

## 5.0

# AESTHETICS/VISUAL RESOURCES

This chapter provides an evaluation of the potential environmental effects of implementing the proposed 2035 San Benito County General Plan (2035 General Plan) on aesthetic and visual resources. As established in the Notice of Preparation (see [Appendix A, Notice of Preparation](#)), urban development and other activities resulting from implementation of the updated 2035 General Plan may result in the degradation of the visual environment within San Benito County (County).

The following environmental assessment includes a review of aesthetic and visual resources potentially affected by the implementation of the 2035 General Plan, including a description of the existing visual character of the rural and agricultural landscape, the built environment, scenic vistas, scenic highways, nighttime sky conditions, and light and glare. The environmental assessment also describes existing state and County regulations related to the protection of visual resources. The potential environmental effects that could result from urban development that would be allowed under the proposed 2035 General Plan are then evaluated.

The existing condition of the visual environment, including agricultural and open space lands, rural landscapes, and foothill, pasture, and grazing areas within the County, was determined by surveys, site visits, an examination of photographic records, and maps of environmental resources, recreation areas, national park areas, open space, and farmlands. Rules and regulations influencing the visual environment were identified by a review of state laws and regulations, scenic highway criteria and programs, local agency general plans, and County design regulations. Potential impacts related to visual quality, based on CEQA assessment criteria were determined by comparing potential urban development that would likely be constructed under the 2035 General Plan to the existing environment, using design criteria and guidelines adopted by the 1992 General Plan.

## **5.1 SETTING**

The County's environmental and regulatory settings for aesthetic and visual resources are described below are based on the General Plan Background Report (San Benito County 2010b). Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines §15150, this document is incorporated into the Revised Draft EIR (RDEIR) by reference as though fully set forth herein. Where necessary, information originating from the Report has been updated with the best available and most current data, as previously discussed in Section 4.3. The Report is available for download at: [www.sanbenitogpu.com/docs.html](http://www.sanbenitogpu.com/docs.html). Copies of the Report may be viewed during standard business hours (8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.), Monday through Thursday, at the San Benito County Planning and Building Department, 2301 Technology Parkway, Hollister, California 95023. County offices are closed to the public on Fridays.

### **5.1.1 Environmental Setting**

The County has a total land area of approximately 888,924 acres, or 1,389 square miles. Located in the California Coast Range, the western-most tip of the County lies within approximately 10 miles of Monterey Bay, while the easternmost tip is approximately 10 miles from the San Joaquin Valley. The most striking features in the County are the Diablo and Gabilan Mountain Ranges and the San Benito Valley between them. Elevations range from 80 feet near Aromas in the northwest portion of the County to 5,241 feet at the peak of San Benito Mountain in the southeast. There are also over 918 miles of public roadways within the County, of which 416 miles are County roads, including five County designated scenic roadways.

The County's agricultural croplands, rangelands, rolling hills, open spaces, mining sites, rural character, and natural geologic features and monuments present in several of the National, State, and County parks have attracted residents and visitors to the region for decades. Preserving scenic features, including both natural and working landscapes, enhances the scenic values and economic development potential of the County and adds to the quality of life for existing and future residents. The scenic resources within the County include a diversity of natural settings and landscapes. Because agriculture and rangeland are dominant land uses within the County and account for approximately 75 percent of the total land area, scenic resources primarily include views of agricultural farms, grazing lands, and cultivated fields in the region's foreground, views of valleys immediately beyond the County's cities and small communities, views toward rolling hillsides, open spaces, and private lands, and distant views of the Diablo Range and ridgelines to the east and west. Scenic resources also include historic mining sites and the historic and rural character of the small unincorporated communities within the County, including New Idria and Tres Pinos.

The many views, viewpoints, and scenic qualities of the surrounding rural expanses and mountain ranges create the County's natural beauty and landscape within the northern San Benito Valley. Because of the varying topography within the County, including the valleys and rolling hills and ridgelines, the County also includes varying elevated visual features, such as large trees, rock outcroppings, bluffs, and historical buildings and landmarks. The following summaries describe some of the County's most prominent scenic resources, including the agricultural croplands, open space land, scenic roadways, central coast mountain ranges, and rural character of the County's built environment, including its growing cities and small historic towns.

### **Rural Character**

The County is known not only for its major topographic features, but also for its rows of crops, cultivated fields, orchards, vineyards, farms, and ranches. The County has relatively little urban development compared to neighboring counties and other parts of the state. Cropland and rangeland in the County have high scenic value. These areas constitute more than 75 percent of the County's total land area, of which approximately 91 percent is grazing or rangeland and approximately three percent is prime farmland. Most of the prime farmland is located in the northern part of the County adjacent to developed areas on the San Benito Valley floor. As of 2010, over 580,000 acres of land within the County are under Williamson Act contracts, ensuring additional protection of agricultural resources. Because the majority of land within the County is agricultural, many scenic resources are agricultural areas, such as row crops, pastures, orchards, vineyards, ranches, barns, and farms with cattle and various livestock. Most roadways within the County offer some views of rural agricultural landscapes. During late winter and early spring, the valley floor and rolling hillsides are a verdant green that transition to the prototypical California landscape of yellow and brown dried grasses during summer and fall. While there are some oak woodlands in the County, rangelands are predominantly made up of annual grasslands. Development within these areas tends to be limited to agricultural improvements, such as barns, fences, and cattle holding areas. Travelers along US 101 and SRs 25, 129, 146, and 156 have views of surrounding rangeland.

### **Mountain Ranges**

There are two mountain ranges that transect the County and provide high scenic values: the Gabilan Range and Diablo Range.

#### **Gabilan Range**

The Gabilan Range runs along the western edge of the County and trends in a northwest to southeast direction. The range is bordered by the Santa Lucia Range towards Big Sur to the west

and the San Andreas Fault, San Benito Valley, SR 25, and the Diablo Range to the east. Fremont Peak, at 3,173 feet, is the highest peak within the County in the Gabilan Range. It is protected within the 244 acre Fremont Peak State Park.

### **Diablo Range**

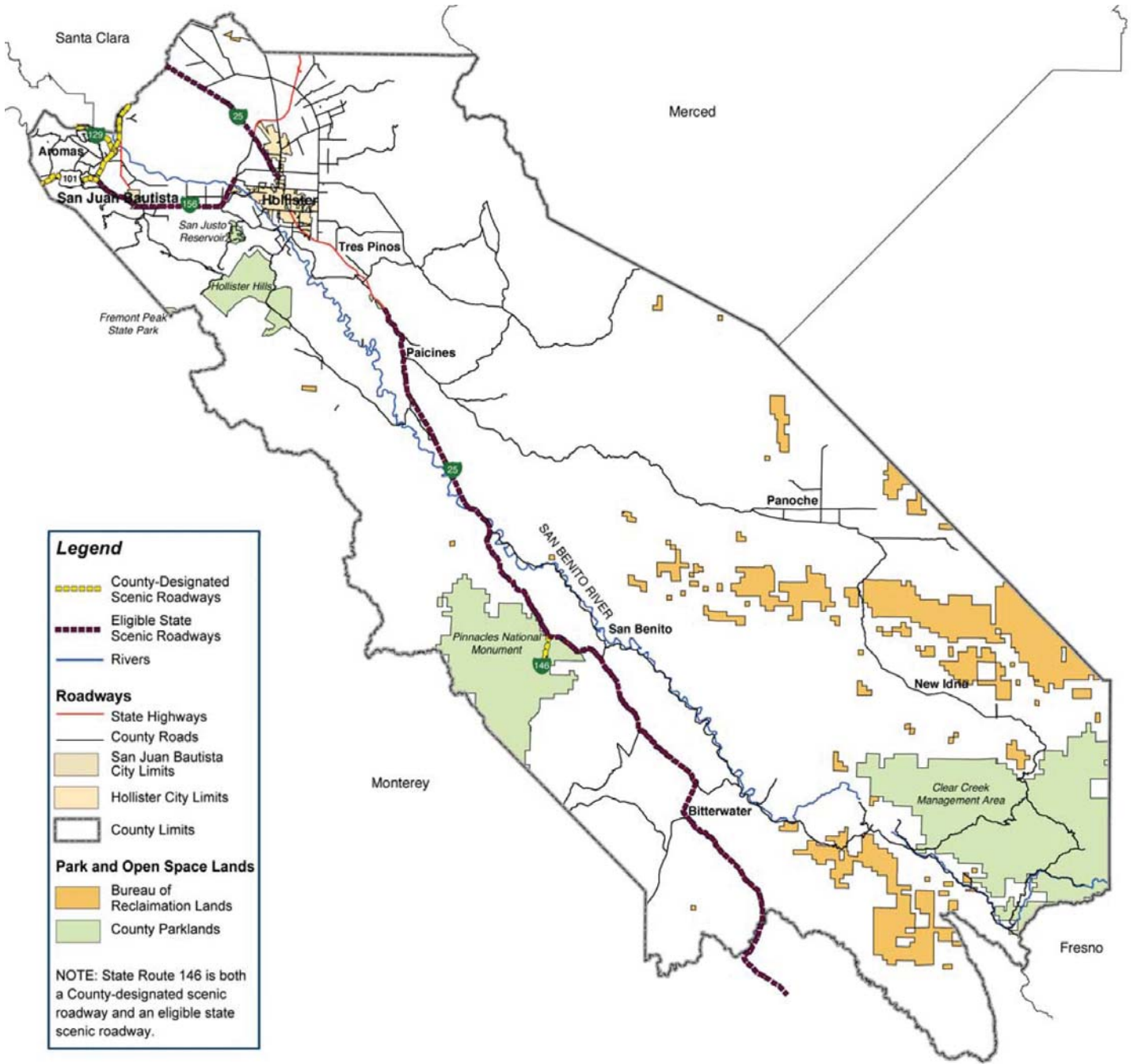
The Diablo Range runs along the eastern edge of the County and is part of the California central coastal range. The range includes summits over 3,000 feet and steep transitions of rolling foothills between the San Benito Valley floor to 2,000 foot plateaus. San Benito Mountain, at 5,241 feet, is the highest peak in the Clear Creek Management Area, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wilderness area. On clear days the peak can be seen from the valley floor.

### **Public and Private Recreation Areas**

There are numerous publicly owned open space areas in the County, including National and State parks, County parks, and public domain lands. These areas host a wide variety of uses ranging from public facilities, such as Paicines and Hernandez Reservoirs, to heavily used recreational areas such as Bolado Park. Approximately 15 percent of the land in the unincorporated County is publicly owned open space, most of which is federally owned (91 percent). Trails within the County serve bicyclists, pedestrians, and equestrians. One popular trail is the San Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail. School sites, while primarily serving the educational needs of students and faculty, frequently serve the recreational needs of surrounding neighborhoods, such as sports fields and tennis or basketball courts. Other facilities are also used by residents after school hours. The majority of the open space recreational uses on private land are camping facilities and RV facilities, including the KOA Campground, Pinnacles Campground, Betabel Road RV Park, Monterey RV Park, and subdivision parks that are gated. The exceptions are private golf and hunting clubs, including the Ridgemark Golf and Country Club.

