

## 4.12 VISUAL RESOURCES

This section contains an analysis of the impacts the 2030 General Plan may have on visual resources in and surrounding the City of Live Oak's Planning Area. The section provides a description of the existing visual resources, and an evaluation of how implementation of the 2030 General Plan would affect views of visual resources.

### 4.12.1 REGULATORY SETTING

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

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws pertaining to visual resources are applicable.

#### STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

##### California Scenic Highway Program

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. For designated highways, Caltrans requires that local jurisdictions implement a monitoring program that reviews and enforces scenic-corridor protection measures to preserve scenic views.

There are no officially designated scenic highways in or near the Planning Area. This issue will not be discussed further in this DEIR.

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

The *Sutter County General Plan* (Sutter County 1996) includes policies related to visual resources:

##### ***Land Use Element***

**GOAL 1.H:** To preserve and protect the visual and scenic resources of the area.

- ▶ **Policy 1.H-1:** The County shall require that new development be designed to utilize vegetation for screening structures and parking areas.
- ▶ **Policy 1.H-3:** The County shall require that design and development standards be applied to all industrial and commercial areas to improve the aesthetic appearance of those developments.

### 4.12.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Live Oak is located in the Sacramento Valley approximately 50 miles north of Sacramento, the largest city in the region. Most of the Sacramento Valley is characterized by flat agricultural land with the Coastal Range and the Sierra Foothills visible in the far distance to the west and east, respectively. One of the most unique visual features in the Sacramento Valley is the Sutter Buttes, a small, isolated mountain range that rises out of the valley floor to an elevation of approximately 2,000 feet above sea level. The Sutter Buttes are located immediately southwest of the Planning Area and are the dominant scenic feature viewable from the City.

From Live Oak looking outward, views are dominated by the Sutter Buttes to the west/southwest and agricultural land in all directions. Beyond the immediate views of agricultural lands to the east is the Feather River, with associated trees and other vegetation. Further to the east there are views of the Sierra Foothills. Views of the trees

surrounding the river and the foothills are limited in much of the City, and are primarily visible from the agricultural areas in the eastern portion of the Study Area. In some parts of the Planning Area, particularly in the west, the Coastal Range is visible in the far distance on clear days.

Within the City, views are predominantly of buildings and other urban improvements. State Route 99 (SR 99) and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) run parallel to one another, traversing the city north-south and traveling through the City's historic downtown, creating viewing corridors to the north and south along these transportation facilities. Older residential, commercial, civic, and industrial development is generally concentrated near the center of the City and downtown, while the majority of the development in the City beyond the City's core is single-family housing.

### 4.12.3 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact on visual resources is considered significant if the proposed project would:

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

This visual impact analysis evaluates the visual changes that would occur with implementation of the 2030 General Plan using the standards of quality, consistency, and symmetry typically used for a visual assessment. The visual impacts of the 2030 General Plan were evaluated by comparing existing land uses with buildout of designated land uses under the 2030 General Plan. It should be noted that the assessment of visual quality is a subjective matter. What is visually pleasing to one person may not be considered so by another, and reasonable people can disagree as to whether such an alteration would also be considered a substantial degradation of the visual character. For the purposes of this analysis, a conservative approach was taken in analyzing the potential for degradation of visual resources, so permanent alterations of a visual resource are considered significant.

#### IMPACT ANALYSIS

**IMPACT 4.12-1** *Adverse Impacts on a Scenic Vista. Implementation of the 2030 General Plan would result in new urban development that would permanently alter and block some views of the Sutter Buttes, the Live Oak area's single most prominent visual resource, as well as views of agricultural lands. This impact would be significant.*

The Sutter Buttes comprise the most prominent and unique scenic vista viewable from the Live Oak. Despite the City's proximity to the Buttes, some urban development that has occurred in the past has obstructed views of the Buttes. The City recognizes the unique quality of the Sutter Buttes as an asset for the City. Implementation of the 2030 General Plan would result in substantial new development within and surrounding the existing developed area of the City. Development of new urban uses will block some public views of the Sutter Buttes that are currently available along public rights-of-way and other publicly accessible portions of the Planning Area, including from SR 99. Public views of the agricultural land surrounding Live Oak and distant views of the Sierra Nevada foothills and Coast Range would be altered by urban development anticipated under the General Plan.

