

## **5.3 VISUAL RESOURCES**

This section addresses the manner in which the proposed General Plan could affect the aesthetic environment and visual resources in El Dorado County. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and other agencies have established procedures for analyzing project-related effects on visual resources. This analysis relies on these principles in qualitatively assessing how scenic resources could be affected by different development patterns associated with the four equal-weight alternatives. Specifically, it assesses potential growth patterns identified in the land use diagrams for these four alternatives and the extent to which proposed General Plan policies would have an adverse effect on existing resources or degrade visual quality.

Different aspects of visual quality are evaluated in the different impacts presented in this section. Impact 5.3-1 deals with two related, yet distinct, components of the visual environment, namely scenic views or landscapes in the county, as well as specific scenic resources that are found within the overall visual landscape. Impact 5.3-2 considers the overall scenic character of the county and/or subregion that is affected by the proposed development patterns. Lastly, Impact 5.3-3 considers the effects of new sources of light and glare.

### **5.3.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

#### **PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

Located in the foothills of the northern Sierra Nevada, El Dorado County lies east of the Central Valley and west of the state of Nevada. West of El Dorado County, the Sacramento region is characterized as flat urbanized and agricultural areas with scattered oak woodlands traversed by two major rivers. Mountainous terrain lies on the eastern edge of the county, with high desert to the east in Nevada. Urbanized areas such as Folsom, Sacramento, and Auburn surround the western portion of the county while large areas remain open as agricultural and forest lands.

#### **Visual Character of El Dorado County**

The county has a broad range of landscapes that change with the gradual increase in elevation. Elevations range from 200 feet in the western rolling foothills, adjacent to Sacramento County, to more than 10,000 feet along the Sierra Nevada crest on the edge of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The diverse environments of the region are represented by distinct natural communities and landforms that display different development patterns and historical features. This broad

diversity is an important element of El Dorado County's visual heritage and one that many residents value as part of their quality of life.

Rolling hills dotted with mature oaks and oak woodlands, agricultural land, apple orchards and vineyards, evergreen forests and snow-capped mountains, scenic rivers, alpine lakes, and historic structures all contribute to the visual character found in the county. These visual resources contribute to the county's economy through tourism and recreational opportunities. U.S. Highway 50 (U.S. 50) extends east from the Sacramento Valley through the Sierra Nevada and beyond Lake Tahoe. Bordering the west shore of Lake Tahoe, State Route (SR) 89 continues south to the Alpine/El Dorado county line. SR 49 runs north-south from the Placer/El Dorado county line to the Amador/El Dorado county line, passing through the city of Placerville. Travelers on all of these roads pass through areas identified by various public agencies as scenic.

### **Scenic Views and Resources**

Visual resources are classified in two categories: scenic views and scenic resources. *Scenic resources* are described in the CEQA Environmental Checklist as specific features of a viewing area (or *viewshed*) such as trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings. They are specific features that act as the focal point of a viewshed and are usually foreground elements. *Scenic views* are elements of the broader viewshed such as mountain ranges, valleys, and ridgelines. They are usually middle ground or background elements of a viewshed that can be seen from a range of viewpoints, often along a roadway or other corridor.

A list of the county's significant scenic views and resources is presented in Table 5.3-1. This list consists of viewpoints identified through a series of public workshops that were held during the development of a Scenic Highway Ordinance as called for in the 1996 General Plan. This ordinance was never adopted by the County. Many of these viewpoints are areas along highways where viewers can see large water bodies (e.g., Lake Tahoe and Folsom Reservoir), river canyons, rolling hills, or forests. Other viewpoints are the locations of historic structures or districts that are reminiscent of El Dorado County's heritage. Table 5.3-1 indicates where the scenic viewpoints are located and the scenic views and resources that can be seen from those viewpoints. Exhibit 5.3-1 shows the scenic highways and viewpoints in El Dorado County, using the location numbers provided in Table 5.3-1.

<b>Table 5.3-1 Important Public Scenic Viewpoints</b>				
Viewpoint	Location No. <sup>1</sup>	Location	Direction	Scenic View or Resource <sup>2</sup>
<b>Highways</b>				
U.S. 50 westbound	1a	East of Bass Lake Road	South	Marble Valley (V)
	1b	Between South Shingle Road/ Ponderosa Road interchange and Greenstone Road	East	Crystal Range (V)
	1c	East of Placerville, various locations (state-designated scenic highway)	East, north, and south	Sierra Nevada peaks (V), American River canyon (V,R), lower Sierra Nevada ridgelines (V)
	1d	Echo Summit	East	Christmas Valley (V), Lake Tahoe (V,R)
U.S. 50 eastbound	2a	Between Echo Summit and Placerville (state-designated scenic highway)	West, north, and south	American River canyon (V,R), Sacramento Valley (V), lower Sierra Nevada ridgelines (V), Horsetail Falls (R)
	2b	Camino Heights	West	Sacramento Valley (V)
	2c	Bass Lake Grade	West	Sacramento Valley (V)
U.S. 49 northbound	3a	Coloma	All	Historic townsite of Coloma (Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park) (R)
	3b	Marshall Grade Road to Cool	East and west	Coloma Valley (V), American River (V,R), ridgelines (V), rolling hills (V)
	3c	North of Cool Quarry	North	Middle Fork American River Canyon (V,R)
U.S. 49 southbound	4a	Pedro Hill Road to Coloma	East and west	Coloma Valley (V), American River (V,R), Mt. Murphy (V,R), rolling hills (V)
	4b	Coloma	All	Historic townsite of Coloma (Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park) (R)
	4c	South of Crystal Boulevard	East and south	Cosumnes River canyon (V), ridgelines (V)

<b>Table 5.3-1 Important Public Scenic Viewpoints</b>				
Viewpoint	Location No. <sup>1</sup>	Location	Direction	Scenic View or Resource <sup>2</sup>
U.S. 89 northbound	5	Emerald Bay to Sugar Pine Point	East	Lake Tahoe (R)
U.S. 89 southbound	6	Sugar Pine Point to Emerald Bay	East	Lake Tahoe (R)
U.S. 193 northbound (from Placerville to Georgetown)	7	Intersection with U.S. 49 to Kelsey	North, east, and west	American River canyon (V,R), ridgelines (V)
U.S. 193 southbound (from Georgetown to Placerville)	8	Kelsey to intersection with U.S. 49	South, east, and west	American River canyon (V,R), ridgelines (V)
U.S. 88 westbound	9	Kirkwood to Omo Ranch Road	North and west, south into Amador County	Lower Sierra Nevada ridgelines (V)
U.S. 88 eastbound	10	Omo Ranch Road to Kirkwood	North and west, south into Amador County	Sierra Nevada peaks (V), lower Sierra Nevada ridgelines (V)
<b>Other Major Roadways</b>				
Mormon Emigrant Trail (Iron Mountain Road)	11	Intersection with U.S. 88 to approximately 10 miles west of intersection	North	Sierra Nevada peaks (V), South Fork of the American River canyon (V,R), ridgelines (V)
Mt. Aukum Road (E16)	12	Crossings of the North and Middle forks of the Cosumnes River, road section north of South Fork of the Cosumnes River	All	Cosumnes River canyon(s) (V,R)
Omo Ranch Road	13	Between Omo Ranch and U.S. 88	Various	Ridgelines (V), canyons (V,R)

