
Section 4-1

Aesthetics and Visual Resources

This section describes existing visual resources and views in the proposed project vicinity and describes the changes to visual quality that would result from the Proposed Project.

Public concerns regarding the visual impacts of the Proposed Project (particularly the Alamo Detention Basin) submitted both orally and in writing during circulation of the NOP are addressed in this section.

The Proposed Project would not include nighttime lighting. The two detention basins would include inlet structures, berms, outlet pipes, and spillways but not lighting features. The completed basins would be revegetated and maintained as annual grassland or restored to agricultural production (basin floor). The Proposed Project would not include shiny surfaces and no glare would be produced. Since these project elements do not present significant aesthetic impacts compared to existing conditions, they are not discussed further in this section.

4-1.1 STUDY METHODS

Information for this section was obtained from a site visit conducted in July 2009, the Proposed Project plans and elevations, the City of Vacaville General Plan (City of Vacaville 1990), and the County General Plan and General Plan EIR (Solano County 2008a).

4-1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following provides a description of the regional setting, scenic resources, and views at or near the two basin sites.

4-1.2.1 Regional Setting

According to the Open Space Element of the City of Vacaville General Plan (City of Vacaville 2007), open space provides Vacaville visual distinction from other communities. In addition to its value as a visual resource, the area's open space includes oak woodlands, wildlife habitat, creeks, scenic hillsides, riparian habitat, and productive agricultural acreage.

According to the 2008 Solano County General Plan EIR, agricultural landscapes, the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta (Delta) and marshlands, and oak- and grass-covered hills are the primary aesthetic

resources in the County (Solano County 2008a). Aesthetic resources promote a high quality of life for the county's residents. Prominent scenic resources in the County include marshlands and Delta waters located to the south, the Coast Range extending in a north-south direction north and west of Fairfield, meandering hills between Cordelia and Benicia, and expanses of agricultural lands located primarily in the eastern half of the County.

Agriculture has historically been both an important industry in the County and a central part of the county's identity. Agricultural lands account for more land than any other land use, which, in turn, defines much of the county's visual character, supports wildlife habitats and migration corridors, provides open space and recreational amenities for residents and visitors, and acts as a separator defining the County's cities.

4-1.2.2 Scenic Resources

There are no officially State-designated scenic highways in the County; however, a stretch of State Route (SR) 37 located between the city of Vallejo and the county's western boundary is defined as an "eligible state scenic highway—not officially designated" by the California Scenic Highway Mapping System. In addition, SR 160, adjacent to the county border in Sacramento County, is a state-designated Scenic Highway (Solano County 2008a). Pleasants Valley Road is designated a scenic roadway in the Solano County General Plan. The county's agricultural landscapes and the oak- and grass-covered hills offer an abundance of scenic vistas (Solano County 2008b).

4-1.2.3 Existing Visual Resource Conditions

Locations of photographs taken during the July 2009 site visit are presented in Figure 4-1.1. The photographs are included in Figures 4-1.2 through 4-1.6.

4-1.2.3.1 Alamo Site

The Alamo site is located on approximately 79 acres approximately 2,000 feet south of Vaca Valley Road off Rogers Lane. Existing conditions at the Alamo site consist predominately of an abandoned orchard with a small portion of non-native annual grassland.

Views onto the Alamo Site

The Alamo site is located approximately 2,000 feet south of Vaca Valley Road and is similar in appearance to the adjacent agricultural uses. An abandoned orchard occupies the majority of the site. A small area of non-native annual grassland is present in the northwest corner of the site and is bordered by walnut trees. Alamo Creek flows west to east along the southern border of the Alamo site and supports a mature riparian woodland. An area adjacent to Alamo Creek at the southeastern corner of the site is disturbed and appears to have supported a small homestead in the past, evidenced by the presence of ornamental trees and old equipment.

