

# Aesthetics

## Chapter 3.1

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The proposed Project will result in *Less Than Significant Impacts With Mitigation* related to Aesthetics with mitigation. A detailed review of potential impacts is provided in the following analysis.

### INTRODUCTION

#### California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Requirements

CEQA requires that significant impacts on the environment be identified and, where possible, measures be added to minimize or eliminate impacts<sup>1</sup>. A “[s]ignificant effect on the environment” means a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project...”<sup>2</sup> With respect to aesthetics, potentially significant CEQA impacts include visual impacts to scenic highways, the visual character of the site, and impacts from lighting.

This section describes the existing visual environment in the vicinity of the Project area using accepted methodology to evaluate aesthetic/visual landscape quality and light/glare. Aesthetic considerations tend to be subjective. The methodologies used to evaluate aesthetic impacts to visual character are qualitative in nature, and are based on photographic documentation of the site and surrounding area.

The proposed Project site is located in the agricultural (Valley) portion of Tulare County. The Environmental Setting section describes scenic and aesthetic resources in the region, with special emphasis on the proposed Project site and vicinity. The Regulatory setting provides a description of applicable State and local regulatory policies. A description of the potential impacts of the proposed Project is also provided and includes the identification of feasible mitigation to avoid or lessen the impacts.

The analyses of the existing visual setting and potential visual impacts resulting from the proposed Project are based primarily on information provided by the Project applicant.

#### Thresholds of Significance:

- Impact on a scenic vista
- Impact on a scenic highway
- Impact on visual quality
- Creation of glare or impacts on nighttime views

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<sup>1</sup> CEQA Guidelines Section 15382

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

### *Visual Character of the Region*

Tulare County is located in a predominately agricultural region of central California. The terrain in the County varies. The western portion of the County includes a portion of the San Joaquin Valley (Valley), and is generally flat, with large agricultural areas with generally compact towns interspersed. In the eastern portion of the County are foothills and the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The project site is located on the Valley floor, which is very fertile and has been intensively cultivated for many decades. Agriculture and related industries such as agricultural packing and shipping operations and small and medium sized manufacturing plants make up the economic base of the Valley region. Many communities are small and rural, surrounded by agricultural uses such as row crops, orchards, and dairies. From several locations on major roads and highways through out the County, electric towers and telephone poles are noticeable. Mature trees, residential, commercial, and industrial development, utility structures, and other vertical forms are highly visible in the region because of the flat terrain. Where such vertical elements are absent, views are expansive. Most structures are small; usually one story in height, through occasionally two story structures can be seen commercial or industrial agricultural complexes. The County provides a wide range of views from both mobile and stationary locations.<sup>3</sup>

The Project is located immediately adjacent to the Urban Area Boundary for the City of Visalia. The topography of the proposed Project site is relatively flat, and natural drainage features such as creeks, ponds, vernal pools, etc. are absent from the site.<sup>4</sup> Land uses in the Project vicinity are predominantly agricultural and rural residential. Agricultural operations near the Project site include row crops to the north, east and west, and State Route 198 is immediately to the south. The Census Designated Place of Goshen is approximately one-half miles to the north of the site and the Visalia Municipal Airport is just over one mile to the southeast. The City of Visalia's wastewater treatment plant is located approximately one mile south of the proposed Project site. Scattered rural residences are located near the proposed Project site.

### *Existing Visual Conditions*

The proposed Project site is located on the northwest corner of Avenue 298 and Road 68 and is surrounded by actively farmed land (for example, corn silage), State Route 198 and the Road 68 overpass. The existing use includes a GENCOR asphalt plant, a residence, material stockpiles, vehicles, and a man-made drainage basin that supports the existing facility's operations. The GENCOR plant, stockpiles and equipment are partially visible from the adjacent County roads, as well as from State Route 198. Natural drainage features such as creeks, ponds, and vernal pools are absent from the Project site or vicinity.

