3.16 Visual Resources

This section of the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report (referred to throughout as the "Final EIS/R") characterizes the existing visual resources within the Phase 2 project area and whether implementation of the project would cause a substantial adverse effect on visual resources from project implementation. The information presented is based on review of existing visual resources within the area and pertinent state and local regulations, as presented in the section covering the regulatory framework setting. Using this information as context, an analysis of the project's potential impacts on the visual resources is presented for each alternative. The program-level mitigation measures described in Chapter 2, Alternatives, would be implemented with the project. Therefore, this section only includes additional mitigation measures, as needed, for the Phase 2 project.

3.16.1 Physical Setting

Methodology

The development of the baseline visual conditions, significance criteria, and impact analysis for Phase 2 is informed by the Programmatic- and Phase 1-level analysis presented in the 2007 SBSP Restoration Project EIS/R (2007 EIS/R). The assessment of existing visual conditions is also based on a site reconnaissance to gather baseline information on the existing visual character and quality within the area of the Phase 2 pond clusters.[1] Due to the remote location of the Alviso-Island pond cluster, no Phase 2 site reconnaissance was performed at those ponds. Instead, a desktop analysis of existing visual conditions at Ponds A19, A20, and A21 was conducted using URS' photography from recent field work for wetland delineations, publicly available images on Google Maps, and images from the SBSP Restoration Project's library of aerial kite photographs and conventional photography.

This section presents a qualitative assessment of the potential impacts to views and visual character/visual quality associated with each of the alternatives evaluated for Phase 2. The analysis is based on an investigation of existing conditions within the Phase 2 study area, and the potential impact each alternative might have on these conditions. This analysis is commensurate with the level of detail and findings produced for Phase 1. Accordingly, no visual simulations were produced as part of this Phase 2 analysis.

Regional Setting

The San Francisco Bay Area region is in the Coast Ranges Physiographic Province, which spans 400 miles in California from Humboldt County to Santa Barbara County. The San Francisco Bay region is characterized as having a Mediterranean climate, with Coast Redwood forest and chaparral and woodlands. The San Francisco Bay Area is highly developed; however, open space, including areas bordering San Francisco Bay, contributes to the visual character of the region.

As presented in the 2007 EIS/R, the dominant long-range visual resources in the region surrounding the Phase 2 pond clusters include the San Francisco Bay (Bay), the East Bay hills, the Santa Cruz Mountains (to the southwest), open salt ponds along the Bay, the San Mateo Bridge (State Route [SR] 92), and the Dumbarton Bridge (SR 84). The visual setting of the Phase 2 pond clusters ranges from urban—where

[1] URS visual resource analysts conducted a site visit at the Alviso and Ravenswood pond complexes on September 12, 2013.

views include industrial development, roads, and businesses—to open space—where views include parks, baylands, and salt ponds.

The salt ponds along the Bay provide a visual contrast to the dense surrounding urban development of the San Francisco Bay Area due to their geometric and flat dimensional shape (created by raised levees) and their colors (e.g., pink, green, yellow, rust, white).[2] From certain locations, surrounding ground-level streets, trails, and highways provide views of the pond system. The ponds also dominate the views of airline passengers in the approach patterns to the San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose airports. Viewers from these and other elevated vantage points are able to view the entire salt pond landscape, and the constant changes in the visual character of the ponds are especially notable: colors vary according to the time of day, season, cloud cover, and salinity levels. Viewers standing near the shore of the ponds experience them as a buffer in the visual transition from land to the Bay and beyond on the far shore, adding complexity to the visual environment as the eye is drawn across the Bay to the natural and man-made features beyond (2007 EIS/R).

Project Setting

Alviso Pond Complex

Phase 2 proposes project-related activities within specific pond clusters that are part of the greater Alviso pond complex. The Phase 2 pond cluster areas within the Alviso pond complex include the Alviso-Island pond cluster (Ponds A19, A20, and A21), the Alviso-Mountain View pond cluster (Ponds A1 and A2W and the adjacent Charleston Slough), and the Alviso-A8 pond cluster (Ponds A8 and A8S). The following sections generally describe the existing visual character of views of and from these pond clusters.

Alviso-Island Ponds

Accessibility to the Island Ponds is extremely limited. The area around this cluster does not provide recreational opportunities, and this cluster is not adjacent to commercial, industrial, or residential development. No streets or roads run along or near this pond cluster. Long-range views include the East Bay hills and the Peninsula (Figure 3.16-1). Nearer views include other current and former salt ponds, the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) rail corridor and occasional passing passenger and freight trains, and several Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) towers and power lines. Due to its remote location, the Island Ponds are visible only to viewers at elevated locations or traveling by air or train. Aerial photography of this pond cluster depicts the existing deep green/blue colors of the ponds, with the curved lines of channels running through, bordered by strips of soft golden browns and green strips of vegetated marsh.

Alviso-Mountain View Ponds

The Mountain View Ponds include Pond A1, Pond A2W, and the City of Mountain View's Charleston Slough. The slough is being included in Phase 2 planning and designs through a cooperative agreement between the SBSP Restoration Project's management team and lead agencies and the City of Mountain View, as explained in more detail in Chapter 1, Introduction, and Chapter 2, Alternatives. The Mountain View Ponds are directly adjacent to the north edge of the City of Mountain View's Shoreline Park. Recreational trails exit from the northern corners of the park and join the Bay Trail, which runs along the approximately 2-mile south edge of the cluster. The Bay Trail is highly trafficked by walkers, joggers,

[2] The colors of the ponds are influenced by the presence of algae, minerals, microorganisms, and brine shrimp.

bikers, and birders, who are exposed to sweeping near- and long-range views of the pond cluster. Also, this cluster is near the Palo Alto Airport, and highly visible to low-flying private/recreational air traffic.