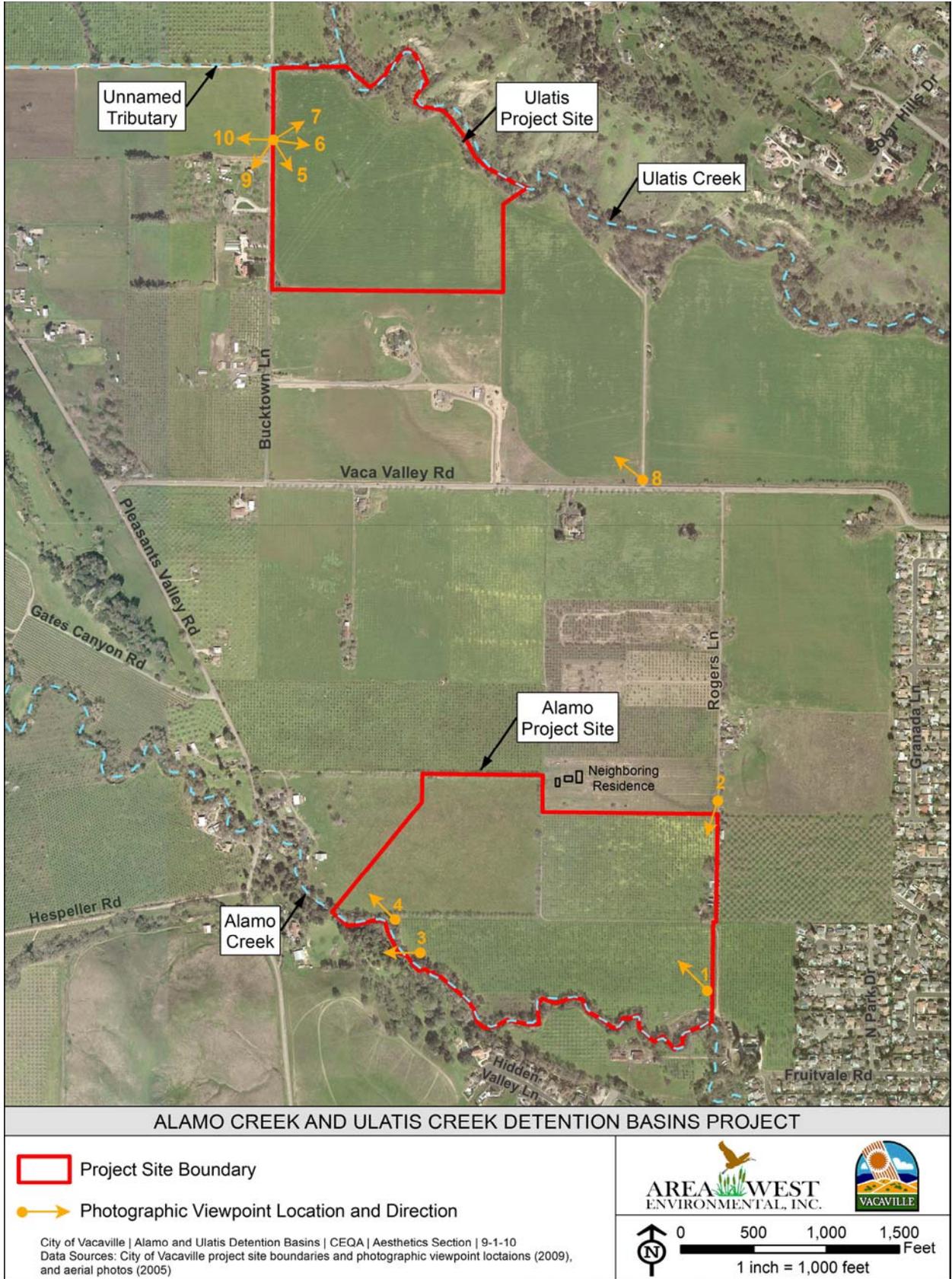


Figure 4-1.1 Photographic Viewpoint Locations



Viewpoint 1. Looking northwest from Rogers Lane onto the Alamo site



Viewpoint 2. Looking southwest onto the Alamo site from Rogers Lane

Figure 4-1.2 Views onto the Alamo Site



Viewpoint 3. Looking west toward the southwest corner of the Alamo site



Viewpoint 4. Looking northwest away from the western edge of the Alamo site

Figure 4-1.3 Views from the Alamo Site



Viewpoint 5. Looking southeast onto the Ulatis site from Bucktown Lane



Viewpoint 6. Looking east onto the Ulatis site from Bucktown Lane

Figure 4-1.4 Views onto the Ulatis Site



Viewpoint 7. Looking northeast onto the Ulatis site from Bucktown Lane



Viewpoint 8. Looking northwest onto the Ulatis site from Vaca Valley Road

Figure 4-1.5 Views onto the Ulatis Site



Viewpoint 9. Looking southwest away from the Ulatis site on Bucktown Lane



Viewpoint 10. Looking west away from the Ulatis site on Bucktown Lane

Figure 4-1.6 Views onto the Ulatis Site

Views onto the Alamo site from Rogers Lane to the north and east are dominated by the existing abandoned orchard (Viewpoints 1 and 2 on Figure 4-1.2) and include views of a portion of the riparian habitat along Alamo Creek (Viewpoint 3 on Figure 4-1.3). The riparian corridor along Alamo Creek provides a vegetative backdrop to the site and vicinity when viewed from the north. Distant views of surrounding hillsides and the Vaca Mountains are available from the site and adjacent properties when viewed across the site from the east. Views onto the site from nearby Pleasants Valley Road and Fruitvale Road are obscured by the riparian vegetation. Views onto the site from rural residences to the east of Pleasants Valley Road include the annual grassland and orchard. The Alamo site does not contain any existing unique visual features.

Views from the Alamo Site

Views from the Alamo site to the south and west consist primarily of the riparian habitat located along Alamo Creek (Viewpoints 3 and 4 on Figure 4-1.3). Views to the north and east from the site consist of existing farmland including fields and orchards. Views to the southeast also include the backs of the residences located on the western edge of development off Fruitvale Road.

4-1.2.3.2 Ulatís Site

The Ulatís site is located on approximately 50 acres south of Ulatís Creek off Bucktown Lane. The site currently supports a fallow agricultural field and is bordered to the north by a riparian corridor composed largely of native oaks, cottonwoods, and willows along the bank of Ulatís Creek.

Views onto the Ulatís Site

