

2.2 Aesthetics

This section identifies the regulatory context and policies related to aesthetics and provides a description of existing visual conditions, meaning the physical features that make up the visible landscape in unincorporated San Diego County and an assessment of changes to those conditions that would occur from new commercial cannabis facilities that would be permitted and licensed under the Cannabis Program. The effects of the Cannabis Program on the visual environment are generally defined in terms of the physical characteristics and potential visibility of new commercial cannabis facilities, the extent to which new commercial cannabis facilities would change the perceived visual character and quality of the environment, and the expected level of sensitivity that the viewing public may have where new commercial cannabis facilities would alter existing views. The “Methodology” discussion below provides further detail on the approach used in this evaluation.

Several comment letters received in response to the notice of preparation (NOP) identified concerns related to adverse effects on surrounding views, potential changes in visual character, and light pollution. These issues are addressed in this section, as appropriate. All comments received in response to the NOP are presented in Appendix A of this PEIR.

A summary of impacts evaluated in this section is provided in Table 2.2.1.

Table 2.2.1 Aesthetics Summary of Impacts

Issue Number	Issue Topic	Project Direct Impact	Project Cumulative Impact	Impact after Mitigation
1	Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources	Alternatives 1–5: Less than Significant	Alternatives 1–5: Less than Significant	Alternatives 1–5: Less than Significant
2	Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality	Alternative 1: Less than Significant Alternatives 2–5: Significant	Alternative 1: Less than Significant Alternatives 2–5: Significant	Alternative 1: Less than Significant Alternatives 2–5: Significant and Unavoidable
3	Adversely Affect Views due to New Light and Glare	Alternatives 1–5: Less than Significant	Alternatives 1–5: Less than Significant	Alternatives 1–5: Less than Significant

2.2.1 Existing Conditions

San Diego County is a visually diverse region within Southern California and features a dramatic coastline, mountains, and desert. The county is rich in natural resources, including open space, topographic features, scenic corridors, and scenic vistas. These natural features contribute to the overall quality of the existing visual setting. Over 90 percent of the unincorporated county land is either open space or undeveloped. Aesthetic elements of the human-made environment, such as historic structures and districts, architectural design, streetscapes, and manufactured landscapes, also provide aesthetic value throughout the county (County of San Diego 2011a). Representative views from public vantage points throughout the unincorporated county are provided in Figures 2.2.1a through 2.2.1e, which are presented at the end of this section. These views were selected based on the representative views identified in the County of San Diego General Plan (General Plan) but have been updated to reflect current conditions in the county.

2.2.1.1 Visual Character of San Diego County

Communities

Community character can be described as the “personality” of the community and is defined by land uses, historical resources, community design, architectural themes, natural resources, and any other human-made or natural features that give the community its overall look and feel. The unincorporated area of San Diego is unique because varying features, such as topography, land uses, and natural features, allow for a variety in community character throughout the county. The predominant pattern of development in the unincorporated county is rural in character with subareas consisting of suburban and urban land uses.

San Diego County is divided into 28 community planning areas (CPAs) that vary in land use and density and are dispersed throughout the unincorporated county, including village areas with developed town centers, rural communities that support agricultural operations, and rural lands that feature large areas of open space (Figure 2.2.2, Community Planning Areas, presented at the end of this section). Some communities are uniquely defined by their setting in hillside areas, the desert valley, and agricultural areas. The most developed CPAs are located along the westernmost boundaries of the unincorporated county and consist of Spring Valley, Valle de Oro, Lakeside, San Dieguito, and North County Metro. The mostly rural residential and agricultural CPAs that contain large areas of open space are Bonsall, Central Mountain, and the Desert Subregion. Some CPAs, such as Alpine, Ramona, and Fallbrook, have established commercial village centers with surrounding rural uses (County of San Diego 2011a; County of San Diego 2011b).

Geographic Regions

As defined in the General Plan, the county has distinctive geographic regions that provide a backdrop for visual resources. The diversity of these regions provides county residents and visitors with an array of natural vistas and scenic environments.

Coastal Plain

The Coastal Plain is where most of the urban land uses in the unincorporated county are concentrated. Commercial cannabis facilities would not be permitted in the coastal zone and would only be authorized in limited areas within the Coastal Plain: the CPAs of North County Metro and San Dieguito. Primary aesthetic resources in these areas of the Coastal Plain consist of lakes, rivers, hillsides, natural vegetation, and open space and recreation areas.

Peninsular Range

The Peninsular Range consists of north-to-south trending mountains. Commercial cannabis facilities would be permitted in many of the CPAs that encompass and surround the Peninsular Range, including Alpine, Central Mountain, Jamul-Dulzura, Julian, Mountain Empire, North Mountain, Pala-Pauma, and Ramona. Notable scenic resources in the Peninsular Range foothills include the Otay River, Sweetwater River, upper San Diego River, Upper and Lower Otay Lakes, Sweetwater Reservoir, Lake Hodges, and San Vicente Reservoir. Scenic resources in the higher elevation of the Peninsular Range region include 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 (County of San Diego 2011a).

Desert

Commercial cannabis facilities would be authorized in limited areas in the desert region, including portions of Borrego Springs and areas surrounding Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. The desert region provides expansive views characterized by dramatic landforms, native desert habitat, and low desert valleys (County of San Diego 2011a).

2.2.1.2 Scenic Vistas and Visual Resources

Viewsheds and visible components of landscape within a viewshed, including the underlying landform and overlaying land cover, establish the visual environment for the scenic vista. A vista is a view from a particular location or composite views along a roadway or trail. Scenic vistas often refer to views of natural lands but may also be compositions of natural and developed areas or even entirely of developed and unnatural areas that provide attractive or unique character to the viewer, such as a scenic vista of a rural town and surrounding agricultural lands.

Public agencies establish visual resource management objectives and policies to protect and enhance public scenic resources. Goals, objectives, policies, implementation strategies, and guidance are typically contained in general plans, resource management plans, and local specific plans. Scenic resources within the county are described in more detail below.

Resource Conservation Areas

Certain areas in the county have been designated as Resource Conservation Areas (RCAs) for the purposes of informing future planning decisions. RCAs are areas of aesthetic quality, scenic geological formations, and astronomical dark skies areas. The General Plan identifies over 40 RCAs in unincorporated San Diego County that are considered valuable because of visual resources. Scenic resources within these RCAs include waterbodies (e.g., reservoirs, creeks, rivers, streams, coastal wetlands), unique geologic features, mountains, valleys, canyons, bluffs, natural habitats, meadows, prominent trees, forests and woodlands, wilderness areas, and riparian areas (County of San Diego 2011a).

Open Space, Parks, Preserves, Reserves, and Regional Trails

Open space consists of areas of outstanding scenic, historic, and cultural value; areas particularly suited for park and recreation purposes, including access to lakeshores, rivers, and streams; and areas that serve as links between major recreation and open space reserves, including utility easements, banks of rivers and streams, trails, and scenic highway corridors. The county has a system of 18 open space preserves and reserves that are distributed primarily in the western and central areas of the county. The county also has several regional parks that contain important historical or cultural sites, museums, and interpretive centers. In addition, the county has several regional trails that cover long distances; extend beyond community or municipal borders; have state or national significance; and provide important connections to existing parks, open space preserves, and other visual resources (County of San Diego 2011a). See section 2.15, "Public Services," for more information.

Built Environment

Aesthetic value is not limited to open space and rural lands but is also found in historic structures and districts, architectural design, streetscapes, and manufactured landscapes. These valuable aesthetic elements of the human-made environment are distributed throughout the county. An example is the historic gold-mining community of Julian (County of San Diego 2011a).

As discussed in Section 2.6, “Cultural and Paleontological Resources,” the unincorporated county contains historical sites, such as residences, schoolhouses, stage depots, and cemeteries. These historical sites are concentrated in the more developed areas of the unincorporated county, such as Spring Valley and San Dieguito, and in areas with established town centers, such as Ramona, Julian, and Fallbrook. Historical resources are also generally located along major roadways in the county, such as Interstate (I)-8 and State Route (SR) 78.

2.2.1.3 *Scenic Highways and Corridors*

A freeway, highway, road, or other vehicular right-of-way along a corridor with considerable natural landscape and a high aesthetic value can potentially be eligible for a scenic highway designation. Scenic highway corridors generally include the land adjacent to and visible from the vehicular right-of-way. The dimension of the corridor is usually identified using a motorist’s line of vision. Scenic highways are important because land use controls can be applied at a scale that allows the County to preserve the visual integrity of the natural landscape (County of San Diego 2011a). Figure 2.2.3, presented at the end of this section, depicts the National Scenic Byways and State Scenic Highways in the unincorporated county.

National Scenic Byways

The National Scenic Byway Program was established by the Federal Highway Administration under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 with the vision “to create a distinctive collection of American roads, their stories and treasured places.” Sunrise Highway is a National Scenic Byway that traverses north from Old Highway 80 to SR 79 through the Cleveland National Forest (County of San Diego 2011a).

State Scenic Highways

State Scenic Highways are highways that are either officially designated by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) or are eligible for designation. A highway may be designated as “scenic” depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the aesthetic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler’s enjoyment of the view. A highway’s status changes from “eligible” to “officially designated” when the local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies for scenic highway approval with Caltrans, and receives notification from Caltrans that the highway has been designated as an official State Scenic Highway. Designated State Scenic Highways in the county include (1) SR 78 through the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (18.2-mile segment) and (2) SR 125 from SR 94 in Spring Valley to I-8 in La Mesa (2 miles of this segment are in the unincorporated county). Eligible scenic highways within the unincorporated county include portions of I-5, I-15, SR 94, I-8, SR 79, SR 78, and SR 76 (County of San Diego 2011a).

County Scenic Highway System

The County of San Diego General Plan identifies over 50 roadway segments that are included in the County's Scenic Highway System. These roadway corridors are subject to measures that protect and enhance scenic resources, which include regulation of land uses, detailed land and site planning, control of outdoor advertising, and careful attention to control of earthmoving and landscaping (County of San Diego 2011a).

Even though the county has an abundance of natural and human-made beauty, only limited segments of these visual resources are viewed regularly. Scenic corridors along county roadways, particularly scenic highways, offer an easy means of viewing these resources. Scenic highways can be used to identify and preserve important viewsheds along roadways. For example, the County adopted Scenic Preservation Guidelines for the I-15 Corridor and a Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan Update that aim to maintain existing scenic highways and corridors (County of San Diego 2011a).

2.2.1.4 *Dark Skies*

Dark skies are a natural resource in San Diego County, contribute to the rural character of several county communities, and are essential to advancing astronomical research. Astronomical research has contributed to a greater understanding of our solar system, supported advances in space travel, improved telecommunication systems, advanced weather forecasting, and provided insight to energy production. The 5 criteria for a high-quality astronomical site are (1) an elevation over 5,000 feet above sea level; (2) clear, cloud-free night skies; (3) proximity to the Pacific Ocean; (4) distant from urban areas; and (5) freedom from nearby sources of light, dust, and smoke. The 2 sites in the county that meet all of the above criteria are Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. The maintenance of dark skies in the county is vital to their operation and the astronomical research carried out at these facilities. Palomar Observatory, located at 5,500 feet at the top of Palomar Mountain in northern San Diego County near Palomar Mountain State Park, is privately owned and operated by the California Institute of Technology and supports some of California's and the United States' premier scientific research programs. San Diego State University and the University of Illinois jointly operate the Mount Laguna Observatory, which is one of best astronomical research and education facilities in the county. The Mount Laguna Observatory is located at an altitude of 6,100 feet on the eastern edge of the Cleveland National Forest near the Anza-Borrego State Park, 45 miles east of downtown San Diego (County of San Diego 2011a).

Light pollution refers to nighttime lighting in excess of what is necessary for its purpose. Nighttime light is produced primarily by upward-pointing or upward-reflected light from outdoor lighting. This type of lighting illuminates the nighttime sky from below and can be detrimental to astronomical observations. Therefore, the County protects the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories by restricting the permitted use of outdoor light fixtures on private property. Nighttime light that spills outside its intended area can also be disruptive to neighbors and potentially harmful to motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians. Furthermore, the health of natural wildlife can be adversely affected from nighttime lighting (County of San Diego 2011a).

Some land uses contribute to greater levels of night lighting than others. Commercial land uses tend to have lighted parking lots and signs at night and use more lighting for nighttime security. Therefore, areas of higher commercial use generally have a greater lighting footprint than most residential areas. In addition, CPAs with greater overall development generally have a greater

lighting footprint than less developed CPAs. The most developed CPAs, which generally have the greatest lighting footprint, are Spring Valley, Valle de Oro, Lakeside, San Dieguito, and North County Metro. Mostly rural residential and agricultural CPAs and those that contain large areas of open space, such as Bonsall, Central Mountain, and the Desert Subregion, generally have a smaller lighting footprint. CPAs, such as Alpine, Ramona, and Fallbrook, that have an established commercial village center have a greater lighting footprint in the village center and a lesser lighting footprint in the surrounding rural uses (County of San Diego 2011a).

