COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE AND REPORT FORMAT AND CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

VISUAL RESOURCES

LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP

Department of Planning and Land Use
Department of Public Works

July 30, 2007

APPROVAL

I hereby certify that these **Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources** are a part of the County of San Diego, Land Use and Environment Group's Guidelines for Determining Significance and Technical Report Format and Content Requirements and were considered by the Director of Planning and Land Use, in coordination with the Director of Public Works on the 30th day of July, 2007.

ERIC GIBSON
Interim Director of Planning and Land Use

JOHN SNYDER
Director of Public Works

I hereby certify that these **Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources** are a part of the County of San Diego, Land Use and Environment Group's Guidelines for Determining Significance and have hereby been approved by the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (DCAO) of the Land Use and Environment Group on the 30th day of July, 2007. The Director of Planning and Land Use is authorized to approve revisions to these Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources except any revisions to the Guidelines for Determining Significance presented in Section 4.0 must be approved by the DCAO.

Approved, July 30, 2007

CHANDRA WALLAR
Deputy CAO

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

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EXPLANATION

These Guidelines for Determining Significance for Visual Resources and information presented herein shall be used by County staff for the review of discretionary projects and environmental documents pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). These Guidelines present a range of quantitative, qualitative, and performance levels for particular environmental effects. Normally, (in the absence of substantial evidence to the contrary), non-compliance with a particular standard stated in these Guidelines will mean the project will result in a significant effect, whereas compliance will normally mean the effect will be determined to be "less than significant." Section 15064(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines states:

> "The determination whether a project may have a significant effect on the environment calls for careful judgment on the part of the public agency involved, based to the extent possible on factual and scientific data. An ironclad definition of significant effect is not always possible because the significance of an activity may vary with the setting."

The intent of these Guidelines is to provide a consistent, objective and predictable evaluation of significant effects. These Guidelines are not binding on any decision-maker and do not substitute for the use of independent judgment to determine significance or the evaluation of evidence in the record. The County reserves the right to modify these Guidelines in the event of scientific discovery or alterations in factual data that may alter the common application of a Guideline.

LIST OF PREPARERS AND TECHNICAL REVIEWERS

County of San Diego

Bobbie Stephenson, DPLU, Primary Author
Jason Giffen, DPLU, Contributing Author
Eric Gibson, DPLU, Contributing Author
Terri Powers, DPLU, Illustrations
Joe Farace, DPLU, Technical Reviewer

Technical Review Panel

Lisa Capper, HELIX Environmental Planning, Technical Review and Contributing Author
R. Brad Lewis, ASLA, HELIX Environmental Planning, Contributing Author
Danielle Putnam, RBF, Technical Review

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List of Acronyms

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
DTAC	Departmental Transportation Advisory Committee
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHS	National Highway System
SHC	Streets and Highways Code
USC	United States Code
USFS	United States Forest Service

INTRODUCTION

This document provides guidance for evaluating adverse environmental effects that a proposed project may have to visual resources. Specifically, this document addresses the following questions listed in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, Appendix G, I. Aesthetics:

a) Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

b) Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?

c) Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

Appendix G also requires evaluation of a proposed project that would create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. This issue is addressed in the County's "Guidelines for Determining Significance for Dark Skies and Glare."

In the context of CEQA, aesthetics addresses scenic vistas, scenic resources, and visual character and quality. Determining what is considered to be a visual resource worth consideration under CEQA is an interpretative process that can lead to wide-ranging analyses. Therefore, standardizing the analysis of project impacts on visual resources is useful to ensure both comparable results between projects and defensible conclusions regarding impacts and their significance. This document provides the standards for evaluating impacts to visual resources in unincorporated San Diego County. The companion document, "Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources Analysis" describes how to evaluate impacts to visual resources.

The visual assessments most widely used in the U.S., and those consulted to prepare these County guidelines, are:

- US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects;[1]

- US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS) Visual Management System; and

- US Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) modified Visual Management System.

The concepts in them are very similar and have analogous approaches to determining the significance of impacts to visual resources.

[1] This document is used by Caltrans.

1.0 GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

Visual resource analysis generally involves the identification of visual resources (natural and built) within the visual landscape and the overall evaluation of the quality and character of that landscape. Evaluating aesthetics and visual resources of a proposed project involves both objective and subjective elements.

The visual landscape can be examined as if it were a landscape painting within a frame, with the frame being the edges of the view. On the objective side, the components of the landscape and the relationships of the elements within it can be described (Figure 1). The landscape can be dissected and its parts (the patterns, lines, shapes, forms, etc.) and their relationships to each other, as well as what is seen as a whole from a particular vantage point, can be described. However, a viewer perceives the visual landscape and its elements subjectively, and determines whether it is scenic or not based on his/her background, culture, and personal experiences. Therefore, the consideration of various viewer groups must be considered in the evaluation.

Existing visual resources define a region's character and identity. Scenic vistas, scenic resources, and community character and quality are resources that are valued in San Diego County. They are important to the quality of life enjoyed here and to tourism, one of the leading industries.

Aesthetic value is not limited to open space and rural lands, but can also be held in historic structures and districts, architectural design, streetscapes and manufactured landscapes. These valuable aesthetic elements of the human-made environment can be found throughout the unincorporated County, even though it is mostly undeveloped. A well-known example is the historic gold-mining community of Julian.

1.1 Viewsheds

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. The viewshed is the area visible from an observer's viewpoint, including the screening effects of intermediate vegetation and structures. The most comprehensive viewsheds are generally from scenic viewpoints, singular vantage points that offer an unobstructed view of expansive visible landscape components. Its components include the underlying landform (topography, e.g. foothills, mountains, flatlands) and the overlaying landcover (e.g. water features, vegetation, cultural sites, and buildings).

Caltrans sometimes designates State scenic vistas along major highways and also designates certain highways or portions of highways as scenic. Highways and other travelways provide a composite viewshed, a compilation of overlapping areas that are visible from a series of viewpoints along a road or similar network (e.g. biking and hiking trails). The best examples of composite viewsheds exist along scenic highways and corridors. A composite viewshed encompasses all the surface areas from an on-site viewer's viewpoint and all surface areas from which a project is seen.

The composite viewshed is the basis for analysis as this is the most comprehensive (largest) and conservative estimate of area which could be visually affected by a proposed project.

1.2 Landscape Units

While projects that are small in size or located within a homogeneous visual area or viewshed can be addressed as a whole, for linear projects of some length, or development projects covering a large number of acres, the *landscape unit* generally provides a useful analytic tool and technical analysts should carefully consider whether use of this concept would benefit their study. The concept and function of landscape units is discussed below.

The underlying topographic form, vegetation type and coverage present, and type of existing land use (or absence thereof) combine to visually create an outdoor "room" (landscape unit) that exhibits a distinct visual character. The edges dividing one unit from other landscape units are often defined by slope types, watershed ridges or other spatial constrictions. Within each of the landscape units the potential modification of its components and addition of proposed project elements will have an identifiable, and different, effect.

Where there are variations in the above existing elements that result in different "rooms," or landscape units, the clear definition of these different units as part of the existing conditions discussion will help draw a clearer picture of baseline conditions, as well as create a basis for defensible impact analyses and significance conclusions.

For example, a rural project area with equestrian uses and avocado groves separated into different areas may be proposed for residential development. Identification of the area as agricultural in nature is accurate. It does not, however, help the reader understand that the equestrian facility consists of a barn and a hundred acres of non-native grassland on rolling hillside, while the avocado groves are tightly massed and obscure the steep hillside on which they are located.

Describing each of these very different visual experiences in terms of their geographic extent and landscape/development content provides an excellent basis for comparing the amount of visible change to a specific landscape unit that is associated with project development. It also allows a logical base for finding different levels of impact significance for what could otherwise appear to be the same existing condition and impact (i.e., agricultural uses being transformed to residential uses), etc. For instance, homes placed on the equestrian facility may result in such a difference from existing conditions that the resulting impact is significant, while inserting homes into the grove area could result in either no visually perceived change (if the homes are snugged into retained grove plantings) or a significant adverse amount of change if the trees are removed and the hillside terraced (with resultant changes in line, form, etc.).

1.3 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. Defining visual character for analyzing impacts under CEQA is an objective process based on a hierarchy of elements, pattern, and order, as described in detail in the Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources.

1.4 Visual Quality

Visual quality is dependent upon the visual environment's brilliance, distinction, and/or excellence, as described in detail in the Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources. The two most commonly used criteria to define visual quality are vividness and intactness/unity. A visual resource with a high degree of vividness and intactness/unity will typically have a high level of visual quality.

1.5 Viewers' Response

Perception is the basic act of seeing or recognizing an object. An individual's perception of a view and his/her enjoyment of a view can vary with each individual. The visual experience of the viewer is a combination of the visual resources in the landscape and the viewer's response to what he/she sees. A viewer may have preferences, standards, ideals, opinions, or bias about visual resources based on his/her background, culture and personal experiences. For example, a viewer may have a strong preference for a visual resource within a dramatic natural area or an area of cultural, historical, local or scientific importance, all of which may influence his/her perception of visual quality.

Exposure is the degree to which viewers are exposed to a view or visual resource, both in time and in space. As the distance between the viewer and an object increases, the ability to see details in the object decreases, which may decrease the importance of the object in the view. If the viewer is driving along a highway, as speed increases, the sharpness of lateral views decreases, and the viewer tends to focus along the line of travel; he/she sees what is seemingly advancing toward him/her and the lateral views would be perceived as blurs of color, rather than as objects.

Viewer exposure varies based on the physical location of the viewer, and the distance and position of the viewer in relation to the resource; the number of viewers of the resource; and the duration and frequency of viewer's contact with the resource. For comparison, typical viewer exposure from a vehicle traveling along a highway as described in the previous paragraph is different than the viewer exposure in someone's front yard in a residential community. From the highway the composite view is from the right-of-way; the viewing distance may be extensive; the number of viewers would probably be high; and the duration of viewing time of any particular view would be limited to the travel time through a particular highway segment and the type of road

(commuter highway vs. scenic highway). In contrast, front yard views from a residential community would have a focused viewshed, the number of viewers would be low and limited to residents and visitors to the home; and the duration of viewing time may be extensive depending on front yard views and activities.

Many of the factors, particularly human factors, affecting a viewer's preferences are usually shared among large groups of people. Since preference is personal and unique to each viewer, judgments must be made about the likes and dislikes of groups in order to assess impacts to visual resources. Therefore, visual resources are usually analyzed from the perspective of groups of people, such as commuters, sightseers, hikers, residents, etc.

1.6 Existing Conditions

San Diego County is a visually diverse place with a dramatic coastline, mountains, and desert. The County's sunny weather allows people to spend much of their time outside throughout the year. For that reason, people come from all over the world at all times of the year to partake of the County's resources. The County is rich in natural open space, unique topographic resources, scenic highways, scenic vistas, and other diverse aesthetic resources. These natural features contribute greatly to the overall quality of the existing visual setting.

