

SECTION 4

Environmental Analysis

4.1 AESTHETICS

Issues & Supporting Information Sources	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the Project:				
a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

Visual resources consist of the natural and manmade features that give a particular environment its aesthetic qualities. These features may be natural appearing or modified by human activities. Together, they form the overall impression of an area, referred to as its landscape character. Landforms, water surfaces, vegetation, and manmade features are treated as characteristic of an area if they are inherent to the formation, structure, and function of the landscape. Landscape character is evaluated to assess whether a proposed project would appear compatible with the existing setting or would contrast noticeably with the setting and appear out of place.

Visual resources also have a social setting, which includes public values, goals, awareness, and concern regarding visual quality. Social setting is addressed as visual sensitivity or the relative degree of public interest in visual resources and concern over adverse changes in the quality of that resource. Visual sensitivity is key in assessing how important an effect on the visual resource would be and whether it represents a significant impact. Recreational uses are generally considered to have high visual sensitivity, as are views from scenic routes or corridors, or along scenic highways and wilderness areas. The primary areas of concern generally are associated with changes to prominent topographic features, changes in the character of an area with high visual sensitivity, removal of vegetation, or blockage of public views of a visually sensitive landscape.

Both the Old River and Connection Slough sites are located in a sparsely developed rural area characterized primarily by agricultural uses, although some wetlands are present in the areas surrounding the river channels. A bridge over Connection Slough is located about 0.3 mile west of the Connection Slough site, and several marinas are located nearby (one is approximately 0.8 mile south and one is about 1.75 miles southwest of the Old River [site](#)). Power lines are present along the adjacent roads, and scattered buildings associated with agricultural uses are located

nearby. The surrounding islands contain a combination of fallow land and land that is actively farmed with row crops. Topography is generally flat, although the adjacent islands are considerably lower than the tops of the adjacent levees. Both the Old River and Connection Slough river channels have been modified with rock-lined levees. The immediate Project vicinity does not contain trees or visually distinctive characteristics.

The Old River site is not accessible to the public by road, but the Connection Slough site is located at the terminus of North Bacon Island Road (Figure 2-3), which is designated by the San Joaquin County General Plan (1992) as a scenic route. State Route (SR) 4 is designated as a scenic route by both San Joaquin and Contra Costa counties (San Joaquin County 1992, Contra Costa County 2005), but it is more than 6 miles south of the Project sites, and these sites would not be visible from this location. The Open Space Element of the Contra Costa County General Plan (2005) identifies the Old River as a scenic waterway. The Old River and Connection Slough sites are accessible by boaters, but the levees limit views of the surrounding areas from the water.

4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

No federal or state regulations are related to the aesthetic impacts of the Project. Both the Contra Costa and San Joaquin County General Plans contain policies intended to preserve the aesthetic qualities of the Delta. The Resources Element of the San Joaquin County General Plan (1992) specifies that:

- Views of waterways...from public land and public roadways shall be protected.
- Outstanding scenic vistas shall be preserved and public access provided to them whenever possible.
- Development proposals along scenic routes are not to detract from the visual and recreational experience along the route.

The Open Space Element of the Contra Costa County General Plan (2005) includes the following goal:

- To preserve the scenic qualities of the San Francisco Bay/Delta estuary system and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River/Delta shoreline.

Policies include:

- In order to conserve the scenic beauty of the County, developers shall generally be required to restore the natural contours and vegetation of the land after grading and other land disturbances. Public and private projects shall be designed to minimize damages to significant trees and other visual landmarks.
- Maintenance of the scenic waterways of the County shall be ensured through public protection of the marshes and riparian vegetation along the shorelines and delta levees, as otherwise specified in this Plan.
- Physical and visual public access to established scenic routes shall be protected.

4.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.1.3.1 No Project

No changes to the aesthetic qualities of the Project sites would result from the No Project alternative because no development would occur.

4.1.3.2 2-Gates Project

a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista

Less than Significant. A scenic vista is usually considered a rural area containing natural visual elements that can be seen from a distance. A scenic vista can be affected by directly reducing the scenic quality of the vista or by blocking views of the scenic resource. Important factors in determining if a proposed project will block views include its height, mass, and location relative to surrounding land uses and travel corridors. The Old River is identified as a scenic waterway by Contra Costa County, and Connection Slough is near the terminus of the portion of Bacon Island Road that is designated as a scenic route by San Joaquin County; therefore, views of Old River from a distance and views from Bacon Island Road could be considered scenic vistas. The Old River site is not accessible to the public by road, and Bacon Island Road, which is a scenic route, is approximately 2.5 miles east of the Old River site. Therefore, the Project components at this site would not be visible from Bacon Island Road, and the Project would not restrict or diminish views of a scenic vista.

The Connection Slough site would be visible from Bacon Island Road; however, this area is quite remote, and there is limited public use because land on either side of Connection Slough is private land in agricultural use; moreover, the gate structure would affect only a small portion of the river channel and the gates would not extend above the levees. The Project components would be visible to boaters, but they would not restrict views of the surrounding areas because of the levees, which block views of the much lower land on the adjacent islands. The gate structures would affect views of the river channels in the immediate vicinity, but these immediate views are not considered a scenic vista. Moreover, the river channels already have been modified with riprap-lined levees and only a small portion of the rivers would be affected. The potential storage area on Holland Tract is fallowed farmland currently used for cattle grazing and is not considered a scenic vista, nor is the area on Bacon Island where dredged material disposal could occur. Any impacts on scenic vistas would not be substantial.

All visible Project components would be removed after the five-year demonstration period, and disturbed areas would be restored. No permanent aesthetic impacts on scenic vistas would occur.

b. Damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway

Less than Significant. Both the Old River and Connection Slough sites already have been modified by the addition of riprap-lined levees. Vegetation is regularly cleared from the levees as part of ongoing maintenance; thus, the limited vegetation that is present is not considered a scenic resource. The Project would not require tree removal, and disturbed areas would be restored to their previous condition once construction was completed and after the Project components were removed after the five-year demonstration period.

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

Less than Significant. The Project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of Project sites and their surroundings. As noted above, both river channels have been altered through the addition of rock-lined levees, and the installation of the Project facilities would affect only a small portion of the rivers. Moreover, all visible facilities would be removed once the five-year demonstration project was completed. The Holland Tract alternate storage site could be used for temporary storage during construction. This site is currently fallow, and temporarily placing rock or other construction materials on this site would not substantially degrade its visual character or quality.

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

Less than Significant. The operator house would include fluorescent lights. The operator would control three sets of flood lights, allowing the eastern and western gates and boat ramp to be illuminated. Channel marker lights would be self-contained solar-powered lights. The flood lights are the primary source of light, but the light would be directed downward toward gates and boat ramps and would be shielded to reduce visibility from neighboring properties. Exposed bulbs would be prohibited. Project lighting would not significantly affect nighttime views in the area, which is unpopulated (the nearest occupied structures are at the marina, which is 4,120 feet from the site). The ramp surface would consist of precast concrete deck panels to provide access around the Project facilities for recreational boaters, and the gates would be constructed of steel. The surfaces would not be highly reflective and would not constitute a substantial source of glare that would affect daytime views. No sources of light or glare would be present once Project facilities were removed at the end of the five-year demonstration period.

4.1.3.3 Cumulative Impacts

The Project's impacts would be highly localized and affect only a small portion of the Delta. No other projects would affect views in the immediate vicinity of the Old River and Connection Slough sites, and no cumulative impacts would occur.