3.1 Aesthetics and Visual Resources

This section describes the existing aesthetic and visual resources within San Luis Obispo County, identifies regulations in place to protect important visual resources, and discusses the impacts to aesthetics and visual resources associated with implementation of the Renewable Energy Streamlining Program (RESP or Program). The analysis focuses on any anticipated alteration of the landscape characteristics and potential visual resource impacts.

3.1.1 PHYSICAL SETTING

Scenic resources include landscape patterns and features that are visually or aesthetically pleasing and that contribute affirmatively to the definition of a distinct community or region including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings. Scenic areas, open spaces, rural landscapes, vistas, country roads, and other factors interact to produce a net visual benefit for individuals or communities in the county. The consideration of scenic resources and aesthetics utilizes resource-specific quantitative and qualitative terminology. The following factors are important to the analysis of visual resources:

- **Key Observation Point (KOP):** Areas or a series of points on a travel route or at a public use area where the view of a proposed activity would be most revealing.
- **Viewshed:** The landscape that can be directly seen under favorable atmospheric conditions from a particular point/area visible from an observer's standpoint.
  - Foreground view: 0–1 mile
  - Middleground view: 1–3 miles
  - Background view: 3–5 miles
- **Visual Contrast:** Opposition or unlikeness of different forms, lines, colors, or textures in a landscape. Generally, increased visual contrast in foreground distances would be more noticeable to viewers than increased visual contrast in background distances.
- **Visual Quality:** The relative worth of a landscape from a visual perception point of view.
- **Viewer Groups:** The perception of viewers is influenced by their location, specific activities in which they are engaged, personal degree of awareness, and individual values and goals. Activities associated with the project could affect three distinct viewer groups: motorists, residents, and recreationists.
  - *Motorists* – Motorists are people who view the primary study area from a moving vehicle. Motorists can be drivers or passengers. This group typically consists of commuters, local residents, business travelers, and tourists. Tourists are often acutely aware of viewsheds. Business travelers, commuters, and local residents who travel the same routes frequently may become inured to a view but at the same time are more likely to be aware of visual changes than occasional passersby.
  - *Residents* – Residents are people whose homes, businesses, and/or property are near and have a view of visual resources and viewsheds. The sensitivity of residents to aesthetic values and changes to a viewshed is highly individual. In addition, the sensitivity of residents to changes in a viewshed is influenced, in part, by the location and the length of time that the view from a particular location appears altered from its previous condition (e.g., temporary changes during construction or long-term modifications to the landscape).

- *Recreationists* – Recreationists are people who participate in land-based activities, such as hiking along the shoreline, camping in campgrounds, or water-based activities, such as boating, fishing, or rafting.

VISUALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

The county has specific scenic resources identified in multiple planning documents described below.

- Designated Scenic Vista: A viewpoint that provides expansive views of a highly valued landscape for the benefit of the general public. The County Designated Scenic Vistas are all located in the Coastal Zone. As the RESP does not apply to lands in the Coastal Zone, these designated scenic vistas are not discussed further in this EIR.

- County-Designated Scenic Highway: Scenic highways are designated in the General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE) and are corridor viewsheds from popular public roads and highways that have unique or outstanding scenic qualities. These scenic corridors are designated to conserve and enhance their scenic beauty.

- County Sensitive Resource Area: As defined in the General Plan, both in the COSE and Land Use and Circulation Elements, Sensitive Resource Areas (SRA) are applied to areas having high environmental quality and special ecological or educational significance. Within the county, SRAs are combining designations or zoning overlays used to protect certain scenic areas (SLO County 2010b). These elements are discussed in further detail in subsection 3.1.2, Regulatory Setting.

- California Scenic Highway: California's Scenic Highway Program serves to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of state highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. Scenic corridors consist of land that is visible from the highway right-of-way and comprise primarily scenic and natural features. Applicable ordinances, zoning, and planning policies are then activated to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor. These ordinances and policies make up the Corridor Protection Program. The only California Scenic Highway in the county is located in the Coastal Zone. As the RESP does not apply to lands in the Coastal Zone, these designated scenic vistas are not discussed further in this EIR.

- County General Plan Suggested Scenic Corridors/Eligible State Scenic Highways: These corridors have been proposed or are eligible for designation but have not yet been officially designated by either the County or the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), separately. The corridors warrant additional study before determining which specific areas along the corridors merit protection and are officially designated as scenic corridors. Due to their proposed and eligible status, some level of visual quality along these corridors is expected.

- Highway Corridor Design Standards: As Area Plans have been updated, these standards were included to reduce visible impacts associated with certain development along the most prominent transportation corridors containing high scenic qualities.

CARRIZO PLANNING AREA

The Carrizo Planning Area is located in southeastern San Luis Obispo County and is dominated by the Carrizo Plain. The northwest–southeast-trending plain is approximately 15 miles wide and 50 miles long, surrounded by foothills and mountains. To the east are the Temblor Range (3,000 to 4,500 feet elevation) and the San Andreas fault. To the west are the La Panza and Caliente ranges (3,000 to 5,000 feet elevation). These mountains separate the plain from the San Joaquin Valley to the east and the Pacific Coast to the west.

The Carrizo Plain consists of grassland, rangeland, desert, and rugged chaparral-covered terrain. Irrigated vineyards and alfalfa fields are found in the north end of the plain. Parcels are generally large ownership acreages. Much of southern half of the plain is federal land managed by the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bakersfield Field Office. The federal land includes the 250,000-acre Carrizo Plain National Monument. This area is noted for its geologic features, which include the San Andreas fault and Soda Lake; archeological sites; and wildlife and other natural resources. The National Monument includes the largest remaining remnant of original San Joaquin Valley habitat.

A two-lane highway, State Route (SR) 58, is the major east–west transportation route across the Carrizo Plain, providing local access and connecting coastal San Luis Obispo County and Kern County. Local county roads connect to SR 58 providing north–south linkages.

The Carrizo Planning Area viewshed is dominated by rolling hills and rural landscape. Following the winter wet season, plant life reemerges, and from March through May, the Carrizo Plain can provide an impressive display of wildflowers, including lupines, poppies, goldfields, thistle sage, primroses, and scores of other flowering plants. This annual spring event varies in duration and intensity, depending on weather, and can attract visitors who come to enjoy this natural display.

Two large utility-grade solar power plants have recently been completed, or are nearing completion, and dominate State Route 58 views over the eastern half of the plain. These two photovoltaic projects cover approximately 5,000 acres and generate 800 megawatts (MWs). Although the dominant visual characteristic of the Carrizo Plain landscape is that of long, unobstructed views across the plain to a mountainous backdrop, prominent features along the eastern half of the plain along SR 58 are two large utility-scale solar power plants. The results along this portion of the highway are that the natural landscape rich in textural diversity is broken up by the smooth lines of the solar plants that lack texture and are uniform and disrupt the natural landform continuity. The western portion of the plain's level topography extends for miles and lacks any substantial vertical elements (e.g., trees or buildings) to obstruct views creating the viewscape.