1.6.1 San Diego County's Scenic Environment

San Diego County has three distinctive geographic regions that provide a backdrop for visual resources: the low-lying Coastal Plain, the mountainous Peninsular Range, and the lowlands of the Desert. The diversity of these regions provides San Diego County residents and visitors with an array of natural vistas and scenic environments that provide a unique aesthetic collection from the ocean to the desert.

Coastal Plain
The Coastal Plain ranges in elevation from sea level to approximately 600 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) and lies mostly within incorporated cities in San Diego County, with the exception of the lower elevation foothills of the San Dieguito Community. This region's primary aesthetic resources are coastlines, bays, lagoons, canyons, mesas, natural vegetation, urban and commercial development, and agricultural lands.

Peninsular Ranges
The foothills of the Peninsular Ranges region rise in elevation from 600 to 2,000 feet AMSL and are characterized by rolling to hilly uplands that contain frequent narrow, winding valleys. This region is traversed by several rivers as well as a number of intermittent drainages. The foothills are developed with various urban, suburban, and rural land uses, including the communities of Ramona, Lakeside, Crest-Dehesa, Valle de Oro, Spring Valley, and Otay. Notable scenic resources in the foothills of the unincorporated County include the Otay River, Sweetwater River, upper San Diego River, Upper and Lower Otay Lakes, Sweetwater Reservoir, Lake Hodges, and San Vicente Reservoir.

The higher elevations of 2,000 to 6,000 feet AMSL are dominated by steep mountains typically covered with granite boulders and chaparral vegetation on the western slopes, evergreen and temperate forests at and near the top, and desert chaparral on the eastern slopes. The largely undeveloped mountain areas surround scattered rural communities, including Alpine, Pine Valley, Jamul-Dulzura, Campo, and Julian. Scenic resources in this region are plentiful, including large open spaces such as Cleveland National Forest, Agua Tibia Wilderness Area, San Mateo Canyon Wilderness, Palomar Mountain State Park, Cuyamaca Rancho State Park and various County reserves and parks, as well as the large water bodies of El Capitan Reservoir, Barrett Lake, Lake Morena, Lake Cuyamaca and Lake Henshaw.

Desert
The eastern portion of San Diego County is within the Desert region. Elevations range from sea level to 3,000 feet AMSL and the terrain includes mountains, alluvial fans, and desert floor. Most of the Desert region is within the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, a valuable visual resource providing scenic beauty for its many visitors. Development within the Desert region of the incorporated County includes the small desert communities of Borrego Springs and Ocotillo. The Desert region provides expansive views characterized by dramatic landforms, native desert habitat, and low desert valleys.

Throughout these three distinctive geographic provinces are vast amounts of publicly owned lands that provide open space and visual relief from the human-made environment. Examples include the United States Marine Corps Camp Pendleton in the Coastal Plain region of northern San Diego County; the Cleveland National Forest in the Peninsular Range region; and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in the Desert region. In addition to these examples of large expanses of open space, County parks, habitat preserves, reservoirs, farmland and undeveloped lands contribute to San Diego County's open space lands and overall aesthetic resource value.

1.6.2 Scenic Highways

Both the State and County designate roadways as scenic. Each is briefly described below.

State Scenic Highways
State Scenic Highways are those highways that are either officially designated as State scenic highways by Caltrans or are eligible for such designation. Eligible scenic highways are identified in Section 263 of the Streets and Highways Code. The status of a State scenic highway changes from "eligible" to "officially designated" when the local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies to Caltrans for scenic highway designation, and receives notification from Caltrans that the highway has been designated as an official State Scenic Highway.

Of the officially designated State scenic highways, one, a portion of State Route (SR) 78 through Anza-Borrego State Park, is within the unincorporated County of San Diego. Eligible highways are the entire portions of SR 94, I-8, SR 79, SR 78, and SR 76 within

the unincorporated County. For more information, refer to the State website at http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/sdiego.htm.

County Scenic Highway System
The County Scenic Highway System is the master plan for official State Scenic Highway designations. The system consists of a map and a priority list (Attachment A) as presented in the Scenic Highway Element of the General Plan.

Scenic Corridors
Scenic corridors refer to any designated freeway, highway, road, street, boulevard, or other vehicular right-of-way that traverses an area of unusual scenic quality. A scenic corridor is the land generally adjacent to and visible from the vehicular right-of-way. The dimension of a scenic corridor is usually identified using a motorist's line of vision, but a "reasonable" boundary is selected when the view extends to the distant horizon. The County has "Scenic Preservation Guidelines for the I-15 Corridor" and a Scenic Highway Element of the General Plan that aim to maintain existing scenic highways and corridors.

Even though the County has an abundance of natural and human-made visual resources, only portions of these visual resources are viewed regularly. The most readily accessible means to observe these resources is within scenic corridors along the County's roadways, particularly scenic highways. Two highways in San Diego County have been officially designated as scenic by the State, one of which is in the unincorporated County. In addition, the County has several first, second and third priority scenic routes that are not officially designated, but do provide viewing access to aesthetic resources. First priority scenic routes are listed in Attachment A and in the County's Scenic Highway Element.

2.0 EXISTING REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS

A number of Federal, State, and local laws have been enacted to protect a specific aesthetic resource (e.g., scenic highways) or include provisions to allow the protection of aesthetic resources. The regulations and programs have been chosen for their applicability to land development in San Diego County.

2.1 Federal Regulations and Standards

National Environmental Policy Act [as amended (Pub. L. 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, January 1, 1970, as amended by Pub. L. 94-52, July 3, 1975, Pub. L. 94-83, August 9, 1975, and Pub. L. 97-258, § 4(b), Sept. 13, 1982). Link: NEPA of 1969]
Federal agencies that implement the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are required to consider aesthetic/visual resource impacts for applicable projects.

National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 [Title III, Section 304. 23U.S.C. 109. Design Criteria for the National Highway System, FHWA Legislation and Regulations]
This landmark legislation designates almost 260,000 kilometers (160,955 miles) of roads as the National Highway System (NHS). Title III, Section 304 of the legislation

allows, but does not mandate, design standards for NHS projects that take into account the constructed and natural environment of the area including the environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, community, and preservation impacts of the proposed activity.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966[2] [Public Law 89-665, October 15, 1966; 16 U.S.C. 470 et seq., http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/FHPL_HistPrsrvt.pdf
The NHPA requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. In addition to other projects, prospective issuance of an FCC license for construction of cell towers and other wireless communication facilities is an "undertaking" subject to Section 106 of the NHPA.

Telecommunications Act of 1996 [Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. LA. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996) FCC - Telecommunications Act of 1996]
This legislation of the Federal Communications Commission standardizes the playing field for telecommunications businesses. The legislation also prohibits local governments from banning wireless telecommunications towers, but gives local governments the right to enact ordinances to ensure wireless towers are sited and designed appropriately.

2.2 State Regulations and Standards

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) [Public Resources Code 21000-21178; California Code of Regulations, Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA, Appendix G, Title 14, Chapter 3, §15000-15387. [http://ceres.ca.gov/topic/env_law/ceqa/guidelines/]
Under the CEQA State and local agencies are required to consider impacts to aesthetic resources. The State CEQA guidelines provide specific guidance to lead agencies to consider impacts to aesthetic resources such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway or scenic vistas. Additionally, the guidelines provide more general guidance regarding the protection of visual character and quality.

California Scenic Highway Law [California Streets and Highways Code, Section 260-283, www.leginfo.ca.gov, CA Codes (shc:260-284)]
The California Scenic Highway Law created the California Scenic Highway Program to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of adjacent lands. The State Legislature established the program through Senate Bill 1467 (Farr), which was then added to the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260-283. The program defines the process for the designation of official scenic highways. A legislatively appointed body, the Departmental Transportation Advisory Committee (DTAC), recommends program criteria, reviews applications, and advises the Caltrans Director to revoke scenic highways that are no longer in compliance with the program.

[2] Compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA is a separate statutory requirement unrelated to any NEPA requirements that may apply.

California Street and Highways Code [California Street and Highways Code, Section 260-283, www.leginfo.ca.gov, CA Codes (shc:260-284)]
The California Street and Highways Code establishes standards for undertaking the development and designation of official scenic highways and assigns responsibility for the development of scenic highways to local jurisdictions. It establishes the State Scenic Highway system by designating highways that are either eligible for designation as a State Scenic Highway or have been designated as such. The code defines the criteria under which freeways may be designated a California Historic Parkway as a part of the overarching State Scenic Highway system.

2.3 Local Regulations and Standards

San Diego County General Plan
The General Plan provides guidance for the preservation of aesthetic resources. The General Plan incorporates specific community plans; which include goals, policies, and recommendations to guide development of a region. These community plans identify a variety of specific planning considerations that may include guidelines for protecting visual character and quality through development guidelines designed to minimize adverse aesthetic affects. The General Plan also includes specific guidelines for scenic highways and open space, as described below.

San Diego County General Plan, Scenic Highway Element, Part VI
The General Plan's Scenic Highway Element includes objectives to: (1) establish a comprehensive County Scenic Highway Program, (2) protect and enhance scenic resources within both rural and urban scenic highway corridors (3) encourage and promote increased coordination and implementation of the program and (4) increase public awareness and involvement in the program. The goal of County's Scenic Highway Program is to protect and enhance the County's "scenic, historic, and recreational resources" within the viewshed of all scenic highway corridors. The Scenic Highway Element includes criteria to be used when reviewing and recommending changes to the County Scenic Highway System.

San Diego County Scenic Highway Program
The County's Scenic Highway Program establishes a scenic highway system priority list, which is included in Scenic Highway Element, Part VI. Two officially designated state scenic highways exist in the County, one of which is in the unincorporated County. The rest of the routes in the County's scenic highway program are listed as First, Second, or Third Priority Scenic Routes. There are six (6) first priority routes, sixteen (16) second priority routes, and thirty-eight (38) third priority routes.

San Diego County General Plan, Open Space Element
The Open Space Element provides guidelines for the conservation, development, and use of natural resources with a section discussing unique geologic features. For more information on unique geologic features refer to the "Guidelines for Determining Significance for Unique Geologic Features."

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance, Scenic Area Regulations [Section 5200-5299, http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z5000.pdf]
The Scenic Area Regulations of the County Zoning Ordinance serve to regulate development in areas of high scenic value in order to exclude incompatible uses and structures, and preserve and enhance the scenic resources in adjacent areas. The regulations apply to areas of unique scenic value including but not limited to: scenic highway corridors designated by the County General Plan; critical viewshed and prime viewshed areas as designated on the Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan; and areas adjacent to significant recreational, historic or scenic resources, including but not limited to Federal and State parks. The designation for scenic areas is identified on a parcel-by-parcel basis by the special area designator "S".

