

4.6 Visual Resources

4.6.1 Overview

This section describes the regulatory setting applicable to visual resources and the potential effects of the alternatives on visual resources in the study area. As described in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, the study area includes the corridors along Interstate 5 (I-5) from State Road (SR) 138 to SR 99, SR 58, and SR 223, and the adjacent communities. The cumulative effects analysis area for visual resources considers the same study area. A description of the cumulative effects analysis area is provided in Section 4.6.7, Cumulative Effects, along with a discussion of the potential cumulative effects of the alternatives.

4.6.1.1 Regulatory Setting

Activities proposed under all the alternatives would be required to conform to Federal, state, and local laws and regulations that protect visual resources, as described below.

Federal Highway Beautification Act

The Federal Highway Beautification Act (23 United States Code [U.S.C.] 131) and regulations that implement it (23 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 750) set national standards to control outdoor advertising adjacent to the interstate highway system. Actual control of outdoor advertising is exercised by the local jurisdiction (Kern County), but the Federal government can restrict Federal-aid highway funds for noncompliance.

California Scenic Highways Program

California's Scenic Highway Program is intended to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. The state laws governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 *et seq.* A highway may be designated as scenic depending on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. The California Scenic Highway System includes a list of highways that are either eligible for designation as scenic highways or have been so designated. The portion of the Covered Lands identified for potential Commercial and Residential Development Activities is visible from only one major highway—I-5—between the Frazier Mountain Park Road and Fort Tejon interchanges. This portion of I-5 is not designated as a state scenic highway and has not been determined to be eligible for designation (California Department of Transportation 2011). Therefore, regulations related to the California Scenic Highways Program are not applicable.

Outdoor Advertising Act and Regulation

The standards for regulation of outdoor advertising on the interstate highway system in California are contained in the Outdoor Advertising Act and Regulation, California Code of Regulations (CCR) Title 4, Business Regulations.

Kern County General Plan

The Kern County General Plan (Kern County 2009a) includes policies that require new development projects to minimize light and glare (Policy 47), and encourage the use of low-glare lighting to minimize nighttime glare effects on neighboring properties (Policy 48). The general plan also includes a policy under Section 1.10.8 (Smart Growth) that encourages discretionary development projects to include in design features “aesthetically pleasing and unifying design features that promote a visually pleasing environment” (Policy 49(g)).

Kern County Dark Sky Outdoor Lighting Ordinance

Kern County has also adopted a "Dark Sky" Ordinance, which applies to all new sources of outdoor lighting in the County's unincorporated areas. Outdoor lighting must be fully shielded and oriented downward, and must comply with height, intensity, and hours of operation restrictions provided in the ordinance. The Ordinance is intended to reduce unnecessary night lighting and minimize lighting effects on surrounding properties (Kern County Ordinance G-8226).

4.6.1.2 Methods

The analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects and the magnitude of such effects on visual resources is considered in terms of whether the alternative would result in physical changes to the study area that would alter existing public views of natural landforms, substantially degrade the existing visual character of the study area as perceived by sensitive receptors, or create a new source of light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the study area.

Visual effects typically occur when there are visible physical changes to landform (topography such as ridges, natural features like lakes and vegetation) or the existing character of the site (significant change in land use patterns, removal of important visible elements, or addition of incompatible elements), or visual changes in the amount of light or glare. The magnitude of the visual changes depends on the number of viewers, their exposure to the changes (whether they have full views or screened views, and the duration of the views), the distance of the viewer (whether those views are foreground, middle ground or background) and their sensitivity to change. In general, effects on visual resources were assumed to be associated with potential visual changes associated with construction and operation of each alternative that would affect sensitive viewers or the visual character of the study area.

4.6.2 No Action Alternative

4.6.2.1 Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

No Commercial or Residential Development Activities would occur under the No Action Alternative. Therefore, there would be no physical changes to landform and no direct or indirect effects on visual resources from Commercial and Residential Development Activities.

Existing Ranch Uses

Under the No Action Alternative, Existing Ranch Uses would continue similar to existing conditions, subject to the use restrictions and best management practices (BMPs) required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement, as currently set forth in the Interim Ranchwide Management Plan (RWMP) (Tejon Ranch Company 2009). Such BMPs include provisions to minimize the effects of grazing on the landscape in general, and on sensitive visual resources in particular. For example, a guiding

principle of the Interim RWMP is the protection of scenic vistas and rare visual resources. Specifically, filming activities that may potentially disturb sensitive areas must be reviewed to ensure that effects are minimized and that a plan to restore the area to prefilming conditions is prepared and implemented as appropriate. In addition, site evaluations are required for any new structures to evaluate and minimize the potential effects on sensitive resources. The Ranchwide Agreement requires that all subsequent RWMPs must similarly reflect BMPs that protect the conservation values of the land and that such management standards and use restrictions are carried through in the conservation easements required by the Ranchwide Agreement.

Existing Ranch Uses would have limited potential to alter public views of natural landforms or to change the visual character of the study area. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any effect, on permanently changing topography or vegetation, and would continue to have a minimal effect under the No Action Alternative. In addition, minimal visual effects associated with filming activities and construction and maintenance of road and utility infrastructure, ancillary ranch uses, and back-country cabins would also occur under this alternative. However, most of these activities would be conducted in a manner to minimize effects on visual resources, would be located far from sensitive viewers, and would represent minor visual changes that would not substantially alter public views of natural landforms or substantially degrade the visual character within the study area.

In addition to the use restrictions and BMPs currently set forth in the Interim RWMP, Existing Ranch Uses would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized. Therefore, there would be minor effects on visual character under the No Action Alternative.

4.6.2.2 Light and Glare Conditions

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

No Commercial and Residential Development Activities would occur under the No Action Alternative. There would be no direct or indirect changes in light or glare conditions associated with these activities.

Existing Ranch Uses

Existing Ranch Uses would continue similar to existing conditions and would not result in substantial increases in new sources of light and glare. As discussed above, Existing Ranch Uses would be subject to the use restrictions and BMPs required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement, as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP, and would include provisions to minimize effects of Existing Ranch Uses on the landscape in general and sensitive visual resources in particular. For example, provisions have been included that require that new ancillary ranch structures comply with Kern County's "Dark Sky" Ordinance to minimize lighting effects (Tejon Ranch Company 2009).

