resources **(Impact 4.2-1)**
- Discussion of existing and proposed views (approximated through photographic simulation and supported by topographic profiles) from identified viewpoints **(Impact 4.2-2)**
- Narrative discussion of existing views (including photographs) and potential changes to the view from viewpoints identified. Include quantitative analysis of visibility of the action alternatives, duration of view, number of viewers, and distance from project **(Impact 4.2-2)**
- Narrative discussion of existing and proposed views for users in the National Forest System-GCW and on nearby dispersed recreation trails (including the Five Lakes Trail) **(Impact 4.2-2)**

- Narrative discussion of potential visibility from other regional viewpoints without photographic simulation, including SR 89 (a scenic byway), Lake Tahoe, the Pacific Crest Trail, Martis Peak, and other ski areas (Northstar and Sugar Bowl) **(Impact 4.2-2)**

- Discussion of lighting and hours/season of operation as well as potential glare-related visibility **(Impact 4.2-3)**

CEQA Criteria

Based on the Placer County CEQA checklist and Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, implementing any of the alternatives would result in a significant impact related to visual resources if it would:

- have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista **(Impact 4.2-2)**;

- substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic building within a state scenic highway **(Impact 4.2-2)**;

- substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings **(Impact 4.2-2)**; or

- create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area **(Impact 4.2-3)**.

4.2.2.3 ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

All visual resource issues addressed in the analytical indicators and significance criteria are evaluated below.

4.2.3 Direct and Indirect Environmental Consequences

4.2.3.1 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 1): Consistency with Federal, State, and Local Regulations

With no new project-related construction or operations, inconsistencies between Alternative 1 and the federal, state, and local plans and guidance presented in Section 4.2.1.2 would not occur. There would be no effects on visual resources in the project area; therefore, Alternative 1 would be in compliance with relevant federal, state, and local plans and guidance. There would be **no effect** under both NEPA and CEQA.

Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, the TNF and Placer County would not provide necessary authorizations to allow construction of a gondola or Gazex facilities. The outcome would be a continuation of existing conditions, with no new construction or installation and operation of new facilities, and there would be no alteration of visual character anywhere in the project area. Inconsistencies between Alternative 1 and the federal, state, and local plans and guidance presented in Section 4.2.1.2 would not occur.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

With no new project-related construction or operations, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

CEQA Determination of Effects

With no new project-related construction or operations, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 4.2-2 (Alt. 1): Visual Character (General Impact on Visual Character)

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing conditions. The project would not be approved or constructed. Therefore, no alteration of visual character from anywhere in the project area would occur. There would be **no effect** under both NEPA and CEQA.

Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, the TNF and Placer County would not provide necessary authorizations to allow construction of a gondola or Gazex facilities. The outcome would be a continuation of existing conditions, with no new construction or installation and operation of new facilities. Therefore, there would be no alteration of visual character from anywhere in the project area.

NEPA Effects Conclusion
With no alteration of visual character, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

CEQA Determination of Effects
With no alteration of visual character, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 4.2-3 (Alt. 1): Night Lighting and Glare

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative would result in a continuation of existing conditions. The project would not be approved or constructed. Therefore, no additional lighting installments would be visible during the night and no structures that could generate glare would be constructed. There would be **no effect** under both NEPA and CEQA.

Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, the TNF and Placer County would not provide necessary authorizations to allow construction of a gondola or Gazex facilities. The outcome would be a continuation of existing conditions, with no new construction and no installation and operation of new facilities. Therefore, there would be no additional lighting installments that would be visible during the night or construction of structures that could generate glare.

NEPA Effects Conclusion
With no additional lighting installments, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

CEQA Determination of Effects
With no additional lighting installments, there would be **no effect** related to this issue.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required.

4.2.3.2 ALTERNATIVE 2

Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2): Consistency with Federal, State, and Local Regulations

Alternative 2 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in alteration of the visual character within the project area. No inconsistencies between Alternative 2 and the federal and state plans and guidance presented in Section 4.2.1.2 would occur; however, one consistency between Alternative 2 and Policy 1.K.1 of the *Placer County General Plan* would occur. Policy 1.K.1 directs that new development in scenic areas is required to be designed in a manner that avoids locating structures along ridgelines and steep slopes. The gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 would extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property, which would represent an inconsistency with Policy 1.K.1. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to consistency with federal, state, and local regulations would be **adverse**. Implementation of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would mitigate this effect. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **significant** because installation of the proposed gondola would create an inconsistency with Policy 1.K.1 of the *Placer County General Plan*. RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Forest Plan

The gondola terminal at the Alpine Meadows base area and the Alpine Meadows mid-station are located on NFS lands; the Alpine Meadows base area and the Alpine Meadows upslope facilities have been assigned VQOs of *Modification* and *Partial Retention*, respectively. All other gondola terminals and mid-stations, which are generally the project components with the greatest potential for impacts on visual resources, are located on private lands, which have no VQO assigned to them. While Alternative 2 may be visible from viewpoints within the National Forest System-GCW, which has been assigned a VQO of *Preservation*, no project components would be located on these lands.

Installation of the proposed gondola would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the alignment, including areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. The *Partial Retention* VQO is applicable at the Alpine Meadows mid-station, and allows for the introduction of form, line, color, or texture which are not found at all in the characteristic landscape if these elements remain subordinate to the visual strength of the characteristic landscape. Chairlifts that resemble the proposed gondola are already present in this area. While Alternative 2 would constitute an incremental addition to the built environment in this area, the presence of gondola infrastructure and Gazex facilities would not dominate the characteristic landscape. Alternative 2 would be compliant with the *Partial Retention* VQO designated for upslope facilities at Alpine Meadows.

It is important to note that all visual impacts discussed below would be reduced in the summer for upslope portions of the project area when gondola cabins would be removed and placed in storage facilities at the Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows base stations until the following winter. However, the storage facilities at the base stations would be very visible and the white gondola cabins would contrast greatly with the darker earth tones visible during the summer season; at the base areas, the visual impacts associated with the project would increase during the summer due to storage of the gondola cabins. During most of the gondola operating season, the white gondola cabins would be on the line, and at the same time, there would be sufficient snow cover in the surrounding landscape for the cabins to blend well with their background. However, during the transitional seasons (defined as the early and late ski seasons) and periods of inconsistent snow cover (which are possible during both the transitional seasons and mid-season), it is possible that Alpine Meadows would still be open for public skiing and snowboarding and the gondola would be operational, and that at the same time southern aspect slopes of the project area would be mostly dry. During these scenarios, the white gondola cabins would contrast more heavily with the exposed vegetation and dirt in the background, causing the visual impacts associated with gondola infrastructure to be greater.

The visual simulations do not account for these potential scenarios. Refer to Section 4.1, "Recreation," and Section 4.3, "Wilderness," for information on how this phenomenon may impact those resources.

During most of the summer, only gondola terminals/mid-stations, towers, wire-rope, and Gazex infrastructure would remain visible in the upslope portions of the project area. Gazex infrastructure would constitute a minimal addition to the existing development already visible at the Alpine Meadows base area and would not constitute an inconsistency with the relevant VQO of *Modification* there. Some cabins would need to be put on the line for limited periods during the summer (less than ten times during the summer for all cars placed on the line, and three to five days per month for a limited number of cars placed on the line) in order to perform maintenance. Storage of the gondola cabins would considerably reduce overall infrastructural mass and therefore visual impacts within the upslope portions of the gondola alignment, as many of the predominantly natural landscapes through which the gondola would pass are utilized primarily by recreationists in the summer. While recreational use of the natural landscapes in the upslope portions of project area is not uncommon in the winter, these areas experience considerably more use during the summer.

The proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would be consistent with the VQO of *Modification*, as this VQO allows for management activities to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. The VMS also directs that lands managed to be consistent with the *Modification* VQO must borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture so completely at such a scale that its visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area or character type; this facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape, and implementation of applicable RPMs (SCE-1, SCE-2, and SCE-4, listed and described below), along with the design review and approval process, would preclude the possibility of any inconsistency with the *Modification* VQO. While all project components would be compliant with the established VQOs of *Partial Retention* and *Modification* on the NFS lands within the project area directed by the VMS, the relevant policies of the BEIG would additionally be applied to further reduce visual impacts.

The Forest Plan also establishes policies for management of federally designated wilderness areas within the TNF, like the National Forest System-GCW. While there are certain locations within the National Forest System-GCW from which gondola infrastructure would be visible under Alternative 2, there is no legislation or policy that precludes development from being visible to recreationists from within federal wilderness areas. (Refer to Section 4.3, "Wilderness," for more information.)

State

Alternative 2 would be compliant with the California Scenic Highway Program, as SR 89 is an eligible route for designation as an official scenic highway but is not yet officially designated. Therefore, the protections afforded by the California Scenic Highway Program do not apply to SR 89. However, even if SR 89 were designated as a scenic highway, Alternative 2 would have limited, if any visibility from this roadway due to distance and topographic and vegetative screening.

Local

The only policy in local planning documents that would represent an inconsistency with Alternative 2 is Policy 1.K.1. of the *Placer County General Plan*, which states that new development in scenic areas is required by Placer County to be designed in a manner that "avoids locating structures along ridgelines and steep slopes." By their very nature, gondolas must extend along steep slopes to achieve their purpose; however, the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 would extend along a lengthy portion of the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property, so Alternative 2 would be inconsistent with Policy 1.K.1 of the *Placer County General Plan*. Various gondola alignments that would connect the Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley base areas without traversing the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property are feasible. Two of these are provided by Alternatives 3 and 4, which would not represent inconsistencies with Policy 1.K.1 (discussed in more detail under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 3) and Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 4).