## Relevant Policies and Programs of the 2030 General Plan

The following policies from the 2030 General Plan are intended to preserve unique views in the City of Live Oak:

- ▶ **Policy LU-5.6:** New residential development proposed adjacent to cultivated agricultural lands outside the City’s Sphere of Influence shall provide buffers to reduce potential conflicts. The width of such buffers will be determined on a case-by-case basis, considering prevailing winds, crop types, agricultural practices, and other relevant factors. Buffers should be designed to minimize adverse dust, spraying, and noise impacts to newly established residents near ongoing agricultural operations and to avoid nuisance complaints from these newly established residents against farmers in the area. The width of public rights-of-way, drainages, and easements may count as part of the buffer. Within agricultural buffer areas, allowed land uses include drainage swales, trails, other infrastructure, community gardens, landscaped areas, linear parks, roads, and other uses that would be compatible with ongoing agricultural operations.
- ▶ **Implementation Program Agriculture-1:** The City will adopt and maintain a “right-to-farm” ordinance (or adopt appropriate portions of Sutter County’s right-to-farm ordinance) to inform residents of ongoing agricultural practices and protect farmers and other agriculture interests from dumping, nuisance complaints, and other problems typically associated with new residents living in agricultural areas.
- ▶ **Policy DESIGN-1.1:** Streets should be located and oriented to define the edges of neighborhoods, frame scenic views, and provide civic landmarks as focal points.
- ▶ **Policy DESIGN-14.1:** New developments shall retain and enhance scenic views of the Sutter Buttes to the extent possible.
- ▶ **Policy Cultural-1.4:** New developments shall be designed to provide view corridors to the Sutter Buttes by orienting major and minor collectors southwest to provide a valuable community aesthetic amenity and maintain vistas that were important to local Native American populations.

## Conclusion

The 2030 General Plan provides these policies to provide adequate buffer space between development and agricultural lands to maintain those views, encourage future urban development to take advantage of views of the Sutter Buttes, and to prevent views of the Buttes and agricultural lands from being blocked by development. In addition, Implementation Program Agriculture-1 would ensure that development within the Planning Area does not create pressure to unnecessarily convert adjacent agricultural lands. Despite this, urban development within a viewshed containing the Sutter Buttes would still permanently alter existing public views of the Sutter Buttes. Additionally, urban development anticipated under the General Plan will block some currently available public views of the agricultural land that surrounds the community, as well as more distant views of the Sierra Nevada foothills and Coast Range. The impact would be **significant**.

The policies and implementation program mentioned above would reduce the impact of loss of views of the Sutter Buttes and of agricultural land by orienting streets to frame scenic views (including views of the Sutter Buttes) and by requiring provision of buffers between developed uses and agricultural areas, which would retain outward views along the edges of developed areas. However, no further mitigation beyond retaining views to the extent possible in developed areas (as proposed in the 2030 General Plan policies and programs) is feasible; there is no mechanism to allow implementation of development projects while avoiding the conversion of the local viewsheds from agricultural land uses and open spaces to urban development. Implementation of the 2030 General Plan will involve land use change and urban development, including placement of structures in areas between public viewing locations and the area’s scenic vistas.

Implementation of policies in the 2030 General Plan would ensure that new development projects are designed with design concepts and elements that would lessen significant impacts associated with preserving scenic views

of the Sutter Buttes. However, development of new urban land uses would permanently change views throughout the City and views of scenic vistas. No feasible mitigation measures or policies are available that could fully preserve the existing views of the Sutter Buttes, while also accommodating long-term land use change under the 2030 General Plan. Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

**IMPACT 4.12-2** **Degradation of Visual Character.** *Implementation of the 2030 General Plan would result in urban development that would substantially alter the current visual character present within and surrounding the City of Live Oak. This impact would be **significant**.*

Overall, the visual character of the area surrounding the City of Live Oak can be described as rural and agricultural. The City is surrounded by open, undeveloped land, as well as agricultural operations, including row crops, rice fields, orchards, and associated agricultural structures. With implementation of the 2030 General Plan, the majority of the land located within the Planning Area is assumed to be converted from this agricultural landscape to urban development. The character of the new development would be similar to that which is already present throughout Live Oak. This change from a visual environment where rural residential and agricultural uses are predominant to a mix of housing, shops, schools, parks, and other urban land uses would constitute a substantial change. Another locally important visual resource, the Feather River, and associated woodlands is outside the Planning Area and not proposed for land use change under the 2030 General Plan.

