

3.10 Aesthetics

The following discussion is based on the Visual/Community Character Analysis for the Otay Hills Project prepared by HELIX (2018a). This report is included as Appendix L to this Draft EIR.

3.10.1 Regulatory Framework

This section provides an overview of State and local regulations and ordinances applicable to the Project.

No specific State highway regulations pertain as the Project is not located along these features and would not place Project-related outdoor advertising along them. California's Scenic Highway Program is intended to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. The California Scenic Highway System includes a list of highways that are either eligible for designation as scenic highways or have been so designated. The only highways in the Project vicinity are I-905 and SR 125. Neither is designated as a scenic highway, nor have they been determined to be eligible for designation.

Visual resources also may be subject to local plans and policies that ensure adequate consideration is given to preserving and/or enhancing the visual qualities of an area. These policies aid in evaluation of the planning agency/community perception of visual qualities within an area, as well as providing guidance as to whether Proposed Project modifications would be visually compatible with County and/or community goals. The County RPO does not apply to the Project and is therefore not addressed in this section. Related discussion relative to steepness of topographic features, however, is referenced in Section 3.10.2, *Environmental Setting*, for context. The Proposed Project is subject to the following guidelines and policies.

3.10.1.1 *County of San Diego General Plan – Conservation and Open Space Element*

The Conservation and Open Space (COS) Element of the County's General Plan provides direction for future growth and development in the County with respect to conservation, management, and utilization of natural resources; protection and preservation of open space; and the provision of park and recreational resources. It provides guidance with respect to the protection of visual resources, including scenic corridors, geographically extensive scenic viewsheds, and dark skies within the natural environment. Four COS Element Policies are applicable to the Proposed Project; addressing scenic resources, ridgelines/hillsides, dark skies, and scenic highways.

Preservation of Scenic Resources

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 landmarks.

COS-11.2: *Scenic Resource Connections.* Promote the connection of regionally significant land 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 to 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

Preservation of Ridgelines and Hillside

COS-12.1: *Hillside and Ridgeline Development Density*. Protect undeveloped ridgelines and steep hillsides by maintaining semi-rural or rural designations on these areas.

COS-12.2: *Development Location on Ridges*. Require development to preserve the physical features by being located down and away from ridgelines so that structures are not silhouetted against the sky.

Dark Skies

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.

Scenic Highways

Based on the County COS Element, the closest County designated scenic highway to the Project is Otay Lakes Road, located approximately 4.0 miles northerly of the Project site as the bird flies. In the 2007 County Scenic Highways List, one third priority scenic roadway is located approximately 2.0 miles west of the Proposed Project, Harvest Road and Otay Freeway (from the U.S.-Mexico international border to Proctor Valley Road). The southern portion of Harvest Road is aligned between industrial developments, while the northern portion is unpaved and parallels the eastern edge of an industrial development. The alignment north of Otay Mesa Road has been removed from the EOMSP Subarea 1 Circulation Element. Per the 2011 General Plan COS element, at this time, Harvest Road is not designated as scenic.

3.10.1.2 East Otay Mesa Specific Plan

The EOMSP, which overlays the project site, includes site planning, landscaping and architectural standards, designed to create industrial and business parks with strong identities, distinction, and quality. The following EOMSP Urban Design Policies are applicable to the Proposed Project:

Policy UD-1: Encourage the preservation and enhancement of visually prominent land forms and areas of special scenic beauty, particularly the San Ysidro Mountain foothills and the valley walls of Johnson and O’Neal Canyons (County dated April 22, 2015: 54).

Policy UD-6: On-site landscaping along public streets should be compatible and complementary with the streetscape design of the public right-of-way (County 2015: 55).

3.10.1.3 Resource Conservation Area

The Otay Subregional Plan identifies Otay Mountain as a Resource Conservation Area (RCA) that is significant as a scenic landmark, and for biological habitat. Figure 3.10-1 shows the RCA boundary relative to the Project. As shown, the western extent of the RCA crosses area within the Project boundary that would be part of the OHCA. The active mining area shown on the figure is a minimum of 850 feet away and down slope at the closest point (at the very northeast portion of the Project footprint). The designation in the Otay Subregional Plan states:

Otay Mountain–Lower Otay Lake – This area is of statewide significance. It includes Lower Otay Reservoir, rare and endangered plants on the lower mesa areas, and Otay Mountain. Otay Mountain contains the world’s largest population of the rare Tecate cypress (*Cupressus forbesii*) and numerous other rare and endangered plants, such as Gander’s pitcher sage (*Lepechinia gander*), Otay manzanita (*Arctostaphylos otayensis*), Orcutt’s brodiaea (*Brodiaea orcuttii*), Dunn’s mariposa lily (*Calochortus dunnii*), and dense reed grass (*Calamagrostis densa*). The Mexican fremontia (*Fremontodenron mexicanum*) may occur on the slopes of Otay Mountain in areas adjacent to the Otay Ranch/San Ysidro Planning Area #17 where the only known U.S. population of this species is located. Otay Mountain is predominantly under the BLM ownership. California Natural Area Coordinating Council lists it as a Significant Natural Area. Vernal pools and their attendant rare species occur on the mesas around the Lower Otay Reservoir. Otay Mountain is also a major scenic landmark for the region.

The scenic landmark portion of the RCA (Otay Mountain) is located approximately 3.5 miles northeast of the proposed Project impact footprint (see Subchapter 4.10 of this EIR).

3.10.1.4 Dark Sky Ordinance

In addition to the policies regarding dark skies contained in the COS Element of the General Plan, the County of San Diego Outdoor Lighting Ordinance (Division 9, sections 59.101-59.115 of the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance) seeks to control undesirable light rays emitted into the night sky in order to reduce detrimental effects on astronomical research. Zone A, defined as the area within a 15-mile radius centered on the Palomar Observatory and within a 15-mile radius centered on the Mount Laguna Observatory, has specific light emission restrictions. The unincorporated

portions of San Diego County not within Zone A fall within Zone B, are subject to lesser restrictions. Outdoor lighting, such as security or parking lot lighting must be fully shielded within Zone B.

The Project site is located more than 15 miles from the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories, and is therefore within Outdoor Lighting Ordinance Zone B.

3.10.2 Environmental Setting

3.10.2.1 Topography

The Project site is located within the western foothills of the San Ysidro Mountains. The topography east of the Project site is varied and includes many steep slopes, canyons and peaks. The peaks within the San Ysidro Mountain range vary in height from 1,020 feet AMSL, within the Project site, to 3,566 feet AMSL at Otay Mountain, approximately 3.5 miles northeast of the Project site. Several canyons are located between these peaks; most of the canyons in the vicinity of the Project site drain into the Otay River Valley, to the north and west of the Project site, while some drain southward into the Tijuana River.