Alternative 2 would not create any inconsistencies with the height restrictions established for buildings in Section 137 of the SVGPLUO. Section 137.10 states that the "maximum permitted height of structures within

the Low Density Residential, Forest Recreation and Conservation Preserve Land Use districts shall be 30 feet; measured as the vertical distance from the highest point of the structure (excluding chimneys) to the average of the highest and lowest points where the exterior walls touch the natural grade." Section 137.12 states that the "maximum average height of a building within the HOR, EC, AC, and HC Land Use districts shall not exceed 35'." While certain components of the gondola on the Squaw Valley side (multiple towers and possible the Squaw Valley mid-station and base terminal) would be contained within the Forest Recreation district and would exceed this height restriction, neither the towers, mid-station, or terminal would include exterior walls touching the natural grade. Refer to the visual simulations contained in Appendix D for images that indicate that these structures would not be enclosed spaces with exterior walls on either side. Specific language in Section 137.10 and the mention of "buildings" in Section 137.12 indicate that these height restrictions would not apply to any of the proposed infrastructure associated with the gondola.

Applicable RPMs

RPMs increase the likelihood that Alternative 2 would be compliant with all policies established for both public and private lands within the project area. With implementation of applicable RPMs, including but not limited to those listed below, Alternative 2 would be compliant with the applicable VQOs of *Partial Retention* and *Modification* at Alpine Meadows, as well as relevant state and local regulations.

RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, and SCE-4 require that the design, scale, and color of installed infrastructure meet relevant VQOs, and that colors used blend well with the forest background. RPMs SCE-1, SCE-7, SCE-8, and REV-1, and REV-3 require review and approval of specific project-level details before implementation of any of the action alternatives. These include, but are not limited, to review of all physical improvements, pertinent topographical features that may affect magnitude of impacts, and areas designated for tree removal. Final project authorization would depend on evaluation of each relevant RPM for visual resources, and this process may identify additional direction intended to further reduce visual impacts and ensure consistency with all applicable federal, state, and local plans. The comprehensive RPM table in Appendix B contains specific details about each of these RPMs. As part of the BEIG review process, the proposed gondola design would require final construction authorization by the Forest Service prior to implementation for those portions of the project located on NFS lands. Project components located on private lands would be subject to relevant local permits, design reviews, and approvals.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Installation of the proposed gondola and Gazex facilities would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the alignment, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. While Alternative 2 would constitute an incremental addition to the built environment in the upslope areas at Alpine Meadows, the presence of gondola infrastructure and Gazex facilities would not dominate the characteristic landscape in these areas and therefore would not constitute an inconsistency with the relevant VQO of *Partial Retention* there. The proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would not constitute an inconsistency with the VQO of *Modification*, as this VQO allows for management activities to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. This facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape, and implementation of applicable RPMs, along with the design review and approval process, would ensure consistency with the BEIG and preclude the possibility of any inconsistency with the *Modification* VQO. However, one inconsistency between Alternative 2 and Policy 1.K.1 of the *Placer County General Plan* would occur because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 would extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to consistency with federal, state, and local regulations would be **adverse**. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3.

CEQA Determination of Effects

Installation of the proposed gondola and Gazex facilities would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the alignment, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. Alternative 2 would create an inconsistency with Policy 1.K.1 of the

Placer County General Plan because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 would extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **significant**. RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 as mitigation measures would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations.

Impact 4.2-2 (Alt. 2): Visual Character (General Impact on Visual Character)

Alternative 2 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in degradation of the project area's visual character. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to visual character would be **adverse**. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would mitigate this effect. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, installation of the proposed gondola would have an adverse effect on visual character because it would create a contrast with currently visible landscapes within certain views and this impact would be **significant**. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would minimize this effect by promoting screening of project features and incorporating design elements that assist the project features in blending into the landscape. However, although implementation of these RPMs would reduce this impact, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels.

Visual character of the various landscapes seen from each view would be altered from their natural state if any component of Alternative 2 is visible from that view. There are many factors that play a role in evaluating degradations to visual character, including but not limited to activity of the viewer, duration of the view, vegetative screening that may change over time, and perceived level of contrast with existing conditions created by the project; these variables were factored into analysis to the greatest extent practicable. Because Alternative 2 would occur in two phases (construction and operation) and would traverse several different types of landscapes, the analysis of impacts of visual character has been divided accordingly.

The construction phase has been analyzed in general terms, as this is a temporary effect, and impacts associated with construction could be felt from any place where construction is evident. All headers below the "Construction" header ("Base Area," "Ridgelines and Sparsely Vegetated Hillsides," "Highly Utilized Roads," and "Other Regional Viewpoints") refer to the operation phase of the project.

Physical settings, on the other hand, have been analyzed in terms that directly relate to each view for which visual simulations were created. The physical settings for this analysis, chosen as representative landscapes through which the gondola would pass, are: base areas, ridgelines and sparsely vegetated slopes, and heavily utilized roads. Analysis is also included for other regional viewpoints; a section titled "Other Regional Viewpoints" broadly addresses visual impacts that could occur to various locations within the viewshed for which visual simulations were not created. Each of the physical settings carries with it a unique range of potential magnitudes of impacts on visual character. For example, visual character impacts associated with gondola infrastructure on an undeveloped ridgeline or forested hillside are very different from those impacts associated with gondola infrastructure within the base area, because the contrast that gondola infrastructure would create with the former would be much more noticeable than with the latter. Views used for visual simulations have been grouped into the physical setting that best describes them and analyzed as such. For clarity, these physical settings describe the viewpoint location itself, not the location of the gondola alignment, or location of proposed equipment. This allows for consistency of this approach for all action alternatives, as the views for which visual simulations were created are constants and the gondola alignments are not.

Construction *(presence of construction associated with installation of gondola infrastructure would contrast with current setting; all impacts would be temporary)*

Relevant Views: All. From all views, the construction phase would create considerable contrast with the currently visible landscape, over the short term (i.e., a single construction season as agreed to by the applicant and as required by RPM MUL-7). Areas where terminals or mid-stations would be installed would be temporarily fenced during construction, and construction equipment and crews would be evident. Disturbance required for gondola tower foundations will depend on the exact location of each tower; proper foundation construction may require either blasting, digging, grading and pouring of a concrete footer, or rock-drilling for towers located on granite outcroppings. Helicopters would be used for placement of gondola towers, transportation of personnel and equipment to the project area, and for some tree removal (refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1 for additional information). Vegetation and soils disturbed by clearing and/or grading would be revegetated immediately after construction; however, these soils could appear lighter than surrounding sediments until revegetated, which could take several years. Similarly, impacts on exposed granite could occur as construction equipment travels along the construction access route; tracked and rubber-tired vehicles could chip, grind down, and/or discolor the exposed granite, which would be evident for many years. BMPs applied during the construction phrase would address this impact. Trees would be cleared from the gondola alignment and trees would continue to be removed as necessary for the life of the gondola to prevent obstruction of gondola system operations. Impacts on visual character associated with the construction phase would be temporary but would constitute an appreciable change to current settings in the short term. For the duration of construction impacts, temporary inconsistencies with relevant VQOs of *Partial Retention* and *Modification* at Alpine Meadows are possible because there would be a substantial degree of contrast between the existing and proposed visual character conditions in the short-term; if temporary inconsistencies with relevant VQOs occur, they would occur only during the construction phase and would be eliminated before operation of the gondola begins.

For the construction phase, types of viewers and duration of their view is hugely variable because all views are potentially relevant during this phase. Viewers may be hiking, biking, or driving, and duration of their view could range from seconds to hours depending on mode of travel and activity of viewer.

Base Area *(infrastructure of all kinds currently visible; no contrast in architectural character would occur with the exception of the gondola cabin storage facility)*

Relevant Views: 5, 6, 7, and 8 (Alpine Meadows Base Terminal), 21 (KT Sundeck/Condo Area). From the views listed above (see photo simulations in Appendix D), the presence of gondola infrastructure would not create a considerable contrast with the currently visible landscape and existing ski area infrastructure. Many of the potential viewers of Alternative 2 enter the project area from the Alpine Meadows or Squaw Valley base area; much of the potential visual impacts caused by Alternative 2 would be visible to these viewers while in this setting. From both base areas, development is very noticeable in the foreground; viewers can observe existing and proposed lift terminals and associated lift infrastructure (chairs, towers, wire-ropes), paved surfaces, and large buildings that contain restaurants, retail stores, room for general management activities, etc. However, it is important to note that the Squaw Valley base area is much more developed and has considerably more lodging, restaurant and retail space than the Alpine Meadows base area. While both base areas would be considered developed, each has its own architectural character; for example, Alpine Meadows has a more rural feel to it than Squaw Valley. For these reasons, gondola infrastructure that would be visible at the Squaw Valley base area would constitute less of a change from existing conditions than additional infrastructure would at Alpine Meadows. In particular, the proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would exhibit contrast with the existing condition and may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape; however, as part of the Design Review process required by the Forest Service and Placer County this facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape as much as possible in accordance with the BEIG and the design review and approval process. It is important to note that as modeled in the visual simulations, the proposed gondola storage facility shows preliminary massing

Gazex infrastructure would be visible in the foreground only from the Alpine Meadows portion of the project area (i.e. within Views 5, 6, 7, and 8). This project would not constitute an appreciable change to the current setting, as considerable development is very noticeable all around the Alpine Meadows base area (described in more detail above). Additionally, the mass of the Gazex infrastructure is comparatively small, which allows it to blend well with the surrounding landforms and vegetation.

