

4.1 AESTHETICS

This section provides a description of existing visual conditions in the unincorporated area of Amador County. Aesthetics, or visual resources, are the natural and human-built features of the landscape that can be seen and that contribute to the public's appreciative enjoyment of the environment. This section provides an analysis of the changes to those conditions that would occur from implementation of the Draft General Plan. The "Analysis Methodology" discussion below provides further detail on the approach used in this section.

4.1.1 REGULATORY SETTING

FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

National Scenic Byways Program

The National Scenic Byways Program is part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Under the program, the U.S. Secretary of Transportation recognizes certain roads as National Scenic Byways based on their archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities (FHWA 1995). To be considered for National Scenic Byways, a road must have at least one intrinsic quality of regional significance.

The goals of the National Forest Scenic Byways Program are to: support and enhance rural community economic development; showcase outstanding national forest and grassland scenery; increase public understanding of national forests and the importance of sustaining healthy, productive ecosystems; ensure that people remain socially connected to public lands; and contribute to the Nation's overall scenic byways effort. Because almost half of the roads designated as National Scenic Byways are located partially or entirely on National Forest System or other public lands, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) is a major partner with FHWA, state departments of transportation, Federal land management agencies, and byway organizations in developing and promoting the National Scenic Byways Program. (USFS 2008)

FHWA requires that a corridor management plan be submitted when applying for National Scenic Byway. These plans will outline a strategy for achieving goals and provide a framework for integrating other planning efforts within the corridor to ensure the intrinsic qualities are protected. (FHWA 1995)

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 prepare and implement a monitoring program that reviews and enforces scenic-corridor protection measures to preserve scenic views. Under the scenic-corridor protection program a city or county must adopt ordinances, zoning and/or planning policies to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. They should be written in sufficient detail to avoid broad discretionary interpretation and demonstrate a concise strategy to effectively maintain the scenic character of the corridor. The local agency is required to report to Caltrans once every 5 years on the success and continued enforcement of the protection measures.

Caltrans requires developers of projects located adjacent to a state scenic highway to consult with the agency to determine whether the project would constitute a minor, moderate, or major intrusion to the scenic quality of the corridor. A minor intrusion is one that either is complementary to the landscape or is recognized for its cultural or historical significance (e.g., widely dispersed buildings with visual screenings). A moderate intrusion is one that is

integrated into the landscape and does not degrade or obstruct scenic views (e.g., orderly and well-landscaped developments with or without roadway screening). A major intrusion is one that dominates the landscape and degrades or obstructs views (e.g., dense and continuous development that dominates the view).

4.1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Amador County is located in the central Sierra foothills between the South Fork of the Cosumnes River and the North Fork of the Mokelumne River. State Route (SR) 49 traverses the County from north to south through the historic mining areas of the Mother Lode, connecting the cities of Plymouth, Sutter Creek, Amador City, and Jackson. SR 104 and SR 124 connect Ione with neighboring areas of Amador and Sacramento Counties, and SR 16 connects the County with Sacramento to the west. SR 88 extends from Stockton on the west, through the County to the Kirkwood ski resort, passing through Jackson, and the unincorporated communities of Martell, Pine Grove, Pioneer, Red Corral, and Buckhorn.

VISUAL CHARACTER OF AMADOR COUNTY

Amador County has a broad range of landscapes that change with the gradual increase in elevation. Rolling hills dotted with mature oaks, oak woodlands and annual grasslands; agricultural land (e.g., field crops, vineyards, and livestock); conifer forests; rivers; lakes; and historic structures all contribute to the visual character found in the County. These visual resources contribute to the County's economy through tourism and recreational opportunities.

Scenic resources in Amador County consist of low-lying hills covered in annual grasslands in the western and central county, mountains in the eastern county, oak woodlands, open space, and agricultural and rangeland with residences scattered throughout the hills. Incorporated cities within the planning area are generally located in the central and western portion of the County, with Plymouth, Amador City, Sutter Creek, and Jackson located along the SR 49 corridor, and Ione located further west, between SR 16 and SR 88. Camanche Lake and Pardee Reservoir are significant visual features in the southwestern portion of the County and contrast with the nearby rolling wooded foothills.