2.2.1.5 *Visual Characteristics of Existing Cannabis Facilities in the County*

There are currently 5 existing cannabis facilities that are authorized to operate and engage in medical cannabis collective, commercial cannabis microbusiness, or commercial cannabis retailer activities in the unincorporated county. These existing cannabis facilities are located on land zoned for industrial and commercial uses in the unincorporated areas of El Cajon, Escondido, and Ramona. The existing cannabis facilities include single-story commercial retail buildings and industrial warehouse buildings for indoor cultivation, distribution, and manufacturing. The existing buildings range in size between 1,107 and 15,206 square feet on lots ranging from 0.5 to 2.7 acres. The buildings are similar in appearance to other facilities on industrial and commercial land uses throughout the unincorporated county. Photographs of the existing cannabis facilities are provided in Figures 2.2.4a through 2.2.4c, which are presented at the end of this section.

2.2.1.6 *Viewer Groups*

Viewer groups include stationary viewers (e.g., individuals on residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural land uses) or mobile viewers (e.g., motorists). Sensitive viewer groups that could be affected by implementation of the Cannabis Program include residents, recreationists, and motorists on designated scenic roads in the vicinity of future projects. Public vantage points throughout the unincorporated county include the public roads, highways, hiking trails, and recreation and open space areas described above in Section 2.2.1.2, “Scenic Vistas and Visual Resources,” and Section 2.2.1.3, “Scenic Highways and Corridors.”

2.2.2 *Regulatory Framework*

2.2.2.1 *Federal*

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws related to aesthetics are applicable to the Cannabis Program.

2.2.2.2 *State*

State Scenic Highways Program

In 1963, the California Scenic Highway Law created the California Scenic Highways Program with the purpose of preserving and protecting scenic highway corridors from any change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. State Scenic Highways are highways that are either officially designated by Caltrans or are eligible for designation. The statewide system of scenic highways is part of the Master Plan of State Highways Eligible for Official State Designation as Scenic Highways. Scenic highway nominations are evaluated using the following criteria:

- The proposed scenic highway is principally within an unspoiled native habitat and showcases the unique aspects of the landscape, agriculture, or human-made water features.
- Existing visual intrusions do not significantly impact the scenic corridor.
- Strong local support for the proposed scenic highway designation is demonstrated.
- The length of the proposed scenic highway is not short or segmented.

A highway's status changes from "eligible" to "officially designated" when the local jurisdiction adopts a Scenic Corridor Protection Program, applies to Caltrans for scenic highway approval, and receives notification from Caltrans that the highway has been designated as an official State Scenic Highway. Once a scenic highway is designated, the local jurisdiction is responsible for regulating development within the scenic highway corridor in areas where the local agency has land use jurisdiction.

As identified above, designated State Scenic Highways in the county include (1) SR 78 through the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (18.2-mile segment) and (2) SR 125 from SR 94 in Spring Valley to I-8 in La Mesa (2 miles of this segment are in the unincorporated county) (Figure 2.2.3, presented below). Eligible scenic highways within the unincorporated county include portions of I-5, I-15, SR 94, I-8, SR 79, SR 78, and SR 76.

California Energy Commission Building Energy Efficiency Standards for Outdoor Lighting

California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 24, Parts 1 and 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards, adopted by the California Energy Commission (CEC) on November 5, 2003, include requirements for outdoor lighting. These standards are updated periodically. The last update took effect January 1, 2023.

The outdoor lighting standards vary according to lighting zone. CEC defines the boundaries of lighting zones based on US Census Bureau boundaries for urban and rural areas, as well as the legal boundaries of wilderness and park areas. The smallest amount of power is allowed in Lighting Zone 1, and increasingly more power is allowed in Lighting Zones 2, 3, and 4. By default, government-designated parks, recreation areas, and wildlife preserves are included in Lighting Zone 1; rural areas are included in Lighting Zone 2; and urban areas are included in Lighting Zone 3. Lighting Zone 4 is a special use district that may be adopted by a local government.

The allowed lighting power in lighting zones is based on the brightness of existing lighting in the surrounding area because eyes adapt to darker surrounding conditions, and less light is needed to properly see. Providing greater power than is needed potentially leads to debilitating glare and to an increasing spiral of brightness because overbright projects become the surrounding conditions for future projects, causing future projects to unnecessarily consume energy and contribute to light pollution.

Department of Cannabis Control Regulations

The Department of Cannabis Control adopts regulations that apply to medicinal and adult-use commercial cannabis businesses. CCR Title 4, Division 19, Section 16304, "General Environmental Protection Measures," includes the following requirements for light sources at cultivation sites:

- All outdoor lighting used for security purposes shall be shielded and downward facing.
- Mixed-light license types of all tiers and sizes shall ensure that lights used for cultivation are shielded from sunset to sunrise to avoid nighttime glare.

2.2.2.3 *Local*

San Diego County General Plan

The following General Plan policies related to aesthetics are applicable to the Cannabis Program:

- **Policy LU-6.6: Integration of Natural Features into Project Design.** Require incorporation of natural features (including mature oaks, indigenous trees, and rock formations) into proposed development and require avoidance of sensitive environmental resources.
- **Policy LU-6.9: Development Conformance with Topography.** Require development to conform to the natural topography to limit grading; incorporate and not significantly alter the dominant physical characteristics of the site; and to utilize natural drainage and topography in conveying stormwater to the maximum extent practicable.
- **Policy LU-10.2: Development Environmental Resource Relationship.** Require development in Semi-Rural and Rural areas to respect and conserve the unique natural features and rural character, and avoid sensitive or intact environmental resources and hazard areas.
- **Policy LU-11.2: Compatibility with Community Character.** Require that commercial, office, and industrial development be located, scaled, and designed to be compatible with the unique character of the community.
- **Policy COS-11.1: Protection of Scenic Resources.** Require the protection of scenic highways, corridors, regionally significant scenic vistas, and natural features, including prominent ridgelines, dominant landforms, reservoirs, and scenic landscapes.
- **Policy COS-11.3: Development Siting and Design.** Require development within visually sensitive areas to minimize visual impacts and to preserve unique or special visual features, particularly in rural areas, through the following:
 - Creative site planning;
 - Integration of natural features into the project;
 - Appropriate scale, materials, and design to complement the surrounding natural landscape;
 - Minimal disturbance of topography;
 - Clustering of development to preserve a balance of open space vistas, natural features, and community character; and
 - Creation of contiguous open space networks.
- **Policy COS-11.7: Underground Utilities.** Require new development to place utilities underground and encourage “undergrounding” in existing development to maintain viewsheds, reduce hazards associated with hanging lines and utility poles, and to keep pace with current and future technologies.

- **Policy COS-12.2: Development Location on Ridges.** Require development to preserve the physical features by being located down and away from ridgelines so that structures are not silhouetted against the sky.
- **Policy COS-13.1: Restrict Light and Glare.** Restrict outdoor light and glare from development projects in Semi-Rural and Rural Lands and designated rural communities to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.
- **Policy COS-13.2: Palomar and Mount Laguna.** Minimize, to the maximum extent feasible, the impact of development on the dark skies surrounding Palomar and Mount Laguna observatories to maintain dark skies which are vital to these two world-class observatories by restricting exterior light sources within the impact areas of the observatories.
- **Policy COS-13.3: Collaboration to Retain Night Skies.** Coordinate with adjacent federal and State agencies, local jurisdictions, and tribal governments to retain the quality of night skies by minimizing light pollution.

Community Plans

Individual community plans identify, and sometimes prioritize, policies for specific scenic corridors that are important resources for the community to preserve. Generally, these corridors are consistent with the priority list of scenic routes identified in the Conservation and Open Space Element. Community plans list and describe the RCAs that are located within the community and identify goals and policies for their protection.

Design Review Guidelines

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, Julian, Lakeside, Ramona, Rancho San Diego, Spring Valley, Sweetwater, and Valley Center. The design guidelines specify the types of design permitted in each community, including architecture, landscaping, building uses, designation of scenic roads, slope modifications, and overall visual effect.

I-15 Corridor: Scenic Preservation Guidelines

Scenic preservation guidelines have been established to help preserve viewsheds in 5 communities within the unincorporated county along the I-15 corridor. These communities are Rainbow, Fallbrook, Bonsall, Valley Center, and North County Metro. The guidelines seek to balance protection of scenic resources within the I-15 corridor area while accommodating “development which harmonizes with the natural environment.” The guidelines establish standards to regulate the visual quality and the environmental integrity of the entire corridor and encourage scenic preservation and development practices compatible with the goals and policies of the 5 CPAs when appropriate.

County of San Diego Resource Protection Ordinance

The San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances (Regulatory Code) Sections 86.601–86,608 protect a variety of resources, including steep slopes. The Resource Protection Ordinance limits development on steep slopes through encroachment minimums, density restrictions on steep slope lands, and 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. Other provisions of the Resource Protection Ordinance require preservation of sensitive habitat, floodplains, wetlands, and historic and cultural resources. 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.

County of San Diego Light Pollution Code

Light pollution is addressed in Regulatory Code Section 51.201 et seq. The San Diego County Light Pollution Code regulates outdoor lighting with the intent to minimize light pollution in San Diego County and to protect against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. The Light Pollution Code regulates applicants for any permit required by the County for work involving outdoor light fixtures, unless exempt. The Light Pollution Code designates all areas within a 15-mile radius of each observatory as Zone A, other unincorporated areas of the county as Zone B, and the unincorporated areas of Julian and Borrego Community Planning Areas as Zone C. Light requirements are further divided into 3 categories: Class I applies to commercial and industrial uses, Class I applies to parking and security for all uses, and Class III applies to decorative lighting for all uses.

County of San Diego Scenic Highway Program

The San Diego County Scenic Highway Program was established to protect and enhance the scenic, historic, and recreational resources in the county within a network of scenic highway corridors. Through this program, the County has established design standards and criteria for regulating the visual quality of development within scenic highway corridors, including the creation of the Scenic Preservation Overlay Zone, which applies to recognized scenic areas along highway corridors. The program maintains a scenic highway system priority list that includes 2 existing official scenic highways, 6 first-priority routes, 16 second-priority routes, and 38 third-priority routes. Routes are prioritized based on the following criteria: routes traversing and providing access to major recreation, scenic, or historic resources; routes traversing lands under the jurisdiction of public agencies; routes supported by significant local community interest; and routes offering unique opportunities for the protection and enhancement of scenic recreational and historical resources (County of San Diego 1986). The scenic highways in the unincorporated county are described above in Section 2.2.1.3, "Scenic Highways and Corridors," and shown in Figure 2.2.3, presented below.

County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance

The County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance (Zoning Ordinance) contains several ordinances that pertain to aesthetic character and resources. These ordinances are summarized in the following sections.

County of San Diego County Scenic Area Regulations

Zoning Ordinance Sections 5200–5212 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 Scenic Area Regulations apply to areas of unique scenic value, including, but not limited to, scenic highway corridors designated by the General Plan; critical viewshed and prime viewshed areas as designated by the Local Coastal Program

Land Use Plan; and areas adjacent to significant recreational, historic, or scenic resources, including federal and state parks.

County of San Diego Historic/Archaeological Landmark and District Area Regulations

Zoning Ordinance Sections 5700–5749 include provisions intended to identify, preserve, and protect the historic, cultural, archeological, and architectural resource values of designated landmarks and districts and encourage compatible uses and architectural design. Areas designated by the Historic/Archaeological Landmark District have an “H” special area designator, whereas areas within a Specific Historic District are noted with a “J” special area designator. Where an “H” designator exists, the Historic Site Board, a board appointed by the Board of Supervisors, may provide guidance to advise the San Diego County Planning and Development Services Director on historical and 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 of San Diego Specific Historic Districts

Zoning Ordinance Section 5749, adopted July 29, 1992, includes a provision for the establishment of Specific Historic Districts to have their own review boards and specific review criteria. The review criteria include standards for the external appearance of structures.

County of San Diego Community Design Review Area Regulations

Zoning Ordinance Sections 5750–5758 include provisions 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 in areas that have a Community Design Review Area Special Designator (Designator B). 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 Community Design Review Area Special Designator also covers portions of 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.