Most of the viewers at these locations, would be those participating in snow sports during the ski season, hikers or bikers during the non-ski season, and guests lodging at the Squaw Valley base area. Duration of views would range from several minutes for those heading uphill, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

Ridgelines and Sparsely Vegetated Hillsides *(currently undeveloped and natural-appearing; gondola infrastructure would contrast with current setting)*

Relevant Views: Views 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 (Five Lakes Trail Switchback 1, Five Lakes Trail Switchback 2, Five Lakes Trail Water Break Hill, Five Lakes Trail Wilderness Boundary 1 and 2, Five Lakes Granite Chief Wilderness, Barstool Lake, Squaw Saddle). From the views listed above (see photo simulations in Appendix D), the presence of gondola infrastructure would be particularly visible. Aside from within View 11, from which existing ski area development is currently visible, no development can currently be seen within Views 9–15, and presence of proposed gondola infrastructure, along the ridgelines and hillsides that are visible from these viewpoints, would stand out from the current landscape; the gondola's alignment under Alternative 2 across the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW from the Caldwell property would make infrastructure especially prominent. Within View 11, gondola towers and one mid-station would be introduced to the landscape; however, existing lift towers ("KT South" on the private Caldwell property) and one Alpine Meadows lift terminal are already visible in the foreground and middleground, respectively. In contrast to View 11, within View 15, presence of the proposed Alpine Meadows mid-station would be particularly noticeable in the foreground, just beyond Barstool Lake, and would represent a considerable contrast with the existing condition; in its existing condition, View 15 appears very natural, and ski area infrastructure is only slightly evident, if at all. However, the dark green color of the Alpine Meadows mid-station and the screening trees between potential viewers and the mid-station would contribute to the structure remaining visually subordinate to the visible characteristic landscape. Many of the potential viewers of Alternative 2 would observe visual character impacts from various dispersed recreation trails that contain expansive views of ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides; much of the potential visual impacts caused by Alternative 2 would be observed by these viewers. From these views, presence of gondola infrastructure would range from a minor to appreciable contrast to the current setting, depending on the form, line, color, and texture of the existing landscape. In areas where the existing landscape is mostly natural an undeveloped, gondola infrastructure would introduce form, line, color, and texture that do not currently exist and would contrast appreciably with the existing landscape. In areas where some development is already visible, like View 11, gondola infrastructure would not introduce new elements to the existing landscape and therefore would constitute only a minor contrast with it.

From View 16, the presence of proposed gondola infrastructure would partially change the currently visible landscape in the foreground. In the middleground of this view, viewers can see a parking lot, lift terminals, and a few buildings within the Alpine Meadows base area. While the topography in the foreground and middleground is not densely vegetated, there are scattered trees visible throughout, some of which would have to be removed to create a path for the gondola. The presence of the proposed gondola, and associated infrastructure, would constitute a considerable change to the current nature of the landscape.

As depicted in View 14, Five Lakes Granite Chief Wilderness, presence of proposed gondola infrastructure would be partially visible just beyond the lake and would constitute a minor contrast with the undeveloped landscape that characterizes the current setting. During the summer period, only the gondola's wire rope would be visible within this view. During the winter, the wire-rope and gondola cabins would be visible. Throughout the year, this infrastructure would introduce form, line, color, and texture that are not presently visible within this view to this natural landscape.

Most of the viewers at these locations would be hikers heading into or within the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes, depending on hikers' ascent speed along the trail or breaks taken at scenic vistas; for Views 14 and 15, however, duration of hikers' view could potentially last several hours.

Each of the relevant views listed above provides an expansive perspective of a highly valued natural landscape, all of which could be considered scenic vistas. As a result, the above analysis under "ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides" is intended to address the first of the CEQA criteria listed above in Section 4.2.2.2, which pertains to substantial adverse effects potentially occurring to scenic vistas.

Highly Utilized Roads *(currently developed; gondola infrastructure would be visible but would remain visually subordinate to the current setting)*

Relevant Views: 1 and 2 (Alpine Meadows Road), 3 (Chalet Road), 4 (Chalet Road – Northwest), 17 and 18 (Squaw Valley Road), 19 and 20 (Squaw Valley Road). From Views 17, 18, 19, and 20 (see photo simulations in Appendix D), the presence of gondola infrastructure would not create an appreciable contrast with the currently visible landscape. While the landscapes visible from these viewpoints do contain some densely forested hillsides, viewers can also see existing paved roads, homes, powerlines, and considerable base area infrastructure. As a result, the presence of the proposed gondola would not constitute an appreciable change to the current setting.

From Views 1, 2, 3, and 4 the presence of the proposed Alpine Meadows mid-station infrastructure would considerably change the currently visible landscape, as the observer would clearly see the mid-station infrastructure against the skyline, which would represent a high degree of contrast with the existing condition. However, the existing view does contain a mix of visible infrastructure such as overhead transmission lines and poles; therefore, the current view is not without interruption. Visibility of gondola infrastructure along the ridgeline would considerably change the existing landscape, as the gondola's alignment under Alternative 2 would be particularly prominent along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. While infrastructure is already evident along Alpine Meadows Road, Chalet Road, and Squaw Valley Road, this existing infrastructure blends more easily with the surrounding landscape than the proposed gondola would high along this ridgeline.

Viewers who experience these views are likely to be driving or biking along the road, and therefore would experience these views for only several seconds (depending on mode of travel).

Other Regional Viewpoints (*various locations within the viewshed for which visual simulations were not created)*

As indicated by the viewshed analysis, the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 would be potentially visible from approximately 17.99 square miles within the surrounding area (refer to Exhibit 4.2-4 in Section 4.2.2.1 to see the viewshed map associated with Alternative 2). These locations include, but are not limited to, SR 89, the Pacific Crest Trail, Martis Peak, other ski areas around Lake Tahoe, and other locations within the TNF. Potential impacts on visual character from these locations could occur in the middleground or the background. Magnitude of these impacts would depend on the viewing distance from Alternative 2, vegetative screening, topography, etc.

The viewshed analysis indicates that Alternative 2 would not be visible from any parts of Lake Tahoe because of the distance between Lake Tahoe and the project area, and vegetative and topographical screening between the two. The viewshed analysis does indicate that Alternative 2 could be visible at certain locations along SR 89, specifically near the intersections of Alpine Meadows Road and Squaw Valley Road with SR 89. Although SR 89 is a corridor that experiences considerable traffic, drivers would often be moving between 45 and 55 mph and as a result, visibility of the proposed infrastructure would last for only a few seconds. In addition, Alternative 2 would be located 90 degrees to the side of drivers' viewpoints as they look ahead at the road. These factors contribute to the determination that visibility of Alternative 2 from SR 89 would be infrequent and very short in duration.

RPMs That Would Reduce Adverse Effects on Visual Character

Effects on visual character would be reduced through the application of RPMs that require a design review and approval process, and project implementation for those portions of the project located on NFS lands would require final construction authorization by the Forest Service. RPMs specifically intended to reduce impacts on scenic resources include RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7. Appendix B contains specific details about what each of these RPMs entails.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Compared to the No Action Alternative, Alternative 2 would reduce the project area's visual character because it would result in visible infrastructure being built within 20 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created. In particular, Alternative 2 would create a considerable visual contrast from ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides during both the construction and operation phases. In these areas, viewers are likely to be hikers and their view of the alignment associated with Alternative 2 would likely last several minutes (or up to several hours), depending on hikers' ascent speed and whether or not they take rests on the trail. From the base areas, gondola cabin storage facilities would contrast with existing architectural character. Along Alpine Meadows Road and Chalet Road (where Views 1–4 are seen from) visibility of gondola infrastructure along the ridgeline that separates the National Forest System-GCW from the Caldwell property would introduce form, line, color, and texture that are not currently visible within the existing landscape. From other regional viewpoints, visibility of Alternative 2 is limited and would not constitute an appreciable change to existing conditions; in particular, the gondola infrastructure under Alternative 2 would not visible from any parts of Lake Tahoe. Overall, the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 2 is visible from many remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels, and in many of these locations, the presence of infrastructure would constitute an appreciable contrast from the existing conditions. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to visual character would be **adverse**. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7.

CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 2 would have an adverse effect on visual character because it would result in visible infrastructure being built within 20 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created. Specifically, Alternative 2 would have a substantial adverse effect on some of the scenic vistas identified as ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides, and the existing visual quality of the site would be degraded within some of these views from the perspective of some observers. Infrastructure would be installed in certain sensitive and remote areas, and therefore, under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be significant**.** RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would minimize this effect by promoting screening of project features and incorporating design elements that assist project feature in blending into the landscape. However, although implementation of these RPMs would reduce this impact, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels. Therefore, this impact would be **significant**.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 as mitigation measures would reduce effects related to visual character; however, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels.

Significance after Mitigation

This significant impact results from infrastructure being installed in sensitive and remote areas. The alternative cannot be implemented without generating this effect. There is no feasible mitigation that would reduce the visibility of the project sufficiently to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact 4.2-3 (Alt. 2): Night Lighting and Glare

Alternative 2 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in the installation of night lighting fixtures at planned gondola terminals and operating buildings, and on gondola cabins for emergencies; however, these lights would be used only for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, so they would rarely be activated during nighttime hours. No lighting is proposed with the Gazex facilities. Under Alternative 2, night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible within 12 views. Construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities could result in a limited amount of glare during certain times of day, depending on angle of the sun, amount of cloud cover, and position of the viewer. There would be **no effect** under NEPA. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **significant** before implementation of RPMs because night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible from certain views, and a limited amount of glare is possible. Implementation of RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8, which limit night lighting and glare, would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Night Lighting

Under Alternative 2, night lighting fixtures could be visible at the gondola's terminals and operating buildings within Views 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, and 21. No lighting is proposed with the Gazex facilities. Night lighting fixtures associated with the Gondola would cause visual impacts on any locations from which they are visible during nighttime hours.

However, night lighting fixtures would be installed only at terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings to allow for maintenance outside of normal operating hours, and to prepare for daily operations. The gondola would typically operate each day during the snow sports season from just before Alpine Meadows and Squaw Valley open until soon after closing (approximately 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.), so lighting fixtures would be activated only during a short period after sunset. Gondola cabins would have internal communications and emergency lights, but they would not be operable by the passengers and would be activated only during emergencies. Gondola towers would have no lighting.

Visibility of night lighting fixtures at base area terminals would not constitute a considerable change from current settings, as both base areas are already heavily developed and well lit. Visibility of night lighting fixtures at mid-station terminals would create a more substantial contrast with existing conditions, as these locations are currently undeveloped and are not artificially lit. Occasions when installed night lighting fixtures would be visible during nighttime hours would be very uncommon. None of these impacts would be present during summer months, as the gondola would operate only during winter months.

