

4.15 VISUAL RESOURCES

4.15.1 INTRODUCTION

This section addresses potential impacts of the proposed project on visual resources, which are the natural and human-built features of the landscape that can be seen and that contribute to an attractive landscape appearance and the public's enjoyment of the environment. Visual resources are defined generally in terms of positive elements of a project site's physical characteristics and potential visibility and the extent to which a proposed project's presence would change the perceived visual character and aesthetic quality of its environment.

4.15.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The following text describes the existing project site and surrounding land in terms of visual character and quality, light and glare, and views of and from the project site. The descriptions of existing conditions are accompanied by exhibits that provide representative photographs of views for potentially sensitive groups (primarily a few rural residents) taken during site visits in March and July 2008 (see the "Analysis Methodology" section below for a description of viewer sensitivity). The locations where these photographs were taken are shown in Exhibit 4.15-1. One set of panorama photographs shows the viewpoint from Arch Road north of the project site (Exhibits 4.15-2a and 4.15-2b) and the other set of panorama photographs shows the viewpoint from Austin Road east of the project site (Exhibits 4.15-3a and 4.15-3b).

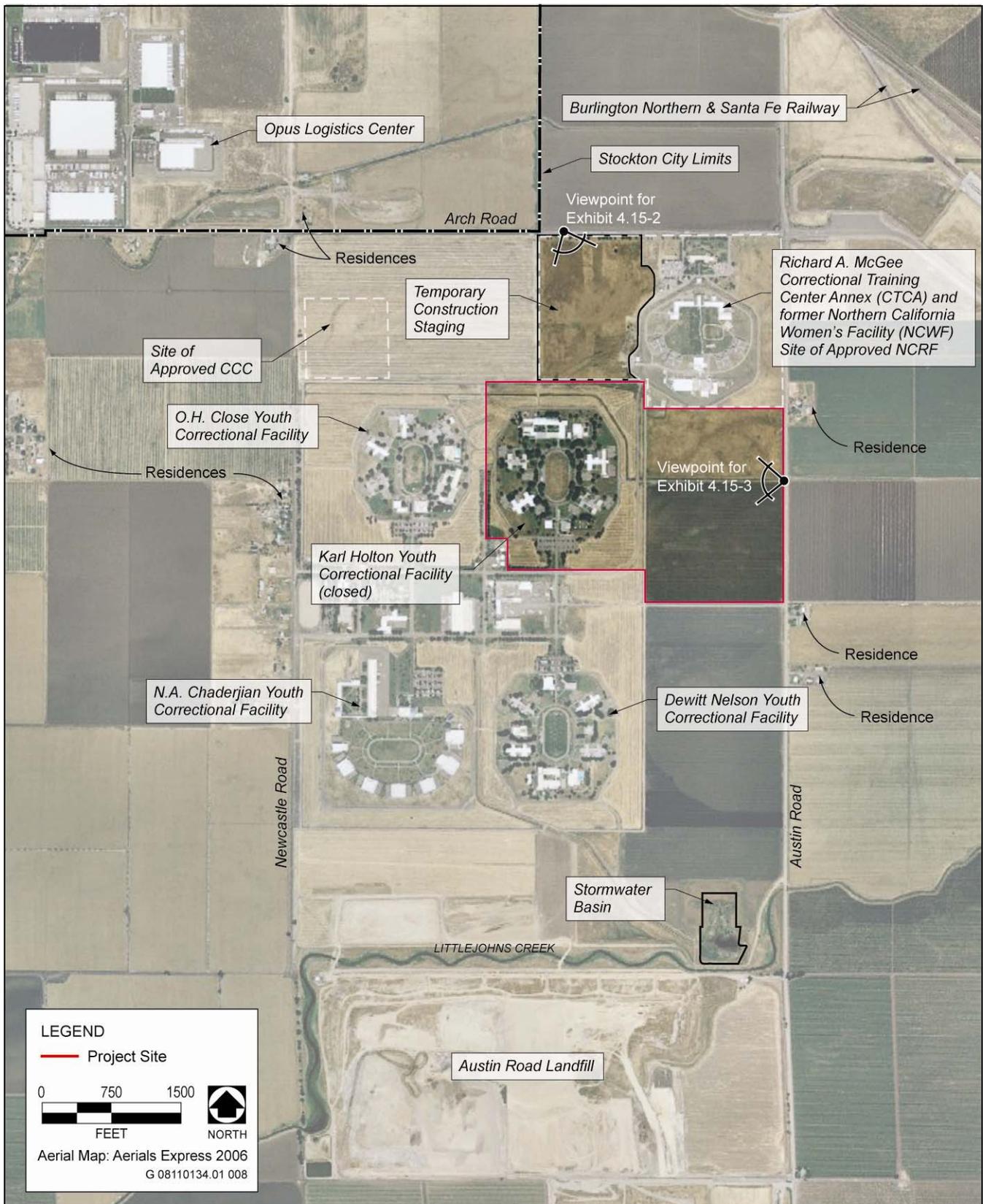
VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF THE REGION