Traveling east of SR 49, the topography becomes more varied, and the low-lying rolling hills the scattered oaks and grasslands give way to conifer forests and mountains with elevations up to 9,000 feet or more. Unincorporated communities (e.g., River Pines, Volcano, Pine Grove, Fiddletown, Pioneer, Buckhorn) are located in or on the fringe of the conifer landscape and contain historic buildings that contribute to the aesthetic character of these communities. East of the community of Buckhorn, Amador County generally consists of undeveloped pine forests, including private timber lands and National Forest lands. While the conifer landscape would constitute an area of high visual quality, areas of timber production and existing rural residential areas are substantial disturbed and would not provide high quality scenic vistas. The Shenandoah Valley, the region's wine country, is located northeast of the city of Plymouth. Vineyards in the Shenandoah Valley are considered to be substantial, high quality, visual resources due to the aesthetic character of agricultural working landscapes in the Valley.

The eastern edge of Amador County contains a portion of the Mokelumne Wilderness, which is generally located on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. It contains varied terrain, ranging in elevation from 4,000 to more than 9,000 feet. The Mokelumne Wilderness became part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964 and was expanded with the passage of the California Wilderness Act of 1984. The Mokelumne Wilderness is a rugged landscape dominated by volcanic ridges and peaks. There are many smaller streams flowing through deep granitic canyons, along with small lakes in the northern portion of this area. During the spring and summer, meadows are filled with wildflowers, while during winter months the mountains and valleys

are snow-covered. Because wildernesses are designated for their “untrammeled” landscape and opportunity for solitude, the Mokelumne Wilderness is considered to have high visual quality.

SCENIC ROADWAY DESIGNATIONS

The criteria for official designation and eligibility includes the scenic quality of the landscape, how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler’s enjoyment of the view. Caltrans has designated SR 88 (Carson Pass Highway) as a state scenic highway from the Dew Drop Ranger Station, east, to the Alpine County line (Caltrans 2012).

In addition, SR 88 from the Dew Drop Ranger Station, east, to the Alpine County line has been designated and a USFS National Forest Scenic Byway (U.S. Department of Transportation 2012). To be considered for National Scenic Byways, a road must have at least one intrinsic quality of regional significance.

SR 88 from the City of Jackson to the Dew Drop Ranger Station and all of SR 49 within Amador County are considered to be eligible state scenic highways (Caltrans 2012). Eligible state scenic highways, while recognized for aesthetic quality, are not officially designated as scenic highways.

LIGHT AND GLARE

Light associated with urban development can result in spillover lighting and glare effects. Spillover lighting is artificial lighting that spills over onto adjacent properties and could cause an annoyance to neighboring residents by disturbing sleep patterns. Glare is intense light that shines directly, or is reflected off a surface, into a person’s eyes. Use of building materials such as reflective glass and polished surfaces can cause glare. During daylight hours, the amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight. Glare is particularly acute at sunrise and sunset because of the low angle of the sun in the sky. The potential for such glare in Amador County is moderated in some areas of the County by the presence of hills and mountains. In addition, increases in light and glare can result in skyglow effects. Skyglow is artificial lighting from urbanized uses that alters the rural landscape and, in sufficient quantity, lights up the nighttime sky, thus reducing the visibility of astronomical features.

The incorporated cities and unincorporated communities in Amador County currently generate significant sources of light, glare, and light that affects the nighttime sky. The majority of new commercial, residential, and industrial development envisioned in the Draft General Plan would be located in and adjacent to the unincorporated communities of Martell, Pine Grove, Buckhorn, and River Pines. The Draft General Plan also identifies the Camanche Village and Camanche North Shore SPAs, and the Carbondale Industrial area, a new industrial area west of Ione. Scattered, rural residential uses in a generally open landscape are adjacent to the Camanche Village and Camanche North Shore SPAs, and these areas currently are void of significant sources of nighttime lighting.

4.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The analysis of potential visual impacts resulting from the adoption and implementation of the Draft General Plan is based on field observations conducted by AECOM in February 2009, along with a review of maps and aerial photographs. The analysis evaluates potential changes to existing visual resources that would result from implementation of the Plan. In making a determination on the extent and implications of the visual changes, consideration was given to:

- ▶ specific changes in the visual composition, character, and valued qualities of the affected environment;
- ▶ the visual context of the affected environment;

- ▶ the extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration.

