Section 4.1
Aesthetics

Introduction

This section identifies and evaluates issues related to visual resources in the action area. The project setting information establishes the existing environmental context within which the reader can understand the potential environmental changes caused by the action. The environmental setting information is intended to be directly or indirectly relevant to the subsequent discussion of impacts. For example, the setting identifies groups of people who have views of the action area to evaluate whether and how the action would change their views and experiences.

The environmental changes associated with the action are discussed under "Environmental Effects." This section identifies potential impacts and describes how they would occur. No potentially significant impacts are identified, but mitigation is proposed for temporary construction impacts. With this mitigation, all aesthetics impacts will be less than significant.

Methodology

Identifying a project area's visual resources and conditions involves three steps:

1. Objective identification of the visual features (visual resources) of the landscape;

2. Assessment of the character and quality of those resources relative to the overall regional visual character; and

3. Determination of the importance to people, or *sensitivity*, of views of visual resources in the landscape.

The *aesthetic value* of an area is a measure of its visual character and quality, combined with the viewer response to the area (FHWA 1988). *Scenic quality* can best be described as the overall impression that an individual viewer retains after driving through, walking through, or flying over an area (BLM 1980). *Viewer response* is a combination of viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity. *Viewer exposure* is a function of the number of viewers, number of views seen, distance of the viewers, and viewing duration. *Viewer sensitivity* relates to the extent of

the public's concern for a particular viewshed. These terms and criteria are described in detail below.

Visual Character

Natural and artificial landscape features contribute to the visual character of an area or view. Visual character is influenced by geologic, hydrologic, botanical, wildlife, recreational, and urban features. Urban features include those associated with human settlements and development, including roads, utilities, structures, earthworks, and the results of other human activities. The perception of visual character can vary significantly seasonally, even hourly, as weather, light, shadow, and elements that compose the viewshed change. The basic components used to describe visual character for most visual assessments are the elements of form, line, color, and texture of the landscape features (USFS 1995, FHWA 1988). The appearance of the landscape is described in terms of the dominance of each of these components.

Visual Quality

Visual quality is evaluated using the well-established approach to visual analysis adopted by the Federal Highway Administration, using the concepts of vividness, intactness, and unity (FHWA 1988, Jones et al. 1975), which are described below.

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

Visual quality is evaluated based on the relative degree of vividness, intactness, and unity, as modified by its visual sensitivity. High-quality views are highly vivid, relatively intact, and exhibit a high degree of visual unity. Low-quality views lack vividness, are not visually intact, and possess a low degree of visual unity.

Visual Exposure and Sensitivity

The measure of the quality of a view must be tempered by the overall sensitivity of the viewer. Viewer sensitivity or concern is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, proximity of viewers to the visual resource, elevation

of viewers relative to the visual resource, frequency and duration of views, number of viewers, and type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

The importance of a view is related in part to the position of the viewer to the resource; therefore, visibility and visual dominance of landscape elements depend on their placement within the viewshed. A *viewshed* is defined as all of the surface area visible from a particular location (e.g., an overlook) or sequence of locations (e.g., a roadway or trail) (FHWA 1988). To identify the importance of views of a resource, a viewshed must be broken into distance zones of foreground, middleground, and background. Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant it is and the greater its importance to the viewer. Although distance zones in a viewshed may vary between different geographic region and types of terrain, the standard foreground zone is 0.25–0.5 mile from the viewer, the middleground zone from the foreground zone to 3–5 miles from the viewer, and the background zone from the middleground to infinity (USFS 1995).

Visual sensitivity depends on the number and type of viewers, and the frequency and duration of views. Visual sensitivity is also modified by viewer activity, awareness, and visual expectations in relation to the number of viewers and viewing duration. For example, visual sensitivity is generally higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure, or people engaging in recreational activities such as hiking, biking or camping; and residents. Sensitivity tends to be lower for views seen by people driving to and from work or as part of their work (USFS 1995, FHWA 1988, SCS 1978). Commuters and nonrecreational travelers have generally fleeting views and tend to focus on commute traffic, not on surrounding scenery; therefore, they are generally considered to have low visual sensitivity. Residential viewers typically have extended viewing periods and are concerned about changes in the views from their homes; therefore, they are generally considered to have high visual sensitivity. Viewers using recreation trails and areas, scenic highways, and scenic overlooks are usually assessed as having high visual sensitivity.

