3.1 Aesthetics

Table 3.1-1 Aesthetics Checklist

Would the project:		Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a.	Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b.	Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c.	Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d.	Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	☐	☐	☒	☐

3.1.1 Setting

The Palermo–East Nicolaus 115-kV Transmission Line Project would be located in the northern Sacramento Valley in Butte, Sutter, and Yuba Counties. The project would run approximately 40 miles from the Palermo Substation at the eastern edge of the town of Palermo in southern Butte County southwards to the East Nicolaus Substation in the town of East Nicolaus in Sutter County.

The existing double-circuit 115-kV transmission line is carried by lattice steel towers (LSTs). The project would entail the replacement of the approximately 75- to 95-foot tall LSTs on the existing Palermo-East Nicolaus transmission line with approximately 85- to 120-foot tall hybrid steel poles (hybrid poles) and tubular steel poles (TSPs) and 85-foot tall lattice steel poles (LSPs). The span lengths will be altered slightly from the existing spans. Of the existing 320 towers, approximately 265 would be replaced with steel poles, and approximately 40 would remain in place. The total number of structures would be reduced by approximately 15 (Table 1.8-2).

The Palermo-East Nicolaus Transmission Line runs parallel to the single-circuit 115-kV Palermo-Pease Transmission Line carried by LSTs. The project would also require the replacement of five existing 75-foot LSTs and the removal of two LSTs (Table 1.8-3) on the adjacent single-circuit line with new steel poles for consistency with the spans on the Palermo-East Nicolaus 115-kV Transmission Line.

Construction of the project would require approximately sixteen lay-down/staging/helicopter landing zone areas ranging from 1.24 to 7.41 acres each and sixteen pull sites ranging from 0.27 to 2.4 acres each (Table 1.8-8). Access to staging areas would rely primarily on existing roadways suitable for truck traffic; however, the project would require the construction of some temporary access roads as well as improvements to existing access roads. Improvements to existing roads include the widening of roadways to 16 feet. All land disturbed by the project would be reseeded to restore the landscape to its preexisting condition.

The majority of the route passes through unincorporated portions of Sutter, Yuba, and Butte Counties. The lands can be classified as agricultural lands with scattered rural residences and associated agricultural structures. Urbanized areas along the route include Marysville, Linda, Olivehurst, and Palermo. The

project route also passes alongside the edge of Yuba Community College. In southern Yuba County, the route passes within two miles of the Lake of the Woods State Wildlife Area.

The project area offers distant views of the Sierra Foothills and the Sutter Buttes. The Butte County General Plan recognizes the scenic qualities of the Sierra Foothills and the extensive scenic views that are available of the foothills and mountains toward the east from the valley but does not contain specific policies to protect those visual resources (Butte County 2000). The Sutter County General Plan identifies the Sutter Buttes as a visual resource and directs development to preserve views of this distinctive landform (Sutter County 1996).

The route crosses several rivers and creeks including the Bear River and the Ping Slough in Sutter County; the Yuba River (near Marysville) and Jack Slough in Yuba County; North and South Honcut Creeks on the border between Yuba and Butte Counties; and Wyandotte Creek and the Wyman Ravine in Butte County. The Yuba County General Plan describes the Bear Creek and Yuba River corridors as "visually appealing" to many people (Yuba County 1996).

The project route would not cross or pass within the viewshed of any designated or eligible state scenic highways. In Butte County, Highway 70 north of Highway 191 and, in Yuba County, Highway 49 are located 10 and 25 miles from the project, respectively, and are both considered eligible state scenic highways. Sutter County has no officially designated or eligible state scenic highways.

Highway 20 is a proposed Yuba County scenic route (Yuba County 1968). State Highway 70/Marysville Bypass to the Butte County line and State Highway 49 (Yuba County 1968) is a potentially eligible new corridor within Yuba County. The project would be located more than two miles from all other designated or eligible scenic routes within Yuba County. The Yuba County General Plan Open Space and Conservation Element Policy 34-OSCP protects scenic qualities from the county's roads, specifically addressing outdoor advertising and parking facilities.

