

I. VISUAL RESOURCES

This section addresses the visual resources for the parks located within the East Bay Regional Park District's (EBRPD's) Wildfire Hazard Reduction and Resource Management Plan (Plan) Study Area. Included in this section is a description of existing visual conditions within the Study Area, as well as an evaluation of the potential effects on visual resources from implementation of the Plan. The visual analysis is based on field observations of the Study Area, aerial and ground-level photographs of the Study Area, use of the Google Maps Street View program, and publicly-available planning documents.

Within this section, the term "viewshed" is used in reference to the surface area visible from a viewpoint or a series of viewpoints: that portion of the landscape that would be visible from a particular location and which could be visually impacted by changes to vegetation or landforms in those areas. For the purpose of determining potential effects of a project on visual resources within an area, particular viewpoints may be selected because they present a view that is representative of the landscape or reflect a typical viewshed for that area. These viewpoints are then used to describe the visual changes or contrasts that could result from implementation of the proposed project.

1. Setting

This section describes the regional context of the Study Area, views within and across the Study Area, applicable EBRPD policies relating to open space and resource management within the Study Area, and concerns related to roadway visibility and safety within the Study Area.

a. Regional Context. The Study Area for the Plan comprises 13 hillside parks running from north to south along San Pablo Ridge, the Berkeley Hills, and the San Leandro Hills as well as 7 shoreline parks adjacent to the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay as shown in Figure III-1.¹ The Study Area is located within Alameda and Contra Costa Counties and covers an area of approximately 19,000 acres; in its entirety this area is approximately 25 miles long and 7 miles wide. The hillside parks range in elevation from 440 feet in Leona Heights Regional Open Space to 1,900 feet in Tilden Regional Park, with rolling hills and steep canyons forming the dominant topographic characteristics. The landscape surrounding the Study Area consists mostly of open space, including protected watersheds to the east and suburban housing primarily to the west. The Study Area provides the background setting for scenic views from San Francisco and Marin Counties and from the major East Bay east-west arterials and freeways for commuters and travelers living and working in the adjacent communities. The shoreline parks are not as visually prominent as the hillside park areas, but are visible from vantage points around the San Francisco Bay and from arterials and freeways generally located in close proximity to the shoreline parks.

b. Adjacent Land Uses. Along the wildland-urban interface of the hillside parks, the predominant land use outside EBRPD-jurisdiction lands is low-density, single-family residential. As noted above, these areas are generally to the west of the hillside parks. Other built features adjacent to the Study Area include: the San Pablo Dam; University of California, Berkeley campus; Lawrence Livermore

¹ Because wildfire hazards are very low and fuel modification activities are not expected to be undertaken in four of the shoreline parks, these areas are not included for further study in this document. The following parks are excluded from further study: Middle Harbor Shoreline Park, Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach, Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline, and Brooks Island Regional Shoreline.

National Laboratory and Lawrence Hall of Science; Claremont Resort and Spa; University of California, Clark Kerr campus; Chabot Space and Science Center; Merritt College; and Lake Chabot Municipal Golf Course. Residential development along the edge of the Study Area has translated into an increased number of viewers potentially affected by wildfire hazard reduction and resource management activities along the perimeter of the parks or within the view corridors of these residences. Additionally, construction of park facilities and other development has modified the visual character within and across some of the hillside parks.

The shoreline parks within the Study Area are located in predominantly built-up urban areas and are typically adjacent to industrial, commercial, and marina uses. Some residential neighborhoods are also located adjacent to the parks; U.S. interstate highways 580/80 and 880 also are adjacent to shoreline parks and serve as the primary transportation corridors in the East Bay.

c. Vegetation Within the Study Area. Land use and vegetation changes over the past two centuries have irreversibly altered the landscape, making it necessary to use management techniques to maintain an ecological balance between native and non-native vegetation and to achieve wildland fire safety objectives. The current blend of vegetation within the hillside parks is composed of a mosaic of plant communities and wildlife habitats that are associated with physical characteristics of a particular area, including aspect, soil type, and previous or ongoing land uses and development. From a visual perspective, the plant communities and habitats found within the hillside parks of the Study Area are:

- Grasslands and Herbaceous Vegetation
 - Coastal Prairie (Native Perennial Grassland)
 - Serpentine Bunchgrass Grassland (Native Perennial Grassland)
 - California Annual Grassland (Non-native Annual Grassland)
 - Ruderal Vegetation (Weedy Herbaceous)
- Scrub Vegetation
 - Maritime Chaparral
 - North Coastal Scrub (Xeric and Mesic)
 - Coyote Brush Scrub
 - Non-native Scrub
- Woodlands and Forest Plantations
 - Mature Eucalyptus Forest
 - Young (small-diameter) Eucalyptus Forest
 - Mature Monterey Pine Forest
 - Young (small-diameter) Monterey Pine Forest
 - Oak-Bay Mixed Woodland
 - Redwood Forest
 - Riparian Woodland.

