

3.3.8 Aesthetic Resources

The discussion of aesthetic resources is divided into four sections. The affected environment is discussed in Section 3.3.8.1, environmental effects of the Project are discussed in Section 3.3.8.2, unavoidable adverse effects are addressed in Section 3.3.8.3, and aesthetic resources-related measures or studies recommended by agencies but not adopted by SSWD are discussed in Section 3.3.8.4.

Existing, relevant, and reasonably available information is sufficient to determine the potential effects of the Project on aesthetic resources, and SSWD did not perform any studies related to aesthetic resources.

3.3.8.1 Affected Environment

This section is divided into two subsections: 1) regulatory context; and 2) existing aesthetic character.

3.3.8.1.1 Regulatory Context

SSWD owns 95 percent of the land within the boundary and the remaining 5 percent of the land is owned by private parties. No federal or state land occurs within or adjacent to the FERC Project Boundary or on the Bear River downstream of the Project. Thus, the only guiding documents for aesthetic resources are the County general plans, including the Nevada County, Placer County and Yuba County general plans. These general plans provide broad goals and direction for aesthetic resources with a general emphasis on protecting and maintaining natural scenic resources related to open space, natural vegetation, and bodies of water. However, these three counties do not have specific visual quality objectives and there are no federal lands associated with this Project that require visual quality objectives. It is clear from the various county general plan's goals and policies that natural scenic values should be protected wherever possible. It is important to note that the Project pre-dates the plans and therefore the general plans were developed with the Project in place.

Yuba County General Plan

A major portion of the Project Area lies within Yuba County. The Yuba County General Plan was updated in 2011 (Yuba County 2011). As part of the plan, goals for aesthetic resources that may be applicable to the Project are described as follows:

Policy NR9.1 – New developments near the Yuba, Bear, and Feather Rivers should be designed and located in a way that retains or enhances scenic views of these important visual resources.

Policy NR9.3 – Development in rural communities should be designed to preserve important scenic resources, landmarks, and icons that positively contribute to the rural character.

Policy NR9.4 – New buildings in areas of natural and scenic beauty should be placed in and designed in a way to preserve scenic vistas available from public right-of-way, parks, and other public viewing areas.

Placer County General Plan

The southwestern shoreline of Camp Far West Reservoir, the powerhouse, and the southern portion of the dam lies within Placer County. In the Placer County General Plan (Placer County 2013) under Part 2, *Goals, Policies, and Implementation Programs*, Section 6, *Natural Resources*, there are goals and policies indirectly associated with aesthetic values for county lands. These are:

Goal 6.A - to protect and enhance the natural qualities of Placer County's rivers, streams, creeks and ground water.

Policy 6.A.14 - the County shall help ensure that open space located in reservoir is preserved and protected to ensure adequate performance of these reservoirs. Camp Far West Reservoir is listed as an immediate key watershed.

Goal 6.E - to preserve and enhance open space lands to maintain the natural resources of the County.

Policy 6.E.1 - the County shall support the preservation and enhancement of natural land forms, natural vegetation and natural resources as open space to the maximum extent feasible.

Nevada County General Plan

The northeastern portion of Camp Far West Reservoir lies within Nevada County. In the Nevada County General Plan (Nevada County 2014), the following aesthetic goals were described for county lands:

To promote and provide for aesthetic design in new development that reflects existing character.

To protect and preserve important scenic resources.

3.3.8.1.2 Aesthetic Character in the Project Area

The following section provides a description of the existing visual resources found in the Project Area.

Regional Context

The Project is located primarily in southwestern Yuba County and northwestern Placer County with a small portion in southwestern Nevada County, California. This Project is located along the Bear River. SSWD is the major private landowner in the Project Area. Camp Far West Reservoir, the only Project impoundment, is located 17 mi southeast of Marysville, California, in

Yuba County and 7 mi northeast of Wheatland, California, in Yuba County. McCourtney Road provides paved access from the south to Camp Far West Reservoir. Camp Far West Road provides paved access from the west to the reservoir, including crossing the dam, and provides views of the reservoir and access to the main recreation facilities associated with the reservoir. The reservoir can also be accessed from the north by Camp Far West and Spenceville roads and from the east by Long Ravine and McCourtney roads in Nevada County. Portions of these roads are gravel.

Scattered grazing, agriculture, residential sites and wildlife management are the primary land uses in the Project Vicinity. Beale Air Force Base is approximately 3 mi to the northwest of the reservoir and Spenceville Wildlife Management and Recreation Area is 2 mi due north. In addition, recreation uses such as boating, fishing, camping, and picnicking are focused at Camp Far West Reservoir (Section 3.2.6). Hydroelectric generating facilities are located below the dam, but are a modest part of the landscape setting.

