

## 4.13 VISUAL RESOURCES

*Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision.* Because individual site plans, design plans, and/or landscaping plans would be prepared by lot owners at a later date, the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision would result in potentially significant impacts to the aesthetic environment. Although the clustering of the proposed residential units and the preservation of open space and agricultural lands would partially maintain the rural character of the site, the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision has the potential to change the aesthetic character of the vicinity through the alteration of scenic vistas, the introduction of new light and glare generators into the area, and changing the area's character from a rural to rural-residential condition. This impact is significant and unavoidable (Class I).

*Future Development Program.* Because no active application exists for the Future Development Program other than the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision, the assessment of aesthetic impacts is based on a reasonable worst case scenario with regard to the future location and design of future land uses within anticipated development areas. Due to the extent of development envisioned in the Future Development Program, buildout of the program would unavoidably alter the existing rural visual character of the Santa Margarita Ranch area, introduce new development along viewing corridors, and introduce new light and glare generators into the region. Impacts are significant and unavoidable (Class I).

### 4.13.1 Setting

**a. Visual Character of the Ranch.** The visual character of the Santa Margarita Ranch area is primarily rural, with little development throughout the almost 14,000-acre property. The Ranch is flanked by the Santa Lucia Mountains to the west and the Salinas River to the east, with gently rolling grasslands, vineyards, row crops, grazing land, riparian corridors, and dense oak woodland characterizing the interior portions of the property. The absence of substantial urban development has allowed most areas of the Ranch to retain a rural character. In addition to its rural character, the Ranch's geographic location within an area dominated by mountain and hill terrain also contributes substantially to its visual qualities.

Extending to the south of the Ranch, the visual character of the surrounding area is dominated by agricultural uses, with open space south of the property in the Los Padres National Forest. Some low-density rural residential development and agricultural uses are located east and west of the Santa Margarita Ranch property. North of the Ranch densities increase as neighborhoods transition into residential-suburban homes, the community of Margarita Farms, and commercial retail uses in the City of Atascadero. The Ranch surrounds the urban and suburban uses in the community of Santa Margarita. A sand and gravel quarry is located just outside of the Ranch property, approximately two miles northeast of Santa Margarita. An oil tank storage facility is located along El Camino Real outside of the Ranch and Future Development Program boundaries.

**b. Visual Character of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision Site.** The portion of the Santa Margarita Ranch proposed for Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision development is undeveloped hilly terrain located near the center of the Ranch, south of the community of Santa Margarita. Portions of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site are currently used for irrigated croplands, including wine grape production. Dominant



features include gently to steeply sloping topography, scattered vegetation including grasses, forbs, scrub, oak woodland, and riparian species, and several streams which traverse the lower reaches of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site. Elevations range from approximately 930 feet above mean sea level (msl) to approximately 1,300 feet msl.

The proposed residential development would occur southeast of the community of Santa Margarita, west of West Pozo Road, in a relatively hilly portion of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site. These hills typically rise 250 to 300 feet above the surrounding terrain in the northern part of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site and about 100 to 250 feet at the southern end. Their defining slopes are often very steep, particularly where they are undercut locally by creeks. The vegetation patterns on these hills exhibit a visually appealing arrangement from grassland through savanna to oak woodland or chaparral at the summits. This patterning gives the hills strong contrasts in color, tone, shape, and texture from the surroundings.

The Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site would be visible from portions of Highway 58 and West Pozo Road due to its location on elevated terrain. Additionally, the site is visible from areas of the Santa Margarita community, particularly homes located at the southern end of the community.

With respect to light and glare, the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site currently has no street lighting or nighttime activity that is lighted, with the exception of limited lighting for on-site agricultural uses. Land uses in the vicinity that would be most sensitive to night lighting are the residences located approximately 500 feet north of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site, in the town of Santa Margarita.

**c. Regulatory Setting.** San Luis Obispo County regulates the design of the built environment through its Land Use Element (LUE) and Land Use Ordinance (LUO). The LUE prescribes visual resource policies, and the LUO, in some cases, requires development review of projects.

The LUE Framework for Planning (Inland) contains policy statements that serve as a framework for evaluating proposed projects for their aesthetic merit in areas designated as Sensitive Resource Areas (SRAs). The SRA combining designation occurs along the southwestern edge of the Santa Margarita Ranch property. No development is planned in this location, however, due to the steep topography that occurs in the Los Padres National Forest, located south of the Ranch property.

The County General Plan Open Space Element contains policies for development in scenic corridor areas. The Open Space Element states that no officially designated scenic highways are located in the vicinity of Santa Margarita Ranch. However, Open Space Element Policy #24 specifies a number of County roads to be studied to determine if and where scenic corridors should be designated, including two in the project vicinity: Highway 58 from the Santa Margarita urban reserve line to the Kern County line and West Pozo Road between Hi Mountain Road and Highway 58.



The LUO contains provisions that regulate the design of future development, such as:

- For applications that propose development along significant visual corridors, as identified in the Open Space Element or the Land Use Element, a visual analysis shall be required to be prepared by a qualified individual approved by the Office of the Environmental Coordinator (Ordinance 22.02.035-038(h)).
- A grading permit may be issued only where the Building Official first finds, where applicable, that: The proposed grading will not create substantial adverse long-term visual effect visible from off-site. (Ordinance 22.05.030(d)(3)).

The Salinas River Area Plan contains Highway Corridor Design Standards intended to provide public views of:

- Scenic vistas and backdrops containing varied topography including ridgelines and rock features;
- Significant stands of trees and wildflowers; and
- Natural landmarks, historical buildings and pastoral settings.

In addition, County Ordinance 22.02 et seq. contains extensive site design provisions related to building heights, setbacks, landscaping, and other design elements.

#### **4.13.2 Impact Analysis**

**a. Methodology and Significant Thresholds.** The assessment of aesthetic impacts involves qualitative analysis that is inherently subjective in nature. Different viewers react to viewsheds and aesthetic conditions differently. This evaluation measures the existing visual resource against the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision and Future Development Program, analyzing the nature of the anticipated change. The Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision and Future Development Program were observed and photographically documented in the surrounding context. The Salinas River Area Plan, County Land Use Element (LUE), and County Land Use Ordinance (LUO) were reviewed for policy instruction relative to visual resources and design policy.