Unlike the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys, where views extend across long distances, the mountains surrounding the Carrizo Plain provide a sense of enclosure to the view. In the southern part of the plain in particular, the infrequency of structures and lack of extensive cultivation enhances a sense of a landscape that would have been experienced in the historic and prehistoric past. The plain's geography enables a viewer to see and be seen over great distances, as compared to locations where views are limited by topography, tall vegetation, and structures. Experiencing panoramic views in the Carrizo Plain is further enhanced when an observer is atop even a modest rise in topography, whether on the plain itself or at its periphery.

The Carrizo Planning Area includes portions of a Scenic County SRA around the Caliente Range in the Carrizo Plain National Monument, most of which is located in the South County Planning Area. Additionally, this Planning Area is dominated by County-suggested scenic corridors along

State Route 58 and Elkhorn Road. Elkhorn Road runs northwest to southeast near the eastern border of the Carrizo Plain. Portions of Soda Lake Road and Bitterwater Road north of SR 58 are also County-suggested scenic corridors.

NORTH COUNTY PLANNING AREA

The North County Planning Area covers the majority of the county and is a combination of rural area dominated by a natural or agriculture countryside with developed areas along the Highway 101 and SR 41 corridors. Topography varies from relatively flat low-lying floodplain areas to rolling hills to steeply sloping foothills of the Santa Lucia Range. This range forms the planning area's western boundary and is heavily forested. The area along the eastern slopes of the Santa Lucia Range is primarily used as rangeland, and rolling farmlands in the north and east of this area support extensive dry farming, orchards, and vineyard operations. The Temblor Range extends into the eastern portion of the planning area. The Cholame Hills and the Cholame Valley make up the northeastern portion of the area. Other notable topographic features include Machesna Mountain, with an elevation of 4,066 feet, and the Shandon and San Juan valleys (DeCourten 2010).

On both sides of the Salinas River, the terrain varies from gently rolling hills with oak savanna and open grassland (from San Miguel to Atascadero) to steeper hills of dense oak woodland (southern Atascadero and Santa Margarita). Oak woodlands are a prominent unifying feature through the planning area. Although this area along the Salinas River has significant urban development, many areas in the North County Planning Area have been able to retain a rural character, providing a visual contrast to the urban centers located along Highway 101.

The communities of Oak Shores, Heritage Ranch, Garden Farms, Santa Margarita, San Miguel, Whitley Gardens, and Shandon introduce some built environment into the otherwise rural planning area. Additionally, the Highway 101 corridor is dominated by the incorporated cities of Paso Robles and Atascadero, and the unincorporated community of Templeton..

The flatter areas of the Salinas River floodplain in the North County Planning Area are generally in cultivation. Agriculture provides a working landscape with rural development such as houses, barns, and warehouses. Typical architectural styles in the planning area often connect to the historic settlements in the North County. Spanish mission, ranch, and western styles of architecture are prevalent and reflect the region's historic link with farming and ranching.

According to SLO County (2014a), the North County Planning Area has several scenic SRAs, including:

- The Lake Nacimiento Drive Interlake Road SRA. The portion of this route from Chimney Rock Road northwest to the Monterey County line is an adopted county scenic highway. Any new land use development along this corridor must consider impacts to visual resources.

- Pine Mountain SRA. This SRA is designated for a combination of botanical, wildlife, scenic, and historical value. The La Panza Range extending south to Machesna Mountain has seen minimal development, so it retains its natural scenic quality.

- Rocky Butte Botanical Area SRA. This SRA is located along the west side of Lake Nacimiento and serves as a valuable scenic backdrop. Approximately 460 acres of this area is owned by the Bureau of Land Management.

- Santa Lucia Wilderness Area SRA. This area is extremely important for its wildlife value but also has been deemed valuable for its scenic backdrop.

In addition to having multiple scenic SRAs, this planning area has eligible state scenic highways (Highway 101 from the intersection with SR 46, SR 46 from Highway 1 to SR 41, and SR 41 from Highway 1 to Highway 101), a County-designated scenic roadway (Interlake Road), and County-suggested scenic roadway corridors (SR 58 and multiple county roads).

SAN LUIS OBISPO PLANNING AREA

The northern portion of the San Luis Obispo Planning Area is defined topographically by two parallel mountain ranges—the Santa Lucia Range along the northeast boundary and the Irish Hills located toward the central portion of the planning area. The valleys between the two ranges are punctuated by a chain of volcanic morros—Islay Hill southeast of the City of San Luis Obispo and Cerro San Luis, Bishop's Peak, Chumash Peak, and Cerro Romauldo to the northwest. Outside the city, the primary visual resource consists of agricultural and open space lands contrasted with volcanic peaks, all viewed against a backdrop of the more distant mountains bordering the planning area. Patterns of vegetation are also a significant visual element. The linear patterns of vineyards and other agricultural crops accentuate the contrast between foreground views and the distant mountain backdrop with its pattern of wooded areas and grasslands.

The planning area is dominated by the incorporated city of San Luis Obispo. However, views of Cuesta Ridge, San Luis Mountain, Bishop's Peak, the Irish Hills, and the San Miguelito Hills provide a scenic backdrop to the city.

According to SLO County (2014a), the San Luis Obispo Planning Area has the following scenic SRAs:

- Coon Creek Bishop Pines SRA. This SRA is a strand of native bishop pines located on the ridge and hillsides on the south side of Coon Creek and forms a scenic backdrop in Montana de Oro State Park.

- Ontario Ridge SRA. This SRA provides a scenic backdrop for the coastal area of Avila Beach and Pismo Beach and for the Avila Valley.

- Irish and San Miguelito Hills SRA. This SRA covers the area from the southern boundary of the San Luis Obispo North subarea down to the 200-foot elevation and is highly visible from Highway 101, SR 227, Los Osos Valley Road, Foothill Boulevard, and Prefumo Canyon Road.

- Los Morros including Islay Hill, Righetti Hill, Cerro San Luis, Bishop Peak, Chumash Peak, Cerro Romauldo, and associated hills SRA. The SRA covers this area from the tops of these hills, peaks, and connecting ridges down to the 280-foot elevation, except that it terminates at the 320-foot elevation above Cuesta College west of O'Connor Way, the 225-foot elevation around the base of the South Street Hills, and varies from 280 feet to 200 feet along Highway 1 east of Cuesta College to the city limits. These areas correspond to the visually prominent backdrops visible from Highways 1 and 101, SR 227, Los Osos Valley Road, Foothill Boulevard, and Prefumo Canyon Road.