County of San Diego Design Review Area Regulations

Zoning Ordinance Sections 5900–5910, adopted November 18, 1981, include 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 in areas that have a “D” zoning designator, which indicates the need for design review. The regulation requires that specific criteria be reviewed to achieve the objectives of the approving authority.

County of San Diego Humidity, Heat, Cold, and Glare

Zoning Ordinance Section 6320, which was amended by Ordinance 9620 (New Series) and adopted December 10, 2003, has performance standards for glare for all commercial and industrial uses in residential, commercial, and identified industrial zones. All commercial and industrial uses subject to this section shall be operated in a manner that does not produce glare that is readily detectable without instruments by the average person beyond the zones in which the uses are located.

County of San Diego Outdoor Lighting

Zoning Ordinance Section 6322, which as amended by Ordinance 7110 (New Series) and adopted April 2, 1986, controls excessive or unnecessary outdoor light emissions that produce unwanted illumination of adjacent properties by restricting outdoor lighting usage.

2.2.3 Analysis of Project Impacts and Determination of Significance

2.2.3.1 Methodology

Characterization of visual changes and determination of whether they are considered adverse are subjective undertakings. Different viewers may draw different conclusions about the nature and severity of visual changes. To evaluate potential for adverse aesthetic effects, this section defines the baseline visual character and scenic resource conditions of the county, which were presented in Section 2.2.1, “Existing Conditions.”

The aesthetic impact analysis qualitatively evaluates whether adoption and implementation of the Cannabis Program under each alternative could create adverse visual effects using the thresholds of significance and the *County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance* identified below. This analysis compares the assumed character of cannabis facilities (cultivation and noncultivation) and cannabis use locations to the existing character of the county to determine the degree of the visual character or view alteration and proximity to an identified scenic resource for EIR analysis purposes for each alternative.

Photographs of existing cannabis facilities in unincorporated San Diego County are provided in Figures 2.2.4a through 2.2.4c. Representative photographs of other types of commercial cannabis facilities that may occur under the Cannabis Program are provided in Figures 2.2.5a through 2.2.5h. Figures 2.2.6 and 2.2.7 provide aerial views of cannabis cultivation sites. Because there are a limited number of existing cannabis facilities that are authorized to operate in San Diego County, example photos of cannabis facilities from Yolo, Mendocino, and Sonoma counties are provided. Figures are presented at the end of this section.

New cannabis use development assumptions for each alternative are provided in Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting.” These assumptions were used to evaluate the extent of potential changes in visual conditions.

2.2.3.2 Thresholds of Significance

According to Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact on aesthetics, light, and glare is considered significant if implementation of the Cannabis Program would do any of the following:

- have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- in non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings (public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points);

- in urbanized areas, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; or
- create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

2.2.3.3 *Issues Not Discussed Further*

All thresholds of significance related to aesthetics are evaluated in the following sections.

2.2.3.4 *Approach to Analysis*

The aesthetic impact analysis qualitatively evaluates whether adoption and implementation of the proposed Cannabis Program under each of the 5 alternatives, including subsequent commercial cannabis facilities, could create adverse visual effects using the thresholds of significance identified below and County regulations associated with aesthetics and lighting/glare in Section 2.2.2, "Regulatory Framework." This analysis compares assumed character of cannabis facilities (cultivation and noncultivation) to the existing visual landscape characteristics of the county to determine the degree of the visual character or view alteration and proximity to an identified scenic resource. Photographs of existing cannabis facilities in the county, as well as photos and aerial images of commercial cannabis sites in other counties in California, and the development assumptions in Table 1.4 were used to evaluate the extent of potential change in visual conditions.

2.2.3.5 *Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources*

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

According to Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and the *County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance: Visual Resources*, the Cannabis Program would have a significant impact if it would:

- obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista that is visible from a:
 - public road,
 - trail within an adopted county or state trail system,
 - scenic vista or highway, or
 - recreational area.
- result in the removal or substantial adverse change in one or more features that contribute to the valued scenic resources in the unincorporated county including, but not limited to, the following:
 - designated landmarks;
 - historic resources or unique structures;
 - county public trails;
 - public views of bays, lagoons, canyons, trees, rock outcroppings, established native vegetation, or agricultural lands in the Coastal Plain region;

- public views of water resources (e.g., reservoirs) and extensive open space including county reserves and parks in the Peninsular Ranges; or
- public views supporting unique or memorable landforms, native habitat, and desert valleys.

Impact Analysis

As discussed in Section 2.2.1.1, “Visual Character of San Diego County,” roadways, trails, scenic highways, and recreational areas offer views of scenic resources throughout the unincorporated county. These scenic resources include designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands.

The General Plan includes policies to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

San Diego County has also adopted regulations that govern the protection of scenic resources in specific areas and communities within the unincorporated county. The following regulations apply to commercial cannabis facilities that would be licensed and permitted under the Cannabis Program.

Sections 5200–5212 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development in areas of high scenic value, including areas within scenic highway corridors and areas adjacent to important recreational, historic, or scenic resources. Commercial cannabis facilities would be permitted in scenic areas, subject to special area regulations and to submittal and approval of a site plan. The site plan must demonstrate that the proposed development does not interfere with or degrade visual features of the site or adjacent sites as viewed from the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource. The County considers the following criteria as part of design review:

- the proposed building characteristics are compatible with the topography, vegetation, and colors of the natural environment and with the scenic, historic and recreational resources of the designated area;
- the placement of buildings, structures, landscaping, and signs does not detract from the visual setting or obstruct significant views and is compatible with the topography of the site and surrounding areas;
- the removal of native vegetation is minimized and proposed landscaping is compatible with existing vegetation of the area;
- landscaping and plantings are used to screen features (e.g., parking and storage areas) to the maximum extent practicable; and
- grading is minimized and alterations to natural topography are screened from view.

The design review process would ensure that commercial cannabis facilities proposed in areas of high scenic value are protective of scenic resources and vistas.

Sections 5700–5747 of the Zoning Ordinance impose site plan requirements and limitations on development within designated landmarks and districts. Section 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance includes specific review criteria for development in historic districts, including design standards for the appearance of buildings. Commercial cannabis facilities that involve the construction or alteration of a building or structure on a parcel containing a designated historic landmark or in a historic district would be subject to site plan review, which would ensure the protection of scenic resources in historic landmarks and districts.

Sections 86.601–86.608 (Resource Protection Ordinance) of the Regulatory Code limit development on steep slopes. The Cannabis Program proposes a general performance standard that prohibits cannabis cultivation on slopes 25 percent or greater, which would ensure the protection of scenic resources and vistas in accordance with the Resource Protection Ordinance.

The County of San Diego is also responsible for regulating development within scenic highway corridors in areas where the County has land use jurisdiction. Commercial cannabis facilities proposed within the I-15 corridor would be subject to the County’s design review guidelines, which specify the types of design permitted in each community. Design review guidelines differ for each community and include requirements related to site layout, architecture, landscaping, signage, and lighting. Commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to scenic preservation guidelines, which establish standards to preserve viewsheds and regulate visual quality within the corridor.

The Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would generally allow for the development of new commercial cannabis facilities in agricultural, commercial, and industrial zones of the unincorporated county, excluding areas within the coastal zone. The types of facilities that would be developed are cannabis storefront, non-storefront retail, and consumption lounges; cannabis cultivation facilities (outdoor, mixed-light, and indoor); cannabis manufacturing facilities; cannabis distribution facilities; cannabis microbusinesses; cannabis testing laboratories; and cannabis temporary events. New features that would be introduced within viewsheds include greenhouses, nurseries, retail storefronts, consumption lounges, storage containers, and warehouses for manufacturing, processing, testing, and distribution. The average building size is assumed to range from approximately 1,500 square feet (e.g., microbusinesses, distribution facilities) to 20,000 square feet (e.g., indoor cultivation facilities) (Table 1.4). The average footprint for cannabis activities would range from approximately 0.5 acres (e.g., manufacturing, processing, testing, distribution, and retail facilities) to 15 acres (e.g., nurseries). Figures 2.2.4a through 2.2.4c depict photographs of the existing cannabis facilities in unincorporated San Diego County, and Figures 2.2.5a through 2.2.5h depict representative views of other types of cannabis cultivation facilities that could be constructed under the Cannabis Program. Figures 2.2.6 and 2.2.7 provide aerial views of example cannabis cultivation sites. Figures are presented at the end of this section.

New cannabis facilities have potential to be sited near scenic resources, including within the viewsheds of designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands throughout the unincorporated county. Commercial cannabis cultivation is prohibited within the coastal zones of unincorporated San Diego County; therefore, the Cannabis Program would have no impact on the coastal scenic vistas.

Commercial cannabis activities that would be permitted in agricultural zones include indoor, outdoor, and mixed-light cultivation, as well as nonvolatile manufacturing, distribution, and retail non-storefront uses as part of a microbusiness (refer to Table 1.1 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting”). Cannabis cultivation uses are assumed to have similar characteristics as existing agricultural and rural uses that currently occur in the unincorporated county, which typically include clusters of built features (e.g., buildings used for equipment storage and processing of agricultural product, offices, greenhouses, and shipping containers). However, the proposed Cannabis Program would require enclosed fencing around outdoor cultivation areas (proposed Zoning Ordinance Section 6995(g)(2)(ix)) that could create a new feature-altering open views of scenic resources.

Cannabis activities that would be permitted in commercial zones are indoor cultivation, nonvolatile manufacturing, distribution, retail and non-retail storefront, on-site consumption lounges, microbusinesses, and temporary cannabis events. Cannabis activities permitted in industrial zones are indoor cultivation, volatile and nonvolatile manufacturing, distribution, testing, retail and non-retail storefront, microbusinesses, and temporary cannabis events (Table 1.1). It is anticipated that the majority of indoor cultivation and noncultivation uses would locate into existing industrial and retail buildings in the unincorporated area. Any new buildings that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program are assumed have similar massing, size, and use of existing commercial and industrial buildings.

The existing local regulations described above were adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. Cannabis facilities would be required to conform to the development standards for the applicable zoning district, which include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, and setbacks. These development standards would ensure that new cannabis facilities are not sited or constructed in a manner that would obstruct views of scenic resources. In addition, local regulations would prevent development that interferes with or degrades visual features of a site, or adjacent sites as viewed from the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource.

Alternative 1: No Project—Retention of Current Cannabis Regulations

Under Alternative 1, the Cannabis Program would not be adopted. The existing 5 commercial cannabis facilities in the unincorporated areas of El Cajon, Escondido, and Ramona would be allowed to continue to operate under the existing ordinances as well as potentially expand their existing facilities and operations to a total of 10,000 square feet of building area for each site.

The 5 existing commercial cannabis facilities are located on land zoned for industrial and commercial uses within developed areas. None of these facilities are located within a State Scenic Highway Corridor or in proximity to any designated scenic resources. Expanded facilities under Alternative 1 would have similar visual characteristics (e.g., height, size, massing, color) to other surrounding commercial and industrial development. Therefore, expansion of existing commercial cannabis facilities under Alternative 1 would not remove or change any features that contribute to the visual character or image of any neighborhood, community, State Scenic Highway, or localized area (e.g., designated landmarks, historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings) in the unincorporated county. In addition, this alternative would not result in any physical development with potential to obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista that is visible from a public road, trail, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area in the unincorporated county.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2: Proposed Project—Cannabis Program Consistent with State Requirements

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 2 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 2 would include 600-foot buffers between cannabis facilities and certain state-defined sensitive uses, including schools, daycares, and youth centers.

New cannabis facilities have potential to be sited near scenic resources, including within the viewsheds of designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands. Commercial cannabis cultivation is prohibited within the coastal zones of unincorporated San Diego County; therefore, the Cannabis Program would have no impact on the coastal scenic vistas. Generally, cannabis facilities would resemble existing uses in agricultural, commercial, and industrial zones. Cannabis cultivation and microbusiness uses are assumed to have similar characteristics as existing agricultural and rural uses that currently occur in the unincorporated county, except for enclosed fencing around outdoor cultivation areas. Indoor cultivation and noncultivation uses would likely locate into existing industrial and retail buildings in the unincorporated area; however, any new buildings that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program are assumed have similar massing, size, and use to existing commercial and industrial buildings.

As described above, commercial cannabis facilities implemented under Alternative 2 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. Sections 5200–5212 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development in areas of high scenic value, and Sections 5700–5747 and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development within designated landmarks and districts. Sections 86.601–86.608 (Resource Protection Ordinance) of the Regulatory Code limit development on steep slopes. San Diego County also regulates development within scenic highway corridors during the design review process. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Cannabis facilities would also be required to conform to the development standards for the applicable zoning district, which include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, and setbacks. These development standards would ensure that new cannabis facilities are not sited or constructed in a manner that would obstruct views of scenic resources. In addition, local regulations would prevent development that interferes with or degrades visual features of a site or adjacent sites as viewed from the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with County development standards.