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance, Specific Historic Districts [Section 5749, http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z5000.pdf]
The County Zoning Ordinance includes a provision for the establishment of Specific Historic Districts having their own review boards and specific review criteria. Currently, Julian is the only community that has developed a historic district and associated design criteria. Section 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance defines the Julian Historic District's overall design criteria and design guidelines. Parcels within the Julian Historic District have a "J" zoning designator to identify the requirement for site plan review by the Julian Historic District Architectural Review Board. For more information of historic districts refer to the "Guidelines for Determining Significance for Cultural Resources."

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance, Community Design Review Area Regulations [Section 5750-5799, http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z5000.pdf]
The County Zoning Ordinance includes provisions to provide for the maintenance and enhancement of a community's individual visual character and identity. The provisions require that a site plan be submitted for development within those areas having a "B" Community Design Review Area Special Designator. The provisions include exemptions to the site plan requirement for certain project types and provisions for granting a site plan waiver for Community Design Review. Currently, the following communities have developed Design Guidelines: Valley Center, Sweetwater, Fallbrook, Lakeside, Ramona, Spring Valley, Bonsall, and Alpine.

The "B" Design Review Area Special Designator also covers portions of Interstate 15 (I-15). The I-15 corridor has its own Scenic Preservation Guidelines and Design Review Board to review discretionary projects that are subject to the guidelines.

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance, Design Review Area Regulations [Section 5900-5910, (http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z5000.pdf)
The County Zoning Ordinance includes provisions to ensure that future structures and development of a site will complement not only the site to be developed but also the surrounding areas and existing development. The provisions require that a site plan be submitted for certain discretionary project applications within those areas having a "D" zoning designator indicating the need for design review. The regulation requires that specific criteria be reviewed to achieve the objectives of the approving authority. These criteria include a review of building characteristics, building structure and placement,

landscaping, roads, pedestrian walkways, parking and storage areas, grading, signs, and lighting. These criteria are assigned at the time of ordinance review for the project site. Applicable community planning or sponsor groups have an opportunity to review such site plans and to present their recommendations to the Director of the Department of Planning and Land Use.

San Diego County Zoning Ordinance, Historic/Archaeological Landmark and District Area Regulations [Section 5700-5749, http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z5000.pdf]
The County Zoning Ordinance includes provisions intended to identify, preserve and protect the historic, cultural, archeological and/or architectural resource values of designated landmarks and districts and encourages compatible uses and architectural design. Areas designated by the Historic/Archaeological Landmark District have an "H" special area designator while areas within a Specific Historic District are noted with a "J" special area designator. Where a "J" designator exists, these areas will be subject to the guidelines and review of the specific historic district. Where an "H" designator exists, the Historic Site Board may provide guidance, a board appointed by the Board of Supervisors, to advise the Director of the Department of Planning and Land Use on historical/archeological matters. The Historic/Archeological Landmark and District Area Regulations include the requirements for a site plan review for certain discretionary projects, site plan review criteria, and site plan waiver provisions.

County Board of Supervisors Policy I-104: Policy and Procedures for Preparation of Community Design Guidelines [Section 396.10 of the County Administrative Code and Section 5750 et seq. of the County Zoning Ordinance, http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/cob/policy/I-104.doc]
This Board policy establishes policy and procedures to ensure adequate community support and citizen involvement in the preparation of community design guidelines.

Resource Protection Ordinance (RPO) [http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/cnty/cntydepts/landuse/planning/Resource/5_regs_stat/res_prot_ord.pdf]
The RPO protects a variety of resources. One of the resources the ordinance protects is steep slopes. The ordinance limits development on steep slopes through density restrictions on steep slope lands and through requirements for steep slope areas to be placed in easements. The requirements of this ordinance therefore will often result in the protection of slopes in their natural state, which provides the added benefit of protecting a potential aesthetic resource. In terms of the preservation of aesthetic resources, this policy encourages the preservation of the existing natural terrain, established vegetation, and visually significant geologic displays. Because the Resource Protection Ordinance is stricter in its requirements for preservation of steep slopes, it has become the main planning tool for preservation of this resource, and therefore generally supersedes the Hillside Development Policy described below.

Board of Supervisors Policy I-73, Hillside Development Policy
[http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/cob/policy/I-73.doc]
The Hillside Development policy was adopted by the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors in 1979 to minimize the effects of disturbing natural terrain and provides for creative design of hillside developments. The Hillside Development Policy provides flexible guidelines for reducing the effects of disturbance of steep slopes. Specifically,

the guidelines aim to "preserve, enhance or improve the physical features of the area consistent with providing building sites while at the same time optimizing the aesthetic quality of the final product."

Design Review Guidelines (http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/dplu/docs/DRB.pdf)
Design review guidelines have been developed for the I-15 Corridor from the Escondido City Limit to the Riverside County Line and for the following communities of unincorporated San Diego County: Alpine, Bonsall, Fallbrook, Lakeside, Ramona, Rancho San Diego, Spring Valley, Sweetwater, and Valley Center. The design guidelines specify the types of design permitted in each community; including but not limited to architecture, landscaping, building uses, designation of scenic roads, slope modifications, and overall visual effect. Design guidelines are similar in form and content from community to community, but may vary in terms of defining specific community character. Vegetation types, especially tree species, are specifically designated in each community plan. The preservation of naturally occurring topography is encouraged by minimizing grading and carefully siting structures.

Wireless Communications Ordinance [San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances. http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/dplu/docs/POD0103ord.pdf]
This Ordinance provides a uniform and comprehensive set of standards for the development, siting and installation of wireless telecommunications facilities.

3.0 TYPICAL ADVERSE EFFECTS

Analysis of a project's impacts to visual resources is based on the identification of the change that would occur when a project proposes to alter the existing visual character and/or visual quality of the environment. The viewers' response to the change must also be considered in the impact analysis. If the project is hidden from sight and will only be seen by the project users, viewer response will likely be minimal. However, if the project is visible to many existing viewers, the viewers' sensitivity to and expectations of the view may place more importance on the change. The change must alter either the visual character or quality, or the viewers' response to the view, in a negative way to be considered an adverse impact.

Adverse effects to visual resources may result in regional or local impacts. On a regional level, multiple detrimental changes in the visual environment may indirectly affect the economy, tourism, history, culture, recreation, or lifestyle.

On a local level, visual resources within an identified viewshed may be adversely affected in numerous ways. In regard to visual character typical adverse effects include proposing changes that create non-compatible visual patterns in terms of dominance, scale, diversity and continuity. Adverse effects to visual quality typically may occur when changes to the visual environment modify a visual resource's vividness and/or intactness/unity.

Adverse visual effects can include the loss of natural features or areas, the removal of urban features with aesthetic value, or the introduction of contrasting urban features into natural areas of urban settings.

Adverse effects to aesthetics and visual resources may be permanent or temporary. Adding a building to a view would be a permanent effect; visual change related to grading could be a temporary effect if landforms are not substantially modified.

Typical adverse effects on visual resources in the unincorporated portion of the County may be caused by any of the following, or others, either temporarily or permanently:

- Altered landforms (i.e., cutting down hills and mesa tops, filling in canyons, encroaching on steep slopes, creating extensive cut or fill slopes, flattening of any topographic feature);
- Incompatible design features;
- Incompatible uses;
- Noise and retaining walls;
- Vegetation clearing;
- Insensitive siting; and/or
- Grading that does not modify landform to a noticeable level once it is vegetated (i.e., remedial grading [cut and fill] beyond pads to be revegetated with native plants).

4.0 GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

The following significance guidelines should guide the evaluation of whether a significant impact to visual resources will occur as a result of project implementation. A project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following, absent specific evidence to the contrary. Conversely, if a project does not propose any of the following, it will generally not be considered to have a significant effect on visual resources, absent specific evidence of such an effect:

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 (such as theme, style, setbacks, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, etc.) or by being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.***

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.***

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.***

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.***

These guidelines address the three CEQA questions listed in the Introduction. Significance Guideline 1 protects the existing visual character and visual quality by not allowing adverse changes or contrasts. The guideline ensures that the community and/or neighborhood will maintain its particular character, which in most cases will be a rural setting or country town. The visual quality is based on the viewers' responses to changes in the character and quality of views of the project site, and whether the project contributes or detracts from the existing character and quality. These aspects of the project should be assessed by analyzing changes that would occur in particular "key" views and the viewers' responses to the changes, as described in Section 5.2 of the Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources.

Significance Guideline 2 addresses potential substantial damage to particular resources that represent or characterize a community or neighborhood. Loss or damage to one or more of these particular resources can change the visual character and may also degrade the visual quality. The effect of the change is determined by the viewer response to the changes. The assessment of visual character and quality, per the directions of Section 5.3 of the Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources, would result in the determination of significance.

Significance Guideline 3 is directed at potentially substantial adverse effects from travelways or recreational areas to particular scenic vistas. Public vantage points, such as roads and trails, allow scenic views to be seen by many people. Scenic views are so important to people that highways and viewpoints are sometimes designated as scenic by the County for County routes or Caltrans for State routes. Adverse changes to these resources could be significant, depending on the degree and nature of the change, particularly if the view is obstructed. Directions for assessing impacts are given in Section 5.3 of the Report Format and Content Requirements for Visual Resources.

The documents listed in Significance Guideline 4 have been developed to maintain the visual character and quality of communities and neighborhoods in the County which are currently regulated by the General Plan or Zoning. Projects that substantially stray from those regulations may result in significant adverse effects, depending on the degree and nature of the variation.

The cumulative impacts must be evaluated for the first three guidelines. A project may contribute to a significant adverse cumulative effect even though the project itself does not cause a significant adverse impact.

5.0 STANDARD MITIGATION AND PROJECT DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

A project will be evaluated for its effect on visual resources under the criteria specified in Section 4.0. If mitigation or project design factors are identified that could reduce a significant effect, those shall be incorporated into the project. While project design elements and/or mitigation shall be incorporated into a project, it may not always be possible to reduce the impact to below a level of significant. In general, if mitigation or project redesign does not reduce a significant impact to visual resources to below a level of significant, the impact will be considered significant and unmitigable.

Both design considerations and mitigation measures are dependent on the specifics of the project. Following are samples of appropriate design considerations and mitigation measures.

5.1 Landforms

To reduce size of cut and fill slopes, consider:

- relocating to an area with less slope;
- changing road width, grade, etc.;
- changing alignment to follow existing grades; and
- minimizing grading.

To reduce earthwork contrasts, consider:

- rounding and/or warping slopes;
- retaining rocks, trees, drainages, etc.;
- toning down freshly broken rock faces with asphalt emulsion spray or with appropriately colored paint;
- adding mulch, hydromulch, or topsoil;
- shaping cuts and fills to appear as natural forms;
- cutting rock areas so forms are irregular;
- designing to take advantage of natural screens (i.e., vegetation, land forms); and
- seeding of cut and fill slopes.

To maintain topographic integrity, consider:

- locating projects away from prominent topographic features;
- designing projects to blend with topographic forms in shape and placement;
- designing structures to conform to the existing natural terrain; and
- modifying structure design to eliminate or screen contrasting/detracting features;

5.2 Vegetation

Loss of vegetation is an important component of visual impacts. Maintaining vegetation in place or vegetating slopes may cause a potentially significant impact to be avoided, minimized or mitigated.

