

3.2.8 Aesthetic Resources

3.2.8.1 Overview

In addition to this introductory information, this section is divided into four general subsections. Section 3.2.8.2 provides a regional context, Section 3.2.8.3 describes pertinent aesthetic resource management plans, and Section 3.2.8.4 discusses the aesthetic character in the Project Area. Section 3.2.8.5 describes known or potential Project effects on aesthetic resources.

SSWD prepared this section based on its collection of existing, relevant and reasonably available information on aesthetic resources. Specifically, SSWD found three County General Plan source documents regarding aesthetic resources. These are listed below and cited throughout this section:

- Nevada County 2014
- Placer County 2013
- Yuba County 1994

Due to the lack of other aesthetic documentation, a landscape architect conducted a field trip to collect information on the existing visual character and setting of the Project Area.

3.2.8.2 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.

3.2.8.3 Aesthetic Resource Management Plans

3.2.8.3.1 County General Plans

Yuba, Placer and Nevada counties' 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 where ever possible.

It is important to note that the general plans were developed with the Project in place and operating as it does now for many years. The Project pre-dates the plans.

3.2.8.3.1.1 Yuba County General Plan

A major portion of the Project Area lies within Yuba County. Currently, the Yuba County General Plan (Yuba County 1994) is in the process of being updated. Part of the updating process resulted in a document titled *Yuba County Environmental Setting and Background Paper* that summarizes the environmental setting and describes direction for aesthetics in the Plan.

Section 16.1, *Local Regulation and Planning for Aesthetics Resource Protection*, of the Yuba County General Plan, Open Space and Conservation Element (OSC), has as its general goal, "To maintain and enhance the natural resources, open space land uses, and scenic beauty of Yuba County in order to protect the quality of the environment, the County's economy, and the health and well-being of present and future residents." In support of this goal is a policy to "encourage the preservation and enhancement of the natural features of the County, including rivers and areas of scenic beauty, and native vegetation." The OSC, along with the Yuba County

Circulation Plan, designated scenic roads and highways, and has thus made a commitment to preserving their scenic values.

Section 12, *Transportation and Circulation Plan*, and Section 12.1.3, *County Roadways, Scenic Corridors*, of the Yuba County General Plan states that because of the special qualities of certain areas of Yuba County, roads traversing those areas are recommended in the current Circulation Element for protection by special ordinances to enhance scenic view sheds. Eleven roads are listed including the main road relevant to the Project Area, which is Camp Far West Road.

3.2.8.3.1.2 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.

3.2.8.3.1.3 Nevada County General Plan

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

- Promote and provide for aesthetic design in new development that reflects existing character.
- Protect and preserve important scenic resources.

3.2.8.4 Aesthetic Character in the Project Area

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

3.2.8.4.1 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. All lands around the reservoir within the existing FERC Project Boundary are owned by SSWD. Beyond the Project Boundary, the lands are owned by other private land owners. No federal lands are associated with the Project. The NSRA is open year-round, while the SSRA is open during the high use season. Additional details on the recreation facilities are provided in Section 3.2.6.

The major access roads to Camp Far West Reservoir are McCourtney Road from the south (Placer County) and Camp Far West Road from the southwest (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.

3.2.8.4.2 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.

3.2.8.4.3 Camp Far West Powerhouse and Transmission Line

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. A 60 kV transmission line runs 1.92 mi to a PG&E facility. 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 60 kV line provides minimal visual contrast compared to the powerhouse in foreground. Other than the south traveling vehicle view point, there is no visual contrast because the transmission line is not seen.

The aesthetic character of Project features within the Project is summarized in Table 3.2.8-1.

Table 3.2.8-1. 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

3.2.8.5 Known or Potential Project Effects

Provided below is a list of known or potential Project effects on aesthetic resources. The list was developed based on responses to SSWD’s PAD Information Questionnaire and SSWD’s current understanding of the issues.

- From Responses to SSWD’s PAD Information Questionnaire:
 - Respondents to SSWD’s Questionnaire did not identify any specific known or potential effects of the Project on aesthetic resources.

- From SSWD:
 - Effects of Project O&M and facilities on aesthetic resources.

3.2.8.6 List of Attachments

There are no attachments to this section.