The project site is immediately southeast of the Stockton city limits in central San Joaquin County. The site is in the northern portion of the San Joaquin Valley, which is characterized predominantly by relatively flat farmland interspersed with rivers and other tributaries and low-density residential farmsteads. According to the *City of Stockton General Plan 2035*, lands on the periphery of the city are characterized by agricultural, residential, and open space land uses.

VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY SURROUNDING THE PROJECT SITE

The visual character of the area immediately surrounding the project site is institutional, industrial, and agricultural, as described below.

- ▶ *North:* The Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center Annex (CTCA) is located immediately north of the site and consists of mostly two-story structures surrounded by utility poles and a chain-link fence topped with coiled barbed wire, and an administration building surrounded by landscaping and parking. The CTCA frontage on Arch Road includes trees and other landscaping, and the CTCA buildings are separated from Austin Road by approximately 300 feet of vacant field. The character of the CTCA is institutional. Views north of Arch Road are across primarily row crops extending to the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad to the north, which runs northwest to southeast.
- ▶ *East:* Austin Road is immediately east of the project site. Two farmstead residences are immediately east of Austin Road, one residence across from the northeast corner of the project site and the other across from the southeast corner of the project site. A utility line runs along the west side of Austin Road and on the project site. Row crops represent the predominant character of this area. They extend east of the project site to the BNSF railroad facility. A cluster of farmstead residences are as close as a mile east of the project site.



Source: Prepared by EDAW in 2008

Representative Viewpoint Locations

Exhibit 4.15-1



Match to image below

Exhibit 4.15-2a. Panorama looking southeast from Arch Road toward the Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center Annex. (Photograph taken by EDAW in 2008)



Match to image above

Exhibit 4.15-2b. Panorama looking south from Arch Road toward the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility. (Photograph taken by EDAW in 2008)



Match to image below

Exhibit 4.15-3a. Panorama looking west from Austin Road toward the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility. (Photograph taken by EDAW in 2008)



Match to image above

Exhibit 4.15-3b. Panorama looking northwest from Austin Road toward the Richard A. McGee Correctional Training Center Annex. (Photograph taken by EDAW in 2008)

- ▶ *South:* Southeast of the project site, a third residence is located east of Austin Road. Row crops extend south of the project site immediately west of Austin Road. South of these row crops, a fenced area for a drainage basin covers approximately 13 acres. A water pump and some concrete associated with the basin are located near Austin Road. The DeWitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility, adjacent to the southwest border of the project site, is surrounded by chain-link fencing and, like the other Northern California Youth Correctional Center (NCYCC) facilities, is institutional in character. Disked soil and/or row crops extend south of this facility to the Austin Road Landfill.
- ▶ *West:* The O. H. Close Youth Correctional Facility is immediately west of the project site and the N. A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facility is immediately south of this facility and southwest of the project site. One- and two-story structures can be seen through the chain-link fence. Both of these facilities are institutional in character. The O. H. Close Youth Correctional Facility blocks views of the project site from six farmstead residences immediately west of Newcastle Road. Row crops extend west of these residences.

The institutional character of the CTCA facility and the NCYCC facilities combined with the industrial character of buildings to the northwest, the BNSF railroad to the east, and the Austin Road Landfill to the south combine to create a moderately low visual quality.

VISUAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF THE PROJECT SITE

The ornamental trees on the western half of the project site, the row crops and ruderal vegetation on the eastern half of the site, and agricultural land surrounding the project site are unremarkable relative to trees and agricultural land throughout the region, especially in the context of the institutional structures surrounding the immediate area. Thus, these trees, crops, and weeds are not scenic visual resources and views of the project site are not scenic vistas. Views from the following areas represent the primary views for residents and motorists (sensitive viewer groups) near the project site.

Views of the Project Site from Arch Road

No residences exist on the segment of Arch Road between Newcastle Road and Austin Road. As shown in Exhibit 4.15-2a, passing motorists on Arch Road view primarily the one- and two-story CTCA structures, high-mast light poles, and a few small plants or bushes near the CTCA fence line. Some trees at the west end of the CTCA property partially block views to the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility. As shown in Exhibit 4.15-2b, the single-row chain-link fence that surrounds the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility (on the project site) is in the more distant viewshed for passing motorists. These motorists can see one- and two-story vacant structures, trees, and light poles (not in use).

Views of the Project Site from Austin Road

Primary views from Austin Road and three residences immediately east of the roadway include the DeWitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility to the southwest, the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility to the west (Exhibit 4.15-3a), row crops immediately west of the roadway, and the CTCA to the northwest (Exhibit 4.15-3b). Chain-link fencing surrounds these correctional facilities. The Austin Road Landfill can be seen farther to the south and appears as a hill in the background. Exhibits 4.15-3b and 4.15-3b show typical views of the project site from Austin Road.

Views of the Project Site from Newcastle Road and the Arch Road/Newcastle Road Intersection

Two residences near the intersection of Arch Road and Newcastle Road are surrounded by vacant disked land and agricultural land with row crops. The O. H. Close Youth Correctional Facility and the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility can be seen to the immediate southeast of these residences. The CTCA facility is within view to the east.

LIGHT AND GLARE

The terms “glare” and “skyglow” are used throughout this analysis to describe the visual effects of lighting. For the purposes of this impact analysis, glare is considered to be direct exposure to bright lights and skyglow is a glow that extends beyond the light source and can dominate or partially dominate views above the horizon.

Light and Glare of the Surrounding Area

North of the site, nighttime lighting sources at CTCA consist of lighting in several buildings and on some pole-mounted lighting around the perimeter. The pole-mounted lighting consists of 11 high-mast lights (i.e., multiple luminaries installed typically in a ring configuration at the top of a pole at least 55 feet tall, used to light outdoor yards) and 42 “cobra”-style lights (single luminary used typically for streetlights) in total around the CTCA facility.

No streetlights exist along Arch Road north of the site, although vehicles passing the project site on Arch Road do contribute to the overall nighttime light and glare in this area. Most of the surrounding area north of the project site is agricultural land that does not have night lighting.

East of the project site, no streetlights exist on Austin Road, although vehicles passing the project site on Austin Road contribute to the overall nighttime light and glare. The BNSF railroad facility east of the project site is operated at night, and yard lighting from this facility is a prominent feature of the night sky for miles around. Two residences immediately east of Austin Road use small pole-mounted lights. The surrounding agricultural land has no night lighting.

West of the project site, the O. H. Close and N. A. Chaderjian Youth Correctional Facilities are being used and have pole-mounted lighting. A few residences west of Newcastle Road use night lighting and the intersection of Arch Road and Newcastle Road has streetlights. The industrial structures approximately to the northwest of the project site have parking lot lighting as tall as approximately 35 feet.

Lighting Views at Sensitive Viewer Locations

Sensitive viewers of nighttime lighting located east of the project site see the DeWitt Nelson Youth Correctional Facility, which has lights approximately 45 feet tall; the abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility, which uses no lighting; and the CTCA, which uses perimeter and high-mast lighting. Viewers east of the project site also see vehicle headlights on the two-lane Austin Road passing the site and lighting for three residences east of Austin Road.