### **Scenic Highways**

Figure 5-1 illustrates the County-designated and eligible state scenic highways in the County. There are approximately 918 miles of public roads within the County, of which 416 miles are County maintained. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) maintains five State highways in the County: SRs 25, 101, 129, 146, and 156.



Source: Planning Partners, November 2011

Figure 5-1  
 County-Designated and Eligible  
 State Scenic Highways



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With the exception of US Route 101, most State highways within the County were originally designed to be two lane rural highways. While there are no State Designated Scenic Highways within the County, the County has designated three of the five State highways as “scenic highways.”

Many of the highway corridors contain the elements that can make a highway “scenic,” such as the natural landscapes that can be seen by traveling along the highway, the quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon a traveler’s enjoyment of the view. Several of these highway corridors lead residents and visitors to many of the County’s recreational areas, including the Pinnacles National Monument, Hollister Hills State Valley Recreation Area, and many farms and wineries. Many of the major roadways in the County fall within a scenic highway (SH) combining district that only permits certain uses. Other uses, such as residential dwellings or related agricultural uses, are allowed subject to review by the Planning Department staff and approval by the Planning Commission. The following is a summary describing each US and State route.

**State Route 25.** SR 25 traverses the entire length of the County from the southern County boundary at the junction of SR 198 near King City, north through Paicines, Tres Pinos, and Hollister, before terminating at US 101 south of Gilroy in Santa Clara County. Within the County, segments of SR 25 are known as the Airline Highway, Tres Pinos Road, Nash Road, San Benito Street, San Felipe Road, and Bolsa Road. SR 25 has been transferred off of Tres Pinos Road, Nash Road, San Benito Street, and San Felipe Road and onto the new SR 25 Bypass, which varies from four to six lanes. SR 25 within the County is primarily a rural, two lane roadway, except for a small section that runs through Hollister where it becomes four lanes for approximately 0.3 miles. However, the northern section of the route returns to two lanes, which from SR 156 northward are divided by a concrete center barrier. This part is travelled primarily by commuters between Hollister and Gilroy. As a result, this northerly segment is often congested. SR 25 from SR 198 to Hollister is also eligible for designation as a State Scenic Route, but it is not a County designated scenic roadway.

**US Route 101.** US 101 passes through the northwestern part of the County for approximately 7.4 miles and serves primarily interregional traffic. It begins as a four lane expressway at the Monterey the County line, changes to a four lane freeway approximately 1.6 miles north of the County line, and continues as a four lane freeway to the Pajaro River Bridge and the San Benito Santa Clara County line. US 101 has been considered both a statewide and regionally significant roadway. Not only is it a principal arterial and part of an Interregional Route System (IRRS), it is also designated by the County as a local Scenic Highway. However, the portion of US 101 that traverses the County is not eligible for official designation as a State Scenic Route.

**State Route 129.** SR 129 extends from Santa Cruz County into the northwestern tip of the County, where it connects to US 101. It provides access between SR 1 in Santa Cruz County and

US 101 for truck traffic generated by food processing plants in the Watsonville area and the A.R. Wilson Quarry near Aromas. The route is also used by farm equipment and slow moving trucks carrying farm produce. The portion of the roadway that runs through the County is a two lane rural road, also known as Chittenden Pass Road. The County has designated this route as a local Scenic Highway, but the roadway is not eligible as a State Scenic Highway.

**State Route 146.** SR 146 is a two lane rural road (also known as Chalone Creek Road and Pinnacles Highway) primarily providing access from SR 25 to the Pinnacles National Monument. It is a minor arterial and eligible for official designation as a State Scenic Route. the County has designated the route as a local Scenic Highway.

**State Route 156.** SR 156 traverses north through the County from US 101 west of San Juan Bautista through San Juan Bautista and Hollister, to the San Benito Santa Clara County line where it connects with SR 152. The corridor serves interregional traffic, including commuters traveling from Monterey and Santa Clara Counties, truck traffic between the Central Valley and Monterey Bay Area during the week, and recreational traffic on the weekend. Portions of the roadway are classified as a rural minor arterial and other sections are four lane expressways from US 101 to San Juan Bautista, where it narrows again to become a two lane expressway as it bypasses Hollister. It is not designated by the County as a scenic roadway, but it is eligible for designation as a State Scenic Highway.

**County Roads and City Streets.** The remaining roadway network in the County includes numerous County maintained roads and city streets. These roadways are classified into five categories, including arterials, collectors, locals, local business streets, and private roads. None of these roadways are designated as a scenic route by the State, County, or either of the two cities.

## **5.1.2 Regulatory Setting**

### **State**

- **California Scenic Highway Program.** The California Scenic Highway Program is administered by Caltrans. The program is designed to protect scenic state highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to the highways. A California 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 would intrude on a traveler's enjoyment of the view. When a city or County nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must identify the scenic corridor of the highway, as defined by the motorist's line of vision. California has established standards for protecting state-designated scenic corridors. These



standards include regulation of land use and the intensity of development through detailed site planning, control of outdoor advertising, attention to landscaping, and the design and appearance of structures and equipment within such corridors.

- **California Government Code: Open Space Lands.** This part of the State Government Code defines open space, and requires every city and County to prepare Open Space Plans as a required element of their General Plan. Building permits, subdivision approvals, and zoning ordinance approvals must be consistent with the local Open Space Plan.
- **California Trails Act.** This law requires every city and County to consider trail-oriented recreational uses, and consider such demands in developing specific open space programs in their General Plan. Every city, County, and district must also consider the feasibility of integrating trail routes with appropriate segments of the state trail system.
- **California Building Code.** The California Building Code (California Code of Regulations, Title 24, Part 2) contains various building standards derived and adapted from the International Building Code, authorized by the California legislature, that address California building issues. They include standards for outdoor lighting intended to improve energy efficiency, minimize light pollution and nighttime glare, and provide design solutions to shield and control outdoor lighting fixtures.

## County

- **San Benito County General Plan.** The County's 1994 Land Use Element contains recommended standards and specific zoning tools, such as Planned Unit Developments, to allow for clustering and density transfer to provide innovative and diversified development. The 1995 Open Space and Conservation Element contains goals and policies to direct development to urban areas; protect scenic roads, highways, ridgelines, and historic structures; and maintain open space. The 1982 Scenic Roads and Highway Element contains various goals and policies to preserve the scenic qualities of the County.
- **Chapter 19.31, San Benito County Code (SBCC): Lighting Regulations (aka "Dark Sky Ordinance").** The purpose of this chapter in the Code is to encourage lighting practices and systems that will minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass, and curtail the degradation of the night-time visual environment.
- **Chapter 19.33, SBCC: Regulations for the Management and Conservation of Woodlands.** This chapter establishes regulations for the conservation and protection of woodlands in the unincorporated areas of San Benito County by limiting tree removal.

- **Chapter 23.29, SBCC: Subdivision Design Requirements.** This section includes general standards that are applied to subdivisions in order to ensure that specific standards for streets, blocks, lots, recreation facilities, grading activity, erosion control, and open space easements are followed for all subdivision and planned unit development activity.
- **Chapter 25.14, Article IV, SBCC: Scenic Highway District.** The purpose of the Scenic Highway zoning district is to establish a combining zone to preserve the scenic qualities of the County along the scenic highway corridor. Certain transportation corridors in the County are recognized as having unusual or outstanding scenic qualities. It is the intent of the Scenic Highway district to protect those transportation corridors.
- **Chapter 25.29, Article III, SBCC: Sign Regulations.** The purpose of sign regulations is to encourage the effective use of signs as a means of communication in the County. Sign regulations also serve to maintain and enhance the aesthetic environment, to improve the County's ability to attract sources of economic development and growth, and to improve pedestrian and traffic safety.
- **Chapter 25.29, Article II, SBCC: Hillside Development Regulations.** The purpose of this article is to encourage design excellence and high quality projects that will maintain the existing rural character of the County, conserve landforms and the natural landscape, preserve wildlife habitats, protect and preserve view sheds, and ensure developments are designed to fit within the characteristics and constraints of a site.
- **Other County Criteria.** The existing General Plan also has standards in place to evaluate highways identified in the state's Scenic Highway Program. These standards apply to scenic highways designated by the state. Currently, there are no state-designated scenic highways in the County. However, there are three eligible highways: State Routes 25, 146, and 156.

## 5.2 ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The aesthetics and visual resources analysis evaluates whether implementation of the proposed urban development that would occur under the 2035 General Plan could result in adverse visual effects.

### 5.2.1 Significance Criteria

As set forth in Appendix G to the State CEQA Guidelines, Section I, Aesthetics, the following criteria have been established to quantify the level of significance of an adverse effect being

evaluated pursuant to CEQA. The numeration of each criterion below corresponds to the questions in the checklist in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines (e.g., I.a, I.b). The 2035 General Plan would result in a significant aesthetics or visual resource impact if implementation of the 2035 General Plan would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. (I.a)
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway or County scenic corridor. (I.b)
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. (I.c)
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. (I.d)

## **5.2.2 Analysis Methodology**

The aesthetics and visual resources evaluation includes a review of visual and scenic resources potentially affected by the implementation of the 2035 General Plan project, and the projected development envisioned under the Plan. The quality of San Benito County's visual character is subjective and dependent upon each viewer's preferences, which can vary as individuals respond differently to changes in the visual environment. As a result, the level of the project's visual impacts can be difficult to quantify. Therefore, the evaluation provides a qualitative rather than quantitative discussion of the potential for the 2035 General Plan project to result in urban and other development that would affect the County's visual character.

Both natural and man-made landscape features contribute to perceived visual character and the scenic attractiveness of the County's landscape. Natural landscape features include vegetation, foothills, pastures, water resources, landforms, rock outcroppings, and topography. Man-made landscape features can include recreational amenities, public roadways, sidewalks, street lighting, farmlands, and rural and urban structures. The evaluation describes both the existing natural and man-made landscape features, and how development proposed under the 2035 General Plan could affect existing scenic vistas, scenic resources, natural environment, and characteristics of the man-made environment.

As discussed in Section 4.5.7, Potential Growth Scenarios, the EIR analysis takes into account two possible growth scenarios: Scenario 1 and Scenario 2. For this programmatic level of analysis, there will be no difference in the potential impacts to aesthetic and visual resources that would result from the two growth scenarios because the County would apply the 2035 General Plan policies, including additional policies from mitigation measures contained in the certified

EIR addressing aesthetic and visual resources equally in approving any development, regardless of location. Site specific analysis of impacts to aesthetic and visual resources would be required for particular development proposals that may be considered in the future.

### 5.2.3 Environmental Impacts

The following discussion examines the potential impacts of the proposed project based on the impact significance criteria described above. Table 5-1 summarizes 2035 General Plan goals and policies that would mitigate environmental impacts associated with aesthetic and visual resources, including an explanation of how the relevant goal or policy would avoid or reduce impacts.