In accordance with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, impacts would be significant if development under the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision or the Future Development Program would result in the any of the following:

- *Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;*
- *Substantially damage scenic resources, 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 site and its surroundings; and/or*
- *Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.*

To assess the potential visual impacts that the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision and Future Development Program may produce, photographic interpretation of present view conditions was completed in addition to photographic simulations of post-Agricultural



Residential Cluster Subdivision conditions. In this analysis, modifications to the viewshed were considered not significant if the modification would be visually subordinate. A modification that is visually dominant or one that substantially modifies the existing view adversely is considered a significant impact.

Views are discussed below in terms of foreground, middleground, and background views. Foreground views are those immediately presented to the viewer, and include objects at close range. Middleground views occupy the center of the viewshed, and tend to include objects that dominate the viewshed in normal circumstances. Background views include distant objects and other objects that make up the horizon.

**b. Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision Impacts and Mitigation Measures.**

**Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision Impact VR-1**      **The clustering of the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision units and preservation of open space and agricultural lands would partially maintain the rural character of the site. However, the proposed development has the potential to alter the aesthetic character of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision vicinity through alteration of scenic vistas, the introduction of new light and glare generators in to the area, and the changing of the area’s character from a rural to rural-residential condition. This is Class I, significant and unavoidable, impact to the aesthetic character of the area.**

**Viewing Corridor Impacts.** The Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site would not be visible from any State-designated scenic highways or routes. However, the County General Plan identifies portions of Highway 58 and West Pozo Road as potential scenic roadways. The Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision residences would be visible from both of these roadways due to its location on elevated terrain. Additionally, the site is visible from areas of the Santa Margarita community. However, it should be noted that the project proposes to cluster the residential units in a generally north-south orientation in the central portion of the site, which would reduce visual impacts from viewpoints east and west of the site.

Photographs were taken from three sensitive public vantage points that have views of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision area. Figure 4.13-1 provides locations for the visual simulation photos. Figures 4.13-2 through 4.13-4 present visual simulations of the pre- and post-Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision conditions from these locations.

Estrada Avenue and J Street. Portions of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site are visible from public roadways in the community of Santa Margarita, as well as from private homes located at the southern end of the community. As depicted on Plate 4.13-2A, existing views looking south from the intersection Estrada Avenue and J Street in the community of Santa Margarita are composed of relatively flat agricultural grazing land in the foreground and rising oak-covered hills in the background. Proposed Lot 30 would be visible from this viewpoint (refer to Plate 4.13-2B). The distance between existing viewpoints and proposed disturbance, and the presence of intervening vegetation, would limit views of proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision disturbance. Nevertheless, because the proposed development would alter the rural character of



the site to a more developed condition as viewed from public roadways and private residences in the community of Santa Margarita, the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision would result in potentially significant impacts on views from these viewing corridors.

*State Route 58 Viewshed.* State Route 58 (SR 58) is a two-lane highway that extends eastbound through the County from Highway 101 to the Kern County line. The segment of SR 58 between Highway 101 and the eastern end of the community of Santa Margarita is also known as El Camino Real. East of town, El Camino Real curves northward and SR 58 branches off southeast to West Pozo Road. As depicted in on Plate 4.13-3A, existing views looking west from the segment of SR 58 east of West Pozo Road consist of agricultural uses and associated structures and vegetation in the foreground, hillsides, vegetation, and oak woodlands in the middle-ground, and the Santa Lucia Mountains in the background. Proposed structures and other improvements along the north and westerly Phase I ridgelines, including Lots 1 through 4, 6 through 11, 14 and 52, would be visible in the background from this viewpoint (refer to Plate 4.13-3B). Certain proposed residential structures may silhouette against the sky from these viewpoints. Since the proposed development would alter the rural character of the site to a more developed condition as viewed from public viewpoints along SR 58, and units may silhouette against the sky from these views, the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision would result in potentially significant impacts on views from this public viewing corridor.

*West Pozo Road Viewshed.* West Pozo Road is a two-lane rural roadway that extends southwest from SR 58 to its terminus in the town of Pozo. As depicted on Plate 4.13-4A, existing views looking northwest from West Pozo Road viewpoints include agricultural uses and associated structures and vegetation in the foreground, hillsides, vegetation, and oak woodlands in the middle-ground, and the Santa Lucia Mountains in the background. Proposed structures and other improvements along southern facing Phase III ridgelines, including on Lots 90, 92 through 95, 97 through 99, 101, 104 through 106, and 112, would be visible in the background from West Pozo Road viewpoints south of SR 58 (refer to Plate 4.13-4B). Certain proposed residential structures may silhouette against the sky from these viewpoints. Since the proposed development would alter the rural character of the site to a more developed condition as viewed from public viewpoints along West Pozo Road, and units may silhouette against the sky from these views, the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision would result in potentially significant impacts on views from this public viewing corridor.

It should be noted that Plates 4.13-2B through 4.13-4B depict post-Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision conditions from three vantage points. Additional public and private vantage points occur throughout the vicinity of the property. Consequently, residences on additional lots may be visible from other roadways within and adjacent to the community of Santa Margarita. In particular, Lots 47 and 50 through 55 may be visible from West Pozo Road, north of camera location one (refer to Figure 4.13-1). Due to proposed lot locations atop ridgelines along the eastern portion of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site, these lots may silhouette against the sky. Impacts are potentially significant.

**Light and Glare Impacts.** Site illumination provides safety for vehicular and pedestrian movement, and increases security. It can also serve to interpret the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision arrangement by giving emphasis to focal points, gathering places, landscaping, and building entrances. Well-conceived lighting gives clarity and unity to the overall site and to each subarea within it. At the same time, the introduction of new lighting



into an unlit area would extend the light glow of an urban area further into rural areas, proportionally affecting the urban light glow in the nighttime sky.

At present, there is minimal nighttime lighting of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site. However, implementation of the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision would require additional lighting that could be visible from public viewing corridors, including Highway 58 and West Pozo Road. Streetlights, entry lights, and interior lights have the potential to adversely affect passing motorists and degrade the nighttime view of the area. The addition of homes and streetlighting in this area would contribute to an alteration of the rural character of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site.