Glare

A limited amount of glare from installed infrastructure is possible during certain times of day (depending on angle of the sun, amount of cloud cover, position of viewer, etc.). However, proper implementation of applicable RPM SCE-5 (discussed below) would ensure that installed infrastructure would meet solar reflectivity standards and would minimize visual impacts associated with intense reflectivity from installed infrastructure; structures would be built with certain materials and given certain colors that minimize reflectivity. The Placer County Design Guidelines also include design requirements that minimize reflectivity and glare.

RPMs That Would Reduce Adverse Effects of Night Lighting and Glare

Effects associated with installation of night lighting fixtures and presence of glare would be reduced through the application of RPMs. RPM SCE-8 is specifically intended to reduce effects associated with installation of night lighting fixtures through an approval process with the Development Review Committee. The approval process includes confirmation that building lighting would be shielded and directed downward such that the bulb or ballast is not visible. RPM SCE-5 requires that installed infrastructure meet all applicable reflectivity guidelines, including covering, painting, staining, chemically treating, sandblasting, or otherwise treating materials to meet the solar reflectivity standards. Specifically, installed infrastructure must meet an average neutral value of 4.5 or less as measured on the Munsell neutral scale.

Appendix B contains a comprehensive list of all RPMs and related descriptions.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Compared to the No Action Alternative, Alternative 2 would result in installation of night lighting fixtures at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and on gondola cabins to be used only during emergency situations. These night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible within 12 views. Lights installed on gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings would be visible only during nighttime hours if preparation for daily operations starts before sunrise, when operation occurs for a short period after sunset, or if nighttime maintenance is required. Lights installed on gondola cabins would be visible only during nighttime hours in the case of an emergency after dark. Glare would be minimized through application of RPM SCE-5. Proper implementation of RPM SCE-5 would ensure that installed infrastructure would meet solar reflectivity standards. Therefore, there would be **no effect**.

CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 2 would result in installation of night lighting fixtures at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and on gondola cabins to be used only during emergency situations. These night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible within 12 views. Lights installed on gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings would be visible only during nighttime hours if preparation for daily operations starts before sunrise, when operation occurs for a short period after sunset, or if nighttime maintenance is required. Lights installed on gondola cabins would be visible only during nighttime hours in the case of an emergency after dark. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects related to light and glare would be **significant** before implementation of RPMs because night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible, and a limited amount of glare is possible. However, RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8 would limit night lighting and glare. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8 as mitigation measures would reduce the potential for generation of excessive light and glare to a **less-than-significant** level.

4.2.3.3 ALTERNATIVE 3

Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 3): Consistency with Federal, State, and Local Regulations

Alternative 3 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in alteration of the visual character within the project area. No inconsistencies between Alternative 3 and the federal, state, and local plans and guidance presented in Section 4.2.1.2 would occur. Alternative 3 would be compliant with Policy 1.K.1 of the Placer County General Plan because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would not extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, there would be **no effect.** Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant**. RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect.

Inconsistencies between Alternative 3 and relevant federal, state, and local plans and guidance would not occur. Most of the discussion under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2) above also is applicable to Alternative 3 although the conclusions differ between Alternatives 2 and 3; key differences between these alternatives are discussed below.

Forest Plan

For the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3, only the gondola terminal at the Alpine Meadows base area and five towers are located on NFS lands. This area has an assigned VQO of *Modification*. Under

Alternative 3, the Alpine Meadows mid-station would be located on the Caldwell property; this mid-station would not be located within the Alpine Meadows SUP area, and therefore, the VQO of *Partial Retention* would not apply to this structure.

The gondola cabin storage facility at the Alpine Meadows base area would be very visible and the white gondola cabins would contrast greatly with the darker earth tones that are present in the summer season. While storage of the gondola cabins during the summer would considerably reduce overall infrastructural mass and therefore visual impacts along the upslope portions of the gondola, storage of the gondola cabins would increase visual impacts associated with the project at the base areas during the summer season. The proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would not constitute an inconsistency with the VQO of *Modification*, as this VQO allows for management activities to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. This facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape, and implementation of applicable RPMs, along with the design review and approval process, would ensure consistency with the BEIG and preclude the possibility of any inconsistency with the *Modification* VQO. Refer to the "Applicable RPMs" header under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2) for a list of these RPMs.

The Forest Plan also establishes policies for management of federally designated wilderness areas within the TNF, like the National Forest System-GCW. While there are certain locations within the National Forest System-GCW from which gondola infrastructure would be visible under Alternative 3, there is no legislation or policy that precludes development from being visible to recreationists from within federal wilderness areas. (Refer to Section 4.3, "Wilderness," for more information.)

State

Alternative 3 would be compliant with the California Scenic Highway Program, as SR 89 is an eligible route for designation as an official scenic highway but is not yet officially designated. Therefore, the protections afforded by the California Scenic Highway Program do not apply to SR 89. However, even if SR 89 were designated as a scenic highway, Alternative 3 would have limited, if any visibility from this roadway due to distance and topographic and vegetative screening.

Local

Alternative 3 would be compliant with all guidance presented in local plans. Policy 1.K.1. of the *Placer County General Plan*, discussed under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2), does not present a potential inconsistency with Alternative 3 because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would not traverse the ridgeline that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property; under Alternative 3, the gondola would briefly pass over the ridgeline above the existing KT-22 lift before dropping down into Catch Valley and would altogether avoid the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property.

For the same reasons described above for Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would not create any inconsistencies with the height restrictions established in Section 137 of the SVGPLUO.

Applicable RPMs

RPMs listed under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2) are also applicable to Alternative 3.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Installation of the proposed gondola and Gazex facilities would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding these facilities, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. While Alternative 3 would constitute an incremental addition to the built environment in the upslope areas at Alpine Meadows, the presence of gondola infrastructure and Gazex facilities would not dominate the characteristic landscape in these areas and therefore would not constitute an inconsistency with the relevant VQO of *Partial Retention* there. The proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would not constitute an inconsistency with the VQO of *Modification*, as this VQO allows for management activities to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. This facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape, and implementation of applicable RPMs, along with the design review and approval process,

would ensure consistency with the BEIG and preclude the possibility of any inconsistency with the *Modification* VQO. Alternative 3 would be compliant with Policy 1.K.1 of the Placer County General Plan because the gondola alignment would not extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, there would be **no effect** related to consistency with federal, state, and local regulations.

CEQA Determination of Effects

Installation of the proposed gondola and Gazex facilities would not create any inconsistencies with relevant state and local plans. Alternative 3 would be consistent with Policy 1.K.1. of the *Placer County General Plan* because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would not extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant**. Implementation of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would further reduce this impact, but these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant effect.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 as mitigation measures would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect.

Impact 4.2-2 (Alt. 3): Visual Character (General Impact on Visual Character)

Alternative 3 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. Degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 3 would be less than that associated with Alternative 2 due to differences in the proposed gondola alignments. While Alternative 2 would connect the Squaw Valley mid-station and the Alpine Meadows mid-station via the ridgeline that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property, Alternative 3 would run down Catch Valley just to the east of this ridgeline to connect the Squaw Valley mid-station with the Alpine Meadows mid-station. Because Alternative 3 would be located in a valley with steep topographical features on either side, its overall visibility would be reduced considerably, including from within the National Forest System-GCW. Although degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 3 would be less than that associated with Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would still result in degradation of the project area's visual character. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to visual character would be **minorly adverse**. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would mitigate this effect. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, installation of the proposed gondola would have an adverse effect on visual character because it would create a contrast with currently visible landscapes within certain views and this impact would be **significant**. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would minimize this effect by promoting screening of project features and incorporating design elements that assist the project features in blending into the landscape. However, although implementation of these RPMs would reduce this impact, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels.

See discussion of visual character for Alternative 2 for a detailed description of how this analysis is organized. Analysis for Alternative 3 is compared to Alternative 2 when possible and distinguished with additional detail when necessary.

Construction *(presence of construction associated with installation of gondola infrastructure would contrast with current setting; all impacts would be temporary)*

Relevant Views: All (excluding 3, 14 and 15). With the exception of Views 3, 14, and 15, visual impacts from the construction phase under Alternative 3 would be observed from all views. For Views 3, 14, and 15, the

gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would not be visible due to shielding by trees or topography. For the remaining views, the types of impacts described above for Alternative 2 would be similar for Alternative 3, including the potential for temporary inconsistencies with the relevant VQOs of *Partial Retention* and *Modification* at Alpine Meadows, which are possible only during the construction phase.

For the construction phase, types of viewers and duration of their view is hugely variable because all views are potentially relevant during this phase. Viewers may be hiking, biking, or driving, and duration of their view could range from seconds to hours depending on mode of travel and activity of viewer.

Base Area *(infrastructure of all kinds currently visible; no contrast in architectural character would occur with the exception of the gondola cabin storage facility)*

Relevant Views: 5, 6, 7, and 8 (Alpine Meadows Base Terminal), 21 (KT Sundeck/Condo Area). Visual impacts from these viewpoints would be similar to those described above for Alternative 2; while the gondola terminal orientation differs slightly, the visual contrast that would be created by the gondola is very comparable. Gazex facilities would be installed in the same locations under all action alternatives; under Alternative 3, this infrastructure would be visible within Views 5–8. As described above under Alternative 2, the proposed gondola storage facility would exhibit considerable contrast with the existing condition during the summer and may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape; however, this facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape as much as possible in accordance with the BEIG and the design review and approval process.