To retain as much existing vegetation as possible, consider:

- using retaining walls on fill slopes to maximize the amount of existing vegetation that is retained;
- reducing surface disturbance; and
- protecting roots from damage during excavations.

Consider minimizing the impact on existing vegetation by:

- using irregular clearing shapes;
- feathering/thinning edges;
- controlling construction access;
- using existing roads;
- limiting work within construction area;
- minimizing clearing size; and
- seeding or planting of cleared areas.

To enhance vegetation, consider:

- mulching cleared areas;
- controlling planting times;
- furrowing slopes;
- choosing native plant species;
- stockpiling and reusing topsoil; and
- fertilizing, mulching, and watering vegetation.

To maintain the integrity of vegetative units, consider maintaining native vegetation communities to the maximum extent possible.

5.3 Structures

Following are suggestions to consider in the design and treatment of structures to avoid or reduce impacts:

- Minimize the number of visible structures;
- Reduce the width and/or height of new structures to reduce the extent of obstruction;
- Adapt important existing structures for reuse;
- Design structures to conform to existing natural terrain;

- Locate new structures on portions of the site that do not interfere with existing views;
- Arrange the window design of the structure so that views through windows are unobstructed;
- Use four-sided architecture (e.g. design details on all sides of structures rather than facades with blank side and back walls); and
- Relate design details to surrounding architecture/history.

To minimize structure contrast, consider:

- using earth-tone paints and stains;
- using cor-ten steel (self-weathering);
- treating wood for self-weathering;
- using natural stone surfaces;
- burying all or part of the structure; and
- selecting paint finishes with low levels of reflectivity (i.e., flat or semi-gloss).

Redesign structures that do not blend or fit. Consider:

- using rustic designs and native building materials in rural areas;
- using natural appearing forms to complement landscape character (use special designs only as a last resort); and
- relocating structure.

Minimize Impact of Utility Crossings. Consider:

- making crossings at right angles;
- setting back structures as far as possible from the crossing;
- leaving vegetation along the roadside;
- minimizing viewing time;
- using natural screening; and
- Placing new utilities underground.

The value of color on structures has limitations in reducing visual impacts. Color (hue) is most effective within 1,000 feet. Beyond that the paint color becomes more difficult to distinguish and tone or value (light and dark) determines visibility and resulting visual contrast. Using color has limited effectiveness (in the background distance zone) in reducing visual impacts on structures that are silhouetted against the sky.

Consider these suggestions:

- painting structures somewhat darker than the adjacent landscape to compensate for the effects of shade and shadow; and
- selecting color to blend with the land and not the sky.

5.4 Roads and Scenic Highways

Consider design road networks to minimize view obstruction and/or enhance existing views. Also consider designing roads to follow existing topography.

5.5 Other Design Considerations and/or Mitigation Measures

Replace existing natural aesthetic features that are proposed for removal. Incorporate designs that integrate natural aesthetics into the project (i.e. cluster development, greenbelts, landscaping, open space, etc.).

6.0 REFERENCES

Anzevino, J. Protecting our region's sense of place in the age of wireless communications. Scenic Hudson, Inc. 1998.

California General Plan Glossary of Terms, 2000

California Public Resources Code
California Environmental Quality Act (PRC §21000-21178).

California State Historic Preservation Officer's (SHPO) Section 106 Consultation Guidelines for FCC Designees and Applicants Regarding Cell Tower and other Wireless Communication Facilities. (http://www.ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1054/files/CASHPO%20GUIDELINES%20FOR%20FCC%20APPLICANTS.doc)

California Streets and Highways Code
California Scenic Highway Act and Program (SHC §260-283)
Streets and Highways Code

County of San Diego
Board of Supervisor's Policy I-73: Hillside Development Policy.
Design Review Guidelines (Alpine, Bonsall, Fallbrook, I-15 Corridor, Lakeside, Ramona, Rancho San Diego, Spring Valley, Sweetwater, Valley Center) (http://www.co.san-diego.ca.us/dplu/docs/DRB.pdf)
General Plan Scenic Highway Element (ELIB:960)
I-15 Corridor Subregional Plan
Light Pollution Code (http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/Resource/docs/3~pdf/LightPollutionCode.pdf)

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Saito, Y. The aesthetics of unscenic nature. Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 56:2. Spring, 1998.

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Tassinari, P. and D. Torreggiani. Visual impact assessment methodologies for rural building design. Agricultural Engineering Interantionl: the CIGR Ejournal. Manuscript BC 05 009. Vol. VIII. January, 2006.

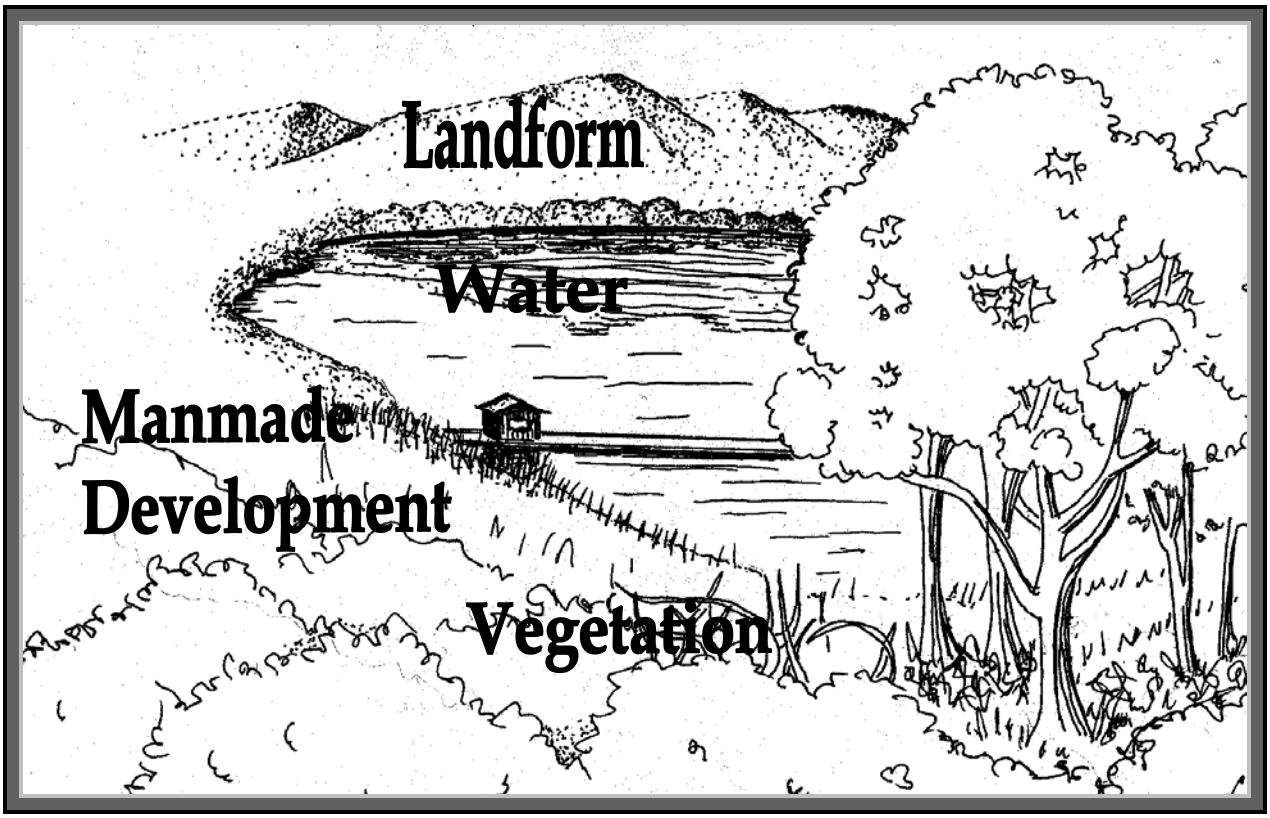
United States Code
National Environmental Policy Act (42 USC §4321), 1969
National Highway System Act (23 USC §109; Title III, Sec 304)
National Telecommunications Act (Pub. LA. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 [1996])

US Department of Agriculture
Forest Service (USFS) Visual Management System

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Visual Resource Management System.
National Park Service Website, Protection of Aesthetic Values.

United States Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects, http://www.elevated.org/_downloads/project/eis/4.5.pdf

Figure 1
Visible Landscape Components



[ATTACHMENT A]

County of San Diego
Scenic Highway System Priority List[3] for
Scenic Highway Corridor Planning and Implementation

Existing Official Scenic Highways

- State Route 78, from the western to the eastern boundary of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (18.2 miles)
- State Route 125, from SR 94 north to Interstate 8 (2 miles)

First Priority

- SR 76, from El Camino Real east to Interstate 15, except portions within City of Oceanside.
- SR 79, from I-8 to intersection of Sunrise Highway (S1).
- Bonita Road, San Miguel, Guajolote, and Sweetwater River Roads (SC2126) from I-805 to SR 94, except the portions within City of Chula Vista.

Second Priority

- N. Santa Fe Avenue and Osborne Street, from Oceanside City Limits, east to Vista Way.
- Gird, Reche, Live Oak Park, and Mission Roads, from SR 76 to I-15.
- Tecate Road, from the International Border north to SR 94.
- SR 76, from East Grade Road, east to SR 79.
- Telegraph Canyon/Otay Lakes Roads from Chula Vista City Limits east to Proctor Valley Road.
- Via de la Valle, El Escondido, Del Dios (S6) Highway from highway 101 north to Via Rancho Parkway.
- I-8, from El Cajon City Limits to SR 79.
- Lake Wohlford road, from Valley Center Road east to Guejito road.
- SR 78, from Via Rancho Parkway to SR 79, except portions within City of San Diego.
- SR 52 from San Diego City Limits to SR 67.
- Willow and El Monte Roads, from SR 67 to the southern end of El Capitan Reservoir.
- Proctor Valley Road, from Otay lakes Road to SR 94.
- SR 79 and Sunrise Highway (S1) from Wynola Road south to Recreational Parkway.
- Potrero Valley Road, from SR 94 to Potrero County Park.
- Lake Morena Drive, from Buckman Springs Road, north to Morena Lake.
- Oak Drive, from Lake Morena Drive north to Buckman Springs Road.

Third Priority

- I-15, from SR 76 north to Riverside County line.
- Mission and Green Valley Roads, from SR 76 north and east to Gird Road.

[3] This list is from the Scenic Highway Element of the County of San Diego General Plan, with minor changes to reflect the current alignments of the highways.

