

CHAPTER 10

AESTHETICS

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This section identifies and evaluates key visual resources in the project area to determine the degree of visual impact that would be attributable to the project. The potential aesthetic effects of the proposed project on the existing natural and developed environment are then described, focusing on the compatibility of the project with existing conditions.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Visual Setting

The topography of the Antelope Valley provides views from many locations. The Lamont Odett Vista Point, just off the Antelope Valley Freeway, provides a view of the City of Palmdale and beyond. From this location, Lake Palmdale and the city can be seen in the foreground, the Sierra Pelona to the west, the Tehachapi Mountains to the northwest, and the extensive flatlands of the Mojave Desert to the north and northeast. The general aesthetic and visual character of the area surrounding the PWRP consists of an expansive desert horizon and sparsely inhabited landscape with views of the surrounding Tehachapi and San Gabriel Mountain ranges in the distance (see Figure 10-1).

Landforms in and around Palmdale form three major, distinct landscape types: the mountains, foothills, and the San Andreas Rift Zone; the alluvial fans; and the desert floor. The mountains, foothills, and the San Andreas Rift Zone are found to the south and southwest. The high peaks and foothills, with the geologic formations of the San Andreas Fault Zone, provide a contrast to the sloping alluvial fans and flat desert floor with occasional buttes found to the north and east.

The PWRP is located in a rural setting, completely surrounded by property owned by LAWA. The surrounding area includes agricultural land and vacant land. The treatment plant structures on the PWRP site

are generally less than 25 feet in height. The existing buildings on the PWRP site are of an industrial character and the berms associated with the existing oxidation ponds and storage reservoirs consist of natural soils with no vegetation. Additionally, overhead electric utility lines, paved roads, and dirt roads are a part of the scenic environment. The PWRP site is bordered on the north and east by sparsely inhabited desert landscape. Residences and domestic parcels can be found further to the south and the west of the PWRP. Some agriculture lands exist east of the PWRP on Avenue P. USAF Plant 42 borders LAWA further to the northwest. To the north and east, rural residences, agricultural land, and vacant desert dominate the landscape. Figure 9-1 in the Land Use section shows current land uses in the project area.

Designated Scenic Highways and Vistas

Table 10-1 lists roadways that are designated as scenic highways by the City of Palmdale. These roadways possess scenic qualities that provide outdoor recreation experience to travelers and hikers. Figure 10-2 shows the location of these locally significant scenic streets and highways that are in the vicinity of the PWRP.

Table 10-1
Designated City Scenic Streets and Highways

1	Barrel Springs Road
2	Tierra Subida Avenue
3	Sierra Highway, South of Avenue S
4	Elizabeth Lake Road
5	Pearblossom Highway
6	Bouquet Canyon Road
7	Godde Hill Road

Source: City of Palmdale General Plan, Environmental Resources, January 25, 1993.

The California Scenic Highways Program preserves scenic highways that meet the Caltrans Scenic Highways Program eligibility requirements. The closest Caltrans-designated scenic highway is the Angeles Crest Highway (Route 2) from the

La Canada/Angeles National Forest boundary to the San Bernardino County Line. No designated scenic highways traverse the project area. Neither the PWRP nor the proposed agricultural or effluent management facilities are within a designated scenic vista.

Scenic Areas

Scenic areas include open space and landscaped corridors and viewsheds. The Lamont Odett Vista Point, just off the Antelope Valley Freeway approximately four miles south of the City of Palmdale, provides a view of Lake Palmdale and the city. The Godde Hill Road winds up the Portal Ridge Mountains and overlooks the entire Antelope Valley. Bouquet Canyon Road is well-known for its tree-lined canyon and winding stream. Juniper Hills Drive is a circular road lined with junipers and tamarisks and rises up to 4,000 feet above sea level.¹ These scenic areas are located several miles from the PWRP.