<p align="center"><b>Table 5.3-1</b> <b>Important Public Scenic Viewpoints</b></p>				
Viewpoint	Location No. <sup>1</sup>	Location	Direction	Scenic View or Resource <sup>2</sup>
Icehouse Road	14	Peavine Road to U.S. 50	South	American River canyon (V,R)
Salmon Falls Road Southbound	15	South of U.S. 49 to Folsom Reservoir	South and west	American River canyon (V,R), Folsom Reservoir (V,R)
Latrobe Road	18	From White Rock Road south to County Line	All	Rolling hills (V), occasional vistas of Sacramento Valley (V)
Wentworth Springs Road	19	East of Georgetown	All	Intermittent forest and ridge views (V), views of water bodies (Rubicon River, Stumpy Meadows Reservoir) (V)
Cold Springs Road	20	Gold Hill area	All	Rolling hills (V), ridgelines (V)
<b>River Corridors</b>				
American River	N/A	Middle Fork forms the western part of the northern county boundary; South Fork meanders through the central part of the county	N/A	Middle Fork (V), South Fork (V, R)
Cosumnes River	N/A	North, Middle, and South Forks pass through south-central portion of the county to the southern boundary	N/A	North, Middle, and South Forks (V)
Rubicon River	N/A	Northern boundary in the central portion of the county	N/A	(V)
Truckee River	N/A	Upper Truckee River flows into Lake Tahoe at South Lake Tahoe	N/A	(V, R)
<p><sup>1</sup> Location numbers correlate to location numbers in Exhibit 5.3-1.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> V=scenic view, R=scenic resource</p> <p>Source: EDAW 2003</p>				

### *Scenic Highways*

Several highways in El Dorado County have been designated by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) as scenic highways or are eligible for such designation. The following state scenic highways have been designated in the county (Caltrans 2000):

- < U.S. 50 from the eastern limits of the Government Center interchange (Placerville Drive/Forni Road) in Placerville to South Lake Tahoe,
- < all of SR 89 within the county, and
- < those portions of SR 88 along the southern border of the county.<sup>1</sup>

All of SR 49 within El Dorado County is eligible for designation as a state scenic highway, but it has not yet been designated (Caltrans 2001a). (Please refer to Regulatory/Planning Environment below for more information about the scenic highway designation process.) The scenic portions of these highways are identified in Exhibit 5.3-1.

### *Scenic River Corridors and Wild and Scenic Rivers*

Rivers are important visual resources that draw tourists to the area for recreational opportunities. The American, Cosumnes, Rubicon, and Upper Truckee rivers run through El Dorado County (Table 5.3-1). The lower portion of the South Fork American River offers a 21-mile stretch of whitewater rapids, which serve as a recreational boating resource, from Chili Bar to Folsom Reservoir

A large portion of El Dorado County is under the jurisdiction of the USFS as part of the Eldorado and Tahoe National forests and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The USFS has jurisdiction, under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, to designate rivers or river sections to “be preserved in free-flowing condition and ... protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations” (U.S. Forest Service 2003). To date, no river sections in El Dorado County have been nominated for or granted Wild and Scenic River status.

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<sup>1</sup> SR 88 has also been designated under the USFS program as a national scenic byway. Studies are pending for a similar designation under a Federal Highway Administration program.

Exhibit 5.3-1 (11x17)

2<sup>nd</sup> page of Exhibit 5.3-1 (11x17)

## ***Historic Resources***

The discovery of gold by James Marshall at a mill owned by John Sutter in Coloma sparked the California Gold Rush in 1848. As a result, boom towns appeared throughout the Sierra Nevada foothills in an area now known as the Gold Country; these boom towns contributed substantially to settlement of the state. Many of the towns, way stations, and stopping points established during that period are still occupied and flourishing today. The Gold Rush era shaped the historic traditions of El Dorado County, and the buildings, communities, and equipment that remain from that period have become an integral part of the county's visual character. Historic trails such as the Mormon Emigrant Trail and the Pony Express Trail traverse the county. Many communities have historical structures, including gold mining remnants, that date back to the Gold Rush era.

Several county and private organizations and commissions serve in an advisory capacity to the county in its efforts to preserve and manage numerous cultural resource sites in the area. These include the El Dorado County Historical Museum, El Dorado County Historical Society, and El Dorado County Pioneer Cemetery Commission. The El Dorado County Cultural Resource Preservation Commission was recently disbanded by the county; the County Board of Supervisors intends to reform and revise the commission. Section 5.13, Cultural Resources, provides more information about the various sites and structures in the County that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places or the California Register of Historic Resources.

## **REGULATORY/PLANNING ENVIRONMENT**

### **California Scenic Highway Program**

The intent of the California Scenic Highway Program is “to protect and enhance California’s natural scenic beauty and to protect the social and economic values provided by the State’s scenic resources” (Caltrans 2001c). Caltrans administers the program, which was established in 1963 and is governed by the California Streets and Highways Code (§260 et seq.). The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of the adjacent land. Caltrans has compiled a list of state highways that are designated as scenic and county highways that are eligible for designation as scenic (Caltrans 2000, 2001a).

A county or city may nominate an eligible highway for designation as a scenic highway if it meets certain criteria based on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on the view. To nominate such a highway, the local jurisdiction, with citizen participation, must submit a scenic

corridor protection program to the Caltrans Departmental Transportation Advisory Committee that includes the following components:

- < regulation of land use and density of development,
- < detailed land and site planning,
- < control of outdoor advertising,
- < attention to and control of earthmoving and landscaping, and
- < attention to the design and appearance of structures and equipment (California Department of Transportation 2001b).

Scenic highway designation can provide several types of benefits to the county. Designation as a scenic highway may also enhance land values and promote local tourism. Scenic areas are protected from encroachment of inappropriate land uses, free of billboards, and are generally required to maintain existing contours and preserve important vegetative features. Only low-density development is allowed on steep slopes and along ridgelines on scenic highways, and noise setbacks are required for residential development (Caltrans 2001b).

### **El Dorado County Standards and Ordinances**

The County has several standards and ordinances that address issues relating to visual resources. Many of these can be found in the County Zoning Ordinance (Title 17 of the County Code). The Zoning Ordinance is one of the mechanisms for implementing the General Plan policies and will be revised upon adoption of the General Plan. Existing ordinance requirements are provided for purposes of this analysis. The Zoning Ordinance consists of descriptions of the zoning districts, including identification of uses allowed by right or requiring a special-use permit and specific development standards that apply in particular districts based on parcel size and land use density. These development standards often involve limits on the allowable size of structures, required setbacks, and design guidelines.

Chapter 17.14 of the Zoning Ordinance contains general requirements for various types of development in the county. Included are requirements for setbacks and allowable exceptions, the location of public utility distribution and transmission lines, architectural supervision of structures facing a state highway, height limitations on structures and fences, outdoor lighting, and wireless communication facilities. The outdoor lighting requirements (§17.14.170) are intended to control artificial light and glare to the extent that unnecessary illumination of adjacent property is prohibited. The creation of light or glare in violation of the requirements constitutes a public nuisance and is subject to abatement proceedings. Lighting plans are

required for commercial, industrial, multifamily, civic, or utility projects and any project requiring design review, a special use permit or development plan application. The standards for outdoor lighting are applicable to all types of residential development. Outdoor lighting is required to be hooded or screened to direct the light downward; parking lot and security lighting is required to be top- and side-shielded. These standards are intended to prevent light trespass, reflection or glare onto adjacent properties. Other elements of the Zoning Ordinance are sign standards (§17.16) and requirements for off-street parking and loading (§17.18).

Title 16 of the County Code establishes requirements for major land developments (i.e., subdivisions). These requirements include, in various contexts, the establishment of a Subdivision Design and Improvement Standards Manual (Design Manual) that must be approved by the County Board of Supervisors (§16.44.120). Following adoption of the manual, design modifications or renovations must comply with the design standards. The current Design Manual contains standards regulating materials, parking, setbacks, frontage design, landscaping, and other design elements of the project.

