

## 4.12 VISUAL RESOURCES

### 4.12.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

#### *VISUAL CHARACTER OF TRINITY COUNTY*

Trinity County offers a pleasing variety of steep slopes blanketed with rich forests and crisscrossed with swift cold streams draining to the west. A large percentage of the County is preserved as scenic land or recreation land by various public agencies (e.g., the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and state and county agencies). Over 70 percent of the County is controlled by the federal and state government. “Scenic land” is defined in Section 65561 of the Government Code of California as “open space land which possesses outstanding scenic qualities worthy of preservation.” “Recreation land” is “any area of land or water designated on the state, or any regional or local open space plan, as open space land and which is actively used for recreation purposes and open to the public for such purposes with or without charge” (Hahn, et.al.1973).

Trinity County’s natural beauty is often cited as a contributing factor to the high quality of life experienced by residents of the County, recreationists visiting the County, and small businesses seeking to relocate to the County. It is therefore important that the County develop in a manner that retains these characteristics (LSC, 2001). The importance of scenic lands to the County has been manifested by efforts to guard them through zoning, using the scenic conservation district or recreational district zoning, or through conservation easements. A prime objective of the Open Space Element of the Trinity County General Plan is to “protect the scenic natural resources of Trinity County and preserve areas which are important as commercial natural resources for future generations.” Another related prime objective is “to conserve, preserve, and maintain the scenic lands of Trinity County which include those precious mountains, trees, and water” (Hahn, et.al.1973).

A significant percentage of residents and non-residents alike experience some, if not most, of their scenic views of Trinity County from the roads and highways. SR 299 is the primary east-west highway in Trinity County. It carries a variety of traffic including local (intra-regional), commuter, and commercial traffic, and it is an important inter-regional route (for both auto and truck traffic) between the Sacramento Valley and the North Coast of California. SR 36, between Red Bluff and Fortuna, is a secondary route between the valley and the coast that is frequently used by recreational traffic. SR 3 is the primary north-south link in the County and carries local (intra-county) traffic, as well as recreational and commercial (primarily natural resource) traffic. Not only are these highways in themselves beautiful, but also they traverse some of the most spectacularly scenic areas in the world. Much of the corridor through which these highways pass is guarded by zoning regulations, such as the Scenic Conservation District and the Recreation District. These districts regulate the placement of structures bordering on public and private roads so that the beauty and rural character will not be permanently destroyed and so that areas of unusual scenic beauty in Trinity County will be preserved (Trinity County, 1973).

The 1973 Open Space and Conservation Elements of the *Trinity County General Plan* recommended that the entire length of SR 299 in Trinity County and SR 3 from Weaverville north to the Siskiyou County line be considered eligible for official scenic highway designation (Trinity County, 1973). In 1974, the County adopted a Scenic Highways Element of the *Trinity County General Plan* and recommended that no highways be considered for Scenic Highway status. In 1986, the Scenic Highways Element was incorporated into the *Trinity County Regional Transportation Plan* and County Scenic Roadways were proposed that were less restrictive than official Scenic Highway status. A 50-foot-wide Scenic-Conservation (SC) overlay zone is assigned to designated County Scenic Roadways. To date, only four roads have been so designated: Trinity Dam Boulevard (Road 105), Rush Creek Road (Road 204), Canyon Creek Road (Road 401), and Sky Ranch Road (Road 412). None of these roads are within the project area viewshed.

In 1990, the U.S. Forest Service adopted a National Scenic Byway system. In 1992, the California State Legislature passed AB 126, renaming SR 299 from Redding to Arcata (formerly the “Trinity Highway”) the “Trinity Scenic Byway.” SR 3 from Weaverville to the north has also been designated as a Trinity Heritage Scenic Byway. One Forest Service road (Rainer Road (35N23Y) and four county roads: Rush Creek Road (204); Trinity Dam Boulevard (106); Wildwood Road (302) and Guy Covington Drive (160) have received the same designation to date (LSC, 2001). None of these roads are within the project area view shed.

#### *VISUAL CHARACTER OF THE PROJECT AREA*

The visual character of the project area consists of moderate to steep hillsides and ridges vegetated with a variable mosaic of coniferous forest, oak woodlands, and brush. The tree cover is an important visual element in the project area, and vegetation cover varies throughout the area, based on exposure, elevation, steepness of slopes, and soils. The area is dominated visually by these vegetated slopes, Hayfork Creek and Hyampom Road.

The project is not located in a Wild and Scenic River corridor and there are no unique or visually outstanding natural or manmade features within the project area.