Views onto the Ulatís site consist predominately of the fallow agricultural field. The site is visible from Bucktown Lane and Vaca Valley Road. Views to the south and east onto the site from Bucktown Lane consist of the fallow field, the PG&E transmission lines, and a small area of vegetation at the base of the transmission tower (Viewpoints 5 and 6 on Figure 4-1.4). Views to the northeast onto the Ulatís site from Bucktown Lane consist of the fallow field and the Ulatís Creek riparian area on the edge of the site (Viewpoint 7 on Figure 4-1.5). The riparian corridor along Ulatís Creek provides a vegetative backdrop to the site and vicinity when viewed from the south across the site. Distant views of surrounding hillsides and the Vaca Mountains are available from the site and adjacent properties when viewed across the site from the east. Portions of the Ulatís site are also visible from Vaca Valley Road to the south. Views from Vaca Valley Road include the fallow agricultural field, the transmission lines and tower, and the surrounding hills located off the site (Viewpoint 8 on Figure 4-1.5). The Ulatís site does not include any existing unique visual features.

Views from the Ulatís Site

Views from the Ulatís site include adjoining fallow fields and rural residential uses to the east, south, and west (Viewpoint 9 on Figure 4-1.6). Views from the site also include riparian habitat and the surrounding hills to the west and north (Viewpoint 10 on Figure 4-1.6).

4-1.3 REGULATORY SETTING

The following discusses the federal, state, and local regulations and policies as they pertain to aesthetics and as applicable to the Proposed Project.

4-1.3.1 Federal Regulations

No federal plan, policies, regulations, or laws pertaining to aesthetics are applicable to the Proposed Project.

4-1.3.2 State Regulations

No state plan, policies, regulations, or laws pertaining to aesthetics are applicable to the Proposed Project.

4-1.3.3 Local Plans and Policies

The following local goals, policies, and regulations are applicable to the visual resources issues analyzed in this EIR.

4-1.3.3.1 Solano County General Plan

The Solano County General Plan goals, policies, and implementation programs relevant to visual resources within the study area are listed below:

Goals

RS.G-6 Preserve the visual character and identity of communities by maintaining open-space areas between them.

Policies

RS.P-35 Protect the unique scenic features of Solano County, particularly hills, ridgelines, wetlands, and water bodies.

RS.P-37 Protect the visual character of designated scenic roadways.

Implementation Programs

RS.I-21: Preserve the visual character of scenic roadways as shown in Figure RS-5 [of the Solano County General Plan] through design review, designating alternate routes for faster traffic, regulating offsite advertising, limiting grading in the view corridor through the grading ordinance, limiting travel speeds, and providing pullover areas with trash and recycling receptacles.

4-1.3.3.2 City of Vacaville General Plan

The City of Vacaville General Plan (City of Vacaville 1990) policies relevant to visual resources for the Proposed Project include the following policies:

Guiding Policies

- 2.1-G 9 Preserve scenic features and the feel of a city surrounded by open space, and preserve view corridors to the hills and other significant natural areas.