Most of the viewers at these locations, would be those participating in snow sports during the ski season, hikers or bikers during the non-ski season, and guests lodging at the Squaw Valley base area. Duration of views would range from several minutes for those heading uphill, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

Ridgelines and Sparsely Vegetated Hillsides *(currently undeveloped and natural-appearing; gondola infrastructure would contrast with current setting)*

Relevant Views: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 (Five Lakes Trail Switchback 1, Five Lakes Trail Switchback 2, Five Lakes Trail Water Break Hill, Five Lakes Trail Wilderness Boundary 1 and 2, Five Lakes Granite Chief Wilderness, Barstool Lake, Squaw Saddle). From Views 9–15, no development can currently be seen. The gondola alignment under Alternative 3 would be visible from Views 9–13. In Views 9-12, contrast between the existing and proposed conditions would be considerable, as the infrastructure would be very visible in the foreground of each view; in View 13, contrast between the existing and proposed conditions would be minor, as the infrastructure would be largely hidden by vegetation. From Views 14 and 15, topography is such that this alignment would not be visible; gondola infrastructure would be hidden on the opposite side of the ridgeline, and therefore, Alternative 3 would not constitute an appreciable change to current setting from Views 14 and 15. Topography from this view is such that the gondola alignment would not be visible if constructed. Visual impacts on View 16 would be less than those described above for Alternative 2; the alignment differs, and as a result, infrastructure would blend with surrounding vegetation and topography considerably.

The differences between Alternatives 2 and 3 in impacts on visual character within these views are considerable; under Alternative 3, the alignment of the gondola down Catch Valley would greatly reduce the visibility of gondola infrastructure from sensitive views like those seen from ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides.

Most of the viewers at these locations would be hikers heading into or within the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes to hours, depending on hikers' ascent speed along the trail or breaks taken at scenic vistas.

Each of the relevant views listed above provides an expansive perspective of a highly valued natural landscape, which could be considered scenic vistas. As a result, the above analysis is intended to address

the first of the CEQA criteria listed above in Section 4.2.2.2, which pertains to substantial adverse effects potentially occurring to scenic vistas.

Highly Utilized Roads *(currently developed; gondola infrastructure would be visible but would remain visually subordinate to the current setting)*

Relevant Views: 1 and 2 (Alpine Meadows Road), 3 (Chalet Road), 4 (Chalet Road – Northwest), 17 and 18 (Squaw Valley Road), 19 and 20 (Squaw Valley Road). Visual impacts from Views 1–3 would be different from those described above for Alternative 2. The gondola alignment within these views would be mostly screened by tall trees in the foreground, so infrastructure from these views would not be visible at all. The presence of a gondola would not constitute an appreciable change to the current setting and gondola infrastructure would remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape.

Visual impacts from Views 4 and 17–20 would be similar to those described above for Alternative 2; the alignment differs slightly, but the contrast that would be created by gondola infrastructure is comparable.

Viewers that experience these views are likely to be driving or biking along the road, and therefore would experience these views for only several seconds (depending on mode of travel).

Other Regional Viewpoints *(various locations within the viewshed for which visual simulations were not created)*

Visual impacts from these locations associated with Alternative 3 are less than those associated with Alternative 2; as indicated by the viewshed analysis, the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would be potentially visible from approximately 16.04 square miles within the surrounding area (refer to Exhibit 4.2-5 for the viewshed map associated with Alternative 3). However, far less of the gondola infrastructure would be visible on high ridgelines because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 runs down Catch Valley rather than along the ridgeline that separates the National Forest System-GCW from the Caldwell property. This is a considerable difference, in that the alignment of Alternative 2 along this ridgeline makes it easily visible from many locations within the viewshed for which viewpoint analysis was conducted. The alignment of Alternative 3 down Catch Valley allows for substantial topographical screening on either side of this alignment, greatly reducing the visibility of gondola infrastructure. The viewshed analysis indicates that Alternative 3 would not be visible from any parts of Lake Tahoe because of the distance between Lake Tahoe and the project area, and vegetative and topographical screening between the two. The viewshed analysis indicates that visibility of Alternative 3 for travelers on SR 89 are nearly the same as that discussed above for Alternative 2 (refer to Exhibit 4.2-5 for the locations along SR 89 that are within the viewshed).

RPMs That Would Reduce Adverse Effects on Visual Character
RPMs listed under Impact 4.2-2 (Alt. 2) are also applicable to Alternative 3.

NEPA Effects Conclusion
Installation of the proposed gondola under Alternative 3 would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the alignment, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. However, degradation of the project area's visual character within each of these different landscapes under Alternative 3 would be substantially less than that associated with Alternative 2 due to differences in the proposed gondola alignments. In particular, Alternative 3 would result in visible infrastructure being built within 15 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created. The location of Alternative 3 in a valley with steep topographical features on either side would result in its overall visibility being greatly reduced, including from within the National Forest System-GCW. Under Alternative 3, installed gondola infrastructure would not be visible from any parts of Lake Tahoe. Although degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 3 would be less than that associated with Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would still result in the installation of infrastructure in certain sensitive and remote areas. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to visual character would be **minorly adverse**. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7.

CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 3 would degrade the project area's existing visual character because it would result in visible infrastructure being built within 15 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created. Specifically, Alternative 3 would have a substantial adverse effect on some of the scenic vistas identified as ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides, and the existing visual character of the site would be degraded within some of these views from the perspective of some observers. However, degradations in visual character associated with Alternative 3 would be substantially less than that associated with Alternative 2 due to differences in the proposed gondola alignments. The location of Alternative 3 in a valley with steep topographical features on either side would result in its overall visibility being greatly reduced, including from within the National Forest System-GCW. Although degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 3 would be less than that associated with Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would still result in the installation of infrastructure in certain sensitive and remote areas, and therefore, under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be significant. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would minimize this effect by promoting screening of project features and incorporating design elements that assist project feature in blending into the landscape. However, although implementation of these RPMs would reduce this impact, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels. Therefore, this impact would be **significant**.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 as mitigation measures would reduce effects related to visual character; however, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels.

Significance after Mitigation

This significant impact results from infrastructure being installed in sensitive and remote areas. The alternative cannot be implemented without generating this effect. There is no feasible mitigation that would reduce the visibility of the project sufficiently to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact 4.2-3 (Alt. 3): Night Lighting and Glare

Alternative 3 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in installation of night lighting fixtures at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings, and on gondola cabins for emergencies; however, these lights would be used only for maintenance, to prepare for daily operations, for short periods of operation after sunset, and emergencies, so they would rarely be activated during nighttime hours. No lighting is proposed with the Gazex facilities. Under Alternative 3, night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible within six fewer views than Alternative 2. Construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities could result in a limited amount of glare during certain times of day, depending on angle of the sun, amount of cloud cover, and position of the viewer; however, specific PDC and BMPs would be implemented to minimize glare. There would be **no effect** under NEPA. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **significant** before implementation of RPMs because night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible from certain views, and a limited amount of glare is possible. Implementation of RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8, which limit night lighting and glare, would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Night Lighting

Under Alternative 3, night lighting fixtures could be visible at the gondola's terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings within Views 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Night lighting fixtures would cause visual impacts on any locations from which they are visible during nighttime hours.

Occasions when installed night lighting fixtures would be visible during nighttime hours would be uncommon. Although the placement of facilities differs somewhat under Alternative 3, the lighting types and hours of operation are the same as those for Alternative 2, so the effect is comparable.

Glare

A limited amount of glare from installed infrastructure is possible during certain times of day (depending on angle of the sun, amount of cloud cover, position of viewer, etc.). However, proper implementation of applicable RPM SCE-5 (discussed below) would ensure that installed infrastructure would meet solar reflectivity standards and would minimize visual impacts associated with intense reflectivity from installed infrastructure; structures would be built with certain materials and given certain colors that minimize reflectivity. The Placer County Design Guidelines also include design requirements that minimize reflectivity and glare.

RPMs That Would Reduce Adverse Effects of Night Lighting and Glare

RPMs listed under Impact 4.2-3 (Alt. 2) are also applicable to Alternative 3.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Alternative 3 would result in installation of night lighting fixtures that could potentially be visible within six fewer views than Alternative 2. These night lighting fixtures would be installed at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and on gondola cabins to be used only during emergency situations. Lights installed on gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings would be visible only during nighttime hours if preparation for daily operations starts before sunrise, when operation occurs for a short period after sunset, or if nighttime maintenance is required. Lights installed on gondola cabins would be visible only during nighttime hours in the case of an emergency after dark. Glare would be minimized through application of RPM SCE-5. Proper implementation of RPM SCE-5 would ensure that installed infrastructure would meet solar reflectivity standards. Therefore, there would be **no effect.**

CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 3 would result in installation of night lighting fixtures that could potentially be visible within six fewer views than Alternative 2. These night lighting fixtures would be installed at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and on gondola cabins to be used only during emergency situations. Lights installed on gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings would be visible only during nighttime hours if preparation for daily operations starts before sunrise, when operation occurs for a short period after sunset, or if nighttime maintenance is required. Lights installed on gondola cabins would be visible only during nighttime hours in the case of an emergency after dark. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects related to light and glare would be **significant** before implementation of RPMs because night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible, and a limited amount of glare is possible. However, RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8 would limit night lighting and glare. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8 as mitigation measures would reduce the potential for generation of excessive light and glare to a **less-than-significant** level.

4.2.3.4 ALTERNATIVE 4

Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 4): Consistency with Federal, State, and Local Regulations

Alternative 4 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in alteration of the visual character within the project area. No inconsistencies between Alternative 4 and the federal, state, and local plans and guidance presented in Section 4.2.1.2 would occur. Alternative 4 would be compliant with Policy 1.K.1 of the Placer County General Plan because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 4 would not extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, there would be **no effect.** Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant**. RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect.

Inconsistencies between Alternative 4 and relevant federal, state, and local plans and guidance would not occur. See discussion under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 3); differences between Alternative 4 and Alternative 2 are the same as the differences discussed between Alternative 3 and Alternative 2.

Forest Plan

For the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 4, only the gondola terminal at the Alpine Meadows base area is located on NFS lands, which has an assigned VQO of *Modification*. Under Alternative 4, the Alpine Meadows mid-station would be located on the Caldwell property; while the Alpine Meadows mid-station under Alternative 4 is in a slightly different location on the Caldwell property than it would be under Alternative 3, it still would not be located within the Alpine Meadows SUP area, and therefore, the VQO of *Partial Retention* would not apply to this structure.