The Marysville General Plan recognizes Highway 70 crossing the Yuba River Bridge as providing a scenic view of the Yuba River (City of Marysville 1985). The Plan does not include specific policies pertaining to development along or within viewshed of the Yuba River Bridge. The project route would be located approximately 2.5 miles from the bridge.

The route would not cross or lie in proximity to a Butte County scenic highway. The Land Use Element of the Butte County General Plan identifies Highway 70 north of 149 as a county scenic highway (Butte County 2000). This portion of the roadway is located approximately 11 miles from the northern terminus of the project and nine miles from the northernmost point of the project.

The project route would be located within the vicinity of Highway 20 in Sutter County. The Land Use Element of the Sutter County General Plan requires that development along Highway 20 protect views of the Sutter Buttes in the background (Sutter County 1996). Additionally, the Sutter County General Plan is in the process of being updated. The 2008 Background Report for the Sutter County General Plan update identifies a number of visually and aesthetically scenic roadways throughout Sutter County. These consist of roadways such as those around and through the Sutter Buttes and those along the Sacramento and Feather Rivers (Sutter County 2008). There are no policies currently in place to designate these as county scenic roadways.

Landscape Units

Landscape Units are distinct visual environments traversed by the project. Landscape units have been identified for purposes of documenting and describing the project's foreground viewshed. Within each

distinct Landscape Unit are homogenous topographic, vegetation, and/or development patterns that visually distinguish the unit from surrounding areas.

The project would be located within three Landscape Units (Figure 3.1-1). The Landscape Units are described below, and photos of typical views within these areas are shown in Figures 3.1-2a through 3.1-2e. Landscape Unit 1 encompasses the Palermo Substation (the route's northern terminus) and the route down to its Highway 20 crossing in Yuba County. Landscape Unit 2 covers the route from the Highway 20 crossing to McGowan Parkway near Highway 70 in Olivehurst. Unit 3 runs from McGowan Parkway to the route's southern terminus outside of the town of East Nicolaus in Sutter County.

Landscape Unit 1: Palermo Substation to Highway 20

Landscape Unit 1 runs from the Palermo Substation to where the route crosses Browns Valley Road (Highway 20) on the outskirts of Marysville. The route crosses through the southern limits of the City of Oroville, but the majority of views are characterized by the lower Sierra foothill community of Palermo and the farmland in the northern Sacramento Valley.

The visual setting in this unit is a gently rolling landscape of mature forests giving way to creeks and low-lying grasslands that make up the valleys of the Wyandotte and Honcut Creeks. Elevations along the northern portion of the route reach almost 400 feet, whereas the center of Palermo lies at about 160 feet and farmlands further south vary between 60 to 150 feet. The area is sparsely populated outside of the town of Palermo. Views of the project are available from a small number of residences and agricultural buildings.

Vegetation outside of the town of Palermo consists of grasslands and farms, riparian corridors and orchards. The route crosses several waterways including South Honcut Creek and Jack Slough. Riparian trees such as cottonwoods are characteristic of the vegetation in these areas. The Sutter Buttes provide a distinctive landscape backdrop feature in eastern-facing views from some locations within this landscape unit. The Buttes lie approximately 12 miles away from the southern end of this unit.

The Palermo Substation is located in a flat area off of Stageline Road, west of Drescher Tract Road. The substation is visible from adjacent properties (Photo 1). More distant views of the project route from the south, east, and west are screened by vegetation and topography. Limited views toward the substation are available from the north, including views from the Feather Falls Casino and the associated Kampgrounds of America campground on Lower Wyandotte Road 0.75 miles away. Due to an intervening low and forested ridge that reaches about 400 feet in elevation, the substation is not visible from most of the town of Palermo, located 1.5 miles to the southwest.