Figure 3.16-1. View of Pond A19, facing east

Ponds A1 and A2W. Ponds A1 and A2W are expansive bodies of water, bounded by offshore levees and dotted by a few small islands, which provide landing habitat for various bird species. Long-range views from these ponds include the East Bay hills, PG&E transmission lines, and levees. Near-shore views from these ponds include a long vegetated bank that extends the length of the ponds and the hilly, vegetated buffer between Mountain View's Shoreline Park and the Shoreline Golf Links and the ponds. Tall PG&E transmission lines travel through Pond A2W and northwest along the northern border of Pond A1. These towers dominate views of the east shore of Pond A2W, but become less prevalent as the transmission line moves offshore. The Bay Trail and other walking trails exiting the park converge at a vantage point at the southwestern tip of Pond A1. From this location, Charleston Slough (separated by a small, berm-like levee from Pond A1), portions of Shoreline Lake, and office buildings along Terminal Boulevard are visible.

Charleston Slough. Charleston Slough is a well-known bird-watching location (Figure 3.16-2). Depending on the tide, the slough may be wet or dry. During low tides, Charleston Slough is a mudflat spotted with small, low-lying ponds of water, which may be light brown, purple, deep blue, or black. The colors and textures contrast with the blue bay water of surrounding ponds. Numerous diving and dabbling bird species congregate at various tides, adding a sense of movement that is visible from the trails that

surround the slough. The main channel of Charleston Slough snakes through the mudflats, threading sinuous lines that contrast with the comparatively straight levees that form the current salt pond boundaries. During high tides, views of the slough are comparable to Ponds A1 and A2W. A small viewing area with benches is at the southern edge of Charleston Slough, near the levee that separates the slough from Pond A1.

Alviso-A8 Ponds

The A8 Ponds share similar visual characteristics to the Mountain View Ponds. However, the A8 Ponds are in a remote location at the northern end of the Alviso neighborhood in San Jose. Recreational opportunities adjacent to this cluster are limited. Viewer groups include air travelers, viewers in the buildings of the adjacent business park, and workers accessing an adjacent landfill.

Ponds A8 and A8S. Although the Bay Trail spine alignment runs parallel to the southern border of Pond A8S, views of Ponds A8 and A8S are not available from the Bay Trail due to tall stands of marsh vegetation, San Tomas Aquino Creek, and the closed landfill that separate them. Views of this pond cluster are mostly limited to vehicles accessing the small business park atop that closed landfill near the southeastern border of Pond A8S. Recreational access is limited to licensed and permitted waterfowl hunters on certain days during hunting season. However, the rare viewers at this remote cluster will notice the deep blue bay water, urban development, and the Santa Cruz Mountains in the distance.

Figure 3.16-2. View of Charleston Slough at low tide, facing northeast from the Bay Trail.

The portions of the levee that separated Ponds A8 and A8S until it was breached as part of Phase 1 actions provide an interesting visual feature, because the water that runs between the ponds creates an

island effect around the pieces of levee that remain intact above water (Figure 3.16-3). This levee is expected to continue to degrade over time and not form a permanent piece of the visual landscape.

Ravenswood Pond Complex

Phase 2 proposes project-related activities within a specific pond cluster (the Phase 2 Ravenswood Ponds) that is part of the greater Ravenswood pond complex. The following sections describe the general character of views of and from the ponds in the western end of the Ravenswood pond complex.

Ravenswood Ponds

Ponds R5 and S5. These ponds are bounded by SR 84; the City of Menlo Park's Bedwell Bayfront Park (built atop a closed landfill); and small, berm-like levees, one of which separates these two ponds on the diagonal. These ponds collect rainfall during the rainy season and become partially inundated, though water levels may vary, creating islands of elevated flat lands or completely covering the surface. During the dry season, the bare, flat surface of the pond bottom and expansive white salt deposits are exposed and intermixed by the snaking lines of the former slough trace channels. There is a small triangular forebay at the western edge of Pond S5 that is separated from the main part of the pond by a short levee. The southwestern edge of Pond S5 borders a small duck pond at the southern tip of Bedwell Bayfront Park. A historic red pumphouse (Figure 3.16-4) sits nearby, creating a visual landmark to viewers walking along the edge of Ponds R5 and S5. The pumphouse is now used by Cargill as a telemetry station for monitoring its remaining ponds. Marsh vegetation lines the outer edge of the duck pond, which provides nesting and foraging habitat for waterbirds visible to viewers from Ponds R5 and S5. The northwestern edges of Ponds R5 and S5 border the hilly Bedwell Bayfront Park, which rises on an incline away from the ponds, adding complexity to the visual environment.

Pond R4. Pond R4 encompasses more than 300 acres of former salt pond (Figure 3.16-5). Elevated portions of the Bedwell Bayfront Park provide expansive views of Pond R4 in the midground and the East Bay hills in the background. Pond R4 is one of the largest salt ponds in the SBSP Phase 2 project area. During the dry season, the dry panne of Pond R4 is similar in color to Ponds R5 and S5, with a deep, usually filled historic slough trace snaking through its interior from east to west, through the otherwise dry pond bottom. The northwestern edge of Pond R4 abuts Greco Island, a fully restored tidal marsh. The deep green textured surface of Greco Island provides visual contrast to the flat and geometrically curved surface of Pond R4.

Pond R3. Visually, Pond R3 is similar to Ponds R4, R5, and S5. It is seasonally influenced like the other ponds and presents the same dry and wet visual conditions. Pond R3 is large and visually expansive like Pond R4, but distantly enclosed like Ponds R5 and S5, as it is sandwiched between SR 84 and the All-American Canal (AAC). Depending on the season, Pond R3 may also support some vegetation.

