# 3.17 Visual Resources

## 3.17.1 Physical Setting

### Methodology

This section describes the existing visual resources in the SBSP Restoration Project Area. The regulatory setting includes applicable regional and local plans and policies concerning visual resources. The Project setting describes the visual characteristics of the three SBSP Restoration Project pond complexes. Information presented in this section was obtained during a series of site visits to the SBSP Restoration Project Area.

### Regional Setting

Major visual features in the region (including the SBSP Restoration Project Area) include the coastal ranges to the west, the Santa Cruz Mountains to the south, San Francisco Bay, and the open salt ponds along the edge of the Bay. The San Mateo Bridge (SR 92) and the Dumbarton Bridge (SR 84) are also prominent visual features in the region. Visual characteristics in the South Bay range from urban to rural. In urban areas, visual resources include industrial, commercial and residential development and associated infrastructure (*e.g.*, power lines, roads, flood protection channels). In rural and open space areas, visual resources include salt ponds (both currently in and out of production), bayside mudflats, restored marshes, sloughs, and parks.

The salt ponds along the Bay provide visual contrast to the surrounding urban development due to their assortment of geometric shapes (created by raised levees) and colors (*e.g.*, pink, green, yellow, rust, and white)[1]. Ground-level public streets and trails provide views of the pond system. Some of the ponds are also visible from major highways in the South Bay (*e.g.*, SR 92 and SR 84) and all are highly visible to airline passengers in the approach patterns for San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose airports. Because the terrain is relatively flat, the salt ponds are best viewed from elevated vantage points or from the air, so the entire pond landscape can be seen. From these vantage points, the constant changes in the visual quality of the ponds are especially noted; colors vary according to the time of day, the season of year, and the presence of cloud cover as well as to salinity levels. In addition to the ponds, the multitudinous creeks and sloughs that meander through the salt ponds give depth to the otherwise flat, geometric panorama. The ponds are striking land features, especially in early morning and late afternoon periods when the reflective quality of the ponds increases.

### Project Setting

#### *Eden Landing*

Long-range views from within the Eden Landing pond complex include the mountain ranges to the west and east, which are dominant visual features in the landscape. Medium-range views from within the pond complex include SR 92 and the San Mateo Bridge to the north, urban uses (buildings, transmission line corridor) to the north and east, San Francisco Bay, and the continuation of the topographically flat

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

landscape that stretches to the mountain ranges. Distinctive medium-range view features include the historic salt works (located in the northern portion of the Eden Landing pond complex [Pond E13]), which consist of wooden piers, concrete foundations, wooden dams, and remnants of other salt-operation facilities (see Figure 3.17-1). Due to their low-lying topographical attributes and the low-lying vegetation that surround the waterways, Old Alameda Creek (which extends through the middle of the pond complex), ACFCC (which extends along the southern boundary of the pond complex), and the various sloughs which traverse the landscape are mostly seen in short-range views. Whale's Tail Marsh, along the western boundary of the pond complex, provides a distinctive natural feature with wetland vegetation along the Bay's edge.

Figure 3.17-1 View of the Eden Landing Pond Complex

The visually flat topography is characterized by a broad visual horizon, clear and unobstructed views and an uninterrupted expanse of sky. The operation of existing water control structures and seasonal factors influence the visual character of the site. When the water control structures are open, a number of ponds are completely flooded, while other ponds are flooded on a seasonal basis. When the structures are closed, the pond complex visually recalls its former use as salt beds; portions of the area are devoid of vegetation and interspersed with pooled water with some areas covered in a white salt-like crust or gypsum layer.

Views of the Eden Landing pond complex are available from distant hills, SR 92, adjoining urban land uses on the northeastern and eastern sides of the pond complex, along trails to the east and south of the pond complex, and from airplanes as they approach Bay Area airports. No scenic highways (as

designated by the California Department of Transportation) overlook the pond complex. Views of the pond complex are available from points along ACFCC.

