3.5 Visual Resources

This supplemental environmental impact report (SEIR) addresses proposed modifications to the B.F. Dam Sisk Safety of Dams Modification Project, which was previously evaluated in the B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (2019 EIS/EIR). The project addressed in the 2019 EIS/EIR is referred to herein as the Approved Project; the Approved Project with proposed modifications identified since certification of the 2019 EIS/EIR is referred to herein as the Modified Project.

This section describes the existing visual conditions of the Modified Project site and vicinity, identifies associated regulatory requirements, evaluates potential impacts, and identifies any applicable mitigation measures related to implementation of the Modified Project.

3.5.1 Existing Conditions

3.5.1.1 Visual Resources Overview

San Luis Reservoir and O'Neill Forebay are near the boundary of the Great Valley (San Joaquin Valley portion) and the Coast Ranges geomorphic provinces (CGS 2002). As a result, the landscape includes relatively flat terrain that abuts rolling hillsides and mountainous topography on the west. The area around San Luis Reservoir is dominated by agricultural land uses to the east and publicly owned parkland to the west that provide open, scenic vistas of undeveloped land and open water. These scenic qualities are enhanced by the surrounding undeveloped landscape consisting of "open grassland, expansive vistas of the rolling terrain and the adjacent Diablo range" (Reclamation and CDPR 2013).

Authorized through Public Law 89-72, Federal Water Projects Recreation Act, as amended, a Managing Partner Agreement was signed between the Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Parks and Recreation for management of San Luis Reservoir and related facilities for recreation and fish and wildlife benefits. The San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area (SRA) spans approximately 27,000 acres of federal lands and includes major facilities such as San Luis Reservoir, O'Neill Forebay, and Los Banos Reservoir (Reclamation and CDPR 2013). The San Luis Reservoir SRA contains five use areas (areas designated as major public recreational facilities)—Basalt, Dinosaur Point, Los Banos Creek, Medeiros, and San Luis Creek—and one minor use area for off-highway-vehicle use. The primary activities at each use area vary, but collectively, the San Luis Reservoir SRA provides opportunities for boating, swimming, windsurfing, camping, and fishing (Reclamation and CDPR 2013).

Pacheco State Park lies directly west of the San Luis Reservoir SRA. The park is only partially open to the public for day use recreation, such as hiking and bicycling. Pacheco State Park offers an approximately 25-mile-long trail system, including 15 designated trails. The remainder of the park is used for equestrian activities, cattle grazing, and a wind turbine farm that generates energy for 3,500 homes.

San Luis Reservoir is considered to provide unusual, unique, or outstanding scenic quality, and O'Neill Forebay has elements that provide both unusual and unique quality and an ordinary or common scenic quality. Of the major viewer groups at the reservoir and reservoir facilities, recreationists at San Luis Reservoir have high visual sensitivity. State Route (SR) 152 is a state-designated scenic highway within Merced County, from the Santa Clara

County line to the junction with Interstate (I) 5 (Caltrans 2019). Views from this route can be considered like those available from the San Luis Reservoir SRA.

3.5.1.2 Scenic Vistas

As stated in the San Luis Reservoir SRA Resource Management Plan/General Plan (San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP), a strong characteristic of the local area is the open scenic vistas of undeveloped land and open water. Specifically, the scenic qualities are represented by the surrounding undeveloped landscape, open grassland, and expansive vistas of the rolling terrain and the adjacent Diablo Range. Views of Modified Project component areas (e.g., Borrow Areas 6 and 12 and San Luis Creek Day Use Area) are primarily visible from SR-152 generally from Jasper Sears Road west to the view of O'Neill Forebay.

Scenic attractiveness is an assessment tool used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service Scenic Management System. This assessment tool was used in the 2019 EIS/EIR, so the analysis herein also relies on this tool to classify the visual resources in and scenic quality of the area. The three classes of scenic attractiveness are as follows:

- Class A, Distinctive: Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide unusual, unique, or outstanding scenic quality. These landscapes have strong positive attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance.
- **Class B, Typical:** Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide ordinary or common scenic quality. These landscapes have generally positive, yet common, attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance. Normally they would form the basic matrix within the ecological unit.
- **Class C, Indistinctive:** Areas where landform, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural land use have low scenic quality. Often water and rockform of any consequence are missing in class C landscapes. These landscapes have weak or missing attributes of variety, unity, vividness, mystery, intactness, order, harmony, uniqueness, pattern, and balance.

According to the 2019 EIS/EIR, resources visible from SR-152 near San Luis Reservoir are classified for scenic attractiveness as Class A visual resources.

3.5.1.3 Scenic Highways

Officially designated state scenic highways in the Modified Project area are SR-152 from the Santa Clara County line to the junction with I-5 (through the Modified Project area), and I-5 from the junction with SR-152 to the Stanislaus County line (Caltrans 2019).

SR-152 passes through Upper Cottonwood Wildlife Area and around the northern end of San Luis Reservoir. As it curves around through the Lower Cottonwood Wildlife Area toward O'Neill Forebay and its intersection with I-5, SR-152 passes within 0.1 miles of the Romero Overlook and visitor center. Access to the overlook and visitor center is solely available via SR-152. I-5 is located approximately 1.6 miles east of O'Neill Forebay and 4.7 miles northeast of B.F. Sisk Dam.

3.5.1.4 Visual Character and Quality

An overview of the area landscape is provided in Section 3.5.1.1, Visual Resources Overview. The following discussion pertains to the existing visual character and quality of components of the Modified Project that are the focus of this SEIR. In addition to a discussion of visual character, groups of people provided views to the new impact areas are identified, and the scenic attractiveness of areas (as previously determined in the 2019 EIS/EIR) are disclosed. Each of the new impact areas discussed below are within the boundary of the San Luis Reservoir SRA.

Proposed Campground Area

The 40-acre proposed campground area is located along the northwestern shoreline of O'Neill Forebay. Due to the inclusion of a long, mounded hill in the southwest corner, the area features variable terrain that slopes from west to east toward O'Neill Forebay. Terrain ranges in height from 385 feet in the southwest corner to approximately 220 feet in the northeast corner at the shoreline. The long-mounded hill features a narrow dirt access road that extends from the main paved access road to a cylindrical water tank. In addition to bisecting the proposed campground area, the paved road provides access to the 53 developed sites at San Luis Creek Campground. With the exception of the dirt access road, water tank, paved access road, and a paved path that parallels the shoreline (San Luis Creek Accessible Trail), the 40-acre campground area is undeveloped and covered with grasslands and, occasionally, small rock outcrops on high-elevation terrain west of the paved access road.

According to the 2019 EIS/EIR, views from areas surrounding San Luis Reservoir, including campgrounds and day use areas, can be classified as Class A visual resources. Due to its proximity to the San Luis Creek Campground and San Luis Creek Day Use Area, the proposed campground area is considered to display Class A scenic attractiveness.

Photos illustrating the existing visual character of the proposed campground area are included in Figure 3.5-1, Existing Visual Character: Proposed Campground Area.

San Luis Creek Day Use Area (Improvement Area)

The San Luis Creek Day Use Area is a developed facility located along the western shoreline of O'Neill Forebay, approximately 0.8 miles north of SR-152. Although uncommon in the surrounding landscape, the day use area (except for beach areas) is dotted with trees. Covered picnic facilities are scattered throughout the day use area, and additional facilities/recreational opportunities include a boat launch, restrooms, swimming, and a group campground. Surface parking lots are in the southern portion of the day use area (lots are planted with mature trees), and paved paths wind through the area and provide connectivity to the northerly group campground.