Figure 3.16-3. View of partially removed levee between Ponds A8 and A8S, facing northwest.

Figure 3.16-4. View of pumphouse, facing northwest from Bedwell Bayfront Park.

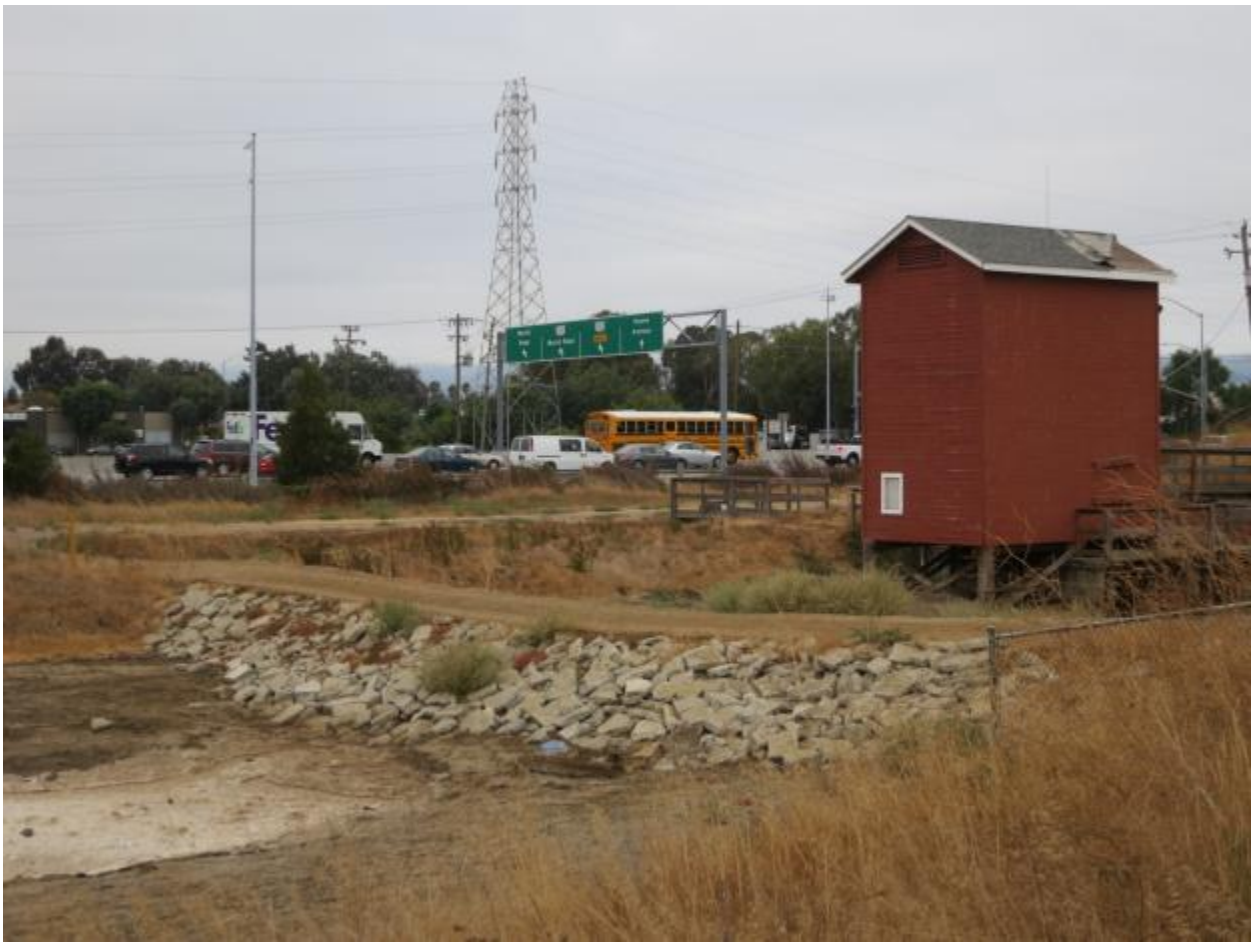
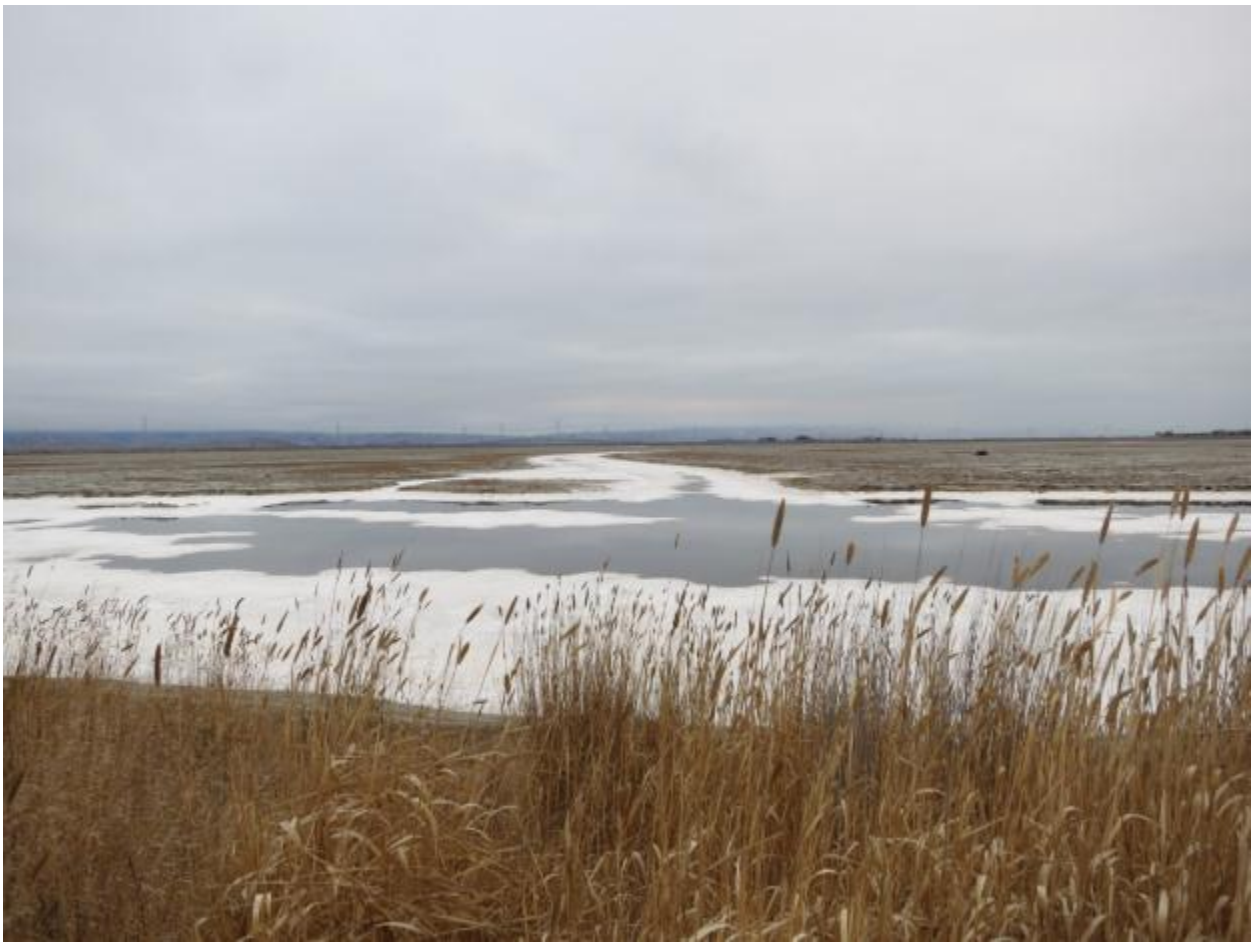