**Table 5-1 2035 General Plan Goals and Policies that Mitigate Aesthetics and Visual Resources Impacts**

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<b>Land Use Element</b>		
<p><b>GOAL LU-1:</b>  <b>Countywide Growth and Development</b>            To maintain San Benito County’s rural character and natural beauty while providing areas for needed future growth.</p>	<p>This goal protects the County’s rural character, natural beauty, and scenic vistas, thereby reducing potential impacts to scenic corridors by limiting development in locations that would not protect valuable scenic resources. Encourages clustering and higher density land uses that are less consumptive of open space, biological and highly valued agricultural resources.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-1.4: Identifiable Community Boundaries</b>            The County shall encourage defined boundaries between communities (e.g., cities and unincorporated communities).</p>	<p>Encourages the protection of agricultural, ranch, and open space lands by maintaining clearly defined boundaries between communities, including between agricultural communities and cities, thereby also protecting the scenic resources within the ranch and open space lands and those resources located along the boundaries of urban communities.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy LU-1.5: Infill Development</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage infill development on vacant and underutilized parcels to maximize the use of land within existing urban areas, minimize the conversion of productive agricultural land and open spaces, and minimize environmental impacts associated with new development as one way to accommodate growth.</p>	<p>Reduces impacts to scenic resources within designated scenic corridors by directing some growth to vacant or underutilized parcels within the incorporated cities in the County, thereby minimizing growth near state scenic highways.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-1.6: Hillside Development Restrictions</b></p> <p>The County shall prohibit residential and urban development on hillsides with 30 percent or greater slopes.</p>	<p>Reduces visual impacts of the nearby foothills that may be viewed from Hollister, San Juan Bautista, and other areas of the San Benito valley floor by prohibiting development on slopes that are 30 percent or greater.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-3: Agricultural and Rangeland</b></p> <p>To ensure the long-term preservation of the agricultural industry, agricultural support services, and rangeland resources by protecting these areas from incompatible urban uses and allowing farmers to manage their land and operations in an efficient, economically viable manner.</p>	<p>Ensures greater protection for areas associated with the agricultural industry, which is among areas that define the County’s prominent scenic resources.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-3.8: Urban Residential Buffer Requirement</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the establishment of a buffer, by the residential developer, between new urban density residential development (i.e., greater than two dwelling units per acre) and existing conventional agricultural operations.</p>	<p>Minimizes visual impacts related to new development and other activities by requiring up to a 30-foot buffer between urban residential development and existing agricultural areas, in turn improving the transition between the different uses.</p>	<p>2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy LU-3.14: Land Trusts and Financial Incentives</b></p> <p>The County shall consider land trusts and financial incentives to preserve agricultural soil resources and to protect the integrity of important agricultural areas for future use.</p>	<p>Land trusts and other financial incentives to preserve agricultural resources, which are recognized as valuable scenic resources, would minimize impacts to the visual character of the County.</p>	2
<p><b>Goal LU-4: Residential Development</b></p> <p>To encourage variety in new unincorporated residential development while also providing incentives for clustered residential as a means to protect valuable agricultural and natural resources.</p>	<p>Clustering residential areas would protect valuable agricultural and natural resources, also recognized as valuable scenic resources, within the County, by limiting the footprint of new development.</p>	1,2
<p><b>Policy LU-4.6: Clustered Residential Program</b></p> <p>The County shall continue to encourage the clustering of residential uses and the use of creative site planning techniques to promote preservation of agricultural land and open space areas.</p>	<p>Reduces impacts to scenic resources that contribute to the County's rural character by clustering residential uses in rural areas in order to maximize the preservation of agricultural and open space lands.</p>	2
<p><b>Policy LU-4.7: Clustered Residential Site Layout</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage clustered residential development be designed to respect existing natural features (e.g., rivers and streams, hills and ridge lines, and substantial tree stands), as appropriate to the density and character of the development, and if applicable to use such features to separate clustered parcels from farming areas.</p>	<p>Lessens impacts to visual resources that define the County's rural character by clustering residential subdivisions in order to protect natural features, such as rivers, streams, hillsides, and ridgelines, considered important for their scenic qualities and that may be visible from designated state highways.</p>	1,2

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy LU-4.8: Conservation Easements Related to Clustered Residential Development</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage new clustered residential development to provide agricultural and/or other appropriate open space easements on farming or open space parcel(s) at the time that the development occurs, or if a multi-phased Planned Development, according to an adopted specific plan.</p>	<p>Encouraging new development to provide conservation easements will help preserve portions of valuable agricultural resources and help avoid impacts to the County’s rural aesthetic character.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-4.9: Transfer of Development Credit Program</b></p> <p>The County shall maintain and implement the voluntary Transfer of Development Credit (TDC) program as an incentive to protect farmland and focus future develop away from the most productive farmland.</p>	<p>The TDC program would incentivize the protection of farmland and result in better preservation of farmlands and minimize impacts to the County’s visual character.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Goal LU-5: Commercial and Mixed-Use Development</b></p> <p>To promote the development of regional, thoroughfare, and locally-serving commercial uses at key opportunities sites in the unincorporated County.</p>	<p>Focusing regional thoroughfare at key locations would ensure those sites are suitable, and pose the least impact to the existing agricultural and open space uses that developed uses may replace.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-5.2: New Commercial Thoroughfare Nodes</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage new Commercial Thoroughfare (CT) nodes, as shown on the Land Use Diagram, serving travelers and tourists along state routes. The County shall require these uses to have adequate public services, be compatible with surrounding land uses, and respect the scenic character of the County. Figure 3-5 shows the locations, Table 3-1 describes the land use designation, and Appendix A, Glossary defines “Centralized Commercial Node Development.”</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to the surrounding land uses that provide valuable scenic resources to County residents and visitors by expanding future commercial thoroughfare uses at appropriate locations.</p>	<p>2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Goal LU-7: Community Character</b></p> <p>To preserve San Benito County's historic identity and rural community character.</p>	<p>Reduces impacts to valuable scenic resources visible from eligible state scenic highways or County-designated scenic highways by setting the intention to preserve the County's rural character.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.1: Historic Communities and Structures</b></p> <p>The County shall protect historic communities and structures by requiring new or remodeled development to respect their architectural and historical significance.</p>	<p>Protects the historic communities and structures that may be considered scenic resources, and those that are visible from designated state scenic highways.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.2: Historic Preservation</b></p> <p>The County shall coordinate with property owners, neighborhood associations, and preservation groups to improve building facades and exteriors consistent with each community's unique history and visual character.</p>	<p>Encourages the County to coordinate with property owners, neighborhood groups, and preservation groups to improve the historic built environment that defines the County's visual character.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.3: Adaptive Reuse</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the adaptive reuse of historic structures in order to preserve the historic resources, so long as the reuse of the structure is consistent with the individual history of each community.</p>	<p>Maintains the historical integrity of older neighborhoods and the rural character of the County by encouraging adaptive reuse.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.4: New Development in Historical Areas</b></p> <p>The County shall require new development in historical areas to be compatible with existing historic structures.</p>	<p>Protects historical areas from the impacts of new development by ensuring that new projects are compatible with existing historical structures. Also, protects historic resources recognized as scenic resources that may be visible from state scenic highways.</p>	<p>1,2</p>



<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.6: Minimizing Parking Impacts</b></p> <p>The County shall minimize the visual impact of public and private parking by requiring it to be located at the rear and/or side of buildings and screened with landscape, where feasible, in order to preserve character and promote human-scale development.</p>	<p>Minimizes the visual impacts associated with parking by requiring it to be located to the rear or sides of buildings, where feasible.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.7: Screening</b></p> <p>The County shall require screening of storage, trash receptacles, loading docks, and other building or site features to reduce visual impacts from public areas.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to views as seen by motorists traveling along eligible scenic highway and County-designated scenic highways by requiring that all storage receptacles, loading docks, and other building features be screened.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.8: Signage Program</b></p> <p>The County should develop, adopt, and maintain a unified signage and way-finding program for residents and visitors that identifies historic communities and structures and directs residents and visitors to points of interest.</p>	<p>Adding a wayfinding program would allow the County to create unified signage that adds to the cohesiveness of the communities within the County, thereby improving their visual qualities.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.9: Art in Public Places</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the placement of art in public places such as social gathering spaces, plazas, bicycle/pedestrian areas, commercial shopping centers, and employment centers.</p>	<p>Improves the visual character of the County through art installations in public and social gathering places.</p>	<p>2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy LU-7.10: New Development Design</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the design of new development to complement its surroundings, including nearby development, nearby open landscapes, and gateways into populated areas, as well as to show coherence within itself, including with regard to architectural style, human-scale development, and street layout.</p>	<p>Encourages designs of new development to complement the surroundings, including natural features recognized as scenic resources, which would preserve the County's scenic resources and minimize impacts to the visual character of the County. Also, minimizing impacts to such resources that are visible from state scenic highways.</p>	1,2
<p><b>Goal LU-8: New Communities</b></p> <p>To provide the option for New Communities to be considered as a way of accommodating planned growth in the unincorporated parts of San Benito County.</p>	<p>Promotes preserving the County's rural landscape by allowing separate New Communities to accommodate growth. Potentially minimizes impact to the historic character of Hollister and San Juan Bautista by focusing growth in distinctly separate locations.</p>	2
<p><b>Policy LU-8.4: New Community Application Content Requirements</b></p> <p>The County shall require all project applicants for New Communities to provide the County with the following information:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A Project Summary that includes: a project description, site history, discussion of the roles of the applicant and County in preparation of the Specific Plan and applicable CEQA environmental review, identification of the anticipated planning issues that will need to be addressed through the application process, and an estimated project schedule.</li> <li>b. Completed General Plan Amendment and Zone Changes applications.</li> </ol>	<p>Reduces impacts to valuable scenic resources visible from eligible state scenic highways or County-designated scenic highways by requiring such elements as the location, intensity of use, circulation system, and infrastructure that are parts of New Communities to be considered as part of the specific development application process.</p>	2

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p>c. A Specific Plan consistent with State specific plan requirements, including the location and intensity of planned land uses and circulation system. The plan should result in a more dense land use pattern than would normally be allowed under existing General Plan designations and zoning, provide the opportunity a mix of land uses and densities (e.g., residential, commercial, mixed-use, employment-generating, and public facilities), ensure access and efficient movement by multiple modes of transportation (e.g., car, transit, bicycle, and pedestrians); and provide for energy efficiency and water conservation.</p> <p>d. An Infrastructure Master Plan that identifies public and private infrastructure needs; service district or assessment area formation details; a development phasing plan; and a strategy for the installation, operations, and ongoing maintenance of infrastructure required to support new community. The Plan should include facility designs and operation techniques that promote energy efficiency and water conservation. The plan shall be consistent with applicable private, local, regional, State and Federal infrastructure, regulations, and programs related to transportation, sewage and wastewater treatment, water quality and quantity, drainage, parks and open space, and any other public facilities infrastructure, and services.</p> <p>e. A Fiscal Impact Analysis that includes an assessment of projected tax revenues</p>		