- Otay Lakes Road, from Proctor Valley Road east to State Route 94.
- Honey Springs Road, from SR 94 to Lyons Valley Road.
- Vista Way, Oransby Street, Gopher Canyon Road, Old Castle Road, Lilac Road and Valley Center Road, from Vista City Limits to SR 76.
- Lake Wohlford Road, from Guejito Road north to Valley Center Road.
- Twin Oaks Valley Road, from Gopher Canyon Road to San Marcos city limits.
- Proposed extension of Twin Oaks Valley road, from San Marcos city limits to Camino Del Norte.
- Proposed extension of Camino Del Norte, from El Camino Real to Del Dios Highway.
- Via Rancho Parkway, from Del Dios Highway to SR 78, except in the cities of Escondido and San Diego.
- Bear Valley Road and SR 78, from Valley Center Road to Via Rancho Parkway.
- SR 125 from the International Border north to Telegraph Canyon Road.
- Espola Road, from San Diego city limits to Sorrento Freeway
- Sorrento Freeway, from Espola Road to SR 67.
- Anza Expressway, from SR 67 to SR 78.
- SR 79, from Riverside County line to Anza Expressway.
- SR 78, from Wynola Road to western boundary of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.
- SR 78, from eastern boundary of Anza-Borrego State Park to Imperial County line.
- Black Mountain Road, between north San Diego city limits (west of Rancho Bernardo).
- Old Overland Stage Route (S2) from Imperial County line north to SR 78.
- Recreation Park Road, from I-8 north to SR 79.
- San Felipe Road, Montezuma Valley road, Hoberg Road and Truckhaven Trail (S22) from SR 79 east to Imperial County line.
- I-5, from Oceanside city limits north to Orange County line.
- San Vicente Road, Conejos Valley Road, Goudie Road, Boulder Creek Road and Viejas Boulevard from Anza Expressway to SR 79.
- Old SR 79 loop to Warner Springs, from SR 79 to SR 79.
- I-8, from SR 79 east to Imperial County line.
- Pomerado Road and Beeler Canyon Road (SA 780), from San Diego city limits to SR proposed SR 125.
- SR 94, from SR 125 to I-8.
- Lyons Valley Road (SA 390, SA 410), Pine Creek Trail, Morena Stokes Valley Road, and Buckman Springs road, from SR 94 to Oak Drive.
- Buckman springs Road, from Lake Morena Drive to SR 94.
- Japatul Road, from Lyons Valley road (SA 390/410) to I-8.
- Highland Valley Road, between city limits east to Lake Hodges.
- El Monte Park Road, from southern end of El Capitan Reservoir to I-8.
- Harvest Road and Otay Freeway, from International Border to Proctor Valley Road.
- Canfield Road, Divide Drive and oak Grove Road, from SR 76 to SR 79.

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

REPORT FORMAT & CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

VISUAL RESOURCES

LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP

Department of Planning and Land Use
Department of Public Works

July 30, 2007

PURPOSE

These Visual Resources Report Format and Content Requirements provide guidance on conducting visual resource studies and preparing reports for discretionary projects being processed by the Land Use and Environment Group. These guidelines are designed to:

1. Ensure the quality, accuracy and completeness of Visual Resources Reports.

2. Aid in staff's efficient and consistent review of maps and documents from different consultants.

3. Provide adequate information to make appropriate planning decisions and to make determinations regarding conformance with applicable regulations.

4. Increase the efficiency of the environmental review process and avoid unnecessary time delays.

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FIGURES

ATTACHMENTS

I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Visual resources must be evaluated under CEQA. County staff will determine the level of analysis needed for a particular project, if analysis is required. For example, a photo-simulation may be adequate to analyze the effects to visual resources of some projects, whereas a visual analysis and report may be needed for others. These guidelines should be followed as they apply for the level of analysis requested.

All Visual Resources Reports will be reviewed for technical accuracy and completeness by County staff. Reports are considered draft until the County determines the report to be complete. Each submittal and review of a draft report is considered an "iteration." During each iteration County staff will either determine the report to be complete or respond with comments for necessary changes. These guidelines have been prepared so that the first iteration will be as complete and comprehensive as possible to address issues in the Scoping Letter. <u>However, each report may have up to three iterations, after which project denial may be recommended due to inadequate environmental progress</u>.

The preparer must disclose the best information available.

II. REPORT FORMAT AND CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

The report should include photographs, aerial photographs, photo-simulations, and other figures, as necessary to illustrate the existing conditions and assessment of impacts. Include descriptive text with each photo and the location from where it was taken.

Include a copy of the project plot plan, landscape plan (if applicable) and all elevations.

Guidelines for preparing visual simulations are provided in Attachment A.

TITLE PAGE

At a minimum, the title page must include:

1. *the name of the project,*
2. *the permit number(s),*
3. *the project environmental review number,*
4. *the date of the report,*
5. *the applicant's name and contact information,*
6. *the preparer's name and contact information, and*
7. *a signature block for the consultant on the County approved consultant's list who completed, or supervised and takes responsibility for, the work performed.*

   The title page should be protected with a clear acetate cover.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Include a Table of Contents with page numbers identifying each section and subsection, as appropriate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Briefly state the results of the visual analysis, the impacts anticipated and their significance under CEQA, and feasible mitigation and/or design considerations to reduce or eliminate potentially significant impacts. Clearly state if less than significant impacts cannot be achieved.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Visual Resources Report

Always use statement such as this: 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 _____ on the surrounding visual environment.

Add additional information, as necessary.

1.2 Key issues

Describe the key issues that will be evaluated in this report.

1.3 Principal Viewpoints to be Covered

Define the principal viewpoints that will be evaluated, including views of the proposed project and views from the proposed project, if applicable.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Describe what the project proposes to construct, what it will look like, the architectural style, and project phasing, specifically calling out elements providing the basis for or requiring evaluation in the analysis, including project design considerations.

Include a vicinity map showing the location of the site at an appropriate scale to show nearby roadways, structures and other features that will be important in the analysis.

Identify perceived continuous or unique elements, scenic highways, and or identified scenic vistas.

If the project is for a wireless telecommunication facility, identify the zone and location preference that the proposed facility is meeting (Z.O. §6986).

2.1 Land Use Designations and Zoning

Include a description of current and planned on- and off-site land use designations. Include a description of current and planned zoning on the site and adjacent to the site.

2.2 Regulatory Framework

Discuss regulations applicable to the protection of visual resources for the subject project. The following is a list of such regulations:

- *San Diego County General Plan (http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/counties/San_Diego/plans.html)*
  - *Open Space Element, Part I*
  - *Recreation Element, Part IV*
  - *Scenic Highway Element, Part VI*
  - *Scenic Highway Program*
  - *Conservation Element, Part X*
- *San Diego County Zoning Ordinance*
  - *S – Scenic Area Regulations [§5200-5299]*
  - *J – Specific Historic Districts [§5749]*
  - *B – Community Design Review Area Regulations [§5750-5799]*
  - *D – Design Review Area Regulations [§5900-5910]*
  - *H – Historic/Archaeological Landmark & District Area Regulations [§5700- 5747]*
  - *G – Sensitive Resource [§5300-5349]*
  - *R – Coastal Resource Protection Area [§5950 – 5957]*
- *Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Ordinance [§6980 – 6991]*
- *County of San Diego Resource Protection Ordinance (i.e., steep slopes)*
- *County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance Section 6712 (d), implemented by the County of San Diego Landscape Water Conservation Design Manual*
- *County of San Diego Board of Supervisors Policy I-73 Hillside Development*
- *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)*
- *California Scenic Highway Program*
- *California Street and Highways Code*
- *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*
- *National Highway System Designation Act of 1995*
- *Telecommunications Act of 1996*

2.3 Design Policies and Guidances

The County has many documents that address visual resources and project design. These documents should be identified here and used in the impact analysis.

Each area of the unincorporated County has a plan (Community Plan or Subregional Plan) that is part of the Regional Land Use Element of the County's General Plan. These community and subregional plans include goals and policies, many of which pertain to visual resources. Plans have been prepared for the following communities and subregions:

Fallbrook, Part I
Valley Center, Part II
Lakeside, Part IV
Rainbow, Part V
San Dieguito, Part VI
Pepper Drive – Bostonia, Part VIII
Julian, Part X
Alpine, Part XI
Valle de Oro, Part XII
Sweetwater, Part XIII
Ramona, Part XIV
Bonsall, Part XVI
Pala/Pauma, Part XVII
North Mountain, Part XVIII
Central Mountain, Part XIX
Mountain Empire, Part XX
Desert, Part XXI
Crest, Dehesa, Harbison Canyon/ Granite Hills, Part XXII
Otay, Part XXIII
Jamul/Dulzura, Part XXIV
North County Metropolitan, Part XXV
County Islands, Part XXVI
Spring Valley, Part XXVIII

In addition, the County has prepared Design Guidelines for the following areas:

Julian Historic District
Alpine
Bonsall
Fallbrook
I-15 Corridor
Lakeside
Rancho San Diego
Ramona
Spring Valley
Sweetwater
Valley Center

The County has also prepared Historic Resources Inventories for Ramona, Julian, Rancho Santa Fe, Fallbrook and Sweetwater Valley that describe the history and list the historic resources that are in those communities (as of the date of publication). The information in these documents can provide insight into the community character.

3.0 VISUAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE PROJECT

Describe the visual environment by discussing the visible landscape including the underlying landform and overlaying cover (topography, vegetation, drainages/surface waters, rock outcroppings, ridgelines, knolls, RPO steep slopes, etc.). Discuss the interrelationships of pattern elements (form, line, color, and texture) and pattern character (dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity). Discuss any designated scenic vistas, scenic highways, scenic corridors, or other scenic resources within the project viewshed. Also include human aspects such as cultural features, landscape history, buildings and settlements, and people affected or their perception of the landscape character.

Incorporate photos of the project site and surroundings into the Baseline Visual Environment discussion to help the reader "see" the project area. Text should accompany each photo to describe the photo and the location from where it was taken. Include a key showing the locations from which the photos were taken. Choose viewpoints for analysis and discuss justification for chosen location. Viewpoints should be chosen with the following criteria in mind: the "typicality" of project area views seen from them and of them, the potential number of viewers, uniqueness of the observed

view in the project area, whether or not the viewpoint represents a scenic vista or otherwise protected visual element (e.g., landmark trees), etc.

3.1 Project Setting

Describe the project setting including the viewshed and the landscape units that will be used in the analysis.

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 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.

The Existing Viewshed is an analytical tool comprising the areas visible from an observer's viewpoint, including the screening effects of intermediate vegetation and structures.

The Topographic Viewshed is the landform, without the screening effect of vegetation and structures that would be visible from a viewpoint.

The Composite Viewshed is a compilation of overlapping areas that are visible from a series of viewpoints along a road or similar network (e.g. biking and hiking trail). The best examples of composite viewsheds exist along scenic highways and corridors.

Identify viewshed limits for the project. Include a figure identifying the extent of the viewshed on an aerial photograph and a topographic map (if the topography is variable).

3.3 Landscape Units

A landscape unit is a portion of the regional landscape and can be thought of as an outdoor room that exhibits a distinct visual character. A landscape unit will often correspond to a place or district that is commonly known among local viewers.