Figure 3.16-5. View of Pond R4 from Bedwell Bayfront Park, facing southeast from the Bedwell Bayfront Park pedestrian path.



3.16.2 Regulatory Setting

This section describes the regulatory goals of the jurisdictions surrounding the Phase 2 project area with regard to visual resources in the salt pond area. These goals are defined in city and county general plans and regional planning documents.

Alviso Pond Complex

Alameda County

The Alameda County General Plan designates salt ponds as open space, and among its objectives is providing "a continuous system of open space for the preservation, enhancement, and protection of natural scenic features and preservation and protection of watershed and wildlife areas and agricultural areas" (County of Alameda 1973).

City of Fremont

The City of Fremont General Plan considers its open space frame (which includes wetlands and the Bay) an important visual characteristic (City of Fremont 2011). The open space frame provides for panoramic

views of open space from the city and views of the city from the open space frame. The objective and policy relevant to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project to protect visual resources are as follows:

"Policy 4-1.1: Elements of City form. Recognize the basic elements of city form—community plan areas, neighborhoods, centers, corridors, employment districts, and open spaces—as the features that contribute to and define Fremont's sense of place. Ensure that land use and transportation decisions, including design review, zoning, capital improvements, and development approvals, improve the visual qualities of these features and strengthen their identity as distinct places."

Santa Clara County

The County of Santa Clara General Plan identifies strategies and policies to preserve and enhance scenic resources within its boundaries (County of Santa Clara 1994). Three general strategies are (1) Manage Growth and Plan for Open Space; (2) Minimize Development Impacts on Significant Scenic Resources; and (3) Maintain and Enhance the Values of Scenic Urban Settings. Specific policies relevant to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project that support these strategies are identified below.

C-RC 57: The scenic and aesthetic qualities of both the natural and built environments should be preserved and enhanced for their importance to the overall quality of life for Santa Clara County.

C-RC 58: The general approach to scenic resource preservation on a countywide basis should include the following strategies:

a. conserving scenic natural resources through long range, inter-jurisdictional growth management and open space planning;
b. minimize development impacts on highly significant scenic resources; and
c. maintaining and enhancing scenic urban settings, such as parks and open space, civic places, and major public commons areas.

C-RC 59: Scenic values of the natural resources of Santa Clara County should be maintained and enhanced through countywide growth management and open space planning.

City of San Jose

The City of San Jose 2040 General Plan identifies the city's baylands as one of its many scenic resources (City of San Jose 2011). Visual-quality-related goals are generally relevant to new development. The city also recognizes the preservation of scenic routes as critical to the preservation and enhancement of such resources. Designated trails and pathways are near the southern boundary of the Alviso pond complex. The following goal and policy are relevant to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project:

Goal ER-3: Bay and Baylands. Preserve and restore natural characteristics of the Bay and adjacent lands, and recognize the role of the Bay's vegetation and waters in maintaining a healthy regional ecosystems.

ER-3.1-1: Protect, preserve and restore the baylands ecosystem in a manner consistent with the fragile environmental characteristics of this area and the interest of the citizens of San Jose in a healthful environment.

City of Mountain View

The City of Mountain View 2012 General Plan identifies the shoreline as an important resource due to its scenic value in providing visual relief from development (City of Mountain View 2012). The following goals and policies regarding visual quality are applicable to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project.