The topography surrounding the Project site to the west is relatively flat, with some gentle variations between 600 feet AMSL at the western edge of the Project impact footprint, and 500 feet AMSL approximately 3.0 miles west of the Project at Brown Field Airport. The most significant topographic variation in the vicinity occurs within the canyon drainages (Johnson and O'Neal canyons) northwest of the Project site that borders the plateaus. The topography in the vicinity of these canyons drops from 700 feet AMSL (at the County East Mesa Detention Facility) and 600 feet AMSL (at the Donovan Correctional Facility) to approximately 300 feet AMSL within the Otay River Valley. The valley walls of Johnson and O'Neal canyons and the San Ysidro Mountain foothills are visually prominent land forms and areas of scenic beauty discussed in the EOMSP (1994, amended through 2015). The Urban Design Policies of the EOMSP include the preservation of these land forms, which are visible from circulation element roads, including Alta Road and (Old) Otay Mesa Road. (Reference Figure 3.10-7, below, for the most encompassing figure showing topography of the Project site and the surrounding areas.)

Several peaks and canyons, including one large canyon, exist within the Project site boundaries. One large canyon flows via an unnamed drainage westward through the Project site, bisecting the northern half of the Project impact footprint and turning southward just beyond the Project boundary. This canyon has a minimum elevation of approximately 650 feet AMSL within the Project site. A second canyon, located in the southeastern portion of the Project impact footprint, contains the lowest elevation of the 105-acre impact footprint, approximately 620 feet AMSL. The slopes of this canyon rise to the highest point within the Project impact footprint, at 820 feet AMSL. A neighboring peak to the east is the highest point within the Project site, rising to approximately 1,020 feet AMSL. These peaks are part of the San Ysidro Mountains bordering the Project impact footprint to the north and east.

The County's RPO provides development controls for unique resources within the County deemed to be fragile, irreplaceable and vital to the general welfare of the County's residents. An element of the ordinance focuses on the preservation and protection of the County's unique topography.

The RPO defines protected steep slope lands as “all lands having a slope with natural gradient of 25 percent or greater and a minimum rise of 50 feet, unless said land has been substantially disturbed by previous legal grading.” The Project is exempt from the RPO, but information regarding on-site slopes meeting the specified standards of slope and rise is provided here for context as the steepest slopes contribute to viewshed elements. Approximately 22 acres, or 21 percent, of the Project impact footprint consists of slopes of 25 percent or higher and having a minimum rise of 50 feet. Less than an acre (total) of slopes on the site is greater than 50 percent (1:2), and these areas are small and scattered among the slopes near the eastern Project impact footprint boundary. The topography of the site overall is gentle; there are no abrupt changes of grade (such as a cliff or incised creek). Therefore, the areas with slopes greater than 25 percent (1:4) are not highly distinguishable, particularly from public viewpoints such as the points from which the photographs were taken west of the Project impact footprint. Refer to Figure 3.1-2 for a map of the slopes on site; areas shown in white or yellow are less than 25 percent gradient, while areas in orange or red are steeper than 25 percent gradient.

3.10.2.2 Existing Land Uses

Figure 1-2 illustrates the land uses within the Project site and the surrounding area. The immediate setting of the Project site mainly consists of undeveloped land and industrial uses. The closest development to the Project site consists of the power plant and batch plant located immediately west of the impact footprint. The land adjacent to the remainder of the impact footprint is either graded and vacant or undeveloped. The area between the Calpine power plant (Calpine Energy Center) and Vulcan Materials batch plant has been graded and is currently vacant. The remaining undeveloped lands are covered with low-growing grasses, while some scattered trees, near the topographic low spots and bordering the power plant property, provide dark green accents within the views of this area.

Areas immediately south of the Project consist of undeveloped land and farther to the south are industrial portions of Tijuana, Mexico. Starting approximately 0.5 mile west and southwest of the Project site and spreading westward, are industrial developments consisting of large buildings and automobile and/or equipment yards. Two prison facilities, the R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility and the County East Mesa Detention Facility, are located approximately 1.5 miles north of the Project impact footprint. Two airports, Brown Field and Tijuana International Airport are in the vicinity; Brown Field is a general aviation airport in the City of San Diego approximately 3 miles west of the Project impact footprint, and Tijuana International Airport is in Tijuana, Mexico, approximately 2.5 miles to the southwest. The buildings making up the various industrial and (excluding towers) prison developments in the area are boxy, white, three-stories or less in height with few windows and are surrounded by surface parking lots. A few trees are planted within and around the parking lots; however, the buildings, automobiles and other vehicles are visually prominent within these areas. Undeveloped lots scattered between the various facilities generally support low-growing grassy plants that are brown most of the year, and green in the spring.

The international border between the U.S. and Mexico is located approximately 0.5 mile south of the Project impact footprint. The border is visible from slightly more elevated points in the Project vicinity as a line beyond which industrial and residential portions of Tijuana are visible.

The San Ysidro Mountains lie north and east of the Project impact footprint. The mountains and foothills are largely undeveloped. A few roads, such as the Otay Mountain Truck Trail and some dirt trails cross these mountains, which are largely overlaid by a San Diego County RCA for Biologically Sensitive lands. The Otay Mountain Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area and the BLM Otay Mountain Wilderness Area, National Wilderness Preservation System land also overlay areas east of the Project impact footprint. The Otay Mountain Truck Trail provides access to the BLM Otay Mountain Wilderness Area, portions of which are located within one mile from the Project impact footprint to the east. Portions of the mountains and their foothills are shown in each of the figures provided in this section.

Area maps were reviewed to identify public recreation areas located within the immediate vicinity of the Project. Besides the trails already mentioned, the closest mapped facilities include the Lower Otay County Park and the Otay County Open Space Preserve approximately within 2.5 miles to the north of the Project impact footprint. These two San Diego County facilities are located downslope, within the Otay River Valley.

The scattered rural residential uses nearby consist of five private residential farms/ranches located within approximately two miles of the Project impact footprint. The properties include facilities for animals such as horses and sheep, multiple usable and derelict vehicles, as well as homes and scattered outbuildings. The closest to the Project impact footprint are three residences located approximately 1.3 miles west on Old Otay Mesa Road. Another home is located off Alta Road via Kuebler Ranch Road (the former Kuebler residential ranch is currently a commercial establishment, R&F Metal, Inc.). The fifth house is located between the two prison facilities, accessed via a dirt road off of Alta Road before Alta Road reaches the County East Mesa Detention facility. Relatively small in scale and separated by large areas of open space, these uses do not form dominant elements within the landscape. The structural uses contribute some level of variation in pattern elements (line and color) through such common features as rows of trees edging a roadway or a small copse of trees associated with the dwelling that can be notable in this otherwise very horizontal and xeric landscape.