Judgments of visual quality and viewer response must be made based on a regional frame of reference (SCS 1978). The same landform or visual resource appearing in different geographic areas could have a different degree of visual quality and sensitivity in each setting. For example, a small hill may be a significant visual element on a flat landscape but have very little significance in mountainous terrain.

Affected Environment

Regulatory Setting

No federal or state plans or policies related to aesthetics apply to the proposed project. No roadways within the project corridor are officially designated in

federal, state, or local plans as a scenic roadway or as a corridor worthy of protection for maintaining and enhancing scenic viewsheds.

Local Regulations

Because the CPUC has exclusive jurisdiction over siting, design, and construction of the project, the project is not subject to local discretionary land use regulations. The following analysis of local regulations relating to visual resources is provided for informational purposes and to assist with CEQA review.

San Benito County General Plan

Polices in the San Benito County General Plan (San Benito County 1995, 1980) related to visual character are as follows:

Open Space and Conservation Element (San Benito County 1995)

> ***Policy 15 Open Space Overlay District*** The County will enforce the intended purpose of the Open Space District of the County by using the Zoning Ordinance to protect and preserve the rural landscape and implement open space policies for public health, safety, and welfare, continued agricultural uses, scenic viewscape preservation including scenic highway corridors, park and recreation uses, conservation of natural resources, the containment and definition of limits of urbanization, and the preservation of natural habitat for threatened and/or endangered plant and animal species.

Scenic Roads and Highways Element (San Benito County 1980)

This Scenic Roads and Highways Element identifies State Highways 101 and 129 as county scenic roadways. The scenic roadway corridor is defined as all land within 400 feet of State Highway 101 centerline and all land within 340 feet of State Highway 129 centerline. These roadways are near but outside of the western extent of the project. If it was within local jurisdiction, a utility line would be subject to the following policy:

> ***Policy 5 Utility Lines.*** It will be the County's policy to review each application and to provide mitigation measures which will minimize the visual impact of utility lines on the Scenic Corridor.

City of Hollister General Plan

Goals and policies in the City of Hollister General Plan (City of Hollister 2005) related to visual character are as follows:

Land Use Element

Policy LU3.2 Street Trees. Promote street tree planting and other community design features to maintain visual quality and small town atmosphere.

Policy LU3.3 Landscaping. Maintain roadway landscaping through both public and private means.

Policy LU3.4 Existing Trees. Preserve existing significant trees and tree groupings where possible. Replace trees removed due to site development.

Policy LU9.4 San Benito River. Where possible, preserve and restore natural drainage ways to the San Benito River, and coordinate recreational and trail use along the river.

Open Space and Agriculture Element

Policy OS1.1 Open Space Preservation. Retain and protect open space areas whenever practical through the protection of prime farmlands, the prevention of new development in areas subject to natural hazards that serve as wildlife habitat or as visual assets for the community, and where the development of additional parks and trails is possible. Open space areas can also function as connections between neighborhoods, for example with the creation of pathways in environmentally appropriate areas.

Policy OS1.6 Utilities in Open Space. Discourage utilities in open space areas. Necessary utilities in open space should be located and designed to minimize harm to the area's environmental and visual quality.

Natural Resources and Conservation Element

NRC 1.5 Wetlands Preservation. Maintain existing riparian areas in their natural state to provide for wildlife habitat, groundwater percolation, water quality, aesthetic relief and recreational uses that are environmentally compatible with wetland preservation. Require appropriate public and private wetlands preservation, restoration and/or rehabilitation through compensatory mitigation in the development process for unavoidable impacts. Support and promote acquisition from willing property owners, and require those development projects, which may result in the disturbance of delineated seasonal wetlands to be redesigned to avoid such disturbance.

Monterey County General Plan

Goals and policies in the Monterey County General Plan (Monterey County 2006) related to visual character are as follows:

Land Use Element

Policy LU-1.8: Voluntary reduction or limitation of development potential in the rural and agricultural areas through dedication of scenic or conservation easements, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), and other appropriate techniques shall be encouraged. The Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) in the Big Sur Land Use Plan is a separate program to address development within the critical viewshed.

Circulation Element

Policy C-5.1: Area Plans may propose roadways, or specific segments thereof, to be considered for designation as State Scenic Highways or County Scenic Routes.