Viewers north and northwest of the project site may see perimeter fence lighting and pole-mounted lighting above the trees, located west of the project site. The abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility on the project site uses no lighting. Perimeter and high-mast lighting is visible at the CTCA facility. East of the CTCA facility and project site, the BNSF railroad facility operates yard lighting that is a prominent feature of the night sky for miles around.

4.15.3 REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS

FEDERAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

No federal plans, policies, regulations, or laws relating to visual resources are applicable to the proposed project.

STATE PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND LAWS

The California Department of Transportation manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to highways. No state-designated scenic highways are in the project area (Caltrans 2007). The nearest officially designated state scenic highway to the project site is Interstate 580, approximately 21 miles to the southwest. This highway segment is not visible from the project area.

LOCAL PLANS, POLICIES, REGULATIONS, AND ORDINANCES

No local plans, policies, regulations, or ordinances relating to visual resources are applicable to the proposed project.

4.15.4 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The level of significance of visual impacts was determined using the thresholds of significance discussed below. Visual impacts of the proposed project were evaluated for the project construction and operation periods. Note that an assessment of aesthetic quality is a subjective matter, and reasonable people can disagree as to whether alteration in the visual character and appearance of the project site would be adverse or beneficial.

The method used for this assessment of impacts on aesthetics, light, and glare is adapted primarily from guidelines prepared by the Federal Highway Administration (1988) for assessing visual impacts associated with transportation projects; these guidelines are transferred easily to other types of projects that could alter existing landscapes. The process of describing and evaluating visual resources near the project site and the surrounding area involves the following steps:

- ▶ Identify the visual features or resources that compose and define the *visual character* of the viewsheds. (A viewshed is a physiographic area consisting of land, water, biotic, and cultural elements that may be viewed and mapped from one or more viewpoints and that has inherent scenic qualities and/or aesthetic values as determined by those who view it.)
- ▶ Assess the *quality* of the identified visual resources relative to overall regional visual character.
- ▶ Identify major viewer groups and describe *viewer exposure*.
- ▶ Identify *viewer sensitivity*, or the relative importance of views to people who are members of the viewing public.
- ▶ Evaluate the extent to which the affected environment contains places or features that have been designated in plans and policies for protection or special consideration.

The visual character and quality of the project site and surrounding area is discussed in the environmental setting section above; viewer exposure and viewer sensitivity is discussed below.

Viewer Exposure

Viewer exposure refers to the location of viewer groups, the number of viewers, and the frequency and duration of views (FHWA 1988:63).

Residential development is sparse in the area and is rural; viewers are few. Residences northwest of the project site at the intersection of Arch Road and Newcastle Road have relatively distant views, just over one-half mile from the project site. Immediately east of the project site on Austin Road, two residences have direct views from across Austin Road. A third residence with east-west oriented views is approximately 650 feet southeast of the project site. The viewer exposure for two residences located more than one-half mile northwest of the site would be low. Because of the small number of viewers and the close proximity to the site, the viewer exposure for the two nearest residences east of the site and, to some extent, the third nearest residence southeast of the site would be moderate.

Northbound motorists on Newcastle Road do not have direct or peripheral views, while southbound motorists do have peripheral views of the project site. From Arch Road, westbound motorists have both direct (but distant) and peripheral views of the project site. Immediately east of the project site on Austin Road motorists have direct and peripheral views of the site. According to the *2006 Draft Environmental Impact Report for the City of Stockton General Plan 2035*, motorists traveling on State Route (SR) 99 do not have direct views of the site, but do notice the skyglow from the existing NCYCC, CTCA, and BNSF railroad facilities near the project site. Because of the high number of motorists passing on SR 99, these motorists would have moderate visual exposure to skyglow around the project site. Considering the relatively small number of motorists who drive on Arch Road, which is one-third mile north of any proposed structures, the viewer exposure is low. Likewise, for southbound motorists on Newcastle Road northwest of the site, the viewer exposure is also low. Finally, relative to Arch Road motorists, total motorists passing immediately east of the project site on Austin Road is low. Thus, the visual exposure for nearby motorists on SR 99 is moderate and the visual exposure for all other motorists passing the site is low.

Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity depends on the type of viewers and increases generally with an increase in the frequency and duration of views. Viewer sensitivity is higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure, people engaged in recreational activities, and for views seen by residents from near their homes. Sensitivity tends to be lower for commuters or for those driving as part of their work, for views in commercial and industrial landscapes, and for visitors whose visit purpose is not for leisure or recreation, such as business purposes (FHWA 1983:63–64, SCS 1978:12).

Because residents west of the project site have low visual exposure and have grown accustomed to the moderately low visual quality of the site and the surrounding area, they would have moderately low visual sensitivity to changes on the project site. Because residents east of the project site have moderate visual exposure to the project site, have grown accustomed to the moderate visual quality of the site relative to the moderately low visual quality of the surrounding area, and have generally more moderate visual sensitivity in the context of the project site, views from these residences would be considered moderately sensitive.

Most of the motorists passing the project site on local roadways commute to the BNSF railroad facility, Austin Road Landfill, nearby farms, or other work-focused destinations to the east. The area is not near tourist destinations and is not within any designated scenic areas. Consequently, viewer sensitivity for passing motorists would be low.

Motorists passing within 1.5 miles west of the project site on SR 99 notice the existing skyglow from the NCYCC, CTCA, and BNSF railroad facilities surrounding the project site. Even so, the skyglow is only of passing interest to travelers on the highway and is not a prominent component of the viewshed. At the same time the skyglow is evident, the motorists are traveling through an urbanizing/urban area of Stockton. Skyglow is not a distracting component of the viewshed and the visual sensitivity for SR 99 motorists is considered low.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

In accordance with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, an impact of the proposed project related to visual resources would be considered significant if project implementation would:

- ▶ have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- ▶ substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to trees (particularly heritage oaks or unusually large trees), rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- ▶ substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings; or
- ▶ create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

ISSUES NOT DISCUSSED FURTHER

Because no state scenic highways are within view in the project area and no scenic resources would be affected by the proposed project, the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including but not limited to unusual trees or oaks, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. For this reason there would be no impact.

Views and viewers northwest and north of the project site will not be discussed further because: (1) motorists passing the site on Newcastle and Arch Roads have low visual exposure; (2) residents northwest of the project site have low visual exposure and moderately low visual sensitivity to the same area; and (3) the primary visual changes from the north and northwest would involve constructing the proposed facility in a location and character generally consistent with the existing abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility.

During the 2-year construction period of the proposed project, the existing visual character on the project site would be replaced by the activity of this large number of construction workers, vehicles, and equipment. The effect of this visual impact is not severe for a variety of reasons. These changes would not be perceived as a substantial degradation of the visual character relative to the existing institutional character and to a small degree agricultural tractors, trucks, and silos in the area. The changes would be viewed by residents who have moderate visual exposure and moderately high sensitivity. Most importantly, construction activity would be temporary. Thus, impacts on visual character from construction activity would not be significant and will not be discussed further. However, impacts resulting from construction lighting are addressed in Impact VIS-3 below.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

IMPACT VIS-1 **Potential Degradation of a Scenic Vista.** *Agricultural land on the project site may be considered scenic by a small number of people. A limited number of people consider this land scenic and the limited effects of a new facility would be consistent with the surrounding context. (Less than significant)*

A scenic vista is generally considered a view of an area that has remarkable scenery or a resource that is indigenous to the area. No state- or locally designated scenic corridors or scenic vistas are within view in the project area. The nearest San Joaquin County–designated scenic roadway is Interstate 5, approximately 7 miles to the northwest and approximately 9 miles to the south via Austin Road. The institutional structures on and generally surrounding the project site are unremarkable, in that they are low profile and do not express noteworthy architectural character; rather, they detract from the overall visual character of the area. The agricultural land on the project site and the surrounding area is unremarkable, in that the farmland is not expansive and is surrounded substantially by institutional development and a landfill and therefore does not constitute a scenic vista. A small number of people may consider agricultural land on the project site to be scenic, and this group could be affected by visual changes on the project site; however, this would be a limited number of

people, and the limited effects of a new facility are consistent with the surrounding context. For these reasons, construction-related and operational impacts on scenic vistas would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measure(s) for Impact VIS-1:

No significant impacts would occur, so no mitigation measures are required.