Existing regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 2 to remove or change any features that contribute to the visual character or image of any neighborhood, community, state scenic highway, or localized area (e.g., designated landmarks, historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings) in the unincorporated county. In addition, existing regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 2 to obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista that is visible from a public road, trail, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area in the unincorporated county.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 2.

Alternative 3: Cannabis Program with Expanded County Regulations

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 3 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 3 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of expanded sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of the expanded sensitive uses.

New cannabis facilities have potential to be sited near scenic resources, including within the viewsheds of designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands. Commercial cannabis cultivation is prohibited within the coastal zones of unincorporated San Diego County; therefore, the Cannabis Program would have no impact on the coastal scenic vistas. Generally, cannabis facilities would resemble existing uses in agricultural, commercial, and industrial zones. Cannabis cultivation and microbusiness uses are assumed to have similar characteristics as existing agricultural and rural uses that currently occur in the unincorporated county, except for enclosed fencing around outdoor cultivation areas. Indoor cultivation and noncultivation uses would likely locate into existing industrial and retail buildings in the unincorporated area; however, any new buildings that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program are assumed have similar massing, size, and use of existing commercial and industrial buildings.

As described above, commercial cannabis facilities implemented under Alternative 3 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. Sections 5200–5212 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development in areas of high scenic value, and Sections 5700–5747 and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development within designated landmarks and districts. Sections 86.601–86.608 (Resource Protection Ordinance) of the Regulatory Code limit development on steep slopes. The County of San Diego also regulates development within scenic highway corridors during the design review process. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 3 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic

resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. As described above, cannabis facilities would be required to conform to the development standards for the applicable zoning district, which include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, and setbacks. These development standards would ensure that new cannabis facilities are not sited or constructed in a manner that would obstruct views of scenic resources. In addition, local regulations would prevent development that interferes with or degrades visual features of a site or adjacent sites as viewed from the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with county development standards.

Existing regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 3 to remove or change any features that contribute to the visual character or image of any neighborhood, community, state scenic highway, or localized area (e.g., designated landmarks, historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings) in the unincorporated county. In addition, these regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 3 to obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista that is visible from a public road, trail, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area in the unincorporated county.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 3.

Alternative 4: Cannabis Program with Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation Prohibition

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 4 is anticipated to accommodate up to 212 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, "Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting," for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 4 would allow mixed-light and indoor cannabis cultivation only when contained within a building. Alternative 4 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of expanded sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of the expanded sensitive uses.

The types of facilities that would be constructed, the visual characteristics of these facilities, and the locations where these facilities would be sited are described above. Alternative 4 would allow mixed-light and indoor cannabis cultivation only when contained within a building. Alternative 4 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. The 1,000-foot buffer observed from sensitive uses would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. In addition, this alternative would eliminate outdoor cannabis cultivation landscape features, such as agricultural shade or crop structures, storage buildings, and enclosed fenced cannabis cultivation areas, that may be noticeable to a viewer.

New cannabis facilities have potential to be sited near scenic resources, including within the viewsheds of designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands. Commercial cannabis cultivation is prohibited within the coastal zones of unincorporated San Diego County; therefore, the Cannabis Program would have no impact on the coastal scenic vistas. Generally, cannabis facilities would resemble existing uses in agricultural, commercial, and

industrial zones. Microbusiness uses are assumed to have similar characteristics to existing agricultural and rural uses that currently occur in the unincorporated county. Indoor cultivation and noncultivation uses would likely locate into existing industrial and retail buildings in the unincorporated area; however, any new buildings that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program are assumed have similar massing, size, and use as existing commercial and industrial buildings.

As described above, commercial cannabis facilities implemented under Alternative 4 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. Sections 5200–5212 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development in areas of high scenic value, and Sections 5700–5747 and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development within designated landmarks and districts. Sections 86.601–86.608 (Resource Protection Ordinance) of the Regulatory Code limit development on steep slopes. The County of San Diego also regulates development within scenic highway corridors during the design review process. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 4 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. As described above, cannabis facilities would be required to conform to the development standards for the applicable zoning district, which include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, and setbacks. These development standards would ensure that new cannabis facilities are not sited or constructed in a manner that would obstruct views of scenic resources. In addition, local regulations would prevent development that interferes with or degrades visual features of a site or adjacent sites as viewed from the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with County development standards.

Existing regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 4 to remove or change any features that contribute to the visual character or image of any neighborhood, community, state scenic highway, or localized area (e.g., designated landmarks, historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings) in the unincorporated county. In addition, these regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 4 to obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista that is visible from a public road, trail, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area in the unincorporated county.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 4.

Alternative 5: Cannabis Program with Maximum 1 Acre of Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation Canopy

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 5 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1,

“Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 5 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. Alternative 5 also limits the size of outdoor cannabis cultivation canopy to 1 acre.

New cannabis facilities have potential to be sited near scenic resources, including within the viewsheds of designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands. Commercial cannabis cultivation is prohibited within the coastal zones of unincorporated San Diego County; therefore, the Cannabis Program would have no impact on the coastal scenic vistas. Generally, cannabis facilities would resemble existing uses in agricultural, commercial, and industrial zones. Cannabis cultivation and microbusiness uses are assumed to have similar characteristics as existing agricultural and rural uses that currently occur in the unincorporated county, except for enclosed fencing around outdoor cultivation areas. Indoor cultivation and noncultivation uses would likely locate into existing industrial and retail buildings in the unincorporated area; however, any new buildings that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program are assumed have similar massing, size, and use to existing commercial and industrial buildings.

As described above, commercial cannabis facilities implemented under Alternative 5 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated County. Sections 5200–5212 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development in areas of high scenic value, and Sections 5700–5747 and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance regulate development within designated landmarks and districts. Sections 86.601–86.608 (Resource Protection Ordinance) of the Regulatory Code limit development on steep slopes. The County of San Diego also regulates development within scenic highway corridors during the design review process. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 5 would be subject to local regulations adopted for the purpose of preserving scenic views and protecting scenic resources within viewsheds of the unincorporated county. As described above, cannabis facilities would be required to conform to the development standards for the applicable zoning district, which include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, and setbacks. These development standards would ensure that new cannabis facilities are not sited or constructed in a manner that would obstruct views of scenic resources. In addition, local regulations would prevent development that interferes with or degrades visual features of a site or adjacent sites as viewed from the scenic highway or the adjacent scenic, historic, or recreational resource. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards.

Existing regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 5 to remove or change any features that contribute to the visual character or image of

any neighborhood, community, state scenic highway, or localized area (e.g., designated landmarks, historic resources, trees, and rock outcroppings) in the unincorporated county. In addition, these regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternative 5 to obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista that is visible from a public road, trail, scenic vista or highway, or recreational area in the unincorporated county.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 5.

2.2.3.6 Issue 2: Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines establishes the following guidelines for determining significance of effects to visual character or quality:

- in non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public view of the site and its surroundings, and
- in urbanized areas, conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.

In addition, the *County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance: Visual Resources* provides the following direction:

- Implementation of the project would result in a significant impact if it would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings by:
- introducing 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
- being inconsistent with applicable design guidelines.

Impact Analysis

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, “Existing Conditions,” the unincorporated county contains diverse topography, land uses, and natural features that contribute to the unique visual character and quality of each community. The predominant pattern of development in the unincorporated county is rural in character (County of San Diego 2011b).

The General Plan includes policies to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), new commercial and industrial development is compatible with community character (Policy LU-11.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Many of the same regulations and processes described in Section 2.2.3.5, “Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources,” also address visual character and quality.

Regulations that relate specifically to the built form of a community (such as design review designators and guidelines) are directly relevant to visual character and quality. Regulations that relate to preservation of the natural environment, such as the Resource Protection Ordinance, have greater relevance to visual character and quality in rural communities and are less relevant in developed areas. Refer to Section 2.2.3.5 for a summary of regulations that apply to development within areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors.

The Zoning Ordinance contains additional standards that relate to visual character, including requirements for building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, and building materials. In addition, the Zoning Ordinance includes setback requirements that would reduce potential visual effects of cannabis-related uses on viewers that are more sensitive to visual changes (e.g., residential land uses). Sections 5750–5758 of the Zoning Ordinance include provisions for maintaining and enhancing a community’s individual visual character and identity. Commercial cannabis facilities proposed in areas with a Community Design Review Area Special Designator are required to submit a site plan. Similarly, Sections 5900–5910 of the Zoning Ordinance require that site development complements the existing site and surrounding areas, and areas having a “D” zoning designator must undergo design review.

As identified in Section 1.6.1.4, the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include additional development standards for cannabis activities that would minimize impacts on visual character and quality. The following zoning regulation would apply to activities permitted as part of a microbusiness:

- Section 6995(e)(1)(iv)(a): Cultivation activities shall be limited to indoor cultivation in the C36, C37, C40, M50, M52, M54, M56, and M58 zones. Mixed-light and outdoor cultivation are prohibited in all commercial and industrial zones.

The following performance standard would apply to all cannabis facilities:

- Section 6995(f)(2): Fencing. All facilities shall comply with Sections 6700-6714 of the Fencing and Screening Regulations, except for Section 6708(b)(2), and shall also comply with the additional cultivation specific requirements in Section 6995(q)(1)(iii). Where necessary, fencing shall be designed to allow for the movement of wildlife.

The following standards would apply to cultivation uses:

- Section 6995(g)(2)(i): Outdoor and mixed-light cannabis cultivation areas shall be setback a minimum of 100-feet from all lot lines.
- Section 6995(g)(2)(iv): Outdoor and mixed-light cannabis cultivation areas shall be setback a minimum of 300-feet from legal residences on adjoining parcels existing at the time of permit application submittal.
- Section 6995(g)(2)(vi): All cannabis processing activities (e.g., drying, curing, grading, and trimming) must occur within an enclosed, permanent structure.
- Section 6995(g)(2)(viii): Enclosed fencing shall be required around all areas designated for outdoor cannabis cultivation. Fencing materials including razor wire, barbed wire, electrical wire, or similar are prohibited from use in these areas.

The following standard would apply to microbusiness:

- Section 6995(g)(3)(iii): All cultivation permitted as part of a microbusiness shall be limited to a maximum of 10,000 square feet of canopy area.

The Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would allow for the development of new commercial cannabis facilities in agricultural, commercial, and industrial zones of the unincorporated county, excluding areas within the coastal zone. The types of facilities that would be developed are cannabis storefront, non-storefront retail, and consumption lounges; cannabis cultivation facilities; cannabis manufacturing facilities; cannabis microbusinesses; cannabis testing laboratories; and cannabis temporary events. New features that would be introduced within viewsheds include greenhouses, nurseries, retail storefronts, consumption lounges, storage containers, and warehouses for manufacturing, processing, testing, and distribution. The average building size is assumed to range from approximately 1,500 square feet (e.g., microbusinesses, distribution facilities) to 20,000 square feet (e.g., indoor cultivation facilities) (Table 1.4). The average footprint for cannabis activities would range from approximately 0.5 acres (e.g., manufacturing, processing, testing, distribution, and retail facilities) to 15 acres (e.g., nurseries). Figures 2.2.4a through 2.2.4c depict photographs of the existing cannabis facilities in unincorporated San Diego County, and Figures 2.2.5a through 2.2.5h depict representative views of other types of cannabis cultivation facilities that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program. Figures 2.2.6 and 2.2.7 provide aerial views of cannabis cultivation sites. Figures are presented at the end of this section.

Under Alternatives 2 through 5, new commercial cannabis activities that would be permitted in agricultural zones include indoor and mixed-light cultivation, as well as nonvolatile manufacturing, distribution, and retail non-storefront uses as part of a microbusiness (Table 1.1). Outdoor cultivation would be permitted under Alternatives 2, 3, and 5 and prohibited under Alternative 4. Cannabis cultivation sites are assumed to have similar characteristics as existing agricultural and rural uses throughout the unincorporated county, which typically include clusters of built features (e.g., buildings used for equipment storage and processing of agricultural product, offices, greenhouses, and shipping containers). However, the proposed Cannabis Program would require enclosed fencing around outdoor cultivation areas (proposed Zoning Ordinance Section 6995(g)(2)(viii)) that could alter the visual character of rural and open space characteristics of an area. Although cannabis cultivation uses overall are not substantively different from other allowed agricultural uses in terms of size and massing, there are visual characteristics unique to cannabis cultivation that are different aesthetically from agricultural and rural land uses. Cannabis cultivation activities are often organized on a small portion of a larger site, with the supporting buildings and greenhouses located close to each other, as differentiated from other county agricultural operations, such as row crops, orchards and vineyards, and pastureland that more commonly use the entire parcel area for a range of operations and activities. For example, a typical cannabis cultivation operation may have 2 acres of area within a larger parcel, whereas orchards, vineyards, and row crops typically utilize the entire parcel. In addition, agricultural shade or crop structures are more commonly associated with cannabis cultivation. Also, for security purposes, outdoor cannabis cultivation often includes solid fencing that obstructs views of the site and may block open public views across agricultural fields from some vantage points (these conditions would not occur for mixed-light and indoor cultivation within a building under Alternative 4). Other features that differ from existing agricultural operations include security features (e.g., gates, security personnel, and guard dogs) and in some cases, the lack of maintenance of the remaining land areas of the parcel that are not used as part of the cultivation operation.