POS 3.1: Preservation of natural areas. Preserve natural areas, creeks, and shoreline at Mountain View Regional Park primarily for low-intensity uses.

LUD 9.5: View preservation: Preserve significant views throughout the community.

Ravenswood Pond Complex

San Mateo County

The San Mateo County General Plan was written in 1984 and does not contain up-to-date information on the visual quality of the baylands (County of San Mateo 1986). However, the Conservation and Open Space Element develops general policies to protect and enhance scenic resources and establish aesthetic controls over utility structures to protect shorelines (County of San Mateo 1973).

City of Menlo Park

The City of Menlo Park General Plan establishes protection for lands that have "inherent qualities to provide visual amenity, including topographic features, views or vistas… scenic water areas, creeks and the San Francisco Bay" (City of Menlo Park 2013). The following policies are established to enhance visual quality as it relates to the areas of the Phase 2 project activities:

OSC1.6: South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project and Flood Management Project. Continue to support and participate in Federal and State efforts related to the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration project and flood management project. Provide public access to the bay for scenic enjoyment and recreation opportunities as well as conservation education opportunities related to the open Bay, the sloughs, and the marshes.

The plan establishes the "provision of open space [as] intended to offer residents and visitors opportunities for quiet introspection in a location that provides visual relief from buildings, concrete, and noise associated with more urban life" (City of Menlo Park 2013).

Other Relevant Plans in the Region

San Francisco Bay Plan

The Appearance, Design, and Scenic Views section of the San Francisco Bay Plan (Bay Plan) provides the findings and policies related to the visual effects of development on the shoreline (BCDC 1979). Specific policies relevant to the SBSP Restoration Project include the following numbered items (irrelevant items not included in this list):

3. In some areas, a small amount of fill may be allowed if the fill is necessary—and is the minimum absolutely required—to develop the project in accordance with the Commission's design recommendations.

4. Structures and facilities that do not take advantage of or visually complement the Bay should be located and designed so as not to impact visually on the Bay and shoreline. In particular, parking areas should be located away from the shoreline. However, some small parking areas for fishing access and Bay viewing may be allowed in exposed locations.

8. Shoreline developments should be built in clusters, leaving open area around them to permit more frequent views of the Bay. Developments along the shores of tributary waterways should be Bay-related and should be designed to preserve and enhance views along the waterway, so as to provide maximum visual contact with the Bay.

9. "Unnatural" debris should be removed from sloughs, marshes, and mudflats that are retained as part of the ecological system. Sloughs, marshes, and mudflats should be restored to their former natural state if they have been despoiled by human activities.

10. Towers, bridges, or other structures near or over the Bay should be designed as landmarks that suggest the location of the waterfront when it is not visible, especially in flat areas. But such landmarks should be low enough to assure the continued visual dominance of the hills around the Bay.

12. In order to achieve a high level of design quality, the Commission's Design Review Board, composed of design and planning professionals, should review, evaluate, and advise the Commission on the proposed design of developments that affect the appearance of the Bay in accordance with the Bay Plan findings and policies on Public Access; Appearance, Design, and Scenic Views; and the Public Access Design Guidelines. City, county, regional, state, and federal agencies should be guided in their evaluation of bayfront projects by the above guidelines.

14. Views of the Bay from vista points and from roads should be maintained by appropriate arrangements and heights of all developments and landscaping between the view areas and the water. In this regard, particular attention should be given to all waterfront locations, areas below vista points, and areas along roads that provide good views of the Bay for travelers, particularly areas below roads coming over ridges and providing a "first view" of the Bay (shown in Bay Plan Map No. 8, Natural Resources of the Bay).

15. Vista points should be provided in the general locations indicated in the [Bay Plan] maps. Access to vista points should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means to connect to the nearest public thoroughfare where parking or public transportation is available. In some cases, exhibits, museums, or markers would be desirable at vista points to explain the value or importance of the areas being viewed.

The proposed Phase 2 project components would be consistent with the Bay Plan.

3.16.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Significance Criteria

The significance criteria for visual resources are drawn from those adopted for the 2007 EIS/R. The 2007 EIS/R defined the project as having a significant impact on visual resources if it would:

- Have a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic 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 site and its surroundings; or
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare that would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

The Phase 2 project area does not contain any designated scenic vistas and is not within the viewshed of a state scenic highway. Furthermore, the Phase 2 project does not include lighting or contain materials that would generate substantial light or glare. Therefore, the Phase 2 project was not evaluated against these significance criteria, and this Final EIS/R does not evaluate the impacts associated with them. The two other significance criteria listed above are included in Impact 3.16-1, which addresses altering the view and visual character of the Phase 2 project ponds.

Although both the Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (AEP 2014) were considered during the impact analysis, the impacts identified in this Final EIS/R are characterized using CEQA terminology.

Program-Level Evaluation

The 2007 Programmatic EIS/R evaluated the potential visual impact of three long-term, program-level alternatives, each of which were determined to have less-than-significant impacts to visual resources, scenic resources, and scenic character. The 2007 Programmatic EIS/R found that under each programmatic alternative, the historic salt production remnants (e.g., piers, Archimedes' screws) would continue to remain in place, therefore limiting changes to visual character in terms of structural development. Furthermore, the 2007 Programmatic EIS/R found that none of the programmatic alternatives would include lighting components or materials that would generate substantial light and glare.

Project-Level Evaluation

Phase 2 Impact 3.16-1: Alter views of the SBSP Restoration Project area.