Policy C-5.2: Application for official designations of State Scenic Highways or County Scenic Routes shall be coordinated between all appropriate state and local jurisdictions and affected property owners.

Policy C-5.3: Guidelines shall be developed to assure that development and land use in the Scenic Highway Corridors are compatible with the surrounding area using techniques that include, but are not limited to:

a. placement of utilities underground, where feasible;

b. architectural and landscape controls,

c. outdoor advertising restrictions;

d. encouragement of area native plants, especially on public lands and dedicated open spaces; and,

e. cooperative landscape programs with adjoining public and private open space lands.

Policy C-5.4: Land use controls shall be applied or retained to protect the Scenic Highway Corridor and to encourage sensitive selection of sites and open space preservation within such areas. Where land is designated for development at a density that would create a substantial adverse visual impact, the landowner shall be encouraged to voluntarily dedicate a scenic easement to protect the Scenic Highway corridor.

Policy C-5.5: Agencies involved in officially designating State Scenic Highways and/or County Scenic Roads shall coordinate their efforts for the integrated design and implementation of such designations.

Policy C-5.6: Special scenic treatment and design within the rights-of-way of officially designated State Scenic Highways and/or County Scenic Roads shall be implemented and may include highway directional signs, guardrails and fences, lighting and illumination, provision of scenic outlooks, road lanes, frontage roads, vegetation, grading, and highway structures.

Conservation and Open Space Element

Policy OS-1.3: To preserve the County's scenic qualities, ridgeline development shall not be allowed. An exception to this policy may be made only after publicly noticed hearing and provided the following findings can be made:

a. The ridgeline development will not create a substantially adverse visual impact when viewed from a common public viewing area; and,

b. That the proposed development better achieves the goals, policies and objectives of the Monterey County General Plan and applicable area plan than other development alternatives; or,

c. There is no feasible alternative to the ridgeline development.

Pursuant to Policy OS-1.6, in areas subject to specific plans, the ridgeline policies and regulations of the applicable specific plan shall govern.

Policy OS-1.4: Criteria shall be developed to guide the design and construction of ridgeline development where such development has been proposed pursuant to Policy OS-1.3.

Policy OS-1.6: In areas subject to specific plans, the ridgeline policies and regulations of the applicable specific plan shall govern. Each specific plan shall address viewshed issues, including ridgeline development as part of the plan, including but not limited to provisions for setbacks, landscaping, height limits, or open space buffers.

Policy OS-1.12: The significant disruption of views from designated scenic routes shall be mitigated through use of appropriate materials, scale, lighting and siting of development. Routine and ongoing agricultural activities shall be exempt from this policy, except: 1) large-scale agricultural processing facilities; or 2) facilities governed by the Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan.

Public Services

The North County Area Plan

Policy NC-2.2: Old Stage Road shall be continued as a public right-of-way and its historical value shall be protected by the continuance of agrarian land use activities along its route.

Policy NC-3.1: Within areas designated as "sensitive" or "highly sensitive" on the Scenic Highway Corridors and Visual Sensitivity Map [see Figure 4.1-1], … landscaping or new development may be permitted if the development is located and designed in such a manner that public views are not disrupted.

Policy NC-3.3: Conservation of North County's native vegetation shall be given high priority to:

a. Retain the viability of threatened or limited vegetative communities and animal habitats,

b. Promote the area's natural scenic qualities, and

c. Preserve rare, endangered and endemic plants for scientific study.

Property owners shall be encouraged to cooperate with the County in establishing conservation easements over areas of native vegetation.

Policy NC-3.4: Removal of healthy, native oak and madrone trees in the North Monterey County Area shall be discouraged. A permit shall be required for the removal of any of these trees with a trunk diameter in excess of six inches diameter breast height (d.b.h.). Where feasible, trees removed will be replaced at a 1:1 ratio using nursery-grown trees of the same species that are a minimum of one gallon in size. Removal without a permit shall result in a minimum fine, equivalent to the retail value of the wood removed plus replacement of one gallon, nursery-grown trees at a 2:1 ratio. Exemptions to the above permit requirement shall include:

a. tree removal by public utilities, as specified in the California Public Utility Commission's General Order 95, and by governmental agencies.

b. emergencies caused by the hazardous or dangerous condition of a tree and requiring immediate action for the safety of life or property, provided the County is notified of the action within ten working days.