The Design Manual also includes requirements for road width. The typical road minimum in a rural subdivision or parcel map is 24 feet. Urban areas are 28 feet for very low volume roads, 36 feet for low to moderate volume roads, and 40 feet for all other roads (including regional roads), although lower standards are permitted in hillside development areas. Commercial/industrial areas also have a minimum of 40 feet. These roadway standards serve as guidelines and can be relaxed through the design waiver process (§§16.08.020 and 16.40.010) or by the County Engineer. Very low volume rural roads have been permitted at widths as low as 18 feet. However, a minimum width of 18 feet is required by state fire safe regulations.

The Lake Tahoe Basin is under the jurisdiction of the TRPA, which manages visual resources and other environmental issues through its Regional Plan and Plan Area Statements. See Section 5.14 of this EIR for more information about TRPA and management of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

### **El Dorado County River Management Plan**

The El Dorado County River Management Plan was adopted in 2001 by the County Board of Supervisors as an update to a 1988 river management plan. The plan is intended to provide overall guidance for the long-term commercial and recreational use of the South Fork American River and adjacent riparian lands between Chili Bar Dam and Salmon Falls Road while protecting the environmental quality of the river. This 21-mile stretch of river is a

popular whitewater boating destination, and the River Management Plan provides operational guidelines for commercial and private boaters using this area. In particular, the plan addresses the optimal carrying capacity on the South Fork American River to provide recreational opportunities without damaging the environment (El Dorado County Department of General Services 2001).

The limitations on carrying capacity are intended to preserve the river as a scenic and recreational destination in the county.

### **U.S. Forest Service Management Plans**

The USFS prepared the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan in 1988 to guide management and land use planning decisions in this National Forest. The plan designates management areas based on the established priority of various resources, such as wilderness, recreation, wildlife, timber, and visual resources. In general, areas in the eastern portion of the county are designated for wilderness, primitive, and recreational uses. Much of the National Forest within El Dorado County is designated for visual foreground or middleground retention, including areas along the American River north of Camino and Pollock Pines, areas on both sides of U.S. 50 between Pacific House and Kyburz, and along the Cosumnes River at the southern border of the county (U.S. Forest Service 1988).

Subsequent to development of the land and resource management plans, the USFS developed the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan, which serves as a regional management plan for 11 National Forests, including the Eldorado and Tahoe National Forests and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The goal of the forest plan is to manage sensitive wildlife habitat cautiously and provide for species conservation while addressing the needs of forest managers to reduce the threat of wildfire. The Sierra Nevada Forest Plan addresses five objectives for the Sierra Nevada region:

- < preserve and enhance old forest ecosystems and associated species;
- < identify and implement effective techniques for fire and fuel management; preserve and enhance aquatic, riparian, and meadow ecosystems and associated species;
- < manage noxious weeds; and
- < sustain lower westside hardwood forest ecosystems (U.S. Forest Service 2001).

This planning process resulted in the adoption of the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA), which amended the 11 national forest plans. As a result of an appeal by various individuals and groups, the USFS is reviewing certain elements of the SNFPA and seeking

public input on improvements to those elements. As a result of the SNFPA, the land and resource management plans of various national forests are now being revised to bring their management practices and guidelines into conformance with the policies of that document. The SNFPA and land and management forest plans are both in effect currently, although the SNFP a takes precedence where they conflict.

### **Federal Agency Methods for Evaluating Visual Resources**

Several federal agencies have well-established methods for evaluating visual resources and project-related effects on those resources; two agencies of note are the USFS and the FHWA. Visual impact assessment involves consideration of several elements, including the visual resources of the region and the immediate area, important viewing locations (e.g., roads) and the general visibility of potentially distracting elements, and viewer groups and their sensitivities. The visual character and quality of the region and a particular area are assessed based on three criteria:

- < Vividness—the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking or distinctive visual patterns.
- < Intactness—the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements; this factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes as well as natural settings.
- < Unity—the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole; it frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the artificial landscape.

The appearance of the landscape is assessed using these criteria and descriptions of the dominance of elements of form, line, color, and texture. These elements are the basic components used to describe the visual character and quality (U.S. Forest Service 1974, Federal Highway Administration 1983).

Another important element of visual impact assessment is viewer sensitivity or concern. Viewer sensitivity is gauged based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, the proximity of viewers to the visual resource, the elevational position of viewers relative to the visual resource, the frequency and duration of views, the number of viewers, and the type and expectations of individuals and viewer groups.

The criteria for identifying the importance of views are related in part to the position of the viewer relative to the resource. An area of the landscape that is visible from a particular

location (e.g., an overlook) or series of points (e.g., a road or trail) is defined as a viewshed. To identify the importance of views, a viewshed may be divided into distance zones (i.e., foreground, middleground, and background). Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant it is and the greater its importance to the viewer. Although distance zones in viewsheds may vary between different geographic regions or types of terrain, a commonly used set of criteria identifies the foreground distance zone as extending 0.25–0.5 mile from the viewer, the middleground zone as extending from the foreground zone to 3–5 miles from the viewer, and the background zone as extending outward beyond the middleground zone (U.S. Forest Service 1974).

Visual sensitivity also depends on the number and type of viewers and the frequency and duration of views. Generally, visual sensitivity increases with an increase in total number of viewers, the frequency of viewing (e.g., daily or seasonally), and the duration of views (i.e., how long a scene is viewed). Also, visual sensitivity is higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure; people engaged in recreational activities such as hiking, biking, or camping; and residents. Sensitivity tends to be lower for views seen by people driving to and from work or as part of their work (U.S. Forest Service 1974, Federal Highway Administration 1983, U.S. Soil Conservation Service 1978). Views from recreational trails and areas, scenic highways, and scenic overlooks are generally assessed as having high visual sensitivity.

### 5.3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The General Plan would result in a significant impact if development would:

- < have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- < substantially damage the scenic quality of an area, including but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- < substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area or region; or
- < create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views in the area.



**Degradation of the Quality of Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources.** By accommodating additional residential and nonresidential development, the four equal-weight alternatives all have the potential to degrade the quality of scenic vistas and resources in the county. Development levels would be the highest

under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, followed by the Environmentally Constrained, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus,” and No Project alternatives. However, the spatial distribution of development and policy sets associated with these alternatives are unique in certain respects. All of the alternatives provide for of the establishment of a Scenic Corridor Ordinance and Scenic Corridor Combining Zone District, which would enhance the protection provided to scenic views. Policies associated with the two constrained alternatives are more stringent in terms of protecting the county’s visual resources. All of the alternatives could allow ministerial residential development to occur without consideration of impacts on visual resources. In addition, none of the alternatives consider the placement of utility facilities in scenic corridors or propose to provide additional protection to scenic resources along SR 49, an eligible State Scenic Highway. As a result, this impact is considered **significant**. Impact significance before and after mitigation is shown in the table below.

Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus”)		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-1: Degradation of the Quality of Scenic Vistas and Scenic Resources	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>4</sub>	S <sub>4</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>
Mitigation	Significance After Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus”)		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-4(a); 5.3-1(b): Protect Views from Scenic Corridors; 5.3-1(c): Extend Limitations on Ridgeline Development within Scenic Corridors or Identified Viewing Locations to Include All Development; 5.3-1(d): Nominate SR 49 for Scenic Highway Designation	LS	LS	—	—	—	—	LS	LS

Mitigation	Significance After Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-1(a), Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-4(a); 5.3-1(b), Nominate SR 49 for Scenic Highway Designation; and 5.3-1(c), Protect Views from Scenic Corridors	—	—	LS	LS	LS	LS	—	—
* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.								