<p align="center"><b>Goals and Policies</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Impact AES-#</b></p>
<p>compared to projected County service costs in order to demonstrate that the community will have a fiscally neutral or positive impact on the County and any special districts that provide services to the project.</p> <p>f. A Water Supply Analysis that demonstrates access to adequate existing and future water supply for the project.</p> <p>g. A Public Service Financing Program to ensure that upon buildout the New Community will provide or fund a full range of needed public services, including fire protection, law enforcement, parks, library, community center, and other necessary public services.</p> <p>h. A commitment to enter into a Reimbursement Agreement requiring deposits into a Trust Fund with Benito County for all, or an agreed upon portion, of the estimated staff costs for processing the application, including the costs for preparing the applicable CEQA environmental review.</p>		
<p><b>Economic Development</b></p>		
<p><b>Goal ED-1: General Economic Development and Diversification</b></p> <p>To sustain the long-term economic well-being of the County by promoting economic sustainability and diversification.</p>	<p>In broad terms, sustaining the long-term economic well-being of the County would help the County preserve scenic resources visible from state scenic highways and scenic resources that define the County’s visual character.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy ED-1.5: Quality of Life Improvements</b> The County shall focus economic development efforts on creating positive change in the County relative to residents and workers' quality of life. This should include considering air quality, education opportunities, safety, water quality, scenic beauty, and recreational opportunities during economic development decisions.</p>	<p>Encouraging economic development efforts to consider scenic beauty and recreational opportunities ensures that scenic resources seen from state scenic highways will be considered. Improving the quality of life for the residents in the County would ensure air quality, water quality, scenic beauty, and recreational opportunities are enhanced, minimizing impacts on the County's visual character.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Goal ED-5: Tourism</b> To expand tourism opportunities in order to make the County a premier destination.</p>	<p>Expanded tourism would better highlight the County as a vacation destination and minimize impacts related to the County's visual character.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy ED-5.1: Tourism Promotion</b> The County shall coordinate with the Economic Development Corporation of San Benito County, San Benito County Chamber of Commerce, and interested public and private stakeholders to market San Benito County as a premier ecotourism and agritourism destination.</p>	<p>Promoting the County as a premier ecotourism and agritourism destination would also help preserve and protect the County's visual and scenic resources.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy ED-5.2: Heritage Tourism Promotion</b> The County shall coordinate with agencies, organizations, property owners, and business interests to develop and promote heritage tourism opportunities in the County. Heritage tourism refers to experiencing the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. This can include cultural, historic, and natural resources.</p>	<p>Coordination among other entities in the County to promote heritage tourism would avoid impacts to the County's visual character because the County would protect heritage sites and places, such as cultural, historic, and natural resources.</p>	<p>2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy ED-5.3: New Events</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the creation of sporting tournaments and entertainment events such as cycling, baseball, soccer, field hockey, tennis, golf, art and wine festivals, and outdoor concerts.</p>	<p>Encouraging the creation of new events that highlight the County’s recreational and natural resources would also support the preservation of such resources.</p>	2
<p><b>Policy ED-5.4: Destination Attractions</b></p> <p>The County should encourage the development of destination attractions that celebrate San Benito County’s unique heritage, including contemporary and performing arts, winemaking culture, agritourism, and Spanish Mission history.</p>	<p>Encouraging the development of destination attractions that highlight the County’s heritage, cultural resources, and natural features, would also support the preservation of such resources.</p>	2
<p><b>Policy ED-5.5: Outdoor Recreational Venues</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the development of outdoor recreation for visitors and residents alike, such as mountain biking, mountain climbing, hiking, horseback riding, camping, birding, hunting, and fishing.</p>	<p>The development of outdoor recreation for visitors and residents emphasizes the importance of recreational resources, and would also support the preservation of such resources.</p>	2
<p><b>Policy ED-5.6: Safe and Convenient Tourist Travel</b></p> <p>The County, in coordination with Council of San Benito County Governments (SBCOG), should enhance tourists’ ability to travel safely and conveniently to different destinations throughout the County. This should include developing strategies to ensure tourists travel safely on rural roads and to promote an integrated, multi-modal transportation system that includes bike rental services, pedestrian connections, and hiking, biking and riding trails.</p>	<p>Applying strategies to ensure tourists travel safely on rural roads in the County would improve the visual appearance of the County’s roadway system and also support the preservation of such resources.</p>	2

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy ED-5.8: Long- Term Environmental and Economic Health of Public Recreational Resources</b></p> <p>The County shall coordinate with Federal, State, and local agencies that own and operate public recreational resources in the County to ensure the long-term access and environmental/economic health of these public resources.</p>	<p>Coordination among government agencies that manage public recreational resources would also ensure those resources are properly protected, reducing impacts to the County’s visual character.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Circulation Element</b></p>		
<p><b>Policy C-1.3: Roadway Improvement Aesthetics</b></p> <p>The County shall require roadway improvements to be designed to conform to existing landforms and to include landscaping and/or other treatments to ensure that aesthetics are preserved, including the County’s rural character.</p>	<p>Ensuring roadway improvements conform to existing landforms can help to preserve the scenic resources and rural aesthetic character along state scenic highways and to minimize visual impacts and preserve the County’s rural character.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy C-1.16: Roads on Hillsides</b></p> <p>The County shall require that new public and private roads on hillsides minimize visual impact by blending with natural landforms and by following the natural contours of the land as much as possible and that driveway access in hillside areas be consolidated where possible and limited to areas where adequate sight distance is available for all approaches.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to scenic resources by requiring that the visual effects of road construction on hillsides be minimized.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy C-1.17: Grades on Hillsides</b></p> <p>The County shall require that new roads on hillsides do not exceed a 15 percent grade. The County may allow grades on hillsides of up to 20 percent for distances of up to 400 feet. Grades over 15 percent must have all weather surfaces such as asphalt or concrete.</p>	<p>Minimizes roadways on hillsides over a 15 percent grade, which reduces the number of roadways visible from the valley floor and from state scenic highways, minimize the visual impacts associated with roadway construction and roadway visibility, and would avoid impacts to the County’s visual character.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy C-1.18: Minimize Hillside Scarring</b> The County shall require new roads on hillsides and ridges that are visually prominent from other roadways to minimize scarring.</p>	Minimizes impacts to scenic resources by requiring that the visual effects of road construction on hillsides be minimized.	1,2
<b>Public Facilities and Services Element</b>		
<p><b>Goal PFS-9: Telecommunications</b> To facilitate the orderly and appropriate development and expansion of telecommunications facilities to meet the needs of residents and businesses for comprehensive, reliable, and cost effective telephone, wireless telephone, broadband, and cable television service.</p>	Appropriate development siting of telecommunication facilities could minimize the visibility of communication infrastructure, such as telephone poles and wireless towers from state scenic highways.	1,2
<p><b>Policy PFS-9.4: Siting of Telecommunication Facilities</b> The County shall require that the siting of telecommunications facilities minimizes their visibility, prevents visual clutter, reduces conflicts with surrounding land uses, and meets the requirements of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The siting of telecommunications facilities shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use existing buildings, structures, poles, or other support structures;</li> <li>b. Avoid ridgelines unless screened from public views;</li> <li>c. Avoid views of scenic highways, public parks and recreation facilities, or other scenic view areas;</li> <li>d. Include setbacks from residential dwellings, public and private schools, and child daycare facilities; and</li> <li>e. Document why the selected site is the best way to accomplish the project.</li> </ol>	Careful siting of telecommunication facilities could minimize the visibility and visual clutter of new infrastructure visible from state scenic highways and avoid impacts to the County's visual character.	1,2



<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy PFS-9.5: Telecommunication Design</b></p> <p>The County shall require that the design of telecommunications facilities (e.g., cabinets, buildings, antennas, security fencing) integrate into existing adjacent conditions and minimize visibility through the use of: appropriate colors, existing buildings and structures, screening, disguising, landscaping, and compatibility with surrounding structures and natural environments.</p>	<p>Appropriate and careful design of telecommunication facilities, through the appropriate use of colors, screening, landscaping, and other measures, would minimize the visibility of communication infrastructure, such as telephone poles and wireless towers and ensure such infrastructure better integrates into the surrounding environment, reducing impacts to scenic resources seen from state scenic highways and reduces impacts to the County’s visual character.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Natural and Cultural Resources Element</b></p>		
<p><b>Goal NCR-1: Open Space</b></p> <p>To preserve and enhance valuable open space lands that provide wildlife habitat and conserve natural and visual resources of San Benito County.</p>	<p>This goal preserves and enhances the County’s extensive open space land, which conserves the visual resources within the open space lands.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-1.1: Integrated Network of Open Space</b></p> <p>The County shall maintain an integrated network of open space lands that support natural resources, recreation, tribal resources, wildlife habitat, water management, scenic quality, and other beneficial uses.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to scenic resources by encouraging the use of parks and open space, thereby increasing the County’s appreciation for such resources. Encourages contiguity of open space parcels, preserving intact viewsheds.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-1.2: Conservation Easements</b></p> <p>The County shall support and encourage the use of conservation easements to protect open space that contains valuable natural resources.</p>	<p>Reduces potential impacts, including visual character impacts, to scenic resources by supporting the use of conservation easements to protect open spaces that contain natural and scenic resources.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy NCR-1.3: Open Space Overlay District</b></p> <p>The County shall continue to protect and preserve the rural landscape and implement open space policies for: public health, safety, and welfare; continued agricultural uses; scenic viewscape preservation, including scenic highway corridors; park and recreation uses; conservation of significant natural resources; the containment and definition of limits to urbanization; and the preservation of the natural habitat for threatened and/or endangered plant and animal species.</p>	<p>An open space overlay district would protect the rural landscapes and valuable scenic resources visible along recognized scenic highway corridors.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Goal NCR-2: Wildlife Habitat</b></p> <p>To protect and enhance wildlife communities through a comprehensive approach that conserves, maintains, and restores important habitat areas.</p>	<p>Habitat protection would reduce visual character impacts by protecting open space and other habitat areas that are recognized as valuable scenic resources.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-2.4: Maintain Corridors for Habitat</b></p> <p>The County shall protect and enhance wildlife migration and movement corridors to ensure the health and long-term survival of local animal and plant populations, in particular contiguous habitat areas, in order to increase habitat value and lower land management costs. As part of this effort, the County shall require road and development sites in rural areas to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Be designed to maintain habitat connectivity with a system of corridors for wildlife or plant species and avoiding fragmentation of open space areas; and</li> <li>b. Incorporate measures to maintain the long-term health of the plant and animal</li> </ol>	<p>Avoids impacts to scenic resources and protects the visual character of the County by protecting wildlife migration corridors and other habitat areas. Encourages contiguity of open space parcels, preserving intact viewsheds.</p>	<p>2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p>communities in the area, such as buffers, consolidation of/or rerouting access, transitional landscaping, linking nearby open space areas, and habitat corridors.</p>		
<p><b>Policy NCR-2.6: Regeneration of Oak Woodland Communities</b> The County shall promote the restoration, restocking, and protection of oak woodland habitat on public and private lands in the County through a combination of the habitat conservation planning, inter-agency coordination, and updated development review or tree preservation procedures.</p>	<p>The protection of oak woodland habitat would protect open space lands, which would also protect visual resources, thereby minimizing impacts on the County’s visual character.</p>	2
<p><b>Policy NCR-2.7: Mitigation of Oak Woodlands</b> The County shall encourage development near oak woodlands to be clustered to avoid, where technically or economically practical, the loss of heritage oak trees. The County shall require transitional buffers to help maintain viable ecosystems where appropriate. Where removal of trees cannot be avoided, the County shall require project applicants to prepare a mitigation plan that identifies on- or off-site tree replacement.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to visual resources, specifically oak woodlands by encouraging development to avoid the loss of heritage oak trees.</p>	2
<p><b>Goal NCR-4: Water Resources</b> To protect water quantity and quality in natural water bodies and groundwater basins and avoid overdraft of groundwater resources.</p>	<p>Water quality protection would ensure waterways remain unpolluted and safe for recreational purposes, minimizing visual impacts that could be associated with degraded waterways.</p>	2