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<sup>3</sup> Tulare County General Plan 2030 Update RDEIR, page 3.1-11

<sup>4</sup> Kamansky's Ecological Consulting, Appendix D, Reconnaissance Page 34

**Figure 3.1-1**

**View of site looking west from State Route 198**



**Figure 3.1-2**

**View of site looking north across State Route 198**



**Figure 3.1-3**  
**View of site looking east from State Route 198**



## **REGULATORY SETTING**

***Federal Agencies & Regulations*** - None that apply to the proposed Project.

### ***State Agencies & Regulations***

#### **Title 24 Outdoor Lighting Standards**

Title 24 Outdoor Lighting Standards were adopted by the State of California Energy Commission (CEC) (Title 24, Parts 1 and 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards (Standards) on November 5, 2003 and went into effect on October 1, 2005. The changes included new requirements for outdoor lighting, which vary according to which “lighting Zone” the equipment is in. The CEC defines rural areas as Lighting Zone 2. Existing outdoor lighting systems are not required to meet these lighting allowances.

#### **Scenic Highway Program**

The California Scenic Highway Program was established by the state Legislature in 1963 for the purpose of protecting and enhancing the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. The State Scenic Highway System includes a list of highways that are either eligible for designation as scenic highways or have been officially designated. The state laws governing the scenic highways program are found in the Streets and Highways Code Sections 260-263. In Tulare County, portions of State Routes 190, 198, and 180 are eligible for state scenic highway designation.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Local Policy & Regulations***

“The scenic landscapes in Tulare County will continue to be one of the County’s most visible assets. The Tulare County General Plan emphasizes the enhancement and preservation of these resources as critical to the future of the County. The County will continue to assess the

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<sup>5</sup> Tulare County 2030 General Plan, Goals and Policies Report Part 1, page 7-5

recreational, tourism, quality of life, and economic benefits that scenic landscapes provide and implement programs that preserve and use this resource to the fullest extent.”<sup>6</sup>

#### County Scenic Roadways

“Tulare County’s existing General Plan identifies State designated scenic highways and County designated eligible highways. There are three highway segments designated as eligible by the State. These include State Route 198 from Visalia to Three Rivers, State Route 190 from Porterville to Ponderosa, and State Route 180 extending through Federal land in the northern portion of Tulare County. State Route 198 closely follows around Lake Kaweah and the Kaweah River, while State Route 190 follows around Lake Success and the Tule River. Both Scenic Highways travel through agricultural areas of the valley floor to the foothills and the Sierra Nevada Range... Additionally, the General Plan Update identifies preserving the rural agricultural character of SR 99 and SR 65 as valuable to the County and communities.”<sup>7</sup>

#### Tulare County General Plan Policies

The Tulare County General Plan has a number of policies that apply to projects within the County of Tulare. General Plan policies that relate to the proposed Project are listed below.

**SL-1.1 Natural Landscapes** - During review of discretionary approvals, including parcel and subdivision maps, the County shall, as appropriate, require new development to not significantly impact or block views of Tulare County’s natural landscapes. To this end, the County may require new development to:

1. Be sited to minimize obstruction of views from public lands and rights-of-ways,
2. Be designed to reduce visual prominence by keeping development below ridge lines, using regionally familiar architectural forms, materials, and colors that blend structures into the landscape,
3. Screen parking areas from view,
4. Include landscaping that screens the development,
5. Limit the impact of new roadways and grading on natural settings, and
6. Include signage that is compatible and in character with the location and building design.

**SL-1.2 Working Landscapes** - The County shall require that new non-agricultural structures and infrastructure located in or adjacent to croplands, orchards, vineyards, and open rangelands be sited so as to not obstruct important viewsheds and to be designed to reflect unique relationships with the landscape by:

1. Referencing traditional agricultural building forms and materials,
2. Screening and breaking up parking and paving with landscaping, and
3. Minimizing light pollution and bright signage.