In addition to having multiple scenic SRAs, this planning area has multiple State (Highway 1 from the western entrance into the planning area to Highway 101) and County (the entire length of Highway 101 in the Planning Area) designated scenic highways and Highway Corridor Design Standard areas (some areas along Highway 101 and Highway 1).

SOUTH COUNTY PLANNING AREA

The South County Planning Area is located in southern San Luis Obispo County and is dominated by agriculture, rural lands, and open space. Large agricultural areas between Santa Maria, Nipomo Mesa, and Arroyo Grande reflect a rural character. Because of its rural landscape, Nipomo Mesa has attracted recreational development associated with destination resorts and rural residential living. Recreational opportunities, including golf courses, have been developed between Nipomo and Arroyo Grande. This region has older villages that have matured with additional recreational opportunities and community facilities. A peaceful rural atmosphere still prevails around and between Nipomo and the villages. Rural character is also achieved by development in a rural residential density which is the dominant land use on Nipomo Mesa between the urban and village areas. A combination of this overall low density and development which is sensitive to this issue retains and maintains rural charm. New development fits within a rural ambiance both through standard and clustered subdivision designs. Development in rural villages and site-sensitive treatment in scenic areas further enhances this quality of life.

Agriculture remains the most widespread land uses in the eastern portion of the planning area with a total of 223,157 acres of its total 441,790 acres. Over half (51 percent) of the planning area is used for agricultural resources. Many of the large old ranchos and land grants are owned and operated by descendants of the original families living in the same ranch buildings. The large parcel sizes and ownership patterns, the large number of properties under agriculture preserve contracts, and the good soils and extensive grazing lands all reinforce this as an agricultural area.

In addition to agriculture, rural lands and open space land uses make up the majority of the remaining land in the planning area. Rural lands consist of rugged, chaparral-covered terrain and include areas along State Route 166 that are primarily steep brush-covered hills, as well as the rugged and rolling terrain of the Temettate Ridge and Newson Ridge area north and east of Nipomo. Public lands in the Los Padres National Forest are managed by the US Forest Service and are designated as open space. A portion of the eastern part of the planning area is in the Carrizo Plain National Monument, described under the Carrizo Planning Area.

According to SLO County (2014a), the South County Planning Area has several scenic SRAs, including:

- Fish Creek Geode Mountain SRA. This area supports oak woods, mixed evergreen forests, and prominent geologic outcrops of high scenic value.

- Lopez Lake SRA. This area includes private lands within the viewshed and immediate watershed of the Lopez Lake Recreation Area and the highly visible hillsides along the Lopez Drive corridor near Lopez Dam. The SRA boundary largely follows the ridgelines of the areas visible from the recreation area. Development on the scenic hillsides around the lake could threaten the park's visual scene, water quality, primitive values, and wildlife habitat.

- Caliente National Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area SRA. The existing preserve includes 58,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management property. This range is considerably different from most areas in the county. There is very little tree cover (occurring primarily on northern slopes), yet this scenic backdrop is one of the most striking in the county. Caliente Mountain, the highest peak in the county at more than 5,100 feet, is located here and is the prominent peak in this outstanding scenic backdrop.

- Pismo Beach Hillsides SRA. The hills and terrace next to the City of Pismo Beach are a scenic backdrop due to their proximity to the city and their undeveloped character.

In addition to having multiple scenic SRAs, this planning area has multiple eligible state scenic highways (Highway 101 for its entire length and SR 166 from Highway 101 to SR 33) and County-suggested scenic highways (scenic highways north of Nipomo). Additionally, the Temettate Ridge and portions of the ridges north of SR 227 have been designated as Highway Corridor Design Standard areas.

3.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING

This subsection discusses the applicable policies and regulations that are relevant to the visual resource analysis of the proposed Program. The section concludes with **Table 3.1-1**, which presents a summary of key policies and standards for aesthetics.

STATE

Nighttime Sky – Title 24 Outdoor Lighting Standards

The California Legislature passed a bill in 2001 requiring the California Energy Commission (CEC) to adopt energy efficiency standards for outdoor lighting for both the public and private sector. In November 2003, the CEC adopted changes to the Title 24, Parts 1 and 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards. These standards became effective on October 1, 2005, and included changes to the requirements for outdoor lighting for residential and nonresidential development. The new standards will likely improve the quality of outdoor lighting and help to reduce the impacts of light pollution, light trespass, and glare. The standards regulate lighting characteristics such as maximum power and brightness, shielding, and sensor controls to turn lighting on and off. Different lighting standards are set by classifying areas by lighting zone. The classification is based on population figures of the 2000 Census. Areas can be designated as LZ1 (dark), LZ2 (rural), or LZ3 (urban).

LOCAL

San Luis Obispo County General Plan – Conservation and Open Space Element

The Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE) includes visual resource policies that seek to maintain a sense of place, preserve intact scenic landscapes that are valued by residents and visitors, and achieve a high quality visual environment. Within the COSE, important visual landscapes are designated as Scenic Resource Areas (SRAs) and County-designated scenic highways. The SRAs function as an overlay to protect certain scenic areas. The Highway Corridor Design Standard areas are designated areas where scenic protection policies apply. While SRAs and Highway Corridor Design Standards are created in COSE policies, the Land Use Ordinance

provides standards that complement and implement the aesthetic objectives of the COSE. Land Use Ordinance standards are described in further detail below.

San Luis Obispo County General Plan – Land Use and Circulation Element

The Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCE) provides policies for land use and transportation. The County's Strategic Growth Principles in the LUCE guide all countywide development, including Principle #3 to "foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place." Policies and strategies in the LUCE apply countywide and by planning area. Policies and strategies seek to maintain distinct urban boundaries and protect attractive rural landscapes. The LUCE also uses combining designations to identify areas with characteristics that are either of public value or hazardous to the public. The special location, terrain, man-made features, plants, or animals of these areas create a need for more careful project review to protect those characteristics or to protect public health, safety, and welfare. Combining designations are established to achieve the following (this list in not all inclusive and only shows goals pertinent to aesthetics and visual resources):

1. To relate intensity of development to the sensitivity of natural resources or other environmental features to minimize adverse environmental impacts.

2. To preserve the natural beauty and topography of the county by encouraging intensive development only where appropriate with regard to those natural features.

In the county, areas of high environmental quality and special ecological or educational significance are designated SRAs. The purpose of areas identified as SRAs is to:

1. Identify areas of high environmental quality, including but not limited to important geologic features, wetlands and marshlands, undeveloped coastal areas and important watersheds.

