

## 3.1 AESTHETICS

This section provides a description of existing visual conditions, meaning the physical features that make up the visible landscape, near the Folsom Corporation Yard SOIA/annexation area and the surrounds. The effects of the project on the visual environment are generally defined in terms of the project's physical characteristics and potential visibility, the extent to which the project's presence would change the perceived visual character and quality of the environment, and the expected level of sensitivity that the viewing public may have where the project would alter existing views. The "Analysis Methodology" discussion below provides further detail on the approach used in this evaluation.

Comments received on the notice of preparation regarding aesthetics included concerns regarding changes to visitor views from the Prairie City State Vehicular Recreation Area (Prairie City SVRA) and changes to Scott Road as a scenic corridor.

### 3.1.1 Environmental Setting

#### CONCEPTS RELATED TO SCENIC RESOURCES

Visual changes, and whether they are considered adverse, are highly subjective. One person may conclude that any change in a pleasing visual setting is adverse. Others may find the same changes to be acceptable or even an improvement. Further, there are few formal tools available to evaluate changes to the visual environment and conclude significance. This discussion uses general terms and concepts that draw upon the methodologies of the U.S. Forest Service (1995) and the Federal Highway Administration (1981), two of the relatively few public agencies that have formalized visual resource assessment.

In this section, the viewshed is comprised of short-, medium-, and long-range views. Short-range views include the immediate foreground (from 0 feet to approximately 300 feet). Medium-range views include everything within the viewer's general vicinity (from approximately 300 feet to about 0.5 mile). Long-range views are anything further than 0.5 mile from the viewer. A scenic vista is a location from which the public can experience unique and exemplary high-quality views, including panoramic views of great breadth and depth.

Scenic or visual resources can include both the natural and built features of the landscape that contribute to the experience and appreciation of the environment by the general public. Therefore, the landscape is understood to include the built environment (i.e., developed features), the natural environment (i.e., undeveloped land in its natural state), and the managed environment (i.e., agriculture and any other use where vegetation provides the dominant visual character, but the uniformity required by farming and the associated infrastructure keep the landscape from appearing completely natural).

#### Visual Quality

Visual quality is defined as the overall visual impression or attractiveness of an area as determined by the landscape characteristics, including landforms, rock forms, water features, and vegetation patterns. The attributes of line, form, and color combine in various ways to create landscape characteristics whose variety, vividness, coherence, uniqueness, harmony, and pattern contribute to the overall visual quality of an area.

#### Viewer Exposure

Viewer exposure addresses the variables that affect viewing conditions from potentially sensitive areas. Viewer exposure considers the following factors:

- ▲ landscape visibility;
- ▲ the proximity of viewers to the project;

- ▲ whether the project would be viewed from above, below, or from a level line of sight;
- ▲ whether the line of sight is open and panoramic to the project site or restricted by terrain, vegetation, and/or structures;
- ▲ the duration that the project site would be visible to a particular viewer; and
- ▲ whether the view is publicly accessible, with large numbers of viewers, or is a private view and experienced by a small number of viewers.

### **Viewer Sensitivity**

Viewer sensitivity is the overall measure of the variable receptivity of viewers to adverse visual changes in an existing landscape. Individuals have varying degrees of sensitivity to changes in visual conditions, often depending on the character of the land use from which they are viewing the scene and the overall visual characteristics of the place. In areas of more distinctive visual quality, such as designated scenic roads, parks, and recreation and natural areas, viewer sensitivity is characteristically more pronounced. In areas of more indistinctive visual quality or visual quality that is generally representative of the setting, sensitivity to change tends to be less pronounced. This analysis of viewer sensitivity is based on the combined factors of visual quality before and after project implementation, viewer types and numbers of viewers, and visual exposure to the project.

Viewer sensitivity is considered in assessing the impacts of visual change and is a function of several factors. The sensitivity of the viewer or viewer concern is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, proximity of the viewers to the visual resource, elevation of the viewers relative to the visual resources, frequency and duration of views, number of viewers, and types and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

### **Light Pollution**

Views of the night sky can be an important part of the natural environment, particularly in communities surrounded by extensive open space. Light pollution refers to all forms of unwanted light in the night sky, including glare, light trespass, skyglow, and over-lighting.