Existing lights are limited to lighting associated with ranch headquarters, ancillary ranch structures, back-country cabins, entry gates, and the equestrian facility. Any additional lighting would be limited to similar structures and would be implemented in a manner to minimize effects as described above. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any, contribution to light and glare sources. In addition, minimal light and glare effects could occur associated with vehicle lights on new roads, the construction of new structures, grading, vegetation removal, and nighttime filming activities. However, most of these activities would be

located far from sensitive viewers and would represent minor visual changes that would not result in new sources of light or glare that would substantially adversely affect day or nighttime views.

In addition to the use restrictions and BMPs provided pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement, Existing Ranch Uses would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized and any new sources of lighting would be required to comply with applicable Federal, state and local laws, including the Kern County General Plan policies to minimize lighting impacts, and the Kern County "Dark Sky" Ordinance requiring outdoor lighting to be fully shielded and oriented downward. Therefore, there would be only minor visual effects associated with light and glare from Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative.

4.6.3 Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative

4.6.3.1 Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

Under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative, Commercial and Residential Development Activities would occur on 5,533 acres of the Covered Lands and would result in visual changes associated with the placement of new commercial and residential buildings and associated land uses where little development previously existed. Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would require grading and earth movement of approximately 75 million cubic yards of soil.

Visual changes would consist primarily of the presence of dispersed, low-density buildings and other related infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and other supporting structures where largely open space previously existed. Implementation of the conservation measures in the TU MSHCP would reduce changes to natural landforms and visual character by only allowing low-density development. However, new structures could alter views of natural landforms or degrade the existing visual character, depending on their locations. In addition, construction of the proposed facilities would require the removal of vegetation and changes in topography associated with grading. Vegetation removal and grading could degrade the visual character of the area by altering natural landforms and replacing vegetation with developed land uses.

The proposed development would occur along the I-5 corridor between the Fort Tejon Road interchange with I-5 and the Lebec Road interchange with I-5, and a portion of it would be visible in the foreground to motorists, residents, and workers located along the I-5 corridor. However, the majority of the proposed development would not be visible from the surrounding area because the intervening topography would block and limit views of the developed area. As discussed in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, views of the Covered Lands from Fort Tejon in the State Historic Park would be limited by views of ranch headquarters and related development immediately across I-5, and then blocked by the intervening topography. Foreground views from Fort Tejon would include proposed development in the Lebec/Existing Headquarters area, but the visual changes would largely be consistent with the existing visual character of the immediate area, which is already developed with ranch headquarters infrastructure and related uses to the east of I-5, and the uses that compose the community of Lebec to the west of I-5. From I-5 and other communities in Lebec, some middle and background views of the development would be visible; however, the majority of the middle and background views would be blocked by intervening topography. From I-5 to the

east, while the TMV Project would be visible in the south, views of the seasonal wildflowers would be unchanged and much of the existing vegetation would remain. From I-5 to the west, proposed development would be consistent with existing land use patterns that are currently in place along the boundary of the Covered Lands on the west of I-5, including the community of Lebec. A more detailed visual analysis is not provided for the areas within view of SR 58 or SR 223 because development would not occur in this location under this alternative.

The remainder of the Covered Lands would be preserved in open space with no further Commercial or Residential Development Activities allowed. Under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative, 129,318 acres would remain in its current undeveloped state with no or minor changes to landform or visual resources. Potential visual changes within open space areas are discussed further under Plan-Wide Activities below.

As indicated in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, all Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be subject to project-specific approvals from Federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions, including grading restrictions, General Plan and "Dark Sky" Ordinance requirements, and design review. It is anticipated that the local approval process would include provisions that would reduce adverse effects on visual resources in the study area. For example, the Kern County's approval of the TMV Project requires structures to maintain a low profile and maintain the visual context of the existing setting and visual character of the surrounding area, grading to maintain the natural topography and minimize visual effects to the extent possible, and revegetation of graded areas with native plants (Appendix J, Kern County 2009b, MM 4.1-2 and 4.1-3).

Even with the implementation of mitigation measures and BMPs to reduce visual effects, some visual changes associated with commercial and residential development would remain. Views of the development would be somewhat limited for the majority of sensitive viewers or would be consistent with the existing development present along the I-5 corridor. Therefore, potential effects on sensitive viewers under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would be minor to moderate depending on the extent and visibility of the changes as seen by sensitive viewers.

Plan-Wide Activities

Plan-Wide Activities would occur under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative similar to the Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative, with the exception that permanent ground disturbance would be limited to 200 acres. Plan-Wide Activities would be subject to the use restrictions and BMPs required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement that would include provisions to minimize the effects of grazing on the landscape in general and sensitive visual resources in particular. For example, a guiding principle of the Interim RWMP includes the protection of scenic vistas and rare visual resources. Specifically, filming activities that would potentially disturb sensitive areas would be reviewed to ensure that effects are minimized and that a plan to restore the area to prefilming conditions is prepared and implemented as appropriate. In addition, site evaluations are required for any new structures to evaluate and minimize the potential to affect sensitive resources (Tejon Ranch Company 2009). The Ranchwide Agreement requires that all subsequent RWMPs must similarly reflect BMPs that protect the conservation values of the land and that such management standards and use restrictions are carried through in the conservation easements required by the Ranchwide Agreement.

Plan-Wide Activities have limited potential to alter public views of natural landforms or to change the visual character of the study area. As described above, the most extensive land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any, effect on permanently changing topography or existing vegetation and would continue to have minimal effect under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative. In addition, minimal visual effects associated with filming activities and construction and maintenance of road and utility infrastructure, ancillary ranch structures, and back-country cabins would also occur under this alternative. However, most of these activities would be

conducted in a manner to minimize effects on visual resources, would be located far from sensitive viewers, and would represent minor visual changes would not substantially alter public views of natural landforms or substantially degrade the visual character within the study area.