The Project site is currently undeveloped, with the exception of a few dirt roads that transect it. Due to the Project's location near the international border, the site is frequently patrolled by the U.S. Border Patrol. A 120-foot SDG&E easement with power lines extends diagonally through the Project site. In addition to the power line right-of-way, four SDG&E utility towers are clustered at the northern extent of the Project property. A 20-foot wide natural gas pipeline easement that was formerly within or parallel to the noted SDG&E easement has been relocated, and now extends generally parallel to and within the western and southern boundaries.

3.10.2.3 On-site Vegetation

The Project site contains Diegan coastal sage scrub (including disturbed) and non-native grassland. Other types of on-site native vegetation, present in smaller areas within the Project site, include native grassland, cismontane alkali marsh, chaparral scrub, chamise chaparral and southern mixed chaparral. Areas of disturbed habitat and developed land (mainly dirt roads) also occur within the site. The Diegan coastal sage scrub existing within the flatter portion of the Project site is visually similar to and not easily distinguishable from the vegetation on the surrounding hillsides. This plant community is composed of generally low-growing shrubs and grasses that are tan, brown,

rust red, and light green most of the year. Orange, yellow and pink flowers are visible in the spring; although the flowers individually are small, when flowering en masse the flower colors create visible patches that shade a hillside. Some larger and darker colored shrubs such as toyon and laurel sumac also grow within the coastal sage scrub area; these shrubs, sparsely scattered among the vegetation on site and in the surrounding hillsides, create darker patches on the northern facing slopes. The non-native grassland contains mainly low-growing grasses that are brown most of the year and produce yellow and white flowers and green foliage in the spring.

3.10.3 Representative and Typical Views

Figure 3.10-1, *Photograph Locations/Viewshed Map*, identifies the location of each photograph taken to illustrate general Project setting and views of the Project site and surrounding area and also places the location relative to County RCA and the proposed OHCA. Two types of views provide context for the existing conditions discussion. The figures start with two views from generally undeveloped areas to the east. Considered representative views, they illustrate types of views that may be obtained from areas east of the Project. Views from the east are generally restricted based on existing topographic variation (see the areas highlighted in green versus those that are not on Figure 3.10-1). They are not considered “typical” because they are viewed only by individuals accessing this backcountry area (largely prohibited from access from points west) and therefore have relatively small viewership. Similarly, the view from the old Kuebler Ranch property (taken from the driveway, the closest location to the Project with the most open view toward it) depicts a potential view that illustrates general principles of visibility but is not considered “typical” due to low viewership. Finally, an unlikely but potential future view is addressed through a view east and south of a street terminus and “looking behind” an existing facility to an area that is not open to the public. Again, it is not considered “typical” as it is not accessible and the number of individuals who could see the view is considered very low. The remainder of the views are generally located westerly of the site, along public paved roads, and are identified as “typical” given their ease of access and relatively large number of viewers along these roads. These latter views include the areas with the most open views toward the Project based on topography.

Together, these views illustrate the existing visual character of the eastern mesa. These photographs illustrate the dominance, scale, diversity and continuity, as well as the varying amounts of vividness and unity of the area surrounding the Project and establish the baseline visual environment against which the Proposed Project can be evaluated.

View 1 (Figure 3.10-2, *Representative Views A*) was taken from the dirt access road abutting the east side of future Project mining area. It represents a future closest view to the Project mining area from the east. The general area currently contains a number of dirt roads and paths. As discussed in Subchapter 4.10, this area is expected to be less accessible if the Project is approved, as a substantial amount of acreage east of the Project impact footprint (approximately 305 acres) would be protected and managed as the OHCA. This panorama represents a view currently available to SDG&E employees, Border Patrol staff, and a limited number of off-road vehicle users (as access to this area is generally posted for no trespass and/or gated off from points west). As such, it is not considered “typical” but is illustrative of the type of expansive views from the San Ysidro foothills and mountains. These views become even broader and more expansive (although less distinct) as the viewer is sited further to the east.

The view shows existing on-site land uses and the land uses north and west of the site. To the north, the abutting Calpine power plant at the northern extent of the Project is prominent in this view; the Donovan prison facility is visible to the right (northwest) of the power plant. Local roads are also visible, as is the nearby auto auction yard and other more distant development in Otay Mesa. The SDG&E power lines that edge developable portions of the Project are visible, as is the U.S.-Mexico international border, at the left (southern) edge of the view, beyond which the industrial and residential areas of Tijuana are visible.

View 2 (Figure 3.10-2) was taken from the Otay Mountain Truck Trail. When this photograph was taken in 2005, access into the hills could be gained from Alta Road. In 2017, access from the west from south of Otay Mesa Road to approximately the George F. Bailey Detention Center is either gated, posted for “No Trespass,” or both, and low levels of traffic may be even lower (access is available from the north from Jamul Valley from the Pio Pico RV Resort approximately three miles east of Otay Lakes [as the bird flies] and from Dulzura approximately nine miles to the east [again, as the bird flies]). As a result, the photograph has not been updated. It has been retained for context, however, as it is still indicative of views that could pertain to a small number of users approaching the mesa from the east and continuing this far to the west.

As shown on Figure 3.10-1, most of the mountainous area to the north and east of the viewpoint does not have visibility toward the site. View 2 represents the most encompassing view from the road to the site. The photograph illustrates a portion of the Project proposed for permanent biological preserve (the hillside to the left of the picture and the draw down toward the mesa, or basically the bottom third and left-hand two-thirds of the photograph), just north of the Project’s easternmost extent into the hills. View 2 shows the dense development of Tijuana, Mexico, and the grading associated with primarily industrial and commercial development west of the Project impact footprint. The views include the hills within/adjacent to the Project impact footprint as a dominant element in the foreground view. Long-reaching views over the flat mesa areas to the west are illustrated. The location of the neighboring power plant is visible (refer to View 1 for power plant scale), as are other industrial developments in the surrounding area. The automobiles in the nearby auction yard are reflective and draw the viewer’s attention. Straight lines created by area roadways also are visible in the background.

View 3 (Figure 3.10-3, *Representative Views B*) illustrates existing uses in the Project vicinity. This view is from the former Kuebler ranch, currently containing a commercial/industrial establishment and Alta Café restaurant. The view is from the access road to the restaurant, just south of the parking lot. This view shows the Otay Mesa Detention Center just south of a graded pad, the Calpine power plant beyond that on the left side of the photograph, and the Pio Pico Energy Center on the right side of the photograph. Mesa area south of these areas shows as generally developed in this photograph and from this vantage point. Project property is located east of the Calpine facility.

