

6.7 AESTHETICS

6.7.1 INTRODUCTION

This section describes the existing aesthetic setting of the project site, the regulatory background that applies to the project and the potential visual impacts on aesthetic resources from implementation of the project.

6.7.2 EXISTING SETTING

The following text describes the existing visual character of the project site and surrounding land. The descriptions of existing conditions are accompanied by exhibits that provide photographs of representative views taken during a site visit on October 4, 2005. The locations of project site viewpoints are shown in Exhibit 6.7-1.

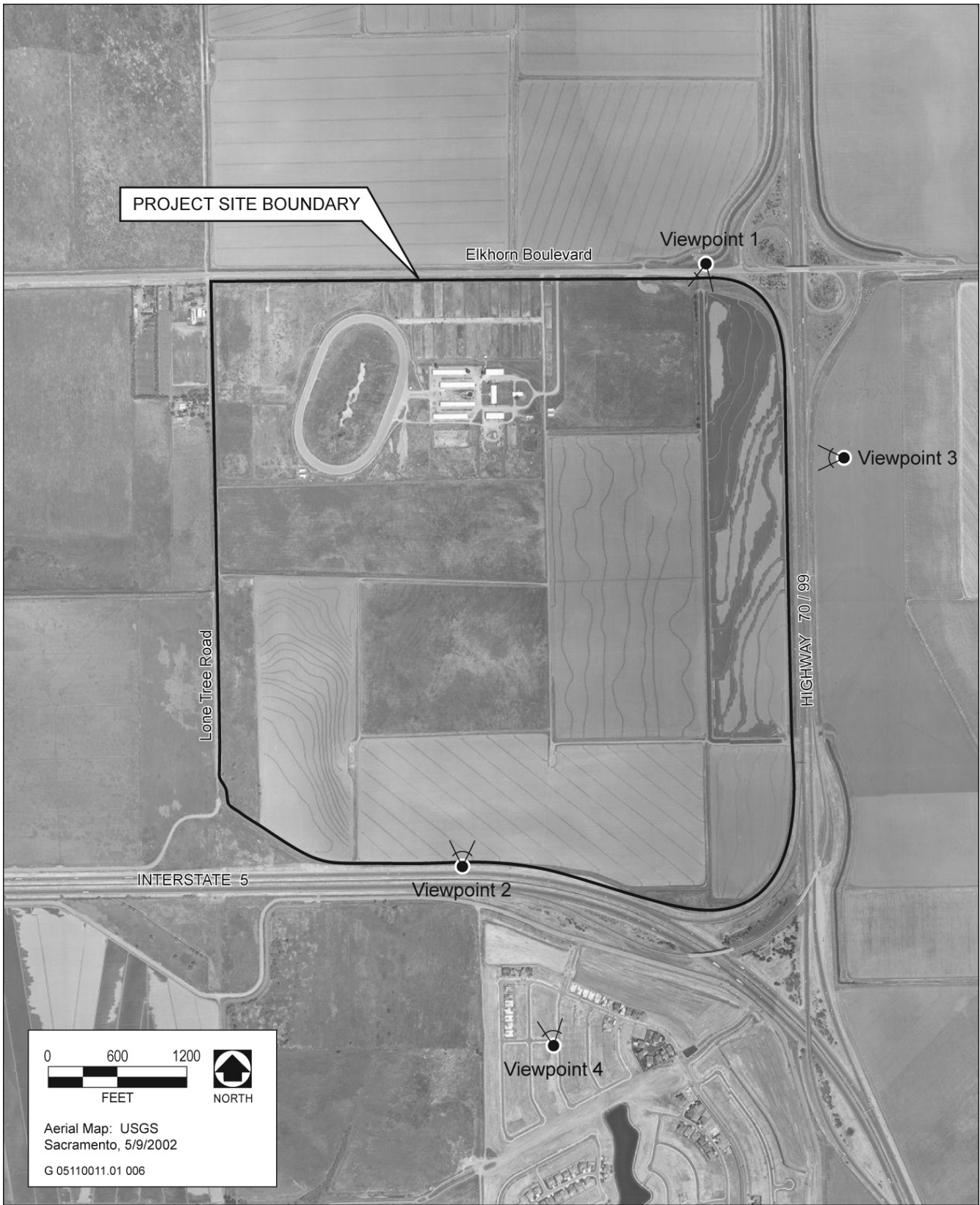
VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT SITE

The Greenbriar site is generally flat with elevations at 5 to 25 feet above mean sea level. The plan area slopes gently from west to south. The project site is dominated by fallowed land that was historically used for cultivating crops. In general, the site consists of large open areas and canals/ditches. The northwestern and north-central portion of the project site consists of some remnant building foundations, a racetrack, and large unvegetated and graveled areas. Overall, the character of the project site is representative of agricultural properties that make up the Natomas Basin (Basin), but there are no distinguishing characteristics that set the site apart from other properties in the Basin.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