In addition to the use restrictions and BMPs currently set forth in the Interim RWMP, Plan-Wide Activities would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Plan-Wide Activities that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized.

For these reasons, potential effects on visual resources from Plan-Wide Activities under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would be minor and could be less than those associated with the No Action Alternative, where ground disturbance in open space areas would not be limited to 200 acres.

4.6.3.2 Light and Glare Conditions

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

As discussed above, Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would occur on 5,533 acres of the Covered Lands. Commercial and Residential Development Activities would result in the construction of approximately 3,632 dwelling units and 1,804,390 square feet of commercial space in the Disturbance Area. This development would result in new sources of light from newly constructed residences, street, commercial centers, and vehicles, and glare from new reflective surfaces, such as roofs and roadways. The proposed development would occur along the I-5 corridor between the Fort Tejon interchange and the Lebec Road interchange and portions of it would be visible in the foreground to motorists and residents and workers located along the I-5 corridor.

Visual changes would consist primarily of the presence of dispersed low-density buildings and other related infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and other supporting structures where largely open space previously existed. Implementation of the conservation measures in the TU MSHCP would reduce effects associated with new sources of light and glare by allowing only low-density development and requiring that lighting be directed away from open space areas (Tables 2-3 and 2-4 in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives). However, the proposed land uses would include new sources of light and glare associated primarily with nighttime lighting and vehicle headlights. The proposed development would be consistent with existing development along the I-5 corridor in and adjacent to the Lebec/Existing Headquarters Area and less intrusive than the commercial uses at Frazier Mountain Park Road interchange, which include a brightly lit commercial center. The remainder of the Covered Lands would be preserved in open space with no further Commercial or Residential Development Activities allowed. Under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative, 129,318 acres would remain in its current undeveloped state with relatively minimal sources of light and glare. Potential visual changes from light and glare within open space areas would be minor are discussed further under Plan-Wide Activities below.

The majority of the proposed Commercial and Residential Development would not be visible from the surrounding area because the intervening topography would block and limit views of new sources of lighting. As discussed in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, foreground views of the Covered Lands from Fort Tejon in the State Historic Park would be limited by ranch headquarters immediately across I-5 and middle and background views would be limited by topography. From I-5 and the surrounding communities, foreground views of the visual changes, including new light sources, would be visible to motorists, residents, and workers. At the Lebec/Existing Headquarters

Area, the visual changes from lighting would largely be consistent with the existing visual character of the immediate area, which is already developed, and less than the commercial center at Frazier Mountain Park Road. In the TMV Planning Area, development in West of Freeway would similarly be consistent with existing adjacent land use patterns and sources of light and glare. Development to the east of I-5 in the TMV Planning Area would be visible from I-5 and the surrounding communities, and these uses immediately visible from I-5 would be consistent with the existing land use pattern and development in the surrounding communities immediately to the west of I-5. Some middle and background views of the proposed development would also be visible from these locations between intervening topography. Views of the surrounding open space would remain darkened with relatively few, if any, visible sources of light.

As indicated in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, all Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be subject to project-specific approvals from Federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions, including General Plan and "Dark Sky" Ordinance requirements and design review. It is anticipated that the local approval process would include provisions that would reduce adverse effects on visual resources in the study area. For example, Kern County's approval of the TMV Project requires implementation of a lighting program consistent with specific plan design guidelines. The guidelines limit visible exterior lighting to the extent required for safety so as to preserve the nighttime ambiance; require lighting to be designed and maintained to be consistent with a dark sky; and require downward facing lighting. In addition, in keeping with the rural mountainous character of the area, street lighting would only be provided at intersections and nighttime helicopter pad lighting would only be used for take offs and landings and be kept to the minimal levels required by the Federal Aviation Administration (Appendix J, Kern County 2009b, MM 4.2-4 through 4.2-6).

Even with the implementation of mitigation measures and BMPs to reduce visual effects, some new sources of light and glare would occur and would be visible to sensitive viewers. However, the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would not result in new sources of light and glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the study area. Views of the proposed development would be somewhat limited for the majority of sensitive viewers or would be consistent with the existing development present along the I-5 corridor. Therefore, potential effects associated with new sources of light and glare under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would be minor to moderate depending on the extent and visibility of the changes as seen by sensitive viewers.

Plan-Wide Activities

Plan-Wide Activities would occur under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative similar to Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative, with the exception that permanent ground disturbance would be limited to 200 acres. Similar to the No Action Alternative, Plan-Wide Activities would be subject to use restrictions and BMPs required by the Ranchwide Agreement (as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP). For example, provisions have been included that require new ancillary ranch structures comply with Kern County's "Dark Sky" Ordinance to minimize lighting effects (Tejon Ranch Company 2009).

Existing lights are limited to lighting associated with ranch headquarters, ancillary ranch structures, entry gates and the equestrian facility. Plan-Wide Activities have limited potential to result in new sources of light or glare within the study area. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any effect, on light and glare. In addition, minimal light and glare effects could occur associated the vehicle lights on new roads, the construction of new structures, grading, vegetation removal, and nighttime filming activities. However, most of these activities would be located far from sensitive viewers and would represent minor visual changes that would not substantially alter public views of natural landforms or substantially degrade the visual character within the study area.

As indicated in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, Plan-Wide Activities would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized. Therefore, there would be only minor visual effects associated with light and glare from Plan-Wide Activities under the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative.

4.6.3.3 Mitigation Measures

As described above, BMPs and use restrictions required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement (as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP) would reduce the effects of the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative on visual resources. The Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would also include conservation measures (Tables 2-3 and 2-4 in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives), such as requiring that only low-density and low-profile construction be allowed and requiring that lighting be directed away from modeled habitat, which would reduce potential effects on visual resources. If the Service issues an incidental take permit (ITP) to Tejon Ranchcorp (TRC) for the 27 species covered under the TU MSHCP, these measures would be enforceable under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) through the ITP and applicable conservation easements.

The following mitigation measure would further reduce potential effects on visual resources that may be associated with the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative.

