APPENDIX A. VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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CAL POLY GOLD TREE SOLAR FACILITY VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

May 2016

Prepared For

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Visual Impact Assessment
San Luis Obispo County, California

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1 INTRODUCTION

This study assesses visual impacts that may result from the proposed construction of a solar energy facility located on the east side of Highway 1, south of the California Men's Colony, approximately 0.5 mile north of Stenner Creek Road on the University campus (refer to Figure 1). The purpose of this analysis is to determine if a change in the visual environment would occur, whether that change would be viewed as a positive or negative one, and the degree of any change relative to the existing setting. If the project has the potential to cause visual impacts, this study specifically defines those impacts.

This analysis focuses on the potential for the proposed project components to result in impacts on visual resources as seen from public locations and roadways. The baseline visual condition is analyzed, visual resources identified, and a baseline scenic character established. The analysis methodology evaluates the aggregate affect that the project may have on the overall visual character of the project site and surrounding landscape. If a change in character is identified, it is compared to viewers' expected sensitivity, and is reviewed for consistency with applicable county and state planning policies. Levels of impact are determined according to California State University/ California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) definitions and guidelines.

2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed approximately 23-acre facility would consist of up to 1,500 single axis tracking solar modules containing approximately ten solar panels per module. Modules would be arranged in 20 to 60 rows depending upon final configuration. Each tracker module would be approximately 230 square feet in size, mounted onto a galvanized steel rack. Each tracker module would be tilted to the south. On level ground, the higher end would be approximately 12 feet and the lower end at approximately 4 feet. These estimated heights could be taller or shorter depending on the slope-angle of the ground at the base. A total of up to approximately 1,500 photovoltaic (PV) panels are proposed; each panel would be approximately 42 inches tall by 82 inches wide. The panels would be made of crystalline silicon with an anti-reflective coating. During most times of day the panels would be tilted to either the east or west along the tracker's northerly axis.

In addition to the arrays, the project includes construction of a new transformer and a maintenance and storage building. The maintenance and storage building would be located near the existing power lines and northern fence (property boundary), and would consist of an approximately 200-square foot "seatrain"-type structure, approximately ten feet in height. The proposed project would include 6-foot tall wood or metal post and barbed wire security fencing surrounding the perimeter of the facility and maintenance and storage structure. Motion-sensor security lighting is proposed at the maintenance and storage structures, consisting of six 24-foot tall poles and shielded light fixtures.

The proposed project would include a connection to the existing Pacific Gas & Electric substation, located approximately 200 feet north of the project site. There are existing power lines traversing the project site leading to the substation. The following options are currently identified for connection to the substation: 1) tie into the existing lines, 2) construction of a new overhead line and new cross arms; or 3) construction of new poles, lines and conductors.

The site would be accessed from an existing ranch road extending from Highway 1, and internal 24-feet wide unpaved, decomposed granite access roads within the arrays. The project includes the planting, establishment, and maintenance of approximately 1 acre of landscaping located along Highway 1 and consisting of native vegetation that would reach a height of 6 to 8 feet.

Figure 1. Project Location Map

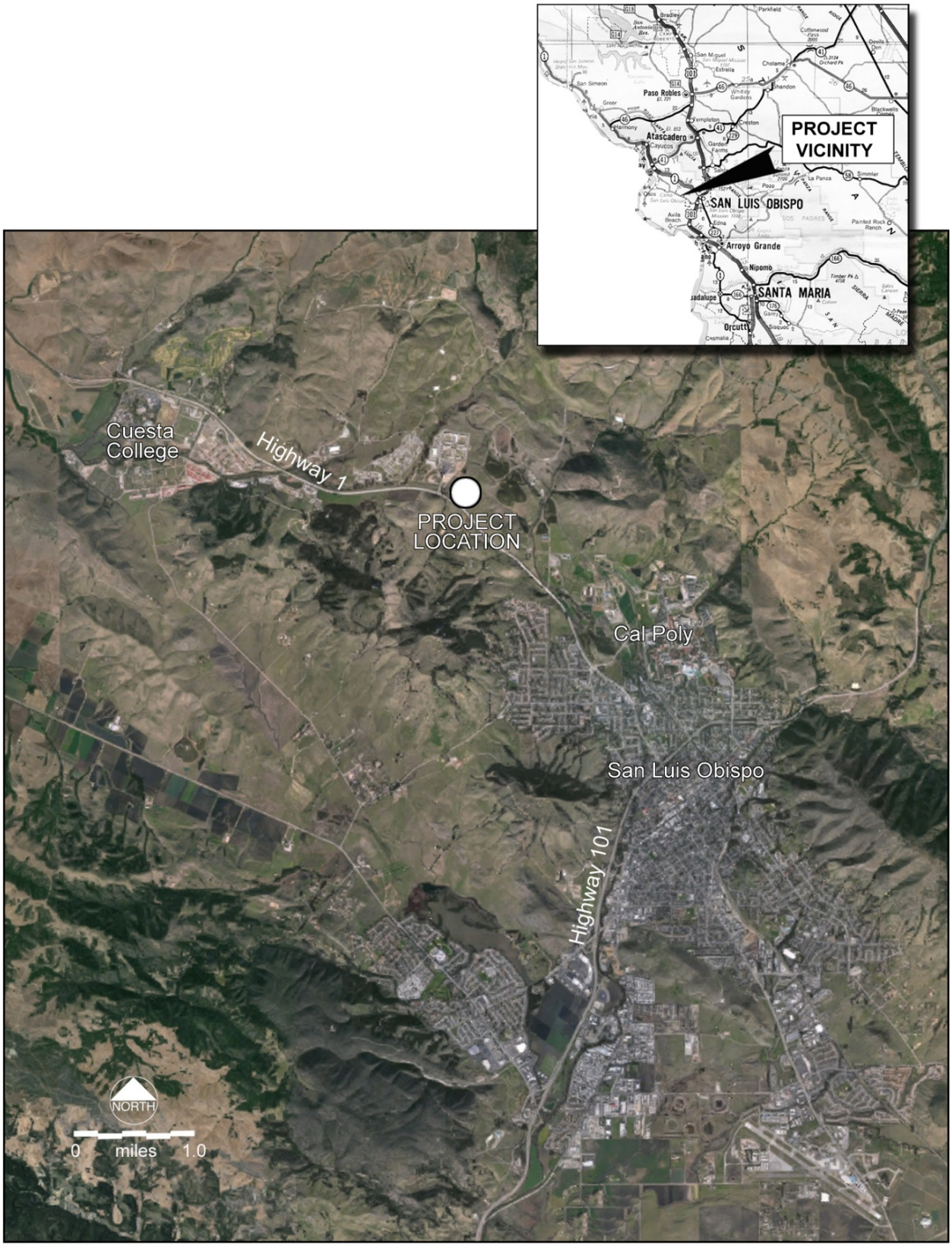


Figure 2. Project Area Plan

3 REGIONAL PROJECT SETTING

The proposed project is located within the highly scenic Chorro Valley, which runs from San Luis Obispo northwest to Morro Bay and the Pacific Ocean. The valley is generally defined by the Santa Lucia hills and the Cuesta Ridge to the northeast, and the Morros, a series of distinct mountain peaks rising up from the valley to the southwest. The Morros are recognized in County of San Luis Obispo planning documents as highly scenic visual resources that should be protected (County of San Luis Obispo 2010), and the Cal Poly Master Plan Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) identifies the Morros as a scenic resource that provides a dramatic backdrop to the University (California State University 2001).