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy NCR-4.4: Open Space Conservation</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage conservation and, where feasible, creation or restoration of open space areas that serve to protect water quality such as riparian corridors, buffer zones, wetlands, undeveloped open space areas, and drainage canals.</p>	<p>Reduces visual impacts because open space is recognized as a valuable scenic resource.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Goal NCR-7: Cultural and Historic Resources</b></p> <p>To protect, preserve, and enhance the unique cultural and historic resources in the County.</p>	<p>The protection and preservation of cultural and historical resources minimizes the effects on scenic resources along recognized state scenic highways.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-7.1: Historic Districts</b></p> <p>The County shall establish historic districts for the communities of Tres Pinos and New Idria to preserve the character of these historic communities.</p>	<p>Protects the historic communities and districts that may be considered scenic resources visible from designated state highways.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-7.4: Integrate Architectural Styles</b></p> <p>The County shall protect existing historic structures by requiring nearby new development to use architectural styles that complement the historic structures and by striving to ensure roadway improvements enhance and do not detract from nearby historic resources.</p>	<p>Avoids negative effects to historic structures by requiring the use of complementary architectural styles and by avoiding roadway improvement plans that detract from nearby historic resources, thereby protecting historic resources that are considered scenic resources that are visible from designated state highways.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-7.5: Preservation of Structures</b></p> <p>The County shall require development proposals that would remove structures 100 years or older to demonstrate why preservation of the structures and integration of the structures into the development proposal is inappropriate or infeasible.</p>	<p>Requires developers that propose the removal of structures 100 years or older to demonstrate why preservation of the structure is infeasible, preventing the inappropriate removal of such resources and preserving the scenic and historical qualities of the area where such resources are located.</p>	<p>1</p>

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy NCR-7.7: Resource Identification and Preservation</b></p> <p>The County shall maintain a register of historic properties that will be used during the design review process to protect the character of historic communities in the County.</p>	<p>Maintenance of a historic register of properties to be used during the design review process would ensure a range of project types are cataloged and documented and that future development impacts are minimized and scenic resources that may be visible from state designated highways are protected.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-7.8: Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage the adaptive reuse (e.g., converting a historic building to residential use) of historic resources when the original use of the resource is no longer feasible and when the new use is allowed by the underlying land use designation and zoning district.</p>	<p>Adaptive reuse of historic structures would help preserve the historic scenic qualities that define the visual character of the County.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p><b>Goal NCR-8: Scenic Resources</b></p> <p>To enhance and preserve the attractive visual qualities of scenic vistas and corridors in the County.</p>	<p>Sets the County's intention to preserve visual qualities and vistas evident along the scenic corridors, thereby minimizing environmental effects on important visual resources and to preserve visual qualities and the character of its communities and rural landscape.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.1: Protect Scenic Corridors</b></p> <p>The County shall endeavor to protect the visual characteristics of certain transportation corridors that are officially designated as having unique or outstanding scenic qualities.</p>	<p>Reduces impacts to visual resources visible along scenic corridors by protecting transportation corridors with designated scenic qualities.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.2: Sign Regulations within Scenic Corridors</b></p> <p>The County shall require the elimination of signs within Scenic Corridors other than those identified in the permitted use section of the Zoning Ordinance.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts, including visual character impacts, related to scenic resources by eliminating signs within scenic corridors, if not permitted under the zoning ordinance.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.3: Grading within Scenic Corridors</b></p> <p>The County shall review all projects involving grading within Scenic Corridors to protect valuable soil resources, preserve the natural environment, and avoid significant adverse impacts within scenic areas.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to visual resources within scenic corridors, and to the scenic quality of the County, by ensuring that County review occurs for all proposed projects involving grading in scenic corridors.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.4: Review Architectural Design</b></p> <p>The County shall review development proposals to ensure that the obstruction of views is minimized through architectural building massing and location that is compatible with scenic areas.</p>	<p>Reduces impacts to visual resources within scenic corridors by requiring the County to review all development proposals to ensure that view obstructions are minimized.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.5: Review Site Planning</b></p> <p>The County shall review development proposals to ensure a reasonable and attractive appearance from the highway concurrent with a harmonious relationship with the existing landscape and shall require development that is determined not to be in harmonious relationship with the existing landscape to be screened from view through planting or other forms of visual buffers.</p>	<p>Lessens impacts related to the County's visual character and to visual resources within scenic corridors such as eligible state scenic highways and County-designated highways by requiring the County to review all development proposals to ensure that a reasonable and attractive appearance is maintained from the highway.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.6: Regulate Building Height and Setback</b></p> <p>The County shall regulate building height and setbacks to protect the field of vision within an officially designated Scenic Corridor. The County shall not approve building heights that exceed, nor setback requirements that are less, than those of the basic zoning district unless such variance has had the appropriate review and public comment.</p>	<p>The regulation of building heights and setbacks would help to ensure that the views as seen by motorists and passengers within a scenic corridor are maintained and protected to preserve the visual resources within them.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.7: Native Landscaping in Scenic Corridors</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage landscaping in Scenic Corridors to use indigenous plants and grasses compatible with local vegetation and ground forms and to reestablish the natural landscape. In addition to native vegetation, other acceptable vegetation in Scenic Corridors shall include: agricultural plants such as row crops, fruit trees and other agricultural species; and grasses and fairway trees of parks and golf courses.</p>	<p>Native landscaping ensures that the County’s native grasslands and other vegetation types are protected, also retaining their related visual value as seen by motorists traveling along scenic corridors.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.8: Underground Utility Lines</b></p> <p>The County shall require all new electric and communication distribution facilities proposed within the Scenic Corridor to be placed underground, whenever feasible. Where overhead utility lines are unavoidable, every effort should be made to reduce the visual impact through elements of design.</p>	<p>Avoids unsightly scenic impacts related to utility, communication, and power transmission lines by requiring all such infrastructure to be located underground whenever feasible, and duly considering other means of reducing the visual impacts of such facilities if undergrounding is not feasible.</p>	<p>1,2</p>

<b>Goals and Policies</b>	<b>How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact</b>	<b>Impact AES-#</b>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.9: Hillside Protection</b></p> <p>The County shall use design review for development on hillsides and within Scenic Corridors to protect the hillsides and ridgelines that are a unique scenic resource in the County.</p>	<p>Reduces scenic impacts by implementing a design review process for development on hillsides and within scenic corridors.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<p><b>Policy NCR-8.10: Sign Ordinance</b></p> <p>The County shall maintain and implement the Sign Ordinance to control the locations and types of signs throughout the County in an effort to protect the County's scenic character.</p>	<p>Helps to avoid impacts to scenic resources by implementing the Sign Ordinance to control the types of signs in the County.</p>	<p>1,2</p>
<b>Health and Safety Element</b>		
<p><b>Goal HS-2: Flood Hazards</b></p> <p>To minimize the loss of life, injury, or damage to property as a result of floods in the County.</p>	<p>Reduces impacts to visual resources by minimizing the damage to property from flooding, including open space, agricultural lands, historic buildings and structures, cultural resources, and riparian areas that are recognized as important scenic resources.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>Policy HS-2.6: Multi-Purpose Flood Control Facilities</b></p> <p>The County shall encourage multi-purpose flood control facilities that incorporate recreation, resource conservation, preservation of natural riparian habitat, and scenic values of the County's streams, creeks, rivers, and lakes.</p>	<p>Helps to avoid impacts to the County's visual character by encouraging flood control facilities to incorporate recreation, natural riparian habitat, and scenic values of the County's waterways.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p><b>GOAL HS-5: Air Quality</b></p> <p>To improve local and regional air quality to protect residents from the adverse effects of poor air quality.</p>	<p>Avoids adverse effects on air quality in the County, thereby improving the County's visibility and long-range views.</p>	<p>2</p>



Goals and Policies	How the Goal/Policy Avoids or Reduces Impact	Impact AES-#
<p><b>Policy HS-5.7: Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions</b></p> <p>The County shall promote greenhouse gas emission reductions by supporting carbon efficient farming methods (e.g., methane capture systems, no-till farming, crop rotation, cover cropping); supporting the installation of renewable energy technologies; and protecting grasslands, open space, oak woodlands, riparian forest and farmlands from conversion to urban uses.</p>	<p>Minimizes impacts to visual resources by supporting efficient farming methods that protect grasslands, open space, oak woodlands, riparian areas, and farmlands, all recognized scenic resources.</p>	<p>2</p>

*Impact AES-1: Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. (La)*

**Significance of Impact:** Less than significant, no mitigation required.

Most of the County consists of agriculture and rangeland uses such as row crops, pastures, orchards, vineyards, ranches, and farms; as such, many of the County’s scenic vistas consist of views of these areas. The northern portion of the County also contains numerous scenic vistas and viewsheds of nearby and distant ridgelines of the central coast mountain ranges. During public outreach efforts for the 2035 General Plan, the community identified the importance of agricultural and open space vistas in the County.

As shown in [Table 5-1](#), selected goals and policies under the 2035 General Plan’s Land Use, Public Facilities and Services, Natural Resources, and Health and Safety Elements communicate the County’s intention to achieve a balance between urban development and protection of scenic vistas in the County.

The Land Use Element contains several policies that seek to encourage clustered residential development to protect scenic vistas. The policies designed to protect natural resources, open space areas, and ridgelines minimize visual impacts to vistas by limiting development in these areas. Goal LU-1 states the goal of the County is to protect the County’s rural character, natural beauty, and scenic vistas. Goal LU-4 encourages incentives for clustered residential plans as a means to protect valuable natural resources. Goal LU-8 and its supporting policies encourage new development in the unincorporated parts of San Benito County to occur in a manner that protects and enhances the County’s visual character and vistas. The Land Use Element also contains several policies that encourage development to be screened and be architecturally consistent with the rural setting. Goal LU-7 encourages visual impacts from building and site

features be screened from eligible scenic highway and County-designated scenic highways. Goal NCR-8 minimizes impact to visual resources by requiring architectural review for potential view obstruction.

The Public Facilities and Services Element contains Goal PFS-9 to minimize visual impacts associated with telecommunication infrastructure, such as telephone lines and wireless towers. Policies supporting this goal aim to ensure careful siting and design for communication facilities, in order to reduce their visibility.

The Natural and Cultural Resources Element contains Goal NCR-8 which states the County intends to enhance and preserve the attractive visual qualities of scenic vistas and corridors in the County, including policies that provide for scenic corridor protections, sign regulations, grading restrictions in scenic corridors, architectural review, and the review of development proposals to ensure that the obstruction of views is minimized. These policies also require all development proposals contain a reasonable and attractive appearance from highways and require the County to regulate building height and setbacks to protect scenic vistas.