View 4 (Figure 3.10-3) is taken from the eastern terminus of Calzada de la Fuente and the northeast edge of the Calpine power plant fence line, looking south-southwest onto Project property. The Calpine fence is visible, as are three transmission tower bases near the viewer. The SDG&E access road is visible in the center of the photograph. Access to the Project property or open space beyond is not available from this viewpoint; it is both gated and posted for no access.

View 5 (Figure 3.10-4, *Typical Views A*) looks directly east at the Pio Pico Energy Center at the southwest corner of Calzada de la Fuente and Alta Road. The photograph looks east along Calzada de la Fuente. This street ends by dead ending into Project property. Existing uses accessed from this road include the Pio Pico Energy Center and the Calpine power plant both on the south side of the road, and the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) Otay Mesa Detention Facility on the north side of the road.

View 6 (Figure 3.10-4) was taken directly across Alta Road from the Pio Pico facility. Looking southwesterly over the fully fenced parcel, it has been graded, has a graveled surface, substantial drainage improvements along its northern boundary, lighting and a Quonset hut installed on site. Lacking structures as a whole, the impression is industrial in nature. Looking away from the site, this view does not include Project property, but illustrates a typical type of lot on the mesa.

View 7 (Figure 3.10-5, *Typical Views B*) illustrates a view of the Project site from Paseo de la Fuente and De la Fuente Court, approximately 0.15 mile east of Alta Road and 0.25 mile north of Otay Mesa Road. It represents a typical view of the site from the west, and from the road accessing adjacent industrial areas to the north and east. The Calpine power plant, Vulcan Materials plant, and associated roadways and landscaping are the dominant features within this view. Paseo de la Fuente and De la Fuente Court are lined with sidewalks, low-lying, flowering shrubs and street trees (e.g., Mexican fan palms), which provide visual contrast to the earth-toned facilities and the San Ysidro Mountains in the background.

View 8 (Figure 3.10-5) depicts a view looking east from the intersection of Paseo de la Fuente and Access road, which provides access to the Vulcan Materials plant and graded pad on the north side of the road, approximately 0.4 mile east of Alta Road and 0.15 mile north of Otay Mesa Road. The mix of industrial/modified uses and open space on this part of the mesa is clear. The Vulcan Materials plant is clearly visible along the right side of this view. Again, Access Road, sidewalks and landscaping are dominant in the foreground, while the foothills and San Ysidro Mountains draw the eye easterly and up. The highest mountains from this viewpoint are skylined in the distance and the undeveloped nature of those high features is notable in contrast with the hardscape and somewhat industrial elements visible in this view. The tall transmission towers and their right-of-way that bisects the closest hill approximately mid-point are also visible.

View 9 (Figure 3.10-3, *Typical Views C*) is a view into the Vulcan Materials Company plant located just west of the Project. Taken looking southeasterly from Access Road, this photograph shows the geometric towers, concrete processing equipment, and some storage structures of the facility, which range in color from light yellow to muted gray, as well as the low surrounding walls and streetscape. The lowest foothills of the San Ysidro Mountains within the Proposed Project site are visible east of the batch plant.

View 10 (Figure 3.10-6, *Typical Views C*) is from the intersection of Alta Road and the terminus of Otay Mesa Road, approximately 0.5 mile to the west of the Project impact footprint. This represents clear eastward views of the visual environment of the site and the surrounding area. Undeveloped land, transected by dirt roads and vegetated by grasses and low-lying shrubs, is visible in the foreground of the view. The closest points of the Project site are also the lowest. The San Ysidro Mountains provide a background for eastward views. This picture provides the most direct and clear views toward the entirety of the Project site relative to existing views. Traffic

volumes at this intersection are approximately 9,065 ADT. As noted, Otay Mesa Road ends at this point, and Alta Road provides northerly access to the commercial businesses at Kuebler Ranch, the prison facilities, and the power plant. The bulk of the traffic at this intersection, therefore, presumably consists of workers at the power plants, Vulcan materials plant, and prison and detention facilities and other businesses; visitors to the prisons; and patrons of the restaurant at Kuebler Ranch (when open). These motorists are not highly sensitive viewers, as they generally would not be recreational viewers, although their expectations of a scenic eastward view and knowledge of the area may be high due to their familiarity with the area.

3.10.4 Project Viewshed

A viewshed is an analytical tool to aid in identification of views that could be affected by a project site. A viewshed is comprised of all the surface areas visible from an observer's viewpoint. The limits of a viewshed are defined as the visual limits of the views located from the Proposed Project. The viewshed also includes the locations of viewers likely to be affected by visual changes brought about by Project features. Due to the generally flat and gently varying topography west of the Project impact footprint, views within approximately two miles of the Project impact footprint were included in the Project viewshed analysis. The viewshed for the Project, determined using these criteria, is shown in Figure 3.10-1. The viewshed was delineated through computer-aided and field-verified analysis of the topography on site and in the surrounding area.

As shown on Figure 3.10-1, the Project would be visible mainly from points west and south. Otay Mesa Road is aligned such that drivers traveling eastward have a view of the most visible hill in the southern portion of the Project as well as the higher slopes behind. Otay Mesa Road is classified as a Major Road with bike lanes from its eastern junction with Otay Mesa Road/SR 905 to its terminus. An average of approximately 8,784 vehicles travel Otay Mesa Road on the four segments east of SR 125, with most drivers that travel to its eastern terminus at Alta Road turning left onto Alta Road (Darnell and Associates 2017). On opening day in 2019 with Project Phases 1 and 2 both assumed, ADT would be expected to be approximately 12,067 vehicles on Otay Mesa Road east of Enrico Fermi Drive (Darnell and Associates 2017). Drivers east of SR 125 would have more open views of the Project site. However, several factors reduce the likelihood that the Project would comprise clear or long-term visual elements for these viewers. These features include: (1) the volume of traffic on Otay Mesa Road that demands the driver's attention; (2) distance from the Project, which visually mutes individual features of the landscape, and results in the Project site being only one element in the larger regional landscape; and (3) rolling topography that occasionally blocks views from Otay Mesa Road/SR 905 both eastward and westward, and northward and southward. Drivers stopping at the end of Otay Mesa Road to turn left and continue on Alta Road (the closest north-south trending paved road adjacent to most mesa development), on the other hand, would have a clear northeasterly view to the Project, which at its closest point is approximately 0.5 mile northeast of the end of Otay Mesa Road (see View 10, 3.10-6).

The topographic conditions noted above limit visibility to the Project impact footprint from the undeveloped areas of the San Ysidro Mountains north and east of the Project. The Otay Mountain Truck Trail, a gravel-paved road sometimes used for recreational purposes, transects the San Ysidro Mountains in a generally east-west direction, and has a section located northeast of the Project site; visibility of the Project site from this road is discussed below. The Project site is not visible from locally significant canyons; slopes along the southern edge of the Otay River Valley

and the slopes of Johnson and O'Neal canyons block views to the Project site from these areas. Areas north of the Otay River with potential to view the Project site due to elevation are more than seven miles away, muting visibility of any Project features.