Impacts to visual resources could be generated by residential and non-residential uses. In terms of residential development, the General Plan’s stated intent to focus high-intensity land uses and residential development in Community Regions and Rural Centers would be implemented with various levels of success under the four equal-weight alternatives, based on the extent of restrictions on residential subdivision. For the No Project and Roadway Constrained Six-Lane “Plus” Alternatives, the dispersed development pattern would encourage development in rural areas currently characterized by significant open space resources, encroaching on or threatening scenic views and resources in the process. Because ministerial residential development is permitted at one parcel per acre under all alternatives, varying amounts of residential development would not be subject to the discretionary review process.

Other types of development could also affect the quality of scenic views and resources. The County has no regulatory authority over the locations of power lines, and public utility distribution and transmission facilities (see Section 5.6, Utilities). The County can however regulate the location of wireless facilities. Chapter 17.14.180 of the Zoning Ordinance recognizes the potential for wireless communication facilities to alter the aesthetic character of the County, but does not yet contain standards to mitigate these potential effects. These structures can be visually intrusive and could potentially be located in scenic viewsheds.

SR 49 has been identified by Caltrans as eligible for state scenic highway status, and portions of the highway have been identified as scenic viewpoints by County staff. Visual resources along SR 49 are not protected at the same level as those along U.S. 50, SR 88, and SR 89 because the El Dorado County portion of SR 49 has not been designated as a state scenic highway. If the

County were to apply for SR 49 to become a designated state scenic highway and Caltrans approved the application, the County would be required to adopt a scenic corridor protection program for SR 49, which would protect views and place controls on incompatible land uses along the highway.

### **No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)**

#### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative***

The relevant policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.6.1.1 through 2.6.1.7, 2.7.1.1 and 2.7.1.2, 5.6.1.3, 7.4.5.1 and 7.4.5.2, 7.5.2.1 through 7.5.2.6, 7.6.1.1(C), 7.6.1.1(E), 7.6.1.3(E), and 9.1.3.2.

#### ***No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

In terms of residential development, the General Plan's stated intent to focus high-intensity land uses and residential development in Community Regions and Rural Centers would be unattainable based on the restrictions on residential subdivisions under this alternative. As a result, this alternative would lead to a broad, dispersed spread of low-intensity residential development throughout the county. This dispersed development pattern would result in more development in areas characterized by significant open space resources, encroaching on or threatening scenic resources in the process. For example, individual single-family residences might be developed along ridgelines in scenic areas without the review contemplated by Policy 2.6.1.5. This policy would, however, limit commercial development on ridgelines in scenic corridors, which would somewhat reduce visual intrusion into scenic areas.

To the extent that the land use map is applicable, the distribution and types of land uses identified in the No Project Alternative land use diagram correlate well with the location of scenic views and resources identified in Table 5.3-1 and Exhibit 5.3-1. Land uses in and surrounding important viewing areas are generally low-intensity uses with larger parcel sizes such as Rural Residential, Low-Density Residential, Natural Resources, and Open Space. However, because of the relatively uninterrupted natural views provided by these designations, viewers traveling along highways in the Rural Regions (particularly those identified in Table 5.3-1 as having scenic viewpoints) would have high sensitivity to changes in landscape or vegetative cover. Dispersed residential development in these rural areas could result in the removal of oak trees and other vegetation or involve leveling and grading that would affect the intactness, unity, and topography of the viewshed. Views of residential streets and landscaped yards would also detract from the open views of rolling hills common in many

parts of the county. In addition, these types of uses are less likely to bring visually intrusive elements into the landscape.

The policies included in the No Project Alternative, combined with existing standards and guidelines in the Zoning Ordinance, are intended to protect scenic vistas and resources in the county. Policies 7.6.1.1(E) and 7.6.1.3(E) provide specific guidance about the use of primarily native landscaping for visual buffering. The protection of open space is addressed in Policy 7.6.1.1. Guidelines for protection and replacement of native landscaping are included in Policies 7.4.5.1 and 7.4.5.2. Design guidelines for historic districts and structures are addressed in Policies 7.5.2.1 through 7.5.2.6, although no protection is provided by these policies for old, visually distinctive buildings that are not historic. Policy 7.5.2.6 protects the viewshed of the historic district of Coloma. Policy 9.1.3.2 provides for increased public access to scenic waterways. These policies would provide a broad range of protections for visual resources in the county for commercial and industrial development, the discretionary residential development within existing commitments, and any ministerial development that was not in compliance.

Policy 2.6.1.1 also requires adoption of a Scenic Corridor Ordinance, which would protect scenic vistas identified by the County from being obstructed or intruded on by conflicting or distracting elements such as sound walls, oversized buildings, signs, communication structures, and unvegetated graded slopes. The possible addition of a Scenic Corridor Combining Zone District (Policy 2.6.1.6) would also address visual degradation along scenic corridors in Rural Regions. The General Plan does not require implementation of a Scenic Corridors Ordinance or combining zone district, however. As a result, these protections are not assured. The policy excludes Community Regions and Rural Centers, which would also reduce the protection for scenic views that include more intensive foreground views in addition to less developed middle ground and background views. Policy 5.6.1.3 directs utility easements and electric transmission lines to be located in open space greenbelt corridors. To the extent that this occurs, this policy could result in degradation of the scenic corridor, particularly in the case of power lines that extend for long distances and can be visually intrusive.

Policy 2.6.1.2 essentially implements scenic corridor protection programs for Caltrans-designated scenic highways. As described above, the No Project Alternative does not address the fact that SR 49 is eligible for designation by Caltrans as a state scenic highway. Designation would protect views and place controls on incompatible land uses along SR 49 at a level equivalent to SR 88, SR 89, and U.S. 50.

In summary, the fact that the County does not presently review and approve ministerial residential development would present gaps in the County's ability to protect and preserve

scenic views and scenic resources within identified scenic viewsheds. Further, this alternative does not address ministerial development on ridgelines or structures in scenic corridors, which could affect scenic views in the county. Lastly, there are no provisions to further protect resources along SR 49, which is an eligible State Scenic Highway. As a result, this impact is considered significant.

#### ***No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

If the No Project Alternative were to reach buildout, all legal parcels would be developed with at least one residence and the policies and land use map would continue to have the gaps relating to visual resource protection that are identified for 2025. The greater amount of development anticipated at buildout could intensify the degradation of scenic views and the risk of encroachment on scenic resources as residential uses become dispersed throughout the Rural Regions. The increased need for services could increase the likelihood that power lines, and public utility distribution and transmission facilities would infringe on scenic viewsheds. As development intensifies in the county, the lack of state-designated scenic highway status on SR 49 could result in visual degradation of this corridor. This impact is considered significant.

#### **Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (Alternative #2)**

##### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative***

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative are Policies HS-2c and HS-2d, HS-4a and HS-4b, LU-2d, LU-6a through LU-6e, LU-6g and LU-6h, LU-7f, Implementation Measures LU-F through LU-I, Policies CO-11a and CO-11b, CO-12a and Implementation Measures CO-G and CO-O.

##### ***Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

The distinctions between the impacts of the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” and No Project Alternatives are that the former would result in slightly higher and more dense levels of development through 2025 that could affect scenic resources in the county. Outside of the existing commitments and one parcel map division of up to four new parcels where permitted by the land use designation, residential development would be ministerial; ministerial projects are not typically subject to General Plan policy review.