2. Enhance and maintain the amenities accruing to the public from the preservation of the scenic and environmental quality of San Luis Obispo County.

3. Provide for review of proposed alterations of the natural environment and terrain in areas of special ecological and educational significance.

4. To identify for the purposes of the Land Use Element certain areas defined as open space lands in the county Conservation and Open Space Element, or areas with unique or endangered resources as identified by local, state, or federal governments.

5. Provide locational and design guidelines for siting development that may occur within Sensitive Resource Areas, and encourage development to occur outside of SRAs whenever possible so as to preserve the scenic and environmental qualities of San Luis Obispo County, while retaining the ability to establish proposed land uses and minimum parcel sizes as allowed by the Land use Ordinance.

The LUO provides detailed criteria for the review of projects proposed in the SRA combining designation to achieve the following:

1. Buildings and structures should be designed and located in harmonious relationships with surrounding development and the natural environment.

2. Buildings, structures and plant materials should be constructed, installed or planted to avoid unnecessary impairment of scenic views.

3. Potentially unsightly features should be located to be inconspicuous from streets, highways, public walkways and surrounding properties; or effectively screened from view.

4. Natural topography, vegetation and scenic features of the site should be retained and incorporated into proposed development.

5. Buildings and non-farm structures on agricultural property should be located to cause the least possible conflict with agricultural production by siting them away from the productive agricultural land, while still protecting to the greatest extent possible the scenic and environmental quality of the sensitive resource area.

Certain visual strategies apply only to subareas or specific sites, as presented in **Table 3.1-1**.

San Luis Obispo County General Plan – Agriculture Element

Policies in the Agriculture Element balance visual resource protection with the ongoing viability of agricultural resources and facilities. Policies state that new development in designated scenic corridors must protect scenic resources and locate structures and development in a way that maintains compatibility with agricultural operations. Structures are also encouraged to blend with traditional agriculture and existing agricultural landscapes.

San Luis Obispo County Land Use Ordinance – Title 22

The Land Use Ordinance (LUO) includes standards that apply to setbacks, heights, signage, fencing and screening of mechanical equipment, undergrounding of on-site utilities, and other common project features.

LUO – Exterior Lighting

Exterior lighting is regulated by Section 22.10.060 of the San Luis Obispo County Code, which establishes standards applicable to all outdoor night-lighting sources installed (except streetlights located within the public rights-of-way and all uses established in the Agricultural land use category). This section establishes regulatory guidance relative to light directed onto parking lots, light intensity to reduce glare, light sources to be shielded, height of light fixtures, and street lighting.

LUO – Sensitive Resource Areas

Sensitive Resource Areas are defined as a part of the County's Official Maps and regulated through an SRA Combining Designation as defined in LUO Section 22.14.100 and described within specific Area Plans. Many SRAs are highly scenic areas that have been identified as containing important visual resources that should be considered when new development is proposed. The combining designation applies to new land use permits and requires certain considerations and special findings be made so that all uses within a SRA conform to minimum site design and development standards to protect visual resources. Nonstructural agricultural uses and one single-family dwelling per lot of record are excluded from these provisions.

LUO – Highway Corridor Design Standards

Highway Corridor Design Standards (Section 22.10.095 of the LUO) are design standards developed to protect important views, natural landmarks, scenic backdrops, and scenic vistas for mapped areas of visual resources along the San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor (as mapped on the County's Official Maps and described in the County's LUO (Section 22.10.095)). In the San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor, these standards apply requirements for all projects within the SRA (as mapped on Figure 10-22 of LUO Section 10.22.095) and all residential structures and residential accessory structures along the highway corridor located outside of the SRAs. These standards were developed during individual Area Plan updates and also apply to the Salinas River Highway Corridor and the South County Highway Corridor; however, they apply only to residential structures and residential accessory structures.

LUO – Planning and Community Area Standards

Subareas and communities in the unincorporated area are addressed by specific ordinance standards that require compatibility with a particular landscape or neighborhood. Within the LUO, Article 9 (Planning Area Standards) and Article 10 (Community Area Standards) provide additional standards that seek to protect existing visual character, preserve scenic vistas, and minimize the impacts of new development by blending new development into the existing environment. Several specific plans also provide additional regulations.

LUO – Development Standards and General Requirements

Section 22.32.030 has specific requirements and development standards to protect not only scenic viewsheds but scenic geologic features, such as rock outcroppings, from visual encroachments associated with development.

- Section 22.32.030.D requires that areas cleared of vegetation and topsoil during construction be restored (regraded, covered with topsoil, and replanted) once those disturbed areas are no longer required for operation.

- Section 22.32.030.F requires that electric distribution lines less than 60 kilovolts (kV) be undergrounded to prevent visual clutter.

- Section 22.32.030.I requires that ground-mounted renewable energy facilities not be placed on exposed bedrock, rock outcrops, or significant ridgetops.

Countywide Design Guidelines

The Countywide Design Guidelines (1998) apply throughout the county to protect visual and historical character. General guidance applies to both urban and rural areas. Guidance encourages accessory structures to reflect the character of main buildings. Fences and screening for projects should reflect the area's rural character. In addition, guidance directs that infrastructure in rural areas should be painted or located to reduce visibility.

Community Design Plans

New development in the following areas is guided by individual design plans, which have been adopted by the Board of Supervisors: communities of Cambria, San Miguel, Santa Margarita, and Templeton, Olde Towne Nipomo, and in the West Tefft Corridor. These plans provide

additional goals, policies, standards, and/or guidelines for the appearance and design of new development.

Summary of Local Regulations and Policies

Table 3.1-1 summarizes regulations and policies from the documents described above, including General Plan elements, the LUO, and the Countywide Design Guidelines. Information is organized by planning area. The table also identifies where policies or standards only apply to subareas or land use designations.