***Ponds E8A, E8X and E9.*** The visual quality of Ponds E8A, E8X, and E9 are representative of the salt ponds. They are various-shaped, low-lying ponds bounded on all sides by dirt levees. Depending on the season and the tides, they may be flooded or dry. The area is mostly devoid of vegetation, and when the ponds are dry during summer and fall periods, part or all of the ground is encrusted in white. The white crust is a layer of salt crystals which is created when water evaporates from the ponds. When the area is flooded during winter, the ponds take on a different visual aspect. Because winds can be high in the area, the water tends to be choppy. The water becomes mottled in color, consisting of browns and interspersed with the color of the sky, be it blue, gray, or white. Due to the distance from public viewpoints and the relatively flat terrain, Ponds E8A, E8X, and E9 cannot be seen from the nearest public viewpoints, including the ACFCC and offsite locations. However, the ponds are likely visible in long-range views such as from a plane during its takeoff or landing, or possibly from SR 92 and the distant hills. In long-range views, it would be difficult to distinguish these ponds from surrounding ponds within the pond complex as there are no distinctive aesthetic features within these ponds.

***Ponds E12 and E13.*** The visual quality of Ponds E12 and E13 is characterized by the remnant salt work production facilities on the site, including but not limited to piers, foundations, water control structures, and the Archimedes screw. Figure 3.17-1 presents a view of some of these remnants. Due to the presence of the historic salt works remnants, there is a strong visual distinctiveness to these ponds compared to other ponds in the Eden Landing pond complex. Similar to the other ponds, the topography of Ponds E12 and E13 is flat and the presence of water in these ponds varies by season. As with the other ponds, the ground is encrusted with a white gypsum layer in the lowest areas during the dry season, and is flooded during the wet seasons. In general, the area is mostly devoid of vegetation, although isolated stands of vegetation may occur. Due to the distance from public viewpoints and the relatively flat terrain, Ponds E12 and E13 cannot be seen from the nearest public viewpoints, including the trail along the ACFCC and offsite locations. However, the ponds are likely visible from distance views such as from an airplane during its takeoff or landing, or possibly from SR 92 and the distance hills. From such long-range views, the visually distinctive salt works remnants would not be readily visible.

### *Alviso*

The Alviso pond complex is also characterized by a topographically flat and expansive visual environment with uninterrupted views of land, water, and sky. Long-range views from within the pond complex include the surrounding mountain ranges and SR 84/Dumbarton Bridge. Medium-range views in and around the pond complex include the active landfill east of the pond complex, the Refuge Environmental Education Center near the easternmost edge of the pond complex, San Francisco Bay, and urban uses to the south (City of Sunnyvale WPCP, parks, industrial uses, and the community of Alviso). The Alviso pond complex also provides striking views of the largest colony of California gulls in the South Bay, which nests within Pond A6, at the Bay's edge. Creeks and sloughs adjacent to and within the pond complex (*e.g.*, Coyote Creek, Mallard Slough [Artesian Slough], Alviso Slough, Guadalupe Slough, Stevens Creek, and Mountain View Slough) are generally hidden by low-lying vegetation and as such are seen only in short-range views.

Historic features within the pond complex include the historic town of Drawbridge between Ponds A19 and A20. Drawbridge is an abandoned, isolated town located on the Island Ponds which was once a stop along the UPRR. Currently, Drawbridge consists of a small cluster of dilapidated wooden buildings which are sinking into the marsh. The historic town is a distinctive visual feature which is visible from the UPRR.

Short-range views include the salt ponds (maintained as open waters throughout the year, with some areas that are seasonally flooded), and marsh vegetation that rim some of the ponds (*e.g.*, cattails) (see Figure 3.17-2).

Figure 3.17-2 View of the Alviso Pond Complex

Views of the Alviso pond complex are available from distant hills, adjoining parks (Palo Alto Baylands Preserve, Mountain View Shoreline Park, Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Study Area, Sunnyvale Baylands Park, Alviso Marina County Park), the Refuge Environmental Education Center, from trails throughout the pond complex, and from airplanes as they approach Bay Area airports. No scenic highways (as designated by the California Department of Transportation) overlook the pond complex. The Coyote Creek Lagoon, immediately east of Pond A19 and outside of the SBSP Restoration Project Area, is identified by the City of Fremont as a unique visual resource having "combined water and hill views" (Fremont 1991).

***Pond A6.*** Pond A6 is similar in appearance to the ponds described above (see Eden Landing Ponds E8A, E8X, and E9) in that it is a low-lying area surrounded on all sides by an earthen levee. The presence of water in the pond is dependent on the season and tides. Generally, the area is unvegetated, although weeds may grow on the edge of the levees. As noted above, the largest colony of California gulls in the South Bay nests within Pond A6, at the Bay's edge. There are no other distinctive aesthetic features at

this pond. Pond A6 is visible from the western portion of the Alviso loop trail which extends along Ponds A9 and A10. Pond A6 would also be visible from Guadalupe and Alviso sloughs on either side of the pond.