The project route follows an existing transmission route for approximately 1.5 miles from the substation west then northwest, crossing Upper Palermo Road (and Pinecrest Road). The project route parallels three existing routes at this point (Photo 2), then turns southwest near the intersection of Lincoln Boulevard and Ophir Road, and from Ophir Road proceeds approximately 1.5 miles southwest, where it crosses Lincoln Boulevard near Firloop Circle (Photo 3). It continues southeast for about 1.3 miles between the railroad corridor and Railroad Avenue. Photo 4, taken from Baldwin Avenue at Railroad Avenue represents views from this area looking west toward the project. A half mile south of South Villa Avenue, at what would be the extension of Louis Avenue, the line crosses the Union Pacific Railroad tracks and continues on the west side of the tracks. As shown in Photos 5 and 7, for most of this Landscape Unit the route runs within 100 feet west of the Union Pacific Railroad corridor.

In Landscape Unit 1, the route crosses various local roads including Cox Lane, Central House Road, Middle and Lower Honcut Roads, Ramirez Road, Ellis Road, Kimball Lane, and Jack Slough Road.

These rural roads connect residents of the area to Highway 70 and to the towns of Palermo, Honcut, Wyandotte, and Gridley. Photo 6 shows the crossing at Lower Honcut Road, a well-traveled roadway that joins Honcut to the east with Highway 70. As shown in Photo 8, at the southern end of the unit, the route crosses Highway 20.

Distant views of the project are also available from the heavily traveled Palermo-Honcut Highway and from Highway 70. Palermo-Honcut Highway runs parallel to the route approximately one to three miles to the east, and Highway 70 runs parallel to the route one to three miles to the west.

Landscape Unit 2: Highway 20 to McGowan Parkway

Landscape Unit 2 runs approximately six miles from Browns Valley Road (Highway 20) near the northeast edge Marysville to the Highway 70 route crossing at McGowan Parkway in Olivehurst. Landscape Unit 2 includes the most populated areas of project corridor, passing through the communities of Linda and Olivehurst as well as the city limits of Marysville. Elevations in this area are fairly constant, ranging from approximately 55 to 75 feet above sea level.

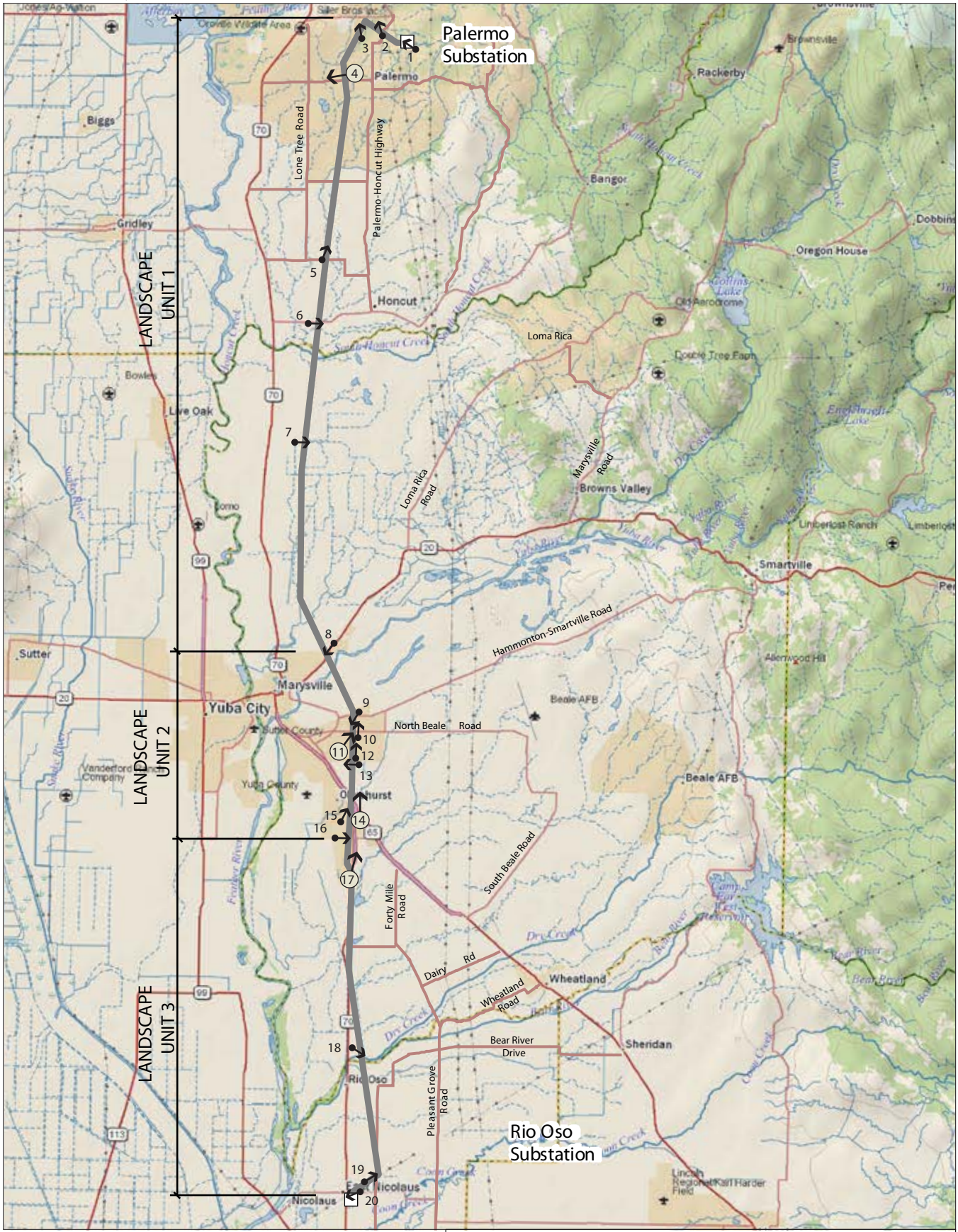
Highway 20, a proposed Yuba County scenic route, runs east and west and connects smaller foothill communities with Marysville and Yuba City. Views from Highway 20 encompass low-lying farmlands as well as distant views of the Sierra Nevada foothills and the Sierra Buttes. In this area, the line passes within 0.25 miles of an existing residential area. Where the route briefly crosses through Marysville, views of the transmission line are screened by a levee that separates the residential areas from farmland to the northeast.