Alviso-Island Ponds

Alternative Island A (No Action[3]). Under Alternative Island A (the No Action Alternative), Ponds A19, A20, and A21 would continue to be managed through the activities described in the Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) and other management documents and practices for the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). Aside from monitoring and management activities in the AMP other Refuge management documents and practices, Ponds A19, A 20, and A21 were breached on their southern sides in March 2006 as part of the Initial Stewardship Plan (ISP). As such, alteration of existing views of Ponds A19, A20, and A21 would occur in relation to the gradual natural degradation of the levees and the transition of the pond from salt production toward tidal marsh. The gradual change in

[3] "No Action Alternative" is the NEPA term. It corresponds to the CEQA term "No Project Alternative." This Final EIS/R uses No Action throughout.

visual character associated with the evolution of the salt ponds into tidal marsh would alter existing views; however, this change in habitat would appear as an extension of pre-existing tidal marsh habitat that surrounds the Bay. As such, the transition of salt ponds over time (according to Alternative A) to tidal marsh would not significantly degrade views or the visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project area within the Island Ponds. Under Alternative Island A, there would be a less-than-significant impact on views and the visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project area.

Alternative Island A Level of Significance: Less than Significant

Alternative Island B. Alternative Island B would result in an increase of hydraulic connectivity and tidal flushing for Ponds A19 and A20 (but not Pond A21), and all ponds would continue to transition into tidal marshes. The connectivity and habitat complexity would be greater in Alternative B than in Alternative Island A. The transition to tidal marsh would introduce more vegetation than is currently present, altering the texture and color of these ponds and adding contrast between open water and nearby land/salt pond areas. Under Alternative Island B, the views and visual character of the Island Ponds would be gradually altered, as was the intent of the previous breaches; however, this impact would be less than significant.

Alternative Island B Level of Significance: Less than Significant

Alternative Island C. Alternative Island C would result in an increase of hydraulic connectivity and tidal flushing for Ponds A19, A20, and A21, and all of these ponds would continue to transition into tidal marshes. The connectivity and habitat complexity would be greater in Alternative C than in Alternative Island B. The transition to tidal marsh would introduce more vegetation than is currently present, altering the texture and color of these ponds and adding contrast between open water and nearby land/salt pond areas. Under Alternative Island C, the views and visual character of the Island Ponds would be gradually altered, as was the intent of the previous breaches; however, this impact would be less than significant.

Alternative Island C Level of Significance: Less than Significant

Alviso-Mountain View Ponds

Alternative Mountain View A (No Action). Under Alternative Mountain View A (the No Action Alternative), Ponds A1 and A2W would remain partially managed ponds, and the fringing marsh outside of the ponds' levees and along Permanente Creek and Mountain View Slough would continue to exist in their current state. As such, the No Action Alternative would not alter the views and visual character of the Mountain View Ponds.

Alternative Mountain View A Level of Significance: No Impact

Alternative Mountain View B. Ponds A1 and A2W would be breached and opened to tidal action under Alternative Mountain View B, beginning their transition into tidal marshes. The creation of tidal habitat would change the visual environment from ponds to vegetated marshes, altering the texture and color of the views. These changes would be visible from recreational trails and elevated locations in nearby Shoreline Park. Bird use at these ponds would be expected to change with the conversion to tidal habitat and the construction of islands within the ponds, increasing the sense of movement as viewed from recreational trails. These changes would create potential effects on the views and visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project area when compared with the deepwater of the ponds to the east. However, these changes would be compatible with views of Charleston Slough and the Palo Alto Flood Basin, which furnish similar vegetation and wildlife. Alternative B would slightly alter the views and visual

character of the Mountain View Ponds but would not introduce a high degree of contrast. Therefore, the impacts resulting from Alternative Mountain View B would be less than significant.

Alternative Mountain View B Level of Significance: Less than significant

Alternative Mountain View C. Ponds A1 and A2W and Charleston Slough would be breached and opened to tidal action, beginning their transition into tidal marshes. The changes in Ponds A1 and A2W would be similar to those described in Alternative Mountain View B. The proposed changes would alter the views and visual environment at Charleston Slough. Opening Charleston Slough to tidal action would convert Charleston Slough and Pond A1 to one continuous tidal marsh, altering the broken-up views of these ponds. The conversion of Charleston Slough to tidal marsh would reduce habitat capacity for diving and dabbling bird species, which attract birders and recreational users to this area and add a sense of movement and additional color to the ponds when present. Although this sense of movement and color contributes to the character of Charleston Slough, the presence of the birds does not constitute an attribute inherent to the land itself (the effects of the alternatives on the birds themselves are assessed in Section 3.5, Biological Resources). Furthermore, the transition of Charleston Slough to continuous tidal marsh would introduce its own set of avian species to the area. When considered within the context of the SBSP Restoration Project as a whole, the changes to Charleston Slough would be consistent with the existing visual character of the project area. Views of Charleston Slough and Pond A1 would be visually similar to views of natural marshes and restored marshes around the South Bay. Thus, the alteration of the views and visual character of the Mountain View Ponds caused by Alternative Mountain View C would be less than significant.

Alternative Mountain View C Level of Significance: Less than significant

Alviso-A8 Ponds

Alternative A8: A (No Action). Under Alternative A8 A (the No Action Alternative), the A8 Ponds would continue to function as muted tidal ponds. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) would continue to operate and maintain these ponds in accordance with the AMP and other Refuge management documents and practices that have been in place since the implementation of Phase 1 actions. Under the No Action Alternative, views of this pond cluster would remain the same, and there would be no alteration of views in the A8 Ponds.

Alternative A8 A Level of Significance: No Impact

Alternative A8 B. The A8 Ponds would remain muted tidal ponds under Alternative A8 B. However, two habitat transition zones would be constructed from upland fill material and/or dredge material. The transition zones would be built along the southern corners of Pond A8S, introducing vegetation and a small amount of wildlife habitat to this otherwise sparsely vegetated pond. These alterations would be notable for their changes in the color, texture, and movement of the visual environment, as wildlife activity is attracted to the area. These changes would constitute a minor visual enhancement and would not significantly detract from or adversely impact the views or visual character of the A8 Ponds.