In the Health and Safety Element, Goal HS-5 would avoid adverse effects on air quality in the County, thereby improving the County's visibility and long-range views of the surrounding mountain ranges.

As described above, the 2035 General Plan envisions two potential growth scenarios. Both scenarios implement key goals of the General Plan by directing growth away from prime agricultural lands and towards lands not visible from existing scenic roads and therefore minimize potential visual and aesthetic impacts, as feasible. The two scenarios vary in how the goals are implemented. Scenario 1 generally locates growth adjacent to the existing urbanized area of Hollister. Scenario 2 allows development in the New Community Study Areas but this development must be master planned, thereby increasing the likelihood of visual coherence, and is subject to Specific Plan approval for project scale development.

Given the potential scale of development allowed under the 2035 General Plan, future development could impede scenic views of distant agricultural and rangeland uses and central coast mountain ranges from the existing viewpoints. Agricultural and rangeland activities in the County are widespread. The Diablo and Gabilan Mountain Ranges travel then length of the County on the east and west, respectively. Views are readily available from State Route 156 and 25 and other locations throughout the County, including from unincorporated areas directly adjacent to the cities. Due to the frequency and duration of available views along and adjacent to these areas throughout the County and the selected goals and policies under the 2035 General Plan that seek to protect scenic vistas, the limited impedance of views to scenic agricultural and rangeland uses and distant mountains that may occur with development under the 2035 General Plan is considered to be less than significant. This limited impedance of views would be

consistent with a rural landscape, where clusters of development are set within a larger landscape context, and the larger landscape predominates visually.

***Impact AES-2: Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within state scenic highways or County scenic corridors. (I.b)***

**Significance of Impact:** Less than significant, no mitigation required.

According to the California Scenic Highway Mapping System, San Benito County has no officially designated state scenic highways (Caltrans 2011a). There would be no impacts to designated state scenic highways in the County. However, State Routes 129 and 146 and U.S. Highway 101 are all County-designated scenic highways. None of the County-designated scenic highways have been identified as eligible for state scenic highway designation. The state has designated State Routes 25, 156, and 198 as eligible for state scenic highway designation.

Because there are no officially designated state scenic highways in the County, and the 2035 General Plan contains goals, policies, and implementation programs that would preserve the viewsheds within County designated scenic corridors and minimize visual effects to these corridors from development, for these reasons, through development standards and open space buffers, this would be a less-than-significant impact.

Nonetheless, scenic corridor resource protection is a major goal of the 2035 General Plan. The Land Use, Economic Development, Circulation, Public Facilities and Services, and Natural and Cultural Resources Elements include goals and policies that would preserve scenic views of the agricultural, natural, and rural environments from designated highways and recognized scenic corridors. Table 5-1 includes goals and policies from various elements of the 2035 General Plan that communicate the County's intention to protect scenic resources within County-designated scenic highways and other recognized scenic corridors.

Urban development, specifically residential and commercial urbanization under the 2035 General Plan, could occur south of the City of Hollister along State Route 25, and along State Route 156 between the City of Hollister and north of the City of San Juan Bautista, and in the New Community Study Areas. Urban and regional commercial development is also likely to occur near the junctions of State Route 156 with U.S. Highway 101 and State Route 129 with U.S. Highway 101. Similar development is planned at two locations adjacent to U.S. Highway 101: (1) at the San Benito County boundaries with Monterey County on the south and (2) Santa Clara County on the north. Scenic resources immediately adjacent to the County-designated scenic highways are within the County's Scenic Highway (SH) district, which is intended to preserve the scenic qualities along scenic highway corridors by limiting permitted uses. The SH district applies to all land outside the transportation corridor right-of-way, but immediately adjacent to the right-of-way. For example, the SH district applies to land within 400 feet on

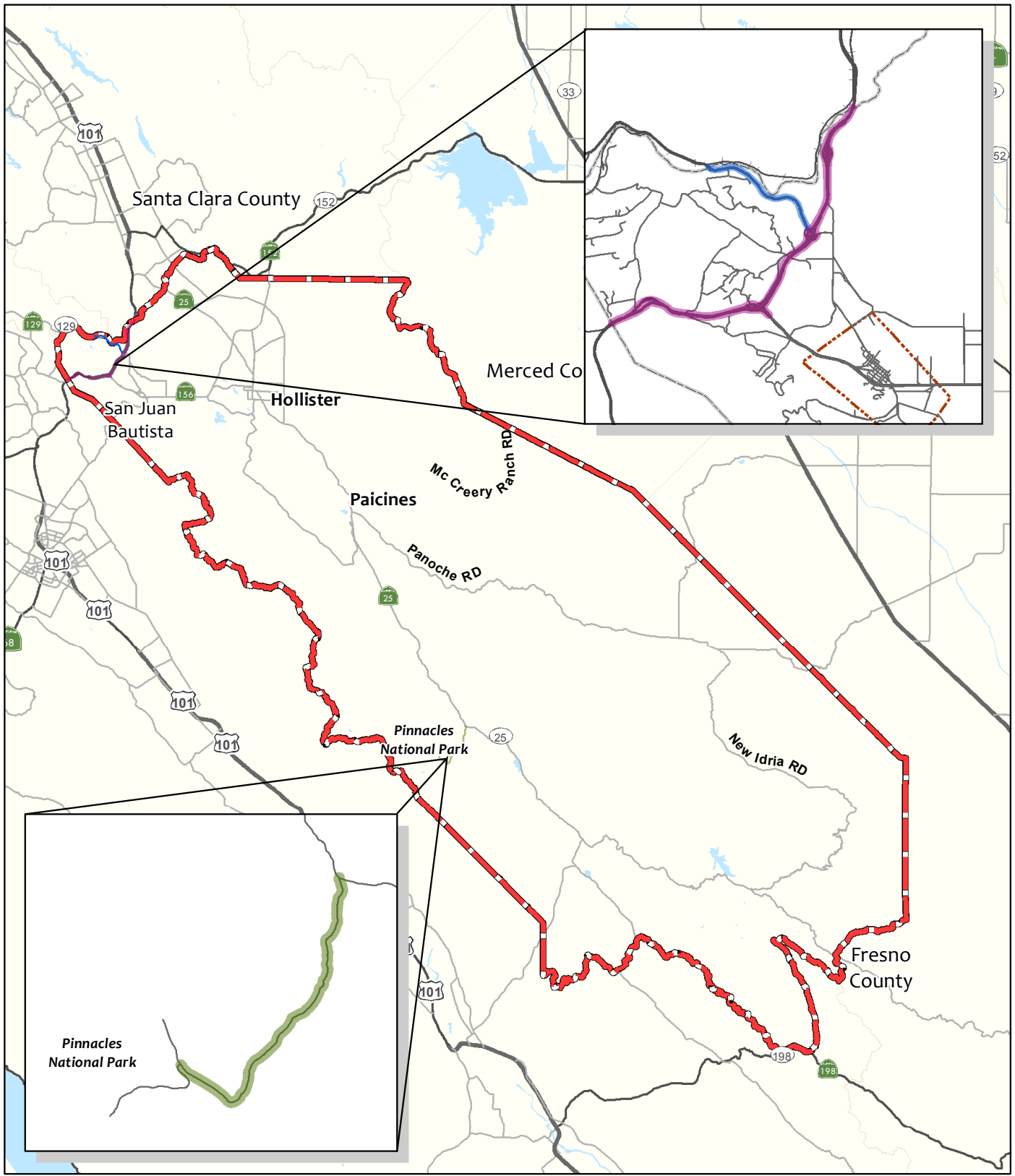
either side of U.S. Highway 101, and land within 340 feet on either side of State Route 129 and State Route 146. Therefore, scenic resources within 400 feet of U.S. Highway 101 and within 340 feet of State Route 129 and State Route 146 would be protected from visual impacts (See [Figure 5-2](#)). The SH District also provides a setback for potential development, the distance of which reduces the apparent heights of buildings and other potential visual obstructions to the foothills views of the Gabilan and Diablo ranges, among other visual resources. Goal LU-7 additionally requires screening considerations of certain buildings and site features to minimize impacts to views as seen by motorists.

Aesthetic impacts associated with the implementation of the 2035 General Plan may result in the diminished integrity of views of cultivated croplands, rangelands, rolling hills, valleys, hillsides, and open spaces beyond the County's two cities. Development may alter distant views of the ridgelines of the Diablo and Gabilan ranges as experienced by motorists traveling along the County-designated scenic highways and the eligible state scenic highways. Development may also affect existing and future residents; they may experience a heightened sensitivity to potential visual changes to the existing open grasslands, the agricultural landscape, foothill views of the Diablo and Gabilan ranges, and the distinguishing characteristics of the rural scenery as seen from the County's scenic corridors.

Summarily, as set forth in [Table 5-1](#), implementation of various policies in several elements of the 2035 San Benito General Plan would reduce potential adverse visual effects within areas visible from scenic roadways and corridors, particularly by enacting the following goals and their supporting policies.

In the Land Use Element, Goal LU-1 and the policies that support it would maintain San Benito County's rural character while also providing areas for needed future growth. Further, according to the proposed 2035 San Benito County Land Use Diagram, the development within the unincorporated County would occur along the northeastern end of the Hollister city limits and east of Fairview Road towards the eastern end of Hollister and/or in the New Community Study Areas. None of these areas proposed for development would be visible to travelers along scenic corridors.

Goal LU-4 would provide incentives for clustered residential development, which would direct growth away from known scenic resources, such as agricultural lands, open space, and other natural resources. Goal LU-7 would avoid impacts to valuable scenic resources visible from eligible state scenic highways or County-designated scenic highways by setting the intention to preserve the County's rural character. Goal LU-8 would provide for large scale growth in the New Community Study Areas which have been located to not be visible to travelers along scenic corridors and away from prime agricultural lands. Further, development in the New Community Study Areas potentially minimizes impact to the historic character of Hollister and San Juan Bautista by focusing growth in distinctly separate locations.



 Not to scale.  
  U.S. Hwy 101  
  State Route 129  
  State Route 146  
  San Benito County

Figure 5-2

# Scenic Highway Districts



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The Economic Development Element contains Goal ED-1 to sustain the long-term economic well-being of the County by promoting economic sustainability. This goal and its supporting policy would lead to planned and orderly growth as envisioned on the San Benito County Land Use Diagram and its associated preservation of scenic resources visible from state scenic highways.

The Circulation Element contains several policies that ensure existing and new roadways avoid impacts, as feasible, to the County's visual character, including policies for roadway improvements to conform to existing landforms, to include landscaping and/or other treatments to preserve the rural aesthetic, and to minimize the visual impacts that could potentially arise from grading on hillsides. Specific policies are included to ensure roadway improvements conform to the existing landforms and topography, include landscape treatments, minimize cut and fill, avoid exceeding a 15 percent grade, and prevent the siting new roadways in visually sensitive areas.