As noted above, SR 299 and SR 3 from Weaverville north are designated Scenic Byways. The proposed roadway project would not be visible from either highway. Hyampom Road is considered an eligible County Scenic Roadway (LSC, 2001; LSC, 2002).

## 4.12.2 PLANNING DOCUMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

### *TRINITY COUNTY GENERAL PLAN OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION ELEMENT*

The Trinity County General Plan Open Space and Conservation Element contains the following visual resources objectives and recommendations relevant to the proposed project:

- Objective: The objective is to protect the scenic natural resources of Trinity County and preserve areas which are important as commercial natural resources for future generations.
  - Recommendation: Preserve areas of established natural scenic beauty as areas of active and passive enjoyment.
- Objective: To conserve, preserve, and maintain the scenic beauty of Trinity County.
  - Recommendations: Acquire scenic easements for conservation of Trinity County's scenic beauty; Develop scenic highway zoning in addition to the scenic conservation and recreation zoning now in effect in many areas of the County, all of which are designed to preserve the scenic areas of the County; Encourage continuous sustained yield practices on public and private forest land; Adopt stringent regulations requiring the landscaping and maintenance of vegetation on cut and fill slopes as required by the appropriate agency; and Control encroachment of cut and fill slopes into scenic easement areas or corridors along scenic highways, whether State or County.

### *TRINITY COUNTY GENERAL PLAN LAND USE ELEMENT*

The Open Space and Conservation Elements of the *Trinity County General Plan* (Trinity County, 1973) address the treatment of scenic lands in the County and contain the following objectives and recommendations regarding visual resources relevant to the project:

- Objective: To conserve, preserve and maintain the scenic beauty of Trinity County.
- Recommendations:
  7. Adopt stringent regulations requiring the landscaping and maintenance of vegetation on cut and fill slopes as required by the appropriate agency.
  8. Control encroachment of cut and fill slopes into scenic easement areas or corridors along scenic highways, whether state or county.

### *TRINITY COUNTY GENERAL PLAN CIRCULATION ELEMENT*

The *Circulation Element* of the *Trinity County General Plan* (LSC, 2002) contains the following goals, objectives and policies regarding visual resources that are relevant to the proposed project:

- Goal 1: Provide for the long-range development of the county's roadway system that is consistent with adopted land use patterns, ensures the safe and efficient movement of people and goods, minimizes impacts on the attractiveness of the community, meets environmental and circulation objectives and implements funding strategies for construction, improvement, and maintenance of existing and new roadways.
  - Objective 1.5: Utilize environmental protection/mitigation measures that consider environmental, social, and economic factors when designing, constructing and operating transportation facilities.
    - Policy 1.5.A: Support early consideration of environmental issues in the planning and design of transportation facilities
    - Policy 1.5.B: Comply with applicable State and Federal environmental laws during the planning and construction of roadway projects.
  - Objective 1.13: As feasible under financial constraints, expand the transportation system to accommodate and attract new businesses and visitors.
    - Policy 1.13.B: Assess each project's contribution to the aesthetics of the area in which it is implemented and support those projects that enhance the visitor's experience in the region.
  - Objective 1.15: Achieve scenic roadway designation for appropriate state and county highways/roads.
    - Policy 1.15.A: The County Scenic Roadways program will consist of specific right-of-way zoning per the County Scenic Conservation Overlay Zoning District. At the time the Community Plans or the General Plan Land Use Element are developed or updated, identify appropriate roads (or road segments) to be designated as County Scenic Roadways. Factors to consider include current view shed condition, resource utilization needs and the need for shaded fuel breaks. Hyampom Road (Road 301) is a county road eligible for designation as a County Scenic Road.

### *TRINITY COUNTY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN*

The *Trinity County Regional Transportation Plan* (LSC, 2001) contains the following goals, objectives and policies regarding visual resources that are relevant to the proposed project:

