

3.6 Visual Resources

This section describes the visual resources in the study area. For this section, the study area includes the corridors along Interstate 5 (I-5) from State Road (SR) 128 to SR 99, SR 58, and SR 223, and the adjacent communities. The characterization of the study area viewsheds is based on field reconnaissance conducted by visual resource specialists between 2005 and 2008 and again in 2010 and 2011.

3.6.1 Visual Character

The study area includes I-5, Fort Tejon State Historic Park and the community of Lebec along the western border of the Covered Lands and SR 223 and SR 58 are to the north of the Covered Lands (Figure 3.6-1). There are no scenic highways in the study area. The nearest scenic highway is I-5 between Interstate 210 (I-210) near Tunnel Station, and SR 126 near Castaic (California Department of Transportation 2008).

3.6.1.1 Land Form and Topography

The study area is located in the Tehachapi Uplands, which are generally at or above an elevation of 2,000 above mean sea level (amsl) on the north (San Joaquin Valley) side of the Tehachapi Mountains, and generally above 3,500 amsl on the south (Antelope Valley) side. The maximum elevation of the Tehachapi Uplands is approximately 7,000 feet amsl. The topography of the study area includes rugged terrain incised by narrow canyons.

Castac Lake is a point of visual interest in the study area. It is an approximately 400-acre natural lake located in the southwestern portion of the study area just east of in the Castac Valley (Figure 3.6-1). This is the only naturally occurring lake in the study area. The lake is visible to motorists on I-5 and from certain portions of the mountain communities located to the west of the study area. There are no rivers designated as wild and scenic in the study area (California Public Resources Code Section 5093.54) (Bureau of Land Management et al. 2011).

3.6.1.2 Vegetation

As described in Section 3.1, Biological Resources, the primary vegetation in the study area is oak savannah dominated by valley and blue oak. Oak woodlands dominated by canyon live oak and interior live oak are present along some steep canyons on north- and east-facing slopes and in some canyon bottoms. The southeast slopes of the Tehachapi Mountains support a mixed oak-chaparral community that varies in composition depending on elevation, slope, and exposure. A white fir-black oak community is located near the vicinity of the upper reaches of the hillsides that border the Tunis Creek and El Paso Creek drainages. Large sycamore, cottonwood, and willow trees are present along major drainages.

Onsite vegetation can be observed from many locations in the San Joaquin Valley, the mountain communities to the west, and roadways and local communities located to the north and east of the study area. Depending on rainfall conditions, wildflowers bloom on certain hillsides in the study area. These displays can be observed from I-5 and other roadways near exposed hillsides in the

study area, and can affect the seasonal color and hue of the area when observed from more distant locations.

3.6.1.3 Land Uses

The study area includes the community of Lebec, which has lower-density rural development, Fort Tejon State Historic Park and Tejon Ranch. The ranch and outlying areas of Lebec have a unified mountain ranching character with a rural and open rangeland appearance. The primary land use in the study area outside of the community of Lebec is grazing. Grazing tends to emphasize the visual distinction between areas dominated by large shrubs and trees and the more open grassland or smaller shrub ranges in which cattle and other domesticated animals feed. Other land uses in the study area include residential, commercial, institutional and industrial land uses in the community of Lebec, , farming and Fort Tejon State Historic Park. .Within the Covered Lands, uses include Tejon Ranchcorp (TRC) headquarters and ancillary ranch structures, and limited built infrastructure, such as farming and irrigation water diversion equipment, ancillary ranch structures and back-country cabins, fences, and buildings associated with the Lebec/Existing Headquarters Area.

Views of lands uses from the I-5 corridor and surrounding mountain communities are dominated by grazing, open space and natural landforms, but also include views of orchards and vineyards, access roadways, TRC headquarters buildings, and lake maintenance activities. Utility corridors can be observed from many locations in and around the study area. Other land uses, including occasional filming and hunting, are relatively small in scale and do not represent a significant visual element in the study area.

3.6.1.4 Light and Glare Conditions

Current sources of nighttime light and glare occur at the structures and facilities of the TRC headquarters and from vehicle headlights used for ranch purposes. Light and glare associated with the headquarters area and adjacent activities are visible from local roadways, commercial areas, and residences in and near the mountain communities.

The mineral extraction activities located on the southern face of the Tehachapi Mountains generate a substantial amount of nighttime light and glare visible at a distance as a light cone above the mining site and from locations along SR 138.