IMPACT VIS-2 **Potential Degradation of the Visual Character of the Project Site.** *Residents and some motorists immediately east of the project site would experience a slight degradation in visual character from converting 70 acres of agricultural land to an institutional use; however, this would not be a substantial change from the current visual character of the area. (Less than significant)*

The proposed project would involve constructing an institutional facility to replace the existing abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility and approximately 70 acres of agricultural land. This agricultural land, in a predominantly agricultural area, is unremarkable and is against a backdrop of institutional facilities. The proposed project would be consistent visually with the surrounding one and two story institutional facilities and would include institutional structures between one and three stories, chain-link fencing, pole-mounted lighting, and a guard tower. All ornamental nonnative trees within the fence line of the existing Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility would be removed.

Three residences immediately east of Austin Road have unobstructed views of the site. The visual character of the 70 acres of vacant land would change from an agricultural to an institutional character. However, given that the current view includes a number of multi-story institutional facilities, and given the few number of people who regularly view the site, the visual change would not be substantial. Therefore, the change in visual character as viewed from the residences east of the project site would be less than significant.

Mitigation Measure(s) for Impact VIS-2:

No significant impacts would occur, so no mitigation measures are required.

IMPACT VIS-3 **Increase in Light and Glare.** *Skyglow impacts for viewers in all directions would be similar to current skyglow caused by the NCYCC and the BNSF railroad facility. Construction lighting, parking lot lighting, 35-foot-high facility lighting, and building lighting would increase light and glare for residents immediately east of the project site. (Significant, significant and unavoidable)*

Construction of the proposed project is anticipated to last 24 months with a peak construction period of approximately 7 months. Night lighting may be used during this period. Because construction night lighting can create a nuisance by spilling onto residential properties (and through windows) even for parking lot construction, construction impacts from light and glare for two residences east of the project site, although temporary, would be substantial.

The abandoned Karl Holton Youth Correctional Facility and agricultural land on the project site do not generate any sources of light, glare, or skyglow. The proposed parking lot and associated lighting would be visible along Austin Road from the two nearest residences immediately east of the roadway. In addition, proposed high-pressure sodium bulbs would illuminate areas inside and outside the fence line. Finally, building lighting within the proposed facility would contribute to the overall lighting on the project site. This lighting would be viewed against the existing backdrop of pole-mounted lighting at the two youth facilities southwest and west of the project site and perimeter lighting surrounding the CTCA property. The proposed project may appear more like the existing CTCA facility, which does not reflect a high degree of glare. However, the proximity of the proposed structures to the existing residences, as well as the placement of a parking lot in the immediate vicinity of the structures, could result in glare from metal poles, metal and glazing on structures, and chrome and windshields of vehicles associated with the parking lot.

Skyglow as seen by people traveling in the area, including along SR 99, would not be noticeably different than the current skyglow generated by the existing facilities on the site and at the BNSF railroad facility. Therefore, this project would not contribute significantly to more distant skyglow affects.

Because of the proximity and extent of proposed lighting and potential glare near visually sensitive residents east of the project site, light and glare impacts on residents east of the project site would be significant.

Mitigation Measure(s) for Impact VIS-3:

Minimizing of Construction Lighting Impacts. To minimize the construction light that could spill onto the residential properties immediately east of the project site, the flood or area lighting needed for construction activities will be directed downward toward work activities and shielded from adjacent residences. Portable construction lights will be operated at the lowest allowable height and in the smallest number feasible to maintain adequate night lighting.

Redirecting Lighting from Project Operations Downward and Away from Residences to the East. To minimize the light from operation of the proposed project that could spill and glare onto residential properties immediately east of the project site, lights will be shielded such that direct lighting does not spill onto the residences. Further, light fixtures will not use reflective surfaces.

Significance after Mitigation

With the implementation of the mitigation measures for Impact VIS-3, which minimize construction lighting impacts and direct lighting from project operations downward and away from residences to the east, construction and operational night lighting would be shielded, where possible, from sensitive residents east of the project site. However, the overall intensity of light would increase substantially for the residences directly adjacent to the site, despite the use of glare shields, because of the need to provide overall security to the site. Therefore, the project would result in a significant and unavoidable impact.