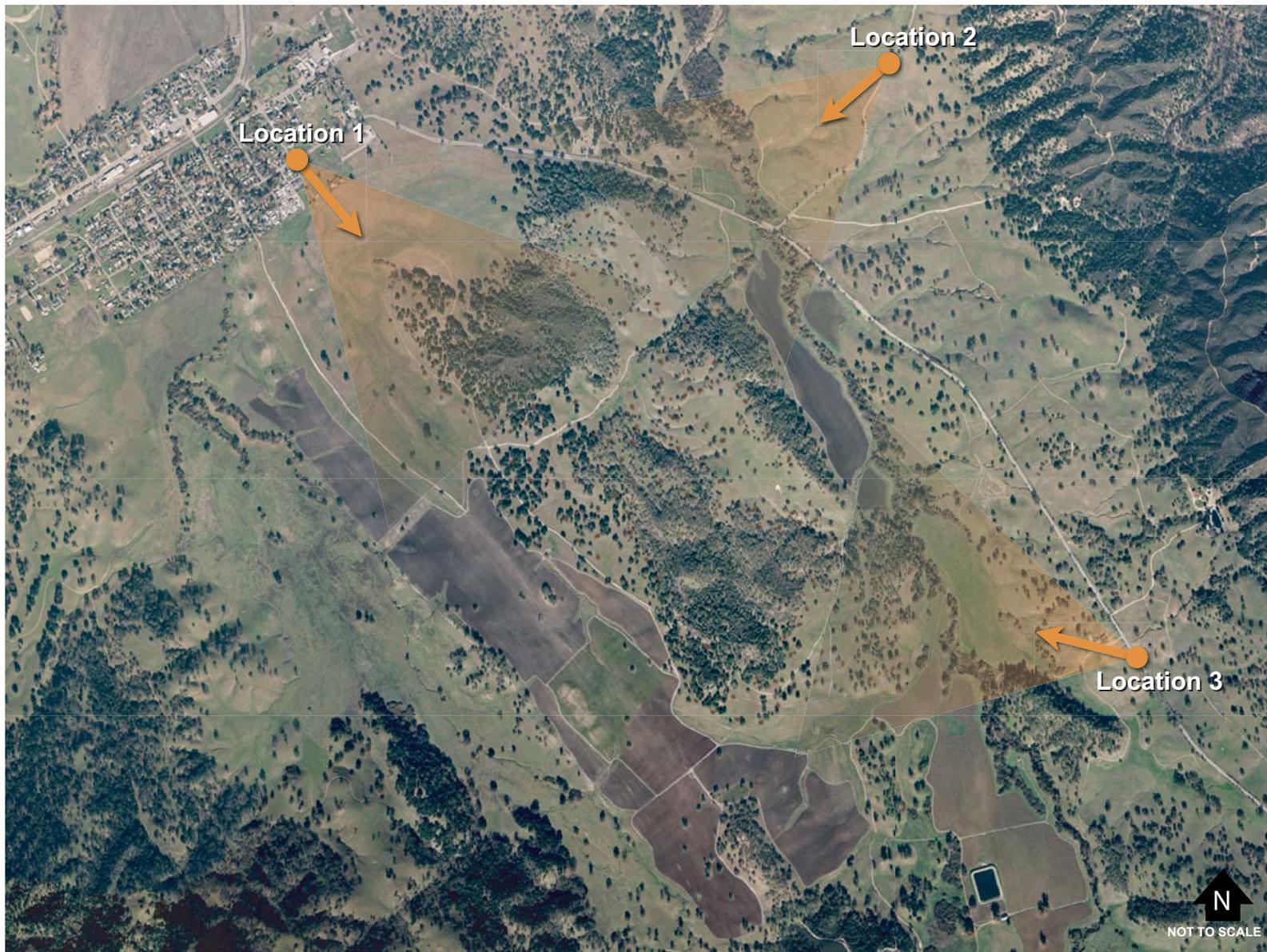
Sources of glare that may affect public viewpoints would be building exterior materials, surface paving materials, and vehicles traveling or parked on roads and driveways within the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision area. Any highly reflective facade materials would be of particular concern. Public viewpoints may be impacted by project-generated lighting and glare.

**Conclusion.** The Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision proposes to cluster the residential units in a generally north-south orientation in the central portion of the site, which would reduce visual impacts from viewpoints east and west of the site. Regardless, the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision has the potential to alter the aesthetic character of the site vicinity by changing the scenic views from public viewing locations, introducing community design elements that may be aesthetically inconsistent with the surrounding area and introducing new light and glare generators into the area.

It should be noted that County regulations require oak trees removed to be replaced with a ratio of 4:1 (trees replaced to trees lost) for oak trees greater than six inches diameter at Diameter Breast Height (DBH) or 4.5 feet above mean natural grade, and a 2:1 replacement ratio for oak trees impacted, but not removed as a result of construction activities.

It should also be noted that the installation of off-site sound walls required as mitigation for noise impacts (refer to Section 4.8, *Noise*) and off-site transportation improvements, including traffic signals and signage, required as mitigation for traffic impacts (refer to Section 4.12, *Transportation and Circulation*) would also result in substantial adverse changes to visual character in the vicinity.





Visual Simulation Photo Location Map

Source: Interacta, 2006

Figure 4.13-1

County of San Luis Obispo







Photo 1- Existing viewshed from Estrada Avenue and J Street looking south.



Photo 2- Post-Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision viewshed from Estrada Avenue and J Street looking south.

Viewshed Photosimulation from  
Estrada Avenue and J Street  
(Location 1)

Figure 4.13-2

County of San Luis Obispo







Photo 1- Existing viewshed from Highway 58 looking west.