Identify and describe the landscape units defined for this project.

4.0 EXISTING VISUAL RESOURCES AND VIEWER RESPONSE

4.1 Existing Visual Resources

4.1.1 Visual Character

Visual character is descriptive and non-evaluative, which means it is based on defined attributes that are neither positive nor negative in themselves. A change in visual character cannot be described as having positive or negative 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 resistance to a project that would contrast that character, then changes in the visual character should be evaluated.

Describe the existing visual character of each landscape unit by describing:

> *Pattern elements: form [bulk, mass, size and shape], line, color and texture.*
> *Pattern character: dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity.*

4.1.2 Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated by identifying the vividness, intactness and unity present in the viewshed. The analysis should correlate with public judgments well enough to predict those judgments. The three criteria for evaluating visual quality can be defined as follows:

> ***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.*

Describe the existing visual quality of each landscape unit.

4.2 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 viewers might react to visual changes brought about by a project.

Include distances from the project to neighboring residences, commercial buildings, parklands/recreational areas or other potential viewer locations.

4.2.1 Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is both 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. Even when the existing appearance of a project site is uninspiring, a community may still object to projects that fall short of its visual goals. Analysts can learn about these special resources and community aspirations for visual quality through citizen participation procedures, as well as from local publications and planning documents.

Discuss existing viewer sensitivity.

4.2.2 Viewer Groups

Groups and individual viewers are affected by their exposure to a project. Whether a viewer is near to or far from a project; whether they are viewing a project from above, at eye level, or from below; and whether the direction of view is from the north, south, east, west; all contribute to a viewer's response.

In addition, visual perception also has an important subjective element. Classes of viewers differ in their visual response to a project and its setting. Depending on the type of project, groups that should be considered when analyzing impacts to visual resources include, but are not limited to:

- *Viewer groups with a view from the project to _____;*
- *Viewer groups with a view of the project from their homes or community;*
- *Viewer groups with a view of the project to or from an historic property if "setting" was an element in designation of the property;*
- *Viewer groups with a view of the project from roadways, particularly scenic highways, highway waysides, rest areas and vista points*
- *Recreational groups (park, resort, overlook, and historic site visitors; river and lake users, scenic railroad passengers, trail users, etc.)*
- *Special interest groups (civic, conservation, cultural, environmental, educational, economic, etc.)*

Identify viewer groups.

4.2.3 Viewer Exposure

The number of viewers and the duration of view are also important to analyzing impacts. The number of viewers in nearby residences (stationary view), and the duration of their view of a project would be very different than the number of people who see a project from a highway or roadway (moving view). Whether the viewers on the highway are residents of the local community or visitors may also affect their responses to a viewshed.

Viewer exposure is typically assessed by measuring 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.

Describe viewer exposure.

4.2.4 Viewer Awareness

A viewer's response is also 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.

Describe anticipated viewer awareness.

5.0 VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 Guidelines for Determining Significance

State the applicable guidelines for which the analysis will be done.

5.2 Key Views

Analyzing all the views in which the proposed project would be seen is not feasible. A number of key viewpoints that would most clearly display the visual effects of the project should be selected. These key views should also represent the primary viewer groups that would potentially be affected by the project.

Show key view locations with directional arrows on a figure.

Key View #1

Describe the following:

- *Orientation*
- *Existing Visual Character and Quality*
- *Proposed Project Features*
- *Change to Visual Character and Quality*
- *Viewer Response*
- *Resulting Visual Impact*

Key View #2

Same as above, and continue for each Key View.

5.3 Assessment of Visual Character and Visual Quality

Visual resource change is the combination of the change in visual character and change in visual quality. The visual impacts of project elements and alternatives are determined by assessing the change in seen elements caused by the project and predicting viewer response to that change.

The following should be considered in analyzing the project:

- *The nature and quality of recognized or valued views such as natural topography, settings, context, built or natural features of visual interest, and other visual resources such as mountains;*
- *The extent to which the project negatively affects recognized views from a public roadway, bike path, or trail, including the length of the roadway, bike path or trail where the views would be affected and the number of viewers from these locations;*
- *The extent of view obstruction, e.g., total blockage, partial interruption, or minor diminishment, etc.; and*
- *In cases when something is substantially different as result of a land use action (GPA/SPA/zoning), consider private views as well as public views.*

Include a discussion of public and selected private locations where the project may be viewed as a prominent feature.

Include information identifying the portions of the proposed project that will be visible from the scenic highway. State whether and how long motorists and cyclists (if highway includes bike lanes) would be able to see the project if traveling at the posted rate of speed in each direction, or less if traffic congestion is anticipated that would make the viewing time longer.

Discuss the visual impact in terms of scale, bulk, and coverage in terms of applicable project elements such as development layout/clustering, fire clearing, grading, structures (including outdoor storage/ancillary buildings such as garages/barns), signage, service areas, towers etc.

Consider architectural guidelines for color/style/building materials.

Color and finish palette and proposed screening, if applicable.

Include before and after photo-simulations of the project on finished grade, cross-sections of major areas of grading and visual prominence, and elevations. At least one photo-simulation must be provided; if only one is included it must be from the point of highest visibility.

If the project is for a wireless telecommunication facility:

- *State whether or not it is in a preferred zone or location,*
- *Provide the information requested in Z.O. §6986 B (http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z6000.pdf)*
- *Refer to Z.O. §6987 Design Regulations (http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/z6000.pdf).*
- *Indicate how the project is in compliance with these regulations.*

5.3.1 Assessment of Visual Character

The first step in determining visual resource change is to assess the compatibility of the proposed project with the visual character of the existing landscape.

Describe the visual character for the following stages of the project and the changes from one stage to the next:

- *Existing condition*
- *During construction [grading, cut and/or fill slopes, other open ground]*
- *End of construction*
- *Maturity*

5.3.2 Assessment of Visual Quality

The second step is to compare the visual quality of the existing resources with projected visual quality after the project is constructed.

Describe the visual quality for the following stages of the project and the changes from one stage to the next:

- *Existing condition*
- *During construction [grading, cut and/or fill slopes, other open ground]*
- *Completion of construction*
- *Maturity*

5.4 *Assessment of Viewer Response*

The viewer response to project changes is a combination of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity to the project as determined in the preceding section. Viewer exposure is the degree (number of viewers, length of time and/or frequency) to which viewers are exposed to a view or visual resource. Viewer sensitivity and expectations are based on the preferences, standards, ideas, opinions, and bias of different viewers. For example, recreational and residential viewers' sensitivity and expectations of their visual surroundings are traditionally higher than viewers in industrial or commercial settings.

Discuss viewer exposure, sensitivity and expectations. Describe the existing/expected viewer response during the following stages of the project and the changes from one stage to the next:

- *Existing condition*
- *During construction [grading, cut and/or fill slopes, other open ground]*
- *Completion of construction*
- *Maturity*

5.5 Determination of Significance

State each Guideline for Determining Significance. Provide a discussion explaining the affirmative or negative response to each guideline and clearly state if the impact is significant, less than significant, or less than significant with mitigation incorporated, based on the analysis.

5.6 Cumulative Impact Analysis

Define cumulative boundaries by using the viewshed or another boundary determined to be most appropriate based on the type and location of the visual impact. Generally the viewshed will not be the whole community. Include a discussion of the reasoning and justification for the chosen boundaries. The cumulative impact area for a Scenic Highway may be the length of the highway itself or a segment of the highway.

Analyze the significance of the project's visual impact on a cumulative level pursuant to CEQA Guidelines (§15130 and 15355) using the CEQA "List of Projects Method".

Use projects within the cumulative impact boundary that have similar visual impacts. For example, cellular facilities should analyze the cumulative visual impact of a proposed cellular tower in addition to the visual impact of other cellular facility projects within the cumulative study area.

Projects within the cumulative study area for which a CEQA document found a less than significant direct visual impact may still contribute to a cumulative impact.

To identify projects that may contribute to a cumulative visual impact, DPLU is tracking discretionary projects in a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) layer known as the Discretionary Projects Layer. This GIS layer is available as a printed copy of a map for each Community Planning Area for $30 by calling (858) 694-2960, or (800)-411-0017 in advance to order the most current map. The layer is updated monthly. Alternatively, the GIS layer with all of its associated data may also be purchased from SANGIS (www.sangis.org).

Make a clear statement indicating whether or not the project will result in a significant adverse direct and/or indirect impact on the visual environment.

5.7 Summary of Project Impacts and Significance and Conclusions

Describe the overall project impacts including those not depicted in a key view and provide a conclusion as to the significance of the impact.

6.0 VISUAL MITIGATION AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Describe visual mitigation and design considerations for the project and provide a conclusion as to the significance of the impact after mitigation.