The terms “glare” and “skyglow” are used in this analysis to describe the visual effects of lighting. Glare is direct exposure to bright lights. Light that is either emitted directly upward by luminaires or reflected from the ground is scattered by dust and gas molecules in the atmosphere, producing a luminous background known as skyglow. Skyglow is highly variable depending on immediate weather conditions, quantity of dust and gas in the atmosphere, amount of light directed skyward, and the direction from which it is viewed. In poor weather conditions, more particles are present in the atmosphere to scatter the upward-bound light (National Lighting Product Information Program 2007).

## **EXISTING VISUAL CHARACTER**

### **Regional Viewshed**

#### **Visual Character of the Project Site**

The project site consists mainly of grassland and is located at the southeast corner of Prairie City Road and White Rock Road, just west of Scott Road in Sacramento County, California. The project site has gentle rolling hills throughout the site but, otherwise, has little topography. There are no buildings located on the project site, however there are several trees on the site close to White Rock Road. High voltage electrical transmission lines traverse the site from north to south, creating an interruption to an otherwise natural viewshed.

## Visual Character of the surrounding area

Neighboring the project site is the Prairie City SVRA. This area is a park designed for motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, four-wheel drive vehicles, and other off-road vehicles. While some portion of the SVRA is also open grassland, built-up portions of the park consist of cross-country trails, competitive and practice tracks, and park facilities (bathrooms, offices, etc.). The topography of the Prairie City SVRA is consistent with that of the project site having flat, open grasslands with gentle hills throughout (State Parks 2016). The surrounding area also consists of relatively flat topography with patches of tree groves scattered throughout. The grasslands are consistent with those on the project site. To the north of the project site, the transmission lines continue over rolling grassland. While currently vacant, this area is slated for development and the potential impact on the loss of visual character of this site has been analyzed in the Folsom South of U.S. 50 Specific Plan Project EIR/EIS, certified in 2011.

## Views of the Site and Likely Viewers

Public views of the site are currently available to drivers along White Rock Road and Scott Road and to visitors to the SVRA. Both White Rock Road and Scott Road have very little shoulder and are not conducive to pedestrian travel. Therefore, the likely viewers are travelers in motor vehicles. Exhibit 3.1-1 shows the locations of viewpoints near the site. View 1 shows the view from a car looking northwest towards the site from Scott Road (Exhibit 3.1-2). A slight hill impedes the background views; however, the power lines are still visible. Exhibits 3.1-3, 3.1-4, and 3.1-5 show views from White Rock Road. As stated previously, while the visual character of the site is mainly grassland, the view is broken by transmission lines (View 2, Exhibit 3.1-3). A traveler may see, in the foreground, views of barbed wire fences, grasslands in the middle to background, and high-voltage electrical transmission lines in the fore to background views (View 3, Exhibit 3.1-4). In the far background view, there are tree groves and slight hills (View 4, Exhibit 3.1-5). This area is part of a large stretch of undeveloped land along Scott Road and White Rock Road. While the transmission lines detract from its unity and intactness, this still could be considered a scenic vista.