Within the shoreline parks, the plant communities and habitats found consist of the above plant communities (with the exception of Serpentine Bunchgrass Grassland and Northern Maritime Chaparral (Manzanita-Chinquapin Chaparral) types) as well as the following plant communities:

- Coastal Prairie
- Salt Marsh
- Freshwater Marsh.

While some or all of these plant communities and wildlife habitats are present in portions of the Study Area, each park has dominant vegetation characteristics. These dominant characteristics affect a viewer's perception of the overall quality of the area's visual resources as well as the degree to which wildfire hazard reduction and resource management actions are necessary. Figures IV.I-1 through IV.I-4 display typical characteristics of some of these plant communities.

d. Views Within and Across the Study Area. The East Bay Hills have significant resource values viewed from within the parks and as viewsheds seen from external vantage points. These visual resources include the elements that provide a "sense of place" within the East Bay Hills and contribute to its unique identity. These elements encompass both natural and man-made features of the local environment as well as the broader aspects that contribute to how the park lands are perceived as a place. Within the hillside parks, water features provide memorable views including Lake Anza, San Pablo Reservoir, Temescal Lake, and Lake Chabot. Significant architectural features include the Environmental Education Center and the Brazil Building in Tilden Regional Park, and Chabot Space and Science Center in Redwood Regional Park. In some areas, including the southernmost portion of the Study Area in Anthony Chabot Regional Park, views are impacted by existing disturbances such as high-voltage transmission lines and telecommunications towers.

Views from the different parks included in the Study Area include the San Francisco Bay to the west and north, the City of San Francisco to the west, San Pablo Bay and the Marin Headlands to the northwest, the City of Oakland to the south, Mount Diablo to the southeast, and San Leandro Reservoir to the south. Additionally, most of the hillside parks are composed of large open space areas that are publicly available for exploration on foot, horseback, or bicycle along hundreds of miles of trails. When traveling through the parks in these modes, users are afforded panoramic views from ridgelines and peaks as well as secluded, enclosed views from within valleys and deep canyons.

The shoreline parks are not as visually prominent as the hillside park areas, but are visible from public vantage points around the San Francisco Bay, including from U.S. interstate highways 80, 580, and 880, which are generally located in close proximity to the shoreline parks. Generally, the shoreline parks cannot be distinguished from the surrounding landscape in views of the shoreline from surrounding but more distant locations, such as across the San Francisco Bay. Adjacent views from the shoreline parks include the San Francisco Bay and neighboring development. Distant panoramic views to the west include the San Francisco Bay and City of San Francisco skyline, the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge, the towers at Mount Sutro and Twin Peaks, the Golden Gate Bridge, Angel Island, Alcatraz Island, and Treasure Island. Views to the east and south include the Campanile at UC Berkeley, the Claremont Hotel, Lawrence Hall of Science and Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, the cranes at the Port of Oakland, and the high rise buildings in Emeryville.

e. **Visual Environment Assessment Methodology.** The assessment of visual resources within and across the Study Area was based on the landscape evaluation system developed by the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Agriculture for their Visual Management System. To assess the potential effects a project may have on visual resources, it is first necessary to describe the visual environment of the Study Area. Landscapes are dynamic, and even those areas of high aesthetic value require some level of management activity, at a minimum, to retain their character over time. Defining what that character is in an evolving landscape can be difficult, however, as seen in the changes to Wildcat Ridge in Tilden Regional Park over the 74-year period shown in Figure IV-I.1. For the purposes of this analysis, it is understood that a basic objective of the Plan and EBRPD is to manage the landscape within the Study Area to generally retain the landscape characteristics of the hillside and shoreline parks while reducing overall fuel loads that pose a significant wildfire hazard. EBRPD recognizes that the landscape within identified recommended treatment areas may be altered to varying degrees depending on the management activities selected for implementation and, as a result, the viewer's perception of these areas and their use may also change.

The scenic qualities of a landscape were determined through an analysis of the landscape character type, which is a unit of physiographic area having common landscape features (e.g., landforms, rock formations, water forms, and vegetative patterns.) Landscape features were separated according to four factors: form, line, color, and texture. The form of an object is its visual shape or mass. Lines are often defined by edges of objects, landforms, or vegetation. Color is defined both by the value or reflective brightness (e.g., light, dark) and hue (e.g., red, green.) Texture is the apparent surface coarseness of an object or area.