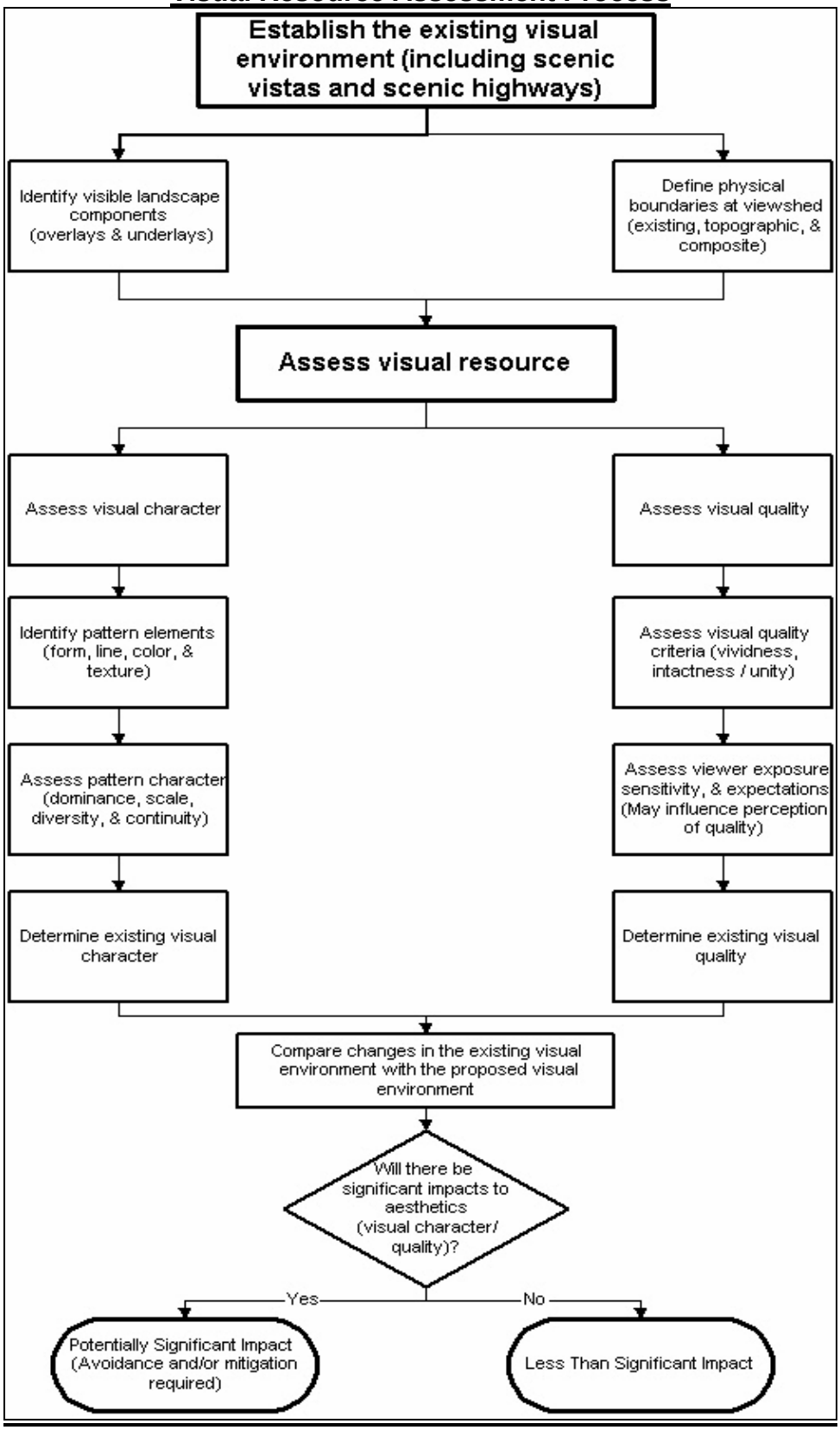
7.0 REFERENCES

Include citations for all references used in the analysis.

8.0 REPORT PREPARERS

Provide names and qualifications of those participating in the fieldwork and in the report preparation. Ensure the primary consultant is on the County Approved Consultants List to prepare Visual Analyses. The County Approved Consultant must sign the front cover of the report.

Figure 1
Visual Resource Assessment Process



[ATTACHMENT A]

GUIDELINES FOR PHOTO-SIMULATIONS

Photo-simulations are an important tool for representing the relative scale and extent of change to the existing visual environment a project represents, as well as the overall visual effect and aesthetics of the proposed project. Technology and techniques have evolved to the point where very realistic photo-simulations are not only possible but they are often expected by the public. County staff and consultants should work together to decide which key view points should be used for simulations as well as to agree on whether the intent is to show "worst case" or "typical" amounts of change. County staff and consultants should agree as to whether the photo-simulation would show the project during construction (possibly during grading) at completion or at some point in the future (5 years for example). Photo-simulations are to be used objectively in the visual impact analysis process, not as merely sales or public relations tools for the project proponents.

Simulations should:

- Always be prepared from agreed upon Key View Points. Key View Points should always represent conditions from which the project will actually be viewed (i.e. not aerial or oblique “bird’s eye” views), and should taken at points that would “most clearly display the visual effects of the project” based on County staff/consultant coordination.
- Adequately represent a real view as the public would see it from a publicly accessible location.
- Be from ground level, not be aerial views or oblique bird’s-eye views (unless view point is from a place viewers can access that overlooks the project).
- Not be panoramic view or “pasted together” in an attempt to show entire project in one single view.
- Use a (standard) 50-mm photo lens or the closest equivalent with a digital camera because that most closely represents the 60° “Cone of Vision” perceived by the human eye.

A few other suggestions:

- Checks and balances should be used to ensure accuracy. Consultants should have a defensible photo-simulation process.
- Know and be able to prove with certainty the point and angle from which the key view “before” photo was taken; this also should be the point and angle from which the simulation of the proposed project is prepared. GPS is one current tool, and aerial maps also are important for verifying location and view angles.
- Digital modeling tools to represent terrain and structures are excellent, but also must be field verified for positioning and scale.
- Tried and true methods like using story-poles, field markers, and/or balloons are useful tools to help determine/verify scale and extent of project features.

[ATTACHMENT B]

ATTRIBUTES OF VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY

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. Defining visual character is an objective process based on a hierarchy of elements, pattern, and order.

Pattern Elements

Interrelationships of elements in the landscape create pattern character, and pattern character forms visual character. Four elements create pattern, with form being the most dominant, followed by line, color, and lastly texture (Figures B-1, B-2, B-3 and B-4).

form + line + color + texture = pattern

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. Figure B-1 shows a large boulder with massive bulk, mass, size and shape compared to its immediate surroundings.

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. Figure B-2 depicts many aspects of line.

Color is the reflected hues (red, yellow, and blue) and value (light or dark) of the light reflected or emitted by an object. Figure B-3 shows an example of color within a flower field.

Texture is the apparent coarseness of the surface of various elements in the landscape. Figure B-4 portrays a landscape textured with rocks and boulders encountered in San Diego's local foothills or mountains.

Pattern Character

Pattern character can best be described in terms of dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity (Figures B-5, B-6, B-7, and B-8).

dominance + scale + diversity + continuity = pattern character

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 as shown in Figure B-5, 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. Figure B-6 shows an example of scale with several freeway interchanges.

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 (Figure B-7).

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 (Figure B-8). 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.

VISUAL QUALITY

Visual quality is dependent upon the visual environment's brilliance, distinction, and/or excellence. The most commonly used criteria to define visual quality are vividness, intactness and unity.

vividness + intactness + unity = visual quality

Vividness is the memorability of visual impression received from contrasting landscape components that combine to form a striking and distinctive visual pattern and impression.

Intactness is the integrity of visual pattern, evaluated by the extent to which the landscape is free from encroachment by competing visual elements.

Unity is the compositional harmony and intercompatibility of landscape components and the degree to which the landscape components join together to form a coherent, harmonious visual pattern.

A visual resource with a high degree of vividness, intactness and unity will typically have a high level of visual quality. For examples refer to Figures B-9 and B-10.

VISUAL CHARACTER CRITERIA
Pattern Elements

Figure B-1
Form

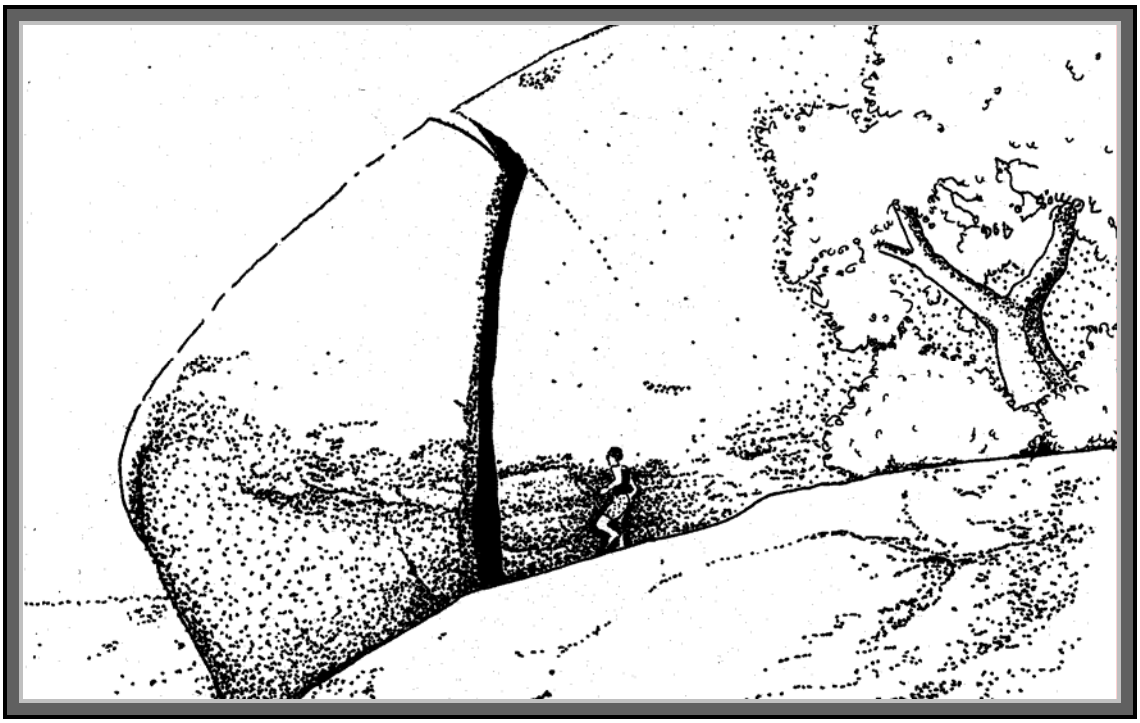
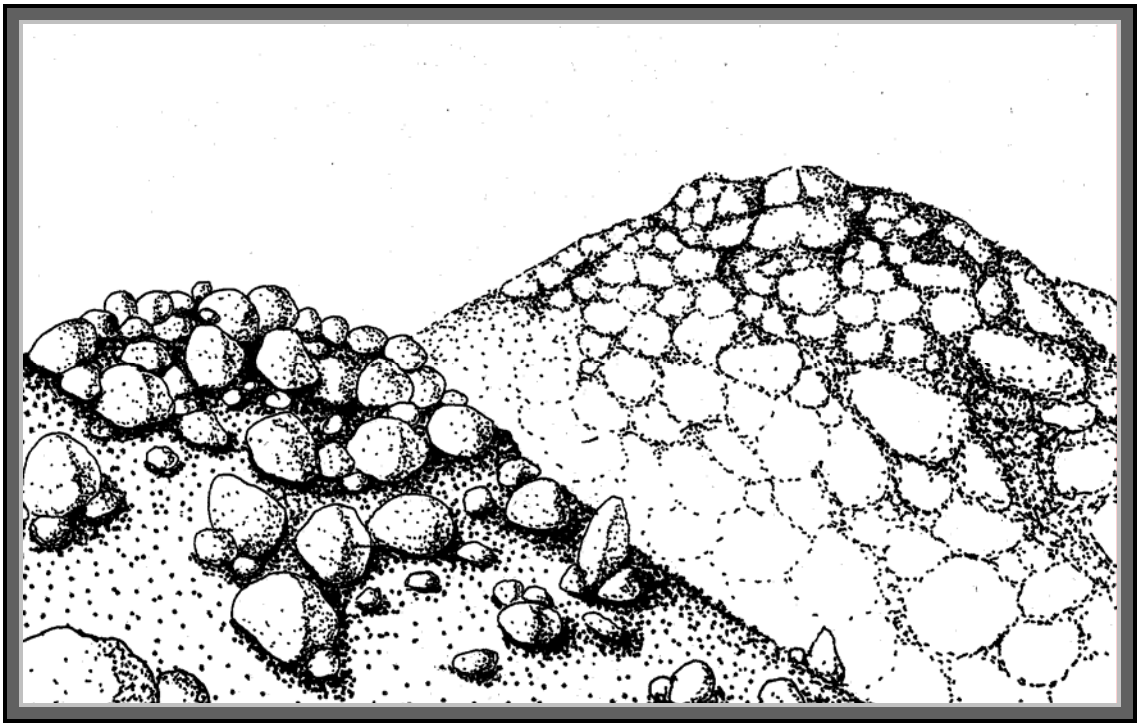