After crossing Highway 20, the route runs southeast for about two miles and crosses the Yuba River and orchard land before entering the residential community of Linda, a suburb of Marysville. On the north edge of Linda the route passes through the Peach Tree Golf & Country Club, a private club built in 1960.

Near Linda the route crosses a number of local and regional roadways including Hammonton-Smartville Road (shown in Photo 9), North Beale Road (an entry road for Beale Air Force Base), and Erle Road (Photo 13). For slightly more than 1.5 miles the project traverses the Linda community passing adjacent to the Yuba Community College campus (Photo 10). Photo 11 and Photo 12, respectively, are views from a recently built suburban development and a nearby walking trail in Linda.

Highways 65 and 70 are heavily-traveled north-south-running routes that connect Roseville and Sacramento with the communities of Lincoln and the Marysville/Yuba City area. Photo 14, taken from Highway 65, shows the project route where it crosses near the junction of the two highways. This view includes existing lattice towers of the project line along with a parallel transmission line as well as existing distribution lines. After this roadway crossing, the project route continues parallel to and within 0.25 miles of Highway 70. At this location the route enters Olivehurst, where it also travels parallel to and within 100 feet of a residential area along Powerline Road for one mile. Photo 15, taken from Yuba Gardens School on Powerline Road near 11th Avenue shows a view of this area. Photo 16 shows the route at McGowan Parkway just before its second Highway 70 crossing.

Reference: Fig. 3.1-1, Photo Viewpoint Locations, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009



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1 → Photo Viewpoint

(3) → Simulation Viewpoint

PALERMO–EAST NICOLAUS 115-kV TRANSMISSION LINE

Figure 3.1-1

Photo Viewpoint Locations

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-2a, Landscape Unit 1 – Visual Character Photographs, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

1. Stageline Road looking northwest toward Palermo Substation

2. Upper Palermo Road at Pinecrest Road looking northwest

3. Lincoln Boulevard at Firloop Circle looking north

4. Baldwin Avenue at Railroad Avenue looking west*

*Simulation shown in Figure 3.1-3

PALERMO–EAST NICOLAUS 115-KV TRANSMISSION LINE

Figure 3.1-2a

Landscape Unit 1: Visual Character Photographs

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-2b, Landscape Unit 1 – Visual Character Photographs, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