The degrees of diversity in a landscape are called "variety classes" and are a measure of the scenic quality of a landscape. Three variety classes have been established for evaluating the landscape by the Department of Agriculture's Visual Management System:

- **Variety Class A – Distinctive:** Areas where features of landform, vegetative patterns, water features, and rock forms are of unusual or outstanding visual quality.
- **Variety Class B – Common:** Areas where features contain variety in form, line, color, or texture, or combinations thereof, but which tend to be common throughout the character type and are not outstanding in visual quality.
- **Variety Class C – Minimal:** Areas where features in the landscape have little change in form, line, color, or texture. Includes all areas not found under Classes A or B.

Visual relationships between elements in a landscape can often be traced to four factors: dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity. Specific elements or components in a landscape may dominate the view because of an element's position within the landscape, visual contrast with adjacent or surrounding elements, or importance. Scale is the apparent size relationship between landscape components. Diversity is a function of the number, variety, and intermixing of visual patterns. Continuity is the uninterrupted flow of patterns in a landscape and the maintenance of the visual relationships of connected or related landscape patterns.



Wildcat Ridge - 1930



Wildcat Ridge - 1961



Wildcat Ridge - 1971



Wildcat Ridge - 2004



Upper Wildcat Canyon (Tilden) - circa 1900



Same View Today - About 100 Years Later

L S A

FIGURE IV.I-1

*EBRPD Wildfire Hazard Reduction
and Resource Management Plan*
Photos of Alterations of the Landscape Over Time

SOURCE: EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT, 2006

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California Annual Grassland (Spring)



California Annual Grassland
(Summer/Fall)



Coastal Prairie



Manzanita-Chinquapin Chaparral



Coyote Brush



Broom Scrub (foreground) and
Eucalyptus (background)

L S A

FIGURE IV.I-2

*EBRPD Wildfire Hazard Reduction
and Resource Management Plan EIR
Photos of Vegetation Types*

SOURCE: EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT, 2007

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Mesic North Coastal Scrub



Mesic Scrub (foreground) and
Xeric North Coastal Scrub (background)



Coast Live Oak Woodland/Forest



Coast Live Oak Woodland/Forest
with moist understory



Emerging Coast Live Oak/California Bay Woodland



Eucalyptus Forest/Plantation

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FIGURE IV.I-3

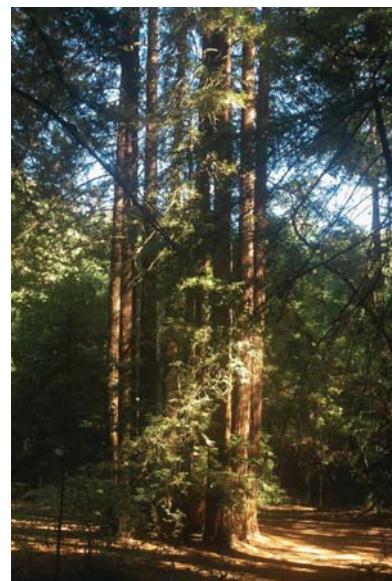
*EBRPD Wildfire Hazard Reduction
and Resource Management Plan EIR
Photos of Vegetation Types*

SOURCE: EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT, 2007

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Monterey Pine Forest



Redwood Forest



Willow Riparian Woodland/Forest

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FIGURE IV.I-4

*EBRPD Wildfire Hazard Reduction
and Resource Management Plan EIR
Photos of Vegetation Types*

SOURCE: EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT, 2006

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f. Character and Visual Quality of the Study Area. The overall visual quality within the Study Area is generally Variety Class B, with some Variety Class A based on specific visual features as follows:

- The Study Area consists predominantly of recreational parks and has value as open space.
- Hilly landforms, vegetative cover, and suburban development are common within the regional landscape of the hillside parks, as noted above.
- Distinctive hilly features in shoreline parks, including the bluffs at Point Pinole Regional Shoreline and the Potrero Hills within Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline, contribute to the visual quality of the Study Area.
- In the hillside parks, vegetation creates a dense medium texture of land cover and provides a visual continuity or flow of pattern.
- In the shoreline parks, the variety of natural features includes beaches, coastal marshes, meadows, lagoons, and ponds, as well as some eucalyptus groves.
- The variety of vegetation types and natural features also results in an intermixing of visual form, color, and texture patterns.

By contrast, the majority of the landscape in the recommended treatment areas identified in the Plan are composed of large stands of blue and red gum eucalyptus trees and Monterey pines, limiting the overall visual variety of those specific areas. A number of private residences and destination park facilities are located in close proximity to large stands of tree plantations. Landforms range from hilly to flat, and all of the sites are contained within recreational parklands, contributing further to their value as open space.

g. Scenic Value and Sensitivity to Change. Scenic value is a function of the number and type of viewers, the visual importance of the Study Area, surrounding land uses, and the presence or absence of significant geological, historical, or botanical and vegetative features. Viewer groups for the Study Area generally include recreational users of parks (hikers, cyclists, and equestrians); travelers utilizing roadways that traverse parks (principally in Tilden Regional Park); travelers using U.S. interstate highways 80, 580, and 880, Grizzly Peak Boulevard, Claremont Avenue, Skyline Boulevard, and a few residential roads; and residents and commercial/industrial uses neighboring the parks.

