

APPENDIX D VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

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VISUAL IMPACT ANALYSIS
EL MONTE SAND MINING PROJECT
LAKESIDE, CALIFORNIA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been prepared to assess the potential visual impacts of the proposed El Monte Sand Mining Project (project) in the unincorporated community of Lakeside, in San Diego County (County), California. The significance of visual impacts on the surrounding visual environment is determined in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, 1970 as amended (CEQA), and measures are proposed to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse visual impacts associated with the construction and operation of the project.

Proposed Project

The 479.5-acre project site comprises portions of six parcels which are all owned by El Monte Nature Preserve, LLC. The Major Use Permit and Reclamation Plan boundary encompasses 479.5 acres within the six parcels and project activities will affect 262 acres (243 acres within the mining footprint and 19 acres outside the mining footprint). The project proponent, El Monte Nature Preserve, L.L.C. is proposing to extract 12.5 million tons of mineral resources (sand and gravel) in four phases over a 12-year period. The project is expected to be fully completed in 16 years: mining would occur for 12 years and reclamation and revegetation activities would continue for an additional 4 years after mining is complete. Following completion of mining activity in Phase 1, reclamation would commence.

Existing Visual Conditions

The existing visual character and quality of the El Monte Valley is described in terms of Landscape Units (LUs) Ten LUs were identified within the project viewshed as detailed in Section 3.3 and include Lake, Lowland Agriculture, Lowland Disturbed, Lowland Residential, Lowland Residential/Agriculture, Mountainous, Ridgeline Residential, Riparian River Channel, Suburban Developed, and Undisturbed Canyon Slope. The project site includes Lowland Disturbed and Riparian River Channel LUs. As existing, the onsite Lowland Disturbed LU has moderate visual quality and the Riparian River Channel LU has high visual quality. Five viewer groups were identified with views of the project site, including Vehicle Occupants, Trail Users, Lake Jennings Campground Patrons, Ridgeline/Slope Residents, and Valley Residents. All viewer groups were found to have moderate to high sensitivity to the visual environment.

Summary of Visual Analysis and Significance Conclusions

The potential mining and reclamation visual impacts (during the time period including excavation operations through reclamation and revegetation activities) and post-reclamation (after successful Reclamation Plan implementation) visual impacts are analyzed.

The primary mining and reclamation visual elements that the project would introduce into views of the valley would be site clearing, mining equipment, grading and exposed soil, processing equipment and stockpiles, reclamation and revegetation activities and, eventually, the post-reclamation conditions would include restored habitats and open space. To illustrate the project effects, a total of 18 potential key views of the project site were proposed and analyzed to determine which key views best portray sensitive and/or typical views from viewer groups. Seven of the key views considered are analyzed in detail by creating computer-generated image simulations to realistically portray the project in its context. Significance of visual impacts is considered based on County significance guidelines as summarized below.

- 1. The project would introduce features that would detract from or contrast with the existing visual character and/or quality of a neighborhood, community, or localized area by conflicting with important visual elements or the quality of the area or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.*

Mining and Reclamation

The exposed soil during mining operations would be highly visible. Additionally, the equipment, vehicles, processing plant, and stockpiles that would be visible during the project operation would be industrial-like features in what is currently a mostly natural, although disturbed, setting. These visual changes would be substantial and result in a **significant visual impact**.

Post-Reclamation

Based on successful implementation of the Restoration Plan, the resulting visual quality of native riparian/upland habitat in the disturbed project site would be an improvement from the existing moderate level of the Lowland Disturbed LU and the same as the high visual quality of the existing Riparian River Channel LU and would result in a **less-than-significant visual impact**.

- 2. The project would result in the removal or substantial adverse change of one or more features that contribute to the valued visual character or image of the neighborhood, community, or localized area, including but not limited to landmarks (designated), historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings.*

Mining and Reclamation

No designated landmarks, historic resources, or rock outcroppings exist within the site or the valley. However, the exposed soil, lack of vegetation, removed trees, and exposed raw edges of the mine's pit would be highly visible and contrasting with the existing visual character and would result in a **significant visual impact**

Post-Reclamation

Revegetation would introduce trees into the project site to replace those native trees that would be removed and native vegetation would establish across the disturbed project site. The resulting visual character of the project site would not be substantially different from the existing conditions and impacts to visual character would be **less than significant**.

- 3. The project would substantially obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a valued focal and/or panoramic vista from: a public road, a trail within an adopted County or State trail system, a scenic vista or highway, or a recreational area.*

Mining and Reclamation

The exposed soil, equipment, processing plant and stockpiles would highly contrast with the surrounding existing vegetation and natural slopes, and thus would detract from the visual quality from a wide variety of public viewpoints, including trails and scenic roads. This would result in a **significant visual impact**.

Post-Reclamation

The minor change in visual quality and relatively small scale of the features within the expansive panoramic views would not detract from the vistas. The enhanced riparian and upland habitats would be an improvement to the currently disturbed habitat within the valley and would not contrast with the natural configuration of the valley and adjacent slopes. The post-restoration change would result in a **less than significant visual impact**.

- 4. The project would not comply with applicable goals, policies or requirements of an applicable County Community Plan, Subregional Plan, or Historic District's Zoning.*

Mining and Reclamation

The project would be unable to conform to certain policies of the San Diego County General Plan COS, Lakeside Community Plan, and Lakeside Community Design Guidelines, as well as the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance. Therefore, the project would result in a **significant impact**.

Post-Reclamation

In the post-reclamation condition the project would conform to visual goals and policies applicable to the site and project; thus, would result in a **less than significant impact**.

Mitigation Measures and Significance after Mitigation

Mitigation Measure 1 entails a County-approved Screening Plan that shall be implemented along certain segments of El Monte Road adjacent to the project site to reduce the temporary visual impacts to vehicle occupants along this roadway (fully detailed in Chapter 6).

Temporary visual quality and view quality impacts would be reduced for vehicle occupants along El Monte Road by Mitigation Measure 1. However, the change to the visual environment as seen from other viewpoints during project operations would remain noticeable and would continue to contrast with the existing and surrounding visual environment. Mining and reclamation impacts to view quality would remain significant.

No other mitigation measures are feasible to reduce mining and reclamation related significant impacts on visual quality, community character, scenic views, or inconsistency with visual policies. Therefore, visual impacts due to project operations would remain significant.

In post-reclamation, the project would replace the disturbed area with high quality native riparian and upland habitat. The proposed long-term features would not highly contrast with the existing and surrounding area, and would result in less than significant visual impact to visual resources.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE VISUAL RESOURCES REPORT

The purpose of this study is to assess the visual impacts of the proposed project, determine the significance of the impacts under CEQA, and to propose measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse visual impacts associated with the construction of the proposed El Monte Sand Mining Project (project) on the surrounding visual environment.

1.2 KEY ISSUES

The key issues in this visual impact analysis are the potential visual impacts to the unique visual character of the El Monte Valley within the Lakeside Community Plan Area (Figures 1 and 2). Mining and reclamation impacts are defined as those that would occur during the time period including excavation operations through reclamation and revegetation activities. Post-reclamation impacts are defined as the visual conditions post-restoration with achievement of the success criteria in the Reclamation Plan. This analysis considers impacts on various sensitive viewer groups. Also, four parcels owned by El Monte Nature Preserve, LLC in El Monte Valley, which includes most of the project site, in addition to surrounding properties, carry the Scenic “S” Special Area Regulation as defined in Sections 5200 – 5212 of the County Zoning Ordinance.

The study determines if changes to the visual character of the area would result from the project, whether these changes would be noticeable and if so, would they be negatively perceived by viewer groups.

1.3 PRINCIPAL VIEWPOINTS TO BE COVERED

Key views of the project site have been chosen to highlight sensitive and/or typical views from viewer groups within the El Monte Valley. A total of 18 key views were identified and are listed in Table 1. Seven of the key views considered have been analyzed in detail by creating computer-generated image simulations to realistically portray the project in its context. Two of these seven key views are from ridgeline public trail locations and five are from surrounding roadways. Figure 3 shows the 18 key view locations and the direction of the view they represent.

Table 1
Key Views

Key View (KV) Number	Directional Description of Viewpoint	Viewer Groups	View Description
1	Looking north-northwest down valley from top of valley slope	Trail Users	Represents the public view from a trail at the Lake Jennings campground.
2	Looking northwest across valley from El Monte Road	Vehicle Occupants on El Monte Road	Represents eastbound public view.
3	Looking northwest across valley from El Monte Road	Vehicle Occupants on El Monte Road	Public view reflecting part of northeastern portion of project.
4	Looking east up valley from northern valley slope	Vehicle Occupants on Willow Road; Lowland Residents	Represents views for residences and drivers on Willow Road.
5	Looking southeast across valley from Willow Road	Vehicle Occupants	Represents views for drivers on Willow Road.
6	Looking west across valley from Blossom Valley-El Monte Park Trail	Trail Users/ Ridgeline/Slope Residents	Public view from local park trail; also represents views similar to those for Ridgeline/Slope Residents.
7	Looking west across valley from El Monte Road	Vehicle Occupants	Public view, encompasses southwestern portion of project.
8	Looking northeast up valley from Lake Jennings Campground Trail	Trail Users; Lake Jennings Campground Patrons	Public view from private park.
9	Looking northeast down the valley from top of valley slope	Ridgeline/Slope Residents	Landforms to the west block views of most project features
10	Looking northwest down valley from Quail Canyon Road	Ridgeline/Slope Residents	Landforms to the west block most project feature locations.
11	Looking northwest over western half of valley from Lake Jennings campground	Lake Jennings Campground Patrons	Public view from private park.
12	Looking north up valley from top of valley slope	Ridgeline/Slope Residents	View limited by landforms.
13	Traveling west on El Monte Road, looking north-northwest	Vehicle Occupants	Low angle view; east of most of the project site
14	Looking northwest across valley from El Monte Road/residential area	Vehicle Occupants; Valley Residents	Similar to KV 13 but closer to project elements.
15	Looking west across valley from El Monte Park-Blossom Valley Trail	Trail Users	Similar to KV 6 but at a lower elevation along the same trail.
16	Looking southwest down valley from Willow Road	Vehicle Occupants	Low angle of view but most of valley is visible.
17	Looking northeast up valley from Willow Road	Vehicle Occupants	Low angle of view but most of valley visible.
18	Looking southeast across valley from Willow Road	Vehicle Occupants	Similar to KV 17 but farther from project elements.

Note: Grey shading indicates views that were simulated.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project site is located in the San Diego River watershed in the Lakeside Community Planning Area, within the unincorporated portion of San Diego County. The project site (MUP and Reclamation Plan boundary) consists of approximately 479.5 acres and is bordered by El Monte Road to the south and Willow Road to the north. Highway 67 is located approximately 1.5 miles to the west at San Vicente Creek, and El Capitan Reservoir is located approximately 2.8 miles upstream (Figures 1 and 2).

The 479.5-acre project site comprises portions of six parcels which total 583.3 acres and are all owned by El Monte Nature Preserve, LLC (San Diego County assessor's parcel numbers (APNs) 392-060-29, 392-150-17, 391-061-01, 391-071-04, 393-011-01, and 390-040-51). The Major Use Permit and Reclamation Plan boundary encompasses 479.5 acres within the six parcels. A total of 243 acres of the project site would be impacted by mining, staging areas, and trails within the mining footprint. In addition, 19 acres located outside the mining footprint would be impacted by trails and fuel modification areas. Thus, the project's total impact area is 262 acres. Vehicular access to the project site would be from El Monte Road 0.5 miles northeast of the intersection with Lake Jennings Park Road.

Project Features

The project proponent, El Monte Nature Preserve, L.L.C. is proposing to extract 12.5 million tons of mineral resources (sand and gravel) over a 12 year period. The mining would occur in four phases, and site would be incrementally reclaimed as mining is completed within each phase. The project is expected to be fully completed in 16 years: mining would occur for 12 years, and reclamation would continue for an additional 4 years after mining is complete, refer to Figure 4, Project Phasing and Processing Plant Sites and Table 2.

Table 2
Mining Area and Duration

Mining Phase	Acres Affected by the Project ¹	Duration (Years)
1	93	4
2	52	3
3	48	3
4	50	2
Total	243	12