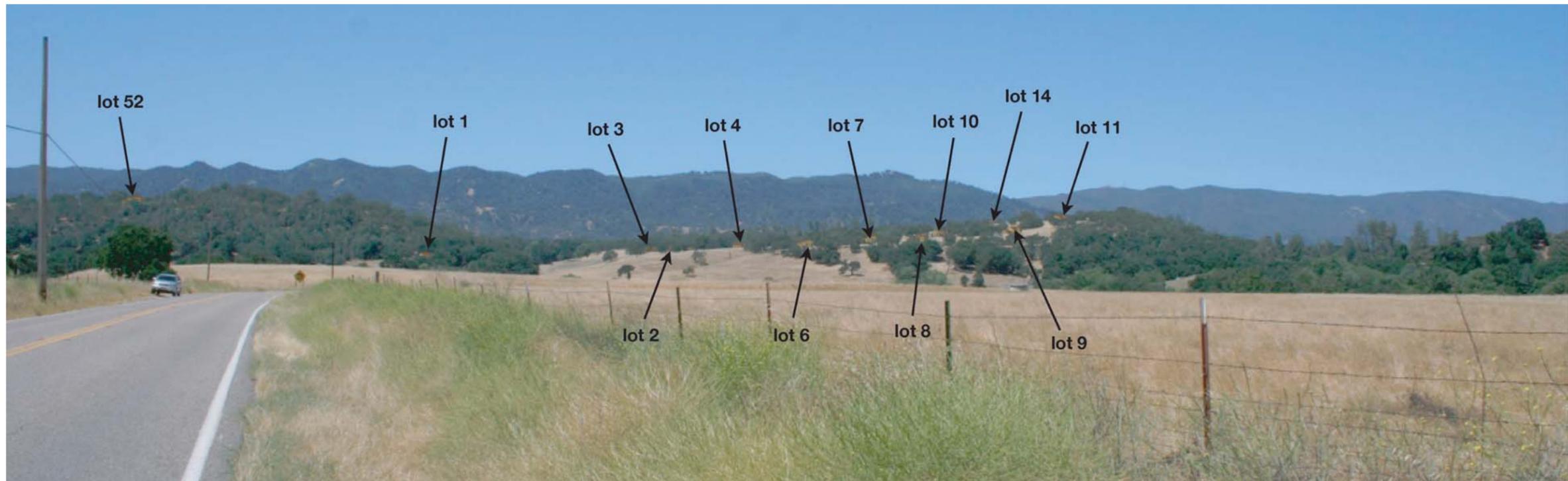


Photo 2- Post-Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision viewshed from Highway 58 looking west.

Viewshed Photosimulation from  
Highway 58 (Location 2)





Photo 1- Existing viewshed from West Pozo Road looking northwest.

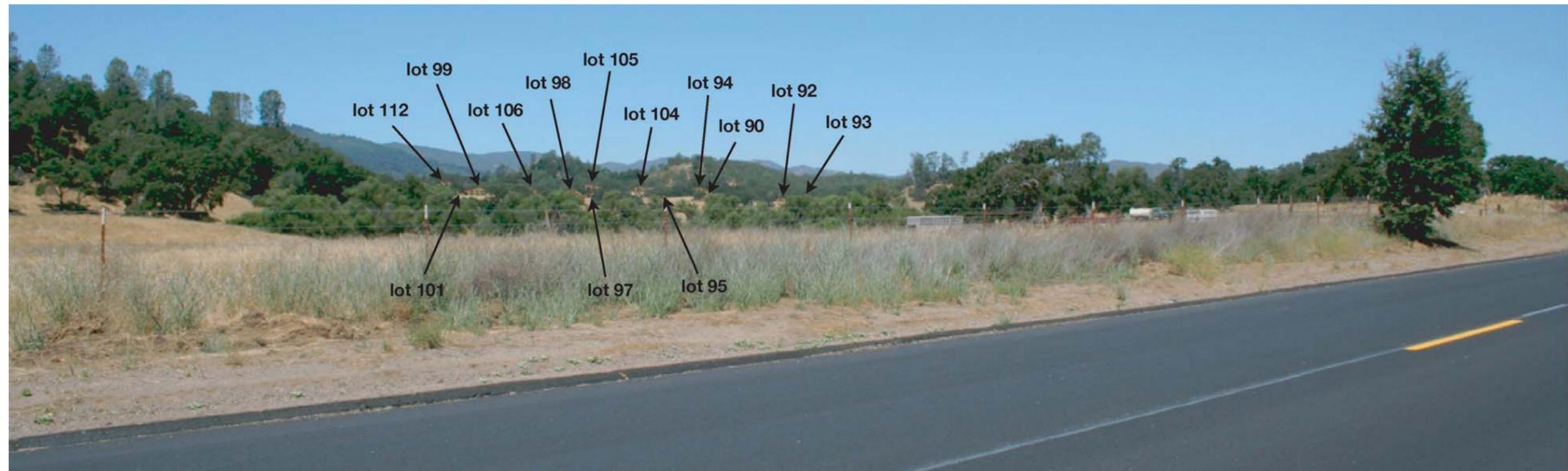


Photo 2- Post-Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision viewshed from West Pozo Road looking northwest.

Viewshed Photosimulation from  
West Pozo Road (Location 3)



Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measures are required:

**Agricultural Residential  
Cluster Subdivision  
VR-1(a)**

**Prohibition of Structural Silhouetting.** Proposed lots located on on-site ridgelines shall be relocated, building heights shall be limited, and vegetative screening shall be provided such that the residential units do not silhouette against the sky when viewed from off-site viewpoints. If structural setbacks are implemented, structures shall be setback as follows: units on Lots 50 through 54 shall be setback to the west from the top of the bluff a sufficient vertical distance to preclude silhouetting of units on the top of on-site bluffs. This could also require the relocation of Lots 47 and 55.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** The relocated, height-reduced, and vegetation-screened units shall be shown on plans submitted to Planning and Building for review and approval prior to land use permit approval for tract improvements. Prior to issuance of building permits, individual lot owners shall submit topographical cross-section figures that demonstrate that proposed units do not silhouette against the sky, subject to the review of County Planning and Building. **Cross sections shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review building plans and cross sections prior to issuance of building permits and inspect units prior to occupancy clearance.

**Agricultural Residential  
Cluster Subdivision  
VR-1(b)**

**Architectural and Landscape Guidelines.** The applicant shall develop and implement Architectural and Landscape Guidelines that include the components listed below. The Guidelines shall include clear criteria and requirements to guide the design, layout, and landscaping of individual residential lots. All future development shall comply with the Guidelines. Enforcement of compliance with the Guidelines shall be the responsibility of the Planning and Building Department.