Visitors to EBRPD parks and people viewing the hillside or shoreline areas from different vantage points (e.g., from public areas adjacent to the parks, from trails within the parks, from roadways traversing and adjacent to the parklands, from the flatland urban areas, or from elevated vantage points or aircraft) have a perceived image of what they expect to see when viewing these areas. This image is based on their personal knowledge of the Study Area at a set moment in time, as well as the emotional values that they attach to specific aspects of the landscape. This expectation generally does not take into account the evolution of the landscape over time, and as a result may not generate a realistic expectation of views of the Study Area or the surrounding landscape. As the length of time viewers have to examine a landscape is extended, however, the expectation of how that landscape should appear will increase. For example, viewers will tend to take greater notice of the visual impacts of the results of vegetation management activities as the viewer's exposure to and familiarity with a particular view increases. Therefore, those vegetation management activities conducted at

recommended treatment areas viewed from a trail, vista point, visitor center, picnic area, or other prominent viewpoint will generally have a greater impact on the visual quality of an area than those that cannot be readily viewed, such as areas that are screened from view or located below a line-of-sight or are viewed only in passing. Factors that affect a viewer's impression of vegetation management activities, then, can include:

- **Capacity of the Landscape to Absorb Change:** For example, the view within a heavily-forested area is much shorter than that of an open vista. As a result, views into a forested area will be limited, and selective management activities conducted within the interior of these forested areas will likely be screened, at least partially, from viewers. Conversely, forested areas that are clear cut or burned will have a greater visual impact than a meadow that has been mowed or burned, because the changes will be more evident initially and the recovery period will be of a longer duration.
- **Viewing Distance from Management Activities:** Activities that take place immediately adjacent to places where people will gather for an extended period of time, near destinations where people travel explicitly to view the surrounding landscape (such as picnic or camp sites, staging areas, vista points, and public facilities), or near private residences will be more visually apparent than those activities at remote sites located further from viewers.
- **Focus of the Viewer:** The potential visual impact of vegetation management activities will increase as the viewer's attention is focused toward an object or key viewpoint. For example, management activities that take place within the direct line of sight from a vista point to Mount Diablo will be more apparent than similar activities conducted along a side trail below the viewer's line of sight.

Naturally-occurring changes to the existing scenic value of views within the Study Area are also likely to occur that can disrupt viewers' expectations of the vegetation and landforms within the hillside and shoreline parks. The East Bay Hills are a dynamic system that have developed over the millennia through complex physical processes and continue to change in response to the tectonic forces generated by the San Andreas Fault Zone. The landscape, wildlife species, and uses of the hills are also continuing to change through factors such as human influence, wildfire, and grazing animals. Moreover, in the course of the last 100 years the landscape has changed dramatically as a result of land management decisions made in the early 1900s. As a result, the park vegetation seen today is a mixture of native vegetation and introduced non-native annual grasses, herbs, and tree plantations. The visual significance of these changes to the landscape within the study area are illustrated by photos of Tilden Park's Wildcat Ridge, south of Inspiration Point, that were taken over a 100-year period, as shown in Figure IV.I-1.

The visual landscape of the San Francisco Bay shoreline has also been significantly affected by human activity. Many of the shoreline areas that are now parks were once part of the San Francisco Bay, but through the placement of fill from waterway dredging and other development activities, these areas are no longer subject to tidal influences and are predominantly above sea level. The shoreline park areas were generally occupied by industrial, commercial, and marina uses prior to their acquisition by EBRPD, and these uses still exist on lands adjacent to many of these parks. Efforts to restore tidal lands and create more natural landscapes on the shoreline parks are ongoing.

h. Visual Sensitivity. Visual sensitivity is a measure of people's concern for scenic quality and is a function of the number and type of viewers, activities of viewers, visual exposure of potential

vegetation management or other activities that could impact visual resources, and the relative distance of potential vegetation management or other activities from sensitive viewing locations. Three sensitivity levels are defined by the U.S. Forest Service:

- **Sensitivity Level 1 – Highest Sensitivity:** Level 1 includes lands seen from primary travel routes where a significant number of viewers have major concerns for scenic qualities; primary recreation areas; scenic byways; views from residences; and areas of geological, botanical, or historical importance.
- **Sensitivity Level 2 – Average Sensitivity:** Areas with Level 2 sensitivity include primary travel routes where a smaller volume of travelers have concerns for scenic qualities and/or the travel route or use area is of only local importance and has a low use volume.
- **Sensitivity Level 3 – Lowest Sensitivity:** Level 3 includes all areas seen from travel routes and use areas where few users or travelers would have a concern for scenic quality.