¹ Rounded to the nearest acre, including mining area, trails, and staging area

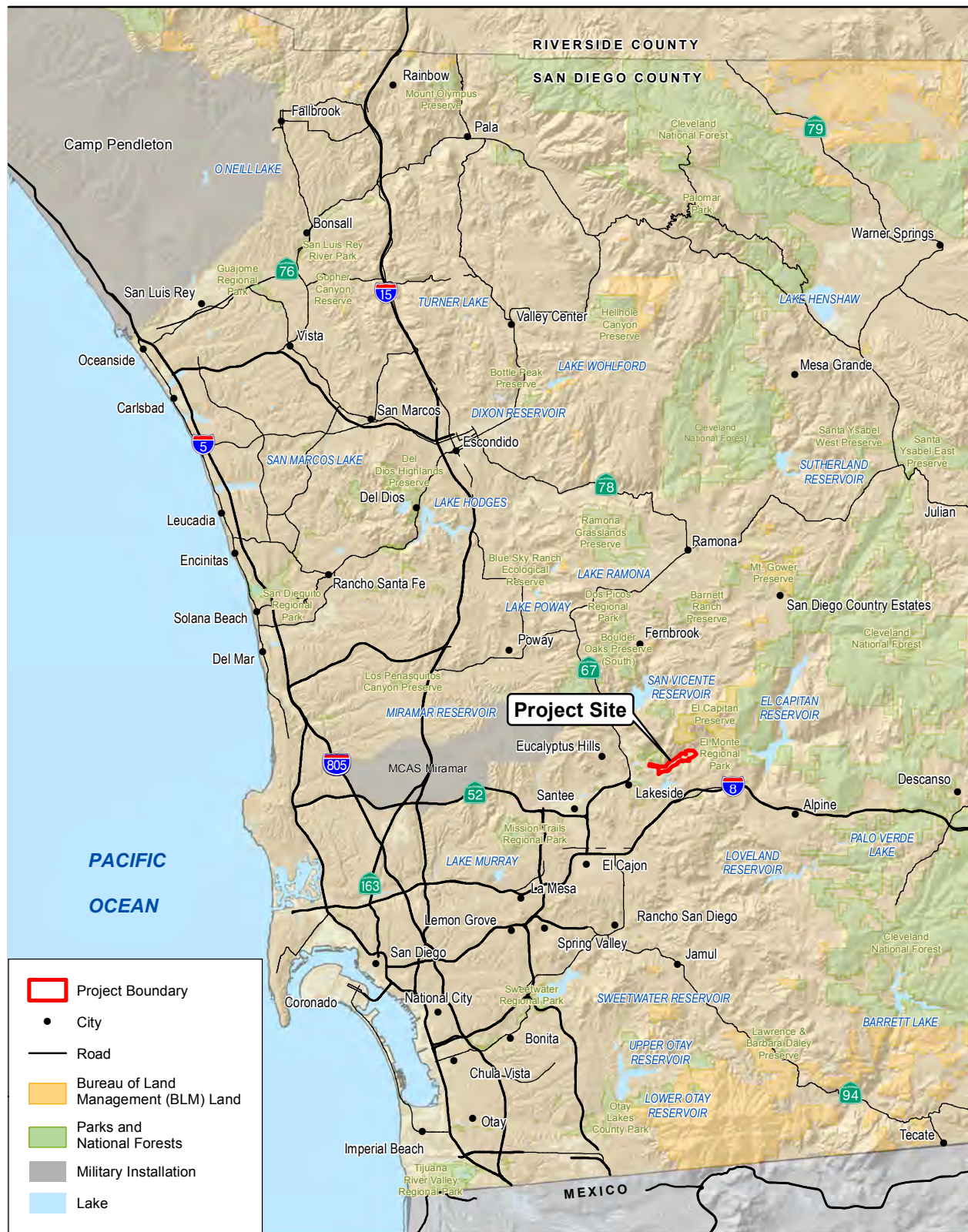
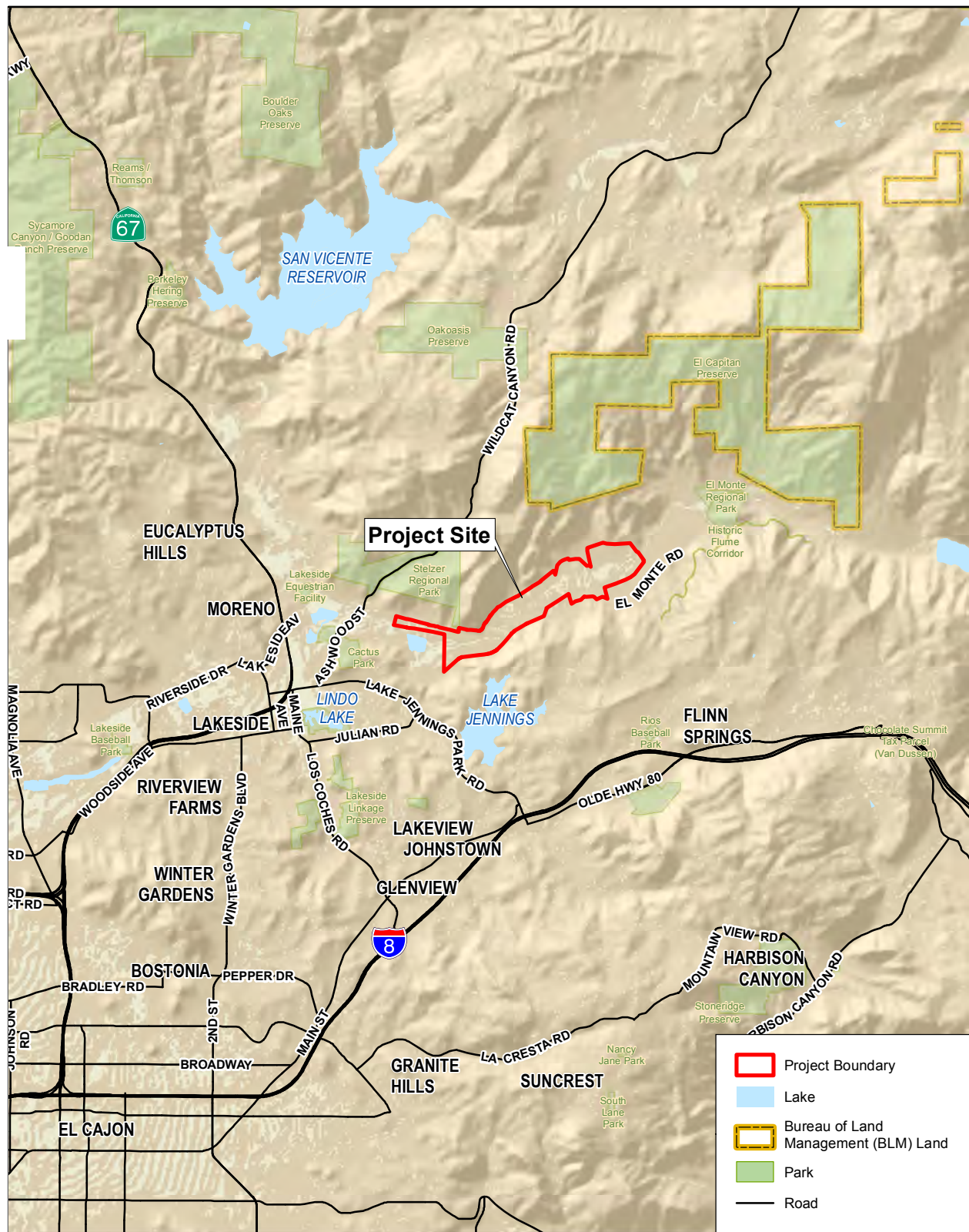


Figure 1
Regional Map

Draft Visual Impact Analysis - El Monte Sand Mining Project

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Source: ESRI, SanGIS; SANDAG.

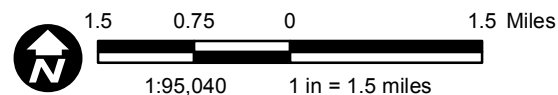


Figure 2
Project Vicinity Map

Draft Visual Impact Analysis - El Monte Sand Mining Project

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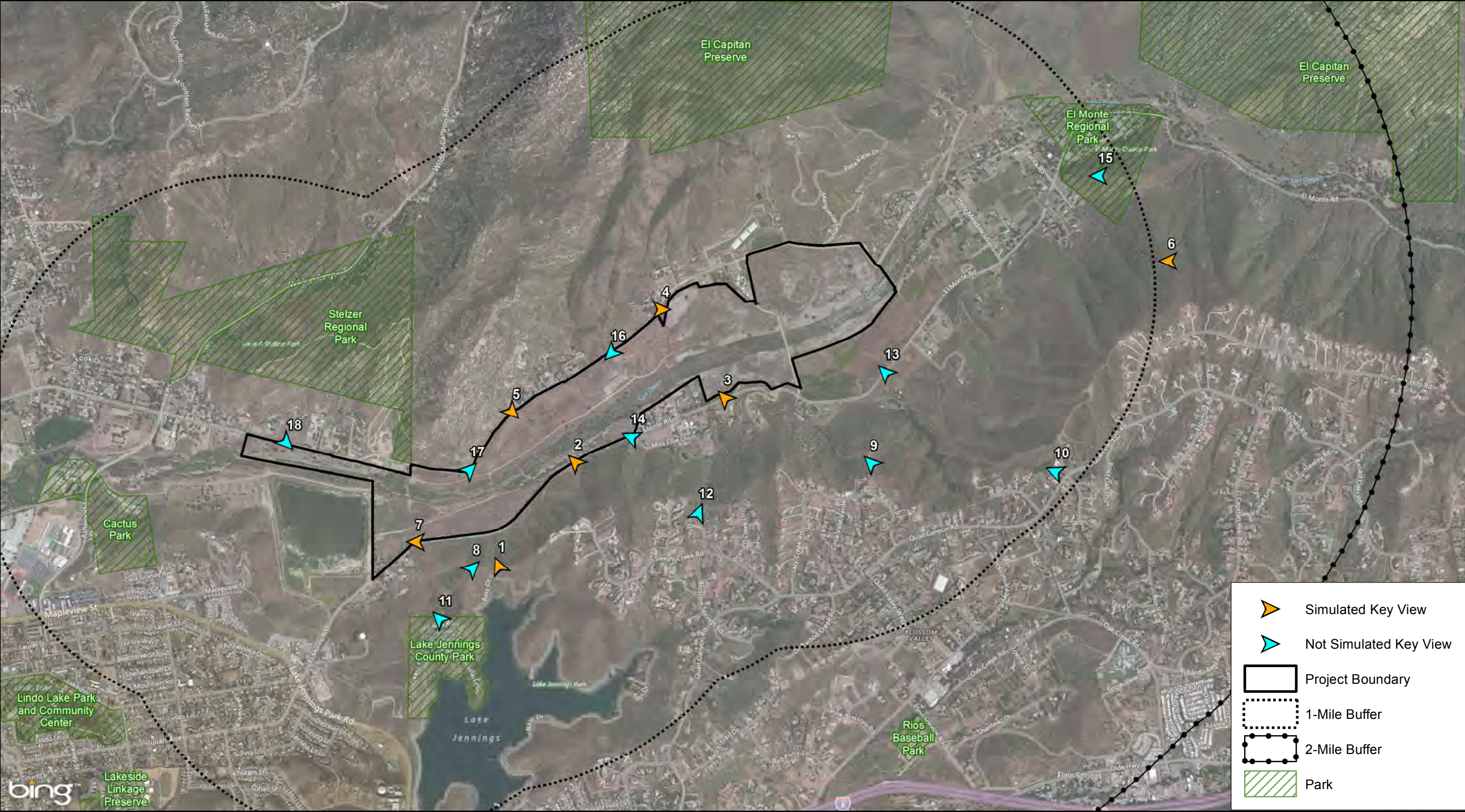


Figure 3
Key View Locations

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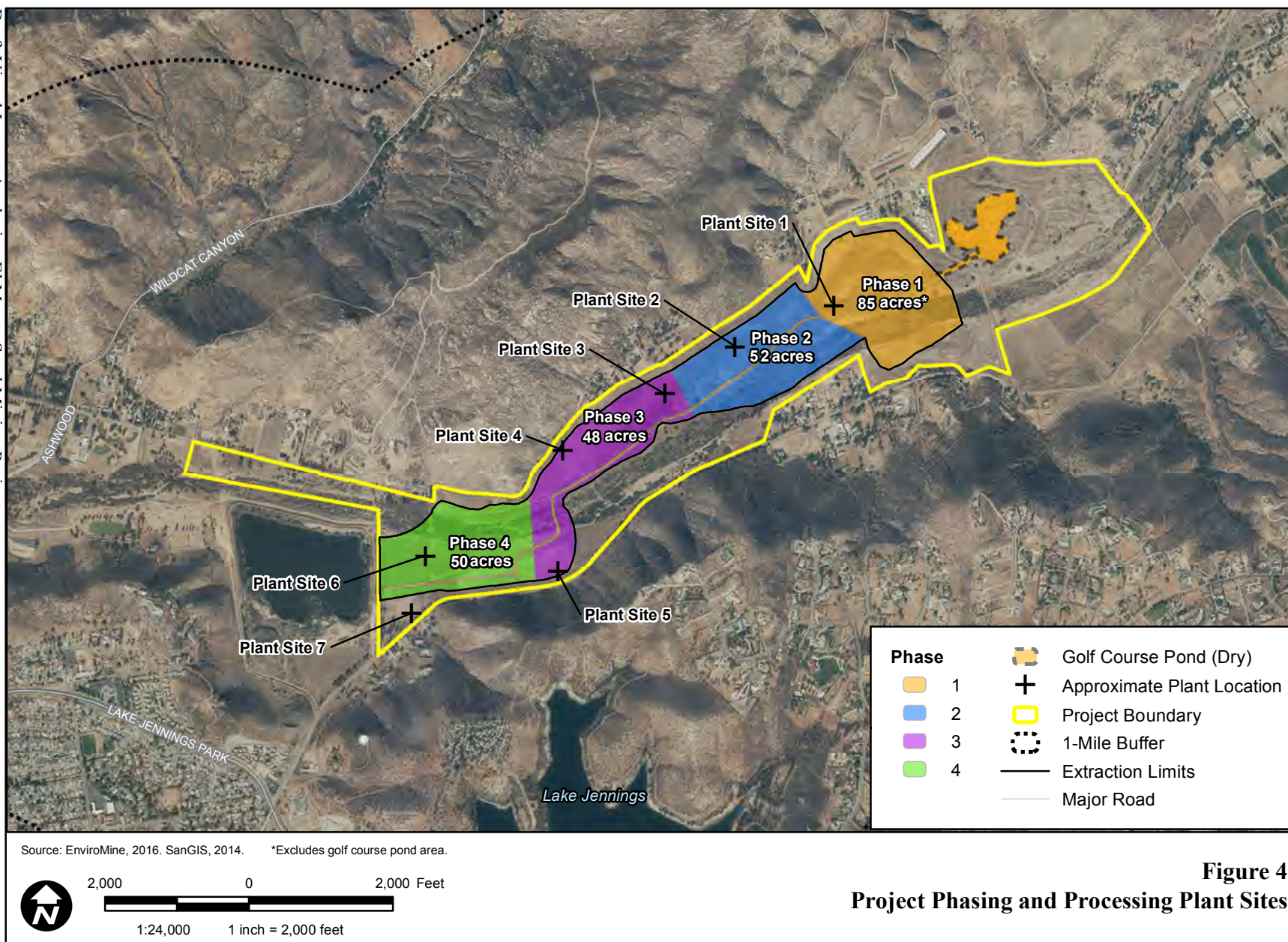


Figure 4
Project Phasing and Processing Plant Sites

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Mining Operations

Mining operations consist of excavating materials with wheeled front-end-loaders, moving the material directly into the processing plant or stockpiles at the plant. The project would establish 150-foot setbacks from El Monte Road and Willow Road and a 300-foot setback from the eastern parcel line of APN 391-071-04 and Dairy Road prior to commencing operations. All extractive operations would be setback from the project limits by a minimum of 150 feet. A setback from areas identified as Mature Riparian Woodland would be set at 50 feet from the outer foliage of the trees. The project footprint and excavation cross sections phasing areas are shown in Figure 5, Project Limits.

The project would be developed in four mining phases that would proceed in an east to west direction. A portable processing plant situated near the active mining operations would be relocated westward multiple times as the phased mining progresses. The first phase would include the creation of a pad at approximately 10 feet below existing grade on which to place a portable aggregate processing plant. An 8-foot-high earthen berm around this area, between the processing plant and adjacent public roadway, would provide partial screening of the plant and associated equipment. The precise berm location will be determined as the plant location is established. A temporary power line, typically consisting of evenly spaced poles and a single power line would be installed to the processing plant. Trucks and mining equipment would access the processing plant and Phase 1 extraction area via a sub-grade access road through the approximate middle of the project site from the entrance at the southwest corner of the project site, off El Monte Road. To reduce noise impacts to residents located on El Monte Road, on-highway haul trucks would use an egress point from the project site located 0.4 miles east of the project site entrance. The pad for each processing plant location and the access road would be screened with earthen berms 8 feet taller than the adjacent ground surface.