Like the proposed campground area, the San Luis Creek Day Use Area is considered to display Class A scenic attractiveness.

Borrow Areas 12 and 14

Borrow Area 12 is an area of approximately 28 acres that includes a grassland-covered hill east of B.F. Sisk Dam's south valley section that is approximately 100 feet higher than the surrounding lower-lying area. The highpoint of the hill is situated 685 feet east of Basalt Road and 0.60 miles south of SR-152. The top of the hill is flat, having been used in the past as a borrow area for initial construction of B.F. Sisk Dam, with two unpaved

roads leading to the top from the south. In addition to SR-152 and Basalt Road motorists, Gonzaga Road motorists are provided views to the wide mounded landform of Borrow Area 12.

Borrow Area 14 is an approximately 200-acre area south of Borrow Area 12 situated around four low, east-west mounded hills covered with seasonally gold grasslands. The northernmost hill (i.e., hill nearest SR-152) is the smallest in terms of height and bulk, and at its highpoint is approximately 50 to 70 feet higher in elevation than lands to the west. A wood utility pole supporting a distribution line is located downslope and west of the hill's highpoint. The long, mounded hills to the south feature a narrow, unimproved road leading to the top, with a utility pole installed downslope to the west. An east-west utility line is aligned in the topographical low point/saddle between Borrow Area 14 hillsides and connects Basalt Hill Quarry to the southwest; California Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Reclamation, and California Department of Water Resources administrative facilities near the Gianelli Pumping-Generating Plant (Gianelli Plant) to the northwest; and Kampgrounds of America (KOA) Los Banos West/I-5 campground to the northeast (28485 Gonzaga Road in Los Banos; approximately 0.50 miles east of the SR-33/SR-152 junction).

Due to the presence of existing development and the relatively common frequency of grassland-covered hills in the area, Borrow Areas 12 and 14 are considered to display Class B scenic attractiveness.

Photos illustrating the existing visual character of Borrow Areas 12 and 14 are included in Figure 3.5-2, Existing Visual Character: Borrow Areas 12 and 14.

Minor Additions to Contractor Work Area

As discussed in Chapter 2, Project Description, the Modified Project includes minor expansion of work areas located downstream of the dam that were not included or addressed in the 2019 EIS/EIR (see Figures 2-4A and 2-4B, Modified Project Detail, in Chapter 2). These additional staging and stockpiling areas encompass a portion of the slope located to the immediate west of the Gianelli Plant, farther downstream near the dam's right abutment, west of the dam's right abutment on exposed shoreline, and on previously disturbed hillsides and valley lands near Basalt Hill Borrow Area.

Regarding the hillsides west of the Gianelli Plant, the landscape has been modified by previous disturbance. Specifically, the hillside was previously cut to accommodate pumping station and spillway conduit construction; however, the east-facing slope is covered with low, seasonally gold grasses and is visually compatible with unaltered hillsides in the surrounding area. In addition, dark horizontal lines created by access roads for construction traverse the hillside and are visible from SR-152.

Farther downstream areas included in the Modified Project generally comprise two low hills that abut the dam's right abutment. As viewed from Basalt Road (approximately 400 feet to the east), the work areas/low hills display a smooth, undulating line and are bisected by a narrow, unimproved access road. Scattered trees are in the topographical saddle between the highpoint of the hills. The low hills are primarily visible from Basalt Road and have brief visibility from SR-152 near Basalt Road.

Fleeting views of exposed shoreline west of the dam's right abutment are available from Basalt Road near the access road to Basalt Campground. Where visible from Basalt Road, the exposed shoreline is approximately 0.5 miles away and appears as a patch of tan and green located between the chalky white of the right abutment to the east and waters of San Luis Reservoir to the west.

Lastly, added contractor work areas near Basalt Hill Borrow Area are located approximately 1.2 miles west of Basalt Campground and comprise a low point in the landscape surrounded by hills to the west, south, and east. Visible from

Basalt Road (located 375 feet away), views to the previously disturbed area that is traversed by access roads, terrain cuts, and color contrast due to the exposure of underlying grey colored soils are available to motorists on the approach to the south boat launch and picnic area along the southeastern shoreline of San Luis Reservoir.

The additions to contractor work areas display Class A and B scenic attractiveness. Specifically, hillsides visible in west-oriented views from SR-152 have Class A scenic attractiveness, and more downstream areas primarily visible from Basalt Road typically display Class B scenic attractiveness.

Additional Construction Assumptions

Construction assumptions included in the Modified Project are addressed within the context of the individual components described above. As noted in Chapter 2, additional construction assumptions primarily consist of the anticipated construction timeframe and personnel for the new campground and day use area improvements (i.e., up to 18 months with up to 20 construction personnel working standard 8-hour dayshifts). These additional construction assumptions have no bearing on visual resources.

3.5.1.5 Light and Glare

Primary sources of light and glare in the area consist of outdoor lighting fixtures installed at California Department of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Reclamation, and California Department of Water Resources administrative buildings, and outdoor lighting fixtures installed at the Gianelli Plant. These facilities are clustered south of SR-152 and west of Basalt Road, near the dam's berm at the north valley section. Headlights from vehicles on SR-152 are also a source of light and glare during evening and nighttime hours. However, because these lighting sources are mobile and transient, they are not considered prominent sources of light and glare in the Modified Project area.

3.5.2 Relevant Plans, Policies, and Ordinances

3.2.2.1 Federal

There are no federal plans, policies, or ordinances related to visual resources that are relevant to the Modified Project.

3.2.2.2 State

California Scenic Highway Program

Created by the Legislature in 1963, the purpose of the state's Scenic Highway Program is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors through conservation. State laws governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Sections 260 through 263. The Scenic Highway Program includes a list of highways that have been officially designated as scenic by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) (official designation is considered if an acceptable Corridor Protection Program has been adopted at the local level) or are eligible state scenic highways. Two historic parkways (Arroyo Seco Parkway in Pasadena and SR-163 in San Diego) are also included in the Scenic Highway Program.

There are two officially designated state scenic highways in Merced County: SR-152 and I-5. SR-152 is a designated state scenic highway from the junction of I-5 west to the Santa Clara County line (approximately 13.8 miles) (Caltrans 2019). I-5 is a designated state scenic highway from SR-152 north to the Stanislaus County line (approximately 14.9 miles).

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area Resource Management Plan/General Plan

The San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP defines distinct geographic divisions, or management zones, within the SRA based on physical, social, and management characteristics (Reclamation and CDPR 2013). The management zones are the Administrative and Operations zone (for staff, operations, and maintenance activities), Front Country zone (for most visitor facilities, camping, and concessions), and Backcountry zone (for less-intensive recreation and with limited camping and trails).