Project Setting

Key viewpoints, shown in Figure 4.1-2, have been chosen for their representation of the landscape within which they are located and the viewers that would be affected.

San Benito County

San Benito County begins in the north at the southern end of the Santa Clara Valley. Just west of Santa Clara Valley is the much smaller San Juan Valley. These two valleys constitute the largest portion of flat land in the county. The remainder of the county is mostly made up of the Diablo Range, with the exception of the Gabilan Range that is located west of the valleys and makes up the northwestern border of the county. Hollister is located at the southern end of the Santa Clara Valley, and San Juan Bautista is located along the western edge of the San Juan Valley, at the base of the Gabilan Range.

The region historically has been dominated by agricultural production and cattle ranching, but in recent years has flourished with expanding residential, commercial, and industrial development. Cattle graze on large portions of the rolling land, where the terrain allows. Throughout the expanding development, however, San Benito County and its cities have retained a feeling of openness, preserving tree-lined streets in older neighborhoods and preserving undeveloped lands that surround newer sections of development. In addition to buildings, infrastructure such as roadways, fences, utility lines, signs, and power lines (including those associated with the proposed project) are dominant man-made visual features within the region and vicinity. The landform within the region is generally rolling to steep, with only the areas within the valleys that have been leveled for existing or historical agricultural production (Figure 4.1-3, Photo 1). The San Benito River, a dry river in the summer, flows west along the base of the Flint Hills and is predominantly abutted to the south by agriculture. The existing power line parallels the river at the base of the Flint Hills and crosses the river approximately 0.5 mile west of Lucy Brown Road, which is within this agricultural area (Figure 4.1-3, Photo 2). There is one rural residence and associated agricultural production just southwest of the crossing, which is somewhat screened from the crossing by surrounding landscaping. The terrain lends to the overall high-quality visual character and allows for a variety of panoramic views offered dependent on location within the landscape.

City of Hollister

Hollister is the largest city in the county and is incorporated. The city boasts a mix of older established neighborhoods, new development, and historical town center. New growth, radiating out from the city's core and major roadways, is reducing the amount of agricultural land on the outskirts, changing the visual character from rural to suburban. This growth is typified by a growing core of residential, commercial, and some industrial land uses typical of that occurring

throughout California. In addition to buildings, infrastructure such as roadways, fences, utility lines, signs, and power lines (including those associated with the proposed project) are dominant man-made visual features within and near the city. Views of the surrounding mountain ranges are present down roadway corridors, on the outskirts of the city, and from multistory buildings. Water features in the greater region include the San Benito River and its tributaries, numerous reservoirs, and smaller local irrigation ditches.

City of San Juan Bautista

San Juan Bautista is located approximately 2 miles away from the project corridor. As such, viewers within this city will not be affected by the proposed project and are not discussed further.

Monterey County

Located mid-state along the Pacific Ocean, Monterey County is part of the Coast Ranges. The Salinas Valley separates the Gabilan Range and Cholame Hills, located along the eastern border of the county, from the San Lucia Range that mostly comprises the western half of the county. The proposed project is located in the Gabilan Range and ends at the northeastern edge of the Salinas Valley.

Ridgelines are one of the most prominent features of the landscape, and they offer the greatest opportunity for panoramic vistas that extend far into the background. These views vary based on available access to the ridgelines, which is often limited to that provided by travel on public roadways and parks, and the viewers' position in the landscape. It can range from full middleground and background views of multiple ridges, to views that are limited to the middleground by ridgelines that are of a higher elevation, to middleground and background views of agriculture fields/pastures. Based on the viewer's location within the landscape, views may be more expansive when unobstructed or more limited by obstructions such as ridgelines, vegetation, development, row crops, and orchards. Development on prominently visible ridgelines and slopes, even small structures, can cause a significant impact as a structure's full mass may easily be visible from numerous points in the surrounding terrain that have views toward the ridgelines. In addition to buildings, infrastructure such as roadways, fences, utility lines, signs, and power lines (including those associated with the proposed project) are dominant man-made visual features within the region and vicinity.

Travel routes provide the broadest range and greatest visual access to the various aesthetic resources in the county. Roadways and highways often wind through the region at changing elevations and serve to take travelers on a visual journey through the landscape. These roadways provide visual access to varying degrees.