**LU-7.14 Contextual and Compatible Design** - The County shall ensure that new development respects Tulare County’s heritage by requiring that development respond to its context, be

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<sup>6</sup> Tulare County General Plan Update Goals and Policies Report, p. A-2

<sup>7</sup> Tulare County 2030 General Plan, Goals and Policies Report, page 7-2

compatible with the traditions and character of each community, and develop in an orderly fashion which is compatible with the scale of surrounding structures.

**LU-5.3 Storage Screening** - The County shall require adequate landscaping and screening of industrial storage areas to minimize visual impacts and enhance the quality of the environment.

**LU-7.6 Screening** - The County shall require landscaping to adequately screen new industrial uses to minimize visual impacts.

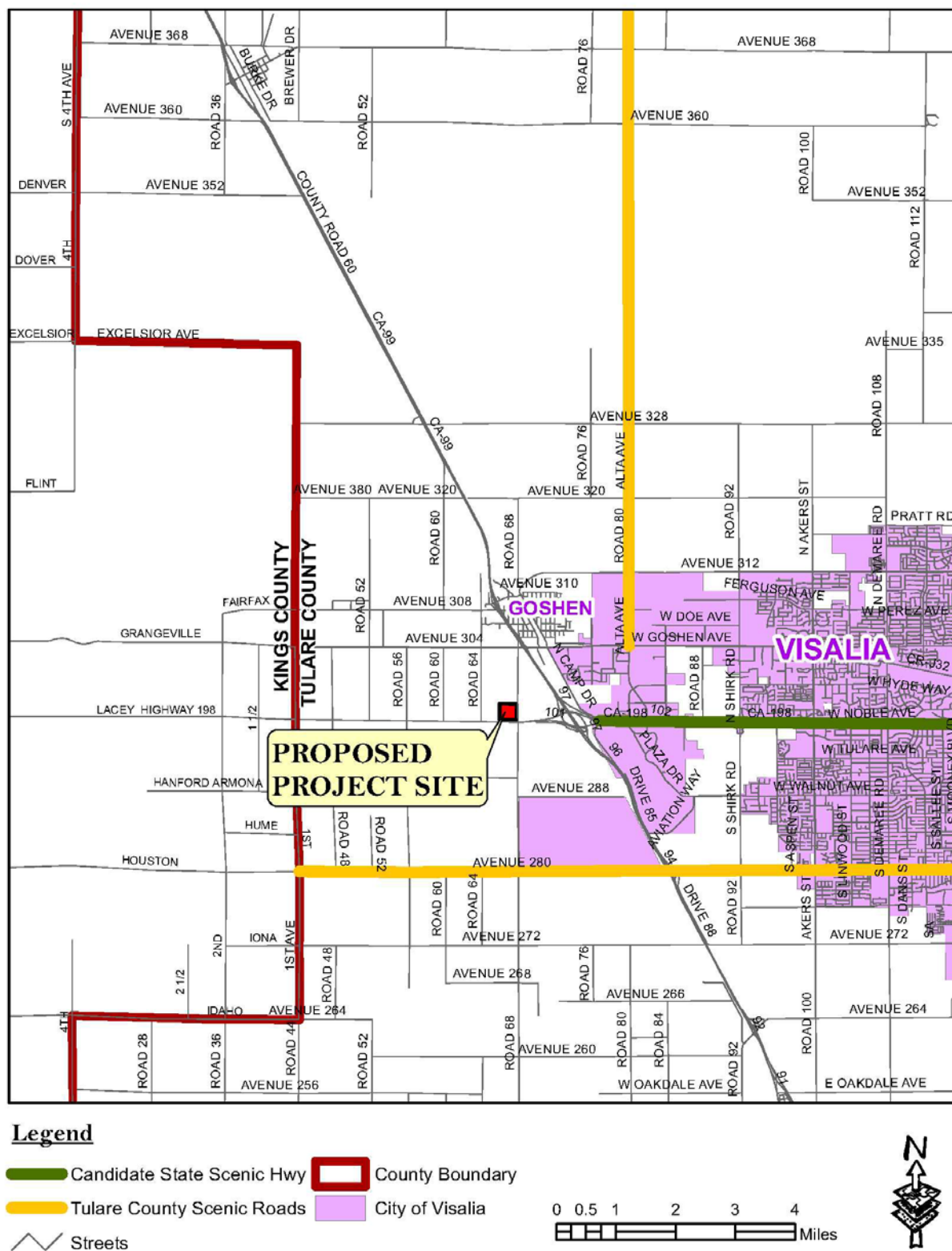
**LU-7.19 Minimize Lighting Impacts** - The County shall ensure that lighting in residential areas and along County roadways shall be designed to prevent artificial lighting from reflecting into adjacent natural or open space areas unless required for public safety.