The San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP is organized into a system of broad planning areas that include the following:

- Resource Management (RES)
- Visitor Experience, Interpretation and Education (VIS)
- Local and Regional Planning (REG)
- Infrastructure and Operations (OPS)
- Water Operations (WA)

Resource Management is further organized into categories, including Scenic/Aesthetics (RES-S). According to the San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP, "a strong characteristic of the Plan Area is the open scenic vistas of undeveloped land and open water. The scenic qualities are represented by the surrounding undeveloped landscape, open grassland, expansive vistas of the rolling terrain and the adjacent Diablo Range." Further, the San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP discusses the presence of scenic vistas as follows: "most shoreline areas allow for uninterrupted views of the open water from the three reservoirs" and "in some cases, such as at Los Banos Creek Reservoir, the views from the north and south plateaus provide a vista opportunity of the water and adjacent landscape."

The following scenic/aesthetics goals and guidelines are applicable to the Modified Project (Reclamation and CDPR 2013):

Resource Management (RES)

Goal RES-S1: Preserve scenic vistas that overlook open land and water through the identification and definition of significant vista points and viewsheds.

Guidelines:

- Before development of new facilities, consider the visual effect of new structures and carefully site features within an identified viewshed.
- where feasible, avoid placement of new structures or other obstructions at or near identified significant vista points and along uninterrupted shorelines and landscapes.
- Goal RES-S2: Maintain large expanses of open space free of visual and physical interruptions.

Guideline:

• Minimize, shield, or use new architectural controls in the development of new structures and reduce existing structures and other features that visually and physically fragment open space.

Goal RES-S3: Make new structures architecturally compatible with their use as recreation facilities and distinguishable from the water operations structures but in keeping with overall site character.

Guidelines:

- Identify the architectural components (style) and other contributing elements that define the recreation use areas and site character and use this information to assess consistency of new structures.
- Where feasible, ensure that the mass and scale of new structures are compatible with the setting and do not dominate the surrounding landscape.
- **Goal RES-S4:** Identify a common and unified set of site-related details and materials signage, gates, surface materials, fences, etc.) so that new facilities and infrastructure are compatible with the character of the site and are distinctive for recreation facilities.

Guidelines:

- Avoid the introduction of materials not in keeping with the local and on-site character.
- Design new details to be compatible with existing materials and finishes while creating a unified image for the Plan Area recreation facilities.
- Develop a signage and wayfinding system that incorporates guidelines and standards for signage as well as the location, distribution, and frequency of signs.
- **Goal RES-S5:** Prevent aesthetic and environmental damage from duration and intensity of lighting and fixtures.

Guidelines:

- Design and place light fixtures only as needed and in keeping with use and character. Minimize intensity by considering techniques such as low-voltage fixtures and downlighting.
- Design lighting systems and facilities that avoid light pollution on-site and off-site spills to neighboring areas.

3.5.2.3 Local

Merced Vision 2030 General Plan

As required by state law, Merced County has adopted a general plan to guide land use decisions within the county. The general plan provides goals, policies, standards, and implementation programs to guide the physical development of a county. At a minimum, the general plan must address the topics of land use, transportation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. The Merced Vision 2030 General Plan (Merced County General Plan), adopted in 2013, has established the year 2030 as the plan's time horizon. The Merced County General Plan's Natural Resources Element contains goals and policies applicable to visual resources, and according to Merced County, the rural and agricultural landscapes provide the primary scenic resources in Merced County (Merced County 2013). Relevant goals and policies from the Natural Resources Element are listed below; however, because Modified Project components would be located entirely within the boundary of San Luis

Reservoir SRA, local policies are not expressly applicable to the Modified Project. As such, the following goal and policies from the Merced County General Plan are listed for informational purposes only (Merced County 2013):

Natural Resources Element

Goal NR-4: Protect scenic resources and vistas.

- **Policy NR-4.1**: Scenic Resource Protection: Promote the preservation of agricultural land, ranch lands, and other open space areas as a means of protecting the County's scenic resources.
- Policy NR-4.2: Special Review Process for Structures Adjacent to Scenic Highways: Coordinate with Caltrans, during the review of proposed structures and activities.
- **Policy NR-4.5: Light Pollution Reduction**. Require good lighting practices, such as the use of specific light fixtures that reduce light pollution, minimize light impacts, and preserve views of the night sky.

3.5.3 Thresholds of Significance

The following significance criteria from the 2019 EIS/EIR are used for the purposes of analysis in this SEIR. These criteria, which have not changed from the 2019 EIS/EIR, are identified in Chapter 10, Visual Resources, of the 2019 EIS/EIR. A significant impact related to visual resources would occur if the Modified Project would:

- 1. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista (areas with Scenic Attractiveness Class A or Class B classifications are considered scenic vistas).
- 2. Substantially damage scenic resources including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings, within a state scenic highway corridor.
- 3. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- 4. Create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

3.5.4 Impacts Analysis

To aid in the assessment of potential impacts to visual resources, conceptual visual simulations of the Modified Project were prepared from Key Observation Points (KOPs) in the surrounding area. KOPs were preliminarily identified during a desktop review of the Modified Project area and the location of components capable of resulting in substantial visual change (i.e., proposed campground area and excavation and reclamation of Borrow Areas 12 and 14). Photographs from KOPs were taken during a site visit conducted in October 2020 when conditions were sunny and visibility was clear. For the proposed campground area, the KOP was established on the access road bisecting the proposed campground area. A conceptual campground design and layout was created using the list of campground amenities developed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation (see Chapter 2) and review of the existing layout of the San Luis Creek Campground. Similar landscaping (i.e., pine and eucalyptus trees) as planted near the San Luis Creek Campground was assumed for the proposed campground and would provide partial visual screening, buffering for adjacent campsites, and a partial wind break. Landscaping in the conceptual visual simulation is depicted at approximately 10 years of growth.

For Borrow Areas 12 and 14, KOPs were established on SR-152 and Basalt Road. SR-152 is the highest-volume roadway in the immediate area, and thus supports the highest number of potential viewers that would experience

visual change associated with excavation and reclamation activities. Basalt Road is the closest regularly travelled public road to the borrow areas, and as such, provides a relatively close view of visual change associated with excavation and reclamation activities. Alteration of terrain was depicted in the conceptual visual simulation using general information provided in Chapter 2 and in the grading plan. The visual simulations depict the post-reclamation scenario, with existing elevations lowered approximately 25 feet and resulting lines softened to preserve existing contours to the greatest extent practicable. During active mining, mobile viewers at KOPs 2 and 3 would experience the gradual visual change associated with excavation activities and the modification of terrain over an 8- to 20-year period. During this time, viewers would also observe construction equipment and vehicles in the borrow areas and straight, horizontal lines associated with excavation of the mounded landforms.

The locations of KOPs in the context of the Modified Project is depicted in Figure 3.5-3, Key Observation Points. Existing conditions photographs and conceptual visual simulations from the selected KOPs are referenced in the impact analysis below, with figure numbers provided.

Threshold 1

Would the Modified Project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista (areas with Scenic Attractiveness Class A or Class B classifications are considered scenic vistas)?

2019 EIS/EIR Impact Determination	Modified Project Impact Determination	New Significant Increase in Impact Severity?
Less than Significant	Less than Significant	No

Campground Construction and Day Use Area Improvements

Construction activities associated with the new campground and improvements to the San Luis Creek Day Use area would introduce heavy equipment and associated construction equipment and vehicles into the viewshed of the northern and western portions of O'Neill Forebay. Construction equipment and vehicles, and alteration of the primarily undisturbed grasslands comprising the proposed campground area, would be temporarily visible to motorists using the adjacent public road to access San Luis Creek Campground and to users of San Luis Creek Accessible Trail. San Luis Creek Accessible Trail parallels the shoreline of O'Neill Forebay through the western extent of the proposed campground area and running along the shoreline of O'Neill Forebay through the San Luis Creek Day Use Area farther south.