The entire Study Area is categorized as Sensitivity Level 1 (Highest Sensitivity) based on the views afforded and number of viewers, as described below:

- The hillside and shoreline parks included in the Study Area are heavily-used recreational areas by local and regional visitors, and serve as a significant natural attraction for the region.
- The Study Area serves as a major viewshed for several major highways in the East Bay, including U.S. interstate highways 80, 580, and 880, and California state highways 13 and 24.
- The hillside parks have boundaries that are adjacent to the major hillside travel routes, including Grizzly Peak Road, Skyline Boulevard, and Redwood Road.
- Residential areas are located directly adjacent to lands with high scenic qualities, including residences in Claremont, Sheppard, Thornhill, Tunnel, and Redwood Canyons; in the Montclair Hills; and along Skyline Boulevard and Redwood Road.
- Several public institutions and recreational facilities are located in or adjacent to the Study Area, including the Tilden Environmental Education Center, Tilden Park Golf Course, Chabot Space and Science Center, Lake Chabot Family Campground, and Lake Chabot Municipal Golf Course.

Several key public viewpoints are located within or in close proximity to the Study Area. These viewpoints are areas where a significant number of viewers would have major concerns for the scenic qualities of a particular viewshed, and include (but are not limited to):

- Ellerhorst Elementary School (adjacent to Sobrante Ridge Regional Preserve)
- Nimitz Way (within and adjacent to Tilden Regional Park) and other ridgeline trails
- The San Francisco Bay Trail
- Other trails along the San Francisco Bay, as well as fishing piers and observation towers
- The Berkeley beach area, the Brickyard, and Albany Beach (Eastshore State Park)
- The historic Alvarado section of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park
- Tilden Environmental Education Center in Tilden Regional Park
- Trail destinations within and adjacent to the hillside parks, including Inspiration Point (Tilden Regional Park) and Round Top (Robert Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve)

- Lake Chabot Family Campground in Lake Chabot Regional Park
- The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge westbound travel lanes.

Residences with potential viewsheds of recommended treatment areas, particularly those recommended treatment areas within Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve, Leona Heights Regional Open Space, and parts of Tilden Regional Park could also be considered key viewpoints. However, visual analysis under CEQA is typically based on public views of a potential project: those views afforded from publicly-accessible locations such as roadways, parks, and public buildings.

i. Visual Resources Policies and Guidelines. As noted in Section IV.A, Land Use and Planning Policy, the EBRPD Master Plan² contains a vision statement and policies relating to those resources contained within and unique to parklands within its jurisdiction, including those visual resources commonly identified with the East Bay Hills and San Francisco Bay shoreline.

2. Impacts and Mitigation Measures.

The following section discusses potential effects related to the visual resources of the Study Area on public views that could result from implementation of the Plan. The section begins with the criteria of significance, establishing the thresholds to determine whether an impact is potentially significant. The latter part of this section presents the impacts and mitigation measures, if required.

a. Criteria of Significance. Implementation of the Plan would have significant impacts on visual resources if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway;
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Study Area and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

b. Less-Than-Significant Visual Resources Impacts. Less-than-significant visual resource impacts are discussed in this section. Any specific projects undertaken as part of implementing the Plan will include additional environmental analyses to determine project-specific impacts to visual resources, including any potential conflicts with EBRPD policies and guidance, and additional mitigation measures applied as needed.

(1) Have a Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista. CEQA guidelines state that visual impacts would be considered significant if implementation of the proposed project has substantial negative aesthetic effects on public views. In relationship to visual quality, the level of impact is also affected by the visual relationship of the viewer to the affected area. A negative impact on the visual quality of an area is generally most substantially adverse when viewed at a scale proportional to the scale of the action creating the impact; large-scale removal of tree stands, for

² East Bay Regional Park District, 1996. *Master Plan* 1997. December 17.

example, may not appear significant at close range because of the uniformity and completeness of the action, but when viewed from afar the removal has dramatic and substantial adverse effects on a scenic vista. Likewise, small-scale brush clearing or tree removal may appear substantially adverse at close range, but when viewed from further away in the context of a scenic vista such actions would likely not be visible or apparent.

The vegetation management activities likely to occur at recommended treatment areas within the Study Area would consist of a number of various treatment methods, including hand labor, mechanical, and chemical treatment as well as grazing of selected areas by livestock or the prescribed burning of brush or leaf litter. One of the goals stated in Chapter II. Plan Goals, Objectives, and Guidelines includes consideration for aesthetic values: "Preserve aesthetic landscape values for park users and neighboring communities." This goal is furthered by Objective 7 of the Plan, which states "Evaluate the environmental and aesthetic effects of vegetation management treatment methods and options." The Plan also includes a guideline specific to aesthetic resources, namely Guideline 2.8: "EBRPD will consider the visual character and aesthetic resources of the parks when planning for and implementing fuel reduction treatment actions."