The study area is characterized by rural land use patterns with limited sources of light and glare. The exception is commercial uses located at the Frazier Mountain Road interchange with I-5 where travel-related businesses are primary sources of light and glare in the study area.

3.6.2 Visual Resource Reconnaissance

3.6.2.1 Viewsheds

A viewshed refers to all surface areas visible from the viewpoint of an observer(s). Using methodology developed by the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, in association with the American Society of Landscape Architects, viewsheds can be divided into three distance zones, depending on the distance from the viewer(s) (U.S. Federal Highway Administration no date):

- **Foreground.** Foreground viewsheds are close enough for the viewer to see some extent of the larger visual elements such as landform, vegetative cover, and land use patterns, and also more

detailed visual elements such as colors and texture, and more detailed elements in the viewshed such as signs, structural elements, and individual plants.

- **Middleground.** Middleground viewsheds are located slightly farther away and allow the viewer to see larger visual elements, such as landform, vegetative cover, and land use patterns. In the middleground, generally only larger structural elements are visible and not individual plants, with the exception of large trees.
- **Background.** Background viewsheds are located in the distance and allow the viewer to see only large visual elements such as landform, large areas of vegetative cover, and major land use patterns, with individual structural elements and even the largest plants not being individually discernible.

3.6.2.2 Sensitive Viewers

Sensitive viewers in the study area consist of motorists on the adjacent public roadways, people living and working in the surrounding communities (residents, business, schools), and visitors to the Fort Tejon State Historic Park, located to the south of I-5. Views to and from the study area with respect to these groups are discussed in greater detail below.

There is no general public access to most of the study area and no public recreation opportunities. The Tejon Ranch Conservancy provides limited docent-led hikes, and guests of TRC or licensees who enter the property by invitation or permit to recreate, hunt or do commercial filmmaking are not considered sensitive viewers for the purposes of this analysis. Views of the Covered Lands are somewhat limited to public roadways and surrounding commercial and residential areas located on the outskirts of the study area.

Foreground viewsheds of the Covered Lands are available primarily along area roadways, including I-5 along the western border and SR 223 and SR 58 to the north. None of the public roadways visible within the study area are designated scenic highways. A 16-mile-long segment of I-5 traverses through the southwestern portion of the study area, from near the Frazier Mountain Park Road interchange through Tejon Pass and down to the San Joaquin Valley floor. The TRC headquarters facilities, the adjacent school and playfields, and the adjacent hills with displays of seasonal wildflowers comprise foreground viewsheds throughout this corridor. Foreground viewsheds from SR 58 and SR 223 consist of views of the sloping topography, seasonal vegetation, and existing land uses located within this area. It is also possible to see background viewsheds consisting generally of open space and sloping topography in the distance.

Foreground viewsheds of the Covered Lands are also visible from the Fort Tejon State Historic Park, which is located immediately adjacent to the study area west of I-5. Foreground views of the Covered Lands are limited to approximately 900 feet because the canyon topography surrounding the park limits more extensive views. Foreground views from Fort Tejon include views of the TRC headquarters and related development immediately across I-5; middle ground views of the Covered Lands are blocked by the intervening topography.

Middleground viewsheds of the Covered Lands are visible from certain residential areas, roadways and commercial locations located in the mountain communities to the west and at commercial areas along the I-5 corridor at the Grapevine interchange and other highway commercial areas along I-5 and SR 99. Views of the Covered Lands from residences along the I-5 corridor adjacent to the study area consist of views of open space, including hills, vegetation, and Castac Lake. Middleground views from these locations extend up to 3 miles when not blocked by topography. The topography,

seasonal vegetation, and land uses in the viewshed middleground can generally be perceived with less detail than from viewshed foregrounds. Only larger-scale development (e.g., the California Aqueduct, National Cement Company of California, and large utility easements and facilities) are visible at these distances.

Background viewsheds are visible to viewers traveling along these major roadways and in commercial areas and communities along the I-5 corridor and surrounding area. This includes most of SR 223, SR 138, SR 58, as well as Antelope Valley locations to the east, and communities to the north and east, such as Arvin, Keene, Tehachapi, and portions of the Bakersfield metropolitan area. Background views include more sweeping views of the landscape, which consist largely of open space areas with some scattered residential and commercial land uses as indicated above. In general, only large-scale land uses that affect a significant portion of the study area are visible from these locations.