An existing northeasterly view from the access road across the proposed campground area toward the waters of O'Neill Forebay is shown in Figure 3.5-4a, Key Observation Point 1: Proposed Campground Area from Access Road (Existing Conditions). Construction of the new campground and improvements to the day use area would take place over an 18-month timeframe and would require up to 20 construction personnel working standard 8-hour dayshifts, Monday through Friday.

Due to the location of the new campground and day use area, the availability of views of construction—including equipment and vehicles, and, at the new campground area, resulting form, line, and color contrasts and reduced landscape intactness associated with vegetation removal and disturbance to construct campground features—would be limited to the adjacent unnamed access road and users of San Luis Creek Accessible Trail. Despite the visibility of campground construction activities that would be in the foreground of motorists and trail users, construction activities would be temporary, and distinctive features in the landscape—including tan grass-covered

rolling hills and the waters of O'Neill Forebay against a backdrop of mounded, tan grass-covered hills—would remain characteristic of the wider landscape throughout the construction period.

Construction activities associated with proposed improvements to the San Luis Creek Day Use Area would temporarily introduce construction equipment and vehicles into the viewshed in an existing developed day use area with abundant vegetative screening that would act to limit views into the day use area from the adjacent roadway. During periods when the San Luis Creek Day Use Area remains open while improvements are ongoing, temporary construction disturbance and associated equipment and activities would be viewable to users of the day use area. However, construction impacts would be temporary, would occur within an existing developed campground, and would be consistent with typical and periodic improvements to existing day use area facilities.

Because construction activities associated with the new campground and day use area improvements would be temporary and would primarily be viewed by mobile viewer groups who would experience effects as short-term and fleeting, impacts associated with construction of the proposed facilities would be consistent with existing recreational facilities in the SRA, and would display intactness and harmony within the wider landscape, impacts to scenic vistas and scenic attractiveness resulting from temporary construction activities would be **less than significant.**

A conceptual visual simulation of the proposed campground is provided in Figure 3.5-4b, Key Observation Point 1: Proposed Campground Area from Access Road (Conceptual Visual Simulation). As shown in the conceptual visual simulation, the existing quality of the view at KOP 1, as shown in Figure 3.5-4a, would be altered through the introduction of landscape trees that would be scattered throughout the campground area. In addition, new access roads through the area, parking stalls, amenities at campsites, and the vehicles of campers would alter the existing character of the currently undeveloped site. However, the vegetative patterns would remain perceivable due to foreground and background terrain covered in grasslands, and the campground would be appropriately scaled, consistent with other developed campgrounds and recreational facilities in the SRA, and would display intactness and harmony within the wider landscape.

New campground facilities would alter easterly and westerly views from the unnamed access road as motorists proceed through the footprint of the campground area. Specifically, the presence of visitors, vehicles, and amenities (e.g., picnic tables) at campsites; the low, rectangular form of restroom and shower buildings and a campfire center; new access roads; and trees would alter the existing open and unencumbered nature of existing views to the shoreline and open water of O'Neill Forebay available to motorists and recreationists traveling through the campground area in the existing condition. However, the segment of the unnamed road that traverses the footprint of the new campground is relatively short in length (approximately 0.35 miles long), and characteristic views of the mountain and valley landscape (i.e., areas with Class A scenic attractiveness) would remain available through the campground area, and existing views to the shoreline and open water of O'Neill Forebay would remain available from other segments of the unnamed road. Also, the campground would afford additional shoreline access that would provide views to O'Neill Forebay and surrounding lands. In total, development of the new campground would alter a small portion of San Luis Reservoir and the Central Valley landscape considered to display Class A scenic attractiveness.

Once installed, new amenities at the San Luis Creek Day Use Area would not be visually prominent, and the addition of new amenities would not substantially alter the existing quality of the landscape. Further, the introduction of an additional boat launch lane and boarding float in the North or South Beach area, new fish-cleaning station, and six restroom stalls would not obstruct or otherwise affect an existing scenic view of the valley and mountain landscape as experienced from the day use area or the unnamed public access road near the day use area. In addition, due to the distance between developed facilities in the day use area and the

unnamed access road (approximately 0.25 miles), and due to the relatively dense clustering of trees, it is likely that the new amenities at the day use area would be visually screened from view of motorists on the unnamed access road. Therefore, alteration of the undeveloped landscape comprising the new campground area and improvements to the existing day use area would result in a **less-than-significant impact** to scenic vistas.

Changes in Borrow Area Location

As described in Section 3.5.1, Existing Conditions, Borrow Areas 12 and 14 are considered to display Class B scenic attractiveness due to the presence of existing development and relatively common frequency of grassland-covered hills in the surrounding area.

During construction, temporary effects to existing views and scenic quality/attractiveness would result from the presence of construction equipment and vehicles, including haul-truck trips travelling from the borrow areas to the dam site. Because the use of Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would not require crossing SR-152, haul-truck trips would primarily be experienced by motorists on Basalt Road, and as a result, viewer volume would be low. In addition to haul-truck trips that would occur and be visible throughout the 10- to 12-year (and possibly up to 20 years) construction timeline previously associated with the Approved Project, existing visual quality (e.g., intactness and unity) would be reduced by materials extraction that would occur within Borrow Areas 12 and 14. Materials extraction would consist of excavation and related activities, and although the existing topographic contours of the borrow areas would be preserved to the greatest extent practicable, elevation of existing hills and ridges would be lowered up to 25 feet from their current elevation. For example, at Borrow Area 12, the elevation of the existing flat-topped, mounded landform (approximately 443 feet above mean sea level at the high point) could incrementally be reduced by up to 25 feet over 10 to 12 years (and possibly up to 20 years), resulting in a high point elevation of 418 feet above mean sea level, which is a reduction of 6% of its existing height. However, the hill would generally maintain its current flat-top appearance. Similarly, the four low and long grasslandcovered hills would be visibly and incrementally altered by extraction activities; however, the long, mounded lines displayed by ridgelines would be preserved (to the extent practicable). An existing view from SR-152 across the road toward Borrow Areas 12 and 14 is included in Figure 3.5-5a, Key Observation Point 2: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from SR-152 (Existing Conditions). At Key View 2, the borrow areas are approximately 0.5 miles away.

Modifications of existing hills within Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would result in adverse effects to the landscape, which was inventoried and found to display Class B scenic attractiveness. Specifically, the gradual alteration of hills would negatively affect the existing intactness and unity of the landscape. Further, active extractive operations, including the presence of equipment, vehicles, and personnel (and gradual changes to the seen landscape), would be experienced by nearby viewers over a 10- to 12-year (and potentially, up to 20-year) timeframe. Borrow area work would also result in long-term effects to identified hills as existing ridgelines and elevations are gradually (and noticeably) lowered and softened. Construction activities in borrow areas would attract the attention of nearby viewers accustomed to Class B landscapes; however, due to the presence of similar hills and valley views in the immediate area, the panoramic nature of views from SR-152 and Basalt Road, and the relatively low exposure of mobile viewers to scenes of the borrow areas, the overall influence of distraction associated with daytime construction within Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would be reduced. In addition, long-term effects to existing lines and elevations of the hill terrain would be reduced by the presence of previously altered terrain in the same area and by the prominence of unaltered hills and mountains in the surrounding area. Further, and as stated in Chapter 2, a goal of reclamation of the areas is to preserve existing contours to the greatest extent practicable.