Sensitive Visual Resources

The North County Planning Area contains designated visual resource areas that are characterized as Sensitive Areas and Highly Sensitive Areas; the area also includes existing and proposed scenic highways and routes, as shown in Figure 4.1-1. As stated above, there are no existing officially designated scenic highways along the project route.

The existing Hollister No. 1 power line, to be reconductored as part of this project, passes through an area identified as Highly Sensitive and near a proposed scenic roadway, San Juan Grade Road.

Existing Viewer Groups and Viewer Responses

Viewers of the proposed project include county and city residents, roadway users, recreational users, and businesses. Key viewpoints, shown in Figure 4.1-2, have been chosen for their representation of the landscape within which they are located and the viewers that are affected.

Residents

County residents primarily inhabit rural residences that often are spaced far apart. Vegetation is planted around the perimeters of most of these residences for shade in the open fields and for privacy. County residents with views can see nearby city edges across the fields and the surrounding ranges, in the middleground and background.

Residents within the city limits with views of the project site primarily are located in newer developments. Older, more established neighborhoods are located closer to the cities' core and away from the outskirts. Residents in cities have limited views to the site. Residents' homes in the newer developments often are oriented with the backs of the buildings facing the site and the front toward the residential street. Many residents also have privacy fences and landscaping that limit views.

Residents located adjacent to the project corridor are the most likely to be affected by the proposed project. However, there is an existing power line in these locations. Figure 4.1-4, Photo 3 shows a vantage of the existing corridor from a rural residence.

Roadway Users

Viewers who frequently travel roadways in and around the project area generally possess moderate visual sensitivity to their surroundings. They are generally focused on traffic rather than on surrounding scenery and tend to have fleeting views of an area. Many roadways are very straight, and driving takes less

focused attention, giving roadway travelers limited moments to take in the scenery around them. However, on many roadways, viewers' attention is mostly focused on the winding roadway and roadway conditions. Many of these roadways are scenic. At standard roadway speeds, views are of short duration and roadway users are fleetingly aware of surrounding traffic, road signs, their immediate surroundings within the automobile, and other visual features. As mentioned, viewers often have opportunities to take in their surroundings, and the rolling foothills and stately oaks create a pleasant viewing experience that is often rural (Figure 4.1-4, Photo 4).

Recreational Users

Recreational users include local city park users, residents who use adjacent agricultural fields, and cyclists or runners on local roadways. Vista Hill Park located at the northern edge of Hollister is used by many nearby residents. Residents occasionally may use the agricultural fields to take walks and to walk their animals, and children use them to play in—although this is private property and such uses are unsanctioned. Cyclists and runners may use various roadway corridors. These users are accustomed to the existing levels of traffic, sights of the vegetated right-of-way, rolling terrain, and current level of development, including existing power lines, along these corridors. Recreational users who will view the proposed project are more likely to regard the natural and built surroundings as a holistic visual experience and therefore will have a high visual sensitivity to their surroundings.

Businesses

Businesses that generally view the project site for an extended period are mostly related to agricultural activities (Figure 4.1-5, Photo 5 and Photo 6 and Figure 4.1-6, Photo 7). Views for businesses located in the cities are the same as views for residents of those cities. Businesses are considered to have moderate visual sensitivity because, although they are used to views of the existing transmission system, they generally make a livelihood off the land and, therefore, often regard their surroundings in a higher esteem.

Environmental Effects

This section describes potential impacts on visual resources for the proposed project. It describes the methods used to determine the Project's impacts and lists the thresholds used to conclude whether an impact is considered potentially significant. Because evaluating visual impacts is inherently subjective, federal and professional standards of visual assessment methodology have been used to determine potential impacts on aesthetic values of the project area. Measures to mitigate potentially significant impacts accompany each impact discussion.

Significance Criteria

For this analysis, an impact related to aesthetics was considered potentially significant under CEQA if the project would result in any of the following environmental effects. The criteria are based on Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines and professional practice.

Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines indicates that an impact is considered significant if a project would:

- Cause a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect on a scenic vista or view open to the public, or have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, 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; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime public views.

Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Using the concepts and terminology described at the beginning of this section and the criteria for determining significance described above, analysis of the visual effects of the proposed project were based on:

- Photographic documentation of key views of and from the project site,
- Review of project construction drawings, and
- Review of the project in regard to compliance with state and local ordinances and regulations and professional standards pertaining to visual quality.