- Goal 5.2: Preserve high quality viewsheds along state highways and county roads in an effort to improve visitor experience and economic enhancement.
  - Objective 5.2.1: Achieve scenic roadway designation for appropriate state and county highways/roads.
    - Policy 5.2.1.A: The County Scenic Roadways program will consist of specific right-of-way zoning per the County Scenic Conservation Overlay Zoning District. At the time the Community Plans or the General Plan Land Use Element are developed or updated, identify appropriate roads (or road segments) to be designated as County Scenic Roadways. Factors to consider include current viewshed condition, resource utilization needs and the need for shaded fuel breaks. Hyampom Road (Road 301) is a county road eligible for designation as a County Scenic Road.
- Goal 7.1: To coordinate this plan with adopted environmental goals and policies addressed in the Trinity County General Plan and other documents. These goals and policies include, but are not limited to air, water, timber, and land management plans.
  - Objective 7.1.1: Support those social, economic, recreational, safety, and service needs of the people in Trinity County which will preserve the quality of life outlined in the County General Plan.
    - Policy 7.1.1C: Assign funding priority to projects which would reduce or eliminate existing environmental impacts.
  - Objective 7.1.3: Minimize environmental impacts, project delays, and added costs or procedures for transportation projects through early, continued resource agency consultation and through public involvement.
    - Policy 7.1.3A: At a minimum, meet the legal public notification requirements of state and federal law, as applicable. Whenever feasible, utilize additional measures such as public workshops or newsletters to increase opportunities for public involvement.

#### *SHASTA-TRINITY NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN*

The proposed action area is included in Management Area 17, Hayfork Creek, and Management Area 19, Indian Valley/Rattlesnake of the Shasta-Trinity National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (LMP; USDA, 1995). The LMP policies regarding visual resources that relate to the proposed project are as follows:

Applicable Forest Goals related to visual resources include the following:

- Develop or expand opportunities for scenic drives and vista points.
- Maintain a diversity of scenic quality throughout the Forests, particularly along major travel corridors, in popular dispersed recreation areas, and in highly developed areas.

Applicable Forest Standards and Guidelines include the following:

- Manage activities and projects to meet adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) of: (1) preservation (P); (2) retention (R); (3) partial retention (PR); (4) modification (M); or (5) maximum modification (MM). On rare occasions the adopted VQO may not meet management's objectives (i.e., catastrophic events). Any proposed modification to adopted VQOs must go through the NEPA process and be approved by the Forest Supervisor.
  - In the following sensitive travel corridors, the foreground portions (areas located from ¼ to ½ mile from the road viewer) will be managed primarily to meet the adopted VQO of PR: includes Hyampom Road (County 301).

Supplemental LMP management direction for visual resources within Management Area 17 includes the following:

- Emphasize recreational and scenic values along the South Fork Trinity River and Hayfork Creek Canyon areas.

There is no supplemental LMP management direction for visual resources within Management Area 19.

### 4.12.3 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The CEQA *Guidelines* state that significant effects on the environment include substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effects, as well as conflicts with adopted environmental plans and goals of the community. The CEQA *Guidelines* specify that significant effects to scenic vistas or scenic highways and the creation of light or glare should be evaluated in conjunction with the analysis of aesthetic effects. Appendix G of the CEQA *Guidelines*, the CEQA Environmental Checklist, poses the following questions to be considered in determining whether the project would cause significant visual impacts:

Would the project:

- Cause a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
- Substantially damage scenic resources (such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State Scenic Highway)?
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views of the area?

Aesthetic impacts consist of negative changes from existing to post-project landscape character. These changes are the result of introducing foreign elements of line, form, color and texture to the existing

landscape. The magnitude of the impact is usually related to the relative scale of the change, to the sensitivity of the viewing population, and to exposure time. The distinctiveness of an existing landscape contributes to sensitivity and impact significance.

Aesthetic impacts must be evaluated from community perspectives. For instance, a nighttime light or glare created by a development set in an urban or suburban environment might not generate the same level of significance as it would in a rural community. Impacts to viewsheds can differ significantly from urban and suburban environments to rural areas where vistas may be mostly undisturbed.

#### 4.12.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

##### *PERMANENT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES*

#### **Visual Impact – 1: Construction of the proposed project will result in the removal of existing trees and other changes to visual resources.**

The proposed project consists of repainting and widening the Nine Mile Bridge; realigning, widening, and raising the profile of Hyampom Road; improving the surface and subsurface drainage systems; replacing the James Creek culvert with a bridge, and installing rock slope protection and retaining walls along Hayfork Creek. The work to be done as part of the proposed project will be completed within the already existing Hyampom Road corridor and will not significantly change the visual character of the project area. The final project will result in a road and bridges with a newer appearance, with fresh paint and pavement.

Trees will be removed from the construction limits and from the safe recovery zone, which will extend 10 feet from the edge of pavement (where feasible based on topography). Existing trees growing outside of the construction limits and safe recovery zone will not be removed as part of project construction. However, no new upland tree species will be replanted on cut or fill slopes or within 100 feet of the new centerline. Only native shrubs, grasses, and forbs will be planted in this area. This will result in fewer large trees (fir, pine and oak) adjacent to the road. However, in view of the extent of similar trees on both sides of the roadway throughout the project area, large trees will continue to dominate the overall viewshed. Views along the roadway will retain their existing characteristics of steep hillsides and ridges vegetated with a variable mosaic of coniferous forest, oak woodlands, and brush.