Much of the visual setting of the region is established by the combination of the dramatic topography and mountain peaks along with the existing vegetative patterns. Somewhat dense stands of oak trees and pines are visible on many of the adjacent hills and slopes. Rock outcroppings are noticeable on the adjacent Morro peaks and throughout the area. Creeks and drainage-ways support oaks, sycamores, willows and other riparian vegetation along the hillsides. The vegetation of the valley floor and lower hillsides is primarily annual grasses and some agricultural crops. Introduced landscaping can be seen in areas of institutional and recreational development as well as established ranches and farms. Occasional stands of eucalyptus trees are present throughout the valley and pine trees are also seen in the area, becoming more frequent closer to the coast.

The region is mostly rural, however development can be seen in the vicinity of the project site and throughout the valley. The most visible developments include Cal Poly, Cuesta College, Camp San Luis Obispo, the County Sheriff facility, the California Men's Colony, the County Office of Education, and a gun club and shooting range. Dairy Creek Golf Course and El Chorro Regional Park are also seen along the route. Residences can be seen on the hillsides closer to San Luis Obispo. Each of these developments are located along Highway 1 within the valley floor, and although they are mostly large in size, the adjacent mountain peaks rising up behind them tend to dominate the views and define the scenic character.

Highway 1 through the Chorro Valley and continuing north to the city of Monterey in Monterey County is both a Designated State Scenic Highway and an All-American Road in the National Scenic Byway system. Each of these designations indicate a high degree of scenic quality within the highway's view corridor. Highway 1, which passes immediately south of the project site is a four-lane divided highway with a narrow median, widening out north of Cuesta College.

4 PROJECT SITE

The project site is approximately 40 acres in size and is located immediately north of Highway 1, approximately one mile north of San Luis Obispo. The topography of the site is mildly to moderately sloping, ranging in elevation from 480 feet at the northwest and southwest corners to approximately 550 at the southeast corner. A predominant ridge starts in the southeast corner of the parcel, losing elevation as it trends to the northeast through the middle of the site. A separate, rounded knoll with rock outcroppings is seen near the southeast portion of the site. A small draw separating the ridge and the knoll slopes downhill as it exits the parcel to the east. The topography is somewhat flatter throughout the western portion of the site.

Little vegetation is found on the project site. The area is predominantly used for livestock grazing, and low, ruderal grasses are the predominant ground cover. Grazed grassland continues east onto the adjacent parcel, and avocado orchards abut the project site to the north. Scattered native shrubs are found along the southern perimeter of the parcel along the highway right-of-way. The parcel is bounded on the northern, western and southern boundaries by post and wire fencing, and the eastern boundary is not continuously fenced. Cross-fencing of various types is seen throughout the site. A water storage tank and livestock

troughs are located near the center of the parcel. Wooden power poles cross the site from the west to the east.

Surrounding the project site are orchards and grazing land to the north and east, an electric substation and vacant field to the west, and an equestrian boarding facility across Highway 1 to the south. The California Men's Colony is within 0.2 mile to the west, and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) tracks can be seen approximately 0.3 mile north of the project site.

The project site contributes to the high visual quality of the Highway 1 corridor approaching San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly. The site is part of an open space buffer between the Cal Poly core to the east, and the Men's Colony to the west. As seen from both north and southbound directions of Highway 1, the eastern portion of the project site serves as part of the primary ridgeline to the north. The varied topography of site increases its noticeability and influence on the visual quality of the corridor. The pastoral land use visually supports the agricultural and rural history of the County and of Cal Poly.

5 VISUAL ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The findings of this study are based on multiple field visits conducted over several days, including review of the entire site as well as the surrounding area. Resource inventories were conducted both on foot and from moving vehicles, during the day and nighttime. Existing visual resources and site conditions were photographed and recorded. Assessment of project elements was based on plans and descriptions provided by Cal Poly. Planning documents and previous studies relevant to the surrounding area were referred to for gaining an understanding of community aesthetic values.

The project site was viewed from potential viewer group locations in the surrounding area. Representative viewpoints were identified for further analysis, based on dominance of the site within the view, duration of views, and expected sensitivity of the viewer group. Of those representative viewpoints, Key Viewing Areas (KVAs) were selected that best illustrate the visual changes that would occur as a result of the project (refer to Figure 3).

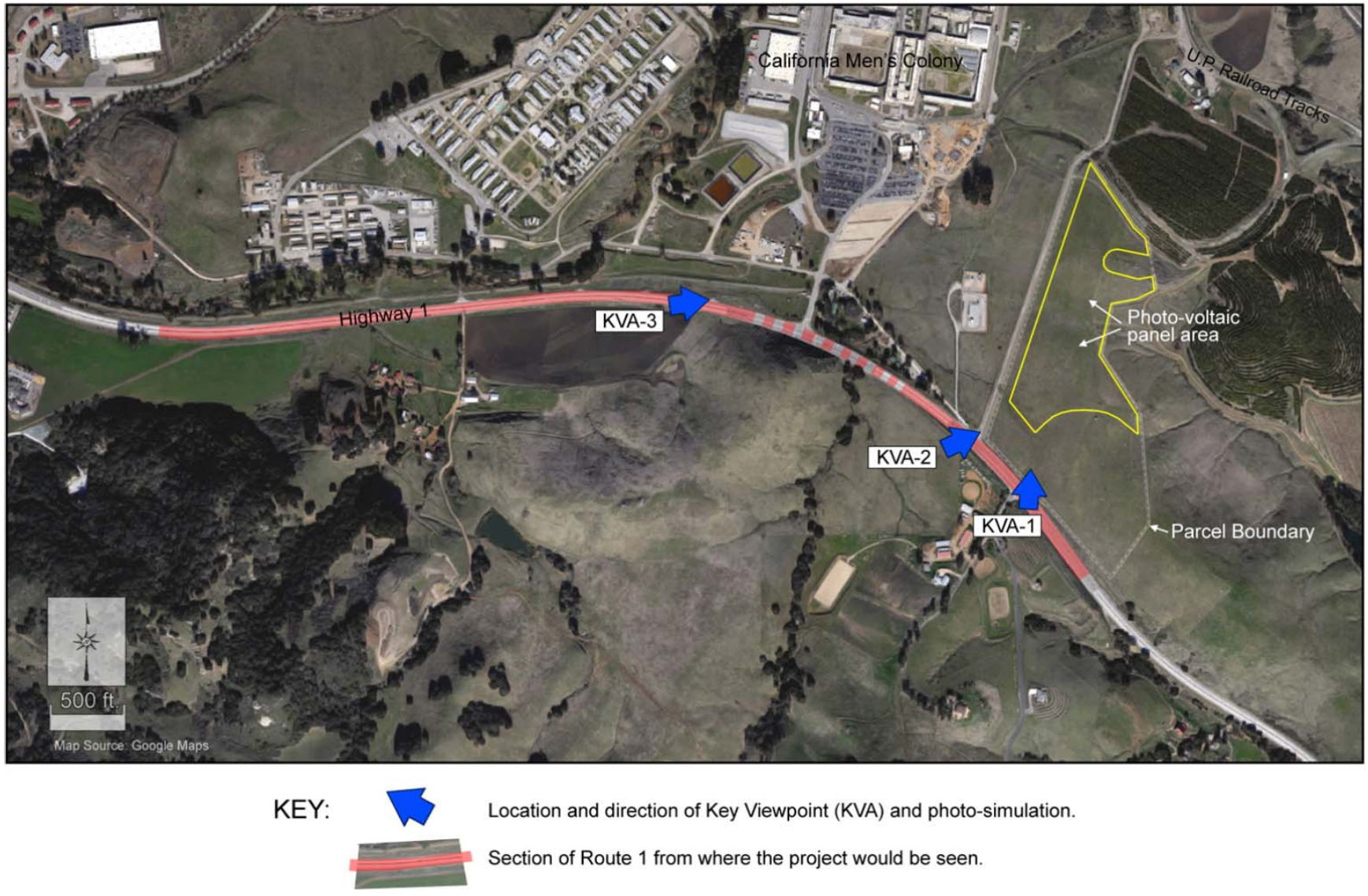
In order to establish the extent of potential project visibility, portable reference pylons and flags were positioned and moved throughout the project parcel. Field crews moved the reference pylons around the site to determine the limits of visibility, as determined by an observer positioned at the Key Viewing Areas. Reference flags established the correct scale and locations of the project elements, and also the extent of project visibility as it related to landform and other variables. The field observations also identified areas where project element would silhouette above a primary ridgeline. Where a limit of visibility or silhouetting was identified, the off-site "observer" directed the field crew to stop and record the specific location.