Because the vegetative cover of the hillside and shoreline parks comprising the Study Area varies significantly across hillsides, within canyons, and along the shore the likelihood of any one vegetation management activity occurring over a sufficiently large area to substantially adversely affect a scenic vista is minimal. For example, prescribed burns have the potential to temporarily but adversely impact the visual quality or character of a large expanse of parkland, but also have the potential to substantially improve the visual quality of a scenic vista by removing the younger specimens within the understory and thinning the overall density of tree stands and brush-laden areas. Prescribed burns also provide the beneficial impacts of promoting new growth, particularly native grass, forbs and wildflowers.

Prescribed burns would, however, produce smoke that may temporarily block distant vistas due to reduced visibility. This impact is reduced by existing fire management and prescribed burning policies, guidelines, and regulations that stipulate when and under what conditions prescribed burns can occur and would occur only over a short period of time. By only conducting prescribed burns during those periods when conditions are optimal, and by conducting all pre-burn actions according to the accepted guidelines and regulations in place, EBRPD can minimize the amount of smoke produced during prescribed burns, reduce the length of time views are impacted, and reduce the potential for substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas to a less-than-significant level. Further, the execution of prescribed burns requires a high level of resources, sufficient to limit their simultaneous conduct over areas large enough to create visual uniformity in the landscape or vista. By only burning part of the Study Area or recommended treatment area at one time, aesthetic values can be maintained. Potential impacts that may result from smoke produced during prescribed burns are further mitigated by implementation of the following best management practices (BMPs) pertaining to smoke as included in Chapter IV. Fuel Reduction Methods and listed in Section IV.F, Air Quality and Global Climate Change.

To evaluate the potential effects of recommended fuel management activities on scenic views within the area of impact, as defined in Chapter III, Project Description, LSA conducted a site reconnaissance of each park, and strategic fire route and visits to the recommended treatment areas, used GIS mapping of the Study Area, aerial photographs, and extensive use of the Google Maps

Street View application. Based on this analysis, it was determined that views of the recommended treatment areas from the majority of the Study Area are removed from the sightlines available at key viewpoints and within important vistas, such as those available along Grizzly Peak Road and Skyline Boulevard. Due to the hilly terrain and vegetation cover that exists within the Study Area, viewsheds within the hillside parks are also generally limited to a foreground view distance (approximately 0.25 mile or less) from trails, roads, and residences. Most recommended treatment areas identified are outside the viewsheds of these viewpoints or vista locations, and as a result vegetation management actions undertaken to reduce the potential for wildfire in these areas and along strategic fire routes would not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas overall. While there will be short term visual changes related to vegetation removal, and especially tree clearing, wildland landscapes are dynamic, and the park land will be managed after treatment to support a diverse, low fire hazard mix of vegetation types within the recommended treatment areas. Additionally, there are potential beneficial effects from vegetation removal related to opening up scenic views and vistas to viewers both within and outside the Study Area. Potential adverse effects on scenic vistas that may result from implementation of the proposed project would be short term in nature and impacts to scenic vistas from fuel management activities would be considered less-than-significant.

(2) Substantially Damage Scenic Resources Within a State Scenic Highway. The State of California has identified two scenic highways each in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties: Routes 580 and 680 in Alameda County, and Routes 24 and 680 in Contra Costa County.³ Site reconnaissance and ground-level examination from these roadways (from vehicles and using the Google Maps Street View application) was conducted in July 2008 to assess potential views of the Study Area along their lengths. Portions of Route 580 in Alameda County traverse a northwesterly route within one mile of Lake Chabot and Anthony Chabot Regional Parks, but views of these parks are fully screened either by adjacent landforms that exceed the elevations of the closest portions of these parks or by landscaping and constructed forms along the roadway. Similarly, views of Robert Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve and Huckleberry Botanic Regional Preserve, the two hillside parks within the Study Area in closest proximity to the Route 24 scenic highway designation in Contra Costa County, are fully screened by adjacent landscaping and constructed forms as well as by landforms proximal to the roadway, such as the eastern ridge abutting Siesta Valley. Because views from these scenic highways to the hillside parks are fully screened, any vegetation management activities that may be undertaken as a result of the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources within view of these highways and would therefore be less-than-significant.