An assessment of visual quality can be a subjective matter, and reasonable people can disagree as to whether a particular change or type of change in the visual character of the Unincorporated County would degrade existing visual character or quality.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact to aesthetics is considered significant if implementation of the Draft General Plan 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 which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

IMPACT 4.1-1 **Effect on Scenic Vistas.** *Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in new development in the planning area, including buildings, structures, paved areas, roadways, utilities, and other improvements, potentially altering scenic vistas in the planning area. This impact would be **significant**.*

A scenic vista is generally considered a distant view of an area that has remarkable scenery or of a resource that is endemic to the area. These scenic vistas are typically viewed from publicly accessible areas, including parks and roadways.

The most common scenic views in Amador County, where development would most likely occur, are open views of low-lying hills covered in annual grasslands, oak woodlands, and crop- and rangeland in the western portion of the County. Agricultural land uses, including barns, ponds, fences, and cultivated fields, as well as scattered rural residences, are visible throughout this area. Views gradually transition to conifer forests, including both forested rural residential areas and less built-up timber areas, in the eastern portion of the County.

Frequently traveled corridors within the unincorporated County include SR 16, SR 49, SR 88, and Ridge Road. Changes that affect the views from these roadways would affect the largest number of public viewers, but public viewers would also be affected by changes near parks and other public locations.

Caltrans has defined SR 88 from the City of Jackson to the Dew Drop Ranger Station and all of SR 49 within Amador County to be eligible for designation as state scenic highways. Because SR 49 and this portion of SR 88 have not been designated as state scenic highways, visual resources along these highways are not protected at the same level as those along the state-designated scenic highway segment of SR 88 (see Impact 4.1-2).

Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in new development in the planning area, including buildings, structures, paved areas, roadways, utilities, and other improvements. These new uses would occur west of Dew Drop, including in areas visible from major roadways such as SR 16, SR 49, SR 88, and Ridge Road; thereby altering views from these roadways. The Draft General Plan focuses a mix of new land uses including residential, commercial, and some industrial uses, within existing unincorporated communities. Town Centers are proposed in Pine Grove, Buckhorn, and River Pines, and in a Regional Service Center is proposed in Martell.

These Town Center and Regional Service Center areas are intended to broaden the range of activities, while encouraging new buildings to conform to a physical model similar to traditional rural towns. New residential uses would also affect views of rolling hills, agricultural lands, and pine forests from these major roadways.

During County review of discretionary projects, Zoning Code requirements are used to reduce effects on scenic vistas by regulating setbacks, height limits, building locations and orientations, and signs for new projects.

Although residential, commercial, and industrial uses currently represent a part of the scenery visible from public areas throughout the planning area, new buildings, structures, paved areas, roadways, utilities, and other improvements allowed by the Draft General Plan would nevertheless change publicly accessible views throughout the planning area. This impact would be **significant**.

Mitigation Measure 4.1-1: Condition Projects to Minimize Effects on Scenic Vistas and Visual Character

- a. To ~~avoid or substantially~~ reduce impacts associated with scenic vistas and visual character to ~~less than significant levels~~, the County will require that new projects be conditioned to incorporate measures to reduce their effect on scenic views and visual character to the maximum extent practicable. Conditions may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- Limiting building heights.
 - Placing and orienting buildings to reduce or avoid impacts on scenic vistas or to be consistent with the existing visual character.
 - Regulating setbacks to be compatible with surrounding uses and existing visual character.
 - Regulating signs to reduce or avoid impacts to scenic views or visual character.

Responsible Agencies/Departments: Planning Department

Time Frame: Ongoing

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.1-1 would reduce impacts to scenic vistas, but not to a less-than-significant level. No feasible mitigation is available that could fully preserve existing publicly accessible views throughout the planning area and prevent substantial impacts on scenic views, while also accommodating future growth in the County. Because the basic purpose of the Draft General Plan is to provide a framework governing future growth in the unincorporated part of the County, including accommodating projected population increase to meet economic development and housing needs, no feasible mitigation measures are available to reduce the potential for new development to reduce effects on existing scenic vistas to a less-than-significant level. The County cannot meet its economic development and housing needs without accommodating additional residents and workers, and the physical facilities necessary to accommodate these residents and workers will affect views from publicly accessible areas within the planning area. Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT 4.1-2 **Damage to Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway.** *Caltrans has designated SR 88 (Carson Pass Highway) from the Dew Drop Ranger Station, east, to the Nevada state line as a state scenic highway. Implementation of Draft General Plan policies and Caltrans requirements for development adjacent to this segment of SR 88 would reduce impacts related to damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway, but these impacts would be **significant**.*

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. Caltrans has designated SR 88 (Carson Pass Highway) from the Dew Drop Ranger Station, east, to the Nevada state line as a state scenic highway.