A conceptual visual simulation of the borrow areas post-reclamation is depicted in Figure 3.5-5b, Key Observation Point 2: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from SR-152 (Visual Simulation). In addition, an existing photo and visual simulation of the borrow areas is included in Figure 3.5-6a, Key Observation Point 3: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from Basalt Road (Existing Conditions), and Figure 3.5-6b, Key Observation Point 3: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from Basalt Road (Visual Simulation, Post-Project Condition). As shown in the figures, terrain in the borrow areas would be noticeably shorter due to excavation activities that would occur over a 10- to 12-year (and possibly up to 20-year) period. However, in the post-reclamation scenario in which terrain would be lowered by approximately 25 feet in elevation, the landforms would display soft, mounded lines that would complement and conform to existing hill terrain in the immediate area. As such, changes to the borrow area locations would result in a **less-than-significant impact** to visual resources and scenic attractiveness.

Minor Additions to Contractor Work Area

In most instances, expanded work areas would occur in locations that have been subject to previous disturbance, and as such, overall impacts to existing visual quality would be reduced. For example, new staging and stockpiling areas west of the Gianelli Plant would be visible from SR-152 and would attract the attention of passing motorists. However, these expanded staging and stockpiling areas are proposed where the terrain has been permanently modified by the construction of dam infrastructure and visually prominent electrical transmission lines. Therefore, expanded work areas near the Gianelli Plant would be visible, but due to the presence of previous disturbance, dam and electrical transmission infrastructure, and the prevailing speed of traffic on SR-152, these new features would have a somewhat muted impact on the wider visual landscape. Similarly, expanded contractor work areas near the dam's right abutment would be located on a low area that has been previously disturbed by access road and dam construction. Staging and stockpiling operations in this area would be visible to passing motorists on Basalt Road. Due to distance, however, activities in these expanded work areas are unlikely to be visible from SR-152 (located more than 1 mile away). Regarding views from Basalt Road, existing modifications from dam construction mark the landscape, and the addition of temporary work areas to views would not substantially alter the existing gualities contributing to the common (Class B) scenic guality of the area. Because the existing landscape includes prominent landform and landscape modifications (e.g., B.F. Sisk Dam), the temporary presence of a contractor work area near the dam's right abutment would not result in a change to the scenic quality of the area. For similar reasons, the presence of contractor work areas farther downstream would not result in substantial adverse effects to scenic vistas (i.e., areas with Class B scenic attractiveness). As such, impacts to scenic vistas and scenic attractiveness due to minor additions to contractor work areas would be less than significant.

Additional Construction Assumptions

Please refer to discussions above for campground construction and day use area improvements, changes in borrow area locations, and minor additions to contractor work areas.

Cumulative Impacts

Projects considered in the cumulative scenario include those previously identified in the 2019 EIS/EIR for visual resources (e.g., California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section, San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP, San Luis Transmission Project, San Luis Solar Project), and the San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project (reservoir expansion project) (SLDMWA and Reclamation 2020). Although the five projects considered in this cumulative assessment are currently active projects, environmental analysis for the reservoir expansion project began in 2020.

As proposed, the California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section would construct a new railway and railway tunnels across Pacheco Pass generally parallel to SR-152 near San Luis Reservoir. The tunnel would exit north of San Luis Reservoir, and between McCabe Road and I-5, the high-speed rail alignment could feature aerial/viaduct, embankment, at-grade, and trench sections (California High Speed Rail Authority n.d.). Adopted in 2013, the San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP established goals and guidelines for the management of the SRA for a 25-year period. For visual resources, facilities expansion and construction, including additional visitor facilities (e.g., day use, camping, shoreline, and water surface facilities), are the primary management consideration that could affect existing views and scenery near the reservoir and forebay areas. Regarding the San Luis Transmission Project and San Luis Solar Project, these projects would involve construction of new facilities downstream of B.F. Sisk Dam that would be visible from SR-152 and a limited number of nearby local roads. Lastly, the reservoir expansion project would result in an increase in storage capacity of San Luis Reservoir by raising the dam crest an additional 10 feet above the 12-foot embankment raise identified in the 2019 EIS/EIR (SLDMWA and Reclamation 2020).

Construction of the projects identified and described above would include equipment, vehicles, and activities that would be visible from San Luis Reservoir, SR-152, and local roads. Further, construction activities associated with the identified cumulative projects would result in adverse effects on scenic vistas, and more specifically, areas near San Luis Reservoir with scenic attractiveness Class A or Class B classifications. If construction of the Modified Project, and specifically, extraction activities in Borrow Areas 12 and 14, were to overlap with these cumulative projects, an adverse effect to scenic vistas could occur due to the introduction of construction equipment and vehicles and visible alterations in the landscape. However, as identified above, the overall influence of distraction associated with davtime construction within Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would be reduced to less than significant due to the presence of similar hills and valley views in the immediate area, the panoramic nature of views from SR-152 and Basalt Road, and the relatively low exposure of mobile viewers to scenes of the borrow areas. For similar reasons, the temporary distraction associated with construction of cumulative projects as experienced from mobile vantage points in the surrounding area would be reduced by the typical scenic attractiveness (i.e., Class B) of the landscape and exposure of mobile viewers (motorists). In the long term, effects to the existing landscape due to borrow area activities would be reduced through implementation of the Modified Project's reclamation and revegetation plan that would address land scars and vegetation removal through the construction of natural-appearing ridgelines and native grassland plantings. Therefore, although construction of the Modified Project could combine with other projects to temporarily affect existing views and scenic vistas as experienced from San Luis Reservoir and SR-152, the gradual visual change resulting from extraction activities over a 10- to 12-year (or up to 20-year period), would not be cumulatively considerable.

Comparison to 2019 EIS/EIR

The additional project components analyzed above would result in less-than-significant impacts and therefore impacts of the Modified Project would not result in a significant increase in the severity of impacts as determined in the 2019 EIS/EIR. Impacts of the Modified Project would remain less than significant.

Threshold 2

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

2019 EIS/EIR Impact Determination	Modified Project Impact Determination	New Significant Increase in Impact Severity?
Less than Significant	Less than Significant	No

Officially designated state scenic highways in the Modified Project area are SR-152 from the Santa Clara County line to the junction with I-5, and I-5 from the junction with SR-152 to the Stanislaus County line (Caltrans 2019). Given the distance, differences in elevation, intervening topography and development, and prevailing speeds of motorists, the Modified Project would not be readily visible from this designated portion of I-5. As such, the analysis below focuses on SR-152.