Photo-simulations were then prepared to quantify potential project visibility and to assess related visual effects. The project site was then field-reviewed to assist in determining possible mitigation measures. Images of the existing views as well as photo-simulations of the proposed project from the KVAs are shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7.

5.1 Photo-simulations

Photographic images and simulations included in this report are important tools for understanding the estimated appearance of the proposed project. It is important to note, however, that photographs do not represent the same level of visual acuity and sensitivity to detail as the human eye. As a result, photo-simulations tend to understate the anticipated perception of impacts.

Figure 3. Key Viewing Area Location Map



6 REGULATORY SETTING

The project is located within the jurisdiction of the California State University (CSU). The regulatory setting is defined in applicable planning policies, the Cal Poly Master Plan and EIR, and in the CSU California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Handbook.

6.1 California State University Initial Study Checklist

Appendix B of the CSU CEQA Handbook requires that the following issues be considered in determining the level of project impacts, found in the CSU Initial Study Checklist:

Will the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

In addition, the CSU CEQA Handbook recommends that good sources for impact threshold determination include federal, state, and local guidelines, several of which are listed in the Section 7 of this report.

Following is a compilation of excerpts of Cal Poly visual policies and guidelines applicable to the project site. Underlined text is added to emphasize key relevant language.

6.2 Campus Land Use and Design Guidelines

6.2.1 Cal Poly Master Plan Principles Summary

Land Use

2) ***Environmental suitability and sustainability:*** *avoid sensitive areas; take advantage of environmental assets; direct development to areas with fewer regulatory and environmental constraints; enhance environmental areas; promote resource and energy efficient design.*

3) ***Compatibility:*** *be considerate of impacts on neighborhoods near campus.*

6) ***Green space:*** *protect environmentally sensitive areas; design green space into each land use; use green space to create a sense of place, visual continuity and visual and physical links throughout the campus.*

Natural Environment

14) ***Aesthetics:*** *Protect scenic resources and take advantage of them in new designs.*

Public Facilities and Utilities

55) ***Invisibility:*** *Conceal these kinds of uses from view to the extent possible unless some important academic function dictates otherwise.*

6.3 Cal Poly Master Plan and Environmental Impact Report - 2001

6.3.1 Chapter 5 – Physical Plan Elements

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Issues

Impacts such as view obstruction, noise, light and odors caused by changes in land uses adjacent to, or visible from, nearby neighborhoods".

Concern about compatibility of Cal Poly land uses with City and County land use policies.

Principles

"Cal Poly's approach to land use planning recognizes seven basic principles: balance among land uses that serve the University's academic mission, environmental suitability and sustainability, compatibility between adjacent uses, proximity among related uses, compactness in the instructional core, protection and provision of green space, and community building".

Green Space

Green space is an integral part of the environment and is essential to the physical and social well-being of the campus. Cal Poly uses its lands in many different ways, ranging from passive recreation and study, and rural, agricultural uses to intense residential, recreational, and instructional activities. Green space plays a different role for each use, depending on the level of activity. Thus, this principle calls for planning, protecting and managing scenic and environmentally sensitive areas on the main campus, San Luis Obispo Creek watershed ranches and Chorro Creek watershed ranches, consistent and complementary with outdoor learning, and the maintenance of environmental quality to sustain an attractive and resource efficient campus. In addition, it calls for the provision and design of green space as a component of each land use in the extended campus - including agricultural units as well as new residential complexes.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

This element recognizes the land at Cal Poly that remains in a relatively natural condition. Of the 6,000 acres held in San Luis Obispo County, only a small percentage constitutes the developed campus. A larger percentage is devoted to agriculture, much of which is grazing land that adds to the region's natural beauty. The balance is part of California's very unique coastal landscape, one of only a handful of Mediterranean climates found in the world.

Background and Issues

Ridges and Foothills

The Santa Lucia range and volcanic Morros form the setting of Cal Poly and the city of San Luis Obispo. The eastern edge of the extended campus is built against the foothills of the Santa Lucia range. These features create a dramatic natural setting for the campus

with panoramic views. Some of the steep slopes are studded with rare serpentine rock formations.

Principles

Aesthetics

Cal Poly has many native ecosystems as a backdrop for the campus. Not only are they used by students, but many visitors from all over the world and members of the community visit and appreciate the beauty of Cal Poly and recognize the importance of protecting these open space areas for future generations. Development and redevelopment stemming from this Master Plan will be sensitive to, and take advantage of, the campus' visual resources.

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

Invisibility

To the extent possible, most public facilities and utility support structures shall be concealed from view. However, some may be visible as explicit contributions to teaching students about an environmental aesthetic that balances beauty and function.

Goldtree Site

Environmental Consequences

The project site is adjacent to the California Men's Colony and lies east of the County Operations Center, both of which are significant existing light sources. However, the project would involve a new source of light, glare and development in a heretofore undeveloped area visible from Highway 1. Impacts are reduced to a less than significant level by the use of hooded lighting and the implementation of design guidelines.

6.3.2 Chapter 6 – Environmental Impact Report

6.3.2.1 AESTHETICS

The following discussion identifies the visual impacts associated with implementation of the proposed Master Plan.

REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY VISUAL CHARACTER

Scenic resources in the campus area include the Morros, especially Bishop's Peak, and the Santa Lucia foothills. These landmarks provide a dramatic backdrop to the university.

SENSITIVE VISUAL CORRIDORS

Principal travel corridors are important to an analysis of aesthetics because they define the viewpoint for the largest number of viewers. This section describes the primary travel (viewing) corridors near the Cal Poly area.

Highway 1. Highway 1 is designated a scenic highway by the County of San Luis Obispo and Caltrans. The Morros and the Santa Lucia foothills are readily visible from this roadway. Portions of the campus visible from Highway 1 are limited to agricultural operations that occupy the foreground view for southbound vehicles and brief views of northern campus facilities, including the sports complex currently under construction. Further north, Cal Poly's ranch facilities and crops (e.g., Chorro, Escuela and Walters) are also visible.

REGULATORY SETTING

Development on Cal Poly land in areas along Highway 1 is subject to guidelines adopted by the County as part of the Scenic Highway designation by California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Development in areas within 100 feet of this roadway must include sensitive design components to preserve scenic resources and views. County guidelines for this area generally include height and color restrictions as well as requirements for vegetative screening.

IMPACTS

Highway 1

Projects potentially impacting views from Highway 1 include the proposed off-campus faculty and staff housing north of Highland Drive, the proposed facilities at Goldtree, and the Bull Test.

Mitigating Measures – Lighting and Glare

All exterior lighting associated with proposed campus facilities shall be hooded. No unobstructed beam of light shall be directed toward sensitive uses (e.g., Brizzolara Creek, Drumm Reservoir, Environmental Horticultural Sciences (EHS), neighborhoods). The use of reflective materials in all structures shall be minimized (e.g., metal roofing, expanses of reflective glass on west-facing walls).

Highway 1 (Gateway to the City of San Luis Obispo)

Mitigating Measures

City Consultation. *Prior to design finalization, the University shall consult with the City regarding the visual impact of the proposed off-campus housing on the City gateway.*

Compliance with County Guidelines. *If the proposed facilities lie within 100 feet of Highway 1, the bull test and Goldtree facility will comply with County Guidelines for design near scenic highways. In any case, the University shall consult with the County regarding reduction of visual impacts to sensitive areas such as the Highway 1 corridor.*

7 VIEWER SENSITIVITY

Sensitivity to change in the visual environment varies with the viewer's activities and expectations. In determining the viewer sensitivity level for purposes of assessing visual impacts associated with the project, the number of viewers as well as exposure, duration and dominance of views were also considered.