The policies for this alternative address the implementation of a Scenic Corridor Ordinance that includes requirements for removal of offsite signs and avoidance of ridgeline development (Policy LU-6a through LU-6d and Implementation Measure LU-F), standards controlling

signage (Policies LU-6c and LU-6d and Implementation Measure LU-H), and efforts to move utility distribution lines underground (Policy LU-6g). These policies provide means to protect foreground, middleground, and background views from scenic corridors and important viewing locations (see Exhibit 5.3-1). Implementation Measure LU-A identifies revisions to the Zoning Ordinance that would apply design and development standards to ministerial as well as discretionary projects, although this intent is not specifically described in the measure or the General Plan policies and no mechanism is provided to ensure that ministerial development complies. Policies for this alternative also address protection of scenic resources, including provision and protection of open space and separation of communities (Policies LU-2d and CO-11a and b), requiring a Scenic Corridor Ordinance (Policy LU-6a and Implementation Measure LU-F), limitations to ridgeline development (Policy LU-6b), fuel management and fire protection standards in areas of high and very high wildfire hazard (Policies HS-2c, HS-2d, HS-4a, and HS-4b and Implementation Measure CO-G), guidelines for protection and replacement of native landscaping and retention of distinctive topographical features (Policies LU-6h, CO-11b and CO-12a, and Implementation Measures CO-G and CO-O), and design guidelines for historic districts and structures (Policy LU-6e, Implementation Measure LU-G, Policies CO-9a through CO-9c, and Implementation Measure CO-N). These policies would provide a broad range of protections for visual resources in the county for commercial, industrial, and some residential development.

In terms of policies, the primary distinction between this alternative and the No Project Alternative is that this alternative provides further protection for ridgeline development through Policy LU-6b, which would prohibit ridgeline development that would break the skyline or be visible from publicly accessed lands such as roadways or parks. This policy would protect all areas of the county from infringement by high-visibility structures on ridgelines that could substantially reduce the intactness and unity of viewsheds.

Ministerial residential development could proceed without discretionary review and application of General Plan policies, at least until the Zoning Ordinance revision is complete, which could potentially affect scenic views and resources in the county. Further, this alternative does not consider the placement of certain intrusive structures (i.e., public utility and transmission facilities) in scenic corridors. Lastly, there are no considerations given to protecting scenic resources along SR 49. Therefore, this impact is considered significant.

### ***Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

If the Roadway Constrained Six-Lane “Plus” Alternative were to reach buildout, all parcels in the county would be developed (some subdivided first) and the policies and land use map would continue to have the gaps relating to visual resource protection that are identified for

2025. The greater amount of development anticipated at buildout could intensify the degradation of scenic views and the risk of encroachment on scenic resources as residential uses become dispersed throughout the Rural Regions, although protections afforded to ridgelines would be greater than under the No Project Alternative. The increased need for services could increase the likelihood that power lines, and public utility distribution and transmission facilities would infringe on scenic viewsheds. As development intensifies in the county, the lack of state-designated scenic highway status on SR 49 could result in visual degradation of this corridor. This impact is considered significant.

### **Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)**

#### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative***

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Environmentally Constrained Alternative are the same as those identified for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative except that Policies LU-6d, LU-7f, HS-2c, CO-11a and CO-11b have been revised and Implementation Policies are renumbered CO-N and CO-O in the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative are CO-O and CO-P, respectively, in the Environmentally Constrained Alternative.

#### ***Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

The policies for this alternative are similar to those for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative discussed above. Differences between the two alternatives are discussed below. The Environmentally Constrained Alternative would result in a markedly different development pattern because a great deal more residential subdivision is permitted. The potential for greater subdivisions has several implications for impacts on visual resources. There is a greater potential for large-scale changes in the landscape; the availability of new building sites with the types of public services typically available in subdivisions may reduce the incentive to develop outlying parcels; and less ministerial development would be expected.

The policies for this alternative are more stringent than the other equal-weight alternatives in requirements for placement of signs (Policy LU-6d). In comparison to the No Project and Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” alternatives, this alternative would result in much higher levels of development through 2025, some of which would still be ministerial and thus unregulated by the policies, at least until the Zoning Ordinance is revised. The inability to review ministerial residential uses within the county would present a gap in the County’s ability to protect and preserve scenic vistas and scenic resources. This alternative does not

protect resources along SR 49, an eligible State Scenic Highway. As a result, this impact is considered significant.

The land use map for the Environmentally Constrained Alternative would provide greatly enhanced protection for visual resources. The reduced boundaries and increased land use densities of the Community Regions and Rural Centers would reduce the incentive for residential development to be dispersed through the Rural Regions as ministerial development. Along with the General Plan policies, this development pattern would protect scenic views, resources, and viewsheds from encroachment by higher intensity development in the lower intensity rural areas. The creation of the Important Biological Corridor overlay designation would contribute to this improved protection by providing another level of disincentive for development in open-space areas throughout the county.

#### ***Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

At buildout, all parcels would be developed at the maximum density allowed by the land use map. The policies and land use map would continue to have the gaps relating to visual resource protection that are identified for 2025. The protections provided by the land use map, including the Important Biological Corridor overlay, and the greater force of the General Plan policies would provide protection for scenic views and resources. The greater amount of development anticipated at buildout, even though it would be focused primarily in the Community Regions and Rural Centers, could intensify the degradation of scenic views and the risk of encroachment on scenic resources as land becomes scarcer in those urban/suburban areas and residential uses become dispersed throughout the Rural Regions. The increased need for services could increase the likelihood that power lines, and public utility distribution and transmission facilities would infringe on scenic viewsheds. As development intensifies in the county, the lack of state-designated scenic highway status on SR 49 could result in visual degradation of this corridor. This impact is considered significant.

#### **1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)**

##### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative***

Please refer to the relevant policies included in the No Project Alternative.

##### ***1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

Under this alternative, there would be more opportunities to apply General Plan policies than under the No Project Alternative because discretionary development (including residential

subdivision) would be subject to review. As with the No Project Alternative, the development pattern established for the 1996 General Plan Alternative focuses on intensifying urban and suburban uses in Community Regions and Rural Centers while leaving Rural Regions in relatively low-intensity uses.

The policies for the 1996 General Plan Alternative—particularly those recommending consideration of a Scenic Corridor Ordinance and Scenic Corridor Combining Zone District—could provide a high level of protection for views from the areas of the county designated and eligible for designation as State Scenic Highways, as well as for those locations identified by the County for protection. However, the ordinance and combining zone need not be implemented. Other policies serve as useful adjunct measures to address specific elements of the visual environment for discretionary projects. Design guidelines are proposed for historic districts and protection of historic structures; these policies would protect the appearance of these scenic resources, although no protection is provided under this policy for old, visually distinctive buildings that are not historic.

In spite of the protections outlined in policy, this alternative would result in substantially higher levels of development through 2025 that could potentially affect scenic resources in the county. For the same reasons described under the No Project Alternative above, this impact is considered significant.

### ***1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

Please refer to 1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion above.

### **Mitigation Measure 5.3-1—No Project Alternative**

The County shall implement all of the following measures:

- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-4(a)
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(b): Protect Views from Scenic Corridors
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(c): Extend Limitations on Ridgeline Development within Scenic Corridors or Identified Viewing Locations to Include All Development
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(d): Nominate SR 49 for Scenic Highway Designation

These mitigation measures are described below. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level, because they would

address all of the various issues identified for the No Project Alternative. Ministerial development would provide application of general plan policies to scenic resources and would protect the visual integrity of SR 49.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)***

The County shall implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a) described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing. This measure would provide for a compatibility review for all ministerial and discretionary development, ensuring that applicable General Plan policies would be implemented.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(b): Protect Views from Scenic Corridors***

The County shall revise Policies 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.6 as follows:

**Revised Policy 2.6.1.1:** A Scenic Corridor Ordinance shall be prepared and adopted for the purpose of establishing standards for the protection of identified scenic local roads and State highways. The ordinance shall incorporate standards that address at a minimum the following:

- H. Placement of public utility distribution and transmission facilities and wireless communication structures;
- I. A program for visual resource management for various landscape types, including guidelines for and restrictions on ridgeline development;

**Revised Policy 2.6.1.6:** A Scenic Corridor (-SC) Combining Zone District ~~may~~shall be applied to all lands ~~exclusive of Community Regions and Rural Centers~~ within an identified scenic corridor ~~as determined by the County Board of Supervisors~~. Community participation shall be encouraged in identifying those corridors and developing the regulations.