Wheeled front-end-loaders would mine materials to approximately ten feet above the water table. Thus, the maximum excavation depth of the approximately 228-acre pit area (excluding the dry golf course pond) would be 36 to 41 feet below existing grade. The project would install a channel erosion control drop structure on the eastern edge of the project site. The drop structure would be located approximately 300 feet west of Dairy Road and would serve as an erosion control device to prevent head cutting of the San Diego River channel to the east.

Within the first phase, wash fines from the processing plant would first be used to fill a large surface depression that was constructed as a water hazard pond for a previously permitted golf course approximately 300 feet east of Dairy Road. Once the golf course pond depression is filled, the area and its surroundings will be revegetated. Thereafter, the wash fines would be directed through a series of settling basins near the process area. The settling basins would be

used to collect wash fines which would be sold as a soil amendment or incorporated into the surface of areas to be reclaimed. When used onsite, the fines would be spread evenly and incorporated into the surface in preparation for planting. Haul truck or loaders would be used to transport wash fines in the pit area.

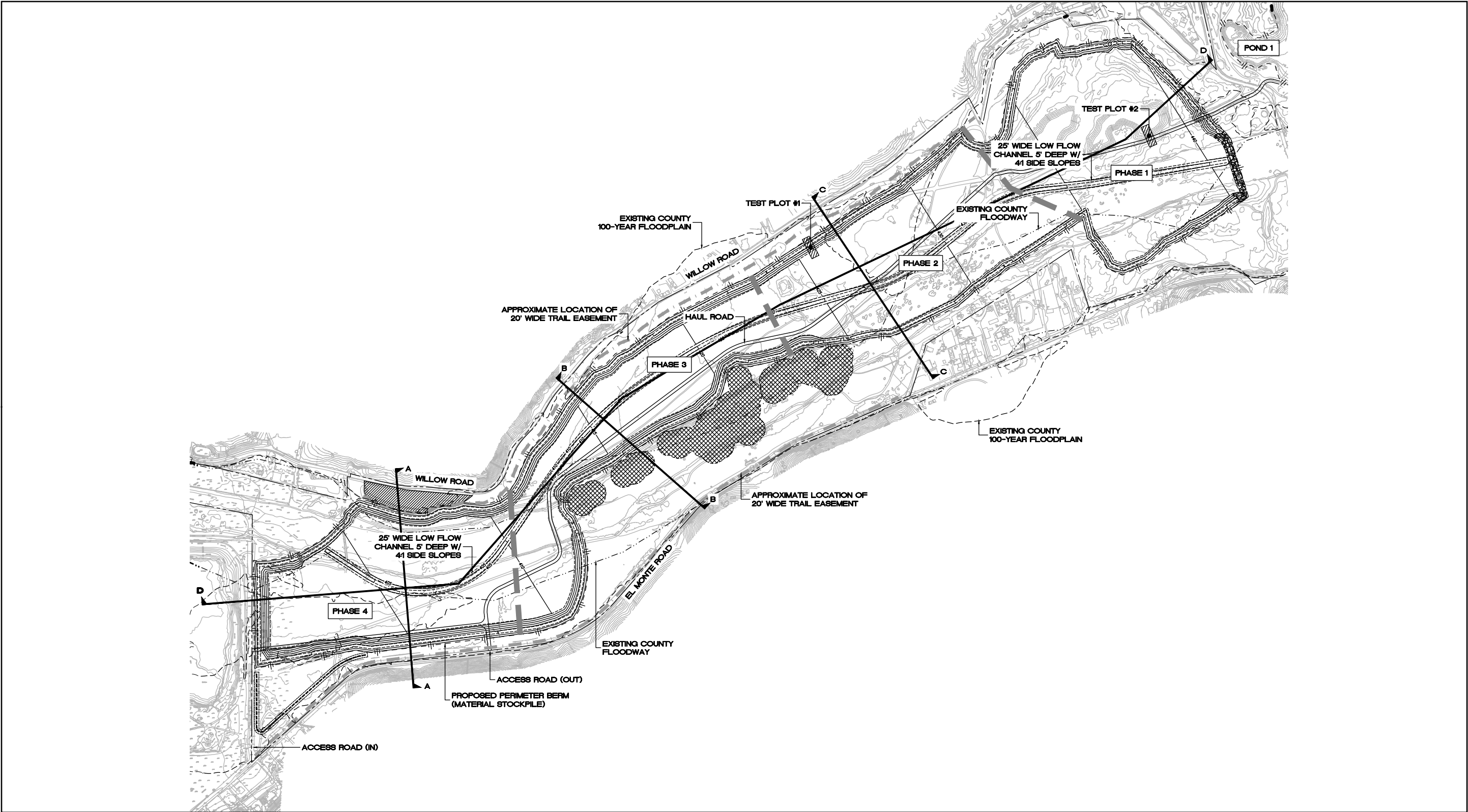
Phases 2, 3, and 4 would consist of the continuation of the extraction process. The processing plant set up at the beginning of the first phase would be moved westward with each phase, to a total of seven locations (see Figure 5, Project Limits). The final location of the processing plant would be in the southwestern portion of the project site, near the site entry. Material would be moved from the active mining area to the processing plant via wheeled front-end loaders, and waste fines would be returned to the pit area via haul trucks or loaders. The processing plant would be removed from the site at the end of extraction activities.

Reclamation Plan

Reclamation would occur concurrently with the extraction activities. As the project progresses, cut slopes would be brought to final grade and revegetated beginning at the eastern boundary and moving westward throughout the site. Following completion of mining activity in any given area, reclamation would commence.

A single bench would have been cut into the surface beginning at the edge of the 150-foot setbacks and extend to a depth of 10 feet below ground surface at a 3:1 gradient. The bench surface would be approximately 20 feet wide. A second 3:1 cut slope would then be developed at the edge of the terrace and proceed to the pit floor. On the pit floor a low flow, meandering channel would be created to direct any surface water produced from storm events that create localized runoff. The channel bottom would be 25 feet wide, 5 feet deep, have 4:1 side slopes and slightly sloped westward. Refer to Figure 6, Cross Section of Proposed Configuration.

Figure 7 shows the typical layout and section of the processing plant equipment, which would be relocated westward as the excavation phases are completed.



Source: Chang Consultants 2016

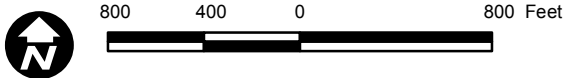
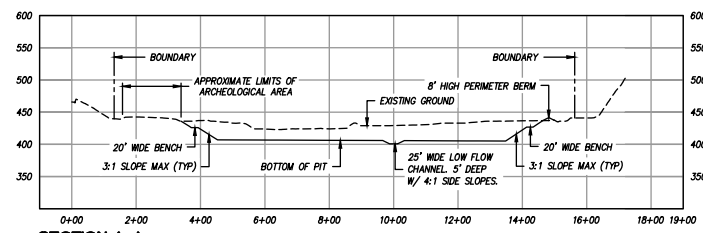
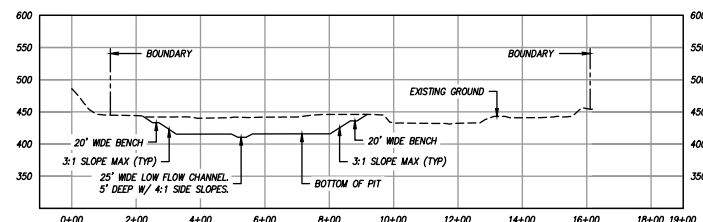


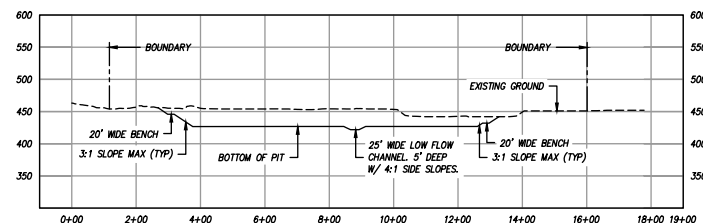
Figure 5
Project Limits



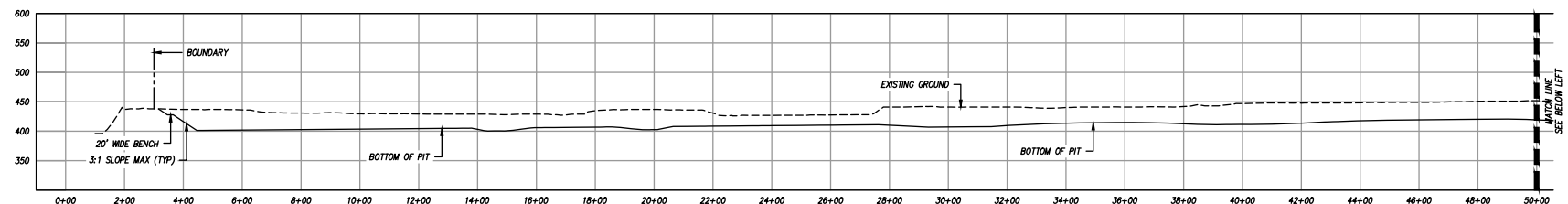
SECTION A-A
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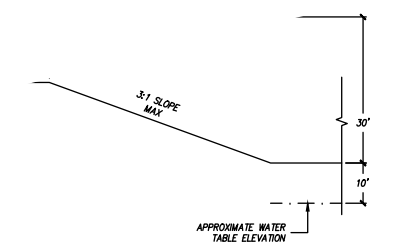
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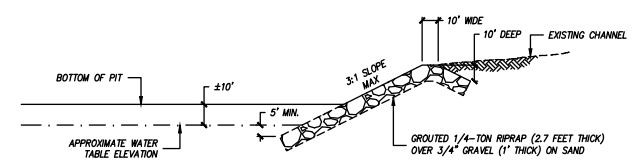
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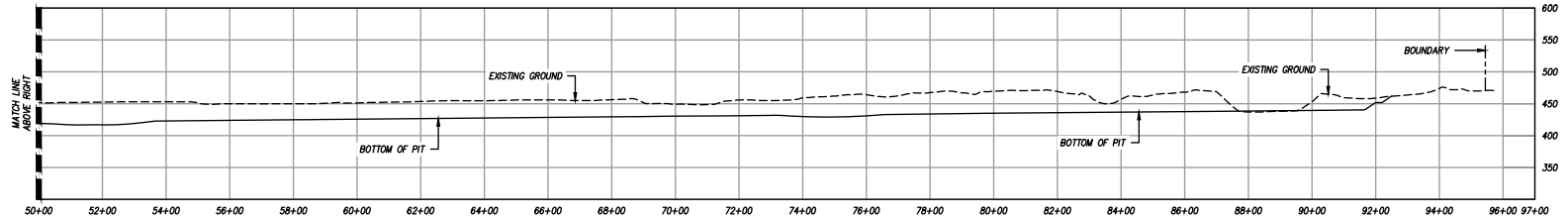
SECTION D-D
SCALE: HORIZ. 1"=200' VERT. 1"=200'



PIT GRADING TYPICAL SECTION
SCALE: 1"=40'



DROP STRUCTURE TYPICAL SECTION
SCALE: 1"=40'



Source: Chang Consultants 2016

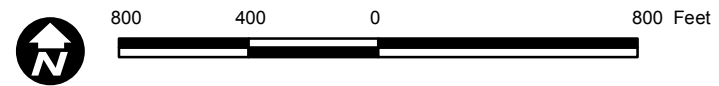


Figure 6
Cross-Section of Proposed Configuration

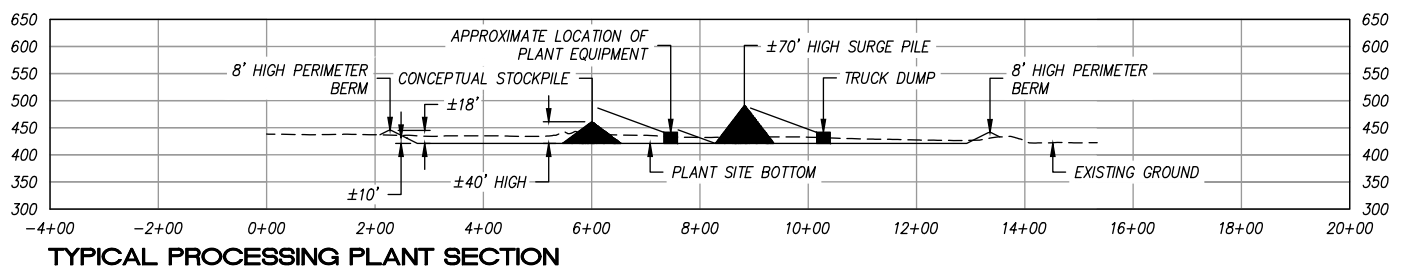
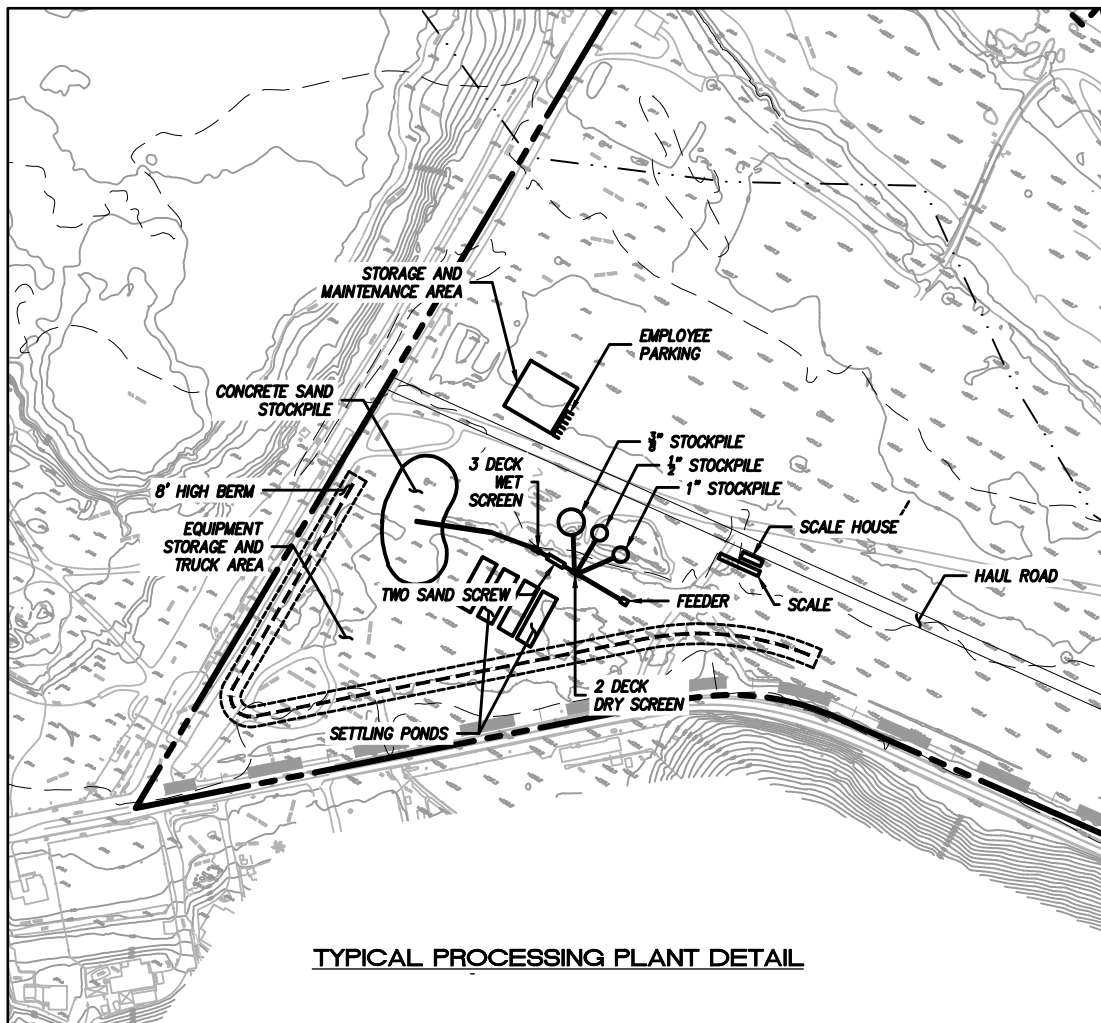