Specific project impacts visible from three representative locations have been illustrated through photo simulations. A photo from a vantage point where a portion of the site is visible has been selected to represent as accurately as possible (a) existing conditions and (b) proposed conditions. These locations are shown in Figure 4.1-2.

The proposed project is generally consistent with and will not conflict with local visual policies. The project involves reconstruction of an existing power line within an existing corridor and relocation of an existing segment currently within the San Benito River floodplain (the existing river alignment). The relocated span of the line will be constructed in a new alignment (the Proposed River Crossing).

Future operation and maintenance activities will be similar to existing operation and maintenance conditions, and will not affect visual resources. The analysis of

impacts on visual resources focuses on construction activities along the existing power line corridor (temporary impacts that will last for the duration of the construction period) and the long-term effects on the viewshed caused by relocation of the overhead crossing across the San Benito River.

Temporary visual impacts caused by construction activities – less-than-significant impact

Construction of the proposed project will create temporary changes in views of and from the project area. Construction activities will introduce considerable heavy equipment and associated vehicles, including dozers, graders, cranes, helicopters, and trucks, into the viewshed of all viewer groups. Helicopters and cranes will be used to erect the poles and towers, and all adjacent viewer groups will be able to see this equipment being used. While viewer groups will not be accustomed to seeing construction activities of the helicopters and cranes erecting the towers, this activity will be temporary and will occur generally during normal business hours when most residents are at work. In addition, such activities will be visible primarily only to adjacent viewer groups and those within a short distance of the construction activities. Viewers further away will not be affected by construction because their distance from the site will render helicopters, cranes, and tower erection indiscernible.

Vegetation clearing will occur during construction to accommodate the towers; however, vegetation clearing is a standard operation practice currently associated with the existing power line corridor for safety and reduction of tree-associated outages. The exposed slopes will be reseeded, per the Erosion Control and Restoration Plan that will be prepared as part of the SWPPP (see Chapter 3, "Project Description"), and will naturalize within a short time. Because construction activities will be temporary (lasting approximately 12 months for the Hollister Pole Segment and 13 months for the Hollister Tower Segment) and the change in the visual character will be short term, visual impacts caused by construction activities are considered less than significant. Implementation of APM AES-1 described below will further ensure that construction-related impacts on visual resources are less than significant.

APM AES-1: LIMIT CONSTRUCTION TO DAYLIGHT HOURS AS FEASIBLE.

Construction activities that are visible to the public and scheduled to occur after 6:00 p.m. or on weekends should not continue past daylight hours (which vary according to season) unless required because of project safety concerns or clearance requirements. This will reduce the amount of construction activities visible to viewer groups because most construction activities will occur during business hours (when most viewer groups are likely at work), and daylight construction will eliminate the need to introduce high-wattage lighting sources to be able to operate in the dark.

Long-term visual impacts are discussed below.

Adverse effects on a scenic vista – less-than-significant impact

Many scenic vistas are present throughout the mountain ranges in San Benito and Monterey Counties; these vistas offer expansive, high-quality views. The alignment of the power line in areas where scenic vistas are present will not change, and the new towers and poles do not noticeably differ from the existing ones. The new towers and poles will not alter the quality of the existing scenic vistas. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project will result in a less-than-significant impact on scenic vistas.

Damage to scenic resources along a designated scenic highway – less-than-significant impact

No roadways in or near the project area are officially designated in state or local plans as a scenic highway or route worthy of protection for maintaining and enhancing scenic viewsheds. Thus, implementation of the proposed project will not damage scenic resources, such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings, along a scenic highway.

The Hollister Tower Segment passes through an area identified as Highly Sensitive and near a proposed scenic roadway, San Juan Grade Road. The Hollister Tower Segment can be seen, on occasion, from some vantages along San Juan Grade Road. The alignment of the power line within view of San Juan Grade Road will not change, and the new towers do not noticeably differ from the existing ones. Except for temporary visual impacts during construction, the new towers will not alter the quality of the existing scenic resources. The impact is less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

Alteration of existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings – less-than-significant impact

The proposed alignment of the power line will not alter or degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project corridor or its surroundings. The Hollister Substation is located adjacent to a railroad, accessed by a road off of SR 25, and is visible at the end of Gateway Drive (Figure 4.1-6, Photo 8). Commercial and warehouse operations are located in this area. The minor modifications to the substation will take place on PG&E property, will not be discernible to nearby viewers, and will not affect viewer groups.