In addition, sensitivity regarding aesthetic and visual quality issues is reflected in the following federal, state, and local planning and regulatory excerpts:

7.1 State and National Scenic Highway Designations

In 1999, Highway 1 was designated by the State of California as an Officially Designated Scenic Highway. The County of San Luis Obispo promoted the designation based on the high level of existing visual quality along the corridor as well as the desire to protect its visual resources in the future. In 2003, Highway 1 was also bestowed the title of "All-American Road" in the National Scenic Byway program. This designation recognizes the visual characteristics of the Highway 1 corridor as being among the highest quality in the nation. These designations illustrate the highest level of concern and viewer sensitivity for the aesthetics regarding the highway corridor, the project site, and beyond.

7.2 Applicable County of San Luis Obispo Visual Policy

7.2.1 General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element, Chapter 9 – Visual Resources

This section defines the following as major visual issues:

7.2.1.1 SCENIC LANDSCAPES

Development will inevitably occur within some of the county's scenic areas. The location and design of development in these areas can have a profound effect on urban and rural landscapes. Buildings that are appropriately placed and designed can complement and even blend with the natural landscape. However, inappropriately located and designed development including telecommunication facilities, roads, and billboards can detract from and conflict with an area's overall character. Land management practices may also cause unnecessary harm to visual resources.

7.2.1.2 SCENIC CORRIDORS

Scenic corridors are view areas, or "viewsheds" from popular public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities. Inappropriate development or billboards can intrude upon these viewsheds. Some examples are highly visible graded roads and pads, buildings that are too close to a highway, and building designs that silhouette against the skyline, telecommunications facilities, utilities, signage, and other structures that dominate rather than blend with a natural landscape. Scenic highways and roads are scenic corridors that are designated to conserve and enhance their scenic beauty. Highway 1 is a designated State Scenic Highway and National Scenic Byway from San Luis Obispo to the Monterey County line.

7.2.1.3 VISUAL RESOURCES GOAL 1: THE NATURAL AND AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE DOMINANT VIEW IN RURAL PARTS OF THE COUNTY.

Policy VR 1.1 Adopt Scenic Protection Standards

Protect scenic views and landscapes, especially visual Sensitive Resource Areas (SRAs) from incompatible development and land uses.

Implementation Strategy VR 1.1.2 Amend Plans and Ordinances

Amend the Land Use Ordinance, Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance, and/or Area Plans, as applicable to enact or revise ordinance standards to protect scenic resources. Adoption and implementation of scenic protection standards shall not interfere with agricultural uses on private lands consistent with AGP30 [Scenic Resources]. Standards for land use permits, including industrial and processing uses, and subdivisions should include visual assessments by qualified experts; visually effective setbacks near highways and roadways; siting in unobtrusive locations; and standards for height, architectural design, landscaping, lighting, and signs. The standards should emphasize avoiding visual impacts through alternative locations and designs where feasible. Establish consistent Countywide Viewshed Protection Standards.

7.2.1.4 VISUAL RESOURCES, GOAL 2, THE NATURAL AND HISTORIC CHARACTER AND IDENTITY OF RURAL AREAS WILL BE PROTECTED.

Policy VR 2.1 Develop in a manner compatible with Historical and Visual Resources.

Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that are compatible with the natural landscape and with recognized historical character, and discourage designs that are clearly out of place within rural areas.

Policy VR 2.2 Site Development and Landscaping

Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that emphasize native vegetation and conform grading to existing natural forms. Encourage abundant native and/or drought-tolerant landscaping that screens buildings and parking lots and blends development with the natural landscape.

Policy VR 2.3 Revise Countywide Design Guidelines

New development should follow Countywide Design Guidelines to protect rural visual and historical character. The guidelines should encourage new development that is compatible with public views of scenic areas, the natural landscape, and existing development.

Implementation Strategy VR 2.3.1 Amend Countywide Design Guidelines

Amend and strengthen the Countywide Design Guidelines to protect rural visual and historical character. The guidelines or standards should address the following: determining the visual and historical setting; using existing site features in site planning; avoiding and minimizing ridgetop development; setting back development from roads; preserving scenic features; landscaping for screening; selecting unobtrusive building materials and colors; and designing with reference to locally historical architecture.

7.2.1.5 VISUAL RESOURCES, GOAL 7 - VIEWS OF THE NIGHT SKY AND ITS CONSTELLATIONS OF STARS WILL BE MAINTAINED.

Policy VR 7.1 Nighttime light pollution

Protect the clarity and visibility of the night sky within communities and rural areas, by ensuring that exterior lighting, including streetlight projects, is designed to minimize nighttime light pollution.

7.2.2 County of San Luis Obispo Land Use and Circulation Element

7.2.2.1 IV. SAN LUIS OBISPO AREA PLAN

Overview

Some of the factors which have contributed to the unique and desirable character of the planning area include the presence of a compact urban center surrounded by open agricultural lands, meandering streams, rolling hills, and ridges, clean air and relatively little traffic congestion. The volcanic Morros give additional character to the area, marching from the city west to Morro Bay. The presence of a state university and a community college has provided educational opportunities for local residents and an educated labor force for local employers. These educational institutions have also brought many students from other areas, contributing to social diversity and a high level of consumer activity in the city. Within the context of state and national economic

conditions, the policies and actions of the County, the City and other public agencies can influence the future of the area. Public policies can assist in encouraging appropriate, integrated patterns of land use. Land use strategies need to balance economic growth with the equally important need to protect and enhance the local environment. Conservation of the area's resources is an integral part of economic development in order to have a lasting economy that is strengthened by the region's environmental assets.

1.6 Vision for San Luis Obispo North Sub-area

This plan's vision for the future includes continued opportunities for economic vitality and growth, along with the opportunity to maintain the environmental attributes that have themselves contributed to the area's historically healthy economy. The community's excellent living environment and educational opportunities can act to attract or retain businesses providing high quality job opportunities for local residents, enabling them to afford housing within the area, while also enhancing local tax revenues needed for public services.

The sub-area should maintain a rural character in harmony with agriculture, business, recreational, environmental and residential opportunities.

1.7 Goals – San Luis Obispo North Sub-area

Environment

1. *Maintain and improve air and water quality at safe and healthy levels.*
2. *Protect and, where it has been degraded, enhance wildlife habitat areas.*
3. *Protect the scenic values of natural landforms.*
4. *Protect important historic or archaeological resources.*
5. *Protect natural drainage channels and floodways in their natural condition to the maximum extent feasible.*

4.3 San Luis Obispo Sub–area Land Use

Community Separation/Rural Character

Note: The project site is located within an area designated as a "Community Separator" on the County Conservation and Open Space Element Community Separator and Gateway Map.

Separation between communities provides each community an opportunity to develop its own distinctive identity. The physical difference between each community is strengthened by the intervening rural land, which can contribute to a unique sense of arrival or departure. The open areas between each town provide a rural visual character. Open areas that separate communities, as illustrated in Figure 4-1 [of the County Conservation and Open Space Element], should be retained through zoning that affects the amount and location of development. This distinct change in the amount of development at the edges of the City of San Luis Obispo and the Los Ranchos/Edna village establish recognizable boundaries to each community.

San Luis Obispo Greenbelt

Note: the project site is located within an area designated as a proposed Greenbelt on the County Land Use and Circulation Element Proposed San Luis Obispo Greenbelt Map (Figure 4-2).