***Pond A8.*** Pond A8 is generally similar in appearance to the other ponds within the Alviso pond complex. However, the visual quality is also affected by a pile of concrete debris that exists between Ponds A8 and A8S. Besides the debris, there are no distinctive aesthetic features at this pond. Pond A8 is visible from the loop trail across Alviso Slough along Pond A12.

***Pond A16.*** Pond A16 is generally similar in appearance to the other ponds within the Alviso pond complex. The visual quality also includes water control structures and a wooden pier accessing the water control structure. There are no distinctive aesthetic features at this pond. This pond is visible from the trail that extends along the Pond A16 levees, and from the Refuge Environmental Education Center to the southeast.

### Ravenswood

Similar to the Eden Landing and Alviso pond complexes, the Ravenswood pond complex is characterized by a topographically flat and expansive visual environment characterized by a broad visual horizon, clear and unobstructed views and an uninterrupted expanse of sky. Long-range views from within the pond complex include the distant mountain ranges to the west and east. Medium-range views include SR 84 (which crosses the site, between Ponds R2 and SF2) and the Dumbarton Bridge, the PG&E Substation adjacent to Pond R2, the hillside within Bayfront Park (a former landfill), commercial uses to the south (including the Sun Microsystems campus), and San Francisco Bay. Ravenswood Slough, which winds through the pond complex, is seen in short-range views as it is generally hidden by surrounding low-lying vegetation.

Views of the Ravenswood pond complex are available from SR 84 which extends through the pond complex, from Bayfront Park (see Figure 3.17-3), from trails within the pond complex, and from airplanes as they approach Bay Area airports. No scenic highways (as designated by the California Department of Transportation) overlook the pond complex.

***Pond SF2.*** Pond SF2 is generally similar in appearance to the ponds described above, in that it is a low-lying pond whose water levels vary by season. In addition to the general appearance of the salt ponds, above-ground infrastructure (pipes) exists within the pond. There are no distinctive aesthetic features at this pond. The pond is visible from the existing trail and SR 84 which extend along the pond's northern boundary.

## 3.17.2 Regulatory Setting

### Eden Landing

#### *City of Hayward*

The City of Hayward identifies the Bay shoreline as a significant regional open space, ecological, and aesthetic resource. The City's General Plan provides polices and strategies to protect the shoreline as

Figure 3.17-3 View of the Ravenswood Pond Complex

well as other resources that provide similar functions (City of Hayward, 2002). Policies concerning protection of aesthetic values are identified under the Regional Trails and Open Space Linkages section of the Conservation and Environmental Protection Element, as described below.

Policy 2 of the Regional Trails and Open Space Linkages strives to "enhance the aesthetic and recreational values of open space resources in the hill and shoreline areas," through the implementation of six strategies related to increasing recreational opportunities.

Also related to protection of visual resources is Policy 4 under the Biological Resources section of the General Plan, which strives to "protect and enhance vegetative and wildlife habitat throughout the Hayward area," through the implementation of eight policies, including Strategy 7:

- Encourage the planting of native vegetation to preserve the visual character of the area and reduce the need for toxic sprays and groundwater supplements.

## Alviso

### *Fremont*

The City of Fremont General Plan (1991) considers its open space frame (which includes wetlands and the Bay) Fremont's dominant visual characteristics. 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 in protecting the City's visual resources are as follows:

Objective NR 13.1: Preservation of the visual character of the City's Open Space Frame and other unique natural visual elements of Fremont. The Frame includes the Hill Face, Bay lands, Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel and adjacent publicly owned open space areas…

Policy NR 13.1.1: Seek permanent protection of unique visual elements within the City. Minimize any negative development impacts on the visual characteristics of the resource when permanent protection is not feasible.

### *San Jose*

The City of San Jose 2020 General Plan (2004) identifies the City's baylands as one of many scenic resources. Visual quality-related goals are generally relevant to new development. The City also recognizes that preservation of scenic routes as critical to preservation and enhancement of such resources. Designated trails and pathways are located near the southern boundary of the Alviso pond complex. The following policy is relevant to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project:

- "The City should control land development along designated Trails and Pathways Corridors in order to provide sufficient trail right-of-way and to ensure that new development adjacent to the corridors does not compromise safe trail access nor detract from the scenic and aesthetic qualities of the corridor."