**ERM-5.18 Night Sky Protection** - Upon demonstrated interest by a community, mountain service center, or hamlet, the County will determine the best means by which to protect the visibility of the night sky.

**ERM-1.15 Minimize Lighting Impacts** - The County shall ensure that lighting associated with new development or facilities (including street lighting, recreational facilities, and parking) shall be designed to prevent artificial lighting from illuminating adjacent natural areas at a level greater than one foot candle above ambient conditions.

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Papich Construction Asphalt Batch Plant Project

**Figure 3.1-4**  
**Scenic Highways and County Scenic Routes**



## Impact Evaluation

### Would the project:

#### a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

Project Impact Analysis: ***Less Than Significant Impact***

The Project site is located in the Valley portion of the County. There are no scenic vistas on the proposed Project site or in the vicinity. Portions of State Routes (SR) 190, 198, and 180 are eligible for state scenic highway designation, but are not located in or near the Project site, as seen in Figure 3.1-4. The proposed Project will have ***Less Than Significant Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item.

Cumulative Impact Analysis: ***No Impact***

The geographic area of this cumulative analysis is Tulare County.

Portions of SR 190, 198, and 180 are eligible for state scenic highway designation, but are not located in or near the Project site, as seen in Figure 3.1-4. Therefore, as there are no scenic vistas on or near the proposed Project site, there will be ***Less Than Significant Cumulative Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item.

Mitigation Measure(s): **None Required.**

Conclusion: ***Less Than Significant Impact***

As noted earlier, there are ***Less Than Significant Project-specific or Cumulative Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item.

#### b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

Project Impact Analysis: ***No Impact***

There are no designated state scenic highways in the Project vicinity or in Tulare County. Portions of SR 190, 198, and 180 are eligible for state scenic highway designation, but are not located in or near the Project site, as seen in Figure 3.1-4.

The Tulare County 2030 General Plan also lists a series of Scenic County Routes, several of which are located in agricultural areas. The nearest Scenic County Roads are Avenue 280 (located approximately one mile south of the proposed Project site) and Road 80, (approximately two miles north of the proposed Project site). The proposed Project will not visually impact these County Scenic Roads.

As the Project site is not visible from Eligible State Scenic Highways or Scenic County Roads, ***No Project-specific Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item will occur.

Cumulative Impact Analysis: ***No Impact***

The geographic area of this cumulative analysis is Tulare County.

There will be ***No Cumulative Impacts*** because the proposed Project will not create visual impacts to State Scenic Highways or Scenic County roads.



Mitigation Measure(s): **None required.**

Conclusion: ***No Impact***

As noted earlier, ***No Project-specific or Cumulative Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item will occur.

**c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?**

Project Impact Analysis: ***Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation***

Agricultural landscapes throughout Tulare County are often scenic and visually appealing. The proposed Project site is located within an agricultural setting, adjacent to the western boundary of the City of Visalia's Sphere of Influence. As seen in Figure 3.1-2, there is currently no structural or vegetative boundary to the operating facility. However; the facility, most notably the 54 foot high asphalt silo (see Figures 3.1-1 and 3.1-3), is clearly visible to persons traveling both east and west on SR 198 and south and north on SR 99. The site is surrounded by actively farmed land to the north and west, by State Route 198 to the south, and by the Road 68 overpass to the east.