Under Alternatives 2 through 5, new cannabis activities that would be permitted in commercial zones are indoor cultivation, nonvolatile manufacturing, distribution, retail and non-retail storefront, on-site consumption lounges, microbusinesses, and temporary cannabis events. Cannabis activities permitted in industrial zones are indoor cultivation, volatile and nonvolatile manufacturing, distribution, testing, retail and non-retail storefront, microbusinesses, and temporary cannabis events (refer to Table 1.1 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting”). It is anticipated that the majority of indoor cultivation and noncultivation uses would locate into existing industrial and retail buildings in the unincorporated area. Any new buildings that would be constructed under the Cannabis Program are assumed have similar massing, size, and use to existing commercial and industrial buildings. No visible cannabis products or graphics would be allowed on the exterior of any property.

The existing local regulations described above were adopted for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the individual visual character and identity of each community within the unincorporated county. Cannabis facilities would be required to conform to the development standards for the applicable zoning district. The proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance include additional development standards to ensure that the development of new cannabis facilities conforms to the existing visual character and quality of the surrounding environment.

Alternative 1: No Project—Retention of Current Cannabis Regulations

Under Alternative 1, the Cannabis Program would not be adopted. The existing 5 commercial cannabis facilities in the unincorporated areas of El Cajon, Escondido, and Ramona would be allowed to continue to operate under the existing ordinances as well as potentially expand their existing facilities and operations to a total of 10,000 square feet of building area for each site.

Expanded facilities under Alternative 1 would have similar visual characteristics (e.g., height, size, massing, color) to other surrounding commercial and industrial development. Therefore, expansion of existing commercial cannabis facilities under Alternative 1 would not substantially degrade existing visual character or quality of public views in nonurbanized areas or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality in urbanized areas.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2: Proposed Project—Cannabis Program Consistent with State Requirements

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 2 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 2 would include 600-foot buffers between cannabis uses and certain state-defined sensitive uses, including schools, daycares, and youth centers.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 2 would be subject to development standards adopted for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the individual visual character and identity of each community within the unincorporated county. As described above, development standards include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, and setbacks. In addition, cannabis cultivation facilities would be subject to regulations that protect areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors that contribute to the visual character and quality of communities within the

unincorporated county (Sections 5200–5212, 5700–5747, and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance and Sections 86.601–86.608 of the Regulatory Code). Sections 5750–5758 of the Zoning Ordinance include provisions for maintaining and enhancing a community’s individual visual character and identity, and Sections 5900–5910 of the Zoning Ordinance require that site development complements the existing site and surrounding areas. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan policies to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), new commercial and industrial development is compatible with community character (Policy LU-11.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Compliance with regulations and regulatory processes would reduce the likelihood that commercial cannabis facilities degrade visual character or quality throughout the unincorporated county, particularly in agricultural and rural areas, or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality in urbanized areas. Nevertheless, aesthetic impacts are subjective, and cannabis uses have distinctly recognizable visual characteristics as compared to other traditional forms of agriculture in the unincorporated county (e.g., agricultural shade and crop structures, security fencing, and business signage depicting cannabis-related images and content), as well as the potential for concentration of cannabis facilities in some areas of the county.

This impact is considered potentially significant under Alternative 2.

Alternative 3: Cannabis Program with Expanded County Regulations

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 3 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 3 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of expanded sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of the expanded sensitive uses.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 3 would be subject to development standards adopted for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the individual visual character and identity of each community within the unincorporated county. As described above, development standards include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, and setbacks. In addition, cannabis cultivation facilities would be subject to regulations that protect areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors that contribute to the visual character and quality of communities within the unincorporated county (Sections 5200–5212, 5700–5747, and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance and Sections 86.601–86.608 of the Regulatory Code). Sections 5750–5758 of the Zoning Ordinance include provisions for maintaining and enhancing a community’s individual visual character and identity, and Sections 5900–5910 of the Zoning Ordinance require that site development complements the existing site and surrounding areas. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process

to ensure compliance with the County's development standards. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan policies to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), new commercial and industrial development is compatible with community character (Policy LU-11.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Compliance with regulations and regulatory processes would reduce the likelihood that commercial cannabis facilities degrade visual character or quality throughout the unincorporated county, particularly in agricultural and rural areas, or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality in urbanized areas. The 1,000-foot buffer observed from sensitive uses would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. Nevertheless, aesthetic impacts are subjective, and cannabis uses have distinctly recognizable visual characteristics as compared to other traditional forms of agriculture in the unincorporated county (e.g., security fencing and business signage).

This impact is considered potentially significant under Alternative 3.

Alternative 4: Cannabis Program with Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation Prohibition

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 4 is anticipated to accommodate up to 212 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, "Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting," for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 4 would allow mixed-light and indoor cannabis cultivation only when contained within a building. Alternative 4 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of expanded sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of the expanded sensitive uses.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 4 would be subject to development standards adopted for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the individual visual character and identity of each community within the unincorporated county. As described above, development standards include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, and setbacks. In addition, cannabis cultivation facilities would be subject to regulations that protect areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors that contribute to the visual character and quality of communities within the unincorporated county (Sections 5200–5212, 5700–5747, and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance and Sections 86.601–86.608 of the Regulatory Code). Sections 5750–5758 of the Zoning Ordinance include provisions for maintaining and enhancing a community's individual visual character and identity, and Sections 5900–5910 of the Zoning Ordinance require that site development complements the existing site and surrounding areas. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County's development standards. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the General Plan policies to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms with

natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), new commercial and industrial development is compatible with community character (Policy LU-11.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Compliance with regulations and regulatory processes would reduce the likelihood that commercial cannabis facilities degrade visual character or quality throughout the unincorporated county, particularly in agricultural and rural areas, or conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality in urbanized areas. The 1,000-foot buffer observed from sensitive uses would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. In addition, this alternative would eliminate outdoor cannabis cultivation landscape features, such as agricultural shade or crop structures, storage buildings, and enclosed fenced cannabis cultivation areas, that may be noticeable to a viewer. Nevertheless, aesthetic impacts are subjective, and cannabis uses have distinctly recognizable visual characteristics as compared to other traditional forms of agriculture in the unincorporated county (e.g., security fencing and business signage).

This impact is considered potentially significant under Alternative 4.

Alternative 5: Cannabis Program with Maximum 1 Acre of Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation Canopy

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 5 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 5 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. Alternative 5 also limits the size of outdoor cannabis cultivation canopy to 1 acre.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 5 would be subject to development standards adopted for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the individual visual character and identity of each community within the unincorporated county. As described above, development standards include requirements related to building height, density, size, massing, coverage, scale, color, architecture, building materials, and setbacks. In addition, cannabis cultivation facilities would be subject to regulations that protect areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors that contribute to the visual character and quality of communities within the unincorporated county (Sections 5200–5212, 5700–5747, and 5749 of the Zoning Ordinance and Sections 86.601–86.608 of the Regulatory Code). Sections 5750–5758 of the Zoning Ordinance include provisions for maintaining and enhancing a community’s individual visual character and identity, and Sections 5900–5910 of the Zoning Ordinance require that site development complements the existing site and surrounding areas. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards. Compliance with these regulations would establish consistency with the County’s General Plan policies to ensure that natural features are integrated into project design (Policy LU-6.6), new development conforms

with natural topography (Policy LU-6.9), development in semirural and rural areas conserves unique natural features and rural character (Policy LU-10.2), new commercial and industrial development is compatible with community character (Policy LU-11.2), development within visually sensitive areas preserves visual features particularly in rural areas (Policy COS-11.3), and development is not sited on ridgelines (Policy COS-12.2).

Compliance with regulations and regulatory processes would reduce the likelihood that commercial cannabis facilities degrade visual character or quality throughout the unincorporated county, particularly in agricultural and rural areas, or conflict with applicable zoning or other regulations governing scenic quality in urbanized areas. The 1,000-foot buffer observed from sensitive uses would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. Nevertheless, aesthetic impacts are subjective, and cannabis uses have distinctly recognizable visual characteristics as compared to other traditional forms of agriculture in the unincorporated county (e.g., security fencing and business signage). Outdoor cannabis cultivation canopy would be limited to a maximum size of 1 acre but could still appear out of character compared to existing agricultural operations.

This impact is considered potentially significant under Alternative 5.

2.2.3.7 Issue 3: Adversely Affect Views due to New Light and Glare

Guidelines for Determination of Significance

Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines establishes the following guidelines for determining significance of effects related to light and glare:

- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

In addition, the *County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements: Dark Skies and Glare* provides the following direction:

- The project will generally be considered to have a significant effect if it proposes any of the following features, absent specific evidence to the contrary:
- The project will install outdoor light fixtures that do not conform to the lamp type and shielding requirements described in Section 59.105 (Requirements for Lamp Source and Shielding) and are not otherwise exempt pursuant Section 59.108 or Section 59.109 of the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.
- The project will operate Class I or Class III outdoor lighting between 11:00 p.m. and sunrise that is not otherwise exempted pursuant Section 59.108 or Section 59.109 of the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.
- The project will generate light trespass that exceeds 0.2 foot-candles measured five feet onto the adjacent property.

- The project will install highly reflective building materials, including but not limited to reflective glass and high-gloss surface color, that will create daytime glare and be visible from roadways, pedestrian walkways or areas frequently used for outdoor activities on adjacent properties.
- The project does not conform to applicable federal, state, or local statute or regulation related to dark skies or glare, including but not limited to the San Diego County Light Pollution Code.

Conversely, if a project does not propose any of the above features, it will generally not be considered to have a significant effect on dark skies or glare, absent specific evidence of such an effect.

Impact Analysis

As discussed above in Section 2.2.1.4, “Dark Skies,” levels of light and glare vary throughout the unincorporated county. Rural residential areas, agricultural lands, and large areas of open space generally have a smaller lighting footprint, whereas developed areas with higher commercial and industrial use generally have a greater lighting footprint.

As discussed in Section 2.2.2, “Regulatory Framework,” regulations have been adopted at the state and local levels to reduce the adverse effects of lighting associated with new development. CEC’s Building Energy Efficiency Standards (CCR Title 24, Parts 1 and 2) regulate outdoor lighting, allowing greater lighting power and brightness in urban areas compared to rural areas. The Department of Cannabis Control additionally regulates outdoor lighting for cannabis uses, requiring that all outdoor lighting used for security purposes be shielded and downward facing and lights used for cultivation be shielded from sunset to sunrise to avoid nighttime glare (CCR Title 4, Division 19, Section 16304).

The General Plan includes policies to restrict outdoor light and glare in semirural and rural areas (Policy COS-13.1) and maintain dark skies, particularly surrounding the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories (Policy COS-13.2 and Policy COS-13.3). Section 51.201 et seq. of the Regulatory Code regulates outdoor lighting with the intent to minimize light pollution in San Diego County and to protect against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. As identified in Section 1.6.1.4, the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards for cannabis activities to reduce light and glare beyond the regulations within Section 51.201 et seq. of the Regulatory Code. The following performance standard would apply to all cannabis uses:

- Section 6995 (f)(1): Exterior Lighting. Exterior lighting shall comply with Section 51.201 et seq. of the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances relating to light pollution. In addition, all exterior lighting shall be operational, full cut-off, shielded, and downward facing. Lighting shall not spill over onto other properties, structures, or the night sky. All lighting for indoor/enclosed spaces shall utilize LED bulbs, or equivalent or more efficient technology. Additionally, security lighting shall be motion sensor activated in agricultural zones.