Major Landscapes

As noted previously, landforms in and around Palmdale form three major distinct landscape types. Each of these landscape types represents a combination of potential recreation resources for residents of the Palmdale area.

- **The Mountain Areas:** Most of the mountain areas are within the jurisdiction of the Angeles National Forest. These areas are managed, whenever possible, to include a variety of recreation opportunities compatible with the primary goal of watershed protection.
- **The Desert Slope:** Landforms of the desert slope provide open space resources for the entire region. They form the scenic backdrop for the Antelope Valley, and at the same time, they support outdoor recreation use. Resources in the area are linked

together by the California Aqueduct and the trail that parallels it.

- **The Desert Floor and Buttes:** The Antelope Valley, with its high desert plain, buttes, and alkali sinks, offers a variety of opportunities for recreation. In the western portion of the valley, Antelope Buttes and Fairmont Buttes offer considerable potential for interweaving compatible recreation and natural resource preservation areas. In the east, this potential is presented by the unique landform and habitat areas surrounding the Saddleback Buttes State Park. The West Alpine and Alpine Butte Wildlife Sanctuaries can also be found in this same area.

REGULATORY BACKGROUND

CEQA provides for the protection of aesthetic resources and requires that potential impacts, which could result from the proposed project, be evaluated. The CEQA Guidelines provide four criteria that may be used to evaluate the significance of potential impacts to aesthetic and visual quality: (1) negative effects on a scenic vista, (2) damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway, (3) degradation of the visual character or quality of a site and its surroundings, and (4) creation of a new source of substantial light or glare affecting views.

The California Scenic Highways Program was created by the California State Legislature in 1963 to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would reduce the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways.² Prior to designation, a proposed highway must meet Caltrans' eligibility requirements and have visual merit.

County General Plan

The *County General Plan* includes a scenic quality element. The element's policies are based on the need to "protect the visual quality of scenic areas including

¹ *City of Palmdale General Plan, Environmental Resources, January 1993.*

² *Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq.*

ridgelines and views from public roads, trails and key vantage points.” Special emphasis is placed on protection of hillside character and SEAs. Scenic highways are identified in the countywide Circulation Element and include adopted State Scenic Highways. The goals and policies under Aesthetic Resources for the Circulation Element are:

Goal: Preservation and enhancement of aesthetic resources within scenic corridors.

Policies

1. Protect and enhance aesthetic resources within corridors of designated scenic highways.
2. Develop and apply standards to regulate the quality of development within corridors of designated scenic highways.
3. Remove visual pollution from designated scenic highway corridors.
4. Require the development and use of aesthetic design considerations for road construction, reconstruction, or maintenance for all designated scenic highways.
5. Increase governmental commitment to the designation of scenic highways and protection of scenic corridors.
6. Improve scenic highway coordination and implementation procedures between all levels of government.

City of Palmdale General Plan

The City of Palmdale General Plan includes scenic roadway designations. The Environmental Resources Element provides for the local designation of scenic highways and corridors and considers both official scenic highways and roadways not yet registered with the state. The element establishes policies concerning resources that relate to their conservation, preservation,

and managed use. Scenic highways and roads have been identified in Policy ER1.2.2.

Objective ER1.2: Protect scenic viewsheds both to and from the City of Palmdale.

Policy ER1.2.1: New development with the potential to substantially obscure or negatively alter the scenic backdrop to the City should be discouraged. “Scenic backdrop” refers to the significant ridgelines of the San Gabriels, the Sierra Pelona and the Ritter and Portal Ridges that form the City’s skyline views.

Policy ER1.2.2: The following roadways are designated as City scenic highways. Apply special design standards for projects adjacent to these highways in order to protect their scenic qualities.

1. Barrel Springs Road
2. Tierra Subida Avenue
3. Sierra Highway, south of Avenue S
4. Elizabeth Lake Road
5. Pearblossom Highway
6. Bouquet Canyon Road
7. Godde Hill Road
8. Antelope Valley Freeway, south of Rayburn Road.