### *Sunnyvale*

No relevant visual quality-related protection and enhancement goals and policies were found in the City of Sunnyvale General Plan (City of Sunnyvale, 1990, 1992, 1997)[2].

### *Santa Clara County*

The Santa Clara County General Plan (1994) identifies strategies and policies to preserve and enhance scenic resources within its boundaries. Three general strategies include: 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;

[2] Three elements of the City of Sunnyvale General Plan were reviewed, including Land Use and Transportation (1997), Open Space (1992), and Community Design (1990).

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.

#### *Mountain View*

The City of Mountain View 1992 General Plan (City of Mountain View, 1992) identifies the shoreline as an important resource due to its scenic value in providing visual relief from development. The following goals and policies regarding visual quality are applicable to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project.

Goal D: Encourage development that preserves the beauty of the natural environment.

Policy 8: Promote the visibility of and safe physical access to San Francisco Bay, the baylands, Stevens Creek, and other natural resources in the City.

Policy 9: Ensure compatible land uses next to the city's natural resources.

Policy 10. Preserve scenic views of the natural landscape.

### Ravenswood

#### *Menlo Park*

The City of Menlo Park General Plan Policy Document (adopted November 30 and December 1, 1994) identifies goals, policies, and implementation programs that promote the protection of visual quality for open space lands. Goal 1-G would "promote the preservation of open-space lands for recreation, protection of natural resources, the production of managed resources, protection of health and safety, and/or the enhancement of scenic qualities."

### Other Relevant Plans in the Region

#### *Union City*

The City of Union City is immediately adjacent to the Eden Landing pond complex. The City's 2002 General Plan Policy Document (City of Union City, 2002) does not identify visual resources goals and policies that are applicable to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project, as they relate specifically to design and integration of new urban development.

#### *Newark*

The City of Newark General Plan Update Project 2007 (1992) recognizes areas of visual significance (those qualities of a city that define its image) within the City of Newark. These include edges, gateways, pathways, and nodes. An edge, which reinforces the sense of place for Newark residents and help

differentiate this city from other cities, is a relevant category to the proposed SBSP Restoration Project as the salt ponds within the Refuge fall within this category.

The City of Newark does not provide goals and policies specific to protection of visual resources, but rather those that are protective of open space and related to conservation in general. Relevant goals, policies, and programs are identified below:

Goal 1: Encourage the conservation and preservation of unique open space and conservation resources that help to define the quality and character of the City.

Policy a: Protect and where possible enhance the public space resources available within or near Newark.

Program 7: Consider all reasonable options for protection or acquisition of sites with unique open space resources.

Policy b: Encourage private property owners to preserve unique open space areas and natural features on their lands.

Program 9: Work with Cargill to conserve its salt production resources during the plan period. Support preservation of identified wetlands under control of Cargill and work with Cargill for controlled conversion of other lands that may take place after the year 2007.

Program 10: Evaluate every land development proposal for potential contributions to the Newark open space system. Identified unique open space, vegetation, animal habitat or natural resource areas should be protected where possible and appropriate.

Goal 2: Acknowledge the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge acquisition, and its value as a community resource.

Policy a: Support actions to preserve and maintain the lands of the Refuge.

### *Palo Alto*

The City of Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan (1998) recognizes the need to respect and manage natural resources in a way that sustains the natural environment and protect its foothills, baylands, creeks, parks, wildlife and open space legacy. The Palo Alto Baylands is considered part of the City's open space resources. Relevant goal and policy of the Comprehensive Plan are provided below.

Goal N-1: A citywide open space system that protects and conserves Palo Alto's natural resources and provides a source of beauty and enjoyment for Palo Alto residents.

Policy N-6: Through implementation of the Site and Design process and the Open Space zone district regulations, minimize impacts of any new development on views of the hillsides, on the open space character, and the natural ecology of the hillsides.

### *East Palo Alto*

The City of East Palo Alto General Plan (1999) recognizes the shoreline as a significant visual resource and thus should be preserved and enhanced to maintain the visual quality of East Palo Alto. The General Plan includes a policy to "preserve and enhance important natural resources and features."