Campground Construction and Day Use Area Improvements

Construction of the new campground and installation of new amenities at the San Luis Creek Day Use area would occur 2.25 miles and 1 mile north of SR-152, respectively. Due to the presence of several intervening hills between the new campground area and SR-152, construction effects and amenities at the new campground area would not be visible from SR-152. From SR-152, the southern extension of the South Beach shoreline is visible to motorists and is primarily experienced as a series of low, undulating, grassland hills traversed by a regional electrical transmission line and marked by a cluster of mature trees in a topographical saddle. Existing amenities of the day use area are not readily visible or distinct from SR-152. Due to distance and the presence of the low, south-facing slope that screens most of the day use area from SR-152 motorists, proposed improvements would have limited to no visibility from SR-152. Although the installation of new restroom and shower facilities or the campfire center building could require the removal of existing pine and/or eucalyptus trees, the removal of ornamental and windbreak trees is unlikely to be noticeable from SR-152. New amenities would be in currently developed areas, and as such, would not result in substantial damage to scenic resources, including trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings. Therefore, campground construction and day use area improvements would result in a **less-than-significant impact** to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Changes in Borrow Area Location

Construction equipment and vehicles, and alteration of hillsides within Borrow Areas 12 and 14, would attract the attention of passing motorists on SR-152. An existing photo from SR-152 toward the borrow areas, and a conceptual visual simulation depiction of the post-reclamation scenario, are included in Figures 3.5-5a and 3.5-5b. Although proposed construction activities and effects in Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would not result in damage to existing trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings, hills would be visibly altered. As discussed previously, the alteration of hills via borrow area activities would detract from the existing visual quality of the landscape by heightening contrasts in form, line, and color between borrow areas and adjacent undisturbed terrain. However, the distance between SR-152 motorists and Borrow Areas 12 and 14, and the prevailing speeds of traffic would reduce the overall magnitude of potential negative effects on the scenic experience of mobile viewers during the 10- to 12-year (and possibly up to 20-year) construction timeline. Further, Borrow Area 6 that was considered in the 2019 EIS/EIR is located closer to SR-152 than Borrow Areas 12 and 14. Ongoing reclamation and revegetation of the disturbed hills within the borrow areas over the duration of the construction period and

B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR June 2021 following completion of the Modified Project would reduce anticipated contrasts created during construction such that impacts to the scenic quality of the landscape as experienced from SR-152 would be muted (see Figure 3.5-5b). Therefore, changes in borrow areas would result in **less-than-significant impacts** to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Minor Additions to Contractor Work Area

Except for additional staging and stockpile areas west of the Gianelli Plant, additional contractor work areas considered would not be clearly visible from SR-152. As such, farther downstream contractor work areas are not assessed in the context of potential impacts to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Proposed staging and stockpiling areas west of the Gianelli Plant would not result in damage to existing trees, rock outcroppings, or historic buildings. Still, these expanded work areas are proposed in a previously inventoried landscape considered to be distinctive (i.e., display Class A scenic attractiveness). Construction equipment and vehicles, landscape alterations to accommodate staging and stockpile areas, and staging and stockpiling of materials would be visible to passing motorists on SR-152 and would create new perceptible contrasts in the landscape. However, because the duration of views available to motorists would be relatively brief due to prevailing highway speeds, and because of the presence of existing disturbances/alterations in the landscape, including hillside grading and dam and power infrastructure, impacts to scenic resources within the viewshed of SR-152 would be reduced. Further, scenic resources impacts would be reduced due to the short-term nature of staging and stockpile operations. Therefore, minor additions to contractor work areas would result in **less-thansignificant impacts** to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Additional Construction Assumptions

Please refer to discussions above for campground construction and day use area improvements, changes in borrow area locations, and minor additions to contractor work areas.

Cumulative Impacts

The construction of projects considered in the cumulative scenario would include equipment, vehicles, and activities that would be visible from SR-152. Although rock outcroppings and historic buildings would not be disturbed or otherwise impacted, cumulative construction activities could result in the removal of existing trees. In addition, the reservoir expansion project would include improvements to a section of SR-152 at Cottonwood Bay, including raising the elevation of SR-152 by approximately 10 feet. The remaining cumulative projects would disturb the grassland-covered terrain, which is a prominent feature of the SR-152 viewshed. However, due to the wide availability of views to grassland-covered hillsides and vistas from SR-152 and the short duration of mobile views from SR-152, the severity of construction impacts on views would be reduced. Once constructed, cumulative projects (except for the California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section) would visually blend (to the extent practicable) with the surrounding grassland-covered hillside landscape. However, in the vicinity of the Modified Project, the California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section would be constructed in tunnels generally north of SR-152 and would not be visible from the highway. Northeast of Cottonwood Bay and near McCabe Road, the tunnel segments of the California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section would transition to trench, aerial (viaduct), at-grade, and embankment segments on the approach toward I-5. Due to its location northwest and northeast of O'Neill Forebay, the aboveground segments of the California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section are not anticipated to be experienced in combination with the Modified Project and would have limited (if any) visibility from SR-152.

The long-term impacts of the Modified Project (post-reclamation) on views from SR-152 are illustrated in Figure 3.5-5b. As shown in the figure, there would be little change to the experience of SR-152 users as they approach and pass Borrow Areas 12 and 14. Therefore, in the cumulative scenario, cumulative construction and operation impacts on scenic resources within the SR-152 viewshed would be less than significant. The Modified Project's contribution to a potential cumulative impact would **not be cumulatively considerable.**

Comparison to 2019 EIS/EIR

The additional project components analyzed above would result in less-than-significant impacts and therefore impacts of the Modified Project would not result in a significant increase in the severity of impacts as determined in the 2019 EIS/EIR. Impacts of the Modified Project would remain less than significant.

Threshold 3

Would the Modified Project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

2019 EIS/EIR Impact Determination	Modified Project Impact Determination	New Significant Increase in Impact Severity?
Less than Significant	Less than Significant	No

Campground Construction and Day Use Area Improvements

Except for a dirt access road and water tank east of a bisecting access road, and a paved trail that roughly parallels the O'Neill Forebay shore, the 40-acre proposed campground area is undeveloped. As previously detailed, the site features west to east sloping terrain that is covered with grasslands and marked by pockets of rock outcroppings. Construction of the campground would include vegetation removal and site grading; installation of utilities, including sewer, water, and electrical; surfacing roadways and vehicle parking areas with asphalt; and constructing restrooms and associated campground and campsite amenities (e.g., picnic tables, fire rings). Campground amenities and construction would occur east and west of the access road that bisects the proposed campground area. Due to its primarily undeveloped nature, construction activities would visibly alter the existing character of the 40-acre proposed campground area. For example, construction vehicles, equipment, and staff would be present in the area for up to 18 months, and vegetation removal and grading to accommodate campground access and amenities would create striking contrasts when compared to the line and color of existing grassland-covered terrain. Vegetation removal would create unnatural lines in the landscape and reveal bare areas of soils. These contrasts would persist in the views of motorists, boaters, and other water-based recreationists for up to 18 months. It is assumed that the portion of the San Luis Creek Accessibility Trail traversing the proposed campground area would be closed during construction.