Policy ER1.2.3: Encourage all new development along scenic highways to maintain sufficient spacing between buildings, perimeter walls and large growing vegetation in order to maintain scenic view corridors of hillsides and open space to the maximum extent feasible.

The City shall establish a design criteria for designated scenic highways that requires specific design standards for nearby development. These standards could include the following:

- Height limits to preserve view corridors;
- Limits or standards for outdoor advertising and sign;
- Maintenance of roadside landscaping;

- Limits on grading activities along highways; and
- The prohibition of overhead utility rights-of-way along scenic highways.

A visual impact analysis may be required for developments within the City of Palmdale in order to preserve the visual qualities of scenic routes.

The following are regulations used by the city to qualify a road as a scenic highway:

- **Visibility:** The vehicle occupants should be able to view expansive scenery without having to stop.
- **Landforms:** The roadway traverses areas dominated by the physical characteristics of the natural corridor, such as gently rolling hills or rugged cliffs, streams, geologic formations, and distant ridges.
- **Vegetation:** The roadway abuts areas with distinctive vegetation within view, such as row crops, orchards, chaparral, or woodlands.
- **Structures:** Buildings may be included in scenic corridors and may add to scenic quality.
- **Panoramas:** Scenic overlooks with panoramic views of urban, rural, or natural areas should be included when available.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Thresholds of Significance

The proposed project would pose a significant impact if it would:

- Block scenic views (e.g., mountains, ocean, rivers, or significant man-made structures);
- Alter the appearance of designated scenic resources along or near a state-designated or county-designated scenic highway or vista point;

- Create significant contrasts with the scale, form, line, color, and/or overall visual character of the existing landscape setting; or
- Be inconsistent with applicable local guidelines or regulations.

Impact 10-1: Implementation of agriculture, storage tanks, storage reservoirs, and new treatment facilities could alter the character of the project area. In addition, the new storage tank and reservoirs could block views from local roadways.

The conversion of open space to agriculture would alter the existing character in some areas from a natural landscape to a developed agricultural region. The conversion would change the character of the region. However, agriculture generally provides an acceptable visual character and would not be considered to cause significant adverse visual impacts. Agricultural operations are already an integral part of the area. No impacts to long range views would be anticipated.

Construction of treatment facilities would occur within the existing treatment plant area and would be consistent with the existing character of the plant. The primary treatment facilities are located near the intersection of 30th Street East and Avenue P-8. The oxidation ponds located at the intersection of 40th Street East and Avenue P would be decommissioned or used as storage reservoirs. The proposed upgraded facilities would appear similar to the existing facilities. New treatment facilities would not block views from surrounding local roadways (Avenue P, 30th and 40th Street East). No significant adverse aesthetic impacts would occur from construction of treatment plant facilities.

Installation of storage reservoirs would modify the open space areas. Views from local roadways would be substantially modified. The storage reservoirs could block views of the surrounding Tehachapi and San Gabriel Mountains and the desert landscape from local roadways. The local streets include both dirt and paved

roads with minimal service. Few residences are located in the area. There are no scenic vistas or highways within the project area vicinity. The storage reservoir berms would be constructed of earthen material. Although the storage reservoirs would alter the character of the area, they would be set back from the roadways enough to minimize blocking long-range views.

In addition to the storage reservoirs, there would be a one-million gallon cylindrical recycled water storage tank to be located at the highest elevation of the selected agricultural reuse site. The tank would be

approximately 96 feet in diameter and approximately 20 feet tall. Design would include security fencing to deter graffiti. Trees would be planted around the tank and the tank would be painted a neutral, low-gloss color that blends with the local landscape. No significant impacts to viewsheds or local aesthetics would occur as a result of the proposed project.

Mitigation Measure

No mitigation measures are required.

Significance of Impact

Less than significant.