**Revised Policy 2.6.1.7:** ~~Community Regions and Rural Centers within or adjacent to designated scenic corridors shall be permitted and encouraged to propose their own scenic corridor standards.~~ Policy deleted.

**Revised Policy 5.6.1.3:** ~~Use open space-greenbelt corridors to accommodate utility easements and high-powered electric transmission lines when practical.~~ Policy deleted.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(c): Extend Limitations on Ridgeline Development within Scenic Corridor or Identified Viewing Locations to Include All Development**

The County shall revise Policy 2.6.1.5 as follows:

**Revised Policy 2.6.1.5:** ~~Discretionary~~ All development on ridgelines shall be ~~limited within identified scenic corridors reviewed by the County for potential impacts on visual resources.~~ Visual impacts will be assessed and may require setbacks, screening, or other methods in order to avoid visual breaks to the skyline. ~~as conditions to receiving discretionary approval.~~

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(d): Nominate SR 49 for Scenic Highway Designation**

The County shall implement the following new policy:

**New Policy:** The County shall nominate SR 49 (segments in El Dorado County) for designation by Caltrans as a State Scenic Highway.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative**

The County shall implement all of the following measures:

- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(b): Nominate SR 49 for Scenic Highway Designation
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(c): Protect Views from Scenic Corridors

These potential mitigation measures are described below. With implementation of these mitigation measures, this impact would be reduced to a less-than-significant level, because they would address all of the various issues identified for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative. Gaps in application of general plan policies to ministerial development, would protect the visual integrity of SR 49 and would encourage involvement in utility placement.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)**

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(a) for the No Project Alternative above.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(b): Nominate SR 49 for Scenic Highway Designation**

Please refer to the proposed Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(d) for the No Project Alternative above.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-1(c): Protect Views from Scenic Corridors***

The County shall revise Implementation Measure LU-F as follows:

**Revised Implementation Measure LU-F:** Inventory potential scenic corridors and prepare a Scenic Corridor Ordinance, which should include development standards, provisions for avoidance of ridgeline development, placement of public utility distribution and transmission facilities and wireless communication structures, and off-premise sign amortization. [Policies LU-6a, LU-6b, LU-6c, and LU-6d]

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1—Environmentally Constrained Alternative**

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measures for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative above. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level, for the reasons described under the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-1—1996 General Plan Alternative**

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measures for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level for the reasons described under the No Project Alternative.



**Degradation of Existing Visual Character or Quality of the Area or Region.**

The existing visual character of the county is predominantly rural, with scenic views located throughout the region. Overall development patterns through 2025 would not significantly change the visual character of the county as a whole under the No Project and Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” alternatives. Therefore, this impact is considered **less than significant** for those two equal-weight alternatives. Both the Environmentally Constrained and 1996 General Plan alternatives would result in intensified development in 2025 that could degrade visual quality. Therefore, this impact would be **significant** for the 1996 General Plan. However, at buildout, because development would occur at maximum permissible densities in all parts of the county, the overall visual character would be affected substantially under any of the four equal-weight alternatives. Impacts at buildout are considered **significant** for all four equal-weight alternatives. Based on projected development levels, the severity of this impact would be greatest under the 1996 General Plan Alternative, followed by the Environmentally Constrained, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane

“Plus,” and No Project Alternatives. Impact significance before and after mitigation is shown in the table below.

Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-2: Degradation of Existing Visual Character or Quality of the Area or Region	LS	S <sub>4</sub>	LS	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>
Mitigation	Significance After Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-2: Design New Streets and Improvements to Minimize Effects on Rural Character to the Extent Possible	LS	SU <sub>4</sub>	LS	SU <sub>3</sub>	SU <sub>2</sub>	SU <sub>2</sub>	SU <sub>1</sub>	SU <sub>1</sub>
* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.								

This impact deals with the change in the visual character of the county and within those parts of the county that may be subject to substantially increased development under the various equal-weight alternatives. El Dorado County as a whole is a relatively rural county with predominantly low-density development and a range of scenic views and resources based on topography and proximity to the Sierra Nevada. Western El Dorado County is more urban in appearance because of the extensive residential development occurring in the El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park area. The four equal-weight alternatives are expected to result in different development patterns that affect the way the county looks. These distinctions are described below.

## **No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)**

### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative***

The relevant policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.5.1.1 and 2.5.1.2, 2.6.1.1 through 2.6.1.7, 2.7.1.1 and 2.7.1.2, 7.4.5.1 and 7.4.5.2, 7.5.2.1 through 7.5.2.6, 7.6.1.1(C), 7.6.1.1(E), 7.6.1.3(E), and 9.1.3.2.

### ***No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

Because this alternative assumes the development of existing commitments (14,565 dwelling units), western El Dorado County would assume a more urban form. Other residential growth projected under this alternative (6,869 dwelling units) would take the form of single-family homes on individual existing parcels scattered throughout the county, as described in Impact 5.3-1. While an individual home might have a localized visual effect, it would not be visible to a substantial number of viewers. The overall quantity of development would be low under this alternative (lowest of the four equal-weight alternatives) and the county would retain its rural character throughout most of its territory, except for the El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park area, which have already been visually transformed to a more urban appearance. There would be no new residential subdivisions or substantial increases in development in the Community Regions and Rural Centers. This impact is considered less than significant.

### ***No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

At buildout, all undeveloped residential parcels could develop with at least one dwelling unit, with existing residential commitments developing at greater densities in the western reaches of the county. Roadways in rural areas may need to be widened, which could affect their visual character (see discussion in the Environmentally Constrained Alternative). This development pattern could be more dispersed and could substantially reduce the amount and quality of contiguous open space and scenic views and resources in the county. Under this scenario, the county may not retain its rural character. This impact is considered significant.

## **Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (Alternative #2)**

### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative***

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative are Policies LU-2d, LU-6a through LU-6e, LU-6g and LU-6h, Implementation Measures

LU-F through LU-I, Policies CO-11a and CO-11b, CO-12a, and Implementation Measures CO-N and CO-O.

***Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

Like the other equal-weight alternatives, continued urbanization of western El Dorado County is expected with the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative. Residential development is expected to be more dense in the western reaches of the county than under the No Project Alternative, but the overall visual character of the El Dorado Hills and Cameron Park area would be essentially the same. Because all subdivision of property under this alternative is restricted to a maximum of four parcels and development would be somewhat limited, the effect of this alternative on the visual character of the remainder of the county would be somewhat similar to that of the No Project Alternative, with growth being pushed out into rural areas. Based on the absolute levels of development under this alternative through 2025 (25,539 additional dwelling units, but only 10,974 units outside of existing commitments spread throughout the county, plus supporting commercial industrial development), the visual character of the county would not be substantially altered. Although limited subdivision could occur, there would be no major new subdivisions or substantial increases in development in the Community Regions and Rural Centers; therefore, there would be little likelihood of any substantial change in the visual character of any specific area of the county compared to the No Project Alternative. This impact is considered less than significant.

***Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

At buildout, all remaining undeveloped residential parcels could be developed with some subdivided into up to four parcels to the extent permitted by the land use designation. This development pattern would be similar to, but more intensive than, that of the No Project Alternative in terms of reducing the amount and quality of contiguous open space and scenic views and resources in the county. With higher absolute development levels throughout the county, rural areas would have a larger number of dispersed parcels, along with accompanying increases in roads, land clearing, houses, and accessory structures. This increase in built environment would result in degradation of the visual character of these open, rural areas. This impact is considered significant.