> *The rural setting that surrounds San Luis Obispo is in direct contrast to the activity within the city. This distinction between city and country should be protected by both the City and County, by establishing a "greenbelt" that would involve property owners in voluntary, innovative methods of open space preservation while maintaining economic land uses. In the area shown in Figure 4-2 [of the County Conservation and Open Space Element], the City and County seek to keep undeveloped land open, while accommodating rural homesites. A greenbelt typically is privately-held land where voluntary, contractual commitments are made between the jurisdiction (the County in this case) and owners that grant land use incentives in return for retaining their property in agricultural and open space use. Other arrangements may be financial, where the potential development value of the property is purchased, leaving it in private ownership for continued use. New development that occurs as an incentive bonus is usually guided to fit unobtrusively within the existing landscape.*

Gateways

Note: The project site is located within or adjacent to an area designated as a "Gateway to San Luis Obispo" on the County Conservation and Open Space Element Community Separator and Gateway Map.

> *Gateways are entrance corridors that herald the approach of a new urban landscape, and that define the arrival point as a worthy destination. All of the road corridors leading into San Luis Obispo are endowed with special natural and built characteristics that are often unique. These entrance corridors are characterized by production agriculture lands which, as a secondary benefit to the production of food and fiber, provide scenic landmarks, historical structures, and rural countryside that denote a special place, culminating with entry into the city. Each of these corridors has a unique character that helps define and enhance the city's central place within the region.*
>
> ***Highway 1 from Camp San Luis to Highland Drive.***
>
> ***Assessment:*** *High-quality views of Stenner Creek, Cal Poly's agriculture program, and of Bishop Peak and San Luis Mountain should be retained.*

4.5 Land Use Programs

Areawide

3. ***San Luis Obispo Greenbelt, San Luis Obispo.*** *The County should collaborate with the City of San Luis Obispo and property owners to plan and implement a greenbelt program to preserve open space and rural character surrounding the city.*

4. ***San Luis Obispo Gateways, San Luis Obispo.*** *The County should work with the City of San Luis Obispo to prepare and implement policies to protect, improve and restore the entryways to the city along the main road corridors, including but not limited to the following:*

    - *Identify three gateway zones around the city, "scenic vista, transition area, and urban arrival area," with short-term and long-term strategies for each.*

- *Identify objects such as billboards that could be removed through an amortization ordinance and replaced by off-ramp signing, and utility poles that could be re-located.*

- *Establish setbacks near the roadway in certain locations, and other limits such as height, sign area, lighting.*

- *Identify key areas that provide the most powerful or memorable, unobstructed views to visitors of the mountains and the city.*

- *Adopt future plan amendments to retain the attributes of the gateways.*

5.3 Major Issues

Scenic Roads and Highways in San Luis Obispo Sub-area

The natural and pastoral landscapes along the major roadways in the planning area provide a high-quality visual experience and enjoyment for local residents and tourists alike. However, inappropriate development could reduce the scenic qualities along these visual corridors. The Agriculture and Open Space Plan recommends that scenic corridors be identified and standards adopted to protect scenic land. As part of preparation of this area plan, visual surveys were conducted to identify scenic backdrops along highway corridors. Visually sensitive areas are identified in this plan as two types:

1. *The most critical landmarks and hillsides near scenic roadways continue to be designated in the Sensitive Resource Area (SRA) combining designation, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Special development standards in the Combining Designations section of Articles 9 and 10 of the Land Use Ordinance apply to construction for dwellings, residential accessory uses and residential access roads, and to some agricultural accessory structures if proposed near the roadway.*

2. *The important foreground and background views of the landscape along scenic highways and roads are identified in a highway corridor design area. Although the highway corridor design area is not designated as a Sensitive Resource Area combining designation, the same concerns and standards for development described in number 1 above apply. Foreground views along highways and railroads are identified in a highway corridor design area. These areas are close enough to the viewing public to reveal individual trees, rock outcrops, creeks, hillsides and historic structures such as farm houses and barns. These elements of the scenic corridors have their own scenic values, while they also serve to frame and enhance views of the more distant scenic backdrops. Accordingly, the highway corridor design area includes areas within 100 feet of Highways 1, 101, 227, Los Osos Valley Road, Orcutt Road, and the Southern Pacific Railroad (which is proposed to accommodate increasing numbers of vacation and business travelers).*

6.2 Combining Designations

Sensitive Resource Area (SRA)

Note: The hillsides immediately southeast of the project site are identified as a Sensitive and Scenic Resource Area (SRA) on the San Luis Obispo Planning Area Rural Combining Designations Map. The project site itself is not within the SRA or within the jurisdiction of the County, and as a result is not directly subject to the SRA ordinances or standards. However, from certain vantage points the project site

serves as the visual foreground for views of the SRA. The effect on views to the SRA should be considered when analyzing the project.

> *This designation covers the highly scenic and important backdrops and natural landmarks visible from scenic highways and the urban area, and is applied to locations of rare or endangered plants and animals. The intent of an SRA is to call attention to the importance of these resources, and to protect the public's interest in them through standards in Articles 9 [Planning Area Standards] and 10 [Community Planning Standards] of the LUO.*
>
> *Scenic and visual qualities of distant ridges, peaks and hillsides, as well as the closer or "foreground" elements such as rock outcrops, oak woodlands, creeks and other visually appealing natural formations and vegetation contribute to the widespread perception by local residents and visitors alike that the San Luis Obispo area is a desirable place to live or visit. This perception, in turn, has a beneficial effect on the economic stability of the recreation and tourist industries. Other economic sectors also benefit from local employees and employers alike who place a high value on living in San Luis Obispo. Therefore, identification and protection of the scenic resources in the San Luis Obispo planning area is an important aspect of planning.*
>
> *Ridges, peaks and hillsides comprise scenic backdrops and natural landmarks. They rise above urban areas and highways, terminating vistas with a largely undeveloped appearance. The scenic backdrops to which the SRA has been applied include scenic lands visible to travelers along Highways 1, 101, 227, Los Osos Valley Road, Foothill Boulevard, Orcutt Road, and the Southern Pacific Railroad, including the following areas:*
>
> 9. ***The Morros:*** *including Islay Hill, Righetti (or Mine) Hill, Cerro San Luis, Bishop Peak, Chumash Peak, Cerro Romauldo and associated hills (SRA). The SRA covers this area from the tops of these hills, peaks and connecting ridges down to the 280 foot elevation, except that it terminates at the 320 foot elevation above Cuesta College west of O'Connor Way, the 225 foot elevation around the base of the South Street Hills, and varies from 280 feet to 200 feet along Highway 1 east of Cuesta College to the city limits. These areas correspond to the visually prominent backdrops visible from Highways 1, 101, 227, Los Osos Valley Road, Foothill Boulevard and Prefumo Canyon Road.*

7.3 Applicable City of San Luis Obispo Visual Policies

7.3.1 San Luis Obispo General Plan – Conservation and Open Space Element

8.2.1. Open space preserved.

Note: The Goldtree project site is within the City greenbelt as shown in the City's Conservation and Open Space Element "*Figure 5: Greenbelt Boundaries"* Map.

> *The City will preserve as open space or agriculture the undeveloped and agricultural land outside the urban reserve line, including the designated Greenbelt as shown in Figure 5, and will encourage individuals, organizations and other agencies to do likewise.*

9.1.1. Preserve natural and agricultural landscapes.

The City will implement the following policies and will encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do likewise:

A. Natural and agricultural landscapes that the City has not designated for urban use shall be maintained in their current patterns of use.

B. Any development that is permitted in natural or agricultural landscapes shall be visually subordinate to and compatible with the landscape features. Development includes, but is not limited to buildings, signs (including billboard signs), roads, utility and telecommunication lines and structures. Such development shall:

1. Avoid visually prominent locations such as ridgelines, and slopes exceeding 20 percent.

2. Avoid unnecessary grading, vegetation removal, and site lighting.

3. Incorporate building forms, architectural materials, and landscaping, that respect the setting, including the historical pattern of development in similar settings, and avoid stark contrasts with its setting.