The applicant of the proposed Project seeks a Special Use Permit (SUP) which will allow continued use and expansion of the existing temporarily permitted facility. The proposed expansion will result in the permanent establishment of the asphalt batch plant on the existing site; adding a new 7,000 square foot office building; increasing the existing operation from 3,700 tons/day to 8,000 tons/day of asphalt; increasing days and hours of operation, and conducting retail/commercial sales of asphalt. However, the above noted expansion will be confined to the existing footprint. As such, no additional land will convert to any other developed use. To mitigate potential degradation of views of the proposed Project site from SR 198, SR 99 and Road 68, Mitigation Measures 1-1 and 1-2 are outlined to provide screening of the site. The Landscaping Plan depicted in Mitigation Measure 1-1 includes the plants described in Table 3.1-1.

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Papich Construction Asphalt Batch Plant Project

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Table 3.1-1  
Landscaping Plan Tree Legend<sup>8</sup>

Species	Common Name	Form	Height at Planting	Mature Height /Crown Spread
<i>Quercus ilex</i>	Holly Oak	Non-native evergreen tree	~7-9 feet	~70 feet/ ~92 feet
<i>Quercus virginiana</i>	Southern Live Oak	Non-native evergreen/partly deciduous tree	~10 feet	~50 feet high
<i>Pinus halepensis</i>	Aleppo Pine	Non-native evergreen tree	~7-9 feet	~114 feet/ ~84 feet
<i>Eucalyptus globuloso</i>	Blue Gum	Non-native evergreen tree	~7-9 feet	~141 feet/ ~126 feet
<i>Laurus nobilis</i>	Sweet Bay	Non-native evergreen tree/shrub	~7-9 feet	~35 feet high
<i>Arbutus marina</i>	Strawberry Tree	Non-native evergreen tree	~10 feet	~ 50 feet/~40 feet
<i>Cercis Canadensis</i>	Eastern Redbud	Non-native deciduous tree	~7-9 feet	~25 feet high
<i>Lagerstroemia indica</i>	Crape Myrtle	Non-native deciduous tree/shrub	~10 feet	~25 feet high

Note: An evergreen tree has leaves throughout the year while a deciduous tree loses its leaves during the winter season.

To further shield views from the site and as part of the proposed Project, a 10-foot berm will surround the southern and western perimeter of the proposed Project. The trees outlined in Table 3.1-1 will be planted on the 10-foot berm, so at the time of initial planting, the height of the trees plus the berm height will range from 17 feet to 20 feet from the ground. A six-foot high slatted fence will be erected behind the trees atop the berm. With the implementation Mitigation Measures 1-1 and 1-2, and the shielding measures included as part of the proposed Project, Project-specific impacts to the visual character of the site and its surroundings will be ***Less Than Significant With Mitigation***.

Cumulative Impact Analysis:     ***Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation***

The geographic area of this cumulative analysis is Tulare County.

Due to the limited amount of physical changes to the Project site, the proposed Project would result in a less than significant visual impact on the existing industrial character of the site.

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<sup>8</sup> SelecTree-Tree Detail Record. Cal Poly Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute. <http://selectree.calpoly.edu/>. Accessed September, 2014.

Therefore, ***Less Than Significant Cumulative Impacts With Mitigation***, as identified in Mitigation Measure 1-1, will occur to the visual character of the site.

Mitigation Measure(s):

- 1-1 Landscape screening shall be placed and effectively maintained along the periphery of the Project site to sufficiently screen the Project's structures and activities from the public right-of-way and views from State Routes 198 and 99, and Road 68. The landscaping plan depicted in Figure 3.1-5 shall be submitted to the Planning Department for review and approval prior to the issuance of building permits.**
- 1-2 The asphalt silo shall be painted in earth-toned colors to allow it to blend into the surrounding scenery to the fullest extent.**

Conclusion: ***Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation***

The proposed Project will result in ***Less Than Significant Project-specific and Cumulative Impacts With Mitigation***, as identified in Mitigation Measures 1-1 and 2-1, as related to this Checklist Item. The results of the landscaping plan (as seen in Figures 3.1-6 through 3.1-8) represent visual aides to demonstrate the effectiveness of the screening capability of the landscape plan within 10 years.