**Tract landscaping.** Landscaping guidelines shall describe the following elements:

- Landscaping shall emulate and be compatible with the surrounding natural environment; **only natural fiber, biodegradable materials shall be used;**
- Fuel management techniques shall be used, including, but not limited to, fire resistive landscaping, defensible space features, and strictly controlled vegetation within defensible space;
- Fire-resistant vegetation shall be used in tract landscaping.



***Individual House Landscaping.*** Landscaping Plans for individual houses shall be prepared by a qualified Landscape Architect, and shall be designed to screen and blend the proposed development into the surrounding area while preserving identified viewsheds. Individual lot landscaping plans shall incorporate plants consistent with the San Luis Obispo County Approved Plant List. **Only natural fiber, biodegradable materials shall be used.**

***Roofing and Feature Color and Material.*** Development plans shall include earth-tone colors on structure roofing and other on-site features to lessen potential visual contrast between the structures and the hilly terrain that constitutes the visual backdrop of the area. Natural building materials and colors compatible with surrounding terrain (earthtones and non-reflective paints) shall be used on exterior surfaces of all structures, including fences.

***Avoidance of Visual Prominence.*** To avoid the visual prominence of structures located at Lots 1 through 4, 6 through 11, 14, 30, 52, 90, 92 through 95, 97 through 99, 101, 104 through 106, and 112, no structure shall exceed a height of 22 feet, except for ancillary features such as antennas or other elements determined to be compatible by Planning and Building.

***Understory and Retaining Wall Treatment.*** Understories and retaining walls higher than six (6) feet shall be in tones compatible with surrounding terrain using textured materials or construction methods which create a textured effect.

***Plan Requirements and Timing.*** Draft Design Guidelines shall be submitted to Planning and Building for review and approval prior to final map recordation. Guidelines shall be recorded with the final map for the tract. A copy of the Guidelines shall be submitted with grading, building, and landscaping plans prior to land use permit approval for individual lot development.

***Guidelines shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.*** Planning and Building shall review the Guidelines prior to final recordation. For both tract and individual house projects, Planning and Building shall ensure construction according to plan.



outs, or split lanes. Home sites should be located where oak trees are less dense on the lot. For additional oak tree impact mitigation, refer to Sections 4.1, *Agricultural Resources* and 4.3, *Biological Resources*.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** Planning and Building shall review tract improvement and individual site plans for avoidance of oak tree removal. **Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review plans prior to final recordation and ensure compliance with oak tree replacement standards.

**Agricultural Residential  
Cluster Subdivision  
VR-1(d)**

**Bury Water Tanks.** The water tanks shall be placed below grade to reduce their visual profile. The tanks shall be placed at a depth such that the tanks do not silhouette against the sky. If burying water tanks is infeasible, natural building materials and colors compatible with surrounding terrain (earthtones and non-reflective paints) shall be used on exterior surfaces.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** The buried tanks shall be depicted on building plans, to be submitted for Planning and Building approval of tract improvement plans. Prior to issuance of building permits, the applicant shall submit topographical cross-section figures that demonstrate that the water tanks do not silhouette against the sky, subject to the review of County Planning and Building. **Cross sections shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review building plans and cross sections prior to issuance of building permits and inspect units prior to occupancy clearance.

**Agricultural Residential  
Cluster Subdivision  
VR-1(e)**

**Lighting.** New lighting shall be oriented away from sensitive uses, and should be hooded, shielded, and located to direct light pools downward and prevent glare. The following standards shall also be implemented:

- All exterior lighting shall be designed as part of the overall architectural concept. Fixtures, standards and all exposed accessories shall be harmonious with the building design, the lighting design and hardware of the public spaces, and the overall visual environment of the County.
- Lighting shall be used for safety and security to illuminate building entrances, parking and loading areas, and pedestrian walkways.
- Light fixtures with exposed light bulbs shall generally be avoided.



- All light fixtures shall be shielded to confine the spread of light within the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision boundaries.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** The applicant shall submit lighting plans to Planning and Building for review and approval prior to issuance of building permits. **Lighting plans shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review all lighting plans prior to issuance of building permits.

**Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision VR-1(f)**

**Street Light Limitations.** Streetlights shall be pedestrian in scale, not to exceed a height of 10 feet, and shall be architecturally compatible with surrounding development. Streetlights, where they are included, shall be primarily for pedestrian safety (at roadway intersections only), and shall not provide widespread illumination.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** The applicant shall submit the tract lighting plan subject to the review and approval of Planning and Building prior to issuance of building permits. Individual lot developers shall submit lot lighting plans subject to the review and approval of Planning and Building prior to approval of building permits. **Lighting plans shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall site inspect prior to occupancy clearance for each phase.

**Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision VR-1(g)**

**Clear Excess Debris.** Upon completion of each phase of development, the developer shall clear the project site of all excess construction debris.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** This requirement shall be noted on final building plans. Debris clearance shall occur prior to occupancy clearance for each phase. **Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall site inspect prior to occupancy clearance for each phase.

**Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision VR-1(h)**

**Grading.** Grading should preserve hillsides and natural topography to the maximum extent feasible. Grading transitions should be gentle rather than abrupt.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** Future applicants shall submit grading plans to Planning and Building for review and approval



prior to issuance of grading permits. **Grading plans shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review grading plans prior to issuance of grading permits and inspect units prior to occupancy clearance for each phase.

**Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision VR-1(i)**

**Accessory Structures/Infrastructure.** New roads shall be blended into the landscape and follow existing topography and vegetation patterns. Cut and fill slopes shall be contoured to conform to the prevailing adjacent landforms and landscapes and drainage swales should be used rather than curbs. Utility service for new development shall be underground.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** The applicant shall submit plans depicting new road and utility placement and design, subject to the review and approval of Planning and Building. **Plans shall be included in Covenants, Conditions and Restrictions (CC&Rs), and monitored by a Homeowners Association (or similar entity) with oversight by County Planning and Building. Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review plans prior to final recordation.

Residual Impacts. Although impacts would be reduced through the above mitigation measures, no mitigation is available to avoid changing the site from its rural condition to a more suburban condition. **This is considered a substantial adverse effect.** Impacts would remain *significant and unavoidable*.

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**c. Future Development Program Impacts and Mitigation Measures.** The Future Development Program represents potential future buildout of the Santa Margarita Ranch, including the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision. Refer to Section 4.13.2(b) for a discussion of visual impacts resulting from the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision independently.