4. Preserve scenic or unique landforms, significant trees in terms of size, age, species or rarity, and rock outcroppings.

9.1.3. Utilities and signs.

In and near public streets, plazas, and parks, features that clutter, degrade, intrude on, or obstruct views should be avoided. Necessary features, such as utility and communication equipment, and traffic equipment and signs should be designed and placed so as to not impinge upon or degrade scenic views of the Morros or surrounding hillsides, or farmland, consistent with the primary objective of safety.

9.2.1. Views to and from public places, including scenic roadways.

Note: Highway 1 adjacent to the Gold Tree project site is identified as a "Roadway of High or Moderate Scenic Value Outside of the City Limit" in the *Conservation and Open Space Element – Scenic Roadways Map,* Figure 11.

The City will preserve and improve views of important scenic resources from public places, and encourage other agencies with jurisdiction to do so. Public places include parks, plazas, the grounds of civic buildings, streets and roads, and publicly accessible open space. In particular, the route segments shown in Figure 11 [of the Conservation and Open Space Element] are designated as scenic roadways.

A. Development projects shall not wall off scenic roadways and block views.

B. Utilities, traffic signals, and public and private signs and lights shall not intrude on or clutter views, consistent with safety needs.

C. Where important vistas of distant landscape features occur along streets, street trees shall be clustered to facilitate viewing of the distant features.

D. Development projects, including signs, in the viewshed of a scenic roadway shall be considered "sensitive" and require architectural review.

9.3. Programs

The City shall do the following to protect and enhance views, and will encourage others to do so, as appropriate.

9.3.6. View blockage along scenic highways.

Determine that view blockage along scenic roadways is a significant impact.

9.3.9. Undergrounding utilities.

Place existing overhead utilities underground, with highest priority for scenic roadways, entries to the city, and historical districts.

15. Scenic Roadways

15.1.1. Scenic Routes

The route segments shown in Figure 11 of the Conservation and Open Space Element – Scenic Roadways Map --are designated as scenic roadways.

15.1.2. Development Along Scenic Routes

The City will preserve and improve views of important scenic resources form streets and roads. Development along scenic roadways should not block views or detract from the quality of views.

A. Projects, including signs, in the viewshed of a scenic roadway should be considered as "sensitive" and require architectural review.

B. Development projects should not wall off scenic roadways and block views.

C. As part of the city's environmental review process, blocking of views along scenic roadways should be considered a significant environmental impact.

F. Lighting along scenic roadways should not degrade the nighttime visual environment and night sky per the City's Night Sky Preservation Ordinance.

15.1.3. Public Equipment and Facilities

The City and other agencies should be encouraged to avoid cluttering scenic roadways with utility and circulation-related equipment and facilities.

B Public utilities along scenic highways should be installed underground.

C. The placement of landscaping and street trees should not block views from Scenic Routes. Clustering of street trees along scenic roadways should be considered as an alternative to uniform spacing.

8 PROJECT VISIBILITY

The project would be visible from several public viewpoints in the surrounding area including Highway 1, the UPRR tracks, and dedicated open space and recreation trails as follows:

8.1 Visibility of the Project Site from Highway 1 Southbound

Travelling southbound on Highway 1, the project would be visible to some degree along an approximately 1.2-mile section of roadway. Heading in the southbound direction, the project would first come into view at a distance of approximately 1.1 miles. The project would be seen almost directly ahead of the viewer. From this viewing distance the project would occupy a small percentage of the overall viewshed, and would be seen in the context of Camp San Luis and the Men's Colony, as well as the open space and rural landscape of the Chorro Valley. As seen from this viewing location, existing trees in the distance partially block views of the project site. Continuing in the southbound direction, the project would become increasingly visible directly ahead. The Men's Colony would also become more noticeable to the north, and intervening trees would continue to filter views of a portion of the project site. Near the entrance of the Men's Colony, the existing trees and other vegetation in the mid-ground generally block visibility of the project site as seen from southbound Highway 1. This vegetation would continue to block views of much of the project site until a point approximately 500 feet north of the project access road, near the project boundary. It should be noted that although the trees in this area currently provide effective screening from this section of Highway 1, several of the trees are dead or in declining health. Continuing loss of these trees would substantially increase views to the project. Approaching the project access road in the southbound direction, little to no intervening vegetation or topography would provide visual screening of the project. From this close vantage point the viewer would clearly see the project occupying the rolling hills in the foreground to the northwest. Continuing southbound along Highway 1, the project would remain visible until the viewer passed the site. The total duration of visibility along southbound Highway 1 would be approximately 60 seconds for motor vehicles travelling at the posted speed limit. An average of 24,500 vehicles pass by the project site each day (Caltrans 2014 data). Bicyclists travelling at a speed of 15 miles per hour could potentially have views of the project for five minutes.

8.2 Visibility of the Project Site from Highway 1 Northbound

Travelling in the northbound direction of Highway 1, intervening topography would blocks views of the project until a point nearly perpendicular to the site. Once visible, the project would be seen along an approximately 0.3 mile section of the highway, with a viewing duration of approximately 15 seconds at the posted speed limit. From this northbound viewpoint, the closest project element would be seen at a distance of approximately 300 feet away. Continuing northbound the viewer would pass the site at Goldtree road and the project would not be within the primary viewshed.

8.3 Union Pacific Railroad Tracks

The UPRR tracks are located approximately 0.3 mile north of the project site. From this slightly elevated vantage point the project would be easily seen by Amtrak travelers. Views from the tracks toward the project would include orchards, grazing land and a ranch house in the foreground, the project site and Highway 1 in the mid-ground, and the picturesque Morros as a backdrop. Just north of the project the visual context would also include the Men's Colony and an electrical substation. Along the tracks to the east, the City's water treatment plant can be seen among the Cal Poly orchards. The project would be potentially visible along an approximately 0.3 mile section of the track as it curves down the hillside from Cuesta Ridge.

8.4 Bishop Peak

The project site can be easily seen from sections of the public recreation trails throughout Bishop Peak and the Bishop Peak Natural Preserve. Because of the elevated viewing position of these viewpoints, the project would be visible in the context of the greater Chorro Valley, including the highly scenic Morros and variety of topographic and natural vegetative elements. The viewshed would also include the overall patterns of land use development including the City of San Luis Obispo, Cal Poly, the California Men's Colony, Camp San Luis, and others. From Bishop Peak, the project would be seen at a viewing distance of approximately 1 mile. Although visible, because of the panoramic viewshed, the project would occupy a relatively small percentage of the overall scenery.

8.5 Other Viewpoints

The project would also be seen from other viewpoints throughout the area. Calle De Caballeros, a local roadway, connects to Highway 1 directly across from the site. Although relatively few people use this road, it would provide direct views of the project. The project would also be visible from a few scattered ranches and residences in the area, as well as portions of the University and the Men's Colony.

9 VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

The project is proposed on a sensitive site in terms of highway corridor aesthetic character. The parcel is adjacent to and highly visible as seen from Highway 1, an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway and National Scenic Byway. The project site is also identified in County and City General Plans as an important gateway to San Luis Obispo, and as scenic open space based in part on its contribution to the area's rural and agricultural visual character.

The high visual quality of the Chorro Valley is due to a combination of several elements, primarily the dramatic views of the Morros, the Santa Lucia foothills, Cuesta Ridge, and other topography, combined with the patterns of native vegetation. The primarily natural and rural land use patterns further contribute to a visual quality and character highly valued by local residents and visitors alike.

In addition to the natural features, the visual quality and character of the project setting is also influenced by the built and cultural environment. Development visible through the Chorro Valley includes the Men's Colony, Cal Poly, Camp San Luis, the County Sherriff's facility, and others. Scattered ranches and ranchland, and occasional private residences, are also part of the view along the corridor. Accordingly, this analysis considers both the natural setting and the existing development as part of the visual baseline.