The visual character of the landscape setting encompasses rolling hills covered with oak woodlands, scattered oaks, and grasslands within the Project Area. This terrain is typical for lower elevations in the Sierra foothills and is characterized by rolling hills, scattered rock outcroppings, and incised river canyons. Oak woodlands and grasslands interspersed with chaparral, dominate the vegetative pattern, with alder and willow occurring along the riparian corridors (Yuba County 1994). The oaks maintain their dark olive green color year round while the grasslands are a bright yellow green in the springtime and then turn to a light yellow tan in the summer and fall. Elevations within the Project Vicinity range from 300 ft at the reservoir surface to around 600 ft at the top of the surrounding hills beyond the existing FERC Project Boundary. Three mi east of the reservoir is Rock Mountain at an elevation of 1,409 ft. Camp Far West Reservoir is a visual attraction due to the wide expanse of water and interesting shoreline that provides many coves and inlets. Camp Far West Reservoir is also associated with camping and boating recreation opportunities.

The visibility of Project facilities to the public varies widely. Camp Far West Dam and Reservoir are highly visible due to road access and the use of the reservoir for boating, fishing, and water skiing. The dam is visible from the main access road, the main campgrounds, boat launches, swimming beaches, and from the water surface. The powerhouse and associated facilities are generally not visible with the exception of passengers in cars heading south over the dam, and only if they look downstream below the dam.

Camp Far West Reservoir

Camp Far West Reservoir is located on the Bear River 18.2 mi upriver from the confluence with the Feather River. It is a medium-sized reservoir, which at NMWSE covers 1,886 ac and creates a shoreline of 29 mi. The NMWSE is 300 ft and the reservoir extends upstream on the Bear River for 5.5 mi from the dam. The water surface is fairly open near the boat ramps and dam, and then slowly narrows into a canyon as it meets the Bear River. The reservoir is visually attractive to the public even with the low water level because the shoreline has an undulating shape and provides several coves and inlets to explore. The surrounding environment of the reservoir is almost completely natural with the exception of the Camp Far West Dam and

Spillway and some of the recreation facilities. Users of the reservoir drive through a mix of agriculture, small ranches, and scattered homes before they arrive at the reservoir.

Oak woodland and grasslands are the dominant vegetation types. Nearly all lands (~95%) around the reservoir and within the existing FERC Project Boundary are owned by SSWD; the rest are owned by private landowners. No federal lands are associated with the Project. The NSRA is open year-round, while the SSRA is open intermittently during the high use season. Additional details on the recreation facilities are provided in Section 3.3.6.

The major access roads to Camp Far West Reservoir are McCourtney Road from the south and Camp Far West Road from the southwest in Placer County. Camp Far West Road continues north across the dam and provides access to the NSRA. This road was listed in the Yuba County General Plan as a scenic road with direction to be managed as a scenic corridor. There are local gravel roads that provide access to areas north and east of the reservoir. These roads provide some public views of the reservoir, but not near Project facilities. The primary views of the reservoir are from McCourtney Road as it parallels the west side of the reservoir and Camp Far West Road as it crosses the dam and continues to the NSRA. Other key views of the reservoir are from the NSRA including the boat launch and swimming beach as well as the SSRA. The main viewing opportunity of the reservoir is by boaters using the water surface for fishing, water skiing, and boating.

Camp Far West Dam and Spillway

The Camp Far West Dam and Spillway are located on the Bear River at the far west end of the reservoir. The dam is 2,070 ft long and transitions to a south wing dam that is 1,060 ft long, a north wing dam that is 1,440 ft long and a northern dike which is 1,145 ft long. All the dams are covered with dark boulders with a maximum diameter of 3 ft. The spillway is 300 ft wide at an elevation of 300 ft and constructed with concrete. The spillway does not have gates and is spanned by a 302.5-ft single span, steel-truss bridge that allows for traffic to continue on Camp Far West Road. Even at low water levels, the visual contrast is low to moderate due to the boulders matching rock outcroppings along the reservoir shoreline. The bridge across the spillway has some visual contrast due to the geometric patterns of an engineered steel bridge. However, at a middle ground distance the bridge contrast is minimal due to the size of members and non-reflective nature of the bridge surfaces.

Camp Far West Powerhouse

The powerhouse is located below the dam and has a gated paved road for access. The building is aboveground, built with reinforced concrete, and white in color. The powerhouse is only seen by passengers traveling in vehicles heading south across the dam. It takes an effort to see the powerhouse below the dam, particularly if the vehicle is traveling at a normal speed (e.g., 25 to 45 m.p.h.). The visual contrast is high for the few people who make the effort to look at the powerhouse in the foreground. However, from any other viewpoint there is no visual contrast because the powerhouse is not seen.