**Future Development Program Impact VR-1**

**Development in accordance with the Future Development Program would unavoidably alter the existing rural visual character of the area, introduce new development along viewing corridors, and introduce new light and glare generators into the area. Potential impacts to visual resources are Class I, significant and unavoidable.**

**Viewing Corridor Impacts.** Future Development Program land uses would be visible from Highway 101, State Route 58, West Pozo Road, and portions of the Santa Margarita community.



Highway 101 Viewshed. U.S. Highway 101 (U.S. 101) is a four-lane highway that runs north-south along the western edge of the Santa Margarita Ranch. Between 19,750 and 22,060 vehicles travel this road daily. Existing views of the Ranch, looking east from Highway 101 south of the SR 58 interchange, are composed primarily of the Santa Lucia Mountains and Foothills. The Future Development Program envisions a retreat center in the Santa Lucia Foothills, which would include up to 24 individual cabins and a 12,000 square foot lodge. The cabins and lodge would be dispersed over 30 acres in a narrow, northerly trending band, which is located approximately 1,000 feet east of US 101 at its southernmost reach and 3,250 feet east of US 101 at its northernmost reach. The cabins and lodge would likely be screened from view by intervening topography and vegetation. The Future Development Program also envisions a livestock sales yard adjacent to US 101, approximately 1,250 feet south of SR 58. The livestock sales yard would be located on approximately 20 acres and include a café. As a reasonable worst-case scenario for aesthetic impacts, structures may be constructed up to a maximum allowable height of 25 feet, may be located on west-facing (highway-facing) slopes. Although development may be partially screened by intervening topography and vegetation, under a reasonable worst case scenario, development in this location could be visible from U.S. 101. Impacts are potentially significant.

North of the SR 58 interchange, views of the Ranch become more expansive as the topography changes from mountainous to a relatively flat, rolling hill landscape. Existing views from this viewshed include grazing land in the foreground, the existing Ranch headquarters, including equestrian center, barn and home site, in the middle ground, with vacant hillside grasslands and oak savannahs in the background. Although the existing Ranch headquarters are visible from this viewing corridor, the scenic character of the area is rural, and background views are of pristine rural and natural visual quality. The Future Development Program envisions a 12-room Bed and Breakfast, 6,000 square foot café, 600 seat amphitheater and 40,000 square foot winery near the existing Ranch headquarters location. The winery would also include a 6,000 square foot retail component. As a reasonable worst-case scenario for aesthetic impacts, structures may be constructed up to a maximum allowable height of 25 feet, may be located on west-facing (highway-facing) slopes, and may silhouette against the sky. Due to the lack of intervening topography and sparse vegetation, under a reasonable worst case scenario, development in this location, including grading and landscaping, would be highly visible from U.S. 101, and would alter the rural and natural visual character of this portion of the Ranch property. Impacts are potentially significant.

El Camino Real Viewshed. El Camino Real runs north-south from the community of Santa Margarita to Atascadero. Approximately 4,300 vehicles travel this road daily. Existing views of the Ranch, looking east from El Camino Real, include panoramic views of broad, open grassland and oak savannahs with foothill and mountain backdrops. As discussed above, the Future Development Program envisions a Bed and Breakfast, café, amphitheater and winery at the existing Ranch headquarters location, west of El Camino Real. As a reasonable worst-case scenario for aesthetic impacts, structures may be constructed up to a maximum allowable height of 25 feet and may be located on east-facing slopes, or silhouette against the sky. In addition, the northernmost envisioned winery and ranch headquarters may be visible from travelers on El Camino Real. Under a reasonable worst case scenario, development in these locations, including associated grading and landscaping, may be visible from the El Camino Real viewshed, and would alter the rural and natural visual character of this portion of the Ranch property. Impacts are potentially significant.



*State Route 58 Viewshed.* State Route 58 is a two-lane highway that runs east-west from U.S. 101 through the community of Santa Margarita, where it curves south before extending northeast to the Kern County line. Between 1,900 and 5,490 vehicles travel this road daily. Existing views from this roadway west of the community of Santa Margarita, looking south, include agricultural uses and associated structures and vegetation in the foreground, hillsides, vegetation, and oak woodlands in the middle-ground, and the Santa Lucia Mountains in the background. The Future Development Program envisions the following uses south of this roadway: a residential village; a 250-unit guest ranch and lodge with a 24,000 square foot restaurant; a 40,000 square foot winery including an additional 6,000 square foot retail component; and a 36-hole golf course on 280 acres, including a 25,000 square foot clubhouse and shop. The land area reserved for these uses extends along the length of SR 58 between U.S. 101 and the community of Santa Margarita, and continues southward along the western edge of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision site to the southernmost lot locations (refer to Figure 2-9 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*). The envisioned uses would be dispersed over this large area, and would be partially screened from view by intervening topography. However, as a reasonable worst-case scenario for aesthetic impacts, the guest ranch, lodge, restaurant, and winery facilities may be constructed up to a maximum allowable height of 25 feet and may be located adjacent to SR 58 on north-facing (roadway-facing) slopes or silhouette against the sky. In addition, up to 347 residences (the remainder of the 550 residential units allowable under the Salinas River Area Plan, minus 36 residential units in Tract 1, 112 units on Tract 2586, and 5 units on Ranch headquarter parcels) could be constructed adjacent to this roadway. Each of these residences could be 3,500 square feet and two stories (25 feet) tall. The golf course could also be visible from this roadway. The level of development envisioned for this location would permanently alter the existing pristine rural and natural visual condition of the area, resulting in potentially significant viewing corridor impacts.

Existing views from SR 58 between Santa Margarita and West Pozo Road include open grazing land, rolling hills, and oak savannahs. The Future Development Program envisions a 40,000 square foot winery south of this segment of SR 58 as well as a 5-acre park and community pool, three 20,000 square foot worship centers, and 50 units of work force housing, constructed in one two-story structure, to the north. As SR 58 curves northeasterly, views looking northwest include rolling hills and oak savannahs in the foreground, with rising hills in the background. Looking southeast, foreground views include relatively flat grassland, with oak savannahs and mountainous terrain in the middle- and background. The Future Development Program envisions a Ranch headquarters directly east of this segment of SR 58 and a winery beyond. The Ranch headquarters could include a two-story, 5,000 square foot residence on a 2.5-acre lot. The winery could include a 40,000 square foot structure and an additional 6,000 square foot retail component. Under a reasonable worst case scenario, facilities on the Ranch headquarters would be highly visible from this viewshed, and although portions of the winery may be screened from view by intervening topography, much of the winery could be visible as well. The development envisioned for this location would permanently alter the existing pristine rural and natural visual condition of the area, resulting in potentially significant viewing corridor impacts.