The land surrounding the project site generally consists of agricultural properties left fallowed, used for grazing activities, or cultivated with crops. Residential subdivisions are currently in development to the east and south of the project site across State Route 70/99 (SR 70/99) and Interstate 5 (I-5), respectively. These developments consist of single-family homes, commercial areas, park and open space, and are typical of the developments and subdivisions present within the North Natomas Community. The area south of the site has been undergoing a visual transformation over the last 10 years, as the North Natomas Community Plan (NNCP) area has converted from predominantly agriculture to a suburbanized setting. The general character of the surrounding area is described below.

- ▶ **North:** Lands to the north of the project site consist of agricultural lands interspersed with farmsteads and large agriculture-related structures (e.g., silos, processing facilities). In general, areas north of the project site are relatively undeveloped and are representative of historic agricultural activities that dominated the Natomas Basin. On clear days, the Sutter Buttes can be seen in the distant background.
- ▶ **East:** SR 70/99, a 4-lane highway, borders the project site to the east. Further east, a residential subdivision is under construction. This area consists of single-family homes and associated amenities (e.g., yards, roadways) and large areas of graded land.
- ▶ **South:** I-5, a 4-lane interstate highway, borders the project site to the south. Similar to areas east of the site, areas south of I-5 are under development with residential land uses.
- ▶ **West:** Lands to the west of the project are dominated by agricultural lands interspersed with farmsteads and large agriculture-related structures. The Sacramento International Airport is visible in the distant background.



Source: EDAW 2005
 Note: This aerial photograph was taken prior to the demolition of all on-site buildings.

Viewpoint Locations

Exhibit 6.7-1

Views of the Project Site

Distant views of the project site are limited because of the relatively flat topography of the site and the presence of elevated features such as the I-5/SR 70/99 interchange and SR 70/99/Elkhorn Boulevard interchange. Views of the project site would primarily be available to people traveling along SR 70/99 and I-5 in the project vicinity. Travelers along SR 70/99 would have views of the project site for a brief time when passing directly in front of the project site. More distant views of the site are not available because the elevated interchanges (e.g., SR 70/99/Elkhorn and SR 70/99/I-5) block views from the north and south. Views of the site from I-5 are available when travelers pass in front of the site. Distant views from the east are not available because of the elevated SR 70/99/I-5 interchange which blocks views. However, distant views from the west are available.

Four viewpoint locations discussed below were chosen to represent areas that were most sensitive to visual change (Exhibit 6.7-1). The general nature of views of the project site is described from these locations.

Views from the Elkhorn Boulevard/SR 70/99 Interchange (Viewpoint 1)

This viewpoint is located at the northeast corner of the project site (Exhibit 6.7-1). As can be seen in Exhibits 6.7-2 and 6.7-3, foreground views are dominated by flat agricultural fields extending to the west. Highway activity associated with SR 70/99 and I-5 is also visible to the south along the boundaries of the project site.

Mid-distant views from this viewpoint also consist of large areas of agricultural fields with farmsteads interspersed throughout the agricultural fields extending westward. Large agriculture-related structures and water channels extending along the edges of agricultural fields can also be seen to the west and north. Views of new residential and office development can be seen south across I-5.

Distant views from this viewpoint are dominated by Sacramento International Airport. A linear formation of trees that line the edges of the Sacramento River is visible to the west of the airport. Urban development is visible to the south of the airport.

Views from Interstate 5 (Viewpoint 2)

This viewpoint is located at the southern edge of the project site (Exhibit 6.7-1). The foreground is dominated by flat agricultural fields extending northward and irrigation ditches extending along the western and southern boundary of the project site. The I-5/SR 70/99 interchange is visible in the foreground and is substantially taller than its surroundings to the east; therefore, no direct views are available from the south of I-5.

Mid-distant views also consist of large areas of fallow and active agricultural fields extending to the north and west. Vehicles traveling along SR 70/99 are visible along the eastern boundary of the project site and further to the north.

Background views also consist large agricultural fields interrupted by large agriculture-related structures. Structures associated with the Sacramento International Airport appear in the background views to the northwest. The Sutter Buttes can be seen in the far distant reaches to the north but are not prominent in this view.

View from Residences to the East (Viewpoint 3)

This viewpoint is located to the east of the project site across SR 70/99 (Exhibit 6.7-1). As can be seen in Exhibits 6.7-4 and 6.7-5, vehicles traveling along SR 70/99 to the north and south dominate the foreground. Flat agricultural fields extending to the west can be seen from this viewpoint. The I-5/SR 70/99 and SR 70/99/Elkhorn Boulevard interchanges are visible in the foreground to the southwest and northwest, respectively, and are both substantially taller than the surroundings.