Alternative A8 B Level of Significance: Less than Significant

Ravenswood Ponds

Alternative Ravenswood A (No Action). Under Alternative Ravenswood A (the No Action Alternative), the Ravenswood Ponds would continue to be managed through the activities described in the AMP and

other Refuge management documents and practices, existing as in their current state as seasonal ponds that receive rainfall and some runoff in the winter. Under Alternative A, views of this pond cluster would remain the same, and there would be no alteration of the views or visual character of the Ravenswood Ponds.

Alternative Ravenswood A Level of Significance: No Impact

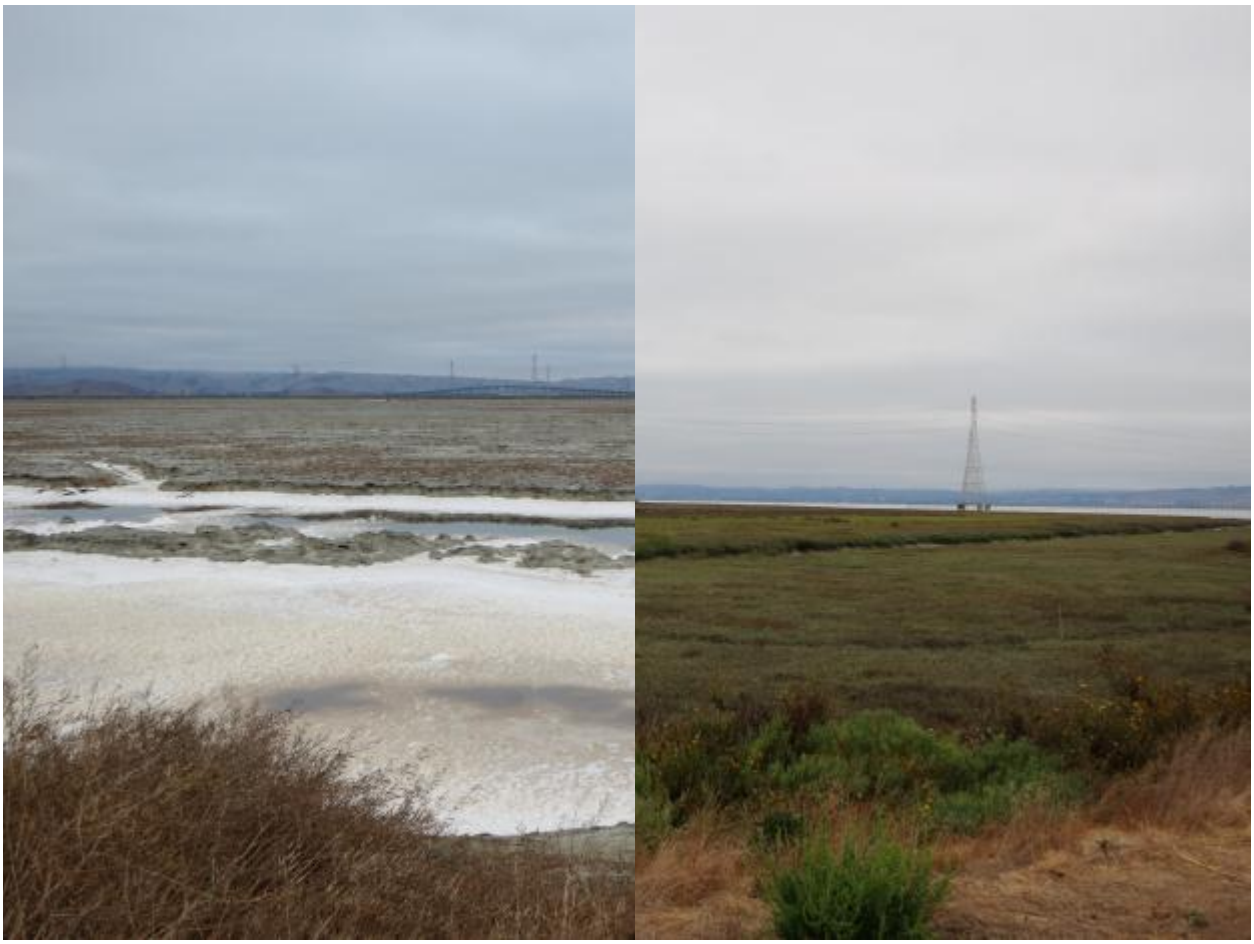
Alternative Ravenswood B. Alternative Ravenswood B would open Pond R4 to tidal flows to restore it to tidal marsh, improve levees to provide additional flood protection, create an upland transition zone along the western edge of Pond R4, convert Ponds R5 and S5 to enhanced managed ponds to improve habitat for ducks and various dabbling birds, enhance Pond R3 for western snowy plover, increase pond connectivity, and improve public access features. Views of Ponds R4, R5, and S5 would change due to increased tidal action and the activity/motion created by increased usage of Ponds R5 and S5 by diving and dabbling ducks and birds. Opening Pond R4 to tidal action would change the color and texture of this pond as the surface transitions from salt panne to a vegetated tidal marsh over time. The immediate addition of a habitat transition zone on the west edge of Pond R4 would introduce a similar change in color and texture, but the change would be more abrupt, because the habitat transition zone would be constructed purposefully over a specified period, whereas the tidal mudflat would develop more gradually over time.