A conceptual visual simulation of the proposed campground is included in Figure 3.5-4b. Although the campground in the figure is shown east of the access road (i.e., east of KOP 1), this analysis assumes that campground amenities and development would occur east and west of the access road. As depicted in the conceptual visual simulation, the current undeveloped grasslands character of the site and the quality of existing unencumbered views of O'Neill Forebay and background hills from the access road would be altered. Specifically, the introduction of road, campsites, campground amenities, landscaping, and visitor vehicles would transform the site to a passive recreation facility. Further, these features would block views of O'Neill

Forebay, and depending on setback of facilities from the access road, existing views of the distant hills. Despite the change in character, the proposed campground would complement the surrounding natural landscape by providing low-intensity uses and low-profile facilities (and features) consistent with recreational uses and development elsewhere in the SRA. In addition, as demonstrated in the conceptual visual simulation, the inclusion of landscape trees in the interior and along the perimeter of the future campground area would partially screen vehicles and campground features from view. Also, trees would help break up the perceived scale and footprint of the campground as viewed by motorists and their passengers on the access road (see Figure 3.5-4b). Regarding visual quality, the introduction of a low-intensity campground featuring interior and perimeter landscaping would not have a substantial effect on the existing vividness or intactness of the landscape as viewed from the access road. Unencumbered views from the access road to the waters of O'Neill Forebay would continue to be available south and north of the Modified Project site, and because foreground grasslands and background hills would continue to be experienced, the prominent features of the landscape would largely remain intact. Additionally, the proposed campground would be visually similar to other existing campgrounds in the area that are visible from various locations in the Modified Project area.

As stated previously, new amenities at the San Luis Creek Day Use Area would not be visually prominent and the addition of new amenities would not substantially alter the existing character of the site. Because these amenities are currently available at the day use area, the addition of a boat launch lane and boarding float in the North (or South) Beach area, new fish cleaning station, and six restroom stalls at the existing day use area would be consistent with the existing visual character. Further, the additional amenities would tend to blend into the existing setting and scene. Based on the analysis provided above, campground construction and day use area improvements would result in a **less-than-significant impact** to existing visual character.

Changes in Borrow Area Location

Existing photographs of Borrow Areas 12 and 14 as experienced from SR-152 and Basalt Road are provided in Figures 3.5-5a and 3.5-6a, and visual simulations of Modified Project changes as viewed from SR-152 and Basalt Road are included in Figures 3.5-5b and 3.5-6b. Construction equipment and vehicles, and alteration of hillsides within Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would result in noticeable visual change. Further, due to the activity in these areas and disturbance of existing terrain, existing visual character would be degraded, and the intactness of views would be reduced. As discussed previously, modifications to hills via extractive activities would detract from the existing character and quality of the landscape by heightening contrasts in form, line, and color between borrow areas and adjacent undisturbed terrain. However, visual changes would occur gradually over the 10- to 12-year (and possibly up to 20-year) duration of construction, and would occur within the confined area of Borrow Areas 12 and 14. Further, the ridgeline of Borrow Area 12 has experienced visible disturbance (i.e., the landform displays a flat ridgeline that is uncharacteristic of surrounding hilly terrain), and as such, proposed alterations would not substantially impact its existing character or quality. In the long term, reclamation and revegetation of the terrain in Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would incrementally reduce anticipated contrasts and effects to existing visual quality such that noticeable change would be softened and obscured (see Figure 3.5-5a through 3.5-6b). Therefore, with implementation of the reclamation and revegetation plans, long-term changes in borrow areas would result in less-than-significant impacts to existing visual character and quality.

Minor Additions to Contractor Work Area

As previously stated, proposed staging and stockpiling areas west of the Gianelli Plant are proposed in a previously inventoried landscape considered to be distinctive (i.e., displays Class A scenic attractiveness). Construction activities would be visible to passing motorists on SR-152 and would create new perceptible

contrasts in the landscape that would temporarily degrade existing visual quality and reduce visual quality. However, due to the temporary nature of the experienced contrasts, and due to the inclusion of existing nearby disturbances/alterations in the landscape, including hillside grading and dam and power infrastructure, impacts to existing visual character and quality would be reduced. For similar reasons, other changes to contractor work areas located elsewhere in the Modified Project area would create temporary visual change that would affect visual character and quality over a short duration. Therefore, due to the temporary nature of construction and the presence of existing landscape disturbance and alteration in the immediate surrounding area, minor additions to contractor work areas would result in **less-than-significant impacts** to existing visual character and quality.

Additional Construction Assumptions

Please refer to discussions above for campground construction and day use area improvements, changes in borrow area locations, and minor additions to contractor work areas.

Cumulative Impacts

Combined with the Modified Project, concurrent construction of the San Luis Transmission Project, San Luis Solar Project, and California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section could result in a cumulative short-term impact on visual character and quality given the introduction of construction equipment, traffic, and personnel and the gradual alteration of the landscape (and views). Although long-term Modified Project impacts to visual character and quality were determined to be less than significant, combined with the other projects in the cumulative scenario, the Modified Project would result in visible changes to existing visual character and quality through development of previously undeveloped areas. For example, the proposed campground is intended to be constructed on a previously undisturbed (primarily) site adjacent to the westerly shores of O'Neill Forebay. Additionally, alteration of hillsides within Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would result in noticeable visual changes resulting from the Modified Project would be limited in these areas and would not substantially degrade visual character (as discussed above), the Modified Project's contribution to a cumulative impact to existing visual character and quality **would not be cumulatively considerable**, and impacts would be less than significant.

Comparison to 2019 EIS/EIR

The additional project components analyzed above would result in less-than-significant impacts and therefore impacts of the Modified Project would not result in a significant increase in the severity of impacts as determined in the 2019 EIS/EIR. Impacts of the Modified Project would remain less than significant.

Threshold 4

Would the Modified Project create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

2019 EIS/EIR Impact Determination	Modified Project Impact Determination	New Significant Increase in Impact Severity?
Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	No

Campground Construction and Day Use Area Improvements

Although most construction activities associated with the new campground and improvements to the San Luis Creek Day Use Area would occur during daytime hours, construction during evening hours may be necessary. For example, in the late winter months, construction activities at the proposed campground area may extend into evening hours after sunset. During these instances, the operation of vehicles and equipment and the use of portable lighting could affect nighttime views available to visitors at San Luis Creek Campground (located 0.2 miles north of the proposed campground area). Because visitors are not permitted in the day use area during evening and nighttime hours, nighttime construction lighting would not impact day use area visitors. Also, due to distance, nighttime construction (and more specifically, the operation of lighting in the day use area) is unlikely to noticeably affect the quality of nighttime views available at San Luis Creek Campground (located 1.3 miles to the north). Other than visitors to the SRA, the nearest uses that could potentially be affected by nighttime construction activities are located east of O'Neill Forebay, off SR-33, in the Santa Nella Village area (approximately 1.9 miles from the day use area). Although there are a limited number of viewers in the surrounding area, lights in the construction area would have a negative impact on nighttime views in the area. However, instances of nighttime construction during the approximately 18-month construction timeline would be limited/infrequent, and if required, lighting at the construction sites would operate for a limited time (i.e., late hours and overnight construction are not anticipated). Further, San Luis Creek Campground is located 0.2 miles (approximately 1,100 feet) and is partially screened from the proposed campground area by existing terrain (west of the access road, the proposed campground area is surrounded on three sides by hills) and trees along the O'Neill Forebay shoreline. Trees within the existing campground would also partially block direct lighting from construction activities at the proposed campground area.

If used, construction lighting would be removed after construction activities associated with the proposed campground and day use area improvements are completed. Minimal new permanent sources of lighting are anticipated to be installed at the new campground and would generally consist of hooded or bollard-style fixtures and elements near restroom/shower facilities and at the campfire center. Because the day use area is not open for nighttime use, no permanent operational lighting is anticipated for the new restroom stalls or other facilities. The operation of limited lighting at the new campground would be consistent with the existing low-light condition in the surrounding area. Also, due to a limited number of viewers, the limited operational lighting at the campground would have an altogether weak effect on the quality of nighttime views currently available to visitors to the San Luis Creek Campground. Based on the analysis presented above, construction and operational lighting at the new campground and day use area would not adversely affect the quality of views in the area. Impacts would be **less than significant**.