Figure 7
Processing Plant Plan and Section

Visible elements of the project would include:

- Vegetated slopes,
- Erosion control drop structure,
- Portable processing wash plant,
- Maintenance area,
- Storage containers,
- Weigh scales with a modular building,
- Access/haul road,
- Trucks and vehicles (up to 314 trucks per day),
- Settling ponds,
- Stockpiles up to 40 feet high next to the processing plant,
- Surge stockpile up to 70 feet high next to the processing plant,
- Berms lining the processing plant pad and access/haul road,
- Exposed soil,
- Portable restroom,
- Power lines and poles,
- Office trailer, and
- Shielded security night lighting near the processing plant and office trailer.

The bench and low flow channel would be continuously developed as the pit progresses to the west. The bench surface would be sloped towards the rear of the terrace. Rough grading would be continuous as mining progresses. Wash fines would be utilized as a top dressing and incorporated into the surface by ripping or disking. Final grading will occur as areas become available for this activity. During the late summer or early fall months these final landform areas would be prepared for seeding and irrigation pipelines (if used) would be installed. Seeding and planting would occur in the November to February time period to take advantage of the natural precipitation season for Southern California, per the project Revegetation Plan. At the end of the extraction operations in Phase 4, 52 acres of disturbed land would need to be graded and revegetated as the majority of the land disturbed by the operation would have already been reclaimed.

Revegetation of disturbed areas of the site would be completed in phases and occur after final graded surfaces are achieved. The reclamation plan is intended to stabilize the post-extraction landform and establish a productive native vegetative cover. Reclamation of the site would include: (1) removal of all manmade structures; (2) grading to achieve final landforms; and (3) revegetation and monitoring. Plant species used would be capable of self-regeneration

without continued dependence on irrigation, soil amendments or fertilizer, and would include species representative of the native habitat, as documented in the project Revegetation Plan.

A portion of the trail network that would be included in the project would be developed during Phase 1 while the remaining trails would be constructed following completion of the mining operations. Trails (Type D Pathways) along the outer perimeter would be constructed during Phase 1 and trails (Type C Primitive Trails) in the interior of the site would be constructed post-mining during Phase 4. The staging area that would also serve the Flume Trail would be constructed post-Phase 4. The proposed trails would contribute to the expansion of and linkage to the County's Community Trails Master Plan trail system. Temporary and permanent fencing and exclusionary signage would be installed.

Post-Reclamation Land Use

Reclamation of disturbed portions of the project site would be phased with mining activities and operations. Reclaimed lands would generally consist of natural open space revegetated with native vegetative cover and appropriate landforms for site drainage. Post-mining land use would also include recreational trail development and use throughout the reclaimed project site.

2.1 LAND USE DESIGNATIONS AND ZONING

As shown in Figure 8, the project site is designated as Public Agency Lands by the San Diego County General Plan Land Use Map. There are a variety of land uses within two miles of the project site, with the most diverse land use designations occurring to the west within the more developed areas of Lakeside. Immediately adjacent to the project site, land uses include Recreation, Parks, Undeveloped; Agriculture; Residential; and a small area of Communications and Utilities.

The majority of the project site is zoned by the County Zoning Ordinance as S-82, Extractive Use (404 acres) with Special Area Regulation overlays of Floodplain (F) and Scenic (S) as shown in Figure 9. A portion of the site also includes the zoning designation of A-70, Limited Agriculture (75 acres) with the Scenic Special Area Regulation overlay. Areas surrounding the project site to the north, west, and east include a mixture of Agricultural zonings and Special Purpose. Commercial and Industrial zones are located at more distant locations to the west, near the more developed portions of Lakeside. Generally, Residential zoning is located along the southern border of the site, with some areas of Special Purpose and Agriculture also intermixed.

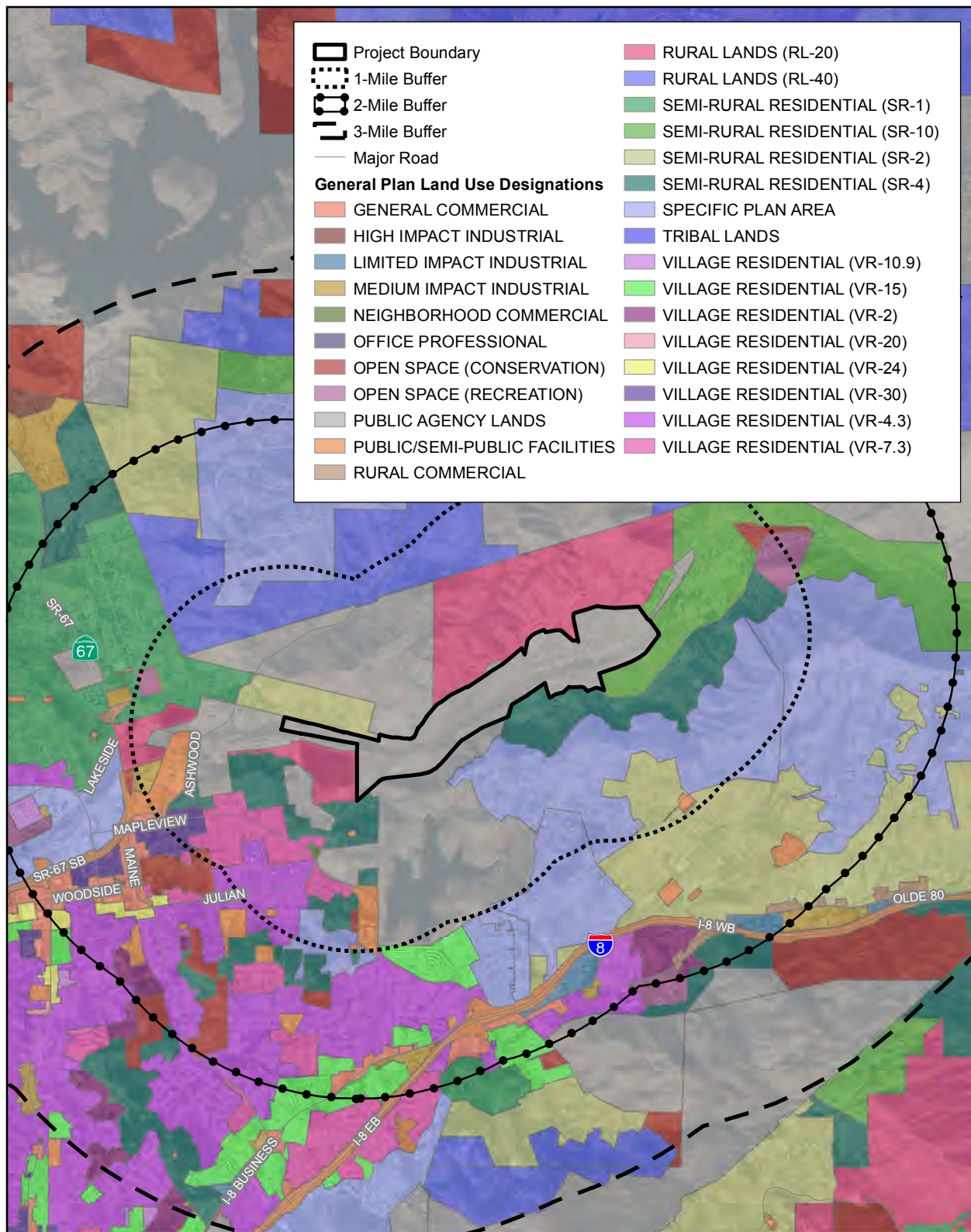


Figure 8
San Diego County Land Use

Visual and aesthetic assessments need to identify not only impacts to current conditions, but also effects on future aesthetic plans and goals. Adopted policies are also an indication of the sensitivity that a particular community may have toward aesthetic issues. Relevant policies are discussed in the following sections.

2.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

San Diego County General Plan

The San Diego County General Plan (General Plan) was adopted in August 2011 and provides a framework for the future growth and development of the unincorporated areas of the County consistent with an established community vision (County of San Diego 2011a). The General Plan is based on a set of guiding principles designed to protect the County's unique and diverse natural resources and maintain the character of its rural and semi-rural communities. It reflects an environmentally sustainable approach to planning that balances the need for adequate infrastructure, housing, and economic vitality, while maintaining and preserving each unique community within the County, agricultural areas, and extensive open space. There are seven required elements that form the General Plan, and those with applicable visual resource policies are described below.

Conservation and Open Space Element

Chapter 5 of the San Diego County General Plan, the Conservation and Open Space (COS) Element, includes a Visual Resources section. The goals and policies of the Visual Resources section emphasize the protection of scenic corridors and dark skies within the natural environment and the recognition and enhancement of community character within the built environment.

The Visual Resources section of the COS describes two County routes that have been officially designated as State Scenic Highways. These officially designated highways are not in the immediate vicinity of the project site. However, there are three roadway segments that are included in the County Scenic Highway System that are in the vicinity of the project site. They include:

- State Route 67: from Santee city limits to State Route 78 (excluding Poway segment)
- El Monte Road; from El Capitan Reservoir to Lake Jennings Park Road

-
- Willow and El Monte Roads: from State Route 67 to southern end of El Capitan Reservoir

The maintenance of dark skies in San Diego County is vital to the two world-class observatories that depend on them for astronomical research; Palomar Observatory and Mount Laguna Observatory. Both of these sites are distant from the project site and dark skies policies specific to these facilities are not applicable to the project.

Visual resource policies within the COS Element relevant to the project site include the following:

Goal COS-11: Preservation of Scenic Resources.

Preservation of scenic resources, including vistas of important natural and unique features, where visual impacts of development are minimized.

COS-11.1: Protection of Scenic Resources. Require the protection of scenic highways, corridors, regionally significant scenic vistas, and natural features, including prominent ridgelines, dominant landforms, reservoirs, and scenic landscapes.

COS-11.2: Scenic Resource Connections. Promote the connection of regionally significant natural features, designated historic landmarks, and points of regional historic, visual, and cultural interest via designated scenic corridors, such as scenic highways and regional trails.

COS-11.3: Development Siting and Design. Require development within visually sensitive areas to minimize visual impacts and to preserve unique or special visual features, particularly in rural areas, through the following:

- Creative site planning
- Integration of natural features into the project
- Appropriate scale, materials, and design to complement the surrounding natural landscape
- Minimal disturbance of topography
- Clustering of development so as to preserve a balance of open space vistas, natural features, and community character.
- Creation of contiguous open space networks

Goal COS-13: Dark Skies.

Preserved dark skies that contribute to rural character and are necessary for the local observatories.

COS-13.1: Restrict Light and Glare. Restrict outdoor light and glare from development projects in Semi-Rural and Rural Lands and designated rural communities to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.

Lakeside Community Plan

Community Plans are designed to work in coordination with the General Plan. The policies contained in a Community Plan should be regarded as applications of broad General Plan policies that are designed to fit the specific or unique circumstances existing in the individual communities. The Lakeside Community Plan (updates adopted August 2011) includes the following goals and policies related to visual resources and applicable to the project (County of San Diego 2011b).

Industrial Goal: Provide for the kind of industrial development that does not detract from the existing rural character of the community.

Policy 4. Encourage new and existing industrial facilities to blend with their surroundings by utilizing harmonious architectural design, undergrounding utilities, landscaping, and a high standard of maintenance.

Sand and Gravel Extraction Goal: Balance the regional need for construction materials with the community need for freedom from any disturbing effects of sand and gravel extraction.

Policy 1. Permit only controlled extraction operations that have a minimal adverse impact on the environment; and

Policy 3. Minimize dust, noise, traffic, unsightly views, accumulations of water, steep slopes, and safety and health hazards resulting from sand and gravel extraction.

The Lakeside Community Plan also designates Resource Conservation Areas (RCAs) for Lakeside as lands requiring special attention in order to conserve resources in a manner best satisfying public and private objectives. The El Cajon Mountain – El Capitan Reservoir RCA overlay includes a portion of the central and western most end of the project site as shown on

Figure 10. The Lakeside Community Plan describes the El Cajon Mountain – El Capitan Reservoir RCA as follows:

El Cajon Mountain - El Capitan Reservoir - This large area contains very steep slopes (of the portion in Lakeside, about 60 to 70 percent is greater than 50% slope) and isolated rocky peaks and ridges, including some of the largest granitic domes in San Diego County. Vegetation is excellent wildlife habitat with Oak woodlands, Coastal Sage scrub and Mixed and Chamise chaparral...The area contains historical and existing golden eagle nest sites.

The rocky peaks, especially El Cajon Mountain, serve as a scenic backdrop for El Cajon as well as the Lakeside region.

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance

Figure 9 shows the San Diego County Zoning in the surrounding project vicinity. The majority of the project site is zoned S-82, Industrial Extractive Use (404 acres) with a portion zoned as A-70, Limited Agriculture (75 acres) (County of San Diego 2016).