TABLE 3.1-1
LOCAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS FOR AESTHETIC ISSUES

Code or Policy Section	Summary
Countywide	
Title 22, Section 22.10.090	Establishes height limits in part to support the preservation of neighborhood character and to preserve viewsheds and scenic vistas.
Title 22, Section 22.10.080	Provides fencing and screening requirements to protect certain uses from intrusion, to protect the public from uses that may be hazardous, and to increase compatibility between different land uses by visual screening.
Title 22, Section 22.10.160	Includes requirements for utilities serving new structures and when undergrounding of these utilities is appropriate rather than the use of poles and overhead lines
Title 22, Section 22.10.060	Includes requirements for onsite lighting, including the height of fixtures and the prevention of glare and light spillage onto adjacent properties.
Title 22, Section 22.32.060	Solar photovoltaic projects must not create any concentrated reflections directed at occupied structures, recreation areas, or roads.
Title 22, Section 22.32.050	Wind energy conversion systems facilities require additional setbacks from property lines and structures.
Conservation and Open Space Element, Policy VR 2.2	Encourage designs that emphasize native vegetation and conform grading to existing natural forms. Encourage abundant native and/or drought-tolerant landscaping that screens buildings and parking lots and blends development with the natural landscape.
Agricultural Element, AGP30, Scenic Resources: b.1	New development requiring a discretionary permit in designated scenic corridors: Balance the protection of the scenic resources with the protection of agricultural resources and facilities.
Agricultural Element, AGP30, Scenic Resources: b.2	New development requiring a discretionary permit in designated scenic corridors: When selecting locations for structures, access roads, or grading, the preferred locations will minimize visibility from the scenic corridor and be compatible with agricultural operations.
Agricultural Element, AGP30, Scenic Resources: b.3	New development requiring a discretionary permit in designated scenic corridors: Use natural landforms and vegetation to screen development whenever possible.
Agricultural Element, AGP30, Scenic Resources: b.4	New development requiring a discretionary permit in designated scenic corridors: In prominent locations, encourage structures that blend with the natural landscape or are traditional for agriculture.
Conservation and Open Space Element, Goal VR 1	Rural areas: The natural and agricultural landscape will continue to be the dominant view in rural parts of the county.
Countywide Design Guidelines,	Rural areas: Accessory structures should reflect the character of the main house.

Code or Policy Section	Summary
Objective RU-4, Guideline a	
Countywide Design Guidelines, Objective RU-5	Rural areas: Fences and screening should reflect an area's rural quality.
Countywide Design Guidelines, Objective RU-6, Guideline b	Rural areas: Where possible, infrastructure should be painted to blend with its surroundings.
Countywide Design Guidelines, Objective RU-6,, Guideline c	Rural areas: Where infrastructure would be visible and cannot otherwise be concealed, undergrounding of utilities is encouraged.
Countywide Design Guidelines, RU-5, Guideline a	Rural areas: When provided, fencing located along public roadways should consider the use of low split rails or peeler posts, architectural wire and fences with vines or shrubs.
Countywide Design Guidelines, RU-6, Guideline a	Rural areas: Infrastructure [greater than 2 feet in diameter] should be sited in trees or behind structure or newly installed landscaping so that it is not visible from public roads or other residences in the area.
Conservation and Open Space Element, Policy VR 1.1	Sensitive Resources Areas (SRAs): Protect scenic views and landscapes, especially visual SRAs from incompatible development and land uses.
Conservation and Open Space Element, Goal VR 4	SRAs: Protect visual resources within visual SRAs for scenic corridors.
Carrizo Planning Area	
No additional policies or standards for the Carrizo Planning Area.	
North County Planning Area	
Title 22, Article 9 (22.94.070.H)	Nacimiento subarea: Any new development shall not be visible from Highway 1, unless the development provides visitor-serving uses or unless no alternative locations exist.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, B.3.a	Salinas River Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary permits: Locate development, including access roads, in the least visible portion of the site, and use existing vegetation and site features to screen the project, as viewed from the applicable highway corridor or road.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, B.3.c	Salinas River Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary permits: Minimize building appearance and mass using low-profile design and colors that harmonize with the surrounding natural environment.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, B.3.d	Salinas River Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary permits: Provide landscaping to screen and buffer development through extensive use of trees and large-growing shrubs in compliance with Chapter 22.16.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, B.2.h	Salinas River Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring zoning clearance: A landscaping plan is required in compliance with Chapter 22.16 and shall ensure at least 50% screening of the structure at plant maturity.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, B.2.d	Salinas River Highway Corridor Area, ridge-top development, projects requiring zoning clearance: Structures within the corridor boundaries shall be located so they are not silhouetted against the sky.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, B.2.g	Salinas River Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring zoning clearance: building height and color: Maximum building height is 25 feet above natural grade. This height limit may be increased an additional 5 feet for agricultural accessory buildings subject to a visual study that supports a finding that buildings will have appropriate forms to minimize their visual impact on surrounding properties and Highway 101. Building color other than trim shall be similar to surrounding natural colors and no brighter than 6 in chroma and value on the Munsell Color Scale.

Code or Policy Section	Summary
Title 22, Article 9 (22.94.082.A-B)	Salinas River subarea, Santa Margarita Ranch, AG: Agriculture, RL: Rural Lands: The visual impact of any new development shall be minimized.
Land Use Ordinance, Section III, Shandon Community Plan Appendix D (EIR Mitigation Measures, AES-3(b)s)	Shandon Community: Finish materials, including glazing, shall be of a low reflectivity to minimize glare.
San Luis Obispo Planning Area	
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, C.4.a	San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Locate all development including accessory structures (including water tanks) and access roads in the least visible portion of the site as viewed from any of the scenic highway or railroad. Exemptions are provided for agricultural accessory structures (Section 22.10.095, C.2.b-d).
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, C.4.d	San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Minimize building height and mass by using low-profile design where applicable. Minimize building visibility (including water tanks) by using colors to harmonize with the surrounding natural environment.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, C.4.e	San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Provide landscaping to screen and buffer development with native or drought-resistant plants, including extensive use of trees.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, C.3.b	San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring zoning clearance: Where possible, residential buildings, residential accessory structures, and agricultural accessory structures shall be set back 100 feet from the applicable scenic highway or railroad right-of-way. If there is no feasible development area outside this setback, the project shall be located on the rear half of the property and provide a landscaping screen. A landscaping plan in compliance with Chapter 22.16 (Landscaping Standards) shall be provided at the time of building permit application submittal.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, C.3.d	San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring zoning clearance: Structures within the SRA shall not be located so as to be silhouetted against the sky as viewed from any of the scenic highway or railroad corridors designated in Chapter 6 of the San Luis Obispo Area Plan.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, C.3.h	San Luis Obispo Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring zoning clearance: A landscaping plan is required adjacent to the applicable structure to obtain at least 50 percent view screening of the structure.
Title 22, Section 22.96.050F	San Luis Obispo Hillside Sensitive Resource Area: Subject to Highway Corridor Design Standards.
South County Planning Area	
Title 22, Article 9 (22.98.020.E.5)	Pismo Beach Hillsides Sensitive Resource Area: proposed projects above the 200-foot elevation contour shall be located to screen 90% of the site from view within the City of Pismo Beach and from Highway 101.
Title 22, Article 9 (22.98.050.C)	San Luis Bay South subarea: Projects requiring a conditional use permit on sites with varied terrain shall concentrate development on moderate slopes. Steep slopes visible from roads should be retained as undeveloped.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.5.a	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Locate development, including access roads, in the least visible portion of the site consistent with the protection of other resources, as viewed from Highway 101. Use existing vegetation and topographic features to screen development from view as much as possible.