5. Central House Road at route crossing looking northeast

6. Lower Honcut Road east of Highway 70 looking east

7. Ramirez Road east of Highway 70 looking east

8. Highway 20 westbound looking southwest

PALERMO–EAST NICOLAUS 115-KV TRANSMISSION LINE

Figure 3.1-2b

Landscape Unit 1: Visual Character Photographs

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-2c, Landscape Unit 1 – Visual Character Photographs, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

9. Hammonton-Smartville Road near crossing looking southwest

10. Yuba Community College looking north toward North Beale Road

11. Fernwood Drive near Wildwood Drive looking northeast*

12. River Bank Drive near pedestrian path looking north

*Simulation shown in Figure 3.1-4

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-2d, Landscape Unit 1 – Visual Character Photographs, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

13. Erle Road near Edgewater Circle looking west

14. Highway 70 northbound at Highway 65 merge looking north*

15. Powerline Road at Yuba Gardens School looking northeast

16. McGowan Parkway at Powerline Road looking east

*Simulation shown in Figure 3.1-5

PALERMO–EAST NICOLAUS 115-KV TRANSMISSION LINE

Figure 3.1-2d

Landscape Unit 2: Visual Character Photographs

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-2e, Landscape Unit 1 – Visual Character Photographs, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

17. Highway 70 northbound looking northeast*

18. Chalice Creek Drive looking southeast

19. Watts Avenue near Pacific Avenue looking northeast

20. East Nicolaus Substation (from East Nicolaus Avenue and Highway 70)

*Simulation shown in Figure 3.1-6

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Landscape Unit 3: McGowan Parkway to East Nicolaus Substation

Landscape Unit 3 extends approximately 12 miles from McGowan Parkway to the East Nicolaus substation. Although the route passes through a newer residential development in the northern portion, this unit's landscape is generally characterized by unpopulated agricultural areas typified by grasslands and rice fields. Railroad tracks, rural roads, and levees punctuate the landscape setting. The route crosses several waterways including the Bear River located at the border of Yuba and Sutter Counties and Yankee Slough. Elevations in this relatively flat landscape range between 40 and 60 feet above sea level.

For most of this unit, the route runs parallel to and within 0.25 miles of Highway 70. Approximately one mile south of McGowan Parkway, the route crosses Highway 70 (Photo 17). The existing transmission route continues to be one of two parallel lines supported by lattice towers throughout this unit.

As shown in Photo 18, south of Plumas Arboga Road the project route passes near several recently built residential developments along Highway 70 in the historic Plumas Lake area. In this area the route crosses then runs parallel to the Western Pacific Railroad tracks until it turns west at Pacific Avenue north of Watts Avenue.

The East Nicolaus substation on El Centro Boulevard (Highway 70) is the project's southern terminus and is situated in an area of residential, light industrial, commercial, and farmland in the East Nicolaus community (Photo 19). Photo 20, taken from approximately 200 feet away, shows a Highway 70 view looking toward the East Nicolaus Substation.

Key Observation Points

The photos or Key Observations Points (KOPs) described to illustrate the Landscape Units crossed by the project represent typical views of the project components and views from sensitive locations. These KOPs are used to help establish the baseline for the existing visual resources. The project's potential to change the visible landscape and likely viewer responses to those changes are compared using simulations of the project components prepared for select KOPs.

Simulations were prepared for four KOPs. The four simulation vantage points are delineated on Figure 3.1-1. They include the view from Baldwin Avenue and Railroad Avenue in Palermo (Viewpoint 4); the view from Fernwood Drive near Wildwood Drive in Linda (Viewpoint 11); the view from Highway 70 northbound at Highway 65 (Viewpoint 14); and the view from Highway 70 northbound near Algodon Road (Viewpoint 17). Existing views from these locations are described in greater detail below.