The S82 Use Regulations identify and create areas within the County where mining, quarrying, or oil extractive uses are permitted (Zoning Ordinance Sections 2820-2829). Typically, the S82 Use Regulations would be applied to areas of mineral deposits, to signify the presence of such deposit and notify adjacent or affected properties of the intention to allow extraction of minerals within the zone. They may be used to preserve areas with valuable mineral deposits until extraction can take place. Special regulations are to be imposed governing the conduct of mineral extraction, associated operating characteristics, and care of the site at conclusion of the extraction operation. Zone A-70 Use Regulations allows for extractive use types (mining and processing) upon issuance of a Major Use Permit (Zoning Ordinance Section 2705e).

Four parcels owned by the EL Monte Nature Preserve, LLC within the project site are zoned with the Special Area Regulation “S” or Scenic designation. Refer to Figure 9 for the extents of the Scenic Regulation Overlay. The Scenic Area Regulations are comprised of Sections 5200 – 5212 of the Zoning Ordinance. Section 5200 states: “The purpose of these provisions is to regulate development in areas of high scenic value, both to assure exclusion of incompatible uses and structures and to preserve and enhance the scenic resources present in adjacent areas.”

Section 5205 requires the preparation and approval of a Site Plan for projects with the Scenic designation, and Section 5210 describes the Site Plan review criteria. The general criterion of



Source: SanGIS.

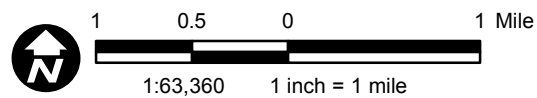


Figure 10
Resource Conservation Areas

Site Plan review is that the proposed development shall not, to the maximum extent feasible, interfere with or degrade those visual features, natural or man-made, of the site or adjacent sites which contribute to its scenic attractiveness, as viewed from either the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource. These requirements will be addressed through the processing of the Major Use Permit for the project.

Lakeside Community Trails and Pathways Plan

The San Diego County Trails Program (adopted June 2005) Lakeside Community Trails and Pathways Plan identifies existing and future trails and pathways within and surrounding the El Monte Valley (County of San Diego 2005).

The Lakeside Community Trails and Pathways Plan identifies 20 first priority proposed trails and 5 first priority proposed pathways that would be at least partially located within the project's viewshed, and many would connect to the trails and pathways that would access the project site directly. The existing and proposed trail alignments in the area of the project are shown on Figure 11. Two east-west trending trails are proposed across the project site (D: San Diego River Park Regional Trail; and 131: El Monte Valley River Trail). Three additional community-level trails are proposed to cross the site in a north-south direction (07: El Monte/Willow Connector Trail; 41: Power Pole Trail; and 61: Dairy Road Trail). On the north side of the project site, the proposed Willow Road Pathway (06) alignment would be located adjacent to Willow Road, which also serves as the majority of the northern boundary of the project site. Along the southern boundary of the project site, El Monte Road Pathway (05) is proposed to be located along El Monte Road.

Existing trails in the Lakeside area are mostly located within or near County parks, including Cactus County Park, Louis Stelzer County Park, and El Monte County Park. The trail within Cactus County Park is located approximately 1 mile west of the project site. The trail in Louis Stelzer County Park is approximately 0.66 to 0.75 miles northwest of the project site, and provides access to three viewpoints, including two that overlook the El Monte Valley and the project site. The trail within El Monte County Park is located 1.4 to 2 miles east of the project site, and provides extensive westward views over El Monte Valley including the project site. The Flume Trail was opened by County in 2011, linking El Monte Park to Blossom Valley. The trail starts by wrapping around the west boundary of El Monte County Park and climbs over 1,100 feet in elevation. From the trail, there are views of El Capitan in the east and El Monte Valley stretching west.

2.3 DESIGN POLICIES AND GUIDANCES

The County has prepared Design Guidelines for the Lakeside community (Adopted July 1989). The Design Guidelines and review process are intended to protect and retain Lakeside's rural environment with the propose to ensure that every new development carefully considers the community context in which it takes places and makes a conscientious effort to develop a compatible relationship to the natural setting, neighboring properties, and community design goals (County of San Diego 1989).

Community Design Objectives

1. Protect the character of the existing natural setting by preserving important natural features, land forms and historic sites.

New development should preserve and incorporate existing mature trees, native vegetation, water courses, topography and natural rock outcroppings into site design. Agricultural and rural site elements from the community's history, such as orchards, groves, corrals and older structures can often be incorporated into new development as special features.

5. Preserve and enhance the quality of scenic roads throughout the Community Planning Area.

Lakeside's scenic roads are an important element of the community's character and image. Among the most important are Willow Road, Wildcat Canyon Road, Lake Jennings Park Road Highway 67 (through Moreno Valley) and El Monte Road. Other roads and streets may also contribute to a distinct feel of a rural residential environment. Existing natural features such as land forms, rock outcroppings and mature trees should be protected along these routes, with new grading and other manmade interventions minimized. Views from the road to the hills and valleys of the surrounding landscape should be preserved when siting new buildings and trees. New planting that continues the predominant existing species on a road or street is encouraged, as are other elements such as rustic fences, stone walls or agricultural artifacts that preserve historic character.

6. Carefully integrate new industrial development with the existing landscape, and minimize its visual impact on the community's residential neighborhoods and scenic resources.

Development of the Upper San Diego River Improvement Project and other future industrial areas will be an important economic opportunity and source of employment for lakeside residents. Industrial development should carefully locate buildings and other

facilities to minimize disruption of views to neighboring hillsides and mountains. The Design Guidelines prescribe strong planting requirements to screen industrial sites from view, creating a park-like background of vegetation that will dominate the built facilities.

A2. Preservation of Significant Trees

2. Guidelines

Site development plans should demonstrate a diligent effort to retain as many native oak and other significant trees as possible. In addition, other existing trees should be preserved to the maximum extent practical.

b. Where Significant Trees Have Been Removed

When oaks or other significant trees must be removed, replanting with the same species is recommended. Open spaces, recreation areas, and terraces are appropriate areas for oaks.

C1. Scenic Roads

This Guideline applies to: Willow Road, Wildcat Canyon Road, Lake Jennings Park Road, Highway 67 (through Moreno Valley) and El Monte Road.

- Retain existing land forms, stream beds, mature trees, and important rock outcroppings. When possible, driveway and underground utilities should be located to avoid destruction of important natural features.

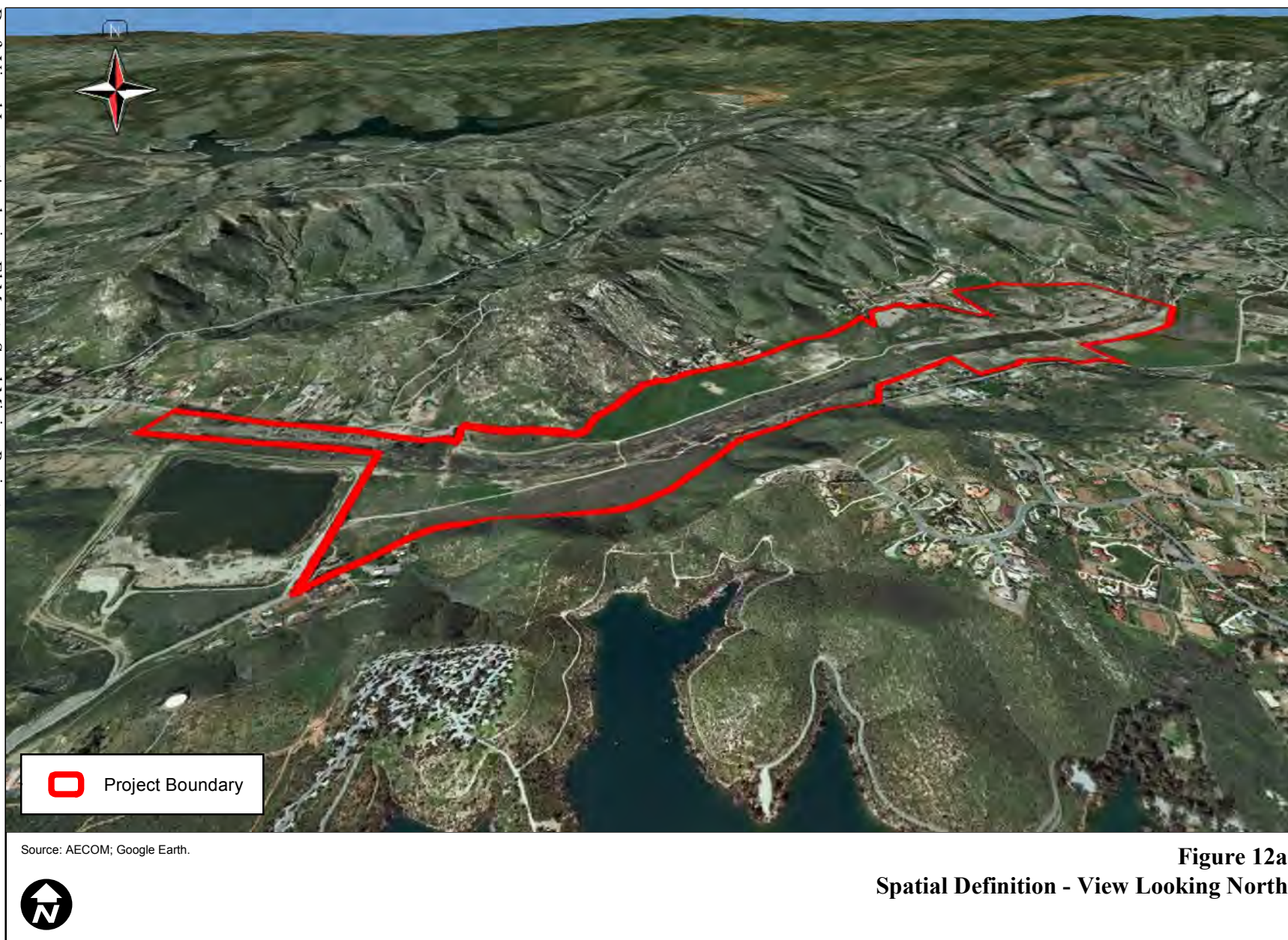
3.0 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PROJECT

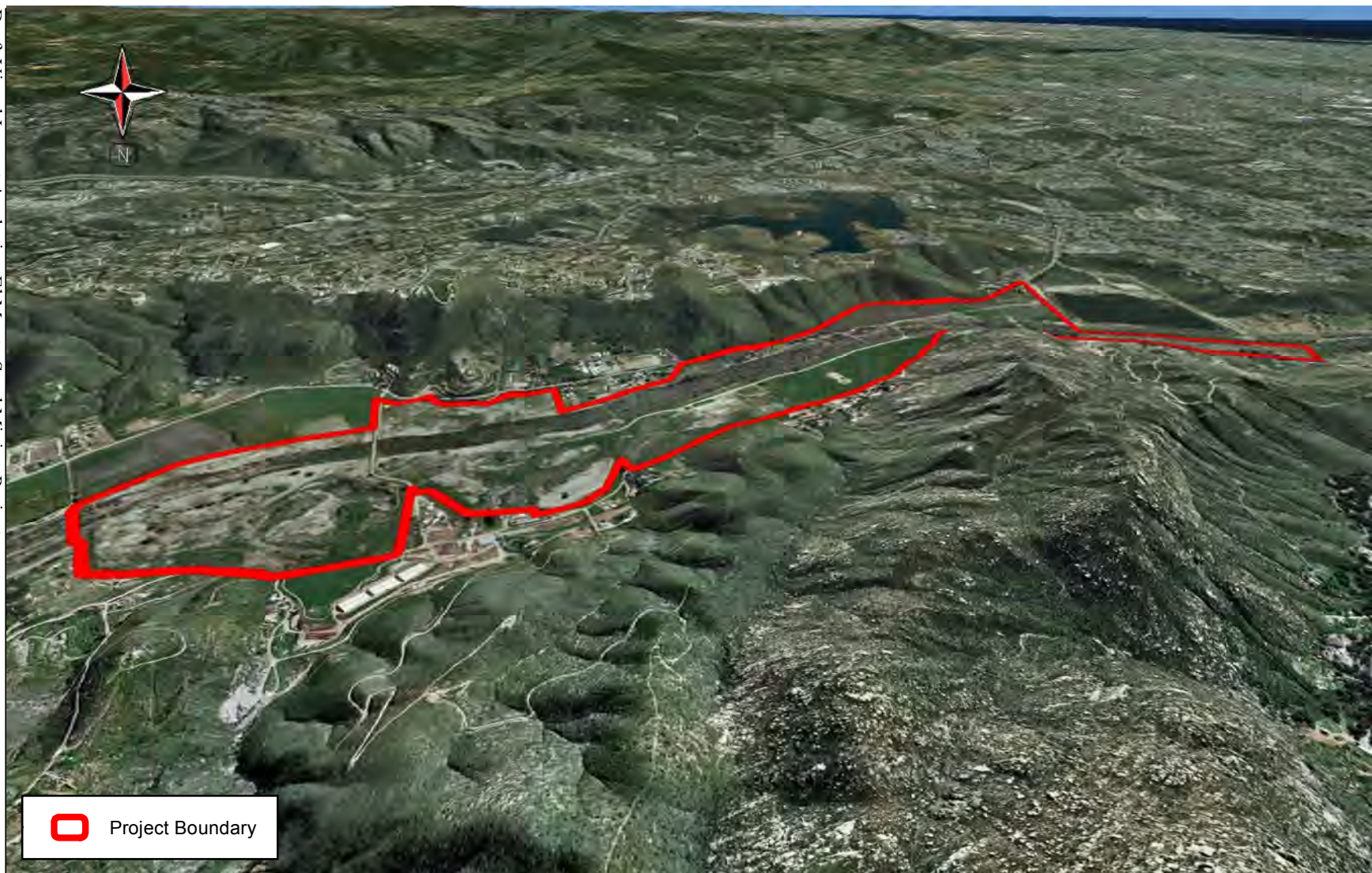
Visual impacts are relative to the visual environment in which they occur. Visual impacts can extend beyond the physical areas that result in disturbance. The regional landscape establishes the general visual environment. Specific impacts are determined by defining the visual quality of the visual character units and the project viewshed. Visual quality and the viewshed are interrelated elements occupying the same three-dimensional space, each space affecting the adjacent space. In order to evaluate the potential change, the existing character must be defined and described, which is best described in terms of Landscape Unit (LU). A LU is a definable area that contains consistent visual and perceptual characteristics.