Changes in Borrow Area Location

Grading and other construction activities occurring in Borrow Areas 12 and 14 may occur during nighttime hours during the up to 20-year construction timeline. As stated in Chapter 2, construction work would be performed 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 12 months per year. As such, construction would require the use of portable lighting and lighting from construction vehicles and equipment to provide proper illumination of work areas and ensure the safety of construction personnel. Although existing lighting operates along the SR-152 corridor near Borrow Areas 12 and 14, lights in the construction area would have a negative effect on nighttime views in the Modified Project area. Further, construction lighting at Borrow Areas 12 and 14 would alter the existing quality of southerly oriented views from SR-152 during evening and nighttime hours. Although Borrow Areas 12 and 14 are located farther from SR-152 compared to Borrow Area 6 that was previously considered in the 2019 EIS/EIR, the duration of construction, the 24/7 nature of construction activities, and the existing low-light environment of the

borrow area landscape would result in a potentially significant impact on nighttime views. However, implementation of **Mitigation Measure VIS-1** (same as VIS-1 in the 2019 EIS/EIR), described in Section 3.5.5, Mitigation Measures, would reduce the severity of this potential impact by requiring that portable lighting sources be shielded and directed downward onto the active area of construction. Instances of upward lighting would be prohibited to the extent practicable given the topography of the borrow area locations. With implementation of Mitigation Measure VIS-1, this construction lighting impact would be less than significant.

Minor Additions to Contractor Work Area

See also the analysis under "Changes in Borrow Are Location," above. In most instances, areas encompassing the additional contractor spaces are visible from nearby roads, including SR-152 and Basalt Road. For example, additional work areas west of the Gianelli Plant would be visible from SR-152, and lighting associated with nighttime construction activities would be experienced by SR-152 users. Although sources of light operate at the Gianelli Plant, lighting associated with stockpiling and staging activities would add to the degraded quality of nighttime views in the area. Similarly, nighttime construction and associated lighting at the expanded contractor work areas near B.F. Sisk Dam's right abutment would be visible from Basalt Road. This expanded work area generally comprises a low-light environment, and as such, nighttime lighting from construction vehicles and equipment, and portable lighting sources (if required), would alter the quality of existing nighttime views. Similar effects are anticipated at other expanded contractor work areas located farther southwest. Based on the duration of construction, the 24/7 nature of construction activities, and the inclusion of low-light environments in the Modified Project area, the operation of nighttime lighting during construction would have a negative and potentially significant impact on nighttime views in the area. However, with implementation of Mitigation Measure VIS-1, this impact would be reduced to **less than significant**. No new sources of permanent lighting would be associated with the expanded contractor work areas.

Additional Construction Assumptions

Please refer to discussions above for campground construction and day use area improvements, changes in borrow area locations, and minor additions to contractor work areas.

Cumulative Impacts

If construction of the San Luis Transmission Project, San Luis Solar Project, California High-Speed Rail Project: San Jose to Merced section, San Luis Reservoir SRA RMP/GP facilities, and the reservoir expansion project overlapped with construction of the Modified Project, there could be a cumulative short-term impact on nighttime views given the operation of portable and stationary lighting and construction vehicles for nighttime construction activities in the Modified Project area. However, up-lighting and light trespass during Modified Project construction would be minimized using shielded and downward-directed fixtures on stationary sources. Vehicle lighting would not be shielded, but mobile sources of lighting would generally operate for a short duration on any given night. Like the Modified Project, projects considered in the cumulative analysis would be expected to implement measures, including shielding and downward-directed lighting, to ensure that off-site light trespass and instances of skyglow are reduced. Therefore, although the Modified Project may combine with other projects to create a cumulatively considerable contribution to significant cumulative visual impacts, the Modified Project's contribution **would not be cumulatively considerable** with implementation of standard best practices for the use of nighttime lighting (Mitigation Measure VIS-1).

Comparison to 2019 EIS/EIR

The additional project components analyzed above would result in less-than-significant impacts with mitigation incorporated and therefore impacts of the Modified Project would not result in a significant increase in the severity of impacts as determined in the 2019 EIS/EIR. Impacts of the Modified Project would remain less than significant with mitigation incorporated (see Section 3.5.5).

3.5.5 Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measure included in the 2019 EIS/EIR would be implemented to reduce impacts associated with the use of lighting during nighttime construction to less than significant.

VIS-1 (Same as VIS-1 in 2019 EIS/EIR): To reduce visual intrusion from light sources, Reclamation shall require the contractors to implement measures to reduce light and glare while meeting minimum safety and security standards. Light reduction measures must include: directing lighting downward to prevent spillover onto nearby areas, utilization of lighting fixtures with directional shielding to focus on areas being lit, and a construction requirement that all lighting in areas not under active construction be shut off. To reduce the amount of glare, building finishes shall be subdued and earth-toned. On-site mechanical equipment roofing materials, and any exposed vents or flashings must be constructed of non-glare finishes that minimizes reflectivity.

3.5.6 Level of Significance After Mitigation

As with the Approved Project, the Modified Project would result in less-than-significant impacts with respect to substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas.

As with the Approved Project, the Modified Project would result in less-than-significant impacts with respect to substantial damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

As with the Approved Project, the Modified Project would result in less-than-significant impacts with respect to substantial degradation of existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

Both the Approved Project and the Modified Project would result in potential significant impacts with respect to creating a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area. Implementation of Mitigation Measure VIS-1, which requires implementation of light reduction measures during construction and was identified in the 2019 EIS/EIR for the approved project, would reduce impacts associated with the modified project to less than significant.



Photo A: Proposed Campground Area, West of Access Road.



Photo B: Proposed Campground Area, East of Access Road.

FIGURE 3.5-1 Existing Visual Character: Proposed Campground Area

B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR

DUDEK



Photo C: Borrow Areas 12 and 14, from Southbound Basalt Road



Photo D: Borrow Areas 12 and 14, from Northbound Basalt Road





SOURCE: Basemap: ESRI World Imagery Project Boundary: Reclamation, 3/14/20 Previous Boundary: DWR, 4/2019

1,800 3,600

FIGURE 3.5-3 Key Observation Points B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR



DUDEK

FIGURE 3.5-4a Key Observation Point 1: Proposed Campground Area from Access Road (Existing Conditions) B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR



Note: New landscaping/trees shown at anticipated growth ten (10) years post-installation.

FIGURE 3.5-4b Key Observation Point 1: Proposed Campground Area from Access Road (Conceptual Visual Simulation) B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR



FIGURE 3.5-5a Key Observation Point 2: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from SR-152 (Existing Conditions) B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR



FIGURE 3.5-5b Key Observation Point 2: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from SR-152 (Visual Simulation) B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR



Note: As experienced at Key Observation Point 3, Borrow Area 14 is generally located behind (i.e., to the south) of Borrow Area 12

FIGURE 3.5-6a Key Observation Point 3: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from Basalt Road (Existing Conditions) B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR



FIGURE 3.5-6b Key Observation Point 3: Borrow Areas 12 and 14 from Basalt Road (Visual Simulation) B.F. Sisk Dam Safety of Dams Modification Project SEIR