The Public Facilities and Services Element contains Goal PFS-9 to facilitate the orderly and appropriate development and expansion of telecommunications facilities. This goal and its supporting policies would ensure the careful siting and design of telecommunication facilities that minimizes the visibility of its infrastructure, such as telephone poles and wireless towers, reducing impacts to scenic resources seen from eligible state scenic highways.

The Natural and Cultural Resources Element also contains numerous goals and policies designed to protect visual resources seen within scenic corridors. Goal NCR-1 would preserve open space lands that provide wildlife habitat and conserve natural and visual resources. The policies that support NCR-1 ensure that the existing natural topography, rural and agricultural landscapes, and open space lands are protected and not converted to developed uses. Goal NCR-7 would ensure the protection and preservation of cultural and historical resources, minimizing the effects on scenic resources along eligible state and County-recognized scenic highways.

Also, the Natural and Cultural Resources Element includes a specific goal and supporting policies intended to protect scenic corridors, including County-designated scenic highways (SH District) and eligible state designated scenic highways. Goal NCR-8 would preserve the attractive visual qualities of scenic vistas and corridors in the County. Acting together, the policies under this goal establish a comprehensive review process for development proposed within scenic corridors, which provides better protection for valuable resources seen within these viewsheds.

While these 2035 General Plan goals and policies would reduce potential impacts to scenic resources within County-designated scenic highways and other corridors, development anticipated under the 2035 General Plan could still partially or completely block views of nearby scenic resources, resulting in permanent changes to the scenic views visible from scenic

corridors. Residential and commercial development would occur within various scenic corridor segments along State Route 129 and U.S. Highway 101, both County-designated scenic highways. Further, State Routes 156 and 25, both eligible state-designated scenic highways, would experience urban development along the edges of the highways, specifically towards the northern and southern ends of State Route 25 near Hollister and along State Route 156 between the cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista.

According to the proposed 2035 San Benito County Land Use Diagram, the development within the unincorporated County would occur along the northeastern end of the Hollister city limits and east of Fairview Road towards the eastern end of Hollister and/or in the New Community Study Area. None of these areas proposed for development would be visible to travelers along scenic corridors. For each of the development areas near scenic corridors (e.g., commercial nodes along State Route 156), the above-outlined policies would ensure that general design criteria, building setback standards, open space buffers, and landscaping improvements are in place. These policies would also ensure that a thorough County review of development projects occurs. Such criteria and review processes would lessen impacts to scenic resources visible along important scenic corridors. Although the design guidelines are general in scope and do not prescribe strict design concepts or architectural styles, they seek to retain the existing visual rural character of the County. The guidelines also establish vegetative screening requirements to maintain scenic views and block unsightly views for travelers along highways. Additionally, development and telecommunication infrastructure that may occur elsewhere within the County and be partially visible to travelers along scenic corridors would be subject to standard design review by the County (in accordance with applicable federal laws and regulations), further lessening visual impacts.

As a result, while some of the potential urban uses would occur near or adjacent to scenic corridors, they would not extend beyond the valley floor. Instead, the potential new urban uses are expected to be clustered and concentrated near the City of Hollister, situated near key commercial development nodes along the U.S. Highway 101 corridor near the Santa Clara, Monterey and Santa Cruz County lines, or in designated New Community locations. Also, based on the outlined 2035 General Plan goals and policies, each new development area would be required to maintain identifiable community boundaries and transitions between urban and rural uses by using open space buffers, installing landscaping treatments, and incorporating other screening measures to create a transition between different uses. Distinct boundaries and transitions would reduce the impacts development may have on the viewsheds seen by travelers along scenic corridors, and improve the appearances between existing agricultural lands and open space areas and new development. Distinct boundaries and transitions would also contribute to preserving the historic character of Hollister and San Juan Bautista by locating potentially incompatible heights and densities in separate locations. Each new development area would also undergo a case-by-case environmental review.



Further, goals and policies that outline roadway aesthetic improvements would help to ensure that new roadways and associated infrastructure conform to the natural topography and landforms and preserve the County's rural character. Thus, through the individual development review process, proposed urban uses would be required to blend with the surrounding open space and agricultural landscape.

Construction of urban uses adjacent to eligible state-designated scenic highways and County-designated scenic highways could also result in temporary changes in visual conditions. Temporary changes may be due to construction activities, which can involve large types of equipment, storage and staging areas, and short-term grading and paving activities that can generate dust and fumes. Such activities would worsen the visibility of views experienced by traveling motorists and could impact nearby residents. However, the construction associated with new commercial development and single-family and multi-family residences would generally be a relatively short-term, temporary visual impact, particularly since the buildout under the General Plan is anticipated to occur in different locations throughout the County at different times over a fairly long time horizon.. Further, the long-term permanent development of areas such as those that would require a specific plan, would need to be properly screened through landscaping treatments and other improvements. Similarly, long-term permanent development related to scattered parcel splits on five-acre lots designated for agricultural use would also be required to be properly screened through vegetation and landscaping measures, and must satisfy any design review conditions prior to approval of a tentative map or a building permit.

Therefore, because there are no state-designated scenic highways within the County, and implementation of the 2035 General Plan policies, including specific open space measures, design criteria, setback standards, buffering techniques, roadway aesthetics, and landscaping improvements would minimize the effects of urbanization on visual resources within all eligible state-designated scenic highways, County-designated scenic highways, and other County-recognized scenic corridors, impacts to important scenic corridors would be less than significant.

***Impact AES-3: Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings (I.c).***

**Significance of Impact:** Less than significant with mitigation.

Implementation of the proposed 2035 General Plan would lead to urban development and other activities that could substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of unincorporated County and its surroundings. The 2035 General Plan would set a framework of goals and policies that aims to balance preservation of the agricultural, open space and rural vistas with planned development, and ensure that new development protects the visual character of San Benito County. However, development outside of designated locations and scattered

residential development, particularly within lands designated for agriculture, could degrade the surrounding rural visual character of the agricultural, rangeland, and open space uses, resulting in a potentially significant impact.

The existing visual character of San Benito County is influenced by the quality of both its natural and man-made features. Important vistas within San Benito County that define its visual character include agricultural croplands, rangelands, rolling hills, open spaces, historic towns and mining sites, and views of the Diablo and Gabilan ranges to the east and west of the County. These agricultural and rangeland areas constitute more than 75 percent of the County's total land area. Also, the County's topography includes valleys and rolling hills, particularly in the northern portion of the County near the cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, where most of the County's population dwells. Compared to development trends in neighboring counties, such as Santa Clara and Monterey, San Benito County has experienced relatively little urban development. Instead, it has retained most of its historic and rural character.

Implementation of the 2035 General Plan envisions a significant amount of urban growth and development in the County's unincorporated fringe areas, areas designated for residential uses, areas designated for commercial uses, and potentially in New Community Study Areas. The land uses and policies proposed under the 2035 General Plan would influence the future visual character and visual quality of the expanding residential areas, new communities, and commercial areas in unincorporated County. Growth and development associated with implementation of the 2035 General Plan would impact the County's visual character.

Even if future urban development is planned and designed consistent with the proposed 2035 General Plan, it would alter the visual character and quality of the County through changes in the types of new housing, commercial centers, or other non-residential uses and the conversion of agricultural and open space resources to urban uses. This would occur primarily due to changes in land use. Open grasslands and other vegetation and existing rangeland uses may be removed to accommodate grading and infrastructure development for new development and roadways. Some natural topography may be modified due to grading for building pads, driveways, and roadways. Also, rock outcroppings and other natural features may become obscured or removed.

Such effects are expected to occur within new communities designated for growth, such as residential development plan areas and specific plan areas. For example, some proposed development areas may contain varying topography, which, if altered, may result in changes to important visual character. Visual effects also may occur in scattered locations in rural areas of the County, such as the agricultural and residential areas to the immediate northeast and east of the City of Hollister.

The County's visual character also would be affected by changes in the form, scale, dominance, and appearance of new development. The changes in the visual environment would be governed

by how the 2035 General Plan land use designations, goals, and policies protect existing dominant County natural and man-made features. Changes would also be affected by how the 2035 General Plan influences the dominance, scale, diversity, contrast, and continuity of future man-made features that would define its visual character. During public outreach efforts for the 2035 General Plan, the community identified the importance of agricultural and open space vistas, and placed a high aesthetic value on the contribution of these land uses to the rural character of the County. The Land Use Element seeks to maintain the County's rural character by maintaining defined boundaries for community areas and limiting development on hillsides. The Natural and Cultural Resource Element also contains goals and policies that address the management and protection of the County's existing visual character. Selected goals and policies under the Land Use, Economic Development, Circulation, Public Facilities and Services, Natural Resources, and Health and Safety Elements seek to achieve a balance between allowing new development and preserving the County's agricultural lands and rural character. [Table 5-1](#) includes selected goals and policies from various elements of the 2035 General Plan that communicate the County's intention to maintain a balance between urban development and protection of the visual character of the County.

[Table 5-1](#) summarizes the various goals and policies in several elements of the 2035 San Benito General Plan that would reduce potential adverse visual effects. As noted on that table, the Land Use Element contains several goals and policies that seek to retain the County's rural character, protect the agricultural industry and its valuable accompanying landscapes, encourage clustered residential development to protect existing visual character, provide financial incentives for land conservation, and preserve the County's historic identity. The goals and policies designed to protect natural resources, open space areas, and ridgelines minimize visual character impacts by limiting development in these areas. Goal LU-1 states the goal of the County is to protect the County's rural character and natural beauty. Because agricultural lands are considered valuable visual resources that define the County's rural character, Goal LU-3 ensures the long-term protection of the agricultural industry and underlying agricultural lands.

Goal LU-4 encourages incentives for clustered residential plans as a means to protect valuable natural resources. Goal LU-5 promotes regional thoroughfare development to be compatible with surrounding lands uses and respect the scenic character of the County. Various other goals and policies focus on finding ways to protect the County's historical resources through design criteria requirements, as outlined under Goal LU-7 and its supporting policies. Those policies require new development to recognize the local architectural and historical context, ensure coordination with property owners, neighborhood associations, and preservation groups, promote adaptive reuse of historic structures, and require new development in historical areas to be compatible with existing historic structures. Other policies under Goal LU-7 promote attractive neighborhoods by minimizing unsightly views of infrastructure. Goal LU-8 and its

supporting policies encourage new development in the unincorporated parts of San Benito County to occur in a manner that protects and enhances the County's visual character.

Planned development and the New Community Study Areas are proposed to accommodate growth while preserving the rural landscape. Projects in these areas will contain clustered and compact mixed use neighborhoods that have distinct boundaries with the adjacent natural or agricultural landscape. This combination of clustered neighborhoods with distinct boundaries to natural or agricultural lands protects the visual character of the existing rural landscape. Similarly, the Wine/Hospitality Overlay Areas are proposed to accommodate certain growth while preserving the rural landscape. Development in these areas will contain limited and compact uses that have distinct boundaries with the adjacent natural or agricultural landscape, which will protect the visual character of the existing rural landscape.

The Economic Development Element contains various protective goals and policies related to the County's quality of life and to tourism that focus on protecting open space, riparian corridors, and heritage resources, which also maintain the County's visual character. Goal ED-1 would sustain the long-term economic well-being of the County, which would involve preserving vistas that define the County's visual character. Goal ED-5 supports expanded tourism to highlight the County as a vacation destination. Several supporting policies under this goal focus on enhancing recreational opportunities, improving the County's wayfinding and signage, and highlighting the County's heritage sites.