The Draft General Plan would allow limited residential and recreational development along some portions of this segment of SR 88. Few physical changes would be expected along this scenic highway segment.

The Draft General Plan includes Policy CM-4.1, which requires the County to “Maintain visual quality and scenic views along designated scenic corridors through project review and adoption of a scenic highway ordinance.” In addition to Draft General Plan policy, Caltrans requires development projects located adjacent to a state scenic highway to consult with the agency and recommend design measures to minimize impacts on scenic resources.

Implementation of Draft General Plan policies and Caltrans requirements for development adjacent to SR 88 from the Dew Drop Ranger Station, east, to the Nevada State line would reduce impacts related to damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway, but not to a less-than-significant level. This impact would be **significant**.

Mitigation Measure 4.1-2: Implement Program P-13, Scenic Highway Corridor Ordinance

- a. The County will develop and adopt an ordinance specifying standards to implement state scenic highway requirements. The intent of this ordinance is to provide land use controls and regulatory safeguards to preserve and enhance an area of special and unique natural beauty and aesthetic interest in Amador County which has been identified as being a basic resource in the economy of the County. In order to accomplish this goal, the ordinance will establish design review controls to ensure that future development within this corridor will not substantially detract from the aesthetics and the County will consequently retain the overall scenic value, as well as economic resource value of SR 88. The objective of this ordinance will be to reduce or avoid visual impacts to state-designated scenic highway corridors. This ordinance will be based on standards in the County’s 1985 Scenic Highways Element. Standards will address landscaping, signs, appearance of buildings (including exterior colors, materials, and height), parking, maintenance, grading, and undergrounding of utilities.

Responsible Agencies/Departments: Planning Department, Building Department, Technical Advisory Committee

Time Frame: Upon Adoption of the Draft General Plan

Significance after Mitigation

The existing General Plan has scenic highway standards that are detailed and regulatory, and more appropriately located in the County’s Code of Ordinances. Because implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.1-2 would reproduce the existing General Plan standards as an ordinance and require future projects within the scenic highway corridor to incorporate landscaping, signage, building appearance, and other features that do not substantially detract from the corridor’s aesthetics, substantial damage to scenic resources would not occur, and the impact is reduced to **less than significant**.

IMPACT 4.1-3 **Degradation of Visual Character.** *Implementation of the Draft General Plan would alter the existing visual character of unincorporated Amador County through changes and intensification in rural residential areas, agricultural lands, and conifer forests. This impact would be **significant**.*

Amador County has a broad range of landscapes that change with the gradual increase in elevation. Open landscapes of low-lying hills dotted with mature oaks, oak woodlands, and annual grasslands; field crops; vineyards; rangeland; conifer forests; rivers; lakes; and historic structures all contribute to the visual character found in the unincorporated part of the County.

Implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in new development in the planning area, including buildings, structures, paved areas, roadways, utilities, and other improvements. The majority of new development envisioned in the Draft General Plan would be located in predominantly rural areas in and adjacent to the unincorporated communities of Martell, Pine Grove, Buckhorn, and River Pines. In addition, the Draft General Plan identifies the Camanche Village and Camanche North Shore SPAs; these areas would include addition of residential uses in a generally open landscape. The Draft General Plan also identifies a new industrial area west of Ione, the Carbondale Industrial area. All of these changes would affect visual conditions.

Although new residential uses would result in visual character similar to existing views of suburban and rural residential settings found throughout the County, these changes would nevertheless result in substantial changes to visual character from publicly accessible areas and roadways. During County review of discretionary projects, Zoning Code requirements are used to reduce effects on visual character by regulating setbacks, height limits, building locations and orientations, and signs for new projects.