View from SR 70/99/Elkhorn Boulevard interchange looking southeast



View from SR 70/99/Elkhorn Boulevard interchange looking southwest

Representative Photographs

Exhibit 6.7-2



View from SR 70/99/Elkhorn Boulevard interchange looking south



Wide view from SR 70/99/Elkhorn Boulevard interchange looking south

Representative Photographs

Exhibit 6.7-3



View from residences east of project site across SR 70/99 looking northwest



View from residences east of project site looking west

Representative Photographs

Exhibit 6.7-4



View from residences east of project site across SR 70/99 looking southwest

Representative Photographs

Exhibit 6.7-5

Mid-distant views are dominated by new residential and office development under construction to the southwest of the project site across I-5 (Exhibit 6.7-5). Vehicles traveling along I-5 are also clearly visible to the southwest.

The Sacramento International Airport dominates background views to the west. Views of trees lining the Sacramento River are visible beyond the airport. Large agricultural-related structures extend above the surrounding landscape and interrupt areas of open space and agricultural lands. The Sutter Buttes are visible to the northwest on clear days and are a distinctive element of the background view to the north.

View from Residences to the South (Viewpoint 4)

This viewpoint is located to the south of the project site across I-5. Vehicles traveling along SR 70/99/I-5 dominate foreground views. Ground level views beyond I-5 are blocked by shrubbery growing within the median of I-5.

At higher elevations, mid-distance views are dominated by large expanses of agricultural fields extending to the north and west. Slight elevation changes in the landscape are visible and appear as extensions of ditches or irrigation canals.

Background views (from higher elevations) are also dominated by large expanses of flat agricultural lands and agricultural-related structures. The Sacramento International Airport and trees lining the Sacramento River are also visible to the northwest. The Sutter Buttes are visible in the distant background and are a distinctive component of the background view on clear days.

6.7.3 REGULATORY SETTING

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. There are no state-designated scenic highways in the vicinity of the project site (Caltrans 2005).

CITY OF SACRAMENTO GENERAL PLAN

The City of Sacramento General Plan does not have any relevant policies related to visual resources.

LAFCo

The LAFCo Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines document does not contain any policies related to aesthetic resources.

6.7.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This visual impact analysis evaluated the visual changes that would occur at the project site using the standards of quality, consistency, and symmetry typically used for a visual assessment. The visual impacts were compared against the thresholds of significance discussed below. Visual impacts of the project were evaluated assuming full project buildout. This approach was taken because certain impacts, such as light and glare, would be greatest at full buildout.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The project would cause a significant impact related to aesthetic resources, as defined by the State CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G), if it would:

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

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

**IMPACT
6.7-1**

Impacts on Scenic Vistas. *Views on or near the project site are not considered scenic vistas. Therefore, development of the project site would not alter or obscure a scenic vista. This impact would be less than significant.*

A scenic vista is generally considered a view of an area that has remarkable scenery or a resource that is indigenous to the area. The project site itself does not provide any aesthetic resources that would be considered a scenic vista. The agricultural land that make up the project site do not

provide scenery of a remarkable character. In addition, the project site has been developed for agricultural production and other uses (i.e., race track) and it does not provide views of the indigenous natural landscape. Although the current land uses provide views of an agricultural landscape that is representative of the project region, the project site does not contain resources that are exemplary of the agricultural history of the area (i.e., historic structures or landmarks) (see Section 6.13, “Cultural Resources”). Views of the project site are not unique in the region.

Views of and from the project site are obscured by elevated features such as I-5/SR 70/99 interchange and Elkhorn Boulevard/SR 70/99 interchange, but overall the project site is easily visible from along I-5 and SR 70/99. Project facilities could obscure views of scenic vistas that may be located outside the project site. Depending on the height of buildings proposed under the project, development of the project site could briefly obscure existing views of the Sutter Buttes from I-5. However, because of the distance between the project site and the Sutter Buttes, the Sutter Buttes are not readily visible from the portions of I-5 near the project area and are not a prominent component of background views for motorists in this area. Because the proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista, this impact is considered *less than significant*.

No mitigation is required.

**IMPACT
6.7-2**

Damage to Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway. *The project site is not visible from a state scenic highway and would not damage scenic resources. The project would result in **no impacts** to scenic resources within a scenic highway.*

A scenic resource is generally a resource, landmark, or area that has been noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is thereby protected because of those qualities. A scenic resource within a state scenic highway is a resource that is noted for its outstanding scenic qualities and is visible from a state-designated scenic highway. No scenic resources have been identified on the project site. Further, the project site is not located along nor is it visible from a scenic highway segment. Therefore, the project would have **no impact** on scenic resources within a State Scenic Highway.

No mitigation is required.