KOP 4: View from Baldwin Avenue and Railroad Avenue

KOP 4 (Figure 3.1-3) provides a view from Baldwin Avenue at Railroad Avenue in the town of Palermo, looking west toward the project and the railroad corridor. This vantage offers an unobstructed view of two existing 75- to 80-foot tall lattice towers. The tower on the left is situated within the project route while the structure seen to the right is associated with the adjacent existing transmission line. Large mature trees situated along Railroad Avenue are prominent in the foreground and scattered large trees and smaller orchard trees form the landscape backdrop seen beyond the railroad corridor.

KOP 11: View from Fernwood Drive near Wildwood Drive

KOP 11 (Figure 3.1-4) provides a view of the project from Fernwood Drive near Wildwood Drive. Existing residences are visible in the foreground. On the right in the background, two existing lattice towers appear against the sky behind the residences. The existing lattice tower situated within the project

route is about 75-feet tall and is located approximately 300 feet away. Existing wood distribution poles are also visible behind the homes.

KOP 14: View from Highway 70 northbound at Highway 65

KOP 14 (Figure 3.1-5) provides a view of the project from northbound Highway 70 at the Highway 65 merge in Olivehurst. This view includes both the project route and a second existing transmission line that crosses Highway 70 in the foreground. Lattice towers associated with both lines appear prominently on each side of the roadway. In the background a wood-pole utility line crosses the roadway, and wood poles of another existing line appear on the right side of the roadway.

KOP 17: View from Highway 70 northbound near Algodon Road

KOP 17 (Figure 3.1-6) provides a view of the project from Highway 70 northbound near Plumas Arboga Road in the Plumas Lake area. This view includes existing lattice towers associated with the project route (seen on the right) as well as an adjacent transmission route to the left. Because of the area's flat, open landscape character, unobstructed close range and distant views of these transmission lines and structures are available from this portion of Highway 70.

3.1.2 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Methodology

This aesthetics and visual resource analysis follows the methodology described in the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects (FHWA 1988). The FHWA process, in widespread use for evaluation of project visual impacts, includes the following steps to assess potential impacts on visual resources:

1. Establish a visual environment for the project by identifying "landscape unit(s)" in which the project is located. Landscape units are areas with reasonably homogeneous views that contain continuous, similar, or interrelated visual elements.
2. Assess the visual resources of the project area by describing the visual character of the project area and assessing the visual quality. Visual character is described in terms of the four visual pattern elements: form, line, color, and texture. Visual quality is assessed based on the vividness, intactness, and unity of views.
3. Describe the potentially affected viewers in terms of viewer exposure to the project and the levels of viewer sensitivity. Viewer exposure considers the distance of the viewer to the project, the position of the viewer in terms of relative elevation, the direction of the view, approximate numbers of viewers, and the duration or frequency of views. Viewer sensitivity describes the viewer's expectation of a view based on viewer activity and awareness and any local or cultural significance of the site.
4. Develop simulations to predict the potential visual impact of the project. Visual impact is a function of the projected visual resource change and anticipated viewer response.

The FHWA assessment methodology was applied for the Palermo East Nicolaus 115-kV Transmission Line Project to establish a baseline environmental setting, identify and describe the project viewers, and develop simulations for select Key Observations Points (KOPs) from which to estimate the level of contrast that would be introduced by the project. The steps listed above were conducted in order to identify landscape areas that constitute logical units for analysis and to describe the existing visual resource setting and viewers.

Reference: Fig. 4.1-3, Visual Simulation, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

Existing view from Baldwin Avenue at Railroad Avenue looking west (VP 4)

Visual simulation of proposed project

Note: For viewpoint location, refer to Figure 3.1-1.

Figure 3.1-3

Existing View and Visual Simulation: Baldwin Avenue at Railroad Avenue

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-4, Visual Simulation, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

Existing view from Fernwood Drive near Wildwood Drive looking northeast (VP 11)

Visual simulation of proposed project

Note: For viewpoint location, refer to Figure 3.1-1.

PALERMO–EAST NICOLAUS 115-KV TRANSMISSION LINE

Figure 3.1-4

Existing View and Visual Simulation: Fernwood Drive near Wildwood Drive

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-5, Visual Simulation, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

Existing view from Highway 70 northbound at Highway 65 merge looking north (VP 14)

Visual simulation of proposed project

Note: For viewpoint location, refer to Figure 5-1.