- ***Comply with Applicable Federal, State, and Local Visual Resource Protection Requirements.*** Activities within the Covered Lands will comply, at a minimum, with applicable Federal, state, and local visual resources protection laws and regulations, including the Federal Highway Beautification Act, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Kern County General Plan, the Kern County "Dark Sky" Ordinance, and the TMV Specific Plan. Specifically, all development would be completed in a manner to conserve natural landforms, minimize grading, protect natural drainage courses, preserve existing specimen trees and tree groupings, design roadways to fit into the existing topography, design structures to blend with natural surroundings, use native or similar planting material, use coordinated and appropriate commercial signage, and prevent spillover lights and night glow effects.

4.6.4 Condor Only HCP Alternative

4.6.4.1 Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

Potential effects on visual character associated with Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the Condor Only HCP Alternative would be the same as described for the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative.

Plan-Wide Activities

Potential effects on visual character associated with Plan-Wide Activities would be the same as described for the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative.

4.6.4.2 Light and Glare Conditions

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

Potential effects from increases in light and glare associated with Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the Condor Only HCP Alternative would be the same as described for the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative.

Plan-Wide Activities

Potential effects from increases in light and glare associated with Plan-Wide Activities would be the same as described for the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative.

4.6.4.3 Mitigation Measures

As described above, the BMPs and use restrictions required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement (as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP) would reduce the effects of the Condor Only HCP Alternative on visual resources. However, only the species-specific conservation measures for the California condor (Table 2-3 in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives) would be implemented under this alternative. The mitigation measures listed in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, would also be implemented under the Condor Only HCP Alternative.

4.6.5 CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative

4.6.5.1 Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

Under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative, Commercial and Residential Development Activities would occur on approximately 4,496 acres of the Covered Lands and would result in visual changes associated with the placement of new commercial and residential buildings and associated land uses where little development previously existed. Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would require grading and earth movement of approximately 90 million cubic yards.

Visual changes would consist primarily of the presence of buildings and other related infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and other supporting structures where largely open space previously existed. As discussed previously, the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would include implementation of the same conservation measures as the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative (Tables 2-3 and 2-4 in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives). However, to avoid condor critical habitat, the proposed Commercial and Residential Development would be more concentrated and would not be as low in density as the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative. Depending on their locations, new structures could alter public views of natural landforms or degrade the existing visual character. In addition, construction of the proposed facilities would require the removal of vegetation and changes in topography associated with grading. Vegetation removal and grading could alter the visual character of the area by altering natural landforms and replacing vegetation with developed land uses.

Under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative, Commercial and Residential Development located to the east of I-5 would be higher intensity than existing developments in the immediate vicinity. Currently, this area has a very rural and open rangeland character, resulting in a landscape dominated by natural features, except in the immediate vicinity of the existing ranch headquarters

and around ancillary ranch structures. Additionally, higher intensity development of this area would make it more difficult to avoid grading steeper slopes and to retain prominent topographical features. Therefore, along the eastern side of the I-5 corridor, Commercial and Residential Development Activities associated with the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would result in changes in visual character.

In the areas west of I-5, the proposed development would be consistent with the existing visual character, such as that near the Lebec Road interchange, which includes neighborhood commercial, low-density residential, industrial, and institutional uses that compose the community of Lebec. The remainder of the Covered Lands would be preserved in open space with no further Commercial or Residential Development Activities allowed. Under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative, 130,339 acres would remain in its current undeveloped state with no or minor changes to landform or visual resources. Potential visual changes within open space areas would be minor and are discussed further under Plan-Wide Activities below.

The majority of the proposed commercial and residential development would not be visible from the surrounding area because the intervening topography would block and limit views of the proposed changes. As discussed in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, views of the Covered Lands from Fort Tejon in the State Historic Park would be limited by views of ranch headquarters and related development immediately across I-5 and then blocked by the intervening topography. Foreground views from Fort Tejon would include proposed development in the Lebec/Existing Headquarters, but the visual changes would largely be consistent with the existing visual character of the immediate area, which is already developed to the east of I-5 (across from the park) with the existing headquarters and related uses, and on the west side of I-5 with the uses that compose the community of Lebec. From I-5 and other communities in Lebec, some middle and background views of the development would be visible; however, the majority of the middle and background views would be blocked by intervening topography. From I-5 to the east, the dense development around Castac Lake would be highly visible in the south. However, views of the seasonal wildflowers would be unchanged and much of the existing vegetation would nevertheless remain. From I-5 to the west, proposed development would be consistent with existing land use patterns that are currently in place including the community of Lebec along the boundary of the Covered Lands on the west of I-5. A more detailed visual analysis is not provided for the areas within view of SR 58 or SR 223 because development would not occur in this location under this alternative.

All Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be subject to project-specific approvals from Federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions, including grading restrictions, General Plan and "Dark Sky" Ordinance requirements and design review. It is anticipated that the local approval process would include provisions that would reduce adverse effects on visual resources in the study area. For example, the Kern County's approval of the TMV Project requires structures to maintain a low profile and maintain the visual context of the existing setting and visual character of the surrounding area; grading to maintain the natural topography and minimize visual effects to the extent possible; and that graded areas be revegetated with native plants (Appendix J, Kern County 2009b, MM 4.1-2 and 4.1-3).

Even with the implementation of mitigation measures and BMPs to reduce visual effects, visual changes associated with commercial and residential development would remain. Although the views of the development would be somewhat limited, grading and earthmoving associated with the more concentrated development under this alternative would result in substantial changes in land form and vegetative cover. Additionally, the changes in land uses associated with higher density development would be out of character with the surrounding setting. Therefore, potential effects on sensitive viewers under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would be substantial.

Plan-Wide Activities

Plan-Wide Activities would occur under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative similar to the Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative, with the exception that permanent ground disturbance would be limited to 200 acres. Similar to the No Action Alternative, Plan-Wide Activities would be subject to the use restrictions and BMPs required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement, which include provisions to minimize the effects of grazing on the landscape in general and sensitive visual resources in particular. For example, a guiding principle of the Interim RWMP includes the protection of scenic vistas and rare visual resources. Specifically, there is a commitment that filming activities that would potentially disturb sensitive areas would be reviewed to ensure that effects on sensitive resources are minimized and that a plan to restore the area to prefilming conditions be prepared and implemented as appropriate. In addition, site evaluations are required for any new structures to evaluate and minimize the potential to affect sensitive resources (Tejon Ranch Company 2009).