Just as with Alternatives 2 and 3, the proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would not constitute an inconsistency with the VQO of *Modification*, as this VQO allows for management activities to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. This facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape, and implementation of applicable RPMs, along with the design review and approval process, would ensure consistency with the BEIG and preclude the possibility of any inconsistency with the *Modification* VQO.

The Forest Plan also establishes policies for management of federally designated wilderness areas within the TNF, like the National Forest System-GCW. While there are certain locations within the National Forest System-GCW from which gondola infrastructure would be visible under Alternative 4, there is no legislation or policy that precludes development from being visible to recreationists from within federal wilderness areas. (Refer to Section 4.3, “Wilderness,” for more information.)

State

Alternative 4 would be compliant with the California Scenic Highway Program, as SR 89 is an eligible route for designation as an official scenic highway but is not yet officially designated. Therefore, the protections afforded by the California Scenic Highway Program do not apply to SR 89. However, even if SR 89 were designated as a scenic highway, Alternative 4 would have limited, if any visibility from this roadway due to distance and topographic and vegetative screening.

Local

Alternative 4 would be compliant with all guidance presented in local plans. Policy 1.K.1. of the *Placer County General Plan*, discussed under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2), does not present a potential inconsistency with Alternative 4 because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 4 would not traverse the ridgeline that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property; under Alternative 4, the gondola would briefly pass over the ridgeline above the existing KT-22 lift before dropping down into the east side of Catch Valley and would altogether avoid the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property.

For the same reasons described above for Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would not create any inconsistencies with the height restrictions established in Section 137 of the SVGPLUO.

Applicable RPMs

RPMs listed under Impact 4.2-1 (Alt. 2) are also applicable to Alternative 4.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Installation of the proposed gondola and Gazex facilities would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding these facilities, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. While Alternative 4 would constitute an incremental addition to the built environment in the upslope areas at Alpine Meadows, the presence of gondola infrastructure and Gazex facilities would not dominate the characteristic landscape in these areas and therefore would not constitute an inconsistency with the relevant VQO of *Partial Retention* there. The proposed storage facility housing the gondola cabins during the summer at the base area of Alpine Meadows would not constitute an inconsistency with the VQO of *Modification*, as this VQO allows for management activities to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape. This facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape, and implementation of applicable RPMs, along with the design review and approval process, would ensure consistency with the BEIG and preclude the possibility of any inconsistency with the *Modification* VQO. Alternative 4 would be compliant with Policy 1.K.1 of the Placer County General Plan because the gondola alignment would not extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, there would be **no effect** related to consistency with federal, state, and local regulations.

CEQA Determination of Effects

Installation of the proposed gondola and Gazex facilities would not create any inconsistencies with relevant state and local plans. Alternative 3 would be consistent with Policy 1.K.1. of the *Placer County General Plan* because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 3 would not extend along the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **less than significant**. Implementation of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations, but these RPMs are not necessary to reduce a significant effect.

Mitigation Measures

No mitigation measures are required. All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-1, SCE-2, SCE-4, SCE-7, SCE-8, REV-1, and REV-3 as mitigation measures would reduce effects related to project consistency with federal, state, and local regulations, but are not necessary to reduce a significant effect.

Impact 4.2-2 (Alt. 4): Visual Character (General Impact on Visual Character)

Alternative 4 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities, which would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the alignment, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. Degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 4, as seen from the viewpoint analysis, would be less than that associated with Alternative 2 due to differences in the proposed gondola alignments; the location of Alternative 4 in a valley with steep topographical features on either side would result in its overall visibility being greatly reduced, including from within the National Forest System-GCW. However, degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 4, as seen from the viewshed analysis, would be greater than that associated with Alternative 2 or 3 because the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 4 would be visible from a small section of Lake Tahoe. Alternative 4 would result in the installation of infrastructure in certain sensitive and remote areas, which would degrade the project area's visual character. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to visual character would be **minorly adverse**. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would mitigate this effect. Under

CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, installation of the proposed gondola would have an adverse effect on visual character because it would create a contrast with currently visible landscapes within certain views and this impact would be **significant**. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would minimize this effect by promoting screening of project features and incorporating design elements that assist the project features in blending into the landscape. However, although implementation of these RPMs would reduce this impact, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels.

See discussion of visual character for Alternative 2 for a detailed description of how this analysis is organized. Analysis for Alternative 4 is compared to Alternative 2 when possible and distinguished with additional detail when necessary.

Construction *(presence of construction associated with installation of gondola infrastructure would contrast with current setting; all impacts would be temporary)*

Relevant Views: All. With the exception of Views 3, 9, 14, 15, and 21, visual impacts associated with the construction phase would be visible from all locations. From Views 3, 9, 14, 15, and 21, the gondola alignment would not be visible due to shielding by trees or topography. For all other views, the types of impacts described above for Alternative 2 would be nearly the same for Alternative 4, including the potential for temporary inconsistencies with the relevant VQO of *Partial Retention*, for the duration of the construction phase.

For the construction phase, types of viewers and duration of their view is hugely variable because all views are potentially relevant during this phase. Viewers may be hiking, biking, or driving, and duration of their view could range from seconds to hours depending on mode of travel and activity of viewer.

Base Area *(infrastructure of all kinds currently visible; no contrast in architectural character would occur with the exception of the gondola cabin storage facility)*

Views: 5, 6, 7, and 8 (Alpine Meadows Base Terminal), 21 (KT Sundeck/Condo Area). Apart from View 21, visual impacts from these locations would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 2 and Alternative 3; gondola terminal orientation differs slightly, but the contrast that would be created by gondola infrastructure is comparable. The gondola alignment for Alternative 4 is such that the terminal at Squaw Valley by the KT Sundeck/Condo Area would not be visible within View 21. Gazex facilities would be installed in the same locations under all action alternatives; under Alternative 4, this infrastructure would be visible within Views 5–8.

As described above under Alternative 2, the proposed gondola storage facility would exhibit considerable contrast with the existing condition during the summer and may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape; however, this facility would be designed to blend with the surrounding landscape as much as possible in accordance with the BEIG and the design review and approval process.

Most of the viewers at these locations, would be those participating in snow sports during the ski season, hikers or bikers during the non-ski season, and guests lodging at the Squaw Valley base area. Duration of views would range from several minutes for those heading uphill, to potentially hours for those sitting at the lodge.

Ridgelines and Sparsely Vegetated Hillsides *(currently undeveloped and natural-appearing; gondola infrastructure would contrast with current setting)*

Relevant Views: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 (Five Lakes Trail Switchback 1, Five Lakes Trail Switchback 2, Five Lakes Trail Water Break Hill, Five Lakes Trail Wilderness Boundary 1 and 2, Five Lakes Granite Chief Wilderness, Barstool Lake, Squaw Saddle). Apart from within View 9, visual impacts from these locations would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 3; the gondola alignment under

Alternative 4 would be visible within Views 10–13 and would create a considerable contrast from the currently visible landscapes in those locations. Within Views 11 and 13, gondola infrastructure would be evident but contrast would be minimal enough such that infrastructure would largely blend into the surrounding landscape; within View 12, the gondola would be largely screen by vegetation but short sections of the wire-rope would be visible. Views 14 and 15, topography is such that this alignment would not be visible; gondola infrastructure would be hidden on the opposite side of the ridge, and therefore, Alternative 4 would not constitute an appreciable change to current setting within Views 14 and 15. Gondola infrastructure would remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape.

Visual impacts on View 16 would be less than those described above for Alternative 2 or 3; the alignment differs, and as a result, infrastructure would blend with the surrounding vegetation and topography considerably. Most of the viewers at these locations would be hikers heading into or within the National Forest System-GCW, and duration of their view would likely last several minutes to hours, depending on hikers' ascent speed along the trail or breaks taken at scenic vistas.

Each of the relevant views listed above provides an expansive perspective of a highly valued natural landscape, which could be considered scenic vistas. As a result, the above analysis is intended to address the first of the CEQA criteria listed above in Section 4.2.2.2, which pertains to substantial adverse effects potentially occurring to scenic vistas.

Highly Utilized Roads *(currently developed; gondola infrastructure would be visible but would not contrast heavily with current setting)*

Relevant Views: 1 and 2 (Alpine Meadows Road), 3 (Chalet Road), 4 (Chalet Road – Northwest), 17 and 18 (Squaw Valley Road), 19 and 20 (Squaw Valley Road). Visual impacts from these views would be nearly the same as those described above for Alternative 3; the alignment differs slightly, but the contrast that would be created by gondola infrastructure is comparable. The gondola alignment within View 3 would still be mostly screened by tall trees in the foreground, so gondola infrastructure from this viewpoint would not be visible at all.

Viewers who experience these views are likely to be driving or biking along the road, and therefore would experience these views for only several seconds (depending on mode of travel).

Other Regional Viewpoints *(various locations within the viewshed for which visual simulations were not created)*

Visual impacts from these locations are greater for Alternative 4 than they are for Alternative 2 or 3; as indicated by the viewshed analysis, the gondola alignment associated with Alternative 4 would be potentially visible from approximately 19.05 square miles within the surrounding area (refer to Exhibit 4.2-6 for the viewshed map associated with Alternative 4). In addition, the viewshed analysis indicates that Alternative 4 has potential for visibility from a small section of the surface of Lake Tahoe, just to the east of Tahoe City. However, as described above, the viewshed analysis does not take into account vegetative screening and existing vegetation could greatly reduce the actual visibility of Alternative 4 facilities from this location. Exhibit 4.2-7 was created to further investigate this possibility. Contrary to the viewshed analysis estimate conducted for Alternative 4, which indicated that infrastructure under Alternative 4 could be visible from a small section of the surface of Lake Tahoe, Exhibit 4.2-7 shows that vegetative screening would fully obscure gondola infrastructure for viewers within this small section of Lake Tahoe. This conclusion shows that vegetative screening would greatly reduce visibility of gondola infrastructure from locations within the Zone of Potential Visibility (as approximated for the viewshed analysis conducted for each alternative) and underscores the conservative nature of the viewshed analysis. The viewshed analysis indicates that visibility of Alternative 4 for travelers on SR 89 is nearly the same as that discussed above for Alternative 2.