Code or Policy Section	Summary
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.5.b	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Minimize grading for both structures and roads that would create cut and fill slopes visible from Highway 101.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.5.c	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Minimize building appearance and visual impact using low-profile design and colors that blend with surrounding natural colors and/or screen the building from view.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.5.d	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review: Provide landscaping to screen and buffer both road and building development with native or drought-resistant plants, including the extensive use of trees and large-growing shrubs.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.4.c	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review, agricultural accessory buildings larger than 600 feet, or buildings meeting other specified criteria: Residential buildings, residential accessory structures, and agricultural structures shall be set back 100 feet from Highway 101. If there is no feasible development area outside this setback, the project shall be located on the rear half of the property and shall provide a landscaping screen to provide 80% coverage.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.4.d	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review, agricultural accessory buildings larger than 600 feet, or buildings meeting other specified criteria: Structures shall be located so they are not silhouetted against the sky as viewed by Highway 101.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.4.f	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review, agricultural accessory buildings larger than 600 feet, or buildings meeting other specified criteria: Maximum building height is 25 feet above natural grade, with exceptions for agricultural accessory buildings of an additional 5 feet subject to a visual study that supports a finding that buildings will have appropriate forms to minimize their visual impact on surrounding properties and Highway 101. Where possible, agricultural accessory buildings within 300 feet of Highway 101 shall have service entrances oriented away from view of Highway 101. Building color shall be similar to surrounding natural colors that are no brighter than 6 in chroma and value on the Munsell color scale.
Title 22, Section 22.10.095, D.4.g	South County Highway Corridor Area, projects requiring discretionary review, agricultural accessory buildings larger than 600 feet, or buildings meeting other specified criteria: Landscaping plan is required that will ensure at least 50% screening of the structure at plant maturity. Landscaping shall include mitigation planting or seeding for graded cut and fill areas in compliance with Chapter 22.16.
Land Use Element, Part II, Section V, 1.6 (Supportive Goals, Environment, 1)	South County subarea: Encourage the blending of structures into the surrounding environment and the minimization of visual impacts in areas considered to be scenic.
Title 22, Article 9 (22.98.072.H.11)	South County subarea, Green Canyon property, RR Residential Rural land use designation: Projects must protect biological resources, maintain rural character, and screen 80% of new development from Highway 1 and Oso Flaco Road.
Title 22, Article 9 (22.98.072.D.3)	South County subarea, North of Santa Maria River area, IND Industrial land use designation: Additional standards apply to select parcels. Projects must minimize visibility from Highway 101, coordinate with the Air Pollution Control District, and protect biological resources within 150 feet of Nipomo Creek and the Santa Maria River.

3.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines and the County's Environmental Checklist, the project would result in a potentially significant impact if it would:

1) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic view.

2) Damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a designated scenic area.

3) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

4) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

5) Significantly impact unique geological or physical features.

PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Have a Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic View (Threshold 1)

Impact 3-1-1 – Construction Implementation of the proposed Program could result in a substantial adverse effect on a scenic view during construction. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Tier 1 roof and structure-mounted solar electric facilities (SEF) and wind energy conversion system (WECS) projects would result in only minor visual disturbance during construction because they will occur on existing structures. During construction of ground-mounted SEF projects (Tier 1, 2, or 3), the presence of construction equipment would introduce temporary visual contrast for foreground and near-middleground views. Ground clearing and numerous vehicles/equipment are required to deliver and install the arrays, resulting in movement, dust, and the presence of construction equipment.

Additionally, access roads may need to be created or widened to accommodate construction equipment needed for project development and could result in visual disturbance, particularly if the roads are located on a visible slope in a SRA. Site clearing also creates opportunities for visible windblown dust clouds to occur. Often, temporary structures are located within the work site for component assembly and finishing and for project site offices. However, visual impacts from the presence of construction equipment and vehicles are short term. Because visual impacts during construction would be temporary, impacts are considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Impact 3-1-1 – Solar Implementation of the proposed Program could result in the development of solar energy projects that have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic view. This impact is **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

Because roof or structure-mounted Tier 1 SEFs would be attached to existing structures, visual contrast with the existing aesthetic environment would likely be nominal. Furthermore, proposed County Code Section 22.32.050.D.2 ensures roof- and structure-mounted solar electrical facilities are integrated with roofing materials or blended with a structure's architectural form. As such, it is assumed that inverter and any other on-site electrical switchgear would be minimal in size and blend with the existing structures or developed area. Adherence to Title 22.32.050.D.2 would minimize visual impacts from roof or structure-mounted Tier 1 solar projects to a **less than significant level (Class III).**

Ground-mounted Tier 1 SEFs, as well as all Tier 2 and Tier 3 SEFs could include enclosed and open areas containing installation infrastructure (e.g., solar panels, switchgear components, and on-site maintenance operation building/structure), access roads, and fencing. Built structures (buildings, piping, fencing, collector arrays, etc.) would introduce industrial elements into the landscape and likely contrast with surrounding undisturbed areas in form, line, color, and texture. In addition, either underground or aboveground connection is then made to the distribution system. The gen-tie lines would likely be 12 kilovolts (kV) and would be strung on either existing or new 35-foot-tall wood poles.

All ground-mounted SEFs would be subject to a Site Plan Review (County Code Section 22.62.040). Site Plan Review applications are required to include landscape plans, contour maps, adjacent land use information, and elevations, renderings, or perspectives of each proposed structure, identifying the color, texture, and type of all exterior finish and roofing materials. In addition, proposed County Code Section 22.32.050.B specifies minimum setbacks of solar facilities to adjacent parcels, while proposed County Code Section 22.32.050.C specifies height limitations for solar facilities. Furthermore, when siting all SEFs, LUO Section 22.32.040.C.4 requires that they not be located in areas containing scenic geologic resources, such as exposed bedrock or rock outcroppings, and also not be located on significant ridgetops.

Setback standards would minimize visual intrusion to foreground views, the distances in which streamlined solar facilities would have the greatest daytime visibility. Height standards would minimize vertical massing and line-of-sight intrusions from adjacent viewsheds. Proposed County Code Section 22.32.040.A.5 requires all distribution lines less than 60 kV to be located underground. In the event any SEFs include transmission interconnection exceeding this voltage or are placed aboveground, proposed County Code Section 22.32.030.B.3 requires that plans for any new or upgraded overhead transmission lines are included in the project application.