4-1.4 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

For the purposes of this EIR and as outlined in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a significant impact on aesthetics and visual resources would occur if the Proposed Project would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or a scenic resource;
- Substantially alter the visual character of the project site as seen from surrounding areas; or
- Create visual incompatibility with surrounding land uses.

4-1.5 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Proposed construction at the Alamo site would replace an existing orchard and field south of Vaca Valley Road with a detention basin, including berm, inlet weir, outlet culvert, and spillway. Vegetation consisting of orchard trees and non-native annual grasses would be removed to construct the two basins. The resulting basin habitat would be revegetated and maintained as annual grassland along the berms, and as agricultural land or wetland habitat within the basin floor. Development of the detention basin would include the excavation of a detention floor, foundation excavation and building of a berm to surround the basin, and construction of an inlet structure to provide for the gravity flow of water into the detention basin from Alamo Creek. It would also include the installation of an outlet pipe to meter the flow of stormwater back into the creek and construction of an overflow spillway to provide for the reentry of detained stormwater into Alamo Creek in the event that the capacity of the detention basin is exceeded. A small parking area for potential passive recreational uses would be located at the northeastern corner of the detention basin site along Rogers Lane.

Proposed construction at the Ulatis site would replace approximately 53 acres of fallow agricultural land to the north of Vaca Valley Road with the proposed detention basin including berm, inlet weir, outlet culvert, and spillway. Construction of the detention basin berms would require initial excavation and removal of non-native annual grasses to stabilize subsurface soil followed by buildup and compaction of suitable native material to create a berm along the north, east, and south sides of the basin. Annual grasses would be temporarily removed to construct the basin and improve the site for project implementation. The resulting basin habitat would be revegetated and maintained as annual grassland along the berms, and as agricultural land or wetland habitat within the basin floor. The detention basin would be constructed around the existing PG&E tower site.

4-1.5.1 Potential to Alter the Visual Character of the Project Sites as Seen from Surrounding Areas

IMPACT 1 – 1: POTENTIAL TO ALTER THE PROJECT SITES' VISUAL CHARACTER

The Proposed Project would replace existing fallow agricultural land and an abandoned orchard with two detention basins, berms, and associated drainage structures. Following project construction, the basins will be revegetated and maintained as annual grassland and agricultural land or wetland habitat.

Short-range views onto the Alamo site would change because the existing predominate view of orchard trees would be replaced with grassland along the berms and, within the basin, alfalfa or oat or wetland habitat. The berm height would be close to that of existing grade on the western portion of the basin and would reach a maximum height of 25 feet above existing grade along the eastern boundary. A spoils mound will be located on the northwest corner of the property and will potentially rise 23 feet above existing grade. The maximum excavation would be approximately 17 feet below existing grade. Views onto the Alamo site would be altered for the rural residences along Pleasants Valley Road and Rogers Lane and for residences along the western end of the development off Fruitvale Road. Long-range views of agricultural land may be altered for nearby residences because of the proposed berms and spoils mound.

Views onto the Ulati site from Bucktown Lane would not be substantially altered because of the existing trees along the road and because the height of the proposed berm would be close to that of the existing grade; however, views onto and across the Ulati site from nearby rural residences along Vaca Valley Road would be altered by the berms, which could reach a maximum of 14 feet above existing grade along the eastern corner of the basin.

Although the majority of the Alamo and Ulati sites would be similar to existing grassland and agricultural uses after revegetation is complete, the addition of the proposed berms could substantially alter views from nearby residences. The Alamo basin could result in berm heights up to 25 feet above existing grade visible to residences to the west and north along Rogers Lane. The Ulati basin could result in berm heights up to 14 feet above existing grade visible to residences to the south and east along Vaca Valley Road. This could result in the interruption of short- and long-range views from adjacent rural residences. This would be a *significant impact*. This impact is partially mitigated at the Alamo basin site by the row of existing redwood trees located on the adjacent property along the northern boundary and by the mature walnut orchard located along part of the eastern boundary. It is infeasible to plant trees that would achieve a significant size along the base of the berms as part of the project because the root systems and irrigation will compromise the integrity of the berm structure. The City's objective is to develop the maximum capacity feasible for each basin in the interest of public safety. As such, it is not feasible to set berms back from the property line to create a sufficient landscape screen that is adequately separated from the base of the berm to avoid root and irrigation effects. Although existing trees partially mitigate visual impacts for the Alamo Basin, a berm might still be perceived as a negative view on both the Alamo and Ulati sites. Therefore, this impact would remain *significant and unavoidable*.