(3) Substantially Degrade the Existing Visual Character or Quality of the Study Area and its Surroundings. As previously noted, the dynamic landscape of the Study Area contains areas of high aesthetic value that require some level of management activity to retain their character over time. The existing visual character and quality of the Study Area is generally categorized as Variety Class B (Common), with some Variety Class A (Distinctive) based on specific visual features such as the bluffs at Point Pinole Regional Shoreline and the Potrero Hills within Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline. The hilly landforms, mix of vegetation cover, and surrounding suburban development that encompass the hillside parks of the Study Area are common within the regional landscape. Wildland flora seen today within these parks is a mixture of native vegetation and introduced non-native species that include annual grasses, herbs, and tree plantations. Vegetation management actions that

³ CA Department of Transportation, 2007. California Scenic Highway Mapping System. http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/scenic_highways/index.htm. December.

could result from implementation of the proposed project would focus on the recommended treatment areas identified within the Study Area; these recommended treatment areas consist predominantly of non-native species, including large stands of blue and red gum eucalyptus trees and Monterey pines, which limit the overall visual variety of those specific areas.

Vegetation management activities would be conducted to reduce fuel loads in these recommended treatment areas to reduce the potential for wildfire on EBRPD lands and adjacent properties. Where feasible, these activities will also be conducted to reduce the amount and number of non-native exotic and invasive species (which includes eucalyptus) and continue the process of revegetation by native species in these areas, which is a stated goal of the District. The majority of these recommended treatment areas exist in areas capable of absorbing such vegetative changes without significantly impacting existing views, due in part to the amount and location of surrounding vegetation and the potential for vegetation regrowth in a short period of time. Additionally, many recommended treatment areas are located at some distance from viewpoints and public facilities, and therefore, the potential impact to views within and across the Study Area would be minimal.

Due to the hilly terrain and vegetation cover that exists within the Study Area, viewsheds within the hillside parks are generally limited to a foreground view distance (approximately 0.25 mile or less) from trails, roads, and residences. Some recommended treatment areas within the Study Area are located in valleys with heavily-vegetated slopes on either side, which limits the viewing distance of these recommended treatment areas. Public views from outside the park areas looking in are generally limited by terrain, vegetation, and existing structures. Residential developments with a view of the Study Area are generally limited to those locations directly adjacent to the Study Area and would be subject to short-term views of vegetation management activities and the results of those activities (e.g., vegetation thinning or removal) in recommended treatment areas and along strategic fire routes located adjacent to such properties. Views from trails and other public use or gathering spaces within the parks would experience more substantial, albeit temporary, impacts from vegetation management activities that clear relatively small areas of brush or understory or leave tree stumps. Due to the nature of the plant communities within the Study Area, these close-up impacts would be short-term because re-growth of new vegetation (particularly native species) would cover or otherwise obscure the remaining stumps or fill in small areas where vegetation was previously cleared. The opening up of internal views and clearing of understory fuels would overall result in a beneficial change to the area's visual character.

A combination of vegetation management activities will be used to selectively remove flammable vegetation and litter from recommended treatment areas within the Study Area. These activities may include hand labor, mechanical or chemical treatment, grazing, or other means commonly used to adequately and efficiently meet fuel reduction goals in areas of similar vegetation. Potential impacts to visual resources as a result of such vegetation management activities could include temporary loss of vegetation in the understory, minor to moderate permanent vegetation removal where vegetation is currently very dense, or the removal of large groups of plantation trees (primarily eucalyptus and Monterey pine). Per Table III-2 in Chapter III, Project Description, removal of eucalyptus and Monterey pine is recommended in some treatment areas, especially those along ridges in close proximity to homes to: 1) minimize ember production and distribution; 2) enhance safety and travel along designated strategic fire routes and major roadways used for evacuation and emergency access; and 3) enhance the potential for the native understory to be well-developed.

Where temporary loss of vegetation occurs, the District would manage the existing vegetation and potential for invasive weeds to colonize a cleared site, and would promote fire-resistant native species (such as live oak). Ultimately, the District would manage vegetation for a low fire hazard and create a more complex visual pattern and dimensional shape than the eucalyptus plantations or solid brush that may currently exist, consistent with the goals stated in the Plan. Selective clearing of small eucalyptus trees and pines would result in minor to moderate permanent changes in the existing visual character of the landscape, but the removal of this overstory vegetation would result in an increase in the hours and levels of light reaching the ground surface, in turn altering the species comprising the understory palette within these areas and increasing their visual appeal. Removal of large groups of plantation trees would cause the most dramatic visual change, but would open views to roadways and more distant vistas, increasing the visual character and quality of these areas and adding to the visual drama of the landscape.