### *Redwood City*

The following open space and conservation policies would apply, as it reflects the City's concerns regarding aesthetic value (City of Redwood City 1990).

> O- 4: The City should preserve and enhance the natural terrain, vegetation, and beauty of Redwood City's various geographical areas.
>
> C- 7: The visual qualities of the community should be preserved and improved.

## San Francisco Bay Plan

The Appearance, Design, and Scenic Views section of the San Francisco Bay Plan (BCDC, amended 1979) provides the findings and policies related to visual effects of development on the shoreline. Specific policies relevant to the proposed Project include the following:

> 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; on 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 Plan maps. Access to vista points should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means and 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 Project components would be consistent with the Bay Plan.

## 3.17.3 Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

### Significance Criteria

For the purposes of this EIS/R, a significant impact on visual resources would occur if the Project 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 SBSP Restoration Project would not result in any substantial damage to scenic resources. The historic salt production remnants (*e.g.*, piers and Archimedes screws) would continue to remain in place, and would be highlighted as a cultural heritage resource from proposed viewing areas and interpretive trails. New facilities, including levees that provide flood protection, water control structures and recreational features (*e.g.*, viewing areas, interpretation stations, and other amenities), would not include lighting or contain materials that would generate substantial light and glare.

As explained in Section 3.1.2, while both CEQ Regulations for Implementing NEPA and the CEQA Guidelines were considered during the impact analysis, impacts identified in this EIS/R are characterized

using CEQA terminology. Please refer to Section 3.1.2 for a description of the terminology used to explain the severity of the impacts.

## Program-Level Evaluation

### *SBSP Long-Term Alternatives*

***SBSP Impact 3.17-1:*** **Alter views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area.**

***Alternative A No Action.*** Under the No Action Alternative, the landowners would continue to operate and maintain the pond complexes in a manner similar to the ISP, although ongoing O&M activities would be scaled back. Visual changes to the SBSP Restoration Project Area under this alternative would occur as some existing levees would gradually deteriorate over time. As shown in Figures 2-4a through 2-4c in Chapter 2, Description of Alternatives, tidal habitat and seasonal ponds are expected to result from unintentional levee breaching under Alternative A. In addition, some areas would remain managed ponds. Because the views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be altered naturally rather than through specific Project actions, this impact would be less than significant.

**Alternative A Level of Significance: Less than Significant**

***Alternative B Managed Pond Emphasis.*** Alternative B would result in a change in the visual landscape such that 50 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would become tidal habitat and 50 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be shallow managed ponds (see Figures 2-5a through 2-5c for the likely locations of tidal habitat and managed ponds under Alternative B). Over time, as tidal habitat is established, tidal areas would be covered with salt marsh vegetation, which would vary in texture and height depending on elevation. As levees are removed and tidal areas are created, a continuous band of green vegetation would dominate the visual landscape, interspersed with a network of sinuous water channels woven into the vegetative topography that would add a sense of movement to the monochrome background. The managed ponds, however, would retain their previous polygonal shape formed by the pond levees. Within the managed ponds, low berms would be installed and bird nesting islands would be built, thus incorporating additional shapes and texture to the terrain. Existing salt works remnants (*e.g.*, piers and Archimedes screws) would remain.

The visual landscape would change gradually over time, particularly where tidal habitat is proposed. It is not known when the 50:50 ratio of tidal habitat to managed ponds would be achieved, as it would subject to the Project's adaptive management process. Until full development occurs with the tidal habitat, some areas may have the appearance of mudflats or unvegetated land (without the levees). For the purposes of this analysis, the discussion of changes associated with the long- and medium/short-range views is based on a full 50:50 balance of tidal habitat to managed ponds.

Under Alternative B, long-range views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be altered. From a distance, particularly from an the aerial view, the striking, deep hues (reds, oranges and greens) that are typical of the existing ponds would be changed to predominately green in the tidal habitat areas and blue/green in the managed pond areas. In some managed ponds, varying salinity levels would occur in order to study how birds respond to changes in salinity. In these ponds, high salinity levels may exhibit

the red and orange hues of the former salt ponds. In views from the air, the distinctive red and orange hues would still be visible within the salt ponds retained by Cargill outside of the SBSP Restoration Project Area, which are assumed to remain in salt production throughout the 50-year planning period.