*West Pozo Road Viewshed.* West Pozo Road is a two-lane rural roadway that extends southwest from SR 58 to its terminus in the town of Pozo. Approximately 1,000 vehicles travel this road daily. Existing views of the Ranch, looking west from West Pozo Road viewpoints, include agricultural uses and associated structures and vegetation in the foreground, with vacant hillside grasslands



and oak savannahs in the background. Views looking east are primarily composed of mountainous backdrops with foothills and oak savannahs dominating the foreground. South of the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision, two Ranch headquarters sites with wineries are envisioned west of West Pozo Road, and one Ranch headquarters site with a winery is envisioned east of West Pozo Road. Each Ranch headquarters/winery may include a two-story, 5,000 square foot residence, a 40,000 square foot winery, and a 6,000 square foot winery-related retail component. The Ranch headquarters/winery west of West Pozo Road nearest the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision could include an 80,000 square foot winery. Under a reasonable worst case scenario, all facilities may be visible from West Pozo Road, either in the foreground or middle ground. The development envisioned along this roadway would permanently alter the existing pristine rural and natural visual condition of the area, resulting in potentially significant viewing corridor impacts.

*Santa Margarita Community Viewshed.* Much of the Ranch is visible from local roadways in the community of Santa Margarita. Roadways at the northern edge of town have views to the north of broad, open grassland and cropland with rising hills in the background. The bed and breakfast, café, amphitheater and winery envisioned on the existing Ranch headquarters site may be visible from these local roadways (refer to the Highway 101 Viewshed discussion above for reasonable worst-case visual conditions). Views from the western edge of town, looking southwest, are composed of agricultural uses and associated structures and vegetation in the foreground, hillsides, vegetation, and oak woodlands in the middle-ground, and the Santa Lucia Mountains in the background. The residential village, guest ranch, lodge, restaurant, winery, and golf course envisioned in this area may also be visible from local roadways (refer to the State Route 58 Viewshed discussion for reasonable worst-case visual conditions). In addition, views from roadways on the eastern edge of town currently consist of open grazing land, rolling hills, and oak savannahs. The community park and swimming pool, worship centers, and work force housing envisioned for this area could be visible from these viewpoints (refer to the State Route 58 Viewshed discussion for reasonable worst-case visual conditions). Future Development Program land uses may be visible from various community roadways and would permanently alter the pristine rural and natural visual condition of the surrounding area. Impacts are potentially significant.

The Future Development Program includes the dedication of land for a future sewage treatment plant, public hiking and/or equestrian trails, and a community drainage facility. When developed, these land uses may impact viewsheds in the Santa Margarita Ranch area. However, locations for these uses have not yet been established. Because specific locations are not currently envisioned, impacts associated with these facilities would be too speculative to address at this time. The visual impacts for these facilities would be addressed during separate environmental and design review once development locations and plans are available.

**Light and Glare Impacts.** At present, there is minimal nighttime lighting throughout the Santa Margarita Ranch. However, development in accordance with the Future Development Program would increase the ambient nighttime lighting throughout the Ranch property. Increased lighting from streetlights, entry lights, interior lights, parking lot lights, and signage on business establishments may impact residences and motorists on area roadways. Increased glare could potentially occur as a result of building materials, roofing materials and windows reflecting sunlight. Potential light and glare impacts from the Future Development Program are significant.



**Conclusion.** The current visual character of the Santa Margarita Ranch property and surrounding area is highly scenic and rural. The Future Development Program envisions potential future development throughout the Ranch, which would permanently alter the rural character of the area and introduce new development along viewing corridors. The introduction of light and glare would also contribute to a change in visual character. Buildout of the Future Development Program would significantly alter the existing rural visual character of the Santa Margarita Ranch. Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

It should also be noted that the installation of off-site sound walls required as mitigation for noise impacts (refer to Section 4.8, *Noise*) and off-site transportation improvements, including traffic signals and signage, required as mitigation for traffic impacts (refer to Section 4.12, *Transportation and Circulation*) would also result in substantial adverse changes to visual character in the vicinity.

Mitigation Measures. Visual impacts would be reduced to some extent through compliance with Salinas River Area Plan and San Luis Obispo County Land Use Ordinance requirements. For example, in accordance with LUO Section 22.104.040.A.1, future residential development in the Santa Margarita Ranch area would be clustered in compliance with Section 22.22.150 (Agricultural Lands Clustering) and would be required to reconfigure and/or relocate existing parcels with minimal or no visual impact on Santa Margarita and Highway 101, thereby reducing viewing corridor impacts to some extent. All future development would additionally be required to comply with exterior lighting requirements, height limits, and setback requirements of the San Luis Obispo County General Plan. Nonetheless, additional mitigation measures are required.

Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision measures VR-1(a) (Prohibition of Structural Silhouetting), VR-1(b) (Architectural and Landscape Guidelines), VR-1(c) (Oak Tree Removal), VR-1(d) (Bury Water Tanks), VR-1(e) (Lighting), VR-1(f) (Street Light Limitations), VR-1(g) (Clear Excess Debris), VR-1(h) (Grading), and VR-1(i) (Accessory Structures/Infrastructure) would apply to all Future Development Program land uses. The following additional mitigation measures are also required to further reduce aesthetic impacts:

**Future Development Program VR-1(a)**

**Residential Siting and Design Standards.** Residential site locations shall be chosen to minimize aesthetic impacts. Considerations shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Home sites shall be clustered in accordance with San Luis Obispo County LUO Section 22.104.040.A.1 and Section 22.22.150 (Agricultural Lands Clustering).
- No building envelopes shall be located where they would create a skyline silhouette.
- Lots shall be screened from roads to minimize impacts to visual corridors.

