

## **4.13 Visual Resources**

### **4.13.1 Introduction**

This section discusses visual resources that could be affected by the proposed program. The visual resources analysis includes a discussion of viewsheds along highways that are designated or eligible for designation as scenic highways.

### **4.13.2 Background**

Public and private lands contain many outstanding scenic landscapes. Visual resources in these landscapes consist of land, water, vegetation, wildlife, and other natural or manmade features visible on public lands. Vast areas of grassland, shrubland, canyonland and mountain ranges on public lands provide scenic views to recreationists, visitors, adjacent landowners, and those just passing through. Roads, rivers, and trails on public lands pass through a variety of characteristic landscapes where natural attractions can be seen and where cultural modifications exist. Activities occurring on these lands, such as recreation, mining, timber harvesting, grazing, or road development, for example, have the potential to disturb the surface of the landscape and impact scenic and recreational values.

Key data sources for the visual resources and recreation analysis include information from the California Department of Parks and Recreation, CAL FIRE's Chaparral Management Program Final EIR (CAL FIRE, 1981), Caltrans' list of eligible and officially designated scenic highways (California Department of Transportation, 1986), and The California Scenic Highway Program (California Department of Transportation, 1995), and methods adapted from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines for visual assessments (described below).

Visual importance of landscape elements is described with respect to their position relative to the viewer. Foreground elements are those features nearest to the viewer, and background elements are features at a great distance from the viewer. The middle ground of a view is intermediate between the foreground and background. Generally, for this analysis, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant and important it is to the viewer. Most of CAL FIRE's vegetation projects are not discernible for long distances.

### **4.13.3 Setting**

The proposed program for vegetation treatment will include projects that occur on private and state lands throughout California. It is assumed that visual impacts will be most noticeable from roads and trails. The duration of the impact to visual or aesthetic resources will vary with both the treatment type and with the vegetation being treated. For example, a prescribed burning of a grass field will recover much more quickly than a tree thinning or tree removal (Figure 4.13.1).

## Visual Resources



Figure 4.13.1 Example of the visual changes to an area following a Fuel Reduction project near Pollock Pines, California in 2003

California's extensive road system consists of nearly 18,000 miles of highways. Highways designated as scenic represent a much smaller fraction of the total highway system, but should be considered most sensitive to visual impacts. California has over 1,200 miles of State highways that are officially designated as scenic and approximately 5,000 miles of highways that are eligible for designation (California Department of Transportation, 2006). In addition, there are over 1500 miles of federal highways that are designated as scenic. The California Scenic Highway Program was created by the California State Legislature in 1963 to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to them. The scenic highway designation is based on how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes on travelers' enjoyment of the view (California Department of Transportation, 1986). Table 4.13.1a and 4.13.1b provide a summary of the combined, State and Federal, miles of scenic roads by Bioregion. In addition, an estimate of the viewshed area is provided. The viewshed represents the visible area surrounding a scenic road, as interpreted from a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) and ignoring the influence of trees, buildings, or other possible obstructions. The viewshed analysis also assumes a maximum viewing distance of 3 miles (Table 4.13.1a, b and Figure 4.13.1).

<b>Table 4.13.1a Highway Miles by Bioregion</b>				
Name	Interstate	State	U.S.	Total
Bay Area/Delta	462	1,535	188	2,185
Central Coast	39	997	269	1,305
Colorado Desert	298	679	93	1,070
Klamath/North Coast	122	1,309	386	1,817
Modoc		717	257	974
Mojave	354	1,096	277	1,728
Sacramento Valley	257	1,031	46	1,334
San Joaquin Valley	248	2,107	0	2,355
Sierra	120	2,189	361	2,670
South Coast	797	1,639	94	2,531
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,698</b>	<b>13,299</b>	<b>1,972</b>	<b>17,969</b>

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Name	Road Miles	Viewshed Area
Bay Area/Delta	264.78	770,204
Central Coast	323.31	784,672
Colorado Desert	43.03	144,192
Klamath/North Coast	562.85	1,526,329
Modoc	168.97	478,954
Mojave	182.79	574,907
Sacramento Valley	6.79	29,133
San Joaquin Valley	56.56	126,823
Sierra	1,138.59	2,910,060
South Coast	375.19	979,842
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,122.87</b>	<b>8,325,116</b>