9.1 The Project's Effect on Scenic Vistas

Scenic vistas are generally defined as high-quality views displaying good aesthetic and compositional value that can be seen from public viewpoints. If the project substantially degrades the scenic landscape as viewed from public roads, or in particular designated scenic routes, or from other public or recreation areas, this would be considered a potentially significant impact on the scenic vista. Scenic vistas related to the viewing experience associated with this project include views of the Morros, the Santa Lucia Mountains and foothills, Cuesta Ridge, important rock outcroppings, patterns of natural vegetation, and predominant pastoral land.

As seen from Highway 1, the Union Pacific Railroad tracks, and other public viewpoints, the project would not block or reduce existing views of the Morros, Santa Lucia foothills, or other important landforms because of the somewhat lower general elevation of much of the project site. The southernmost portion of the project site is either below or at the elevation of the highway. The tallest point of the photo-voltaic panel arrays would be approximately 12 to 18 feet above the ground plane, depending on the

existing slope-angle. In addition, the closest public viewing distance to the project would be approximately 300 feet from Highway 1. The hills lining the Chorro Valley reach elevations ranging from approximately 1,200 to 2,400 feet. The combination of these viewing factors would result in the project having little to no blockage of views to the dominant hills rising up in the background.

The eastern portion of the project is approximately 520 feet in elevation, which is above the elevation of the closest viewpoint on Highway 1 (approximately 490 feet in elevation). Photo-voltaic arrays placed within this eastern portion of the project site would cause a slight blockage of views to the lowest portion of the intermediate hills as seen from a limited segment of Highway 1.

The various project elements such as the photo-voltaic panel arrays, fencing, equipment building and other features would be clearly visible from public viewpoints, however they would not silhouette above the primary horizon line in any direction.

Although the overall views of the background hills would remain mostly intact, the project would dominate the foreground view and would therefor result in a degradation of the scenic vista's compositional value.

Impact 1 **The proposed development would degrade the foreground views to the Santa Lucia Mountains, Cuesta Ridge and Bishop Peak and associated scenic vistas as seen from public viewpoints including Highway 1 and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks (Amtrak). As a result the project would cause potentially significant direct long and short-term impacts to scenic vistas in the area.**

MM-1 ***Screen Planting:*** *The project shall include vegetative screen planting as shown in Figure 4, Vegetative Screening Concept Plan, and the following:*

a. *Only plants native to the central coast of California shall be used. Trees and shrubs shall be planted in random appearing patterns that imitate the character of the surrounding natural vegetated landscape. Plantings shall "feather out" at the perimeters to visually transition from the more dense slope planting to the surrounding landscape. Screen planting shall achieve a minimum 70 percent screening of the project as seen from Highway 1 within ten years of completion of construction.*

b. *A minimum of 50 percent of the plants shall be trees. Tree species shall reach a minimum height of 20-feet at maturity. Trees shall be from a minimum 15-gallon container size.*

c. *Trees shall be planted in random-appearing groupings so not to visually "wall-off" distant views along Highway 1.*

d. *Trees and shrubs within the screen planting area shall be maintained in perpetuity. Trees and shrubs within the screen planting area which die shall be replaced.*

MM-2 ***Fencing:*** *All fencing for the project shall conform to the following:*

a. *Fencing shall be placed as close to the perimeter of the photo-voltaic array layout as possible and as far from Highway 1 as possible.*

b. *Perimeter fencing facing Highway 1 shall be placed as far from Highway 1 as physically possible.*

c. *No security fencing shall be placed outside of the screen planting along Highway 1 or Goldtree Road.*

d. *Barbed-wire shall not be used.*

e. *All metal components of all fencing shall be either black vinyl coated or darkened by acid-etching.*

MM-3 ***Photo-Voltaic Arrays and Associated Elements:*** *All frames, racks, supports, stands, brackets, tracking apparatus, connectors, rods, motor and equipment cabinets, and other metal components shall be darkened by painting, powder-coating, anodizing, acid etching or other methods to reduce reflectivity and visually recede. Elements shall be darkened to near-black or a dark-grey.*

MM-4 ***Equipment Building:*** *The exterior of the equipment building shall be painted a dark earth-tone color to reduce reflectivity and noticeability.*

Residual Impacts

These measures would result in a project less visually intrusive on the foreground context of scenic vistas in the area by visually screening the facility as much as possible, minimizing visual clutter, and by reducing noticeability of the project elements that may not be able to be screened. It is expected that the vegetative screen planting would take between five to ten years to provide effective screening. Until the time that the screen planting became effective, measures MM-2 through MM-4 would make the project less visually contrasting with the natural setting. The combined effect of these measures would result in impacts to scenic vistas to be considered significant but mitigable (CEQA, Class II).

9.2 The Project's Effect on Specific Scenic Resources as seen from the State Scenic Highway

A scenic resource is a specific feature or element with a high degree of memorability or landmark characteristics that contributes to the high visual quality of the corridor. From along Highway 1 through the Chorro Valley, the Morros, Cuesta Ridge, unique rock outcroppings, significant groupings of trees, and certain old ranch buildings are considered the primary scenic resources. The project would result in a significant impact if it were to damage or have a substantial negative effect on views of any of those specific resources as seen from Highway 1, an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway.

Although the various project elements such as the photo-voltaic panel arrays, fencing, the equipment building and other features would be clearly visible from Highway 1, they would not directly block views of the Morros, unique rock outcroppings, significant groupings of trees, or any historic-looking ranch buildings. The photo-voltaic arrays would partially block views of a rock outcropping at the project's northern area, but those rocks are not visually unique or sufficiently noticeable to be considered a scenic resource per this CEQA threshold.

Direct views of the surrounding hills and other scenic resources would be largely unaffected; however, the project would occupy the foreground context for those views and would result in a reduction in the compositional value of the scenic resource setting.

Figure 4. Vegetative Screening Concept Plan

Impact 2 **The proposed development would occupy and change the foreground of views to the Santa Lucia Mountains, Cuesta Ridge and Bishop's Peak as seen from Highway 1, a State Scenic Highway. As a result, the project would cause potentially significant direct long and short-term impacts to views of scenic vistas as seen from a State Scenic Highway.**

Implementation of mitigation measures MM-1 through MM-4 would reduce potential impacts to scenic resources as seen from the State Scenic Highway.

Residual Impacts

Measures identified under Impact 1 would result in a project less visually intrusive on the foreground context of scenic vistas in the area by visually screening the facility as much as possible, and by reducing noticeability of the project elements that may not be able to be screened. Implementation of those measures for Impact 1 would also reduce impacts for Impact 2 by minimizing the project's effect on the visual setting associated with identified scenic resources. As a result, visual impacts to scenic resources as seen from Highway 1 would be considered significant but mitigable (CEQA, Class II).

9.3 The Project's Effect on the Existing Visual Character and Quality of the Site and its Surroundings

The visual character of the project site and its surroundings is defined by the balance of built and natural elements. Much of the visual setting of the area is established by the combination of the dramatic topography and mountain peaks along with the existing vegetative patterns. The Highway 1 corridor between San Luis Obispo and the City of Morro Bay is mostly rural, however development can be seen in the vicinity of the project site and throughout the valley. Although these developments are generally visible from the highway, the adjacent hills and mountain peaks rising up behind them tend to dominate the views and define the scenic character.

Currently the main character-defining features of the project site as seen from Highway 1 include:

- Open space
- Agricultural grazing land use
- Undulating topography

The main character-defining features of the project site's surroundings include:

- Open space
- Agriculture: orchards and other crops, livestock grazing.
- The Morros, Santa Lucia mountains and foothills, and Cuesta Ridge.
- Scattered ranch houses and farm buildings.
- Native vegetation patterns.
- The Men's Colony
- The electrical substation and associated overhead utilities

The primary scenic value of the project site is that it provides a pastoral-agriculture foreground and mid-ground to the dramatic hillside backdrop of the Morros and Santa Lucia mountains. It is highly visible from southbound Highway 1, and supports the open space character and agricultural heritage valued by Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo County, and the City of San Luis Obispo.