4-1.5.2 Potential to Substantially Affect a Scenic Vista or a Scenic Resource

IMPACT 1–2: SUBSTANTIAL ADVERSE EFFECT ON A SCENIC VISTA OR A SCENIC RESOURCE

In the County, views of the Coast Range and nearby hills are considered a scenic vista. Pleasants Valley Road is designated a scenic roadway (Solano County 2008b). Pleasants Valley Road is located to the west of the Proposed Project, approximately 2,000 feet west of the Ulati basin and approximately 500 feet west of the western edge of the Alamo basin. As discussed above, the Proposed Project would replace existing fallow agricultural land and an abandoned orchard with two detention basins, berms, and associated drainage structures. Following project construction, the basins will be revegetated and maintained as annual grassland along the berms, and as agricultural land (hay crop) or wetland habitat within the basin. The Ulati site is not visible from Pleasants Valley Road because of existing trees located on Vaca Valley Road and Bucktown Lane, including orchard trees. The majority of the Alamo site is not visible from Pleasants Valley Road because of the existing riparian habitat located along Alamo Creek. A portion of the Alamo site may be visible at a distance to southbound travelers on Pleasants Valley Road. Views from Pleasants Valley Road would change from a fallow field and orchard to a portion of the basin bottom and a portion of the northern berm. This would not be a substantial change from the existing views because the proposed berm height at the northwestern edge of the basin would be close to the existing grade. For travelers along Pleasants Valley Road, the vegetated berm, spoils mound, and detention basin would appear similar to existing rural grassland and hay crops or wetlands; therefore, this would be a *less-than-significant impact* and no mitigation is required.

4-1.5.3 Potential to Create Visual Incompatibility with Surrounding Land Uses

IMPACT 1–3: CREATION OF VISUAL INCOMPATIBILITY WITH SURROUNDING LAND USES

As stated above, the Proposed Project would replace existing fallow agricultural fields and orchards with two detention basins, including berms and associated structures. The resulting basin habitat would be revegetated and maintained as annual grassland along the berms, and agricultural land or wetland habitat within the basin floor. Surrounding land uses include rural residential uses along Bucktown Lane and Rogers Lane, urban residential uses along Granada Lane to the east, and active and fallow agricultural land. Views from these uses encompass developed land, riparian habitat on both sites, and annual grassland in all directions. Views of riparian and annual grassland include flat land as well as views of the surrounding hills (see Figures 4-1.2, 4-1.3, 4-1.4, 4-1.5, and 4-1.6). The Proposed Project would result in visual landscapes that are similar to existing flat grassland, hillside grassland, and agricultural uses. These views would not be incompatible with agricultural and rural residential uses because the Proposed Project would not result in incompatible urban development in a rural and agricultural setting; therefore, this would be a *less-than-significant impact* and no mitigation is required.

4-1.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The cumulative context for Aesthetics and Visual Resources is buildout in the City and the unincorporated area of the County in the vicinity of the Proposed Project. Implementation of the Proposed Project, in combination with other projects in the region, would alter the visual character of the Alamo and Ulatis sites and vicinity, from surrounding land uses.

IMPACT 1–4: CUMULATIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE ALTERATION OF VISUAL CHARACTER IN SOLANO COUNTY

Development within the City and County is anticipated to continue in the future. The Solano County General Plan EIR concluded that implementation of the County General Plan would substantially alter the visual character of the County by converting agricultural lands and open space to developed urban uses. Implementation of the Solano County General Plan would result in construction of urban development that could include large and tall buildings, soundwalls, berms, and other infrastructure (Solano County 2008a). The detention basin sites are outside of the City’s Sphere of Influence and are designated in the County General Plan for continued agricultural use. The development of detention basins will preclude any future urban development on the sites and, for aesthetic purposes, will allow the land to remain as open space with the potential for agricultural use on the basin floors. The cumulative buildout in the area of the detention basins is minor given the agricultural designation. The development of the basins will not convert land to developed urban uses and therefore will not alter the visual character of the County by converting agricultural lands and open space to developed urban uses. The contribution to cumulative impact is *less than significant*.