The following lighting standards would apply to cultivation uses:

- Section 6995(g)(2)(i): Outdoor and mixed-light cannabis cultivation areas shall be setback a minimum of 100-feet from all lot lines.
- Section 6995(g)(2)(ii): Outdoor and mixed-light cannabis cultivation areas shall be setback a minimum of 300-feet from legal residences on adjoining parcels existing at the time of permit application submittal.
- Section 6995(g)(2)(iv): Lighting is prohibited in an agricultural shade structure or agricultural crop structure, as defined by Sec 91.1.105.2.a.18 of the County Building Code.
- Section 6995(g)(2)(v): Nighttime light escape from mixed-light cannabis cultivation shall be controlled using internal black-out curtains or other equally or more effective methods to prevent the facility from emitting nighttime light escape.

The Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would allow for the development of commercial cannabis uses in agricultural, commercial, and industrial zones of the unincorporated county, excluding areas within the coastal zone. The types of facilities that would be developed are cannabis storefront, non-storefront retail, and consumption lounges; cannabis cultivation facilities; cannabis manufacturing facilities; cannabis microbusinesses; cannabis testing laboratories; and cannabis temporary events.

Commercial cannabis uses are known to use light sources for cultivation of commercial cannabis plants in addition to nighttime lighting associated with operation and security for all cultivation types. Artificial light would be used for the cultivation of commercial cannabis plants within buildings, greenhouses, and nurseries. The use of reflective building materials, such as clear plastic used in greenhouse buildings, could also result in daytime glare. Noncultivation uses could include buildings with exterior and interior lighting, such as retail storefronts, consumption lounges, and warehouses for manufacturing, processing, testing, and distribution.

Depending on the location, lighting used for commercial cannabis uses could create additional ambient lighting of varying degrees in the area and be intrusive to off-site locations and neighboring residents. If not adequately controlled, these light sources can create substantial light and glare impacts, adversely affecting neighboring land uses and wildlife. Wildlife impacts associated with the addition of substantial light and glare are further discussed in Section 2.5, "Biological Resources." If uncontrolled, nighttime lighting could result in light pollution with potential to interfere with astronomical research at the Palomar Mountain and Mount Laguna Observatories.

The existing state and local regulations described above were adopted for the purposes of reducing light and glare to minimize light pollution in San Diego County and to protect against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. The proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance include additional development standards to reduce light and glare specific to cannabis facilities. Compliance with these requirements would avoid the potential for adverse effects of lighting and glare from new commercial cannabis facilities.

Alternative 1: No Project—Retention of Current Cannabis Regulations

Under Alternative 1, the Cannabis Program would not be adopted. The existing 5 commercial cannabis facilities in the unincorporated areas of El Cajon, Escondido, and Ramona would be allowed to continue to operate under the existing ordinances as well as potentially expand their existing facilities and operations to a total of 10,000 square feet of building area for each site.

The 5 existing commercial cannabis facilities are located in developed areas with ambient light levels characteristic of industrial and commercial land uses. Expanded facilities under Alternative 1 would have similar light levels to existing facilities and other surrounding commercial and industrial development. Therefore, this alternative would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 1.

Alternative 2: Proposed Project—Cannabis Program Consistent with State Requirements

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 2 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 2 would include 600-foot buffers between cannabis uses and certain state-defined sensitive uses, including schools, daycares, and youth centers.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 2 would be subject to CEC’s Building Energy Efficiency Standards (CCR Title 24, Parts 1 and 2) and Department of Cannabis Control regulations (CCR Title 4, Division 19, Section 16304) adopted for the purpose of reducing light and glare, as well as regulations in Section 51.201 et seq. of the Regulatory Code that were adopted for the purpose of minimizing light pollution in San Diego County and protecting against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. As noted above, the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would further reduce light and glare from new cannabis uses. Section 6995(f)(1) specifies exterior lighting requirements to reduce light pollution and prevent spillover light, such as the use of motion sensors, LED bulbs, and luminaries that are cut-off, shielded, and downward facing. Section 6995(g)(2) would prohibit lighting in agricultural shade and crop structures and require the use of blackout curtains to prevent light escape from mixed-light cannabis cultivation. In addition, Section 6995(g)(2) specifies setback requirements for cultivation uses, which would prevent the spillover of light onto adjacent properties. Compliance with these regulations would ensure consistency with the General Plan policies that restrict outdoor light and glare in semirural and rural areas (Policy COS-13.1) and maintain dark skies, particularly surrounding the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories (Policy COS-13.2 and Policy COS-13.3). Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards.

Existing regulations and proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance would ensure that the Cannabis Program under Alternative 2 would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day- or nighttime views in the area.

This impact would be less than significant under Alternative 2.

Alternative 3: Cannabis Program with Expanded County Regulations

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 3 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 3 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of expanded sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of the expanded sensitive uses. The 1,000-foot buffer would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area, which would reduce the potential for light pollution.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 3 would be subject to CEC’s Building Energy Efficiency Standards (CCR Title 24, Parts 1 and 2) and Department of Cannabis Control regulations (CCR Title 4, Division 19, Section 16304) adopted for the purpose of reducing light and glare, as well as regulations in Section 51.201 et seq. of the Regulatory Code that were adopted for the purpose of minimizing light pollution in San Diego County and protecting against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. As noted above, the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would further reduce light and glare from new cannabis uses. Section 6995(f)(1) specifies exterior lighting requirements to reduce light pollution and prevent spillover light, such as the use of motion sensors, LED bulbs, and luminaries that are cut-off, shielded, and downward facing. Section 6995(g)(2) would prohibit lighting in agricultural shade and crop structures and require the use of blackout curtains to prevent light escape from mixed-light cannabis cultivation. In addition, Section 6995(g)(2) specifies setback requirements for cultivation uses, which would prevent the spillover of light onto adjacent properties. Compliance with these regulations would ensure consistency with the General Plan policies that restrict outdoor light and glare in semirural and rural areas (Policy COS-13.1) and maintain dark skies, particularly surrounding the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories (Policy COS-13.2 and Policy COS-13.3). Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards.

Existing regulations, proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, and buffer requirements around sensitive uses would ensure that the Cannabis Program under Alternative 3 would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day- or nighttime views in the area.

This impact would be less than significant under Alternative 3.

Alternative 4: Cannabis Program with Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation Prohibition

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 4 is anticipated to accommodate up to 212 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, “Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting,” for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 4 would allow mixed-light and indoor cannabis cultivation only when contained within a building. Alternative 4 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of expanded sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of the expanded sensitive uses. The 1,000-foot buffer observed from sensitive uses and prohibition of outdoor cannabis cultivation would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis

facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area, which would reduce the potential for light pollution.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 4 would be subject to CEC's Building Energy Efficiency Standards (CCR Title 24, Parts 1 and 2) and Department of Cannabis Control regulations (CCR Title 4, Division 19, Section 16304) adopted for the purpose of reducing light and glare, as well as regulations in Section 51.201 et seq. of the Regulatory Code that were adopted for the purpose of minimizing light pollution in San Diego County and protecting against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. As noted above, the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would further reduce light and glare from new cannabis uses. Section 6995(f)(1) specifies exterior lighting requirements to reduce light pollution and prevent spillover light, such as the use of motion sensors, LED bulbs, and luminaries that are cut-off, shielded, and downward facing. Section 6995(g)(2) would prohibit lighting in agricultural shade and crop structures and require the use of blackout curtains to prevent light escape from mixed-light cannabis cultivation. In addition, Section 6995(g)(2) specifies setback requirements for cultivation uses, which would prevent the spillover of light onto adjacent properties. Compliance with these regulations would ensure consistency with the General Plan policies that restrict outdoor light and glare in semirural and rural areas (Policy COS-13.1) and maintain dark skies, particularly surrounding the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories (Policy COS-13.2 and Policy COS-13.3). Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County's development standards.

Existing regulations, proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, buffer requirements around sensitive uses, and the prohibition of outdoor cannabis cultivation would ensure that the Cannabis Program under Alternative 4 would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

The impact would be less than significant under Alternative 4.

Alternative 5: Cannabis Program with Maximum 1 Acre of Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation Canopy

The Cannabis Program under Alternative 5 is anticipated to accommodate up to 372 cultivation and 170 noncultivation sites/licenses within the county in 2044 (refer to Table 1.4 in Chapter 1, "Project Description, Location, and Environmental Setting," for a full list of development assumptions). Alternative 5 additionally prohibits the development of cannabis facilities within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses, including other cannabis facilities. Advertising of cannabis on billboards would also be prohibited within 1,000 feet of sensitive uses. Alternative 5 also limits the size of outdoor cannabis cultivation canopy to 1 acre. The 1,000-foot buffer observed from sensitive uses would reduce the potential for the clustering of cannabis facilities, ensuring that cannabis facilities are not highly concentrated in any given area, which would reduce the potential for light pollution.

Cannabis cultivation facilities implemented under Alternative 5 would be subject to CEC's Building Energy Efficiency Standards (CCR Title 24, Parts 1 and 2) and Department of Cannabis Control regulations (CCR Title 4, Division 19, Section 16304) adopted for the purpose of reducing light and glare, as well as regulations in Section 51.201 et seq. of the Regulatory Code that were adopted for the purpose of minimizing light pollution in San Diego

County and protecting against its detrimental effects on astronomical research at the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories. As noted above, the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would further reduce light and glare from new cannabis uses. Section 6995(f)(1) specifies exterior lighting requirements to reduce light pollution and prevent spillover light, such as the use of motion sensors, LED bulbs, and luminaries that are cut-off, shielded, and downward facing. Section 6995(g)(2) would prohibit lighting in agricultural shade and crop structures and require the use of blackout curtains to prevent light escape from mixed-light cannabis cultivation. In addition, Section 6995(g)(2) specifies setback requirements for cultivation uses, which would prevent the spillover of light onto adjacent properties. Compliance with these regulations would ensure consistency with the General Plan policies that restrict outdoor light and glare in semirural and rural areas (Policy COS-13.1) and maintain dark skies, particularly surrounding the Palomar and Mount Laguna Observatories (Policy COS-13.2 and Policy COS-13.3). Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County's development standards.

Existing regulations, proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, and buffer requirements around sensitive uses would ensure that the Cannabis Program under Alternative 5 would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day- or nighttime views in the area.

This impact would be less than significant under Alternative 5.

2.2.4 Cumulative Impacts

The geographic scope of the cumulative impact analysis for aesthetics consists of the immediate vicinity of view corridors, viewsheds, or scenic resources in the unincorporated county, as well as areas in the vicinity of existing community development and areas surrounding the 2 observatories. This cumulative impact analysis focuses on whether impacts described in Sections 2.2.3.5 through 2.2.3.7 would be worsened under cumulative conditions that include implementation of the cumulative projects described in Section 1.13.2, "Cumulative Projects."

2.2.4.1 *Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources*

The San Diego County General Plan Update Draft EIR did not identify any cumulatively considerable impacts to scenic vistas and scenic resources from implementation of the General Plan (County of San Diego 2009).

The county contains a range of scenic features, including designated landmarks, historic structures, waterbodies, vegetation, geologic features, memorable landforms, open space, and agricultural lands. Past and present development within the unincorporated county, particularly in the western region, has changed views of scenic resources in the region. The County has adopted policies and mitigation measures to ensure that impacts on scenic resources and vistas from cumulative development are reduced to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, the County has identified a cumulative impact related to scenic vistas and resources (County of San Diego 2011a).

Project impacts would be cumulative in nature if the Cannabis Program, in combination with cumulative development, would contribute to remove or change scenic resources that would obstruct, interrupt, or detract from a scenic vista in the unincorporated county. Impacts on

scenic vistas and resources are generally site-specific or localized and not cumulative in nature. For example, changes in views at one location are not generally worsened by changes in views occurring at another location in a different part of the county. Consistent with the analysis provided in Section 2.2.3.5, “Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources,” this cumulative impact analysis focuses on whether the environmental effects described for Issue 1 would be worsened under cumulative conditions.

The expansion of existing commercial cannabis facilities under Alternative 1 would not damage any scenic resources and would not obstruct, interrupt, or detract from scenic vistas in the unincorporated county; therefore, implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternative 1 would not create a new cumulative impact on scenic vistas and scenic resources. This impact would not be cumulatively considerable for Alternative 1.

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would provide a framework for the permitting and licensing of new commercial cannabis facilities in some areas of the unincorporated county. Commercial cannabis facilities would have the potential to change or obstruct scenic vistas and scenic resources if these facilities are sited the immediate vicinity of view corridors, viewsheds, or scenic resources. As discussed in Section 2.2.3.5, “Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources,” the Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards for cannabis activities that prohibit development on steep slopes. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be reviewed for compliance with regulations in the Regulatory Code that are protective of scenic resources, including regulations for development within areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards. Compliance with regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 to change or obstruct scenic vistas and scenic resources. Therefore, implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would not contribute to a new cumulative impact on scenic vistas and scenic resources. This impact would not be cumulatively considerable for Alternatives 2 through 5.