Plan-Wide Activities have limited potential to alter public views of natural landform or to change the visual character of the study area. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any, effect on permanently changing topography or vegetation and would continue to have minimal effect under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative. In addition, minimal visual effects associated with filming and construction and maintenance of road and utility infrastructure, ancillary ranch structures, and back-country cabins would also occur under this alternative. However, most of these activities would be conducted in a manner to minimize effects on visual resources, would be located far from sensitive viewers, and would represent minor visual changes which would not substantially alter public views of natural landforms or substantially degrade the visual character within the study area.

In addition to the use restrictions and BMPs currently set forth in the Interim RWMP, Plan-Wide Activities would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized.

For these reasons, potential effects on visual resources from Plan-Wide Activities under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would be minor and could be less than those associated with the No Action Alternative, where ground disturbance in open space areas would not be limited to 200 acres.

4.6.5.2 Light and Glare Conditions

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

As discussed above, Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would occur on approximately 4,496 acres of the Covered Lands and would result in the construction of approximately 3,161 dwelling units and 1,804,930 square feet of commercial space. This development would result in new sources of light from newly constructed residences, street, commercial centers, and vehicles, and glare from new reflective surfaces, such as roofs and roadways. The proposed development would occur along the I-5 corridor between Fort Tejon Historic Park and Lebec Road interchanges, and a portion of it would be visible in the foreground to motorists and residents and workers located along the I-5 corridor.

Although implementation of the conservation measures (as presented in Tables 2-3 and 2-4 in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives) under this alternative would reduce the effects associated with new sources of light and glare by requiring that lighting be directed away from open space areas, commercial and residential development located to the east of I-5 would be of a higher

intensity than existing developments in the immediate vicinity and could result in a higher concentration of new sources of lighting or glare. Currently, this area has a very rural and open rangeland and a natural appearance. In the areas west of I-5, the proposed development would be consistent with the existing visual character, such as that near the Lebec Road interchange, which includes neighborhood commercial, low-density residential, industrial, and institutional uses that compose the community of Lebec. The remainder of the Covered Lands would be preserved in open space with no further Commercial or Residential Development Activities allowed. Under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative, 130,339 acres would remain in its current undeveloped state with no changes to landform or visual resources. Potential visual changes within open space areas would be minor are discussed further under Plan-Wide Activities below.

Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be consolidated and intensified in the southwestern portion of the Covered Lands, which includes the areas most visible from I-5 and the communities to the west of I-5. As discussed in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, foreground views of the Covered Lands from Fort Tejon in the State Historic Park would be limited by ranch headquarters immediately across I-5, and middle and background views would be limited by topography. From I-5 and the surrounding communities, foreground views of the visual changes, including new light sources, would be visible to motorists, residents, and workers. At the Lebec/Existing Headquarters Area, the visual changes from lighting would largely be consistent with the existing visual character of the immediate area, which is already developed, and less than the commercial center at Frazier Mountain Park Road. Development in West of Freeway would be similarly consistent with existing adjacent land use patterns and sources of light and glare. Development to the east of I-5 and around Castac Lake, as noted above, would be visible from I-5 and the surrounding communities and these uses would be denser than the surrounding communities and land use patterns. Due to the extent of grading and topographical changes that would be required for this alternative, it is possible that some middle and background views of the proposed changes would also be more visible from these locations. Views of the surrounding open space would remain darkened with relatively few, if any, visible sources of light.

As discussed in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, all Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be subject to project-specific approvals from Federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions, including the Kern County General Plan and "Dark Sky" Ordinance requirements and design review. It is anticipated that the local approval process would include provisions that would reduce adverse effects on visual resources in the study area. For example, the Kern County's approval of the TMV Project requires implementation of a lighting program consistent with specific plan design guidelines. The guidelines limit visible exterior lighting to the extent required for safety so as to preserve the nighttime ambiance; require lighting to be designed and maintained to be consistent with a dark sky; and require downward facing lighting. In addition, in keeping with the rural mountainous character of the area, street lighting would only be provided at intersections and nighttime helicopter pad lighting would only be used for take offs and landings and be kept to the minimal levels required by the Federal Aviation Administration. (Appendix J, Kern County 2009b, MM 4.2-4 through 4.2-6).

Even with the implementation of mitigation measures and BMPs to reduce visual effects, some new sources of light and glare would occur and would be visible to sensitive viewers. However, the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would not result in new sources of light and glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the study area. Therefore, potential effects associated with new sources of light and glare under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would be minor to moderate depending on the extent and visibility of the changes as seen by sensitive viewers.

Plan-Wide Activities

Plan-Wide Activities would occur under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative similar to Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative, with the exception that permanent ground disturbance would be limited to 200 acres. Similar to the No Action Alternative, Plan-Wide Activities would be subject to use restrictions and BMPs required by the Ranchwide Agreement (as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP). For example, provisions have been included that require new ancillary ranch structures comply with Kern County's "Dark Sky" Ordinance to minimize lighting effects (Tejon Ranch Company 2009).

Existing lights are limited to lighting associated with ranch headquarters, ancillary ranch structures, entry gates and the equestrian facility. Plan-Wide Activities have limited potential to result in new sources of light or glare within the study area. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any effect, on light and glare. In addition, minimal light and glare effects could occur associated with vehicle lights on new roads, the construction of new structures, grading, vegetation removal, and nighttime filming activities. However, most of these activities would be located far from sensitive viewers and would represent minor visual changes that would not substantially alter public views of natural landforms or substantially degrade the visual character within the study area.

As indicated in Section 4.6.5.3, Mitigation Measures, Plan-Wide Activities would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized. Therefore, there would be minor visual effects associated with light and glare from Plan-Wide Activities under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative.