The 2030 General Plan contains several policies that seek to enhance the quality of the visual resources in and surrounding Live Oak, as mentioned above under the evaluation of Impact 4.12-1, but the General Plan itself contains policies that encourage growth and therefore accommodate the conversion of these lands to new development. There are no policies that would directly prevent this conversion; however, implementation of General Plan programs and policies would require buffers between developed areas and agricultural uses, and enforcement of right-to-farm policies. Implementation of these programs would serve to reduce future conflicts between developed areas and agricultural lands, and would reduce the area of land use change, reducing this impact.

## **Conclusion**

Implementation of the 2030 General Plan would allow for new development that would accommodate growth within Live Oak; however, this development would result in the permanent conversion of the agricultural landscape surrounding the City to urban uses, thereby permanently altering the current visual character of these lands. Whether or not this change in visual character is positive is debatable, but it is still a permanent change in character to a visual resource. Therefore, this is considered a **significant impact**.

Although policies requiring buffering of agricultural lands and enforcement of right-to-farm policies would limit the size of the agricultural area affected by the urban development envisioned under the proposed project, the urban development that would occur would still permanently alter visual character. Reduction and limitation of the affected area is the only possible mitigation, and the policies listed above would function to reduce the area affected. No additional mitigation is feasible to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. The purpose of the 2030 General Plan is to provide a framework governing development of urban uses in the City of Live Oak and its Planning Area. This will include accommodating the construction of buildings, roadways, and other physical improvements that will change the character of the Planning Area.

Although the 2030 General Plan includes policies and programs that are intended to preserve visual resources, there is no mechanism to allow implementation of development projects while avoiding the conversion of agricultural land uses and open spaces to urban development. Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

**IMPACT 4.12-3** **New Source of Light and Glare.** *Implementation of the 2030 General Plan would result in the development of new urban uses, which would create substantial new sources of light and glare in areas currently used for agriculture. This impact would be **significant**.*

The City of Live Oak is surrounded by rural and agricultural lands that contain few major sources of light and glare. By contrast, urban land uses within the City generate a significant amount of light and glare, which affect the brightness of the night sky. Although urban uses in the City already generate substantial amounts of light and glare that affects the nighttime views in the rural areas surrounding the city, the development of new urban uses that are assumed to occur as a part of implementation of the 2030 General Plan would increase the existing level of nighttime light and glare and be located in areas that are currently void of significant sources of nighttime lighting. These additional sources of nighttime light and glare could potentially obscure nighttime views of stars. Furthermore, urban development would create additional reflective surfaces, and cause additional glare, including glare affecting motorists traveling along SR 99 during both night and day.

### **Relevant Policies and Programs of the 2030 General Plan**

The following policies from the 2030 General Plan are intended to reduce the effect of nighttime lighting and glare in the City of Live Oak:

- ▶ **Policy DESIGN-14.4:** The City will encourage lighting practices that reduce light pollution in new development areas.
- ▶ **Policy DESIGN-14.5:** The City will require that new lighting fixtures in new development areas cast light downward toward the ground and reduce spillover light. Existing light fixtures requiring replacement or repair shall be upgraded so they also cast light downward.
- ▶ **Policy DESIGN-14.6:** Exterior building materials in new development areas shall be composed of a minimum 50% low-reflectance, nonpolished finishes and bare metallic surfaces found on infrastructure such as pipes, poles, etc., shall be painted to minimize reflectance and glare.

### **Conclusion**

Development under the 2030 General Plan would result in new sources of light and glare in areas that currently have few existing sources of light or glare, resulting in additional skyglow and glare. Although the 2030 General Plan includes policies to reduce spillover light and encourage use of low-reflectance surfaces, these measures would not reduce adverse effects of lighting and glare generated by new development below the level of significance. This is a **significant impact**.

No feasible mitigation is available to reduce this impact. The proposed project's purpose is to provide a framework governing development of urban uses in the City of Live Oak and its Planning Area. This will include urban development, including buildings, street lights, lighting in parking areas, and other sources of light.

Implementation of the abovementioned policies, along with the remainder of the policies of the 2030 General Plan would help to minimize the potential impacts that light and glare generated by new development. Although these policies would help to reduce the impacts associated with light and glare resulting from new development that would occur under the 2030 General Plan, the urban development envisioned by the Plan would still result in the permanent addition of new nighttime lighting and glare to an existing rural area that is currently relatively void of significant sources of light and glare. Therefore, nighttime views would permanently be affected, making this impact **significant and unavoidable**.