Although other utilitarian and industrial-type development is present along the Highway 1 corridor and in the project vicinity, much of that development is set back from the highway or screened, and is visually subordinate to the rural and natural character of the overall landscape. The California Men's Colony and other institutional development in the area, although visible, do not dominate the visual character of the corridor, nor do they set the aesthetic standard for proposed development along the route.

Even though the project would be approximately 300 feet away from Highway 1, it would be highly noticeable because of the distinctive forms of its elements and its unique purpose. Memorability would also be increased because of the site's undulating topography. The photo-voltaic arrays would be seen following the rolling landscape and rising up at the northern portion of the site. This combined noticeability and memorability would draw attention to the project and would increase its industrial influence on the rural character of the site and area.

Introducing approximately 23 acres of an industrial utility to this pastoral site would permanently alter the visual character of not only the site itself, but it would also the reduce the visual quality of this identified community gateway area. The presence of a solar facility at this location would be visually notable because of its unique appearance and proximity to the highway, and as a result it would likely increase noticeability of the Men's Colony and sub-station located immediately to the west.

The project proposes screen planting along the Highway 1 frontage. Although no planting plan is available at this time, the project description mentions that the planting would consist of approximately one acre of native vegetation, reaching a maximum height of six to eight feet. The effectiveness of this screening would depend on the specific planting location, configuration, density, species and other factors. Given the environmental variables and uncertainty of natural and supplemental water, there is no certainty that the proposed amount of planted vegetation would provide adequate screening for the project, and the plantings will need to be monitored and maintained for the life of the project. In addition, planting along the project's Highway frontage would offer no screening benefit for southbound viewpoints that would include solar panels extending approximately 1,700 feet north along Gold Tree Road.

The project proposes 6-foot tall wood or metal post and barbed-wire security fencing surrounding the perimeter of the facility and maintenance and storage structure. Visibility of this type fencing would reinforce the industrial character of the site and would contribute to the degradation the site's visual quality. Barbed-wire security fencing which is commonly seen at the Men's Colony would visually tie the project with the correctional facility and could contribute to a perception that the two facilities are one large industrial use.

New power poles and overhead lines, if included in the project, would add to the visual clutter of the site and play a part in the overall loss of visual character. The proposed seatrain type equipment enclosure would further reinforce the industrial look of the project.

Impact 3 **The project would cause a noticeable change to the visual character of the site and its surroundings due to the inherent change from pastoral open space to an industrial utility facility. As a result, the project would cause potentially significant direct long and short-term impacts to the visual character of the site and its surroundings.**

Implementation of mitigation measures MM-1 through MM-4 would reduce potential impacts to the visual character of the site and its surroundings.

Residual Impacts

Measures are identified under Impact 1 which would result in a project less visually intrusive on the landscape by visually screening the facility as much as possible, and by reducing noticeability of the project elements that may not be able to be screened. Until the time that the screen planting becomes effective, measures MM-2 through MM-4 would make the project less visually contrasting with the existing setting. Implementation of the measures for Impact 1 would also reduce impacts for Impact 3 by minimizing the project's effect on the visual setting associated with identified scenic resources. As a result, visual impacts to scenic resources as seen from Highway 1 would be considered significant but mitigable (CEQA, Class II).

9.4 Project Light or Glare Affecting Day or Nighttime Views in the Area

The project would result in a significant impact if it subjects public viewing locations to a substantial amount of point-source lighting visibility at night, or if project illumination results in a noticeable spillover effect into the nighttime sky, increasing the ambient light over the region. The height and placement of lighting, source of illumination, and fixture types combined with viewer locations, adjacent reflective elements, and atmospheric conditions can affect the degree of change to nighttime views. If the project results in direct visibility of a substantial number of lighting sources, or allows a substantial amount of light to project toward the sky, significant impacts on nighttime views and aesthetic character would result.

Based on the project description, motion-sensor security lighting is proposed at the maintenance and storage structures, consisting of six 24-foot tall poles and shielded light fixtures. These fixtures would introduce a new source of lighting onto the site. Twenty-four foot tall light poles would increase lighting noticeability from Highway 1 and the surrounding area.

Although there are currently no night lights on the project site, dark skies in the area are currently affected by the extensive security and other lighting associated with the nearby Men's Colony. As a result the ambient light level in the area would likely not change substantially; however, the introduction of lights onto this currently dark site would be a night-time visual indicator of development where none presently exists.

The project proposes the use of non-glare coating on the photo-voltaic panel faces. The frames, racks, supports, stands, brackets, tracking apparatus, connectors, rods, equipment housings and other elements will be metal; as a result, there is a high potential for some number of these thousands of visible metal components to create glare or glint seen from off-site locations.

Impact 4 **The project would introduce a new source of light into a currently dark site, resulting in potentially significant direct long-term impacts to nighttime views.**

MM-5 ***Lighting:*** *New lighting included in the project shall conform to the following:*

a. Light poles shall not exceed twelve feet in height.

b. The point source of all exterior lighting shall be shielded from off-site views.

c. Light trespass shall be minimized by directing light downward and utilizing cut-off fixtures or shields.

d. Lumination from exterior lights shall be the lowest level allowed by public safety standards.

e. Exterior lighting shall be designed to not focus illumination onto exterior walls.

Impact 5 **The project would introduce a new source of glare or glint caused by the sun reflecting off some number of the thousands of metal components associated with photo-voltaic frame, support and tracking apparatus, resulting in potentially significant direct long and short-term impacts.**

Implementation of mitigation measures MM-1 through MM-4 would also reduce potential impacts caused by daytime glare and glint seen from off-site public viewpoints.

Residual Impacts

Implementation of these measures would minimize potential glare and lighting trespass impacts as seen from the surrounding area. As a result, visual impacts based on new source of light or glare would be considered significant but mitigable (CEQA, Class II).

9.5 Cumulative Impacts

The discussion of cumulative impacts relates to the potential for the project to contribute to an aggregate change in visual quality from the surrounding public viewing areas, taking into consideration existing as well as proposed development.

The Chorro Valley has undergone some amount of visual change over the last several years. The development of residential lots in the Paso de Caballo area, expansion of Cuesta College, the Sheriff's Facility, Animal Services, the shooting range, and Wood's Humane Society are all visible from Highway 1. In addition, various components of the University's Master Plan update (currently in process) may be visible from the highway.

The project's proximity to Highway 1 and its location in an area identified in local planning documents as having desirable open space and gateway characteristics increases its potential to influence the aesthetic quality and character of the area. This change in visual character, when experienced along with other projects in the last several years in addition to pending projects, could contribute to a potential emerging perception that the Chorro Valley is undergoing a visual change toward increasing development.

Impact 6 **The highly noticeable alteration of the project site from agriculture to industrial, combined with its foreground effect on scenic vistas, when experienced in conjunction with other projects along Highway 1 would result in potentially significant cumulative adverse visual impacts.**

Implementation of mitigation measures MM-1 through MM-5 would reduce potentially cumulative impacts.

Residual Impacts

Implementation of the measures MM-1 through MM-5 identified in this study would result in cumulative visual impacts to be considered significant but mitigable (CEQA, Class II).

10 REFERENCES

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Figure 5. Key Viewing Area 1 – Existing View and Photo-Simulation of the Proposed Project

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Figure 6. Key Viewing Area 2 – Existing View and Photo-Simulation of the Proposed Project

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Figure 7. Key Viewing Area 3 – Existing View and Photo-Simulation of the Proposed Project

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