Figure 3.1-5

Existing View and Visual Simulation: Highway 70 at Highway 65

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Reference: Fig. 4.1-6, Visual Simulation, ***Proponent's Environmental Assessment, Palermo–East Nicolaus 115 kV Transmission Line Reconstruction Project***, ICF Jones & Stokes, February 2009

Existing view from Highway 70 northbound looking northeast (VP 17)

Visual simulation of the proposed project

Note: For viewpoint location, refer to Figure 3.1-1.

Figure 3.1-6

Existing View and Visual Simulation: View Northeast from Highway 70

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KOPs were used to represent both typical views of the site and views from sensitive locations. The project's potential to change the visible landscape and likely viewer responses to those changes were then assessed using simulations of the project components prepared for each KOP. The simulations were systematically compared against the baseline conditions to determine the nature and degree of potential impacts on visual resources. Levels of impacts are assessed by comparing FHWA rankings of existing views with rankings based on prepared simulations. The impact assessment also takes into account the number of viewers, the duration of views, and viewer expectation. Viewer expectation takes into account viewer activity, and takes into account any federal, state, or local regulations that protect visual resources in the area.

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

NO IMPACT. For purposes of this evaluation a scenic vista is defined as a public view along a corridor or from a specific vantage point that is recognized and valued for its scenic quality. The Butte County General Plan contains language recognizing the scenic qualities of the Sierra Foothills (Butte County 2000), and the Sutter County General Plan contains language recognizing the Sutter Buttes as a visual resource (Sutter County 1996). Additionally, the Yuba County General Plan describes the Yuba River Corridor as "visually appealing" (Yuba County 1996).

The project route would cross the Yuba River near Marysville, and the project area offers distant views of the Sierra Foothills and the Sutter Buttes. However, because the project would involve the replacement of existing approximately 75- to 95-foot tall LSTs with a combination of approximately 85- to 120-foot tall hybrid poles, TSPs, and LSPs, the project would not alter existing views of the river or of distinctive land formations in the backdrop. Therefore, the project would have no impact under this criterion.

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

NO IMPACT. The project is not within the viewshed of any designated or eligible state scenic highways. In Butte County, Highway 70 north of Highway 191 and, in Yuba County, Highway 49 are located 10 and 25 miles from the project, respectively, and are both considered eligible state scenic highways. Sutter County has no officially designated or eligible state scenic highways. The project would have no impact on scenic resources within view of a state scenic highway.

The project is within the viewshed of several eligible and designated county and local scenic highways. These include segments of Highway 20 (proposed Yuba County scenic route), State Highway 70/Marysville Bypass to the Butte County Line (eligible Yuba County scenic route), State Highway 49 (potentially eligible Yuba County scenic route), Highway 70 at the Yuba River Bridge (recognized as scenic in Marysville General Plan), and Highway 20 (recognized for views of the Sutter Buttes in the Sutter County General Plan). However, because the project would involve the replacement of existing approximately 75- to 95-foot tall lattice steel towers with a combination of approximately 85- to 120-foot tall hybrid poles, TSPs, and LSPs, the project would not alter existing views from these roadways. Therefore, the project would have no impact under this criterion.

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

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT. Construction of the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. Construction-related visual impacts would result from the presence of equipment, materials, and work crews along the route and at the substations.

Additionally, grading and clearing would be required for lay-down/staging/helicopter landing zone areas, pull sites, temporary access roads, and improvements to existing roads. Disturbed areas would be restored to preconstruction conditions, including revegetation of areas where vegetation removal is required for construction. Although these effects are relatively short term, they would be most noticeable to residents who live in close proximity to the project route and to motorists traveling along the route on public roadways. Project construction would take approximately 12 to 18 months. However, at any one tower location this time period would be considerably shorter. To minimize impacts to visual resources due to construction, the applicant would instruct all construction subcontractors to keep construction areas clean and construction activities inconspicuous. With the applicant's efforts to minimize impacts to visual resources due to construction and based on the temporary nature of these impacts, construction impacts to visual resources would be less than significant.