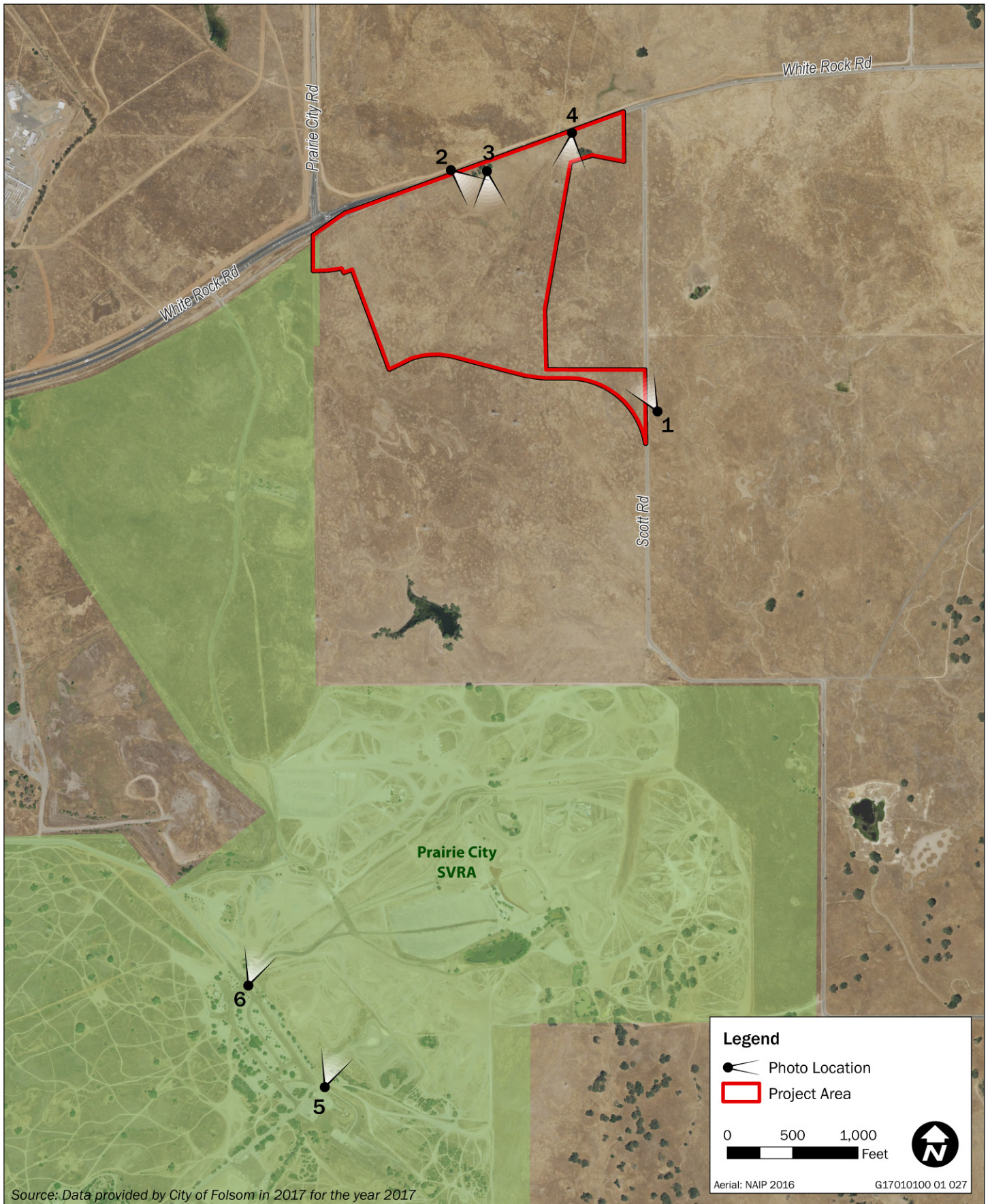
Exhibit 3.1-5, 3.1-6, and 3.1-7 show views from the central portion of Prairie City SVRA. Viewers at the SVRA are recreationists. They may be out for a walk, riding an off-road vehicle, or watching a competition. View 4 is from a central overlook which has a higher elevation than other portions of the SVRA. From there, the project site can be seen in the background, along with views of moving vehicles along White Rock Road. View 5 shows a view from the main loop road. The project site is harder to see from this vantage point because of the topography of the site. View 6 was taken at a special event entrance which could be used by walkers during non-special events. It is hard to see the project site from this location because of a hill between the entrance roadway and the site.

## Light and Glare Conditions

The project site is currently vacant as is most of the surrounding area. The normal sources of light and glare come from buildings, street lights, and other urban uses. However, most of these sources are located away from the project site and do not create much light or glare onsite.