3.1 PROJECT SETTING

El Monte Valley is a rural valley with steep slopes to the north and south. The valley begins at the eastern suburban fringe of the community of Lakeside (see Figure 12a through 12d). The parcels on which the project site is located are owned by the EL Monte Nature Preserve, LLC along the San Diego River north of El Monte Road and south of Willow Road, and between Ashwood Street on the west and Hazy Meadows Ranch Road on the east. El Monte Valley consists of approximately 1,100 acres of land situated between north and south slopes that exceed 25 percent. The proposed activities would take place on approximately 262 acres, in an area approximately 1.2 miles long and less than one-quarter mile wide. The project site is undeveloped and comprised of riparian, coastal sage scrub, and nonnative grassland habitats, as well as previously disturbed areas, including the former Sunrise Powerlink staging yard. Unpaved roads and informal trails extend across the site, which is situated on the mostly flat valley floor. Topography on the project parcels ranges from approximately 380 to 400 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) at the west end to approximately 465 to 480 feet AMSL at the east end. The slopes rimming the valley rise to approximately 850 feet AMSL in the southwest, near Lake Jennings; to approximately 3000 feet AMSL in the northeast, just northwest of El Capitan Reservoir.

The character of the area is mostly determined by the surrounding landforms, land uses, and the visual elements common to those uses, described in terms of LUs. A LU is a definable area that contains consistent visual and perceptual characteristics. Each unit can be classified as having a particular visual quality that results in a common visual experience and sensitivity to change.





Source: AECOM; Google Earth.



Figure 12b
Spatial Definition - View Looking South

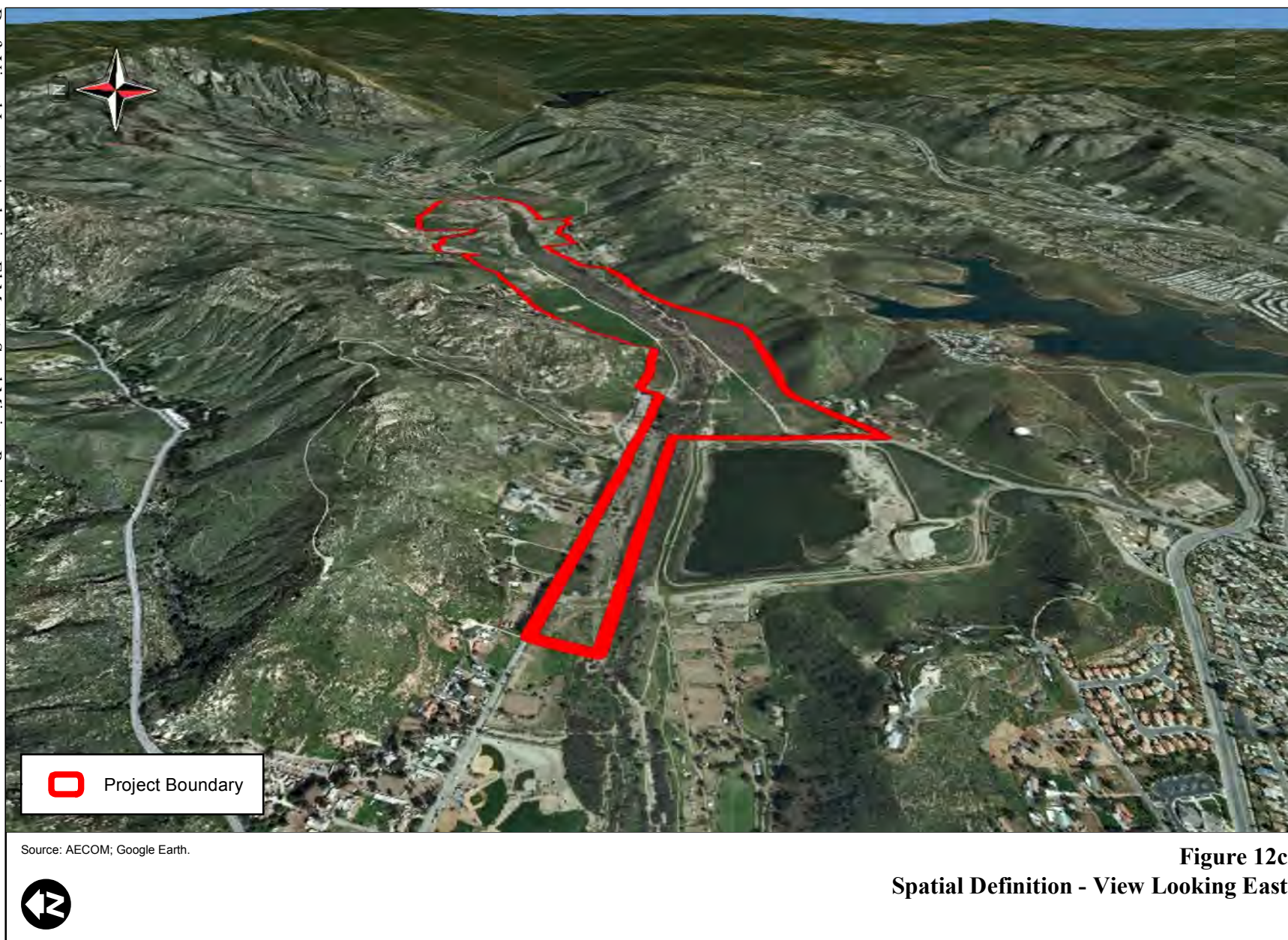
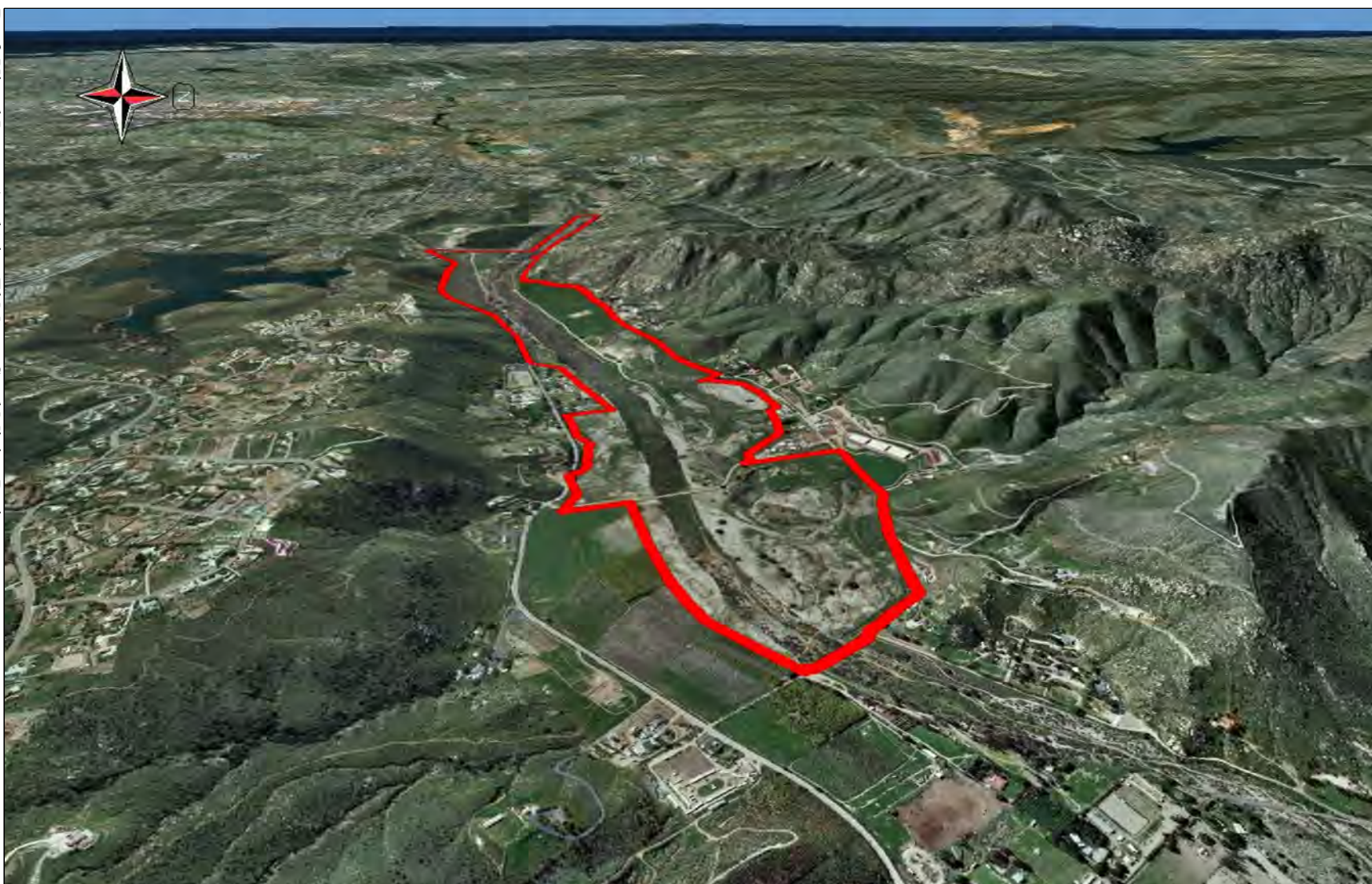


Figure 12c
Spatial Definition - View Looking East



Source: AECOM; Google Earth.



Figure 12d
Spatial Definition - View Looking West

Ten LUs were identified within the project viewshed as detailed in Section 3.3 and include:

1. Lake
2. Lowland Agriculture
3. Lowland Disturbed
4. Lowland Residential
5. Lowland Residential/Agriculture
6. Mountainous
7. Ridgeline Residential
8. Riparian River Channel
9. Suburban Developed
10. Undisturbed Canyon Slope

3.2 PROJECT VIEWSHED

The visual environment can be vast; therefore, for purposes of analyzing impacts, boundaries must be placed on it. The area within those boundaries is commonly referred to as the viewshed. A viewshed analysis helps to determine where viewers would be present. The viewshed analysis was performed to determine project visibility as far away as three miles. However, objects more than two miles away generally will not be considered visually prominent, even if these objects are large enough to be visible. Distance decreases scale and contrast that is normally perceived by changes in texture, color, and pattern.

The theoretical viewshed model was developed using Digital Elevation Models (DEM). These DEM files consist of x, y and z data (north-south, east-west and elevational data) representing an area 10 meters by 10 meters per data point. This analysis is considered a theoretical limit since it only takes into account the position of the viewer, the location of the element being viewed, and the intervening topography. It does not analyze the effects of trees, buildings, or other structures that could limit the visibility of the project elements. It also does not take into account the effects of distance on the visibility of these elements. It does, however, represent the worst-case visibility scenario of a prominent project element. In reality, intervening uses, structures, and plant materials, as well as distance, can affect the overall adversity of visual impacts.

Two viewshed analyses were run for this project. The first, shown in Figure 13, Project Phases Viewshed, is for the total project excavation and reclamation areas by phase. Analysis points were selected along the edges and in the middle of project feature locations, and were assigned an elevation (z data) based on the proposed height of the feature. The surrounding areas are shaded to indicate whether viewers can see one, two, three, or four phases of the project. The

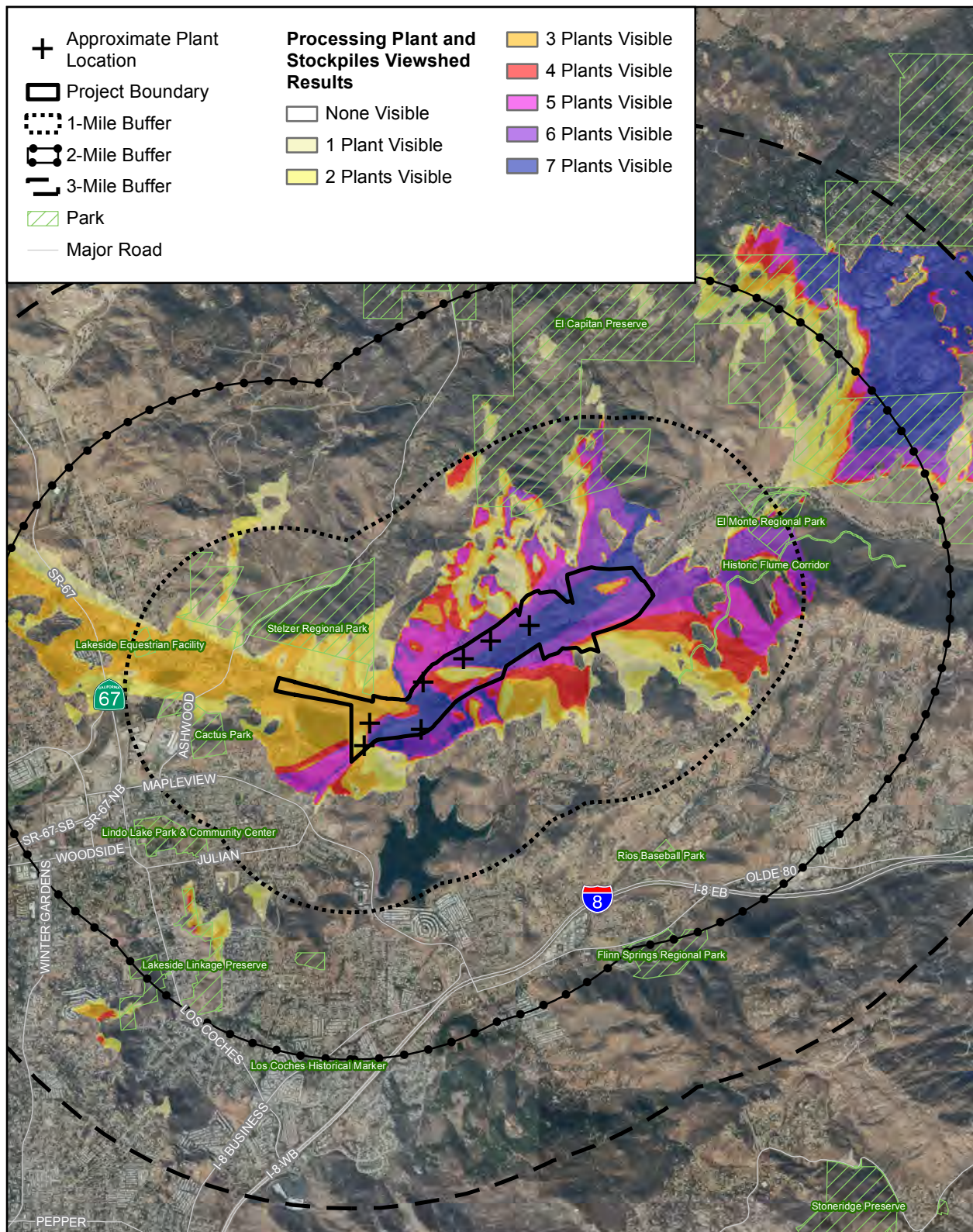
viewshed reveals that all four phases of the project would be visible from most of the immediately surrounding area within one mile of the site (purple shading) and from the hills northeast of the site within and abutting the El Capitan Preserve, up to three miles away. Two to three phases of the project site (orange and red shading) also would be visible up to three miles away west of the project site, into the Eucalyptus Hills community and from portions of Stelzer Regional Park.