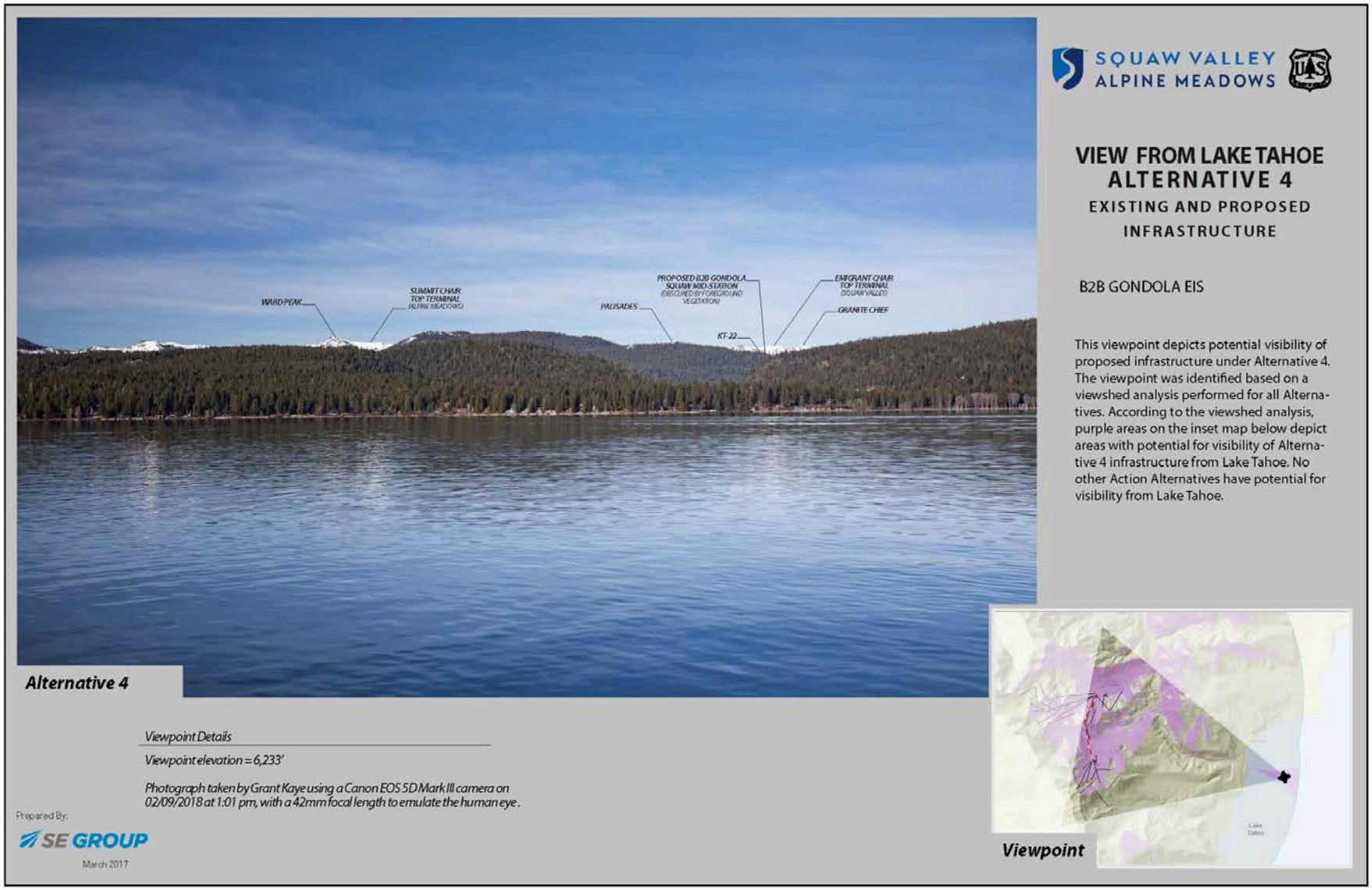

Exhibit 4.2-7 View of Alternative 4 from Lake Tahoe

RPMs That Would Reduce Adverse Effects on Visual Character
RPMs listed under Impact 4.2-2 (Alt. 2) are also applicable to Alternative 4.

NEPA Effects Conclusion
Installation of the proposed gondola under Alternative 4 would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the alignment, including in areas that are currently primarily natural as well as areas that are already heavily developed. Degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 4, as seen from the viewpoint analysis, would be less than that associated with Alternative 2 due to differences in the proposed gondola alignments; the location of Alternative 4 in a valley with steep topographical features on either side would result in its overall visibility being greatly reduced, including from within the National Forest System-GCW. In particular, Alternative 4 would result in visible infrastructure being built within 15 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created. The viewshed analysis indicates that the gondola alignment under Alternative 4 would be visible from a small section of Lake Tahoe; however, vegetative screening would entirely obscure gondola infrastructure from this location (see Exhibit 4.2-7, above). Alternative 4 would result in the installation of infrastructure in certain sensitive and remote areas, which would degrade the project area's visual character. Under NEPA, and considering the NEPA indicators, absent RPMs and/or mitigation, direct and indirect effects related to visual character would be **minorly adverse**. These effects would be mitigated through implementation of RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7.

CEQA Determination of Effects
Alternative 4 would degrade the project area's existing visual character because it would result in visible infrastructure being built within 15 of the 21 views for which visual simulations were created. Specifically, Alternative 4 would have a substantial adverse effect on some of the scenic vistas identified as ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides, and the existing visual character of the site would be degraded within some of these views from the perspective of some observers. However, degradations in visual character associated with Alternative 4 would be substantially less than that associated with Alternative 2 due to differences in the proposed gondola alignments; degradation of visual character under Alternative 4 is very comparable to Alternative 3. The location of Alternative 4 in a valley with steep topographical features on either side would result in its overall visibility being greatly reduced, including from within the National Forest System-GCW. Although degradation of the project area's visual character under Alternative 4 would be less than that associated with Alternative 2, Alternative 4 would still result in the installation of infrastructure in certain sensitive and remote areas, and therefore, under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be significant. RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 would minimize this effect by promoting screening of project features and incorporating design elements that assist project feature in blending into the landscape. However, although implementation of these RPMs would reduce this impact, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels. Therefore, this impact would be **significant.**

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-1 through SCE-4, SCE-6, and SCE-7 as mitigation measures would reduce effects related to visual character; however, it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level because project features would remain visible and adversely affect scenic vistas and visual quality in remote landscapes with high sensitivity levels.

Significance after Mitigation
This significant impact results from infrastructure being installed in sensitive and remote areas. The alternative cannot be implemented without generating this effect. There is no feasible mitigation that would reduce the visibility of the project sufficiently to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, this impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact 4.2-3 (Alt. 4): Night Lighting and Glare

Alternative 4 would result in the construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities. This new construction would result in installation of night lighting fixtures at gondola terminals and operating buildings, and on gondola cabins for emergencies; however, these lights would be used only for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and emergencies are uncommon, so they would rarely be activated during nighttime hours. No lighting is proposed with the Gazex facilities. Under Alternative 4, night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible within eight fewer views than Alternative 2, and 2 fewer than Alternative 3. Construction of a gondola and Gazex facilities could result in a limited amount of glare during certain times of day, depending on angle of the sun, amount of cloud cover, and position of the viewer; however, specific PDC and BMPs would be implemented to minimize glare. There would be **no effect** under NEPA. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, this impact would be **significant** before implementation of RPMs because night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible from certain views, and a limited amount of glare is possible. Implementation of RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8, which limit night lighting and glare, would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Night Lighting

Under Alternative 4, night lighting fixtures could be visible at the gondola's terminals and operating buildings within Views 5, 6, 7, and 8. Night lighting fixtures would cause visual impacts on any locations from which they are visible during nighttime hours.

Occasions when installed night lighting fixtures would be visible during nighttime hours are very uncommon, for the same reasons described above for Alternative 2. Although the placement of facilities differs somewhat under Alternative 4, the lighting types and hours of operation are the same as those for Alternative 2, so the effect is comparable.

Glare

A limited amount of glare from installed infrastructure is possible during certain times of day (depending on angle of the sun, amount of cloud cover, position of viewer, etc.). However, proper implementation of applicable RPM SCE-5 (discussed below) would ensure that installed infrastructure would meet solar reflectivity standards and would minimize visual impacts associated with intense reflectivity from installed infrastructure; structures would be built with certain materials and given certain colors that minimize reflectivity. The Placer County Design Guidelines also include design requirements that minimize reflectivity and glare.

RPMs That Would Reduce Adverse Effects of Night Lighting and Glare

RPMs listed under Impact 4.2-3 (Alt. 2) are also applicable to Alternative 4.

NEPA Effects Conclusion

Alternative 4 would result in installation of night lighting fixtures that could potentially be visible within eight fewer views than Alternative 2, and 2 fewer than Alternative 3. These night lighting fixtures would be installed at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and on gondola cabins to be used only during emergency situations. Lights installed on gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings would be visible only during nighttime hours if preparation for daily operations starts before sunrise, when operation occurs for a short period after sunset, or if nighttime maintenance is required. Lights installed on gondola cabins would be visible only during nighttime hours in the case of an emergency after dark. Glare would be minimized through application of RPM SCE-5. Proper implementation of RPM SCE-5 would ensure that installed infrastructure would meet solar reflectivity standards. Therefore, there would be **no effect.**

CEQA Determination of Effects

Alternative 4 would result in installation of night lighting fixtures that could potentially be visible within eight fewer views than Alternative 2 and two fewer than Alternative 3. These night lighting fixtures would be installed at gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings for maintenance and to prepare for daily operations, and on gondola cabins to be used only during emergency situations. Lights installed on

gondola terminals, mid-stations, and operating buildings would be visible only during nighttime hours if preparation for daily operations starts before sunrise, when operation occurs for a short period after sunset, or if nighttime maintenance is required. Lights installed on gondola cabins would be visible only during nighttime hours in the case of an emergency after dark. Under CEQA, and using the CEQA criteria, effects related to light and glare would be **significant** before implementation of RPMs because night lighting fixtures could potentially be visible, and a limited amount of glare is possible. However, RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8 would limit night lighting and glare. With implementation of these RPMs, this impact would be reduced to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measures

All RPMs provided in Appendix B are adopted by Placer County as mitigation measures and are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project. The adoption of RPMs SCE-5 and SCE-8 as mitigation measures would reduce the potential for generation of excessive light and glare to a **less-than-significant** level.