The proposed power line corridor will follow the existing alignment for the Hollister Tower Segment and Hollister Pole Segment, except for one location where it crosses the San Benito River. In this location, the Proposed River Crossing on the Hollister Pole Segment, the power line will be relocated less than 1 mile downstream. New poles and lines will be constructed in the new location to span the river. The existing poles will be topped (shortened) and left in place on the existing river alignment to continue to provide distribution service to local customers and to avoid disturbing the floodplain. The existing river alignment and Proposed River Crossing are located in an agricultural area, with views

present only from private agricultural fields. The Proposed River Crossing will be at a location further away from the one rural residence in the vicinity and will be seen mainly by persons working the fields. While there is no authorized recreational activity in the riverbed, evidence of occasional OHV and dirt bike use was noticed in the area. The Proposed River Crossing will not substantially alter the visual character or quality of the site or its surroundings because of the proximity to the existing river alignment and lack of sensitive receptors. Because the new poles do not noticeably differ from the existing ones and the locations will not noticeably shift, the new poles will not alter the existing visual character or quality along the rest of the alignment.

Towers 4/27 through 5/31 would be replaced with towers that are approximately the same height and the same tower base dimensions as the existing towers. However, the existing steel cross arms would be replaced with the Horizontal-V Insulator braced line post assembly, which is the assembly that attaches the wires to the towers. The Horizontal-V raises the wire height as required to alleviate EMF concerns near residences. Figure 4.1-7 illustrates before and after conditions from Avenida del Piero and one of the affected towers, (Tower 5/30) near residences. As seen in the simulation, the raised wires do not affect views. Because the proposed Horizontal-V assembly has a narrower and less bulky stature than the existing assembly, the design acts to slightly improve the appearance of the towers at this location by reducing the stature of the tower. It also decreases the perceived width of the tower, making it appear more streamlined. Figure 4.1-8 illustrates before and after conditions from Rocks Road and illustrates how the proposed modifications to the Hollister Tower Segment are indiscernible from the existing towers and alignment. Replacement of wooden poles with TSPs and LDS poles will result in a minor change in the appearance of the poles on the Hollister Pole Segment but will not substantially alter the overall appearance of the corridor, as illustrated in Figure 4.1-9—a view from Wright Road.

Because implementation of the proposed project will not substantially affect existing visual resources or the character and quality of the site and its surroundings, potential impacts on visual resources are considered less than significant. No mitigation is required.

Creation of a new source of light or glare – less-than-significant impact

The proposed project will not create a substantial new source of light or glare that will adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.

Daytime and Nighttime Glare. Once the facility has been built, the towers and poles will be potential sources of glare. In most locations, the new towers will be constructed of the same material as the existing towers. Existing wooden poles will be replaced with TSPs and LDS poles made of steel, which will be rusted brown in appearance, similar to wood poles.

Nighttime Light. No new sources of light will be introduced from the proposed project, except for FAA lighting required for aviation safety on Poles 22/00 and 22/01 that are located along Buena Vista Road, just west of SR 156. The required safety lights would be most visible at night. The affected towers are located near an animal adoption organization and one or two residences. The animal adoption center is set back into surrounding trees that screen views to surrounding areas. Viewers likely are not at the facility, or would be inside, at night, thus reducing the likelihood that the safety lights would be visible from the center. The residence closest to a lighted tower has a light on a pole on the property, as seen using Google Map Street View; and another light is on a pole just down the street toward SR 156. Because of the existing lights on poles in the residential area, the two red FAA-required safety lights would not be as noticeable.

The safety lighting would not substantially affect views from Buena Vista Road or SR 156. Buena Vista Road is roughly paved, with few viewers located alongside the roadway or using the roadway. As noted above, the lighted poles in the residential area further reduce the potential effect of the lighted towers. Views of oncoming headlights would be the main focus of travelers on SR 156 at night, diverting their attention from the area with the lighted towers. In addition, if viewers do look toward that area, the existing lighted poles in the residential area may have some backscatter. Because of these factors, the existing condition and views would be minimally affected by the red FAA safety lighting.

Impacts related to light and glare will be less than significant. No mitigation is required.

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