The distinctive boundaries of individual ponds and their polygonal shapes that are currently visible would gradually disappear across 50 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area under Alternative B. Over time, as tidal habitat is created, half of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would become a continuous band of tidal marsh vegetation with no distinct boundaries, except for the sloughs that would meander through the marsh. The remaining 50 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would retain the polygonal shapes of the ponds interspersed with linear and round bird nesting islands. The overall appearance of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would still include its striking aspect (contrast of the monochrome green tidal habitat against the geometric shapes of the generally blue/green managed ponds). In addition, the shoreline view, from the water and at a distance, would consist of a softer vegetated edge along San Francisco Bay.

Medium- and short-range views, particularly from existing trails, would also be altered under Alternative B. The altered views would include a new visual experience, as viewing areas would be installed to allow users to enjoy the variation in forms and colors of both the tidal habitat and managed ponds. Views from the Bay (such as from a kayak) would also change under this alternative; the salt marsh vegetation along the shoreline would result in a softer vegetated edge in tidal areas than the hard edge of the current pond levees.

Medium- and short-range views would also be altered by proposed levees that provide flood protection and recreational features (see Figures 2-5a through 2-5c in Chapter 2). The height of the proposed levees that provide flood protection would be substantially higher than the existing pond levees, which were not designed for flood protection. Levee heights would be determined during project-level design for subsequent phases of the Project. In addition, areas mapped as “High Ground” in Figures 2-5a through 2-5c (*e.g.*, along the south side of Ponds A1 and A2W in the Alviso pond complex) may also require levees; the need for levees in these areas would also be determined during project-level design for subsequent phases of the Project. The proposed levees that provide flood protection would potentially obstruct some medium- and short-range views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area and the Bay from offsite viewpoints. However, these features would not obstruct designated scenic vistas or views from designated scenic highways. Furthermore, the proposed levees would provide opportunities for new trails; as shown in Figures 2-5a through 2-5c, new trails are proposed along the levees that provide flood protection. These trails would provide new elevated viewing opportunities to the public. Given the flat terrain of the SBSP Restoration Project Area and its surroundings, the new elevated trails would provide improved viewing opportunities across the SBSP Restoration Project Area to the Bay. In the Eden Landing pond complex, which is currently closed to the public, Alternative B would provide public access and viewing opportunities of habitat restoration, the historic salt works and the Bay where no viewing opportunities were available before.

Tidal restoration following proposed restoration has the potential to increase the extent of open water and tidal channels within the restored ponds and introduce line clearance requirements[3]. PG&E towers may be raised or relocated depending on the need to meet these requirements. The need for and location of these activities have not been determined. The raising and/or relocation of towers are not expected to result in a substantial change in the visual quality of the site. Although height increases of individual towers may be visible from long-range viewpoints when compared to the other towers that are not raised, the raised tower(s) would not dominate the visual landscape. Similarly, relocated towers, although in a new location, would not dominate the landscape such that they would detract from the visual character of the site, as existing towers are part of the existing landscape. Short- to medium-range views of the raised or relocated towers would appear large, and the difference in height and location would not result in a substantial adverse change in the visual quality of the pond complexes.

Other public access and recreation features, such as viewing platforms and interpretive stations, would be installed at strategic locations where important information about the landscape (*e.g.*, habitat restoration and historic salt works) can be viewed.

Although the views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would change under this alternative, the alteration would not constitute a negative aesthetic effect, particularly from viewpoints along trails. The increase in texture and contrast of the SBSP Restoration Project Area in long-distance views, the softer shoreline edge in medium- and short-range views, and the increase in viewing opportunities would result in a more interesting and publicly accessible visual landscape. Consequently, this would be a less-than-significant impact under CEQA and a beneficial effect under NEPA.

**Alternative B Level of Significance: Less than Significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)**

***Alternative C Tidal Habitat Emphasis.*** Alternative C would result in a change in the visual landscape such that 90 percent of the ponds in the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be converted to tidal habitat and 10 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would remain shallow managed ponds (see Figures 2-7a through 2-7c in Chapter 2 for the likely locations of tidal habitat and managed ponds under Alternative C). This alternative would differ from Alternative B in that the majority of ponds would be restored to tidal habitat, which would result in a more continuous band of green vegetation throughout the SBSP Restoration Project Area, and fewer ponds with their geometric shape formed by the levees. The landscape would be interspersed with meandering sloughs extending through the tidal marsh. However, in general, the alteration in views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would generally be the same as that described for Alternative B above, with less contrast between tidal habitat and the geometric shapes and terrain of the managed ponds. Tidal restoration under Alternative C would result in the removal of some existing trails, such as the Alviso loop trail, which would remove some viewing opportunities of the SBSP Restoration Project Area. However, Alternatives B and C both include proposed levees that provide flood protection which would provide new, elevated trails and viewpoints with improved viewing opportunities. Consequently, potential effects would be similar to those described for Alternative B above, and would be less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

[3] The minimum clearance between overhead electrical transmission lines and water is 25 ft (8 m) for areas not suitable for sailboating and 47 ft (14 m) for areas suitable for sailboating.