4.2.3.5 SUMMARY OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

Table 4.2-1 provides a summary of the effects determinations for the direct and indirect effects evaluated above for each alternative.

For Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, there would be no effect for all NEPA indicators and CEQA criteria evaluated.

For all action alternatives, there are no meaningful differences in effects for Impact 4.2-1 or 4.2-3. None of the action alternatives would cause inconsistencies with relevant Federal, state, or local regulations, and none of the action alternatives would cause inconsistencies with any lighting or reflectivity standards and guidelines.

With regard to Impact 4.2-2, all action alternatives would increase the developed nature of the landscape surrounding the gondola alignment, resulting in adverse effects to visual character; however, these adverse effects to visual character are not identical across action alternatives. Alternative 2 would have the greatest impact, followed by Alternative 4 and finally Alternative 3.

Alternative 2 would result in adverse effects to visual character because its gondola alignment would traverse the ridgeline separating the National Forest System-GCW from the Caldwell property. The viewpoint analysis indicates that gondola infrastructure would be particularly evident high on this ridgeline from Alpine Meadows Road and the Alpine Meadows base area and would exhibit considerable contrast on this side of the alignment. The prominence of gondola infrastructure along this ridgeline would mean that proposed conditions under Alternative 2 would have the most substantial negative impact on visual character out of all the action alternatives. The infrastructure that would be built near the Squaw Valley base area would contrast less with existing developed nature of that area, like with Alternative 3 or 4. For Alternative 2, the viewshed analysis indicates that gondola infrastructure would be potentially visible from approximately 17.99 square miles within the surrounding area.

Alternative 3 would result in minorly adverse effects to visual character. These effects are lesser than those associated with Alternative 2 because under Alternative 3, the gondola alignment would run through Catch Valley, meaning that natural topography would screen the gondola from many locations. Impacts on visual character associated with Alternative 3 are comparable to those associated with Alternative 2 near the Squaw Valley base area, as proposed infrastructure is comparable to existing infrastructure on the Squaw Valley side, which would not vary appreciably between action alternatives. For Alternative 3, the viewshed analysis indicates that gondola infrastructure would be potentially visible from approximately 16.04 square miles within the surrounding area.

Alternative 4 would result in minorly adverse effects to visual character. These effects are lesser than those associated with Alternative 2 but greater than those associated with Alternative 3. This is because under Alternative 4, the gondola alignment would run closer to the floor of Catch Valley, meaning that natural topography would screen the gondola from many locations, but would not traverse Catch Valley via the lowest alignment possible like with Alternative 3. Impacts on visual character associated with Alternative 4 are comparable to those of Alternatives 2 and 3 near the Squaw Valley base area, as proposed infrastructure is comparable to existing infrastructure on the Squaw Valley side, which would not vary appreciably between action alternatives. For Alternative 4, the viewshed analysis indicates that gondola infrastructure would be potentially visible from approximately 19.05 square miles within the surrounding area.

Table 4.2-1 Summary of Direct and Indirect Effects

Impact	Applicable Analytical Indicators and Significance Criteria	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
4.2-1: Consistency with Federal, State, and Local Regulations	Compliance with Forest Plan VQOs; Compliance with the intent of the BEIG; and Compliance with Local General Plan direction and policy for visual resources	No effect	Adverse under NEPA; significant under CEQA	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA Less than under Alternative 2	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA Less than under Alternative 2 and same as for Alternative 3
4.2-2: Visual Character	Determination of the visibility of contrast between action alternatives and existing condition and visual evidence of dominance of actions to the characteristic landscape	No effect	Adverse under NEPA; significant and unavoidable under CEQA	Minorly adverse under NEPA; significant and unavoidable under CEQA Less than under Alternative 2	Minorly adverse under NEPA; significant and unavoidable under CEQA Less than under Alternative 2 and similar to Alternative 3
4.2-3: Night Lighting and Glare	Compliance with all lighting and reflectivity standards and guidelines	No effect	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA Similar to Alternative 2	No effect under NEPA; less than significant under CEQA Similar to Alternatives 2 and 3

4.2.4 Cumulative Effects

4.2.4.1 METHODS AND APPROACH

The list of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects considered in this cumulative analysis is provided in Chapter 3 of this Draft EIS/EIR. The spatial scope for this cumulative effects analysis of visual resources includes reasonably foreseeable future projects that would occur within the viewshed of the project area.

Any present or reasonably foreseeable future projects within the viewshed of the project area that have the potential to reduce the project area's visual quality are listed below. Potential impacts associated with these projects include changes to landscape dominance elements (form, line, color, texture), degree of contrast that results from the presence of the project compared to the existing condition, inconsistencies with relevant federal, state, and local plans, and general reductions in natural-appearing landscape of the project area.

The following is a list of present and reasonably foreseeable future projects that could reduce the visual quality of the project area.

Project	Potential Impacts
General Development in Olympic Valley	Additional development added to the existing landscape dominance elements found in the Olympic Valley. Development would entail construction of a large residential complex along Squaw Valley Road, and new recreation infrastructure at Squaw Valley (e.g., Timberline Twister). Overall, these visual impacts would not constitute a considerable change to existing conditions as the Olympic Valley is already heavily developed.
General Development in Alpine Meadows	Additional development added to the existing landscape dominance elements found in the Alpine Meadows base area. Overall, these visual impacts would not constitute a considerable change to existing conditions as the Alpine Meadows base area is already developed.
White Wolf project	Changes to the existing landscape dominance elements found on the Caldwell property; degree of contrast that would result from presence of these homes compared to the existing condition; general reductions in natural-appearing landscape of the project area. Overall, these visual impacts would constitute a considerable change to existing conditions on the Caldwell property, as the only development currently existing there is associated with the property owner's permanent residence. An additional 38 homes constructed on this site would reduce the visual quality of the natural-appearing landscape as it currently exists.
Alpine Sierra Subdivision	Additional residential development added to the existing landscape dominance elements found at Alpine Meadows. New residences would increase the development nature of the existing landscape; however, these visual impacts would not constitute a considerable change to existing conditions on the whole as Alpine Meadows has already experienced substantial residential development.

4.2.4.2 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative

Under Alternative 1 – No Action Alternative, there would be no new development within or near the project area, and therefore, no reduction in the visual quality of the project area. There would be no contribution to the cumulative effects on visual resources from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

Alternatives 2

Under Alternative 2, the gondola and Gazex facilities would be constructed on a mix of NFS and private lands. The visual impacts associated with Alternative 2, when combined with the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects listed above, would have varied impacts on the project area. Visual impacts associated with Alternative 2, when combined with General Development in Olympic Valley and Alpine Meadows, would not lead to a substantial cumulative impact. While the developed nature of the project area would increase with implementation of these projects, Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows have already

experienced considerable ski area development. Additional general development and development of recreation infrastructure at these base areas, in combination with Alternative 2, would not constitute an appreciable change to the currently existing conditions at either ski resort. Visual impacts associated with Alternative 2, when combined with the White Wolf project, could lead to an adverse cumulative impact. The White Wolf project is not a connected action to Alternative 2 and is instead considered here as an additive action; implementation of the White Wolf project does not depend on implementation of Alternative 2, and implementation of Alternative 2 does not depend on implementation of the White Wolf project. The White Wolf project could be visible from certain locations within the National Forest System-GCW, which, in combination with installation of the gondola, would further reduce the visual character of some of the scenic vistas from within the National Forest System-GCW.

Visual impacts would be long term, as the gondola and Gazex facilities would be permanent structures. Infrastructure installed in more remote parts of the study area would constitute an appreciable change to current settings in those areas, whereas infrastructure installed within already-developed areas of Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows would not constitute an appreciable change to existing conditions. Visual impacts would be minor within certain landscapes, like the base areas and along highly utilized roads, because these areas have already experienced considerable development and the addition of a gondola and Gazex facilities would not appreciably change the existing conditions. Within landscapes like ridgelines and sparsely vegetated hillsides, visual impacts would be adverse, because the existing conditions within these landscapes are mostly undisturbed and natural, so the addition of a gondola and Gazex facilities would constitute an appreciable change to these landscapes. Impacts would vary from local to regionwide, depending on the distances of viewers within the project's viewshed.

Alternatives 3 and 4

Under Alternatives 3 and 4, cumulative effects on visual resources would be similar to those described above under Alternative 2. The main difference between Alternatives 3 and 4 and Alternative 2 is the difference in the proposed gondola alignments. The gondola alignments associated with Alternatives 3 and 4 would cause less degradation to the project area's visual character. Under Alternatives 3 and 4, the gondola would not traverse the ridgeline that separates the National Forest System-GCW and the Caldwell property, and instead would run down Catch Valley, which would provide considerable topographical screening on either side of the gondola infrastructure. Visual impacts associated with Alternatives 3 and 4, when combined with General Development in Olympic Valley and Alpine Meadows, would lead to an unsubstantial cumulative impact because Squaw Valley and Alpine Meadows have already experienced considerable ski area development. Similarly, when visual impacts associated with Alternatives 3 and 4 are combined with the White Wolf project, there would be unsubstantial cumulative impacts because of the reduced degradation to visual character, described above. Overall, these impacts would be long term, minor to adverse, and local to regionwide for the same reasons described above for Alternative 2.

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