While these existing and proposed County Code requirements will minimize the visual impacts of solar installations, the site-specific setting and visual characteristics of all future SEFs proposed under the streamlining program cannot be known. Therefore, potential remains that certain SEFs could result in an aesthetic incompatibility within public view. Potential for this impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

Impact 3-1-1 – Wind

Implementation of the proposed Program could result in the development of wind energy projects that have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic view. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Streamlining of wind projects under the Program would be limited to Tier 1 WECS, which only includes installations mounted on a roof of a structure or conforming use (refer to **Table 2.0-1** in Section 2.0, Project Description). This scale of wind energy project would not be highly visible because of relatively short vertical tower mounts, small nacelle motors, and short blade lengths. While such rooftop wind turbines may be erected on a structure containing few, if any,

comparable appurtenant vertical structures, they are not expected to result in strong visual contrast. Any visual contrast would be greatest on structures with flat rooftops. While Tier 1 wind turbines may increase visually incongruous "urbanization" associations for viewers, the potential for adverse visual contrast would be reduced because streamlined Tier 1 wind facilities would require an already built conforming structure. Such sites would not be within or on undisturbed natural landscape.

To minimize visual impacts, proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.C specifies height limitations of Tier 1 wind energy installations as 10 feet for agricultural, rural, and public facilities and 5 feet for all other land uses. When compared to the overall height and massing of the conforming structure upon which such turbines would be installed, these height standards minimize visual contrast from adjacent viewsheds. Additionally, proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.D.7 requires all wind turbine surfaces to be an unobtrusive color.

While moving blades may attract visual attention, turbines would take on the general visual appearance of antennas, satellite dishes, and other venting structures regularly affixed to a structure's rooftop. Collectively, multiple turbines would decrease a visual impact (particularly if in close proximity) by providing more horizontal massing that would mimic the structure's rooftop. The adherence to these and all County Code Title 22 requirements ensures Tier 1 WECS projects would result in **less than significant (Class III)** impacts with respect to creating aesthetically incompatible sites open to public view.

Impact 3-1-1 – Policy Changes Implementation of the proposed Program could result in the development of renewable energy projects that have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic view. This impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

While existing and proposed County Code requirements will minimize the visual impacts of solar installations, the site-specific setting and visual characteristics of all future SEFs proposed under the streamlining program cannot be known. Therefore, implementation of the proposed Program could indirectly result in aesthetically incompatible sites open to public view. Potential for this impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

Damage Scenic Resources, Including, but Not Limited to, Trees, Rock Outcroppings, and Historic Buildings Within a Designated Scenic Area (Threshold 2)

Impact 3-1-2 – Solar Implementation of the proposed Program could introduce uses that damage scenic resources. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

As discussed in subsection 2.6 in Section 2.0, Project Description, the RE Combining Designation areas exclude streamlining renewable energy facilities in the following locations:

- County-designated visual SRAs
- Certain Highway Corridor Design Standard areas, including scenic highway corridors
- Areas covered by conservation easements
- Parcels in the Open Space land use category

As these designated scenic areas are excluded from the Program, no renewable energy facilities would be sited in these areas as a result of the RESP. Furthermore, as discussed above, all ground mounted SEFs would be subject to a Site Plan Review (County Code Section 22.62.040), as well as height limitations to minimize line-of-sight intrusions into any adjacent scenic viewsheds (proposed County Code Section 22.32.050.C). Furthermore, when siting all SEFs, LUO Section 22.32.040.C.4 requires that they not be located in areas containing scenic geologic resources, such as exposed bedrock or rock outcroppings, and also not be located on significant ridgetops. Therefore, impacts to scenic resources would be **less than significant (Class III)**.

Impact 3-1-2 – Wind Implementation of the proposed Program could introduce uses that damage scenic resources. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Based on the definitions and conditions identified in **Table 2.0-1** (see Section 2.0), Tier 1 WECS projects may be located on scenic lands open to public views. However, these locations would not include those identified above for solar facilities and listed in Section 2.6. As described above under Threshold 1, adherence to proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.C (height limitations of Tier 1 WECS installations), proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.D.7 (requires all wind turbine surfaces to be an unobtrusive color), and all County Code Title 22 requirements would ensure Tier 1 wind energy projects streamlined by the RESP would result in **less than significant (Class III)** impacts at scenic sites open to public view.

Impact 3-1-2 – Policy Changes Implementation of the proposed Program could introduce uses that damage scenic resources. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

As described above, the County's designated scenic areas are excluded from the proposed Program and no renewable energy facilities would be sited in these areas as a result of the Program. Therefore, **less than significant (Class III)** impacts from RESP policy changes would occur.

Substantially Degrade the Visual Character of an Area (Threshold 3)

Impact 3-1-3 – Solar Implementation of the proposed Program could substantially degrade the visual character of an area. This impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

Ground mounted SEF projects have the greatest potential to change the visual character of an area, especially the larger Tier 2 and 3 SEFs. As described above under Threshold 1, all ground mounted SEFs would be subject to a Site Plan Review and existing and proposed County Code requirements to minimize the visual impacts of SEFs to the greatest extent possible. While these existing and proposed County Code requirements will minimize the visual impacts of solar installations, the site-specific setting and visual characteristics of all future SEFs proposed under the Program cannot be known. Therefore, implementation of the Program could indirectly result in the development of solar energy projects that substantially degrade the visual character of an area. Potential for this impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

Impact 3-1-3 – Wind Implementation of the proposed Program could substantially degrade the visual character of an area. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Streamlined Tier 1 WECS would require an already built conforming structure. Such sites would not be within or on undisturbed natural landscape. As described above under the Threshold 1, adherence to proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.C (height limitations of Tier 1 wind energy installations), Section 22.32.060.D.7 (requires all wind turbine surfaces shall be an unobtrusive color), and all County Code Title 22 requirements would ensure Tier 1 wind energy projects streamlined by the RESP would result in **less than significant (Class III)** impacts with respect to changing the visual character of an area.

Impact 3-1-3 – Policy Changes Implementation of the proposed Program could substantially degrade the visual character of an area. This impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

As discussed above, it is likely that ground mounted SEFs streamlined by the Program could significantly change the visual character of the area. While existing and proposed County Code requirements will minimize the visual impacts of ground mounted SEFs, the site-specific setting and visual characteristics of all future SEFs proposed under the Program cannot be known. Therefore, implementation of the Program could indirectly result in the development of solar energy projects that substantially change the visual character of an area. Potential for this impact is considered **significant, unavoidable, and adverse (Class I)**.

Create a New Source of Substantial Glare or Night Lighting Which May Affect Surrounding Areas (Threshold 4)

Impact 3-1-4 – Solar Implementation of the proposed Program could result in the creation of glare or night lighting that would affect surrounding areas. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Solar energy collectors rely on mirrored or glass surfaces that are reflective and produce glare. Under certain viewing conditions, these surfaces give rise to specular reflections (glint and glare) visible to stationary or moving receptors. Night lighting for security and panel washing could also be incorporated into the design of ground mounted SEFs.