Residential design shall blend new residences and associated improvements into the natural landscapes. This may include, but not be limited to, the following architectural considerations:



- All buildings and associated improvements conform to existing topography.
- For lots located on slopes, stepped foundations shall be used.
- The height and scale of new development shall be compatible with that of surrounding development and/or surrounding natural environment. Residences located beneath the tree canopy shall not penetrate the canopy. Residences located in open space must visually relate to some other larger vertical element in the landscape, such as mature oak trees.
- Building materials shall blend with the surrounding environment in terms of color, texture, non-reflectivity and scale.
- Residences shall be designed to maximize the use of energy efficient climate control systems such as passive solar gain for heating and natural ventilation for cooling.
- Extensive paved areas for long-term external storage of vehicles shall not be permitted.
- Landscaping material standards shall be implemented to promote the use of native vegetation. Landscaping shall

blend into the natural environment and screen the residence from view where feasible.

- Walls and fences shall be designed in a style, materials and color to complement the buildings to which they are attached.
- Attached multi-family development shall incorporate the following elements:
  - Units that resemble large single family dwellings
  - Varied front setbacks within the same structure
  - Staggered unit plans
  - Use of reverse building plans to add variety
  - Maximum of two adjacent units with identical exterior wall and roof lines
  - A variety of orientations to avoid monotony
  - The units shall be clustered on the site.
- The design of residential buildings shall include articulation to give them richness and scale. Long uninterrupted exterior walls shall be avoided. For dwellings with sloped roofs, both vertical and horizontal articulation is encouraged.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** Residential location and design shall be subject to review by Planning and Building. Design standards shall be depicted on site plans. **Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review site plans prior to issuance of building



permits.

**Future Development  
Program VR-1(b)**

**Commercial Siting and Design Standards.** Potential commercial development under the Future Development Program includes a restaurant, café, hotel, bed & breakfast, golf clubhouse and pro shop, and gift shops. Specific site locations for these developments shall be chosen to minimize aesthetic impacts. Considerations shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Buildings shall be designed and placed at locations that will reduce their visibility from Highway 101, El Camino Real, State Route 58, West Pozo Road, and the community of Santa Margarita.
- No building envelopes shall be located where they would create a skyline silhouette.
- No development on slopes of 30 percent or greater.

Commercial design shall blend new structures and associated improvements into the natural landscapes. This may include, but not be limited to, the following architectural considerations:

- Structures shall be visually broken up by creating horizontal emphasis through the use of trim or other elements, adding awnings, eaves or other ornamentation, by using a combination of complimentary colors, and through the use of landscaping.
- All areas to be utilized for storage, refuse, or loading shall be screened from view of access streets, roadways, or adjacent residences with berms, landscaping, low garden walls, fencing, or a combination of these features.
- Parking lot areas shall be landscaped using an orchard design with a minimum of one tree per three spaces planted at the rear of the parking space. In order to provide visual relief, glare reduction, and shade, large-canopy trees are recommended, with the requirement that a minimum of 50% of the trees used are of a species found in the project vicinity (i.e. *Quercus agrifolia*, *Quercus lobata*, and *Platanus racemosa*) to create a transition with the native vegetation along throughout the Santa Margarita Ranch.
- Buildings shall be designed to fit in with the landscape by utilizing alternative foundation systems such as split level, post and beam, etc., and use exterior materials and colors that blend with the surroundings.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** Residential location and design shall be subject to review by Planning and Building. Design



standards shall be depicted on site plans. **Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review site plans prior to issuance of building permits.

**Future Development  
Program VR-1(c)**

**Golf Course Siting and Design Standards.** Future applicants shall be encouraged to design the golf course according to the philosophy of 'Natural Course Design.' Considerations shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- The course shall be planned around natural features, including topography, trees, vegetation, and streams. The existing contour of the land shall suggest the placement of holes and flow of the course.
- Turf shall be limited to approximately 25% of the course in order to retain natural aesthetic of the area as well as to conserve water resources.
- Siting and design considerations for the club house, pro shop, and/or other appurtenant facilities shall be similar to the Commercial Siting and Design Standards noted in mitigation measure AES(FDP)-1(b).

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** Residential location and design shall be subject to review by Planning and Building. Design standards shall be depicted on site plans. **Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review site plans prior to issuance of building permits.

**Future Development  
Program VR-1(d)**

**Hillsides.** Protect hillsides as a visual amenity by implementing design standards and grading requirements that call for:

- Decreasing density as slope increases;
  - Limiting the amount of grading;
  - Providing substantial amounts of landscaping;
  - Incorporating architectural treatment that enhances the form of the hillside rather than conflicting with it;
  - Limiting the number of building sites that may be placed on prominent ridgelines;
  - Ensuring sensitive design of development on steep slopes, and on the crest of major ridgelines.
- Considerations for development on steep slopes shall include the following:
- Avoid slope stability hazards by restricting development from slopes of 30 percent or greater.
  - Site-specific visual assessments (with and without the project) to thoroughly evaluate the visual effects of development proposals on slopes of 30 percent or greater.



- For new development located on ridges and hills consider providing a substantial building setback from the edge of the downhill slope and/or screening landscaping, where the slope exceeds 15 percent.

**Plan Requirements and Timing.** Residential design standards and grading requirements shall be subject to review by Planning and Building. Design standards shall be depicted on site plans.

**Monitoring.** Planning and Building shall review site plans prior to issuance of building permits.

Residual Impacts. With implementation of the above mitigation measures, impacts would be reduced to the extent feasible. However, due to the extent of the Future Development Program and the amount of visual conversion of the existing rural nature of the Santa Margarita Ranch, impacts would remain *significant and unavoidable*.

**d. Cumulative Impacts.** The evaluation of the Future Development Program, which includes the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision, in this EIR accounts for all of the expected growth in the Santa Margarita area, as it represents buildout of the major landholding that surrounds the existing community, consistent with the Salinas River Area Plan. Therefore, cumulative visual resources impacts from buildout of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision in combination with buildout of the Future Development Program were addressed in the Future Development Program impact analysis above. As future applications for individual Future Development Program projects are submitted at a project level of detail, the precise evaluation of future project cumulative impacts would be coordinated through the required Specific Plan and associated environmental review, or through individual project-level environmental review, as applicable.