2.2.4.2 Issue 2: Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality

The San Diego County General Plan Update Draft EIR did identify cumulatively considerable impacts to visual character from implementation of the General Plan (County of San Diego 2009).

The unincorporated county contains diverse topography, land uses, and natural features that contribute to the unique visual character and quality of each community. The predominant pattern of development in the unincorporated county is rural in character. Past and present development within the unincorporated county, particularly in the western region, has changed the visual character and quality of views in the region. The County has adopted policies and mitigation measures to reduce impacts on visual character and quality from cumulative development; however, these impacts could not be reduced to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, the County has identified a cumulative impact related to visual character and quality (County of San Diego 2011a).

Project impacts would be cumulative in nature if the Cannabis Program, in combination with cumulative development, would substantially degrade visual character or quality in the unincorporated county. Impacts on visual character and quality are generally site-specific or

localized and not cumulative in nature. For example, changes in views within one community are not generally worsened by changes in views occurring within another community in a different part of the county. Consistent with the analysis provided in Section 2.2.3.6, “Issue 2: Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality,” this cumulative impact analysis focuses on whether the environmental effects described for Issue 2 would be worsened under cumulative conditions.

Expanded commercial cannabis facilities under Alternative 1 would have similar visual characteristics (e.g., height, size, massing, color) to other surrounding commercial and industrial development; therefore, implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternative 1 would not substantially degrade the visual character or quality of existing communities. This impact would not be cumulatively considerable for Alternative 1.

Alternatives 2 through 5 would provide a framework for the permitting and licensing of new commercial cannabis facilities in some areas of the unincorporated county that would have the potential to degrade the visual character and quality of existing communities. The Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards for cannabis activities to minimize impacts on visual character and quality. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be reviewed for compliance with regulations in the Regulatory Code that are protective of visual character and quality of existing communities. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County’s development standards. Compliance with regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 to change or degrade visual character and quality. Nevertheless, aesthetic impacts are subjective, and cannabis uses have distinctly recognizable visual characteristics compared to other traditional forms of agriculture in the unincorporated county. Therefore, implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would contribute to a new cumulative impact on visual character or quality of existing communities. This impact would be cumulatively considerable for Alternatives 2 through 5.

2.2.4.3 Issue 3: Adversely Affect Views due to New Light and Glare

The San Diego County General Plan Update Draft EIR did identify cumulatively considerable impacts associated with light and glare from implementation of the General Plan (County of San Diego 2009).

Levels of light and glare vary throughout the unincorporated county depending on the type and intensity of land uses. Past and present development has increased sources of light and glare and contributed to light pollution in the unincorporated county. The County has adopted policies and mitigation measures to minimize light and glare impacts from cumulative development; however, these impacts could not be reduced to a less-than-significant level. Therefore, the County has identified a cumulative impact related to light and glare (County of San Diego 2011a).

Project impacts would be cumulative in nature if the Cannabis Program, in combination with cumulative development, would adversely affect views due to new sources of light and glare in the unincorporated county. Impacts from glare are generally localized and not cumulative in nature; therefore, a significant cumulative impact related to glare would not occur. However, any new sources of nighttime light pollution in the San Diego region would result in a potential lighting impact to the Palomar Mountain and Mount Laguna Observatories.

Expanded commercial cannabis facilities under Alternative 1 would have similar light levels to existing facilities and other surrounding commercial and industrial development; therefore, implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternative 1 would not create new sources of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect views. This impact would not be cumulatively considerable for Alternative 1.

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would provide a framework for the permitting and licensing of new commercial cannabis facilities in some areas of the unincorporated county that would have the potential to introduce new sources of light and glare. The Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards to reduce light and glare associated with cannabis facilities. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be reviewed for compliance with regulations in the Regulatory Code that reduce the potential for light and glare to adversely affect views. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County's development standards. Compliance with regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 to adversely affect views due to new light and glare sources. Therefore, implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would contribute to a new cumulative impact on views from new light and glare sources. This impact would not be cumulatively considerable for Alternatives 2 through 5.

2.2.5 Significance of Impact prior to Mitigation

2.2.5.1 *Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources*

Under Alternatives 1 through 5, implementation of the Cannabis Program would result in a less-than-significant impact on scenic vistas and resources. It would not result in significant cumulative impacts associated with scenic vistas and scenic resources.

2.2.5.2 *Issue 2: Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality*

Under Alternative 1, implementation of the Cannabis Program would result in a less-than-significant impact on visual character and quality prior to mitigation. Under Alternatives 2 through 5, implementation of the Cannabis Program would result in a potentially significant impact on visual character and quality prior to mitigation. It would result in a significant cumulative impact associated with visual character or quality.

2.2.5.3 *Issue 3: Adversely Affect Views due to New Light and Glare*

Under Alternatives 1 through 5, implementation of the Cannabis Program would result in a less-than-significant impact on light and glare. It would not result in significant cumulative impacts associated with light and glare.

2.2.6 Mitigation

2.2.6.1 *Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources*

No mitigation is required for any of the alternatives.

2.2.6.2 Issue 2: Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality

No mitigation is required for Alternative 1.

The following mitigation is identified for Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5.

M-AE.2-1: Conduct Project-Level Visual Analysis for Cannabis Facilities

Each outdoor and mixed-light cannabis facility application that is located within public viewpoints (visible from public roads or other public viewpoints such as parks) shall include a visual analysis, photo simulation, or other appropriate level of review consistent with the *County of San Diego Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirement–Visual Resources* to evaluate the potential for a proposed cannabis cultivation facility to substantially degrade the visual character or quality of public views. If the project site can be demonstrated to be outside of a public view, no further action is required. Potential visual impacts shall be addressed by siting outdoor and mixed-light cultivation facilities outside of public views. If this cannot be achieved, the applicant shall provide the reasoning in writing (e.g., all sites within the property are within public views, the site was previously farmed and selecting a new site would require additional grading, other sites contain sensitive resources, other sites do not contain fertile soils or other suitable conditions for growing cannabis). The siting of outdoor and mixed-light cultivation facilities will be subject to the County’s review and approval during the permit application process.

2.2.6.3 Issue 3: Adversely Affect Views due to New Light and Glare

No mitigation is required for any of the alternatives.

2.2.7 Conclusion

The discussion below provides a synopsis of the conclusion reached in each of the above impact analyses and the level of impact that would occur after mitigation measures are implemented.

2.2.7.1 Issue 1: Change or Obstruct Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternative 1 would not damage any scenic resources and would not obstruct, interrupt, or detract from scenic vistas in the unincorporated county; therefore, the direct impact would be less than significant under Alternative 1, and the impact would not be cumulatively considerable.

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would provide a framework for the permitting and licensing of new commercial cannabis facilities in some areas of the unincorporated county that would have the potential to change or obstruct scenic vistas and scenic resources. The Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards for cannabis activities that prohibit development on steep slopes. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be reviewed for compliance with regulations in the Regulatory Code that are protective of scenic resources, including regulations for development within areas of high scenic value, designated landmarks, historic districts, steep slopes, and scenic highway corridors. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the

County's development standards. Compliance with regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 to change or obstruct scenic vistas and scenic resources. Therefore, the direct impact would be less than significant under Alternatives 2 through 5, and the impact would not be cumulatively considerable.

2.2.7.2 Issue 2: Substantially Degrade Visual Character or Quality

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternative 1 would not substantially degrade the visual character and quality of existing communities; therefore, the direct impact would be less than significant under Alternative 1, and the impact would not be cumulatively considerable.

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would provide a framework for the permitting and licensing of new commercial cannabis facilities in some areas of the unincorporated county that would have the potential to degrade the visual character and quality of existing communities. The Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards for cannabis activities to minimize impacts on visual character and quality. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be reviewed for compliance with regulations in the Regulatory Code that are protective of visual character and quality of existing communities. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County's development standards. Compliance with regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 to change or degrade visual character and quality.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-AE.2-1 would require applicants to site outdoor and mixed-light cultivation facilities outside of public views. However, site-specific conditions may not always allow project proponents to locate agricultural shade or crop structures away from public viewpoints. For example, there may be instances in which all developable sites on a property are within public view or the sites outside of public view contain sensitive resources, require extensive grading, or do not contain fertile soils or other suitable conditions for growing cannabis.

Notwithstanding implementation of existing regulations, proposed Zoning Ordinance amendments, and Mitigation Measure M-AE.2-1, the potential for aesthetics impacts to occur is conservatively identified as significant and unavoidable because aesthetic impacts are subjective, and cannabis uses would continue to have distinctly recognizable visual characteristics compared to other traditional forms of agriculture in the county. For example, agricultural shade and crop structures are not typically used in other traditional forms of agriculture in the county. These structures are commonly used for light deprivation in cannabis cultivation operations throughout the state and are necessary for creating the proper growing conditions and extend the growing season for cannabis plants. Therefore, the direct impact is significant and unavoidable for Alternatives 2 through 5, and the impact would be cumulatively considerable.

2.2.7.3 Issue 3: Adversely Affect Views due to New Light and Glare

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternative 1 would not create new sources of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect views; therefore, the direct impact would be less than significant under Alternative 1, and the impact would not be cumulatively considerable.

Implementation of the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 would provide a framework for the permitting and licensing of new commercial cannabis facilities in some areas

of the unincorporated county that would have the potential to introduce new sources of light and glare. The Cannabis Program proposes amendments to the Zoning Ordinance that would include development standards to reduce light and glare associated with cannabis facilities. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would be reviewed for compliance with regulations in the Regulatory Code that reduce the potential for light and glare to adversely affect views. Proposed commercial cannabis facilities would also be subject to site-specific review during the application process to ensure compliance with the County's development standards. Compliance with regulations and processes would reduce the potential for the Cannabis Program under Alternatives 2 through 5 to adversely affect views due to new light and glare sources. Therefore, the direct impact would be less than significant under Alternatives 2 through 5, and the impact would not be cumulatively considerable.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of landscape from Interstate 8 in the community of Alpine.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2024.

View of landscape from Mission Road in the community of Bonsall.

Figure 2.2.1a Representative Views from Public Vantage Points in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of landscape from Dehesa Road in the City of El Cajon.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of historic buildings in the community of Julian.

Figure 2.2.1b Representative Views from Public Vantage Points in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of industrial area from State Route 67 in the community of Lakeside.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2022.

View of landscape from Jamacha Boulevard in the community of Spring Valley.

Figure 2.2.1c Representative Views from Public Vantage Points in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View from the sunrise scenic byway.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of landscape from State Route 188 in the city of Tecate.

Figure 2.2.1d Representative Views from Public Vantage Points in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

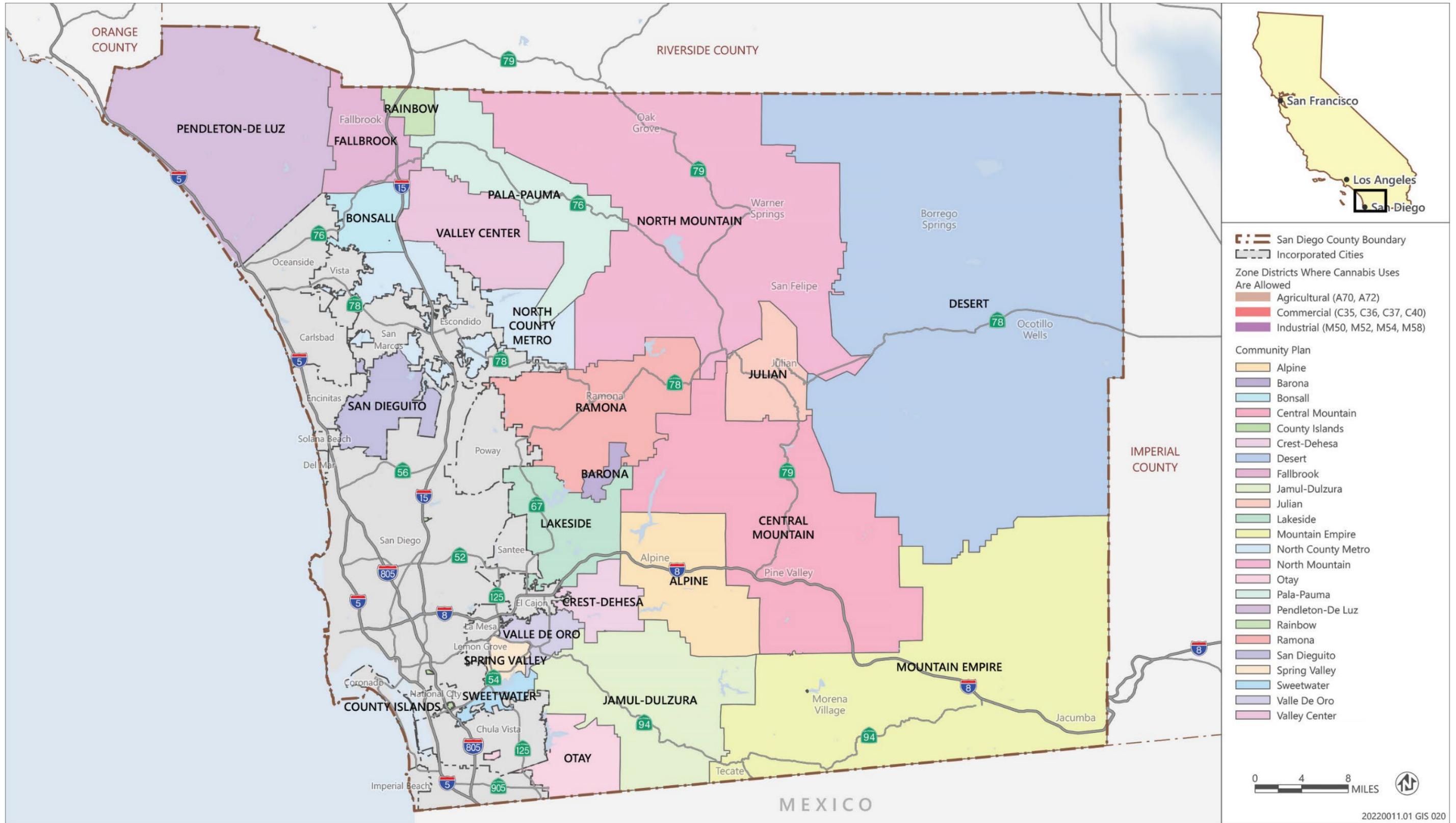
View of landscape from County Highway S6 in the community of Valley Center.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2019.