Structure mounted Tier 1 SEFs would would not result in significant sources of glare or lighting. Given structure mounted Tier 1 SEF characteristics of height, panel size, and typical angle to receive solar rays, these smaller rooftop installations typically do not reflect glare on adjacent ground receptors. Additionally, Tier 1 rooftop facilities are not expected to require nighttime lighting.

As defined in **Table 2.0-1** (see Section 2.0), ground-mounted Tier 1 and all Tier 2 and 3 solar installations have the greatest potential to result in daytime glare and lighting impacts to adjacent receptors. To minimize the impacts of these solar facilities, proposed County Code Section 22.32.050.B specifies minimum setbacks of solar facilities to adjacent parcels. Setback standards will minimize glare intrusion to adjacent receptors. Furthermore, proposed County Code Section 22.32.050.D requires:

- All solar facilities to use nonreflective surfaces that minimize glare to the greatest extent feasible.

- Rotating solar facilities shall have tracking system design and shall not create concentrated reflections directed at occupied structures, recreation areas, County-designated SRAs, or roads.

- Exterior lighting to be activated by motion sensors, fully shielded, and a downcast type where the light does not spill onto adjacent parcels or illuminate the night sky.

These proposed County Code Title 22 requirements ensure solar energy projects streamlined by the RESP would result in **less than significant (Class III)** impacts with respect to creating glare or light to surrounding properties.

Impact 3-1-4 – Wind Implementation of the proposed Program could result in the creation of glare or night lighting that would affect surrounding areas. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

RESP streamlining would be limited to Tier 1 wind projects, which only include installations mounted on a roof of a structure or conforming use (refer to **Table 2.0-1** in Section 2.0). This scale of wind energy project would not result in highly reflective surfaces or require nighttime lighting. Proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.D.5.a requires all wind installation materials and surfaces to be nonreflective, and proposed County Code Section 22.32.060.D.7.d requires no lighting, unless required by the Federal the Federal Aviation Administration, which would be at the lowest intensity. Adherence to these Title 22 requirements ensures wind energy projects streamlined by the RESP would result in **less than significant (Class III)** impacts with respect to creating glare or light to surrounding properties.

Impact 3-1-4 – Policy Changes Implementation of the proposed Program could result in the creation of glare or night lighting that would affect surrounding areas. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

The implementation of policy changes proposed under the RESP would ensure all streamlined solar and wind projects would not generate adverse glare or lighting that could impact surrounding areas. **Less than significant (Class III)** impacts from RESP policy changes would occur.

Impact Unique Geological or Physical Features (Threshold 5)

Impact 3-1-5 – Solar Implementation of the proposed Program could result in impacts to unique geological or physical features. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

Structure mounted Tier 1 SEFs would not impact unique geological or physical features. As discussed under the analysis of Threshold 2, ground mounted SEFs would not be sited within County-designated SRAs, areas covered by conservation easements, or parcels in the Open Space land use category. Therefore, ground mounted SEFs proposed under the Program would not impact unique geological or physical features. **Less than significant (Class III)** impacts would occur.

Impact 3-1-5 – Wind Implementation of the proposed Program could result in impacts to unique geological or physical features. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

RESP streamlining would be limited to Tier 1 wind projects, which are limited to installations mounted on a roof of a structure or conforming use. Therefore, because these streamlined

installations would be located on an existing structure on previously disturbed land, they would not be located on, or result in, changes to unique geological or physical features. Additionally, proposed updates to Section 22.32.040.C.4

The existing County of San Luis Obispo General Plan does not identify any prominent geologic features in the county. Figure 6.5-1 of the Renewable Energy Streamlining Program (RESP) Opportunities and Constraints Technical Study (OCTS) identifies only rock outcroppings throughout the county as geologic features. Some rock outcroppings are located in areas not under County jurisdiction (i.e., Carrizo Plain National Monument). Some of the rock outcroppings identified are located in areas that are identified as Unlikely to Streamline Renewable Energy, while the rest are located in areas that are Potentially Able to Streamline Energy.

Therefore, based on existing information on locations of rock outcroppings and those areas identified as areas with environmental constraints (such as unique geologic features, which includes rock outcroppings), streamlined Tier 1 wind facilities would not be located on or result in changes to or impact views of unique geological or physical features. **Less than significant (Class III)** impacts would occur.

Impact 3-1-5 – Policy Changes Changes to countywide policies resulting from the proposed Program could result in impacts to unique geological or physical features. This impact is considered **less than significant (Class III)**.

The implementation of policy changes proposed under the RESP would ensure all streamlined solar and wind projects proposed under the Program would avoid impacts to unique geological or physical features. **Less than significant (Class III)** impacts from RESP policy changes would occur.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

The largest geographic scope for cumulative analysis for aesthetics and visual resources is generally the foreground (less than 1 mile for Tier 1 solar or wind projects) and up to middleground viewsheds from a Tier 2 or Tier 3 SEF (up to 3 miles). The greatest cumulative extent for visual impacts would be from a maximum graded 160-acre Tier 3 SEF site. Because renewable energy projects streamlined by the RESP could be built anywhere within the allowable RE Combining Designation areas, the cumulative geographic scope for visual impacts is anywhere within foreground or middleground views of these areas.

During construction of streamlined renewable projects, activities and equipment visible from residences, public roads, and other public viewsheds would result in short-term diminished scenic quality for viewers. Examples include dust and exhaust emissions, removal of vegetation during site clearing, contouring and grading associated with construction, presence of vehicles and equipment, material delivery and staging, assembly of components, and construction workers. However, all cumulative development projects would have similar construction activities resulting in short-term visual impacts to scenic quality. Due to the site-specific nature of construction, only projects sharing foreground views could combine with the construction of streamlined facilities under the RESP to result in a cumulative short-term diminished scenic quality. Because visual impacts from construction are short term, the RESP is not considered to cumulatively contribute to significant temporary visual impacts.

The larger Tier 2 and Tier 3 SEFs would likely include roads, areas of persistent surface and vegetation clearance, and other elements that could create visual contrast in form, line, color,

and texture as compared to pre-project conditions. Cumulative development sharing foreground and possibly middleground views of these facilities—as well as any associated glare, reflectivity, and lighting—may increase overall visual contrast and result in a cumulative change to the visual character of an area. The potential for such impacts would be greatest at viewsheds of surrounding undeveloped land where cumulative development results in long-term diminished scenic quality.

While existing and proposed County Code requirements will minimize the visual impacts of solar installations, the site-specific setting and visual characteristics of all future SEFs proposed under the streamlining program cannot be known. Therefore, implementation of the proposed Program could indirectly result in a considerable contribution to a cumulative visual resources impact.

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