The Circulation Element contains several policies that ensure existing and new roadways avoid impacts to the County's visual character. Specific policies are included to ensure roadway improvements conform to the existing landforms and topography, include landscape treatments, minimize cut and fill, avoid exceeding a 15 percent grade, and prevent the siting of new roadways in visually prominent areas.

The Public Facilities and Services Element contains Goal PFS-9 to minimize visual impacts associated with telecommunication infrastructure, such as telephone lines and wireless towers. Policies supporting this goal aim to ensure careful siting and design for communication facilities, in order to reduce their visibility.

The Natural and Cultural Resources Element contains similar protective policies that would prevent impacts to the visual character and quality of San Benito County's natural and man-made features. Goal NCR-1 would protect the visual character of the County by enhancing valuable open space lands. Goal NCR-2 protects and enhances wildlife communities through a comprehensive approach that conserves, maintains, and restores important habitat areas, which are also recognized visual resources. Goal NCR-4 would help to ensure waterways remain unpolluted and safe for recreational purposes and minimizes visual impacts that could be associated with degraded waterways. Goal NCR-8 states the County intends to enhance and

preserve the attractive visual qualities of scenic vistas and corridors in the County, including policies that provide for scenic corridor protections, sign regulations, grading restrictions in scenic corridors, architectural review, and the review of development proposals to ensure that the obstruction of views is minimized. These policies also require all development proposals contain a reasonable and attractive appearance from highways and require the County to regulate building height and setbacks to protect visual character. Site specific analysis of impacts to aesthetic and visual resources would be required for particular development proposals that may be considered in the future, including in the specific plan process required for development within the New Community Study Areas.

In the Health and Safety Element, Goal HS-2 would reduce impacts to visual resources by minimizing damage to property, including open space, agricultural lands, historic buildings and structures, cultural resources, and riparian areas that are recognized as important scenic resources that add to the County's visual character. Goal HS-5 would reduce adverse effects on air quality in the County, thereby improving the County's visibility, health and well-being, quality of life, and long-range views of the surrounding mountain ranges, as further described in Chapter 7.

While many goals and policies in the proposed 2035 General Plan are intended to preserve agricultural and open spaces, urban development pursuant to the 2035 General Plan would continue to result in adverse visual effects.

Specifically, much of the County's rural agricultural land would be exposed to rural development due to subdivision activity on many of the five-acre parcels that are scattered throughout the northern portion of the County. The development of these existing lots, as well as future subdivision as permitted by the 2035 General Plan, could result in the construction of ranchettes at scattered locations within agricultural lands. This type of scattered development has the potential to fragment the agricultural landscape and, in turn, adversely impact visual resources.

Scattered development in undesignated areas is likely to lack specific new community or planned development guidelines and design criteria, compared to larger-scale master-planned communities, which contain design guidelines. Instead, the design requirements for single-family residences and other isolated structures are determined according to San Benito County development standards and on a case-by-case basis. While County development standards would help to reduce visual impacts associated with infrastructure (Chapter 23.25, Design Requirements), developments on hillsides and ridgelines (Chapter 25.29 Article II, Hillside Development Regulations), and oak woodland (Chapter 19.33, Management and Conservation of Woodlands), future development would likely continue to contrast with and fragment the surrounding open spaces and agricultural aesthetic character.

Even with the implementation of the proposed goals and policies cited above, because one of the primary purposes of the 2035 General Plan is to accommodate future urban development needs, the resulting urbanization, specifically development that occurs at scattered locations in rural areas because of its potential visibility and lack of an urban context, would inevitably result in substantial and potentially degrading changes to the visual character of the County. Visual changes would be most apparent where scattered development occurs in agricultural areas, particularly where new residential subdivisions would fragment the existing agricultural landscape. Over time, even though individual projects would be evaluated by the County on a case-by-case basis and adhere to County standards, the development would result in potentially significant impacts. Therefore, the 2035 General Plan's impact on the visual character of the County would be considered potentially significant.

**Mitigation Measures:**

*AES-3a. Amend the following policy in the 2035 General Plan Natural and Cultural Resources Element:*

*Policy NCR-8.9: Hillside and Ridgeline Protection*

*The County shall use design review for development on hillsides and within Scenic Corridors to protect the hillsides and ridgelines that are a unique scenic resource in the County. The County shall prohibit development within 100 vertical feet of any ridgeline unless there are no site development alternatives.*

*AES-3b. Add the following policies to the 2035 General Plan Natural and Cultural Resources Element:*

*Policy NCR-8.11: Landscaping in Areas Designated for Agriculture or Rural Land Uses*

*The County shall ensure that new development and structures, within areas that are not regulated by a Specific Plan, are screened and/or developed in a manner to appear similar to existing agricultural, rural, or low intensity uses in the vicinity.*

*Policy NCR-8.12: Landscaping in New Community Study Areas and Wine/Hospitality Priority Areas*

*To the greatest extent feasible, the County shall require that new development within these areas be screened from existing agricultural, rural, or low-intensity uses in the vicinity by using existing topography and vegetative screening.*

Because Mitigation Measure AES-3 would apply only to developed uses and activities, such as urban development near agricultural and open space lands, scattered residential development in agricultural areas, and development within New Community Study Areas and Wine/Hospitality Priority areas, there would be no additional impacts beyond those identified in Chapters 5 through 22 of this RDEIR.

Because implementation of Mitigation Measure AES-3 would require new development to appear complementary to existing rural or low intensity land uses by requiring the use of vegetative screening and topography and that development be appropriate to the setting either by appearing similar to existing uses in the vicinity or, in the New Community Study Areas, to be master planned for overall design coherence and regulated by a specific plan, this impact would be less than significant with mitigation.

***Impact AES-4: Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the County. (I.d)***

**Significance of Impact:** Significant and unavoidable.

Implementation of the proposed 2035 General Plan would lead to urban development and other activities that could create new sources of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day and nighttime views in the County. The San Benito County (SBC) Code contains ordinances regulating development lighting, signage lighting, glare from commercial uses, and prohibited materials affecting air travel; however, the 2035 General Plan does not contain a specific goal or policy to protect nighttime dark skies and to reduce the creation of new sources of light and glare through good lighting practice.

San Benito County is recognized as having ideal topographic and atmospheric conditions uniquely suited for astronomical observation. The County's rural character, relatively limited development, varying elevations, and location provide exceptional nighttime views and dark skies. Star gazing opportunities are provided at the Fremont Peak State Park and at Pinnacles National Park; an astronomical observatory has also been established in Fremont Peak State Park. In order to maintain these nighttime visual conditions, the County approved provisions to protect and preserve the nighttime sky by regulating outdoor lighting, particularly lighting that would interfere with astronomical observations and the enjoyment of the night sky. The County provisions also help to maintain nighttime safety and security.

Increased outdoor lighting could result in light pollution that would increase impacts on light-sensitive areas, including parks, such as Fremont Peak State Park and Pinnacles National Park. To protect these light-sensitive park areas, the existing County provisions contain three lighting zones. Because the adverse effects of outdoor lighting on light pollution is dependent on the distance from the light sources to sensitive uses, such as park areas, the lighting zones allow increasing flexibility in the uses of outdoor lighting based on the distance each zone is from the light-sensitive parks. The first lighting zone extends approximately five miles from the centers of Fremont Peak State Park and Pinnacles National Park, the second lighting zone extends eight miles from the outer boundary of the first zone, and the third zone includes all remaining land in the County. In general, growth allowed under the 2035 General Plan is directed to less impactful zones.

The development proposed under the 2035 General Plan would increase the amount of light and glare in the County through the introduction of both interior and exterior lighting. The construction of new residences would contain new sources of interior lighting and would likely include installation of exterior lighting. Existing sources of light and glare primarily occur within the County's two incorporated cities, each city's sphere of influence, and within land uses designated for residential and commercial uses. It is expected that the new sources of light and glare would be associated with the development of the urban land uses designated in the 2035 General Plan Land Use Diagram, many of which would continue to occur in existing urbanized areas. However, some new development may occur along the fringes of the two incorporated cities, particularly to the northeast, east, and southwest of the City of Hollister. New sources of light and glare also would occur because of scattered residential growth in agricultural areas. Growth is also likely to occur at commercial centers, some of which would be expanded outside the cities' spheres of influence, increasing the amount of light and glare that occurs outside existing urban boundaries. Because the majority of the County consists primarily of agricultural uses or rangeland areas that currently produce little or no light and glare, it is expected that new sources of light and glare at such locations would result in nighttime light pollution.

The 2035 General Plan does not contain a specific goal or policy intended to reduce impacts related to light pollution. However, as discussed in Section 5.1.2 above, the California Building Code regulates lighting intensity, efficiency, and shielding. It requires that lighting fixtures be designed to minimize light pollution and glare. Further, the SBC Code contains several sections regulating lighting impacts including: Chapter 19.31 encourages lighting practices and systems that will minimize light pollution, glare, and light trespass, and conserve energy while maintaining nighttime safety; Chapter 19.03 prohibits uses resulting in glare that could impair pilot visibility; and Chapter 25.29 requires that lighting for signs not produce a glare.

However, new development impacts would still have the potential to substantially increase the amount of nighttime light and glare in the County, permanently diminishing nighttime views of the sky. Light and glare also adversely affect light-sensitive parks, rural residential and agricultural uses, and recreation and open space uses. The following mitigation measure would serve to support the continued enforcement of County regulations to protect against nighttime light and glare impacts.

### **Mitigation Measure:**

*AES-4. Add the following goal and policy to the 2035 General Plan Natural and Cultural Resources Element:*

*Goal NCR-9: Nighttime Dark Skies*



*The County shall promote the preservation of dark skies necessary for nighttime astronomical viewing at local observatories.*

*Policy NCR-9.1: Light Pollution Reduction*

*The County shall continue to enforce the development lighting ordinance (SBC Code Chapter 19.13) and restrict outdoor lighting and glare from development projects in order to ensure good lighting practices, minimize nighttime light impacts, and preserve quality views of the night sky. The ordinance shall continue to recognize lighting zones and contain standards to avoid light trespass, particularly from developed uses, to sensitive uses, such as the areas surrounding Fremont Peak State Park and Pinnacles National Park.*

Because Mitigation Measure AES-4 would apply only to developed uses and activities, such as urban development near agricultural and open space lands, scattered residential development in agricultural areas, and development within New Community Study Areas and Wine/Hospitality Priority areas, there would be no additional impacts beyond those identified in Chapters 5 through 22 of this RDEIR.

The implementation of Mitigation Measure AES-4 would establish a goal and policy in the 2035 General Plan to promote the preservation of dark skies and to reduce the potential for nighttime light pollution related to new sources of lighting and spillover light and glare, especially with respect to sensitive uses related to astronomical observatories, in keeping with current County regulations. However, because interior and exterior lighting due to urban development outside of existing urban boundaries and from scattered residential development in agricultural areas could still contribute to light pollution, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

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