Natural and artificial light reflect off various surfaces and can create localized occurrences of daytime and nighttime glare. Buildings and structures made with glass, metal, and polished exterior roofing materials do not exist on the project site so there are no reports of excess daytime or nighttime light and glare.





Source: Data provided by City of Folsom in 2017 for the year 2017

**Exhibit 3.1-1**

**Viewpoints**







**Exhibit 3.1-2**

**View 1 - from Scott Road Looking Northwest**



**Exhibit 3.1-3**

**View 2 - from White Rock Road Looking towards Southeast at Trees**

Source: Google 2017





**Exhibit 3.1-4**

**View 3 - from Gate Looking South**



**Exhibit 3.1-5**

**View 4 - from Central North of the Project Site Looking Southeast**





**Exhibit 3.1-6 View 5 - from Overlook Near Motocross Practice Tracks Looking Northeast**



**Exhibit 3.1-7 View 6 - from Road Looking Northeast Over The 4x4 Obstacle Course**

## 3.1.2 Regulatory Framework

### FEDERAL

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws apply to the project.

### STATE

#### California Scenic Highway Program

The California Department of Transportation administers the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. There are no State designated scenic highways located in viewing distance of the project site. The nearest scenic highways are U.S. Highway 50, east of Placerville (more than 20 miles from the site) and State Route 160 (approximately 24 miles southwest of the project site).

### LOCAL

The project site lies within the jurisdictional boundaries of Sacramento County; therefore, the County's policies would apply. While the LAFCo policies would also apply to the project site, LAFCo does not have policies regulating aesthetics. Furthermore, if the SOIA and annexation are approved, the project site would be in the jurisdiction of the City of Folsom. Thus, applicable policies of the City of Folsom's General Plan are described below.

#### Sacramento County General Plan

The following policies from the Sacramento County General Plan (Sacramento County 2011) are applicable to the project:

- ▲ **Policy LU-31:** Strive to achieve a natural nighttime environment and an uncompromised public view of the night sky by reducing light pollution.
- ▲ **Policy CI-53:** Roadway improvements along established scenic corridors shall be designed and constructed so as to minimize impacts to the scenic qualities of the corridor.
- ▲ **Policy CI-58:** Continue to provide scenic corridor protection for Scott Road from White Rock Road south to Latrobe Road, Michigan Bar Road, and Twin Cities Road from Highway 160 east to Highway 99.

#### Sacramento County Zoning Code

Title 1 (General Provisions) of the Zoning Code contains standards requiring that illumination of buildings, landscaping, signs, and parking and loading areas be shielded and directed so that no light trespasses onto adjacent properties. Title III (Use Regulations and Development Standards) requires that lighting is be directed away from residential areas and public streets so that glare is not produced that could impact the general safety of vehicular traffic and the privacy and well-being of residents.

#### City of Folsom General Plan

The following policies from the City of Folsom General Plan (City of Folsom 1993) are applicable to the project:

- ▲ **Policy 16.2:** Public facilities, such as utility substations, water storage or treatment plants, pumping stations, and sewer treatment plants, should be located, designed, and maintained so that noise, light, glare, or odors associated with these facilities will not negatively impact nearby land uses. Building materials and landscaping shall be used to make these land uses less visually obtrusive from neighboring properties.



### 3.1.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

#### METHODOLOGY

While approval of the SOIA and annexation, along with changes to land use and zoning designations, would not result in physical changes to the site, approval of the SOIA/annexation would remove barriers to the development of a future corporation yard at this site. Therefore, this analysis considers the potential environmental impacts of the development of a future corporation yard.

Aesthetic impacts were evaluated by comparing the expected visual changes that development of a future corporation yard would make against the existing visual character of the site. Visual character is defined narrowly to include only analysis of viewsheds, physical site characteristics, and lighting. There is no design for development at this site, so this analysis considers only how development could potentially change the views and visual character. It does not include an evaluation of corporation yard design. The analysis assumes that open spaces and rural areas are typically of higher visually quality than urban areas because of the visual character's preservation of visual continuity (the blending of visual elements) and farther horizon of sight.