3.10.5 Existing Visual Character

3.10.5.1 Visual Character

Visual character is descriptive and non-evaluative, which means it is based on defined attributes that are neither good nor bad in themselves. A change in visual character cannot be described as having good or bad attributes until it is compared with the viewer response to that change. If there is public preference for the established visual character of a regional landscape and a resistance to or a preference for a project that would change or contrast with that character, then changes in the visual character can be evaluated.

The existing visual environment surrounding the Project site is topographically composed of a large, flat mesa area and the foothills and ridgelines of the San Ysidro Mountains. The large, flat mesa areas transition via the lower foothills into the San Ysidro Mountains. The hills and canyons among which the Project site is located provide some continuity between the mesa and the mountains. Due to the vast scale of these dominant geographical features, the Project site appears relatively small, encompassing a portion of the lowest hills at the base of the mountains and the edge of the mesa, particularly when viewed from the mesa west of the site.

Although an overall view encompassing the dominant topographic features generally dwarfs the on-ground elements such as vegetation, buildings, roads, and vehicles, these smaller details create diversity in the area, providing variety in form, color, texture and line. For example, the dirt roads and paths transecting the hills within the Project site and surrounding hillsides show some of the red, white and light brown coloring of the underlying soil, but are not dominant elements. The texture of the land is predominantly smooth, although some smaller scale scattered patches of rough rock outcroppings are visible. The color and texture of the soil, however, generally is hidden beneath vegetative cover. In the overall view, the forms of the existing vegetation are indistinct and not dominant but tend to blend together. Some patches of round, asymmetrical, short shrubs are scattered on the hillsides, interspersed with amorphous low-growing plants; low-growing grasses cover the flat, lower undeveloped areas of the mesa and foothills. Some taller, more densely spaced vegetation is growing near the Calpine power plant and in other patches on the mesa near the Project site.

Heavy industrial uses are sited immediately west of the Proposed Project, as shown on Figure 1-2. The Calpine power plant on the lot abutting the northwestern portion of the Project site is dominated by large, geometric structures between approximately 26 and 130 feet high. These structures include exhaust stacks, water storage tanks, buildings, and ancillary equipment that are generally earth toned or metallic in color. The heat recovery steam generator(s) (HRSGs) associated with Calpine are 160 feet in height. An approximately nine-foot-tall earth-toned fence surrounds the power plant site. Although smaller in scale than the topography to the east, the power plant nonetheless is a dominant element in any views toward the Project site, due to the relatively large vertical scale of the power plant structures and their clearly engineered nature (see View 1

[Figure 3.10-2], View 7 [Figure 3.10-5], and View 10 [Figure 3.10-6]). West of this is the smaller Pio Pico Energy Center, with similar but less dominant features (see View 5, Figure 3.10-4).

Southwest of the Project impact footprint is the Vulcan Materials plant (shown in Views 8 and 9, Figures 3.10-5 and -6), which has separate concrete and asphalt components on the site. The batching components within the Vulcan facility are structurally similar to the power plant structures, comprised of geometric towers, concrete processing equipment, and storage structures that range in color from yellow to muted gray. The equipment and structures are located within the center of the site, while the periphery is graveled and/or earthen to facilitate earth-moving vehicles. The only structures existing on the Project site are the tall SDG&E power lines with complex, geometric latticework. These structures are regularly spaced, providing a sparse but even and ordered texture. The lines within them are straight and are mostly vertical, with some horizontal and diagonal elements within the latticework providing a complex texture. These structures are dark and metallic but are not a dominant feature in the view.

These facilities add a dominant diverse note to an otherwise open view. The verticality of the power plant towers and structure massing, as well as uniform streetscaping in an area otherwise “natural” in habitat, are notably different in form, line and color from the hillsides.

The industrial areas further west also support street-trees and other landscaping. There is no dominant vegetation visible among the vegetation or between vegetative types, rather the lines within the vegetation are broken, diffused, simple, soft, amorphous and diverse.

The vegetation provides the dominant color in views of the mesa and mountains, and mostly includes tans, browns, and yellows for most of the year, and gray-green with some areas of color in the spring time or following rain. The vegetation on the slopes of the mountains transitions to taller, darker shrubs. Some smaller-scale patches of green, including very dark green, are also visible, particularly within the more formalized landscaping on developed properties, such as near the power plant. The muted colors of the on-site vegetation are light, and generally continuous with the browns and tans of the vegetation in the natural hillsides and the lighter tans of the grassy flat areas of the mesa.

The industrial buildings dispersed across the flat portions of the mesa are interspersed with a large number and variety of vehicles, particularly within the auto auction yard. The industrial buildings on the mesa generally are low (less than three stories high), sprawling buildings surrounded by parking lots. Landscape planting and streetscape trees provide some dark green color that offsets the mostly white, gray, and neutral colored buildings. The natural vegetation in these areas is visually unobtrusive and has been replaced by industrial development and expansive graded areas where industrial development is proposed (see Views 3 and 6 on Figures 3.10-3 and 3.10-4, respectively).

3.10.5.2 Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness and unity present in the viewshed. This approach to evaluating visual quality can help identify specific methods for mitigating adverse impacts that may occur as a result of a Project. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality can be defined as follows:

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

The undeveloped areas within and surrounding the Project site have high visual unity, due to the visual coherence of the limited visual components (e.g., the low-growing vegetation). When combined with the structures and landscaping immediately abutting industrial facilities, however, high levels of unity and intactness are lost. The power plants and Vulcan batch plant provide vivid visual notes that vary from the natural landscape in color, scale and line. Their presence tends to emphasize the industrial lines and color of the transmission line route crossing the property where both are in the same view.

The visual unity of the industrial areas further west of the site is moderately high; although the buildings generally adhere to the local design guidelines and therefore are visually similar to each other, the trees and landscaped areas, where present, contrast with the buildings, parking lots and vehicles.

These developed areas are not designed to integrate with the grassland areas, nor the mountains, and where the developed and undeveloped areas converge at the border of the Project site, the components visually contrast with each other, and diversity is higher. The coherence of these components, and therefore the visual unity, of the area is low to moderately low, depending on the viewer's location and which of the above elements are in his view.