The second viewshed analysis, shown in Figure 14, Temporary Project Feature Viewshed, is for the project processing plants and stockpiles. The plant would be placed near each phase of the project, starting in the east and moving westward every few years. The viewshed shows which points in the surrounding area would have processing plant locations within view. The processing plant would include a surge stockpile of up to 70 feet tall and thus has the potential to be visible. The viewshed for the processing plant locations and associated stockpiles is less extensive than the areas from which the total project excavation and reclamation would be visible. There will be only one processing plant (and its associated stockpiles) that will be relocated multiple times during the phasing of the project. Areas highlighted in purple will see all locations of the processing plant and stockpiles for the entire 12 year mining operation. These areas mostly are confined to the El Monte Valley and the higher hills within and abutting El Capitan Preserve. Some areas of local slopes within a mile that would have views of three processing plant locations (red shading), and views of one or two processing plant locations (yellow and orange shading) would be visible from the Eucalyptus Hills community to the west. These areas would likely see the third and fourth phase processing plant locations.

3.3 LANDSCAPE UNITS

A LU is typically defined by the limits of a particular type of land use, landform, vegetation, architectural character, scale, or other distinct visual characteristic with perceivable boundaries. Each LU has its own visual character and visual quality attributes. The boundaries are generally created by landforms and/or edges defined by vegetation, development, or fencing. They typically have similar form, scale, and materials as well as visual quality and character. Each of these features helps define the boundaries of each LU. LUs also represent the context in which viewer groups are present. The LU may range in size from a few acres up to several hundred acres. In certain instances, the edges between visual character units are dramatic, while in others the edges are transitional.

Each LU can be described and qualitatively analyzed by its visual quality and visual sensitivity. The LUs within three miles of the project site are shown on Figure 15. Photos A-T were taken to exhibit the existing character of the LUs. See Figure 16a through 16d for these Baseline Visual Environmental Photographs.



Source: KTU+A, 2016. SanGIS, 2016 (aerial 2014).

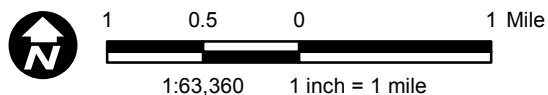
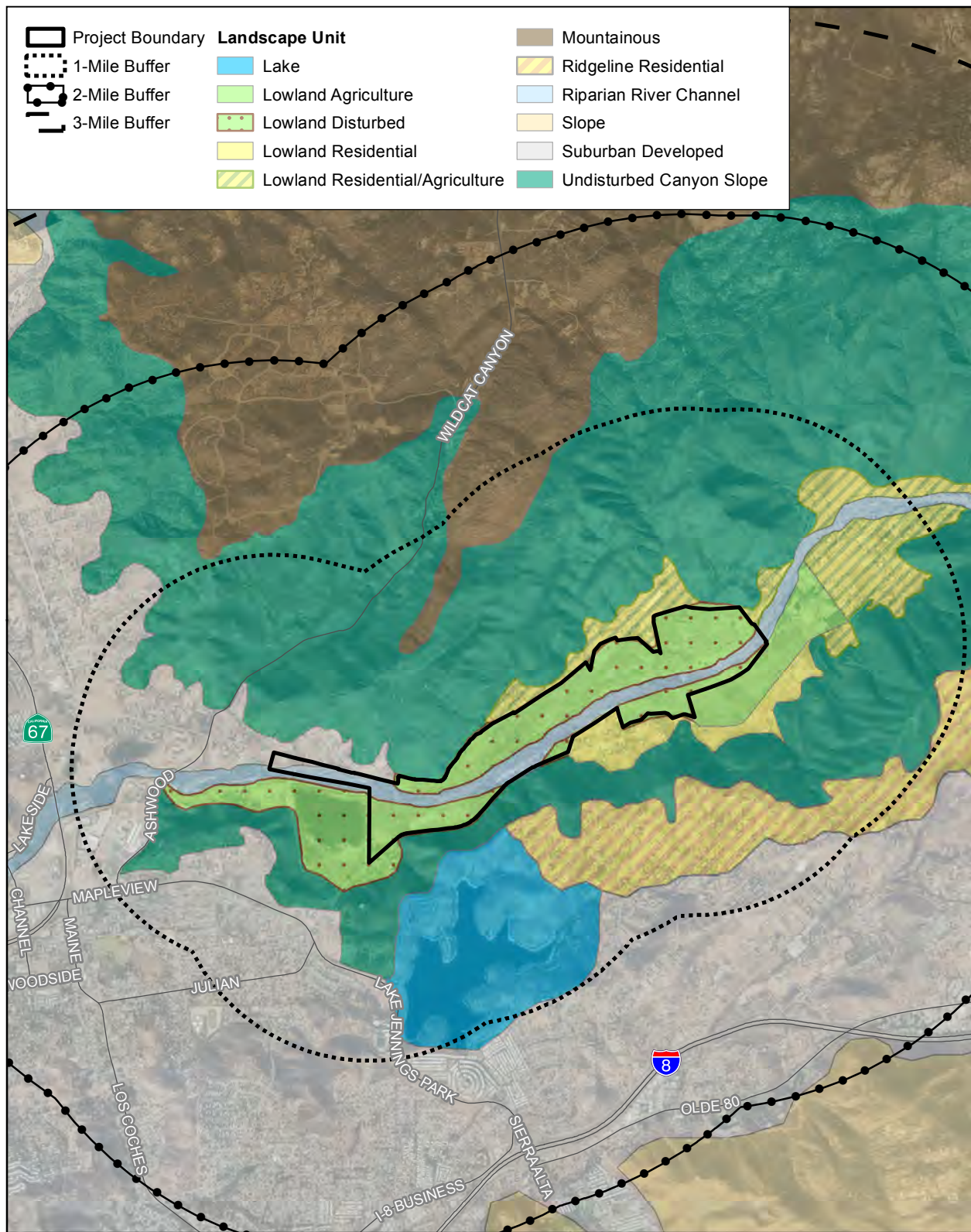


Figure 14
Mining and Reclamation
Project Features Viewshed

Draft Visual Impact Analysis - El Monte Sand Mining Project

Path: P:_6048\60480712_El_Monte_Preserve_Mining\900-CAD-GIS\920 GIS\922_Maps\Plant_Viewshed.mxd, 4/17/18 bradyd



Source: SanGIS. KTU+A.

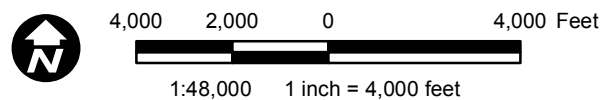


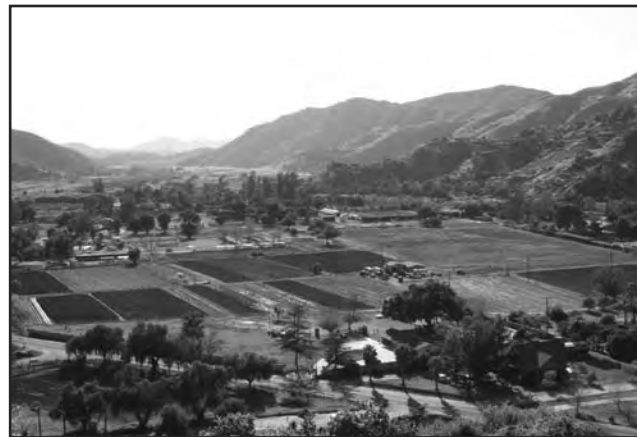
Figure 15
Landscape Units



Landscape Unit Photo A
Unit 1: Lake



Landscape Unit Photo B
Unit 1: Lake



Landscape Unit Photo C
Unit 2: Lowland Agricultural



Landscape Unit Photo D
Unit 2: Lowland Agricultural



Landscape Unit Photo E
Unit 3: Lowland Disturbed



Landscape Unit Photo F
Unit 3: Lowland Disturbed

Figure 16a
Baseline Visual Environment Photographs



Landscape Unit Photo G
Unit 4: Lowland Residential



Landscape Unit Photo H
Unit 4: Lowland Residential



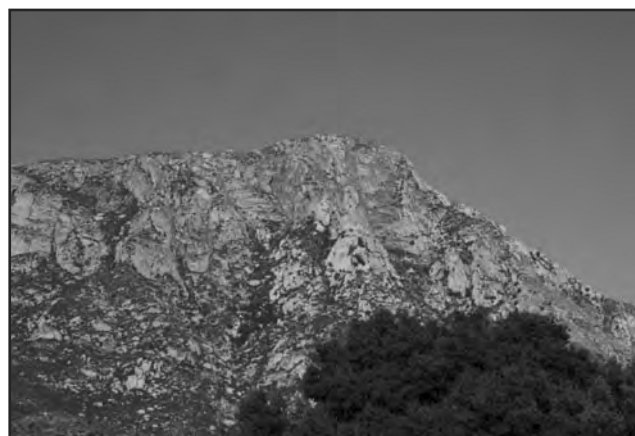
Landscape Unit Photo I
Unit 5: Lowland Residential/Agricultural



Landscape Unit Photo J
Unit 5: Lowland Residential/Agricultural



Landscape Unit Photo K
Unit 6: Mountainous



Landscape Unit Photo L
Unit 6: Mountainous

Figure 16b
Baseline Visual Environment Photographs



Landscape Unit Photo M
Unit 7: Ridgeline Residential



Landscape Unit Photo N
Unit 7: Ridgeline Residential



Landscape Unit Photo O
Unit 8: Riparian River Channel



Landscape Unit Photo P
Unit 8: Riparian River Channel



Landscape Unit Photo Q
Unit 9: Suburban Developed



Landscape Unit Photo R
Unit 9: Suburban Developed

Figure 16c
Baseline Visual Environment Photographs



Landscape Unit Photo S
Unit 10: Undisturbed Canyon Slopes



Landscape Unit Photo T
Unit 10: Undisturbed Canyon Slopes

Figure 16d
Baseline Visual Environment Photographs

1. Lake - The Lake LU includes Lake Jennings and its adjacent slopes that drain into it (photos A and B). An access road encircles the lake and the slopes are covered in chaparral and coastal sage habitats. This LU contains the valley ridge and a campground. This LU is vivid and generally intact with unifying elements and visual organization making it relatively scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery supports this ranking and the cultural modifications do not dominate the visual scene.

The visual quality of this LU is high as it not only provides a scenic view of the mountainous area north of the project but also combines a visually interesting sinuous boundary of the lake and undisturbed chaparral covered hills extending to the lakeshore. The northern portion of the LU is within the viewshed of the project and would look down over the project staging area.

2. Lowland Agriculture - This LU seen in photos C and D is adjacent to the eastern end of the project. Land is used for growing pumpkins, bamboo, row crops, and various citrus as well as used for animal husbandry. This LU is not very vivid and is not intact nor does it have unifying elements. The character is not scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery increases the overall ranking but the cultural modifications are somewhat chaotic and poorly visually organized.

The visual quality of this area is moderate. The different types of agricultural crops form repeating patterns within their defined areas but the variability makes their organization appear chaotic. There is an interesting grove of bamboo and pomegranate trees that line El Monte Road, accentuating the linear road and east west trend of the valley.

3. Lowland Disturbed - A majority of the project site, almost 80% contains land that has been previously disturbed. The majority of the project site has historically been used for agriculture or other activities; some portions of the site have been mined for sand. All these areas are currently nonnative grassland as seen in Photos E and F.

Much of this land surrounds the riparian area that bisects the middle of the project site. This LU is not very vivid and is not intact though it does have some unifying elements and visual organization. The character is not scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery increases the overall ranking but the level of natural disturbance decreases this ranking. There are very few cultural modifications and the landform is somewhat chaotic and poorly visually organized.

Although it contributes to a sense of openness within the valley and allows views of the surrounding mountains, the surface of this LU has been excavated in the past revealing chaotic landform in parts covered by nonnative grassland. There are mature oaks closer to the riparian area serving as interesting focal points that help to break up the monotonous grassland. The overall quality of the area is moderate.

4. Lowland Residential - Along the southeastern edge, adjacent to the project is an area containing approximately 39 homes (see Photos G and H). The homes are single family and mostly single story. Houses and structures on the north side of Willow Drive occur at a higher density than those on the south side. This LU is not very vivid and is not intact though it does have some unifying elements and visual organization. The character is not scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery increases the overall ranking. There are many cultural modifications that are somewhat chaotic and poorly visually organized because of the different design themes, materials, architectural treatments and site features.

The homes on the southern side are on larger parcels of land more likely to contain animal pastures. Some homes are situated on slopes but the majority are close to the valley floor. Because of its disturbed nature, the overall chaotic nature affords only a low visual quality to this LU.

5. Lowland Residential/Agriculture - This area is a mixed-use area of agriculture and single-family homes using the land for agriculture (see Photos I and J). The area is on the northeastern side of the project along Willow Road. This LU is moderately vivid and has some level of intactness with some agricultural based unifying elements and visual organization. The character is somewhat scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery increases the overall vividness. There are many cultural modifications that are somewhat chaotic, but visually organized with some agricultural design treatments such as different design themes, materials, architectural treatments and site features. This LU lies to the north of the project site. The homes are of slightly larger stature. Some homes are located higher up on the slopes following the contour of the mountains. This LU has a moderate visual quality.

6. Mountainous - This LU is comprised of land significantly higher in elevation than the valley floor north of the valley (see Photos K and L). The LU contains some trails, but access is generally limited. The mountainous area supports no housing and is located at the farthest reaches of the study area. The LU possesses numerous rocky outcrops and granitic dome features where not covered with high quality chaparral habitat. This LU is vivid and very intact with unifying elements and visual organization, making it scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery supports this ranking and the cultural modifications do not dominate the visual scene.

This area is covered by numerous rocky outcrops and granitic domes. A healthy chaparral habitat exists where soil covers the slopes. These natural features contribute to the high quality of the area.

7. *Ridgeline Residential* - This LU is comprised of the residential single- family homes that overlook El Monte Valley on the southern side of the project (see Photos M and N). Many of the homes are multistory and are of recent construction (within the last 30 years). Because of its ridgeline setting, this LU is vivid though some of the improvements and grading have degraded the overall quality and intactness of the area. The character is not scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery increases the overall ranking. There are many cultural materials, architectural treatments and site features.

Scattered residential development of varying styles and patterns provide this unit with an overall moderately high visual quality. Larger homes with substantial amounts of paved surfaces and landscaped areas create a noticeable demarcation between the natural and built environment.