The analysis focuses on views of the project site from offsite sensitive receptors and public viewpoints. In determining the extent and implications of the anticipated visual changes, consideration was given to:

- ▲ existing visual qualities of the affected environment and specific changes in the visual character and qualities of the affected environment;
- ▲ the visual context of the affected environment;
- ▲ the extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that provide unique visual experiences or that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration; and
- ▲ the sensitivity of viewers, access of viewers, their activities, and the extent to which these activities are related to the aesthetic qualities affected by the project-related changes.

It should be noted that an assessment of visual quality is a subjective matter, and reasonable people can disagree as to whether alteration of visual character would be adverse or beneficial. For this analysis, a conservative approach was taken, and the potential for substantial change to the visual character of the project site is generally considered a significant impact.

#### THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, a visual resource impact is considered significant if implementation of the project would do any of the following:

- ▲ 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.

## ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

As described in Chapter 2, Project Description, the project has three potential access options. The evaluation of aesthetics would not be affected by these options. Therefore, this is not discussed further in this section.

There are no scenic highways in viewing distance of the project site. Therefore, there is no impact related to substantially damaging scenic resources within a state scenic highway and this topic is not discussed further.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

### Impact 3.1-1: Substantially adversely affect a scenic vista

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The project would reduce the barriers preventing future development of the site, which could lead to the construction of a corporation yard within the viewshed of Scott Road and a rerouting of Scott Road. Because this would alter lands within a scenic vista in a locally designated scenic corridor, this impact would be **significant**.

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The project site is part of the viewshed from Scott Road. Sacramento County considers the view of grasslands and grazing cattle along this roadway to be a scenic resource. If the SOIA/annexation is approved, barriers to developing the site for a future City of Folsom corporation yard would be removed. A future corporation yard would consist of urban development, paved areas, and landscaping. In addition, the project anticipates the rerouting of Scott Road and the abandonment of a section of Scott Road from the White Rock intersection to the new section. While the SouthEast Connector JPA anticipates that Scott Road would need to be realigned when White Rock Road is improved as an expressway (SouthEast Connector JPA 2016), the anticipated change to the configuration and alignment of intersections was not anticipated to result in a significant visual impact.

The City anticipates that Scott Road would need to be aligned south of the corporation yard site to improve access for the corporation yard and enhance the SouthEast Connector's anticipated roadway improvements. Until the SouthEast Connector is built, the City may choose to keep Scott Road in place (see Access Option 1 in Chapter 2, Project Description). While this would reduce some of the impact to the Scott Road scenic corridor, this is anticipated to be a temporary access scenario.

Development of a future corporation yard, along with realignment of Scott Road to be closer to the corporation yard, would remove some elements along this alignment that contribute to the current view's scenic qualities. In addition, the road would be moved closer to development and away from the scenic elements of grasslands that contributed to Sacramento County designating this roadway as a scenic corridor. Because the loss of scenic vista would be permanent and would detract from the elements contributing to a scenic corridor at this location, this would be a **significant** impact.

### Mitigation Measure 3.1-1: Design future corporation yard to soften visual impact.

At the time the City proceeds with development of the site, the City will coordinate with Sacramento County to review design plans to ensure that appropriate landscaping and other best management practices (natural or naturally-colored building materials, berms, trees, attractive fencing, etc.) that can screen and soften views of corporation yard development to travelers along Scott Road to the degree feasible. At a minimum, the City will demonstrate how design measures were considered and determined to be feasible/infeasible based onsite conditions.