The undeveloped areas in the vicinity generally exhibit moderate visual continuity, with moderate topographic diversity as the flat mesa areas transition into the foothills and canyons of the San Ysidro Mountains to the east with gradual changes in scale. Dirt roads and trails crossing the area can be highly visible. Some trees and shrubs are present, and tend to highlight the rolling, monotone nature of the grassy areas. Accordingly, there is moderate variation in line, form, color or texture. The mountains have high visual intactness; they are free from buildings or other developed aspects that would otherwise distract from their visual dominance. The power lines that extend through the Project site, as well as most other structures noted above, are tall when in the foreground of a view, but visually dwarfed by the dominant hills from most vantage points within the viewshed. The industrial uses west of Alta Road, though visually composed of diverse elements, are also highly intact; Otay Mesa has design guidelines that regulate the look and character of the buildings and landscape treatments. Though directly bordering each other, the distinct change from undeveloped to developed visual environments tends to heighten the visually intact character of each within itself. Overall, a moderate to moderately high level of intactness is assessed.

The expansive undeveloped grassland areas can be memorable as open space at the base of the San Ysidro Mountains. The San Ysidro Mountains and foothills are visually dominant and memorable.

In contrast, the developed areas have low visual vividness; excluding the notable forms of the power plants, the buildings are neither unique nor memorable, and taken together they do not comprise a distinctive space. Generally, the openness of the landscape allows a viewer in many portions of the viewshed to observe these disparate elements at the same time. The visual combination of the low vividness of the developed areas, the moderate vividness of the grasslands, and the high vividness of the abutting mountain range results in a moderate level of vividness for the Project site.

Taken together, the low to moderately low unity, moderate to moderately high intactness, and moderate level of vividness, combine to suggest that the Project site has moderate visual quality.

3.10.6 Viewer Response

Viewer response is composed of two elements: viewer sensitivity and viewer exposure. These elements combine to form a method of predicting how the public might react to visual changes brought about by Project implementation.

Viewer sensitivity is defined both as the viewers' concern for scenic quality and the viewers' response to change in the visual resources that make up the view. Local values and goals may confer visual significance on landscape components and areas that would otherwise appear unexceptional in a visual resource analysis. For the Proposed Project, viewer sensitivity has been identified based on the analysts' experience in similar settings and County planning documents (i.e., General Plan and EOMSP).

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring the number of viewers exposed to the resource change, type of viewer activity, duration of the view, the speed at which the viewer moves, and position of the viewer.

A viewer's response also is affected by the degree to which he/she is receptive to the visual details, character, and quality of the surround landscape. A viewer's ability to perceive the landscape is affected by his/her activity. A viewer on vacation in San Diego County would probably take pleasure in looking at the landscape, and an individual may be strongly attached to the view from his home, but a local County resident commuting to work may not "register" those same visual resources on a daily basis.

3.10.6.1 Viewer Groups and Sensitivity, Exposure and Awareness

Motorists

Existing viewers of the Proposed Project site/vicinity are mainly motorists on local streets and workers and visitors to local businesses, industrial operations, and nearby correctional/detention facilities. The existing and projected numbers of motorists on local roadway segments near the Project site are detailed in the Project's Traffic Impact Study (Darnell & Associates, Inc. 2017). The most traveled roadways within the Project viewshed include the east-west trending Otay Mesa Road and Siempre Viva Road, and the north-south trending Alta Road. Generally, the traffic volumes are lower on Otay Mesa Road and Siempre Viva Road near the Project site than along segments further west. Existing roadways such as Enrico Fermi Drive, Sanyo Avenue and Airway Road, located southeast of the Project site, are lesser traveled roads. Specific to roads with views

toward the Project, the segment of Otay Mesa Road between Enrico Fermi Drive and Alta Road, the segment of Alta Road between Calzada de la Fuente and Otay Mesa Road, and Calzada de la Fuente, carry ADT of up to approximately 9,065, 7,913, and 1,196 respectively (Darnell & Associates, Inc. 2017).

Excluding the few residents driving toward their homes, or few recreational motorists driving toward the Otay Mountain Truck Trail (see discussion below for both viewer groups), motorists accessing the automobile/equipment yards, prisons, detention center, mining area, or construction projects in the vicinity are expected to be focused on getting to their destinations rather than driving these roads for aesthetic purposes. Especially for those driving to access their regular place of employment, viewers would already be conditioned to expect construction activities and large-scale ground disturbance as part of their existing daily view. Sensitivity to an additional construction project is anticipated to be relatively low.

Motorists' *sensitivity* overall is mixed. Motorists on roadways within the Project vicinity are likely to be regular visitors to the area with their attention primarily focused on their respective destinations. While motorists may be appreciative of the views available from these roadways – particularly to the east where views of the mountains are more pronounced – they generally are not seeking a recreational experience or scenic views while using these roadways and their sensitivity would be low to moderate. Recreational motorists on the Otay Mountain Truck Trail would have moderate to high sensitivity, as they are expected to be generally more sensitive to modifications to the existing setting, particularly any change from a more to less “natural” experience. Border patrol agents or maintenance workers along the SDG&E transmission facilities, while focused on the access road (and potentially) the views from area dirt roadways, are not considered as having the same sensitivity as recreational motorists. Accordingly, sensitivity of existing viewers in the area is moderate to moderately high.

The *exposure* of existing motorists on local roadways depends on the roadway on which they are traveling, and in which direction. For example, motorists on roadways closest to the Project site, including Paseo de la Fuente, Alta Road, Enrico Fermi Drive and the eastern extent of Otay Mesa Road, potentially have high exposure when in the viewshed, on segments where easterly views are not obscured by existing structures, and when driving with views toward the Project; their exposure is moderately high. Existing local roadways southwest of the Project site extend between buildings and developed lots and provide few views of the undeveloped areas within and near the Project impact footprint; motorists on these roads have low exposure to the Project.

Although drivers passing through the area are expected to note Project-related changes to the existing visual environment, their primary focus is expected to be on speed of travel, interaction with other drivers on the road, and reaching their destination. This, combined with both the relatively short duration of exposure time and the number of competing visual elements in the expansive viewshed, is expected to lessen the importance of specific view elements for this group of viewers. Speed and traffic conditions would comprise an element of distraction from passenger views as well, but it generally would be less than for the driver. In these cases, passengers within the vehicle could be more focused on and have a greater awareness of the surrounding viewscape. The *awareness* of motorists' on local roadways would be moderate.

Motorists using the Otay Mountain Truck Trail also would have moderate awareness of views that include the Project. While they may be aware of the available views, unless stopped at an overlook point they presumably would be focused on the rugged roadway. The reader is referred to additional discussion below under Recreationalists.

Recreationalists

There are no public parks in the vicinity of the Project site. The closest mapped recreational parks include the Lower Otay Lakes County Park, located approximately 2.3 miles northwest of the Project impact footprint, and the Otay County Open Space Preserve, located less than one mile northeast of the Project impact footprint. These two San Diego County facilities are located within the Otay River Valley. Due to their distance from the Project site and intervening topography, these canyons do not provide views to the Project.