In general, the policies of the Draft General Plan are intended to improve the visual character of new land uses. The existing landscapes in the unincorporated part of the County are considered by some individuals to be a valuable visual resource. These lands are valuable aesthetic resources and implementation of the Draft General Plan would result in changes to the existing visual character due to the construction of new buildings, structures, paved areas, roadways, utilities, and other improvements. There are no feasible policies that could maintain the existing visual character, while also accommodating the County's long-term population growth and economic development needs. This impact would be **significant**.

Mitigation Measure: Implement Mitigation Measure 4.1-1

Significance after Mitigation

Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.1-1 would reduce impacts to visual character but not to a less-than-significant level. No feasible mitigation is available that could fully preserve existing visual character throughout the planning area and prevent substantial degradation of visual character, while also accommodating future growth in the County. Because the basic purpose of the Draft General Plan is to provide a framework governing future growth in the unincorporated part of the County, including accommodating a projected population increase to meet economic development and housing needs, no feasible mitigation measures are available to reduce the potential for new development to reduce effects on visual character to a less-than-significant level. The County cannot meet its economic development and housing needs without accommodating additional residents and workers, and the physical facilities necessary to accommodate these residents and workers will affect the existing visual character within the planning area. Therefore, this impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

IMPACT 4.1-4 **Increase in Light and Glare and Skyglow Effects.** *Implementation of the Draft General Plan would require lighting of new development, which could cause increased light and glare, potentially obscuring views of stars and other features of the night sky. In addition, nighttime lighting or the presence of reflective surfaces on buildings in commercial and industrial areas may result in light and glare shining on existing and proposed residences in the vicinity of these land uses and onto motorists traveling along SR 49, SR 88, Ridge Road, and other local roadways in day and nighttime conditions. This impact would be **significant**.*

A substantial increase in the amount of nighttime light and glare would result from development of urban land uses in the planning area as compared to existing conditions, potentially obscuring views of stars and other features of the night sky. Policies of the Draft General Plan focus on reducing impacts that could result from lighting sources. These policies help reduce impacts associated with light and glare shining on existing and proposed residences in the vicinity of these land uses and onto motorists traveling along SR 49, SR 88, Ridge Road, and other local roadways under both day and nighttime conditions, from nighttime lighting to reflective surfaces on buildings in commercial and industrial areas (e.g., reflective window glazing). Development of land uses identified in the Draft General Plan would introduce substantial new light and glare sources in predominantly

rural areas adjacent to the existing communities Martell, Pine Grove, Buckhorn, and River Pines and in rural areas adjacent to the Camanche Village and Camanche North Shore SPAs, as well as the Ione industrial area. Because applicable Draft General Plan policies cannot guarantee reducing impacts from these sources to less-than-significant levels, light and glare effects would be a **significant** impact.

Mitigation Measure 4.1-4: Condition Projects to Minimize Light and Reflectance

- a. To ~~avoid or substantially~~ reduce impacts associated with light and glare ~~to less than significant levels~~, the County will require that new projects be conditioned to incorporate measures to reduce light and reflectance to the maximum extent practicable. Conditions may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- Exterior building materials on nonresidential structures shall be composed of a minimum 50% low-reflectance, non-polished finishes.
 - Bare metallic surfaces (e.g., pipes, vents, light fixtures) shall be painted or etched to minimize reflectance.
 - Require public lighting in commercial, industrial, and residential areas to be of a type(s) that are shielded and downward directed, utilizing light sources that are the best available technology for eliminating light bleed and reflectance into surrounding areas to the maximum extent possible. ~~Prohibit the use of harsh mercury vapor, low-pressure sodium, or fluorescent bulbs for public lighting in commercial, industrial and residential areas.~~
 - Prohibit light fixtures that are of unusually high intensity or brightness or that blink or flash.
 - Use automatic shutoffs or motion sensors for lighting features to further reduce excess nighttime light.

Responsible Agencies/Departments: Planning Department

Time Frame: Ongoing

Significance after Mitigation

New urban development under the Draft General Plan would permanently add nighttime lighting in areas that are currently relatively void of nighttime light and glare. Implementation of Mitigation Measure 4.1-4 would reduce the potential light and glare impacts of future development projects to the maximum extent practicable, but would not reduce the impacts to a less-than-significant level because it is infeasible to eliminate all substantial future sources of light and glare. No additional feasible mitigation is available to reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level. Thus, the impact would remain **significant and unavoidable**.