As mentioned in Section 4.7, *Biological Resources*, riparian trees removed as part of construction will be replaced in riparian areas at a 3:1 ratio. Views of Hayfork Creek will therefore be the same, or slightly enhanced, once the new riparian vegetation is established.

The proposed project is not located along a state scenic highway, a county scenic roadway, or a national scenic byway. However, Hyampom Road is eligible for listing as a county scenic roadway. Changes caused by the proposed project will not change Hyampom Road's eligibility for scenic roadway status, for the reasons mentioned above. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land use management prescription for the project area is Roaded Recreation, which contains visual resource objectives. Hyampom Road is designated as partial retention

on the adopted Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) map. Road reconstruction is one of the allowed activities under this management prescription, and the proposed project is not expected to conflict with USFS VQO.

No new light or glare will result from the proposed project. No streetlights are proposed. The road will not be relocated, or realigned in such a manner as to create new glare on residences from headlights.

**Significance: Less Than Significant**

**Mitigation Measures: None Required**

#### *TEMPORARY IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES*

**Visual Impact – 2: During construction the visual qualities of the site will be temporarily degraded.**

During construction, slopes will be disturbed and unvegetated, and heavy equipment, other construction vehicles and materials stockpiles will be present on site. The appearance of the site during construction will not be as attractive as the existing undisturbed slopes and trees. Construction will occur during the daytime hours only, so the construction site will not be lighted at night.

Although the visual quality of the site will be degraded during construction, this will not permanently damage the visual quality of the site. Therefore, this short-term temporary impact is not considered significant.

**Significance: Less Than Significant**

**Mitigation Measures: None Required**

#### *CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES*

**Visual Impact – 3: The combination of several rehabilitation projects along Hyampom Road will result in permanent changes to the visual qualities of the road corridor.**

Construction of the various projects proposed for the Hyampom Road corridor will involve the removal of trees and changes to the topography and other landscape features that characterize the area. Curve corrections will result in large fills in riparian areas, and there will be large cuts, especially in the one-lane section. As with the proposed project, the extent of surrounding forests, gorges and rock bluffs on either side of Hyampom Road will ensure that similar trees and landscape features will continue to dominate the view from the road even after realignment and other changes are made. Revegetation will occur in a similar manner on all TCDOT and CFLHD projects.

There are a few residences in the other segments of Hyampom Road to be repaired, particularly in the other TCDOT segment from Hayfork to the National Forest Boundary. Views along that segment are characterized by open pasturelands. Minor curve realignments will require the removal of some vegetation, including some trees at the western end of the project, but the project will not result in significant changes to views from the road, new sources of light or glare, or loss of existing visual screening between adjacent residences and the roadway.

In other segments of the road, residences are sparser, and are screened from views of the road by dense vegetation. Although some vegetation will be removed from along the roadway, no residences are expected to be exposed completely to views of the roadway, or to direct glare from headlights.

Because of these reasons, and because the combined projects involve work along an existing disturbed roadway corridor, the visual quality of the area is not expected to be significantly changed. Significant cumulative visual impacts are not expected to result.

**Significance: Less Than Significant**

**Mitigation Measure: None Required**

**Visual Impact – 4: During construction of the combined projects in Hayfork and on Hyampom Road, the visual qualities at each construction site will be temporarily degraded.**

Temporary visual impacts from bridge replacement projects in Hayfork will not be within the same view shed, except for the first mile of the TCDOT project on Hyampom Road in Hayfork, if it is constructed concurrently with the replacement of the SR 3 Bridge in Hayfork. This would result in a cumulative, but temporary, visual impact near the intersection of Hyampom Road and SR 3, but due to its temporary nature, this would not be a significant effect on the environment.

Temporary visual impacts from construction of other rehabilitation projects on Hyampom Road will be similar to those anticipated from the proposed project. These short-term impacts will occur at different locations along the road at different times, and will vary in character depending on the activity being undertaken and the location of staging areas relative to the roadway. Visual impacts will not overlap, but will be cumulative in the sense that they will prolong the time for which various construction activities are observed while driving on Hyampom Road. As with this project, these temporary effects will not result in a significant permanent degradation of the visual quality of the area, and are not considered significant effects on the environment.

**Significance: Less Than Significant**

**Mitigation Measure: None Required**