8. *Riparian River Channel* - This LU bisects the project (see Photos O and P). Native riparian species such as willow, sycamore and mulefat exist within the channel. The invasive nonnative species Tamarisk is also found throughout the channel. Within the project site, non-native tamarisk scrub habitat covers approximately 90 acres of the 479.5 acre site (18%). In comparison, native riparian habitats such as southern cottonwood-willow forest and southern willow scrub cover approximately 12 acres of the site (2%). This unit is somewhat vivid and mostly intact with unifying elements and visual organization making it somewhat scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery supports this ranking and the cultural modifications do not dominate the visual scene.

The channel vegetation is greener toward the west end of the valley where the elevation is lower and groundwater presumably closer to the surface. Nonnative tamarisk is abundant throughout and detracts from the natural state. Various trails wind their way through the riverbed. The area contributes to a high visual quality although it is disturbed from past agricultural and mineral extraction activities and non-native species.

9. *Suburban Developed* - This LU is comprised of suburban single-family residential homes that comprise the more urbanized portion of Lakeside (see Photos Q and R). Construction of these homes is likely to have taken place within the past 50 years. This unit is not very vivid and is not intact, though it does have some unifying elements and visual organization. The character is not scarce in the region. Residential development of varying styles and patterns, including differing degrees of paved areas, landscaping, and other residential lot modifications influence the visual environment. The adjacent scenery somewhat increases the overall ranking; however, the overall visual quality of the suburban development within the rural residential setting of Lakeside is considered low.

10. *Undisturbed Canyon Slope* - This LU envelopes the project site with steep chaparral covered slopes (see Photos S and T). This LU combined with the mountainous LU helps to create the scenic designator within the valley parcels. This unit is vivid and very intact with unifying elements and visual organization making it scarce in the region. The adjacent scenery supports this ranking and the cultural modifications are very limited.

The high visual quality of these steep slopes helps to frame the scenic backdrop of the mountainous LU. The steep slopes draw views connecting the valley floor to the mountains.

3.3.1 Project Site Landscape Units

The project is located on the El Monte Valley floor, and is comprised of the Lowland Disturbed and Riparian River Channel LUs. The existing golf course pond excavation that would be filled by the project is adjacent to the Lowland Residential/Agricultural LU. The Lowland Disturbed and Lowland Residential/Agricultural areas have moderate visual quality and the Riparian River Channel has high visual quality.

4.0 EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES AND VIEWER RESPONSE

4.1 EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES

4.1.1 Visual Character

A viewer observes the visual environment as a whole, not one object at a time. However, the viewer's understanding of that environment is based on the visual character of objects and the relationships between them. Visual character is the order and combination of patterns that are created by visual elements in a scene. Four elements create pattern as defined below, with form being the most dominant, followed by line, color, and lastly texture.

- Form is represented by bulk, mass, size and shape. A mountain is an example of visual pattern with governing form based on bulk, mass, size and shape.
- Line is the geometric representation of a point that has been extended or the intersection of two planes. In the context of visual resources, common examples of lines include horizons, silhouettes, or a boundary between planes in the landscape.
- Color is the reflected hues (red, yellow, and blue) and value (light or dark) of the light reflected or emitted by an object.
- Texture is the apparent coarseness of the surface of various elements in the landscape.

Pattern character can best be described in terms of dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity as described below.

- Dominance occurs when a specific feature is prominently positioned, contrasted or extended to a point where the specific feature strongly influences the pattern character of a scene. An example of dominance may be a billboard or a telecommunications tower in an undeveloped area.
- Scale is the size relationship among landscape components in the visual environment. Scale results from the overall size and positioning of pattern elements and character. For example, the scale of a power plant is greater than a backup generator and as a result is a greater influence on pattern character.

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- Diversity is the frequency, variety and positioning of pattern elements. The more these pattern elements are intermixed the greater the diversity. For example, a rural town between a highway and river, surrounded by a combination of residential uses, agricultural flower operations and natural landscape would have a high level of diversity.
 - Continuity is the uninterrupted flow or transition among pattern elements. An example of pattern elements with high continuity may be extensive grasslands on rolling hills. The continuity expressed by the grasslands on rolling hills would be interrupted if manufactured cut slopes and retaining walls were installed to support an infrastructure project across the hills.

The visual character of each LU was described above in the discussion of each individual LU in Section 3.3.

4.1.2 Visual Quality

Visual quality results from the interpretation of physical character resources and features that are filtered by the viewer's perception of what is seen. These perceptions are based on a viewer's cognitive assimilation of landscape elements into a memorable landscape image, distinguishable from other landscapes within the region. Visual quality factors include:

- **Vividness** - the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in distinctive visual patterns.
- **Intactness** - the visual integrity of the natural and built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. Intactness can be present in developed urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- **Unity** - the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole. Unity frequently attests to the careful design of individual built components in the landscape.

A visual resource with a high degree of vividness, intactness, and unity will typically have a high level of visual quality. The visual quality of each LU was described above in the discussion of each individual LU in Section 3.3.

4.2 VIEWER RESPONSE

Viewer response is influenced by the quality of the existing and proposed resources and the extent to which these resources are observed.

Viewer response is determined by two elements: viewer sensitivity (which includes awareness) and viewer exposure (which includes view duration). These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the public might react to visual changes brought about by the project. Viewer response is evaluated through the different viewer groups that observe project effects. Please refer to Table 3 for the viewer response summary.

Table 3
Viewer Response Summary Table

Viewer Group	Viewer Sensitivity	Viewer Exposure		
		View Duration	Quantity of Viewers	Proximity to Project
Vehicle Occupants	High	Short duration	3,900 ADT	Foreground/ Middleground
Trail Users	High	Short – moderate duration	varies, highest use on weekend days	Foreground/ Middleground/ Background
Lake Jennings Campground Patrons	Moderate	Moderate duration	0 - 50 (13 sites)	Background
Ridgeline/Slope Residents	High	Long duration	200-800	Middleground
Valley Residents	High	Long duration	350	Foreground/ Middleground

4.2.1 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is defined both as the viewers' concern for scenic quality and the viewers' predicted response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual importance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis. Even if the existing appearance of a project site is uninspiring, local viewers may still object to projects that fall short of the community's visual goals and expectations.

All viewer groups would be highly to moderately sensitive to the project as shown in Table 2. Their sensitivity to the visual changes resulting from the project would coincide with the project phases that are visible from their location, and not all members of each group would see the same phase or phases of the project.

4.2.2 Viewer Groups

Five viewer groups are present in the project viewshed as identified in Table 2 and described below. Trail users are the only group that would have direct access to the existing project site through the existing informal trails. The other groups are in areas adjacent to the project and within three miles (the effective viewshed limit, as discussed above in Section 4.3).

Valley Residents: This group is comprised of residents of El Monte Valley and the low-lying areas west of the valley toward SR-67.

Ridgeline/Slope Residences: This group represents residences at higher elevations, particularly on the ridgeline south of El Monte Valley, in the Quail Canyon Estates community.

Vehicle Occupants: This viewer group represents persons traveling on the roadways within the viewshed, in particular El Monte and Willow Roads, but also SR 67 (for the portions within the project viewshed), Ashwood Street, and other local roadways that provide access to the neighborhoods in the area.

Trail Users: This viewer group includes trails users adjacent to and within El Monte Valley. Currently the only existing formal trails exist within Cactus County Park, El Monte County Park, and Louis Stelzer County Park.

Campground Users at Lake Jennings: The northern boundary of the public campground at Lake Jennings along Bass Road contains approximately 13 campsites that would overlook the southwestern corner of the project site.

4.2.3 Viewer Exposure

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring or estimating the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, duration of their view, speed at which the viewer moves, and position of the viewer. High viewer exposure heightens the importance of early consideration of design, art, and architecture and their roles in managing the visual resource effects of a project. Higher levels of exposure tend to increase a viewer's sensitivity. Viewer exposure is summarized in Table 2 and described below for each viewer group.

Valley Residents: Residences in El Monte Valley lie adjacent to the project site and would be in close proximity to project activity. There are approximately 121 households adjacent to El Monte Road or Willow Road on the valley floor, east of the project site. Most of these residences would have views of the first two phases of the project and the first processing plant location.

Approximately 12 residences are present off Willow Road directly north of the second phase of the project; these residences would have views of all of the project phases and processing plant locations. Approximately ten residences are located off El Monte Road about 0.4 miles east of Lake Jennings Park Road. These residences have views of up to three of the project phases, and one or two of the processing plant locations.

The approximately 12 residences off Willow Road as described above are located within 0.5 miles of the fourth phase of the project would view one or two project phases and one or two processing plant locations. The remaining residences in the project viewshed have views of one or two project phases, with only a few having views of three project phases. The project features would be visible in the foreground or middleground from these areas, however, it should be noted that existing vegetation often blocks or filters views of the valley from these locations. The viewer proximity and duration is high, and this viewer group would have a high sensitivity to change.

Ridgeline/Slope Residences: Generally, only the residences on the north edge of the mesa are able to see the valley, are within the project viewshed, and have the potential to see some or all of the project phases and processing plant locations. This viewer group also includes residents of Eucalyptus Hills approximately 2 miles west of the project as discussed in Section 4.3 above. Since these residences are farther away from the project, the project features would be smaller elements in their views. Only one or two project phases and processing plant locations would be visible from this neighborhood.

The project would be in the middleground for elevated public and private views from slopes and ridgelines. The view duration for residences is long and residential viewers have a high sensitivity to changes in the visual environment.

Vehicle Occupants: Vehicle occupants generally are residents, guests of residents, agricultural workers, and persons participating in recreation activities at El Monte County Park and El Capitan Reservoir. Year 2010 traffic counts for El Monte Road were 3,900 average daily trips (ADT). The viewer proximity is high as the roads are adjacent to the project. Viewer duration is moderate as Willow and El Monte Roads have approximately 2.5 miles within the project viewshed (any phase). The project would thus be visible for approximately 5 minutes at posted travel speeds on El Monte Road.

Willow Road is used by a smaller volume of cars as it serves as an access road to 66 residences without the traffic generated by El Monte County Park, El Capitan Reservoir and agricultural jobs that El Monte Road carries. There are no traffic counts available for Willow Road east of Ashwood Street/Wildcat Canyon Road. Willow Road is unpaved from approximately one mile

east of Ashwood Street, for the rest of its length (approximately three miles). The unpaved nature of the road slows traffic and lengthens the duration of views available. At 15 miles per hour this would give vehicle occupants approximately 10 minutes of viewing time.

An approximately one-mile portion of SR-67 north of Willow Road would have views of one phase of the project. The estimated ADT in 2012 for this portion of SR-67 was 18,451 vehicles. SR-67 in this location is a signalized two-lane road with a wide median and is bordered by trees and structures. At estimated speeds of 45 MPH, viewers would traverse the one mile within the viewshed in approximately 1.3 minutes. SR-67 is generally oriented north-south, with the project site located approximately 1.75 miles to the east. The vegetation and structures bordering the roadway generally block views of El Monte Valley from SR-76, but if visible, project features would be in the middleground.

The duration of views along the roadways is moderate (on El Monte Road) to long (on Willow Road). The number of viewers is potentially high, particularly on El Monte Road. Each of these roadways has a scenic designation in the San Diego County General Plan Conservation Element. These factors combine to indicate that vehicle occupants have a high sensitivity to change.

Trail Users: The formal trail within Cactus County Park is within the project viewshed, but potential views of the project site are blocked by vegetation. The trail that traverses the slope at the west end of El Monte County Park to the Blossom Valley neighborhood is approximately two miles east of the project site, and has direct views westward over the valley and the project site. The viewer duration from this trail is moderate, as a trail user would traverse the trail with the project site visible for approximately two miles at a typical hiking pace of three miles per hour. The proximity to the project is moderate as the project resides in the middleground to background view of the trail users.

Few of the trails within Louis Stelzer County Park would have views of the El Monte Valley, except for two viewpoints on the southern peaks of the park. These points have direct views into the valley and over the project site 0.5 to 0.75 miles away. The view duration from these points would be moderate to high.

In addition, El Monte Preserve, LLC currently allows the public access to existing trails that run parallel to the river through the project site, although these are not formal or designated trails. If the trails are accessible during the active mining operations period (12 years), portions of the trail adjacent to construction would experience a high sensitivity to change. There would be access to the trails in the valley area during construction though some temporary trail realignments will be necessary during certain phases of the project.

Trail users generally are in the area to experience the visual environment and enjoy the views available. Overall, their sensitivity to changes in the surrounding visual environment is expected to be high.

Proposed trails in the El Monte Valley portion of Lakeside and near or on the District parcels would generally correspond to existing informal trails and existing road alignments. As such, the trail users can be expected to have similar view exposure and sensitivity as existing trail users.

Campground Users at Lake Jennings: The visibility of the valley is intermittent from the campground as existing trees generally screen the campsites and provide privacy. The project feature would be in the middleground of views from this area. The duration of their views varies with the occupation time of the campsite; it would be longer than hikers on local trails, but not as long as residential views. Overall, their view duration would be moderate. While mostly focusing activities on Lake Jennings, campers are still likely to be seeking a scenic experience. As such, they would have a high sensitivity to changes in the visual environment.

4.2.4 Viewer Awareness

A viewer's response can be affected by the degree to which he/she is receptive to the visual details, character, and quality of the surround landscape, often described as the viewer's awareness. A viewer's ability to perceive the landscape can be affected by his/her activity. Different viewer groups often exhibit varied levels of viewer awareness that is influenced by proximity to the project or how a particular group will be affected by the project outcome.

Valley Residents: Viewer awareness for valley residents would typically be high, especially for those with foreground views as they have long-term exposure to the site and would be observing the view from their homes. Additionally, residential viewers are accustomed to the current visual environment of the project site.

Ridgeline/Slope Residences: Viewer awareness for ridgeline/slope residents would typically be high, as they have long-term exposure to the site and would be observing the view from their homes. Additionally, residential viewers are accustomed to the current visual environment of the project site.

Vehicle Occupants: Viewer awareness for vehicle occupants would range from high to moderate. High awareness would be expected from those motorists driving to enjoy the scenic views while moderate awareness would be associated with those drivers commuting or passing through the area with purposes other than scenic enjoyment.

Trail Users: Viewer awareness for trail users would be high as trail recreationalists would typically expect to experience the visual environment and enjoy the views available.

Campground Users at Lake Jennings: Viewer awareness for campground users would be high to moderate as the focus of the campground experience is mostly centered on Lake Jennings. However, the project site is part of the overall scenic viewshed in the middleground and campers are likely to be seeking an overall scenic experience.