Panoramic views of Otay Mesa are available from parts of Otay Mountain Truck Trail. The Otay Mountain Truck Trail is a graded, gravel-paved roadway used mainly by U.S. Border Patrol agents, Mountain bikers, and off-road vehicle motorists also use this road. It provides access to and across the BLM land neighboring the Project impact footprint and the wildlife conservation area at Otay Mountain, designated as federally protected Wilderness Area. Recreational users of this road (motorists, bicyclists and hikers) have high *sensitivity*, as they generally are seeking a scenic recreational experience. As a result, they are expected to be sensitive to Proposed Project modifications to the existing setting, as well as, potentially, any change from a more to less “natural” experience within their sight lines.

While the speed of travel of recreationalists on the Otay Mountain Truck Trail often is slow, necessitated by the unpaved and winding condition of the road, viewer *exposure* from this roadway is low, due to the low number of users, the intervening topography which blocks many potential views to the Project, and the few overlook areas available on the roadway.

Hikers and bicyclists using the Otay Mountain Truck Trail would have moderate *awareness* of the surrounding area and the available views, including those that encompass the Project. These recreationalists would have a longer duration of time to view the surrounding area than motorists; however, because the surrounding area is a mix of undeveloped and developing areas with obvious large-scale construction activities, hikers and bicyclists also may not be highly aware of changes to the existing environment.

A multi-purpose trail is located along the north side of Calzada de la Fuente, turning north along the property boundary of the CCA Otay Mesa Detention Center northwest of the Project. Pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists may use the trail, although a sidewalk is present along Calzada de la Fuente. These viewers, though low in number, could have a higher sensitivity to the visual environment, as they could be seeking a recreational experience. Nonetheless, such viewers, when present, are expected to be focused on the open, undeveloped areas north and east of the Project site. They would not be expected to look southerly for open space recreational views due to the presence of the existing power plant. As depicted on the EOMSP Land Use Plan, the trail heads northerly from Calzada de la Fuente to O’Neal Canyon, located at lower elevations than the mesa hills, and dropping down into the Otay River Valley to the northwest.

Similarly, dirt roads used primarily by off-road vehicle drivers leading toward Johnson Canyon are located over one mile west of the Alta Road/Calzada de la Fuente intersection (in the vicinity of the Harvest Road and Lone Star Road intersection). No formal trail is located here, and user numbers are unknown, but expected to be low. Their focus (besides vehicle management) would be expected to be on descent into Johnson Canyon, away (and downslope) from the Proposed Project site. For vehicles exiting the canyon, these viewers would have a broad viewscape incorporating numerous built elements, including structures closer to them, as well as the intervening major industrial visual element of the power plants. Sensitivity of these potential viewers to the site, therefore, also would be low. Potential use of these tracks is not addressed in further detail.

Residents

As discussed above, several private residences are located within two miles of the Project impact footprint. Residential viewers are usually sensitive to changes in views from their homes as they are very familiar with these views and have the potential to view them for long periods.

Residential viewers are expected to have moderately high *sensitivity*, due to their familiarity with the area and their concern for the composition of the view from their homes. The highly varied nature of the surrounding environment surrounding these residences, composed of both undeveloped natural areas and dominant industrial areas between the site and these residential viewers, would reduce residential viewers' sensitivity to change.

Residents are expected to be extremely aware of changes associated with Proposed Project improvements. Additionally, since the surrounding area is a mix of developed and undeveloped areas, residential viewers may not have a high expectation for extensive views of undeveloped or highly vivid areas that would attract prolonged attention. Thus residents' *awareness* is moderately high.

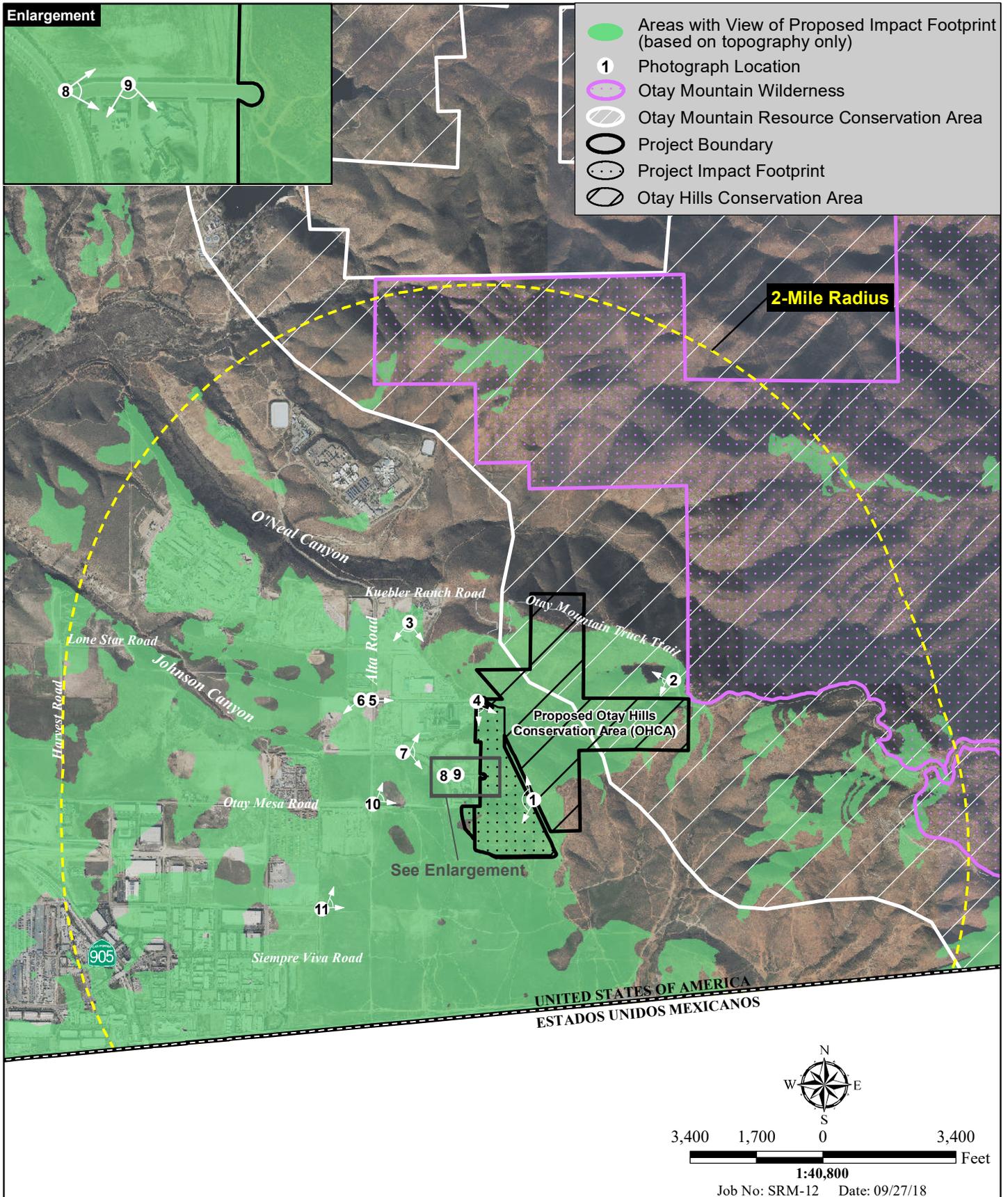
While the group of residents within the Project viewshed is small, these viewers have high *exposure* to views of the surrounding area due to their long-term, stationary views and would be aware of changes in their vicinity. Each of the residential properties within two miles of the Project impact footprint, however, would have obscured views toward the site that are either partially or entirely blocked by small hills, buildings, and/or vegetation.