**Figure 3.1-5  
Landscaping Plan**



**Figure 3.1-6**

**View of site looking west from State Route 198 with implemented landscaping plan**



**Figure 3.1-7**

**View of site looking north across State Route 198 with implemented landscaping plan**



**Figure 3.1-8**

**View of site looking northeast from State Route 198 with implemented landscaping plan**



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

Project Impact Analysis:

***Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation***

Lighting impacts from the Project are typically associated with the use of artificial light during the evening and nighttime hours. Impacts can include light emanating from building interiors (seen through windows) and light from exterior sources, including building or parking lot lighting, security lighting, street lighting, etc, and light coming from the headlights of large trucks at night. Glare is typically a daytime occurrence caused by light reflecting off highly polished surfaces such as window glass. The most common impacts are from glare to nearby moving vehicles.

The proposed Project will not create a new source of light or glare from the existing buildings. New sources of exterior lighting may be included as a part of the office building construction; however, any new exterior lighting associated with a project that requires a Special Use Permits is conditioned to ensure that new lighting be directed downward and away from public roadways and adjacent properties. This standard condition is part of the project design component of the proposed Project.

It is anticipated that the new office building will not result in significant glare, since the structure will not have highly reflective surfaces and the periphery of the proposed Project site will be landscaped as noted in section c), above. The new office will have an approximate height of 20 feet and will be set back from the existing roads. Due to the 17 to 20 feet of screening provided by the vegetation plus berm, the new office is unlikely to impact motorist's or resident's view beyond the plant site. The vegetation screening will also minimize any lighting coming from the nighttime truck traffic. No mitigation measures are required to address potential glare.

With implementation of Mitigation Measures 1-1 and 1-2, ***Less Than Significant Project-specific Impacts With Mitigation***, will occur to this Checklist Item.

Cumulative Impact Analysis:     ***Less Than Significant Impact***

The geographic area of this cumulative analysis is Tulare County.

The proposed Project will result in ***No Significant Impacts*** related to light and glare. As such, ***Less Than Significant Cumulative Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item will occur.

Conclusion: ***Less than Significant Impact***

As noted earlier, a project that requires a Special Use Permits is conditioned to ensure that new lighting be directed downward and away from public roadways and adjacent properties. Therefore, the proposed Project will result in ***Less Than Significant Project-specific and Cumulative Impacts*** related to this Checklist Item.

## DEFINITIONS

**Scenic landscapes** - Landscapes that include agricultural lands, woodlands, forestlands, watercourses, mountains, meadows, structures, communities, and other types of scenery that contribute to the visual beauty of Tulare County.

**Natural Landscapes** - An expanse of naturally-formed scenery that contribute to the visual beauty of Tulare County.

**Working Landscapes** - These are landscapes shaped by human activities that produce economic commodities such as agricultural lands, ranch lands, and timber lands. They may also include picturesque commercial districts in communities, crops, orchards, agricultural structures, stands of timber, and canals.”

**Viewshed** - An area of land, water, or other environmental features that is visible from a fixed vantage point. Viewsheds tend to be areas of particular scenic or historic value that are deemed worthy of preservation against development or other change. The preservation of viewsheds is typically the goal in the designation of open space areas, green belts, and urban separators.

## REFERENCES

CEQA Guidelines Section 15382

Kamansky’s Ecological Consulting, Appendix D, Reconnaissance, page 34

Tulare County General Plan Update Goals and Policies Report, p. A-2

Tulare County 2030 General Plan, Goals and Policies Report Part 1, pages 7-2, 7-5

Tulare County 2030 General Plan: Recirculated Draft EIR (RDEIR), page 3.1-11