**Alternative C Level of Significance: Less than Significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)**

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***SBSP Impact 3.17-2:*** **Alter the existing visual character of the Project Area and its surroundings.**

***Alternative A No Action.*** As described in SBSP Impact 3.17-1 above, visual changes to the pond complexes under this alternative would result from natural deterioration of some of the existing levees over time. Although the existing visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project Area and its surrounding may change slightly over the next 50 years as some ponds become tidal due to unintentional levee breaching, it would not result from any planned actions. While some areas would be converted from ponds to seasonal wetland or tidal habitat, most of the Project Area would retain its existing character. Therefore, the overall visual character of SBSP Restoration Project Area would not change substantially, and impacts would be less than significant.

**Alternative A Level of Significance: Less than Significant**

***Alternative B Managed Pond Emphasis.*** Please refer to SBSP Impact 3.17-1 above for a discussion of the changes in the visual appearance of the pond complexes under Alternative B. As stated above, the visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be altered from existing conditions as ponds are converted to tidal habitat. The currently industrial character of the former salt ponds with their polygonal structure would become more natural when levees are breached and 50 percent of the ponds are opened to tidal action and eventually fill in and become covered with marsh vegetation.

The provision of a more lush and less industrial appearance would enhance the visual diversity of the overall shoreline by increasing the contrast of tidal habitat, managed ponds, and the colors of the ponds. The provision of more contrast compared to a uniform look adds to the richness of SBSP Restoration Project Area's visual character.

The increase in texture and contrast of the overall visual landscape and the variation created by the contrast of tidal habitat and surrounding ponds would result in a less-than-significant impact under CEQA and a beneficial effect under NEPA.

**Alternative B Level of Significance: Less than Significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)**

***Alternative C Tidal Habitat Emphasis.*** As described in SBSP Impact 3.7-1 above, this alternative would result in a change in the visual environment such that 90 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would consist of green marsh vegetation with meandering water channels and 10 percent of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would retain the geometric shapes of the managed ponds. The alteration of the visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be similar to that described for Alternative B. Because surrounding areas outside the SBSP Restoration Project Area would retain the distinctive look and color of the salt ponds, the overall visual landscape would still exhibit visual variety and striking contrast with the surrounding area. Consequently, potential impacts would be less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

**Alternative C Level of Significance: Less than Significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)**

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## Project-Level Evaluation

***Phase 1 Impact 3.17-1:*** **Alter views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area.**

### *Phase 1 No Action*

The following discussion addresses the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) at the project level.

As discussed above (see SBSP Impact 3.17-1), the No Action Alternative would include limited O&M activities and natural changes (*e.g.*, gradual deterioration of the levees) which would not substantially alter views of the Project Area. In the near term, the views of the Phase 1 ponds are not expected to change substantially under Phase 1 No Action, as the scale of the visual changes within the SBSP Restoration Project Area and its surroundings would be limited. Therefore, potential effects would be less than significant.

**Phase 1 No Action Level of Significance: Less than Significant**

### *Phase 1 Actions*

The following discussion addresses the Phase 1 actions (the first phase of Alternatives B and C) at the project level.

The visual effects of installing recreational facilities within the SBSP Restoration Project Area are generally covered in SBSP Impact 3.17-1, above. The following discussion describes the visual changes at each pond associated with the Phase 1 actions.

