

Visual Resources

In general, the dominant visual features within the Planning Area are the open sections of the valley floor, urbanized land uses, agricultural land uses, rivers and creeks, and various species of trees. Because the entire Planning Area consists of relatively flat terrain, views of these resources are available from roadways throughout the Planning Area. Oak trees, streams, creeks, and rivers are among the most significant natural visual features in the Planning Area; in particular, the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, the Sacramento River, and the Cosumnes River. Distant views of the Sierra Nevada and Coastal ranges can be visible under clear conditions.

Significant Features

Rivers and Creeks

Some of the most significant natural features are the rivers and creeks located in the Planning Area; such as the Sacramento River, the Cosumnes River, Deer Creek, and Laguna Creek and its associated tributaries. The stream and river corridors are also home to numerous riparian habitats that provide natural scenic views.

The Cosumnes River makes up the Planning Area's eastern boundary, stretching from the intersection with Jackson Highway down to the intersection with Twin Cities Road. The Cosumnes River is the only undammed river on the western slope of the Sierra, which creates a natural ecosystem that is home to a number of wildlife species. This type of riparian habitat provides textures and colors not commonly found in the urban environment.

Laguna Creek is also one of the Planning Area's most valuable aesthetic resources. Laguna Creek flows throughout the City of Elk Grove, as well as part of the Planning Area. Like Cosumnes River, it is also home to native habitat. It also provides recreational opportunities with existing and planned bicycle and pedestrian trails, which enables close interactions with this aesthetic resource.



Trees

The Planning Area is dominated by many native tree types, such as valley oak, blue oak, interior live oak, cottonwood, sycamore, and willow. These tree types found in rural and urban areas, propagate and grow under natural conditions. These trees also provide a visual break from the uniformity of urban development. Non-native trees are also found in the Planning Area, mostly planted because of ornamental value, shade production, resistance to particular pests, or proven adaptation to the urban environment.

There are no woodland corridors in the Planning Area, except riparian woodland corridors along area waterways. There are also several roadways in the Planning Area that are lined with mature trees in the rural areas.

Scenic Corridors

Many state highways are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Its purpose was to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. A highway may be designated scenic depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler's enjoyment of the view. A

scenic corridor is the land generally adjacent to and visible from the highway and is identified using a motorist's line of vision. A reasonable boundary is selected when the view extends to the distant horizon.

Scenic corridors that extend 660 feet on each side of the right-of-way protect all freeways within Sacramento County. Specifically within the Planning Area, these scenic corridors protect Interstate 5 (I-5) from the Laguna Boulevard exit to Twin Cities Road, State Route 99 (SR 99) from the Calvine Road exit to the juncture of SR 99 and the Cosumnes River south of Grant Line Road, and the entirety of SR 160 (or River Road) that is within the Planning Area and parallels the Sacramento River. The purpose of the corridor is to beautify the freeways to make road travel more pleasant and to create a more attractive image of the urban areas in Sacramento County. Both I-5 and SR 99 provide views for travelers passing through the Planning Area or into the City of Elk Grove. State Route 99 is also designated as a Special Sign Corridor by the Elk Grove Zoning Code, which regulates the type, size and location of signs within the view of the traveling public.

Landscape Corridors

Landscape corridors are linear open space corridors that link natural features with human populations. In addition, landscape corridors provide visual diversity and interest by contrasting urban and natural elements of the visual environment. Examples of landscape corridors include riparian/stream buffers, grassed waterways, field borders, hedgerows and windbreaks. Many of the new residential neighborhoods in the City incorporate landscape corridors directly adjacent to the public right-of-way.



Historic Visual Resources

Historic visual resources are important features of a community's history, providing a link between the visual landscape of the past and the urbanized landscape that characterizes the present. Examples of historic visual resources include buildings, structures, landmarks, monuments and other visually prominent features. There are four sites listed on the California Register within the Planning Area including the site for the first library in Sacramento County, located at 9125 Elk Grove Boulevard in the City of Elk Grove. Murphy's Ranch is located near the southwest corner of Grant Line Road and State Route 99 and is the site for the United States' first conquest of California. Additionally, there are significant historical graves in the Planning Area from members of the Donner Party and the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Agricultural Land

Agricultural lands offer a break from the urban landscape by providing an open space visual resource, characterized by no form, line, color or textural features. The majority of the agricultural land in the Planning Area is located in the area's southern portion. The Planning Area contains a variety of agricultural uses. Currently, the main agricultural uses in the Planning Area include row crops, field crops, orchards, vineyards, and dairies, as well as grazing land for cattle. There are

approximately 50,527 acres of agricultural lands within the Planning Area.



Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge

The Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1994 with a goal of protecting 18,212 acres of natural habitats and valuable agricultural lands in southern Sacramento County. The NWR straddles Interstate 5 (I-5) from the town of Freeport and extends southward for 14 miles between the abandoned Southern Pacific Railroad to the west and Franklin Boulevard to the east, until Lost Slough.