Sites near vista points, such as Inspiration Point in Tilden Regional Park and Round Top in Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, as well as those in the shoreline parks of Point Pinole Regional Shoreline and Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline would benefit visually through the opening of more distant vistas. Viewsheds across Claremont Canyon Regional Preserve, Leona Heights Regional Open Space, and Tilden Regional Park would likely also be expanded to include more distant vistas as the result of vegetation management activities, further increasing the visual character and quality of these areas. Areas where trees and other vegetation form a part of the overall historic setting, and tree removal could alter the existing visual character or quality in a negative manner, include the historic Alvarado section of Wildcat Canyon Regional Park and the area surrounding the remnants of the last Giant Powder Company manufacturing facility in Point Pinole Regional Shoreline. Implementation of Plan Guideline 2.8 – EBRPD will consider the visual character and aesthetic resources of the parks when planning for and implementing fuel reduction treatments – will reduce the potential for substantial degradation of existing visual character.

In most instances, the conduct of vegetation management activities at recommended treatment areas within the Study Area would not eliminate the continuous vegetative cover that currently exists, reducing instead only the density of such cover through thinning and the removal of ground and ladder fuels. The vegetation management actions recommended in Table III-2 of Chapter III, Project Description are intended to reduce fire hazards and encourage conversion of these areas to native species by opening up brushy areas, increasing brush patch complexity, thinning eucalyptus plantations, clearing ground litter, and promoting the reestablishment of oak-bay woodlands and native grasslands. These actions would not be readily apparent from distant views outside the recommended treatment areas, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area but would open up viewsheds and scenic vistas as beneficial effects of the Plan.

As previously noted, foreground or close up views for park users could be temporarily impacted by the presence of tree stumps left in place, but these impacts would be minimal as ground vegetation and other understory growth (particularly native species) would begin to cover or otherwise hide in-place stumps in a short period of time. Because vegetation management activities would be conducted to reduce the potential for wildfire in these areas, would increase the ratio of native to non-native species in these areas, and would improve the visual quality and character of these areas, any potential impacts to visual resources would not substantially degrade the existing visual quality and character of the Study Area or its surroundings and would therefore be less-than-significant.

(4) Create a New Source of Substantial Light or Glare. Vegetation management activities conducted within recommended treatment areas located adjacent to roadways and public facilities may be necessary to reduce the fuel loads within these areas. These vegetation management activities may include a number of treatment methods, such as hand labor, mechanical, chemical, or other treatment or removal methods to reduce the potential for wildfire in such areas, but will not require the construction, operation, or maintenance of any permanent structure or facility. As a result, no new source of light or glare would be created by implementation of the proposed project and any potential impacts would be less-than-significant.

c. Potentially Significant Visual Resources Impact. As stated above, the vegetation management actions recommended in Table III-2 of Chapter III, Project Description are intended to reduce fire hazards and encourage conversion of these areas to native species by opening up brushy areas, increasing brush patch complexity, thinning eucalyptus plantations, clearing ground litter, and promoting the reestablishment of oak-bay woodlands and native grasslands. These actions would not be readily apparent from distant views outside the recommended treatment areas, and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the area but would open up viewsheds and scenic vistas as beneficial effects of the Plan. Nonetheless, temporary visual impacts related to vegetation removal or thinning may be considered significant, and therefore, implementation of the Plan may result in the following significant impact related to visual resources.

Impact VIS-1: Implementation of activities under the proposed Plan (such as vegetation clearing or thinning or prescribed burning) could result in temporary substantial adverse visual effects on the scenic character of the Study Area and its surroundings. (S)

As stated above, the Plan includes treatment considerations and guidelines for each vegetation type that identify treatment actions for fuel reduction and post-treatment management activities over time to encourage revegetation of the area with a low hazard more ecologically diverse vegetation type. Table III-2 also identifies a future “Suggested Fuel Management Goal” for each recommended treatment area. Implementation of the Plan would therefore reduce but not fully mitigate temporary substantial adverse visual impacts to the existing scenic character of the Study Area and its surroundings. However, a primary objective of the Plan is to achieve reasonably stable and fire-safe plant communities which is also critical to EBRPD’s ongoing management efforts as well as its overall goal of protecting natural resources. Resource management and native plant restoration efforts are included in the Plan where synergies exist between wildfire hazard reduction and resource management objectives. Therefore, managing high fire hazard or high ember-producing fuels, such as eucalyptus and Monterey pines, by removal or thinning is considered to be beneficial to EBRPD and the surrounding communities overall. Additionally, while there is the potential for exotic invasive plant species to invade areas where fuel reduction activities have taken place, the Plan contains guidelines, Best Management Practices and considerations in Chapter V. Vegetation Management Program (VMP) of the Plan to address the management of exotic species (see also Appendix G: Prescriptions for the Control of Invasive Plant Species and Noxious Weeds of the Plan) after treatment activities have occurred.

Mitigation Measure VIS-1: None available. While implementation of the guidelines and actions included in the Plan would reduce the severity of this temporary visual impact to the scenic character of the Study Area and scenic resources, no additional feasible mitigation measures are available. Therefore, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable. (SU)