The aesthetic character of Project features within the Project is summarized in Table 3.3.8-1.

Table 3.3.8-1. Aesthetic character of Project features within the Camp Far West Project Area.

Existing Project Feature	Elevation (ft)	Form of Access	Relationship to Land Form	Predominant Vegetation	Visibility from Surrounding Areas	Relative Number of Viewers	County Plan Direction
Camp Far West Dam and Spillway	Dam crest 320 ft Spillway 300 ft	Camp Far West Road from Hwy. 65	Inundated stream valley	Oak woodland and grasslands	Seen from roads, recreation area, and reservoir surface	High	Placer and Yuba counties: Protect and enhance natural scenic values
Camp Far West Powerhouse and facilities	Approx. 150 ft	Gated paved road	Stream valley	Oak woodland and grasslands	Seen from south bound lane of Dam road. Not seen from anywhere else	Low/ Medium	Placer County: Protect and enhance natural scenic values
Camp Far West Reservoir	300 ft at NMWSE	McCourtney road and Camp Far West Road	Inundated stream valley	Oak woodland and grasslands	Seen from McCourtney Road, Camp Far West Road, the recreation areas, and reservoir surface	High	Placer, Yuba, and Nevada counties: Protect and enhance natural scenic values

3.3.8.2 Environmental Effects

This section discusses the potential environmental effects of SSWD’s proposed Project, as described in Section 2.2 of this Exhibit E. As part of the Project relicensing, SSWD proposes a Pool Raise of 5 ft, modifications of existing recreation facilities, and modification of the existing Project boundary. SSWD is not proposing any measures that would impact aesthetic resources.

3.3.8.2.1 Effects of Construction-Related Activities

Construction during the Pool Raise would have a less-than-significant effect on aesthetic resources. The work near the dam and at the laydown areas would be noticeable, but of short duration and in areas near the dam where the public is accustomed to viewing dam features. Outside of the short-term visibility of the construction equipment and staff near the dam, the work on SSWD lands, would remain consistent with Yuba County and Placer County’s general aesthetic goals, which generally emphasizes protecting and maintaining natural scenic resources. Once completed, the work would not impact the existing scenic views of Camp Far West Reservoir and the downstream river canyon from Camp Far West Road. SSWD would obtain all necessary permits and approvals for the work, and would adhere to all permit terms and conditions, which is expected to mitigate any aesthetic impacts.

Construction of the various recreation facility rehabilitations and enhancements would have a minor effect on aesthetic resources. Specific locations undergoing major rehabilitation and construction would be closed during construction. Most recreational users would be in other areas and likely at separate recreation area, which are typically visually screened by vegetation and/or terrain from construction activities. In addition, facility rehabilitations and enhancements projects would be scheduled outside of the peak season, whenever possible, when the public visitation is significantly lower, further reducing impacts to aesthetic resources related to public visitation.

3.3.8.2.2 Effects of Proposed Project Operations and Maintenance

SSWD's proposed Project does not include any significant changes in operations other than management of the Pool Raise. Most of the existing Project facilities have been in place for almost 50 years, and the limited aesthetic guiding documents (county general plans) were developed with the Project in place and under current Project operations and maintenance. None of the counties' general plans provide specific management direction for aesthetic resources. Thus, the existing Project facilities are in compliance with the general goals and policies of the counties' general plans. Continued Project operations and maintenance would have a less than significant effect on aesthetic resources. SSWD does not propose significant changes to existing Project facilities or how they are maintained and operated.

3.3.8.3 Unavoidable Adverse Effects

Constructed related effects on aesthetic resources, which are unavoidable, are expected to be less-than-significant. They will be short-term and very local, and, in most cases, they will be consistent with the character of the area and viewable in a narrow viewshed. The Pool Raise will have a permanent impact on the viewshed at Camp Far West Reservoir but will be less-than-significant since the overall appearance of the reservoir will remain unchanged. Continued Project operation and maintenance would not have adverse impacts on aesthetic resources.

3.3.8.4 Measures or Studies Recommended by Agencies and Not Adopted by SSWD

As described in Appendix E4 in this Exhibit E, USFWS, NMFS, CDFW, SWRCB and FWN each submitted written comments on SSWD's December 29, 2018, DLA. None of the written comments recommended aesthetic resources-specific PM&E measures or studies.

3.3.8.5 List of Attachments

None.