### **Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)**

#### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative***

The relevant policies that are applicable to the Environmentally Constrained Alternative are the same as those identified for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative, except that Policies LU-3a through LU-3j, LU-6d, CO-11a and CO-11b have been revised and Implementation Policies are renumbered, CO-N and CO-O in the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative are CO-O and CO-P, respectively, in the Environmentally Constrained Alternative.

#### ***Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

As with all of the equal-weight alternatives, development under the Environmentally Constrained Alternative through 2025 is projected to be focused in Community Regions and Rural Centers, including the existing residential commitments in the El Dorado Hills area. This development pattern would result in more clustered, as opposed to dispersed, development patterns. Based on the anticipated absolute level of residential development (32,290 new dwelling units), the overall visual character is not expected to change substantially because the availability of clustered development in and near Community Regions and Rural Centers would provide a disincentive for large amounts of dispersed residential development in Rural Regions. The visual character of some specific areas of the county can be expected to change, however. This alternative includes relatively high-density land use designations in the Community Regions and Rural Centers. New subdivisions in areas that are currently relatively undeveloped can be expected to change the rural character to one that is more suburban in nature. Policies LU-3a through LU-3j would require that new subdivisions be designed to provide open space, avoid important natural resources, incorporate design elements of nearby development, encourage pedestrian circulation and transit access, and locate services near high-density residential areas. In addition, each subdivision’s Design Improvement Standards Manual would identify structural design, landscaping, and infrastructure design standards for that development.

These new developments could have a significant visual impact, however, if roadways are not designed in a manner that is in keeping with the existing rural character. As discussed in the setting section, the Design Manual sets road width standards at 24 feet for rural subdivisions and 28 to 40 feet for urban subdivisions. In many residential settings, narrower streets can be designed without sacrificing emergency access, on-street parking or vehicular and pedestrian safety. The development of new or widening of existing roadways to the standards in the

Design Manual could in many cases alter the at the existing rural character of an area and adversely effect neighborhood quality.

While policies in this alternative generally encourage the design of new development to emulate the best characteristics of existing nearby development and provide for design review, the visual character of some areas will substantially change. Further, policies do not specifically address the visual impacts arising from roadways. For this reason, this impact is considered significant.

#### ***Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

At buildout, all residential parcels could theoretically develop to maximum densities. Although land use densities are higher in the Community Regions and Rural Centers and lower in the Rural Regions under this alternative than under the other equal-weight alternatives, approximately 55,078 new dwelling units could be developed. The county, as a whole, could begin to take on a different character, but lower densities and protected sensitive resource areas could allow relatively higher amounts of open space and scenic resources to be retained. Nevertheless, based on the fact that substantial residential growth could occur, the county may not retain its rural character. This impact is considered significant.

#### **1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)**

##### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative***

Please refer to the relevant policies included in the No Project Alternative.

##### ***1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

This alternative would result in the greatest levels of development of any of the equal-weight alternatives (32,491 new dwelling units), with growth being concentrated in the El Dorado Hills area. This alternative, generally, allows more growth in more areas resulting in less of a distinction between rural and developed areas. Based on the level of projected development and the ability of the General Plan to focus high-intensity development in Community Regions and Rural Centers, the overall visual character of the county would not be substantially altered. As with the Environmentally Constrained Alternative, however, the development of new subdivisions could alter the existing rural character in specific areas. Policies 2.2.3.1, 2.2.3.4, 2.2.4.1, 2.2.5.8, 2.2.5.9, and 2.2.5.10 would require that new subdivisions be designed to provide open space, avoid important natural resources, incorporate design elements of nearby development, encourage pedestrian circulation and transit access, and locate services

near high-density residential areas. In addition, the Design Improvement Standards Manual for each subdivision would identify structural design, landscaping, and infrastructure design standards for that development.

As discussed above, current roadway width standards could result in development that is inconsistent with the existing rural character of certain areas. The extent of this impact is expected to be greater under this alternative than under the Environmentally Constrained Alternative because the designated community regions are larger and extend further into outlying rural areas. For example, Pollock Pines is included within a community region under the 96 General Plan Alternative but not under the Environmentally Constrained Alternative. Application of the Design Manual road width standards in connection with new subdivisions that would be permitted in Pollock Pines could substantially alter the character of the existing rural roads in the area. The same is true for other community regions that are larger in this alternative.

Because areas of the county will undergo substantial visual change from a rural to suburban character and roadways may also change in character, this impact is considered significant.

#### ***1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

This alternative is projected to result in the highest level of and most extensive development in the county through buildout of the four equal-weight alternatives. Approximately 78,692 dwelling units could be developed. Development would occur countywide, focused in large Community Regions, which could substantially affect scenic resources and transform the county's rural atmosphere, thus substantially changing the county's visual character. This impact is considered significant.

#### **Mitigation Measure 5.3-2—All Alternatives**

##### ***Mitigation Measure 5.3-2: Design New Streets and Improvements to Minimize Effects on Rural Character to the Extent Possible***

The No Project, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus,” Environmentally Constrained, and 1996 General Plan alternatives have the potential to degrade rural character and cause significant visual impacts. While design policies would largely address this issue, areas of the county will undergo substantial alterations in visual character from rural to a more suburban appearance. Roadway design modification would address a component of this impact but there is no mitigation to fully reduce it. Therefore, this impact would be significant and unavoidable. Revise the Land Use Element of the General Plan as follows:

**New Policy:** New streets and improvements to existing rural roads necessitated by new development shall be designed to minimize visual impacts, preserve rural character, and ensure neighborhood quality to the maximum extent possible consistent with the needs of emergency access, on-street parking, and vehicular and pedestrian safety.

**New Implementation Measure:** Revise the County Design Improvement Standards Manual to allow for narrower streets and roadways. The standards should recognize the need to minimize visual impacts, preserve rural character, and ensure neighborhood quality to the maximum extent possible consistent with the needs of emergency access, on-street parking, and vehicular and pedestrian safety.

Impact  
5.3-3

**Creation of New Sources of Substantial Light or Glare that Would Adversely Affect Daytime or Nighttime Views.** Development allowed under all four equal-weight alternatives could constitute new sources of light and glare. Therefore, impacts associated with nighttime light and glare are directly related to development levels. The most intense development patterns are projected for the 1996 General Plan Alternative, followed by the Environmentally Constrained, Roadway Constrained 6-Lane, and No Project Alternatives. General Plan policies provide for restrictions on high-intensity lighting and glare under all four alternatives, but these policies would not apply to ministerial residential projects that are not subject to the discretionary review process. As a result, new sources of light and glare could be introduced without measures to minimize associated nuisance effects. In addition, the proposed policies are vague in terms of known techniques used to reduce effects from nighttime lighting and glare. Therefore, this impact is considered **significant**. Impact significance before and after mitigation is shown in the table below.