4.6.5.3 Mitigation Measures

As described above, the BMPs and use restrictions required pursuant to the Ranchwide Agreement (as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP) would reduce the effects of the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative on visual resources. Conservation measures, similar to those provided in Tables 2-3 and 2-4 in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives, would also be enforced, such as requiring that lighting be directed away from modeled habitat. The mitigation measures in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, for the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would also be implemented under the CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative.

4.6.6 Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative

4.6.6.1 Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

Under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative, Commercial and Residential Development Activities would occur on approximately 12,142 acres of the Covered Lands and would result in visual changes associated with the placement of new commercial and residential buildings and associated land uses where little development previously existed. Commercial and Residential Development Activities under this alternative would require grading and earth movement of approximately 222 million cubic yards.

Visual changes would consist primarily of the presence of buildings and other related infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and other supporting structures, where largely open space previously existed. Depending on their locations, new structures could alter public views of natural landforms or degrade the existing visual character. In addition, construction of the proposed facilities would require the removal of vegetation and changes in topography associated with grading. Vegetation removal and grading could alter the visual character of the area by altering natural landforms and replacing vegetation with developed land uses.

The Kern County General Plan Buildout incorporates the commercial and residential development associated with the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative for the TMV Specific Plan Area located in the southwest corner of the Covered Lands (Figure 2-5). As discussed in Section 4.6.3.1, Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character, the visual effects of this commercial and residential development would be minor to moderate. Therefore, the potential effects of the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative from development visible along the I-5 corridor and surrounding area would also be minor to moderate.

Commercial and residential development under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative would also result in the development of additional areas identified for specific plan development by the Kern County General Plan (Figure 2-7). Development of these areas would result in similar visual changes to those described above. Views of these additional areas could be visible in the middle and background by motorists along SR 58 and SR 223. Although much of the intervening topography would block views of the proposed changes from sensitive viewers and much of the surrounding open space would remain, new development in this area would be more noticeable and would degrade the existing visual character.

As indicated in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, all Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be subject to project-specific approvals from Federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions. Project approvals from the local jurisdiction include grading restrictions, Kern County General Plan and "Dark Sky" Ordinance requirements and design review. It is anticipated that the local approval process would include provisions that would reduce adverse effects on visual resources in the study area. For example, Kern County's approval of the TMV Project requires that structures maintain a low profile and maintain the visual context of the existing setting and visual character of the surrounding area; grading to maintain the natural topography and minimize visual effects to the extent possible; and that graded areas be revegetated with native plants (Appendix J, Kern County 2009b, MM 4.1-2 and 4.1-3).

Even with the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce visual effects, some visual changes associated with commercial and residential development would remain. The most visible and extensive changes would occur along SR 58 where currently no commercial and residential development occurs. Views of the development along the I-5 corridor would be somewhat limited for the majority of sensitive viewers or would be consistent with the existing development present along the I-5 corridor. However, given the dispersed nature of the development, the middleground views would be substantially affected. Therefore, potential effects on sensitive viewers from Commercial and Residential Development Activities under the Kern County General Plan Alternative would be substantial.

Existing Ranch Uses

Existing Ranch Uses would occur under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative, similar to Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative. Existing Ranch Uses have limited potential to change the visual character of the study area. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any, effect on permanently changing topography or vegetation and would continue to have a minimal effect under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative. In addition, minimal visual effects associated with filming activities and

construction and maintenance of road and utility infrastructure, ancillary ranch structures, and back-country cabins would also occur under this alternative. However, most of these activities would be located far from sensitive viewers and would represent minor visual changes which would not substantially alter public views of natural landforms or substantially degrade the visual character within the study area.

Existing Ranch Uses would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized.

As described in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives, the limitations of the Ranchwide Agreement would not apply under this alternative. However, even in the absence of the Ranchwide Agreement, historic ranch practices as reflected in the Interim RWMP are anticipated to continue (although they cannot be assured), and compliance with legal requirements governing ground disturbing activities directly affecting visual quality would apply. In addition, because most Existing Ranch Uses would have only minor effects on visual quality, it is unlikely that Existing Ranch Uses under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative would significantly alter public views or substantially degrade the visual character of the study area.

4.6.6.2 Light and Glare Conditions

Commercial and Residential Development Activities

Under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative, Commercial and Residential Development Activities would occur on approximately 12,142 acres of the Covered Lands, and would result in the construction of approximately 7,238 dwelling units and 2,144,180 square feet of commercial space. This development would result in new sources of light from newly constructed residences, street, commercial centers, and vehicles, and glare from new reflective surfaces, such as roofs and roadways.

The Kern County General Plan Buildout incorporates the commercial and residential development associated with the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative for the TMV Specific Plan Area located in the southwest corner of the Covered Lands (Figure 2-5). As discussed in Section 4.6.3.2, Light and Glare Conditions, the visual effects of this development would be minor to moderate. Therefore, the potential effects of the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative from commercial and residential development visible along the I-5 corridor and surrounding area would also be minor to moderate.

Commercial and residential development under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative would also result in the development of additional areas identified for specific plan development by the Kern County General Plan (Figure 2-7). Development of these areas would result in similar visual changes to those described above. Views of these additional areas could be visible in the middle/background by motorists along SR 58 and SR 223. Although much of the intervening topography would block views of the proposed changes from sensitive viewers and much of the surrounding open space would remain darkened, new development in this area would be more noticeable and would degrade the existing visual character.

The remainder of the Covered Lands would be preserved in open space with no further Commercial or Residential Development Activities allowed. Under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative, 119,392 acres would remain in its current undeveloped state with relatively minimal sources of light and glare. An additional 13,220 acres would be preserved compared with the No

Action Alternative. Potential visual effects from light and glare within open space areas would be minor and are discussed further under Existing Ranch Uses below.

All Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be subject to project-specific approvals from Federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions. Project approvals from the local jurisdiction include the Kern County General Plan and "Dark Sky" Ordinance requirements and design review. It is anticipated that the local approval process would include provisions that would reduce adverse effects on visual resources in the study area. For example, the Kern County's approval of the TMV Project requires implementation of a lighting program consistent with specific plan design guidelines. The guidelines limit visible exterior lighting to the extent required for safety so as to preserve the nighttime ambiance; require lighting to be designed and maintained to be consistent with a dark sky; and require downward facing lighting. In addition, in keeping with the rural mountainous character of the area, street lighting would only be provided at intersections and nighttime helicopter pad lighting would only be used for take offs and landings and be kept to the minimal levels required by the Federal Aviation Administration (Appendix J, Kern County 2009b, MM 4.2-4 through 4.2-6).

Even with the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce visual effects, some new sources of light and glare would occur and would be visible to sensitive viewers. The most visible and extensive changes would occur along SR 58 where currently no commercial and residential development occurs. Views of this development along the I-5 corridor would be somewhat limited for the majority of sensitive viewers, or would be consistent with the existing development present along the I-5 corridor. Therefore, potential effects on sensitive viewers under the Kern County General Plan Alternative would be minor to moderate depending on the location and the extent of the development.

Existing Ranch Uses

Existing Ranch Uses would occur under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative similar to the Existing Ranch Uses under the No Action Alternative. Existing lights are limited to lighting associated with ranch headquarters, ancillary ranch structures, entry gates, and the equestrian facility. Any additional lighting would be limited to similar infrastructure. Existing Ranch Uses have limited potential to result in new sources of light or glare within the study area. The most extensive existing land use in the Covered Lands is grazing, which has minimal, if any effect, on light and glare. In addition, minor light and glare effects could occur associated the vehicle lights on new roads, the construction of new structures, grading, vegetation removal, and nighttime filming activities. However, most of these activities would be located far from sensitive viewers and would represent minor visual effects on day or nighttime views.

Existing Ranch Uses would be required to comply with all applicable Federal, state, and local regulations on a project-specific basis. For example, activities associated with Existing Ranch Uses that would require substantial ground disturbance would trigger the need for a local grading or building permit. It is anticipated that prior to issuance of the required permits, the local jurisdiction would require demonstration that potential visual effects would be avoided or minimized.

As described in Chapter 2, Proposed TU MSHCP and Alternatives, the limitations of the Ranchwide Agreement would not apply under this alternative. However, even in the absence of the Ranchwide Agreement, historical ranch practices as reflected in the Interim RWMP are anticipated to continue (although they cannot be assured), and compliance with legal requirements governing ground disturbing activities directly affecting visual quality would apply. In addition, because most Existing Ranch Uses would have only minor effects associated with light and glare, it is unlikely that Existing Ranch Uses under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative substantially alter day or nighttime views.

4.6.6.3 Mitigation Measures

As described above, the limitations of the Ranchwide Agreement would not apply under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative. However, even in the absence of the Ranchwide Agreement, BMPs (as currently set forth in the Interim RWMP) are anticipated to continue (although they cannot be assured). Restrictions imposed by the TMV Project Approvals and by easement language in the Existing Conservation Easement Areas would apply under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative. Comparable measures to those provided in Tables 2-3 and 2-4 would likely be implemented to avoid, mitigate, and minimize effects on special-status species (i.e., state or federally listed species, species protected as special-status species under CEQA), which could also reduce effects on visual resources. In addition, the mitigation measures in Section 4.6.3.3, Mitigation Measures, for the Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative would also be implemented under the Kern County General Plan Alternative.

4.6.7 Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects on visual resources are indirect or secondary effects related to the future development that is facilitated by issuance of the ITP by the Service. Cumulative effects on visual resources are analyzed in terms of the criteria discussed in Section 4.6.1.2, Methods, and each alternative's contribution to the loss of public views of natural landforms, the degradation of visual character, and the substantial alteration of day or nighttime views associated with new sources of light and glare. For the purposes of this analysis, the cumulative effects analysis area is the same as the visual resources study area described above, and includes the views along the I-5 corridor, SR 58, and SR 223. Whether or not such effects would be substantial cumulatively is primarily dependent on the mitigation measures put in place by other Federal, local, and state authorities pursuant to their project approval process. Specific cumulative projects are also considered, as discussed in Section 4.0.4, Methods for Assessing Cumulative Effects.

4.6.7.1 Views of Natural Landforms and Visual Character

As described in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, the Covered Lands are located in an area that is primarily rural and mountainous with limited existing development in the surrounding area. As noted in Section 3.6.2.2, Sensitive Viewers, public views of the Covered Lands are somewhat limited due to the remoteness of the area and the presence of intervening topography. Public views of the Covered Lands are provided along roadways, including I-5 to the south and west, and along SR 58 and SR 223 to the north. Views within the Covered Lands are largely limited by lack of general public access.

Within the cumulative effects analysis area, past actions associated with commercial and residential development, the construction of roadways, utilities, and related infrastructure, and other uses, such as farming and ranching, have contributed to the existing visual character. As discussed in Section 3.6, Visual Resources, 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, ranch 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 cumulative effects analysis area.

As noted in Section 4.0.4.2, Other Reasonably Foreseeable Actions, additional development proposed for the surrounding area may occur within the cumulative effects analysis area (Figure 4.0-1). These developments would include additional conversions of open space areas to developed land uses, which could alter public views of natural landforms and result in the degradation of visual character.

While additional future developments would largely not be visible from the same locations where Commercial and Residential Development Activities, Existing Ranchwide Uses, or Plan-Wide Activities would be visible under the various alternatives, cumulative changes in land use patterns would likely attract more visitors and more development to the study area. The potential visual effects of the Commercial and Residential Development Activities associated with the proposed action alternatives would be minor to substantial and visual effects would remain even after mitigation. Therefore, the proposed action alternatives would all have the potential to result in a contribution to the alteration of public views of natural landforms and degradation of visual character that would be cumulatively considerable.

The No Action Alternative does not include Commercial and Residential Development and is unlikely to result in significant visual effects from Existing Ranch Uses. Therefore, the No Action Alternative would not combine with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects to create significant cumulative visual effects.