View of landscape from County Highway S22 in the community of Borrego Springs.

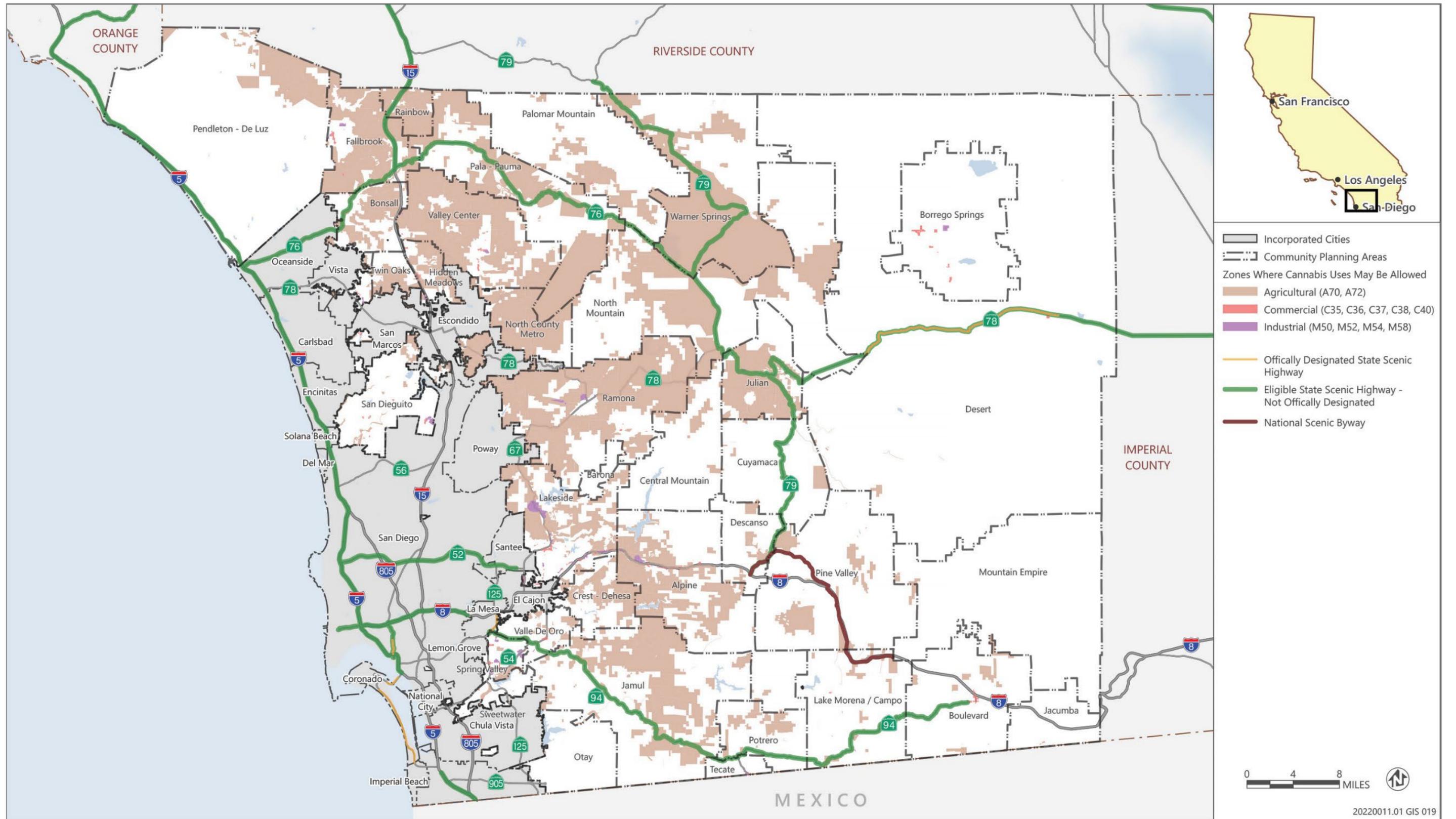
Figure 2.2.1e Representative Views from Public Vantage Points in San Diego County



Sources: Data downloaded from SanGIS in 2021 and San Diego County in 2024; adapted by Ascent in 2024.

Figure 2.2.2

Community Planning Areas in San Diego County



Sources: Data downloaded from SanGIS in 2021 and San Diego County in 2023; adapted by Ascent in 2024.

Figure 2.2.3

State Scenic Highways and National Scenic Byways in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2020.

View of existing retail cannabis facility from Pine Street in the community of Ramona.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of existing distribution, manufacturing, and retail cannabis facility from Montecito Way in the community of Ramona.

Figure 2.2.4a Views of Existing Commercial Cannabis Facilities in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of existing retail cannabis facility from Olive Street in the community of Ramona.



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2022.

View of existing cultivation, distribution, manufacturing, and retail cannabis facility from Wing Avenue in the community of El Cajon.

Figure 2.2.4b Views of Existing Commercial Cannabis Facilities in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Google in 2023.

View of driveway toward existing retail cannabis facility from Nelson Way near the City of Escondido.

Figure 2.2.4c Views of Existing Commercial Cannabis Facilities in San Diego County



Source: Photograph taken by Ascent in 2019.

Outdoor cultivation buildings in Yolo County.



Source: Photograph taken by Ascent in 2019.

Outdoor cultivation in Yolo County.

Figure 2.2.5a

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Photograph taken by Ascent in 2019.

Mixed-light cultivation facility.

Figure 2.2.5b

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Yolo County 2019.

Agricultural shade structures.



Source: Yolo County 2019.

Agricultural shade structure.

Figure 2.2.5c

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Yolo County 2019.

Distant view of cannabis cultivation site in Yolo County.



Source: Yolo County 2019.

Distant view of cannabis cultivation site in Yolo County.

Figure 2.2.5d

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Yolo County 2019.

View of fenced cannabis cultivation site in Yolo County.



Source: Yolo County 2019.

View of fenced cannabis cultivation site in Yolo County.

Figure 2.2.5e

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Photograph provided by DCC in 2024.

View of mixed-light cultivation site in Mendocino County.



Source: Photograph provided by DCC in 2024.

View of mixed-light cultivation site in Mendocino County.

Figure 2.2.5f

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Photograph provided by DCC in 2024.

View of outdoor commercial cannabis cultivation site in Mendocino County.



Source: Photograph provided by DCC in 2024.

View of outdoor commercial cannabis cultivation site in Mendocino County.

Figure 2.2.5g

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Photograph taken by Ascent in 2023.

View of an indoor cannabis cultivation and processing facility in Sonoma County.

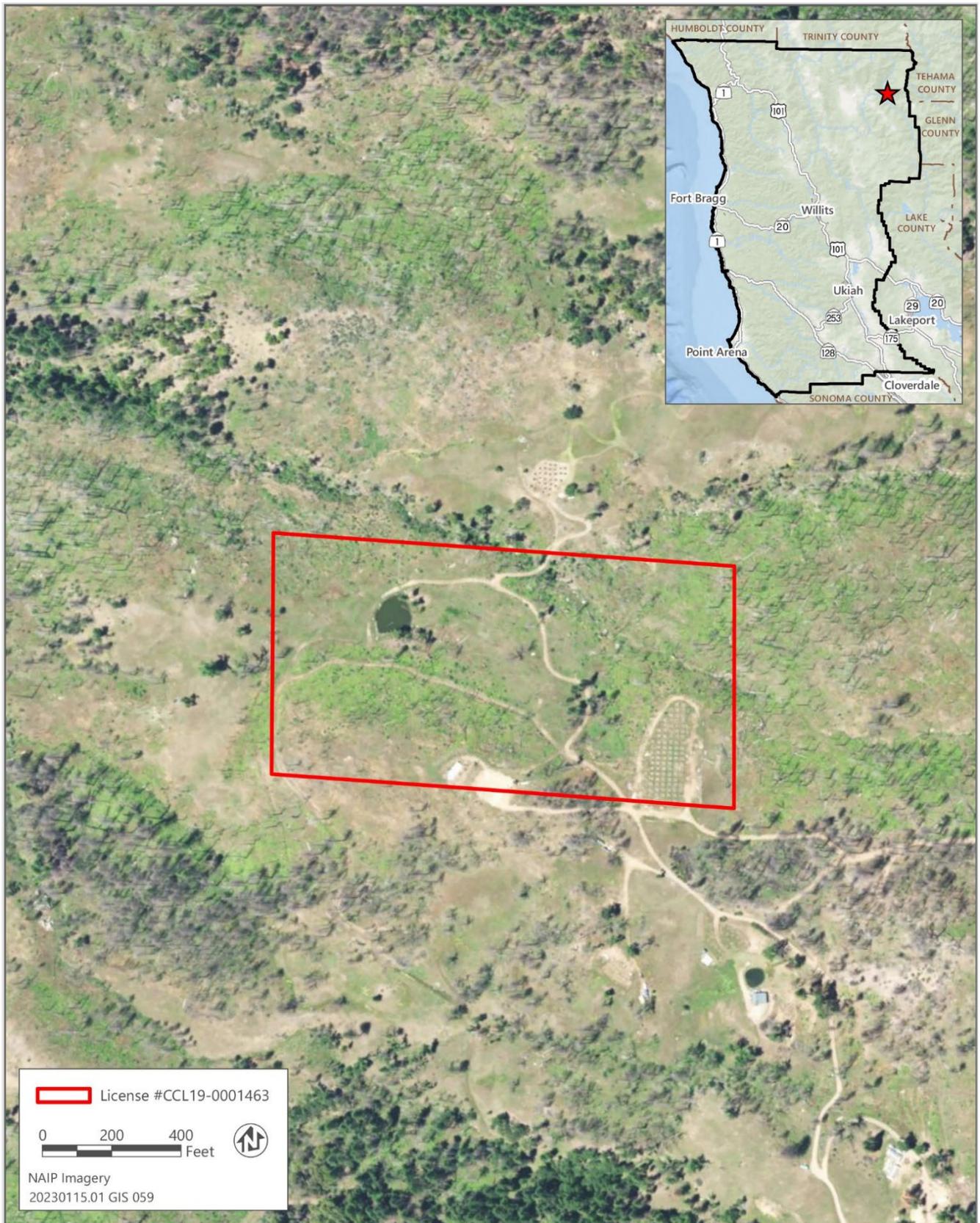
Figure 2.2.5h

Representative Examples of Cannabis Cultivation Uses



Source: Data received from Mendocino County in 2023; adapted by Ascent in 2023.

Figure 2.2.6 Aerial View of Small Mixed-Light Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Site in Mendocino County



Source: Data received from Mendocino County in 2023; adapted by Ascent in 2023.

Figure 2.2.7 Aerial View of Outdoor Commercial Cannabis Cultivation Site in Mendocino County

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