**IMPACT
6.7-3**

Degradation of Visual Character. *The visual character of the Natomas Basin has been gradually changing from agricultural to suburban development as development proceeds north in Sacramento. The project would convert a large area of land from visual open space to suburban development. This is a **significant** impact to the visual character of the area.*

As of the publication of the NOP, project site consisted primarily of fallowed agricultural land. Implementation of the project would result in the conversion of these uses to suburban development and supporting land uses (e.g., parks, school). Conversion from agricultural uses to suburban development would result in a substantial alteration of the visual character of the project area. Because I-5 and SR 70/99 border the project site, the altered visual condition of the project area would be visible to residents living in the area and travelers driving by the project site.

Residents living to the south and east of the project site across I-5 or SR 70/99 would be able to view development on the project site from their homes (Exhibits 6.7-4 and 6.7-5). After the project site is developed, views to the north and east would be consistent with views of the other residential development in the area. Implementation of design, architectural, development, and

landscaping standards as part of the project would ensure that the general visual quality and character of development would be consistent with other development projects in the area. However, the conversion of agricultural land to suburban development on the project site would remove visual open space from these views.

Where the project site is visible from I-5 or SR 70/99, the plan area consists of a common agricultural viewshed found in many locations in Sacramento County. After development of the project, visual conditions of the project site would be similar to existing views of suburban settings found in the project vicinity. Thus, the ongoing visual conversion of the North Natomas Community, as seen predominantly from I-5 and SR 70/99, from open space to suburban development would be extended. Open space, especially in an urbanizing setting is valued for its visual relief. Implementation of design, architectural, development, and landscaping standards as part of the project would ensure that the general visual quality and character of development in the area would be consistent with other suburban development in the area. Although many travelers on this highway segment may not perceive this as a substantial degradation of the visual character or quality of the site because one common type of viewshed found in the area (agriculture) would be replaced by another common local viewshed (urban), others would view the change as adverse.

Individuals may also consider the conversion of agricultural land to urban development on this scale (577 acres) as a loss of an aesthetically pleasing and valuable viewshed. Because agricultural lands can be considered a valuable aesthetic resource and this resource is diminishing in the project area, and because of the size and visual prominence of the site (577 acres), the change in visual character would be considered a *significant* impact.

Mitigation Measure 6.7-3: (City of Sacramento)

Because of the scale and location of the project, there is no feasible mitigation available to address aesthetic resource impacts associated with the conversion of agricultural land to urban development. Although design, architectural, development, and landscaping standards through the proposed Planned Unit Development (PUD) Guidelines would provide an urban development on the project site that remains within certain aesthetic guidelines, there is no mechanism to allow implementation of the project while avoiding the conversion of the local viewshed from agricultural to urban development. Impacts related to the degradation of the local viewshed through conversion of agricultural lands to urban development are considered *significant and unavoidable*.

IMPACT 6.7-4

Impacts from Lighting and Reflective Surfaces. *The project would require lighting of new development and could construct facilities with reflective surfaces that could inadvertently cause light and glare for motorists on I-5 and SR 70/99 under day and nighttime conditions. In addition, the degree of darkness in the City of Sacramento and on the project site would diminish as a result of development. This impact would be significant.*

Under current conditions the project site does not generate any significant sources of light, glare, or light trespass into the night sky. Development of the project would require lighting of roadways, parks, schools, and other facilities associated with proposed land uses. A substantial increase in the amount of nighttime light and glare would result from the development of the project, substantially obscuring views of stars and other features of the night sky. In addition, nighttime lighting in the commercial areas, or the presence of reflective surfaces on buildings in this area (e.g., reflective window glazing), could result in light and glare shining onto motorists on SR 70/99 in day and nighttime conditions. However, lighting guidelines established by the City of Sacramento focus on balancing the safety of residents with the value of darkness.

Because the project would create a substantial new source of light in the project area and could develop facilities with reflective surfaces, this is considered a *significant* impact.

Mitigation Measure 6.7-4: (City of Sacramento and LAFCo)

- a. The project applicant shall install light fixtures that have light sources aimed downwards and install shielded lighting outside to prevent glare or reflection or any nuisance, inconvenience, and hazardous interference of any kind on adjoining streets or property.
- b. The project applicant shall adhere to all requirements of the City of Sacramento design guidelines regarding appropriate building materials, lighting, and signage in the office/commercial areas to prevent light and glare from adversely affecting motorists and adjacent land uses. All proposed development plans shall be approved by the City.

By directing light sources away from adjacent properties and directing light downward and adhering to the City's design guidelines for building materials (e.g., reflective surfaces), implementation of Mitigation Measure 6.7-4 would substantially reduce impacts related to light and glare to a *less-than-significant* level because proposed lighting sources would not substantially obscure views of the night sky.