Based on the EOMSP Land Use Plan, a small number of potential future residential viewers may be located immediately north and south of the Project (and ultimately on rehabilitated Project area) in area identified for Rural Residential uses on the EOMSP Land Use Plan. As such, it could be expected that a small number of potential future residential viewers could be located in the area identified. As shown on Figure 2-1, *Proposed Specific Plan Amendment*, however, the Project would re-designate parcels within the impact footprint to a Mixed Industrial category, eliminating potential for residential lots following reclamation in this industrial part of the County. Other areas would be re-designated Conservation/Limited Use. In the northern area, additional land located between the Project and the existing detention center was granted in open space to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife in 2009, effectively eliminating potential for large-lot residential within the EOMSP area in this location. This area is also under the G Designator overlay zone, which applies Sensitive Resource Area regulations to further protect sensitive resources. In the

south there are two small portions of future Rural Residential identified in locales immediately south of the Proposed Project as well as east of a future U.S. Port of Entry near the border. Both of the areas are bordered on the east by identified Landfill Initiative and are located within Landfill Buffer Overlay. No homes are currently located in these areas, and no further discussion is provided under existing conditions.

Other Private Viewers

Views may be possible from the industrial facilities within Otay Mesa, especially from buildings and lots on the eastern edge of the developed areas. However, few of these buildings have windows, and views from these areas generally would be industrial in nature, including parking lots and sparse landscaping in the foreground. The viewers in this area are not considered sensitive and are not further included as a viewer group in this analysis.



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Photograph Locations/Viewshed Map

OTAY HILLS EIR

Figure 3.10-1



View 1: View westward from Project slopes. (2017)



View 2: View westward from Otay Mountain Truck Trail. (2005)



View 3: View southward toward construction/grading in Project vicinity from parking access road to lot of Alta Cafe (old Kuebler Ranch). (2017)



View 4: View southerly along Calpine fence line from eastern terminus of Calzada de la Fuente. (2017)

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Representative Views B

OTAY HILLS EIR

Figure 3.10-3



View 5: Looking due east along Calzada de la Fuente and at Pio Pico Energy Center from Alta Road. (2017)



View 6: View southwesterly of lot west of Pio Pico Energy Center on Alta Road. (2017)

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Typical Views A

OTAY HILLS EIR

Figure 3.10-4



View 7: Looking southeasterly along Paseo de la Fuente from intersection with De la Fuente Court to Calpine Otay Power Plant and San Ysidro foothills/mountains. (2017)



View 8: Looking easterly along Access Road at intersection. (2017)

Typical Views B

OTAY HILLS EIR

Figure 3.10-5



View 9: View of Vulcan Materials plant from adjacent Access Road, looking southeasterly. (2017)



View 10: View northeast toward San Ysidro foothills/mountains from the eastern terminus of Otay Mesa Road at Alta Road. (2011; unchanged from Calpine to south end of photo in 2017)

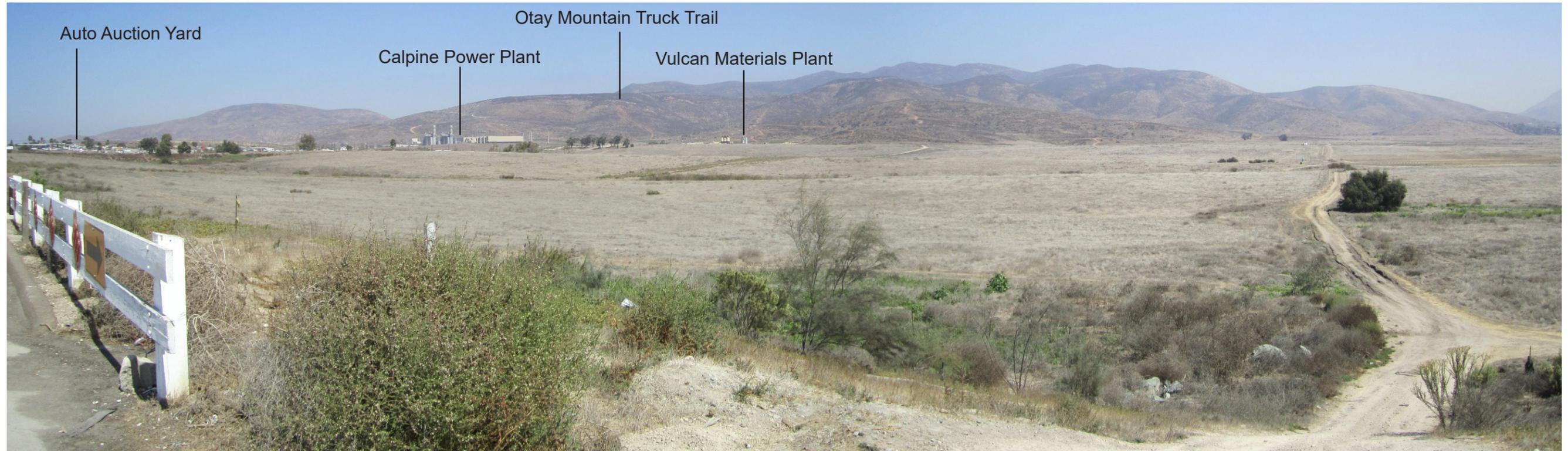
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Typical Views C

OTAY HILLS EIR

Figure 3.10-6

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View 11: View northeast toward the Project and San Ysidro foothills/mountains from the eastern terminus of Airway Road. (2011; unchanged from Calpine Power Plant to south end of photo in 2017)

Typical Views D

OTAY HILLS EIR

Figure 3.10-7