Impact	Significance Before Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-3: Creation of New Sources of Substantial Light or Glare that Would Adversely Affect Daytime or Nighttime Views	S <sub>4</sub>	S <sub>4</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>

Mitigation	Significance After Mitigation*							
	Alt. #1 (No Project)		Alt. #2 (Roadway Constrained 6-Lane "Plus")		Alt. #3 (Environmentally Constrained)		Alt. #4 (1996 General Plan)	
	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout	2025	Buildout
5.3-3(a), Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a) and 5.3-3(b), Consider Design Features to Reduce Effects of Nighttime Lighting	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS	LS
<p>* Notes: LS = Less than Significant; N/A= Not Applicable; S = Significant; SU = Significant and Unavoidable. Significant impacts are ranked against each other by alternative for the 2025 scenario and the buildout scenario, from 1 (Worst Impact) to 4 (Least Impact). Where the impact under two different alternatives during the same time frame would be roughly equal in severity, the numerical ranking is the same.</p>								

Although light is generally considered beneficial, in some circumstances light can be a nuisance. Lighting nuisances can be categorized into three subcategories:

- < Spillover lighting: Artificial lighting that spills over onto adjacent properties and could cause a nuisance to neighboring residents by disturbing sleep patterns.
- < Glare: Intense light that shines directly, or is reflected off of a surface, into a person’s eyes. Use of building materials such as reflective glass and polished surfaces can cause glare. During daylight hours, the amount of glare depends on the intensity and direction of sunlight, and is particularly acute at sunrise and sunset because of the low angle of the sun in the sky. At night, artificial light can cause glare.
- < Skyglow: Artificial lighting from urbanized uses that alters the rural landscape and, in sufficient quantity, lights up the nighttime sky, thus reducing the visibility of astronomical features.

The four equal-weight alternatives have the potential to result in increased lighting sources associated with new development. The outdoor lighting requirements of the County Zoning Ordinance apply to all four of the alternatives. As noted previously, these requirements control light and glare such that unnecessary illumination of adjacent properties is prohibited. Lighting plans are not required for single-family residential development, but the lighting standards are applicable. The distinctions across the four alternatives are presented below.

## **No Project Alternative (Alternative #1)**

### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative***

The relevant policies included in the 1996 General Plan that are applicable to the No Project Alternative are Policies 2.1.4.4 and 2.8.1.1.

### ***No Project Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

The No Project Alternative would result in moderate growth concentrated in western El Dorado County based on existing residential commitments, but limited growth throughout the county as a whole. Most of the existing residential commitments are subject to design standards imposed at the time of approval, which would have been consistent with Policy 2.1.4.4, which requires that projects developed pursuant to specific plans include negotiable design features for public benefit, such as shielded, low-intensity and efficient lighting. Other discretionary projects, such as commercial and industrial development, would be subject to Policy 2.8.1.1, which includes standards, consistent with prudent safety practices, for outdoor lighting to reduce high-intensity nighttime lighting and glare. All development would be subject to the outdoor lighting standards of the Zoning Ordinance. However, there is no mechanism in place to review ministerial projects for compliance with the outdoor lighting standards. Under this alternative, individual single-family homes would develop at low densities throughout the county based on restrictions on residential subdivisions in the Writ. This development pattern could result in small but broadly dispersed increases in light and glare in undeveloped areas of the county. This impact is considered significant.

### ***No Project Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

Under this alternative, impacts at buildout are expected to be more severe than at 2025 based on the higher potential levels of development which could generate additional light and glare. This impact is considered significant.

## **Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (Alternative #2)**

### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative***

The relevant policy that is applicable to the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative is Policy LU-6f and Implementation Measure LU-A.

### ***Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

This alternative would result in higher nighttime lighting and glare impacts than the No Project Alternative, based on the higher expected levels of residential development. New lighting sources would also be created in undeveloped areas of the county that currently have few or no existing light sources, although they would be broadly dispersed. Policy LU-6f limits excess lighting and glare resulting from parking area lighting, signage, and buildings. However, ministerial residential projects could develop without discretionary review, although revisions to the Zoning Ordinance would be intended to apply to all development. However, the lack of a mechanism to implement these standards for ministerial development means that there is no mechanism for nighttime lighting and glare issues to be addressed. This impact is considered significant.

### ***Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

Under this alternative, impacts at buildout are expected to be more severe than at 2025 based on the higher potential levels of development which could generate additional light and glare. This impact is considered significant.

### **Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Alternative #3)**

#### ***Relevant Goals/Policies—Environmentally Constrained Alternative***

For the relevant policies of the Environmentally Constrained Alternative, please refer to the policies listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative.

#### ***Environmentally Constrained Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

The policies and relevant County ordinances that would apply to this alternative are the same as those discussed above for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative. Higher levels of development are expected to occur under this alternative, but they would be more focused in Community Regions and Rural Centers and more of these would be subject to the discretionary review process and subject to the policies. Projects that are subject to the discretionary review process would be reviewed for nighttime lighting and glare impacts but ministerial projects might not. These ministerial projects could result in new sources of light and glare in undeveloped areas of the county. This impact is considered significant.

***Environmentally Constrained Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

Under this alternative, impacts at buildout are expected to be more severe than at 2025 based on the higher potential levels of development which could generate additional light and glare. This impact is considered significant.

**1996 General Plan Alternative (Alternative #4)**

***Relevant Goals/Policies—1996 General Plan Alternative***

For the relevant policy of the 1996 General Plan Alternative, please refer to the policy listed above under Relevant Goals/Policies—No Project Alternative.

***1996 General Plan Alternative (2025)—Impact Discussion***

This alternative would result in the highest levels of residential development throughout the county of the four equal-weight alternatives; therefore, it has the potential to generate the highest levels of nighttime lighting and glare. Under this alternative, potential light and glare impacts associated with subdivision development would, for the most part, be addressed through Policies 2.8.1.1 and 2.1.4.4 applied in the discretionary review process. However, significant amounts of nondiscretionary residential development would also occur under this alternative. These projects could potentially result in increases in light and glare throughout the county, including undeveloped areas with little to no existing lighting. This impact is considered significant.

***1996 General Plan Alternative (Buildout)—Impact Discussion***

Under this alternative, impacts at buildout are expected to be more severe than at 2025 based on the higher potential levels of development which could generate additional light and glare. This impact is considered significant.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-3—No Project Alternative**

The County shall implement both of the following measures:

- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(b): Consider Lighting Design Features to Reduce Effects of Nighttime Lighting

These mitigation measures are described below. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level because potential spill over lighting, glare, and skyglow would be reduced and would not be substantially noticeable.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)***

The County shall implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a) described in Section 5.1, Land Use and Housing.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(b): Consider Lighting Design Features to Reduce Effects of Nighttime Lighting***

The County shall revise Policy 2.8.1.1 as follows:

**Revised Policy 2.8.1.1.** Include standards, consistent with prudent safety practices, for outdoor lighting to reduce high intensity nighttime lighting and glare in the update of the County Zoning Ordinance. Consideration will be given to design features, namely directional shielding for street lighting, parking lot lighting, and other significant light sources, that could reduce effects from nighttime lighting. In addition, consideration will be given to the use of automatic shutoffs or motion sensors for lighting features in rural areas to further reduce excess nighttime light.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-3—Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative**

The County shall implement both of the following measures:

- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)
- < Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(b): Consider Lighting Design Features to Reduce Effects of Nighttime Lighting

These mitigation measures are described below. With implementation of these mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level for the reasons described under the No Project Alternative.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(a): Implement Mitigation Measure 5.1-3(a)***

Please refer to Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(a) for the No Project Alternative above.

***Mitigation Measure 5.3-3(b): Consider Design Features to Reduce Effects of Nighttime Lighting***

The County shall revise Policy LU-6f as follows:

**Revised Policy LU-6f.** Development shall limit excess nighttime light and glare from parking area lighting, signage, and buildings. Consideration will be given to design features, namely directional shielding for street lighting, parking lot lighting, and other significant light sources, that could reduce effects from nighttime lighting. In addition, consideration will be given to the use of automatic shutoffs or motion sensors for lighting features in rural areas to further reduce excess nighttime light.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-3—Environmentally Constrained Alternative**

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measures for the Roadway Constrained 6-Lane “Plus” Alternative above. With implementation of these measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level for the reasons described under the No Project Alternative.

**Mitigation Measure 5.3-3—1996 General Plan Alternative**

Please refer to the proposed mitigation measures for the No Project Alternative above. With implementation of these measures, impacts would be reduced to a less-than-significant level for the reasons described under the No Project Alternative.