A low fence would be constructed along the southern edge of Ponds R3 and S5 (adjacent to the existing Bay Trail spine) to prevent wildlife from entering the Bay Trail or roadway and to discourage Bay Trail users from entering wildlife habitat. The fence would be less than 4 feet tall and would not disrupt views of the salt ponds from the Bay Trail. Also, the fence would be barely noticeable from the northern edges of Ponds R4, R5 and S5. Essentially, the changes to Pond R4 would be visually similar to the appearance of the bordering Greco Island Pond (Figure 3.16-6).

The activities of the SBSP Restoration Project at the Ravenswood Ponds would be highlighted to recreational users by the inclusion of a viewing platform near the border of Ponds R4 and R5. The purpose of the platform would be to educate users on the new features of the pond complex and invite viewers to examine the landscape in greater detail. These changes would be compatible with the surrounding visual environment. Phase 2 would change the mostly barren salt panne in Ponds R4, R5, and S5, characterized by brown- and white-crusted soils intermixed with sparse clusters of weedy vegetation, to one of functioning tidal marsh. Tidal marsh habitat is characterized by low-lying, thick vegetation that ranges from muted greens to brown. Tidal marsh habitat would be interwoven with the sinuous slough channels. The alteration in color and texture caused by the gradual change from salt panne to tidal marsh would be beneficial to the views and overall visual character of the Ravenswood Ponds and improve the overall quality of the scenic environment within South San Francisco Bay. Therefore, this impact would be considered less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

Alternative Ravenswood B Level of Significance: Less than significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)

Figure 3.16-6. Current Pond R4 (left); Greco Island (right)



Alternative Ravenswood C. Alternative Ravenswood C would be similar to Alternative Ravenswood B with the following exceptions:

- Ponds R5 and S5 would be a managed ponds that are enhanced and modified to approximate a tidal mudflat to create habitat for shorebirds and provide a different type of visual recreation experience than the other Ravenswood alternatives.
- An additional water control structure would be added to Pond R3 to further improve habitat for western snowy plover.
- A large habitat transition zone would be constructed along the northern edge of the AAC.
- Additional recreation and public access components would be constructed.

The visual impacts of Alternative Ravenswood C would be predominantly the same as for Alternative Ravenswood B. However, in Alternative C Ponds R5 and S5 would not be as consistently full of water as they would in Alternative Ravenswood B; they would be more frequently exposed intertidal mudflat. Pond R4 would have more constructed vegetated areas with the inclusion of the habitat transition zone along the AAC, increasing the magnitude of the change in color and the intensity. A boardwalk trail and a new viewing platform would be installed at the northwestern corner of Pond R4 to encourage

recreational users to appreciate long-range views of the Bay. A recreational trail would be constructed along the eastern border levees of Ponds R5 and S5 that would run across a raised and improved reconfiguration of the existing levees, creating a negligible visual change when seen from afar but enhancing the viewing areas by opening them to recreational use. These changes would be compatible with the surrounding visual environment. Similar to Alternative Ravenswood B, Alternative Ravenswood C would instigate beneficial changes in the overall views and visual character of the Ravenswood Ponds and improve the overall quality of the scenic environment within South San Francisco Bay. Therefore, this impact is considered less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

Alternative Ravenswood C Level of Significance: Less than significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)

Alternative Ravenswood D. Alternative Ravenswood D can be thought of as a combination of Alternatives Ravenswood B and Ravenswood C. Ponds R5 and S5 would be enhanced managed ponds, as described in Alternative Ravenswood B, and Pond R3 would be enhanced for western snowy plover, as in Alternative Ravenswood C. There would be two habitat transition zones in Pond R4, as in Alternative Ravenswood C. A recreational trail along the northwestern levee of Pond R4 would be added, ending in a viewing platform. These added recreational features would increase awareness of the visual landscape in general and provide recreational users with more opportunity to experience the visual environment and view wildlife, the restoration project, and the Bay itself.

The City of Redwood City's Bayfront Canal and Atherton Channel Project would involve constructing a hydrological connection between these pieces of storm drain infrastructure, Flood Slough, and the triangular forebay to Pond S5. This aspect of the project would add more water pipes and water control structures than is planned for Alternative Ravenswood B. But these pipes would be underground and connected to existing ditches. Similar to the water control structures described in Alternative B, these structures would not create significant impacts to the existing visual character or quality within the Ravenswood pond complex.

All of these changes would be compatible with the surrounding visual environment and would not significantly alter views of the SBSP Restoration Project area. As with Alternatives Ravenswood B and Ravenswood C, Alternative Ravenswood D would improve the views and the overall quality of the scenic environment within the Ravenswood pond cluster and overall South San Francisco Bay. Therefore, the impact of Alternative D would be less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

Alternative Ravenswood D Level of Significance: Less than significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)

Impact Summary

The Phase 2 impacts and levels of significance for visual resources are summarized in Table 3.16-1. The levels of significance are those remaining after implementation of program-level mitigation measures, project-level design features, and the AMP and other Refuge management documents and practices. The visual resources analysis required no project-level mitigation measures to reduce the impacts to a level that was less than significant.

Table 3.16-1 Phase 2 Summary of Impacts – Visual Resources

IMPACT	ALTERNATIVE											
	ISLAND			MOUNTAIN VIEW			A8		RAVENSWOOD			
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	A	B	C	D
Phase 2 Impact 3.16-1: Alter views of the SBSP Restoration Project areas.	LTS	LTS	LTS	NI	LTS	LTS	NI	LTS	NI	LTS/ B	LTS/ B	LTS/ B

Notes:
Alternative A at each pond cluster is the No Action Alternative (No Project Alternative under CEQA).
B = Beneficial
LTS = Less than Significant
NI = No Impact