Operation of the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings. The project would replace the majority of existing transmission towers along the route. Most existing structures are LSTs that would be replaced with slightly taller hybrid pole structures. In specific locations, TSPs or LSPs would be used. The total number of poles along the route would be reduced (Tables 1.8-2 and 1.8-3).

The increased height and different model of poles may be noticeable when seen in foreground views in the project area. However, the change would be incremental and some viewers may consider the hybrid, TSP, and LSPs to have a more streamlined appearance; therefore, the impact under this criterion would be less than significant. Specific visual impacts on the existing character and quality of the landscape are described below as seen in the simulations prepared for the aesthetic resources analysis.

Simulation from KOP 4

This simulation shows an unobstructed view of the new replacement hybrid pole, which would be situated close to the location of the existing tower it replaces. The new structure would be 90 feet tall whereas the existing tower is approximately 75 to 80 feet tall. In comparison to the existing structure it would replace, the new pole would be slightly taller; however, its profile and form would appear more streamlined. In these respects the change to existing visual conditions is incremental. A comparison of the Figure 3.1-3 before and after images demonstrates that the visual change associated with the project would not substantially alter the existing landscape composition and aesthetic character at this location.

Simulation from KOP 11

This simulation view shows the replacement structure, an 80-foot steel pole. The particular pole shown would be a transposition pole. Its design is somewhat unique and more visually complex than a typical replacement pole. The new pole would be located slightly further from the photo viewpoint, and although it would be somewhat taller than the existing tower, it would look similar in scale. The new transposition pole would also be similar in general appearance to the existing utility structures in the area. As seen from this vantage point, the project would result in a minor visual change, which could be somewhat noticeable to the public. However, given the presence of existing utility structures in this area, it would not significantly alter the existing visual character or quality of the landscape setting.

Simulation from KOP 14

The simulation shows three new steel replacement poles, one on the left side of the roadway and two on the right side. The project replaces the existing 90- to 95-foot LST on the left side of the road with an 80-foot steel pole approximately 400 feet away. In addition, the existing 75-foot LST on the right is replaced by a 100-foot steel pole. This replacement structure would be about 900 feet from the photo

viewpoint. The simulation also shows a lattice tower on the adjacent transmission line replaced by a steel pole.

The replacement poles would be similar in scale to the existing LSTs. While the new poles would appear somewhat more substantial than the lattice towers, their streamlined profile would result in a reduced sense of visual clutter at this location. A comparison of the existing view and the visual simulation demonstrates that, given the presence of existing transmission structures, this incremental visual change would not substantially alter the landscape composition or character at this location.

Simulation from KOP 17

The simulation shows a 90-foot hybrid pole. The new structure would replace the existing 90-foot LST. The replacement pole, approximately 450 feet away, would be somewhat closer to the viewpoint than the existing tower. The next replacement pole, about 1,100 feet away, would be a 90-foot hybrid pole that would replace a 70-foot lattice tower. As seen from this Highway 70 vantage point, the project would introduce structures that differ in form but are similar in scale to existing structures. This change represents a minor incremental visual effect that would not substantially alter the area's existing landscape character or quality given the presence of multiple existing large transmission structures.

d. Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT. Construction and operation of the project would not create new sources of substantial light that would adversely affect day or nighttime views along the project route. In some areas, work would be done by night to limit periods of electrical outage. The applicant would limit nighttime work (work done after 7:00 pm and before 7:00 am) to outside of urban areas. Lighting would be restricted to those areas necessary for worker safety and task execution and would be directional and shielded to avoid intrusion into non-necessary work areas. Nighttime lighting required for construction activities would be temporary, shielded, and located away from most receptors; therefore, it would not result in a substantial new source of light.

Construction and operation of the project would not create new sources of substantial glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views along the project route. Replacement poles would have dull grey surfaces. After their installation, the new conductors may initially appear brighter or shinier than the existing conductors; however, it is expected that they would weather to a dull finish within a few years. Therefore, the project would not create a new source of substantial nighttime light or daytime glare, and impacts under this criterion would be less than significant.

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