4.6.7.2 Light and Glare Conditions

As described above, the Covered Lands are located in an area that is primarily rural and mountainous with limited existing development in the surrounding area. Views of the Covered Lands are somewhat limited due to the remoteness of the area and the presence of intervening topography. Views of the Covered Lands are provided along public roadways, including I-5 to the south and west, and along SR 58 and SR 223 to the north. Views within the Covered Lands are largely limited by lack of public access.

Past actions associated with the construction of roadways and the development of discrete areas have contributed to the existing visual character of the cumulative effects analysis area. As discussed in Section 3.6.1.4, Light and Glare Conditions, current sources of light and glare in the Covered Lands include existing structures and facilities located at ranch headquarters and vehicle headlights used for ranch purposes. This light and glare is visible from local roadways, commercial areas, and residences in and near the mountain communities in the vicinity along the I-5 corridor. Mineral extraction activities located on the southern face of the Tehachapi Mountains also generate light and glare that is visible at a distance above the mining site and from locations along SR 138.

As noted in Section 4.0.4.2, Other Reasonably Foreseeable Actions, additional development proposed for the surrounding area may occur within the cumulative effects analysis area (Figure 4.0-1). These developments would include additional conversions of open space areas to developed land uses, which could further alter day or nighttime views associated with new sources of light or glare. However, the extent of effects on nighttime conditions is difficult to predict because visibility depends on atmospheric conditions, topographic features, and other uncertainties. Nighttime lighting effects could be visible from a wider area than daytime sources of light and glare and nighttime conditions could be affected by small amounts of light and glare.

Given the uncertainties of how visible nighttime lighting may be and the potential for nighttime lighting to be far-reaching, in combination with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects in the region, the proposed action alternatives have the potential to result in cumulative substantial visual effects associated with nighttime lighting.

The No Action Alternative, which does not include commercial and residential development, is unlikely to result in significant new sources of light and glare from Existing Ranch Uses, and therefore, would not combine with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects to create substantial cumulative visual effects.

4.6.8 Comparison of Alternatives

The exact contours, locations, and building designs of the Commercial and Residential Development Activities are not known. Therefore, the comparison of alternatives is based on the acreage of disturbance and cut-and-fill estimates and the preserved acres where Existing Ranch Uses or Plan-Wide Activities would occur for each of the alternatives as presented in Table 4.6-1.

Table 4.6-1 Comparison of Disturbance Areas and Open Space Areas for Each Alternative

	No Action Alternative	Proposed TU MSHCP/Condor Only HCP Alternatives	CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative	Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative
Ground disturbance (acres)	0	5,533	4,496	12,142
Cut/fill (cubic yards)	0	75 million	90 million	222 million
Population	0	11,441	9,957	22,800
Dwelling Units	0	3,632	3,161	7,238
Commercial Development (square feet)	0	1,804,390	1,804,390	2,144,180
Permanently preserved open space (acres) ¹	106,317 ² (75%)	129,318 (91%)	130,339 (92%)	119,392 ³ (84%)

¹ Percentage representative of percentage of total study area (Covered Lands) (141,886 acres).

² While conservation easements would be recorded over only 106,317 acres, Existing Ranch Uses would continue over the remaining Covered Lands (with no Commercial or Residential Development).

³ The Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative includes both permanently preserved open space (34,130 acres) and Restricted Open Space (85,262 acres).

Although the No Action Alternative would result in the least amount of open space protected by conservation easements, there would be no visual effects associated with Commercial and Residential Development Activities because no such development would occur and only minor effects associated with Existing Ranch Uses.

As discussed above, the proposed action alternatives would also have a low potential to result in visual effects associated with Existing Ranch Uses or Plan-Wide Activities, but would all result in some level of effects on visual resources associated with Commercial and Residential Development Activities compared with the No Action Alternative. Generally speaking, the potential for adverse visual effects would increase with the extent, intensity, and location of the development as discussed below.

The Proposed TU MSHCP Alternative and the Condor Only HCP Alternative have the potential to alter public views of natural landforms, degrade existing visual character, and/or alter day or nighttime views from new sources of light and glare. However, changes to the majority of the views would not be visible in the foreground and the commercial and residential development along I-5 would be compatible with (or less than) other highway commercial uses. Nevertheless, there would be a minor to moderate effect on visual effects from these alternatives. There is a greater potential to affect visual resources under both these alternatives compared to the No Action Alternative, and both alternatives could contribute to a cumulatively substantial effect on visual resources.

The CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternative would result Commercial and Residential Development Activities that would affect a slightly smaller area compared to the Proposed TU MSHCP and Condor Only HCP Alternatives. Commercial and Residential Development Activities would be consolidated and intensified in the southwestern portion of the Covered Lands, which are the areas most visible from I-5 and from the local communities to the west of I-5. This would result in greater visual effects related to landform changes from grading and earth movement and effects on vegetative cover compared with the No Action, Proposed TU MSHCP, and Condor Only HCP Alternatives. Additionally, the change in the land use pattern with higher density would be out of character with the surrounding setting and new sources of light and glare would be introduced by the development and would be in areas highly visible to the surrounding community. Although light and glare effects are likely to be minimized, the effects on visual resources would likely result in direct and substantial effects on the visual character of the study area, would be greater than effects under the No Action, Proposed TU MSHCP, or Condor Only HCP Alternatives, and would result in substantial visual effects.

The Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative would result in up to 12,142 acres of permanent ground disturbance and 222 million cubic yards of cut and fill. This alternative would result in greater visual effects than the No Action, Proposed TU MSHCP, Condor Only HCP, or CCH Avoidance MSHCP Alternatives. Specifically, the effects under the Kern County General Plan Buildout Alternative would be greater because a larger area would be subject to Commercial and Residential Development Activities. Commercial and Residential Development Activities under this alternative would occur on a project-by-project basis, would be spread out over the extent of the Covered Lands, and would likely result in additional effects on landforms, vegetative cover, and views. Development would also change the visual character of the site, and could be intermittently visible in the middle and background along SR 58 and SR 223. The increased visual effects of this alternative would be roughly proportional to its greater development envelope and would be greater than all the other alternatives both individually and cumulatively.