Figure B-2
Line

Figure B-3
Color

Figure B-4
Texture



Pattern Character
Figure B-5
Dominance

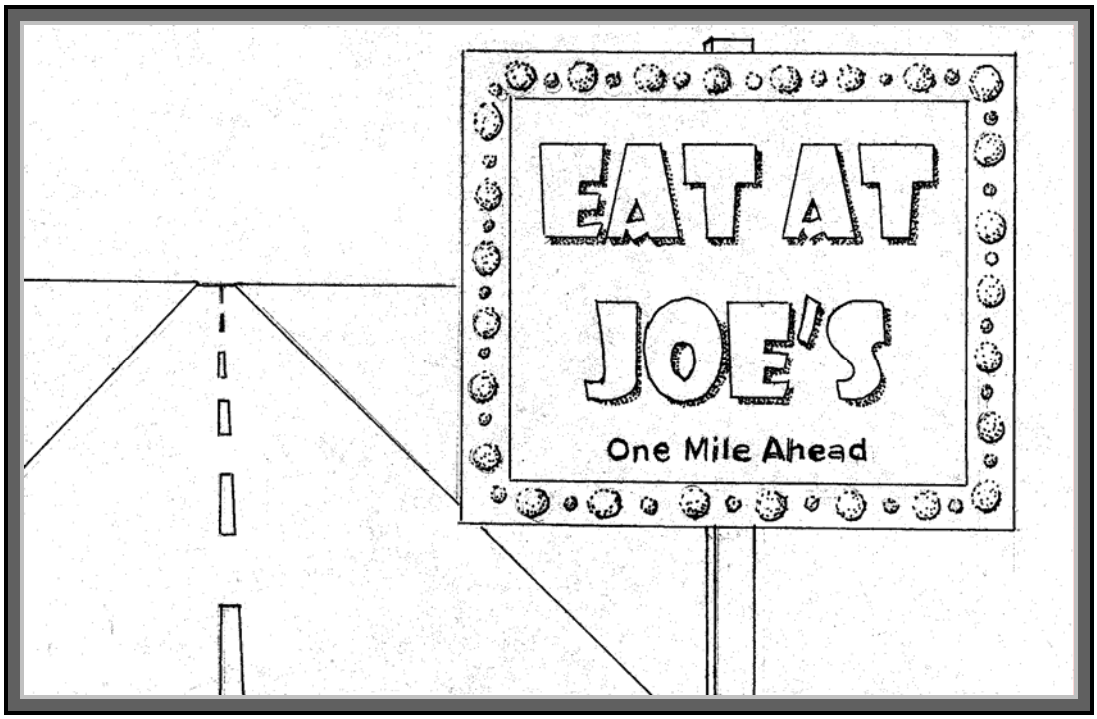


Figure B-6
Scale

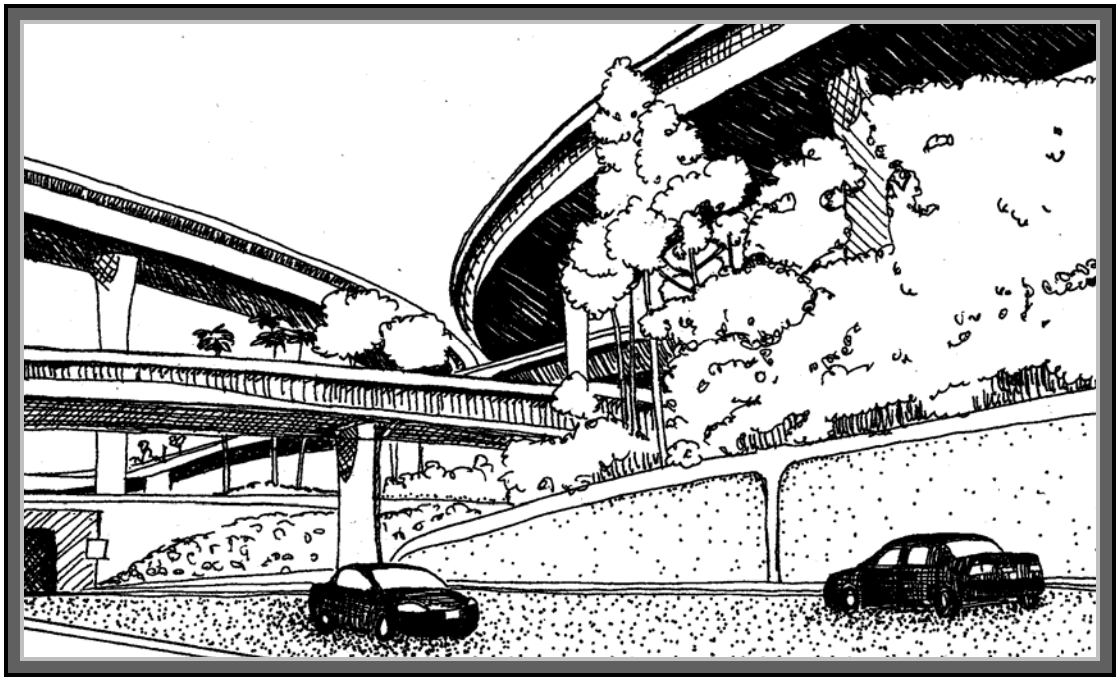


Figure B-7
Diversity

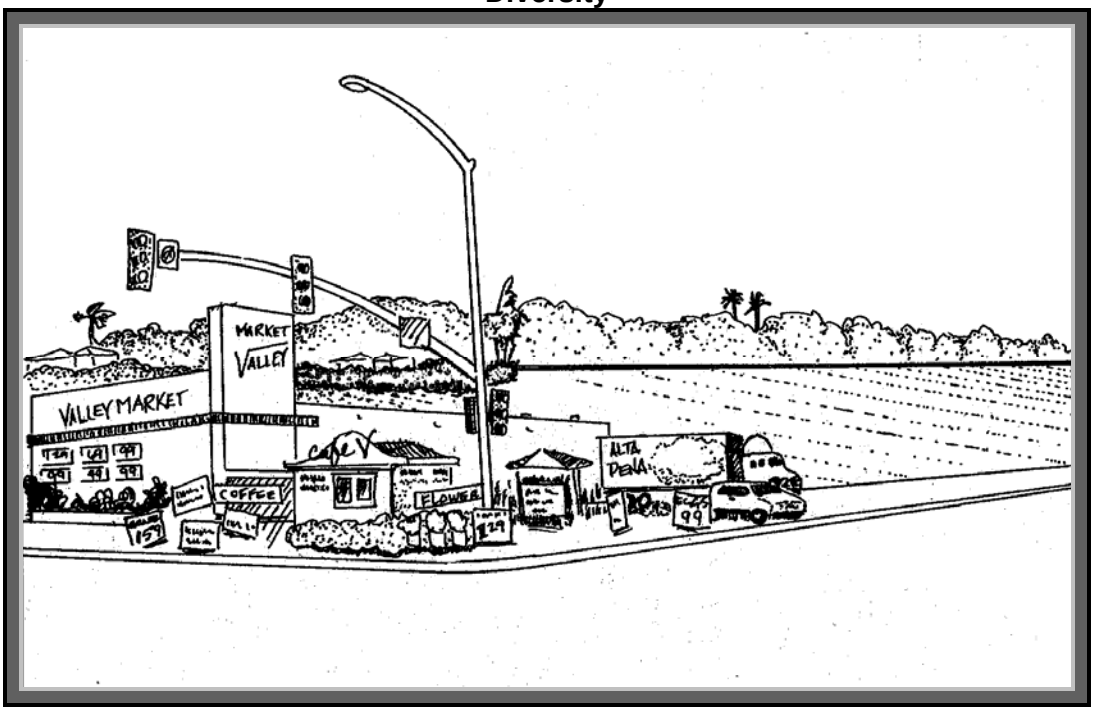
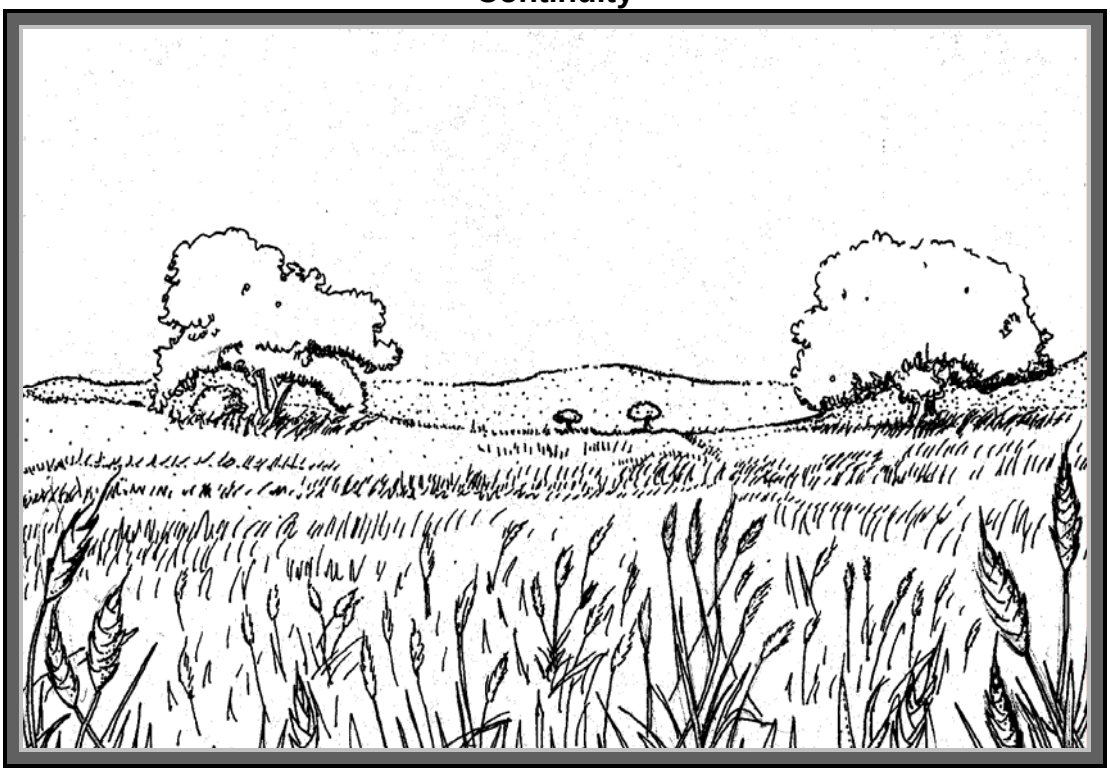


Figure B-8
Continuity



VISUAL QUALITY CRITERIA
Figure B-9
Vividness

Figure B-10
Intactness/Unity