***Eden Landing.*** As shown in Figures 2-9 and 2-10 in Chapter 2, Description of Alternatives, Ponds E8A, E8X, and E9 would be converted to tidal habitat, and Ponds E12 and E13 would be converted to a shallow managed pond that would be subdivided into cells. The conversion of these ponds would alter the texture and coloration of those specific ponds, and add contrast to the surrounding area when viewed from afar. However, medium- and short-range views of these ponds are limited as the Eden Landing pond complex is currently closed to the public (with the exception of ACFCC along the southern edge of the pond complex). Because views of these ponds are limited, potential effects on the views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be less than significant. Furthermore, the Phase 1 actions at the Eden Landing pond complex would provide new trails and viewing opportunities of tidal restoration and the historic salt works that were not available in this area before. This would be a beneficial impact.

***Alviso.*** Figures 2-15 through 2-17 in Chapter 2, Description of Alternatives, show the proposed improvements at Ponds A6, A16, and A8. As shown, Pond A6 would result in breaching of levees to ultimately establish tidal habitat within this pond. Pond A8 would become muted tidal habitat and most likely would retain its current pond characteristics. The creation of tidal habitat would alter the view of

the ponds from their somewhat barren condition to that of a vegetated area with meandering water channels. As part of this alternative, any debris or weeds existing at the sites would be removed. Due to the flat topography and location of Pond A6, the changes may not be visible from recreation trails and other amenities in the area. The changes at Ponds A6 and A8 would be visible in short-range views from nearby trails, but it is likely they would not be visible in medium- and long-range views due to the flat topography of the SBSP Restoration Project Area and its surroundings and the remote location of Pond A6.

Pond A16 would be a managed pond with nesting islands for birds. These islands would generally be linear and circular, although the edges of these islands would not be smooth as the intention is to create isolated areas along the edges of the islands for the birds to nest. Due to its location adjacent to the Refuge, the islands would be visible to the public. Despite the addition of the nesting islands, the managed pond would retain its polygonal shape. These features at Pond A16 would be visible from trails along the Pond A16 levee. Bird use at this pond is expected to increase substantially when the nesting islands are constructed, which would result in improved opportunities to view wildlife from the trail.

Potential effects on views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area from implementation of Phase 1 actions at the Alviso pond complex would be less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

***Ravenswood.*** Figure 2-21 in Chapter 2, Description of Alternatives, shows the proposed improvements at Pond SF2. The area would be visually altered with the inclusion of nesting islands and low berms within the managed ponds. As with Pond A16, construction of the nesting islands at Pond SF2 is expected to substantially increase bird use in the pond, which would increase opportunities to view wildlife. These changes would be visible from SR 84 as well as from nearby trails. Potential impacts on views of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would be less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

**Phase 1 Actions Level of Significance: Less than Significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)**

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***Phase 1 Impact 3.17-2:*** **Alter the existing visual character of the Project Area and its surroundings.**

### *Phase 1 No Action*

The following discussion addresses the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) at the project level.

As discussed above (see SBSP Impact 3.17-1 and Impact 3.17-2), limited O&M activities and natural changes (*e.g.*, gradual deterioration of the levees) would occur under the No Action Alternative. While some of the Phase 1 ponds would be converted to seasonal wetland or tidal habitat as levees gradually deteriorate, their visual character would not change substantially. The Phase 1 ponds would still exhibit an open space character consistent with the surrounding baylands. Therefore, potential effects would be less than significant.

**Phase 1 No Action Level of Significance: Less than Significant**

### *Phase 1 Actions*

The following discussion addresses the Phase 1 actions (the first phase of Alternatives B and C) at the project level.

As described in Phase 1 Impact 3.17-1 above, visual changes for the Phase 1 actions would be limited in extent, occurring only within the ponds where construction would occur. The overall visual character of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would not change substantially, as it would under the long-term Alternatives B and C (see SBSP Impact 3.17-2 above). Under Phase 1, Ponds E8A, E8X, E9 and A6 would be converted to tidal habitat; Pond A8 would become muted tidal habitat; and Ponds E12, E13, A16 and SF2 would be managed ponds. The majority of the SBSP Restoration Project Area would remain in its current condition. However, the minor changes that would occur within the Phase 1 ponds would result in a more natural and less industrial visual character, which would be beneficial. The tidal areas would eventually contain lush marsh vegetation which would provide visual contrast next to the geometric structures of the ponds. The Phase 1 managed ponds would include nesting islands which would increase bird use, which in turn would add richness to the SBSP Restoration Project Area's visual character. Consequently, potential impacts would be less than significant under CEQA and beneficial under NEPA.

**Phase 1 Actions Level of Significance: Less than Significant (CEQA); Beneficial (NEPA)**

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