#### Significance after Mitigation

Complying with Mitigation Measure 3.1-1 would require the City soften the visual impact of the corporation yard development to the degree feasible. However, it is unknown whether specific design measures are available that could minimize the impact to a less-than-significant level. Because the scenic vista would be irretrievably changed even with implementation of mitigation, the impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

### **Impact 3.1-2: Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.**

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The project would change the existing views on the site from open space grasslands to a more industrial setting. Future construction onsite would cause the removal of grasslands and of trees and introduce urban development in an area which is generally natural and could degrade the visual character or quality of the site. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

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Implementation of the project would lead to the removal of grasslands on the project site and the construction of an urban industrial area. This would be a substantial change from the visual character of the site and current surrounding area. In general, change does not necessarily cause the visual character to degrade. However, most reasonable people can agree that industrial development provides a lower quality scenic view compared to grasslands and natural areas, even with transmission lines located onsite. While the surrounding area to the north is current approved for urban development and this area will be transitioning the whole visual landscape of the area over 10-20 years, the project site still retain a relatively natural visual landscape. Its potential development with urban industrial uses in absence of other surrounding urban development could be considered as substantial change to the visual character and quality of the site. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.

#### **Mitigation Measure**

Implement Mitigation Measure 3.1-1.

#### **Significance after Mitigation**

Complying with Mitigation Measure 3.1-1 would require soften the visual impact of the corporation yard development to the degree feasible. However, it is unknown whether specific design measures are available and that could minimize the impact to a less-than-significant level. Because the visual character and quality of the site would be irretrievably changed even with implementation of mitigation, the impact would be **significant and unavoidable**.

### **Impact 3.1-3: Create new source of light or glare**

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The project would lead to the construction of urban buildings on the site. While the City has a policy reduce light and glare impacts offsite, no specific measures are included that would ensure lighting from the site would not trespass to offsite areas and adversely affect travelers and future neighbors of approved developments. This impact would be **potentially significant**.

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The project site is currently undeveloped as are the surrounding areas. Given the lack of development in the surrounding area, there are currently no sources of light or glare in the area. City of Folsom Policy 16.2 states that public facilities be “located, designed, and maintained so that noise, light, glare, or odors associated with these facilities will not negatively impact nearby land uses. Building materials and landscaping shall be used to make these land uses less visually obtrusive from neighboring properties.” This site was chosen to locate the future corporation yard and its day-to-day activities apart from sensitive uses. While no design or facility layout is currently proposed, the future corporation yard would be more than 1,000 feet from the nearest planned residential or commercial uses. Nonetheless, the details of site lighting and building materials is currently unknown and it is possible that structures could contain metals or glass that could cause daylight glare, or include lighting that could trespass on surrounding roadways. While compliance with the City’s lighting policies would minimize impacts, it is unknown if these impacts would be reduced to less-than-significant levels. Construction of the corporation yard is not anticipated to occur at night, therefore, no lighting would be needed that might trespass on surrounding roadways. This would be a **potentially significant** impact.



**Mitigation Measure 3.1-3a: Conform to Construction Lighting Standards.**

The City shall limit construction to daylight hours to the extent possible. If nighttime lighting or construction is necessary, the City shall ensure that unshielded lights, reflectors, or spotlights would not be directed to shine toward or be directly visible from adjacent properties or streets. To the extent possible, the City shall minimize the use of nighttime construction lighting within 500 feet of existing residences. This measure shall be identified on grading plans and in construction contracts.

**Mitigation Measure 3.1-3b: Design development to reduce lighting and glare.**

The City shall design the lighting at the project site to include the following minimum requirements:

- ▲ outdoor lighting shall be properly shielded and installed to prevent light trespass on adjacent properties; and
- ▲ flood or spot lamps installed shall be aimed no higher than 45 degrees above straight down (half-way between straight down and straight to the side) when the source is visible from any offsite residential property or public roadway.

**Significance after Mitigation**

Complying with Mitigation Measure 3.1-3a and 3.1-3b would reduce potential glare and adverse effects related to lighting. However, development would still require lighting for security and other purposes that would expand the footprint of suburban lighting conditions associated with the City. This would contribute to skyglow. Further, compliance with lighting best management practices would not necessarily eliminate glare in all circumstances. There is no additional feasible mitigation to completely offset this impact. Thus, impacts have been determined to be **significant and unavoidable**.