

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This section describes those resources that define the visual character and quality of the County's Planning Area. The County's Planning Area consists of unincorporated land outside the City's boundaries and adopted Sphere of Influence (SOI) but within the One Valley One Vision (OVOV) Planning Area boundaries. The City's Planning Area consists of its incorporated boundaries and adopted SOI. Both the County and the City Planning Areas comprise the OVOV Planning Area. Resources within the County's Planning Area as well as the City's Planning Area include a variety of natural and man-made elements as well as the viewsheds to those elements that serve as visual landmarks and contribute to the unique character of the County's Planning Area. Although specific scenic resources in the County's Planning Area are identified in this section, it is not intended to provide an exhaustive inventory, as the nature of these resources is somewhat subjective and not easily quantified. Implementation of the proposed Area Plan would increase development within the unincorporated portion of the Santa Clarita Valley, which, if unregulated, would contribute to the obstruction of views, damage scenic resources, conflict with the Valley's rural character, and generate substantial levels of light and glare. However, the proposed Area Plan includes policies that would ensure the protection of scenic resources and corridors, promote quality construction that enhances the County Planning Area's urban form, increase open space, and landscaping, and limit light overspill. For these reasons, implementation of the County's Area Plan would result in a less than significant impact on aesthetics.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The OVOV Planning Area is dominated by a physical setting that offers residents and visitors a variety of scenic experiences due to the mixture of topography, flora and fauna, and a rich historical and cultural heritage. Memorable and distinctive scenery provides residents with a sense of place and identity, heightening the feeling of belonging and instilling a sense of uniqueness and civic pride. Together, the City and County Planning Areas comprise the Santa Clarita Valley, which is the valley of the Santa Clara River. The Santa Clara River Valley stretches through northwest Los Angeles County and Ventura County and the Santa Clara River winds through the valley before it empties into the Pacific Ocean between the cities of Oxnard and Ventura. The Santa Clarita Valley is bounded and visually framed by the eastern Santa Susana Mountains, western portions of the San Gabriel Mountains, and southern slopes of the Sierra Pelona Mountains (see **Figure 3.6-1, Scenic Resources within the OVOV Planning Area**). In addition to the major ridgelines forming the boundaries of the Valley, prominent scenic resources include rivers and creeks, canyons, and forestlands.

Angeles National Forest land, most of which is undeveloped and protected, occupies much of the County's Planning Area. The natural topography of the Santa Clara River and its many tributary canyons, in conjunction with the National Forest holdings, has focused growth in the Santa Clarita Valley on the more central, level areas between the Valley's two major freeways. Most of the development has occurred adjacent to the Golden State (Interstate 5) and Antelope Valley (State Route 14) freeways, concentrating urbanization within a "V"-shaped area formed by these two major transportation routes.

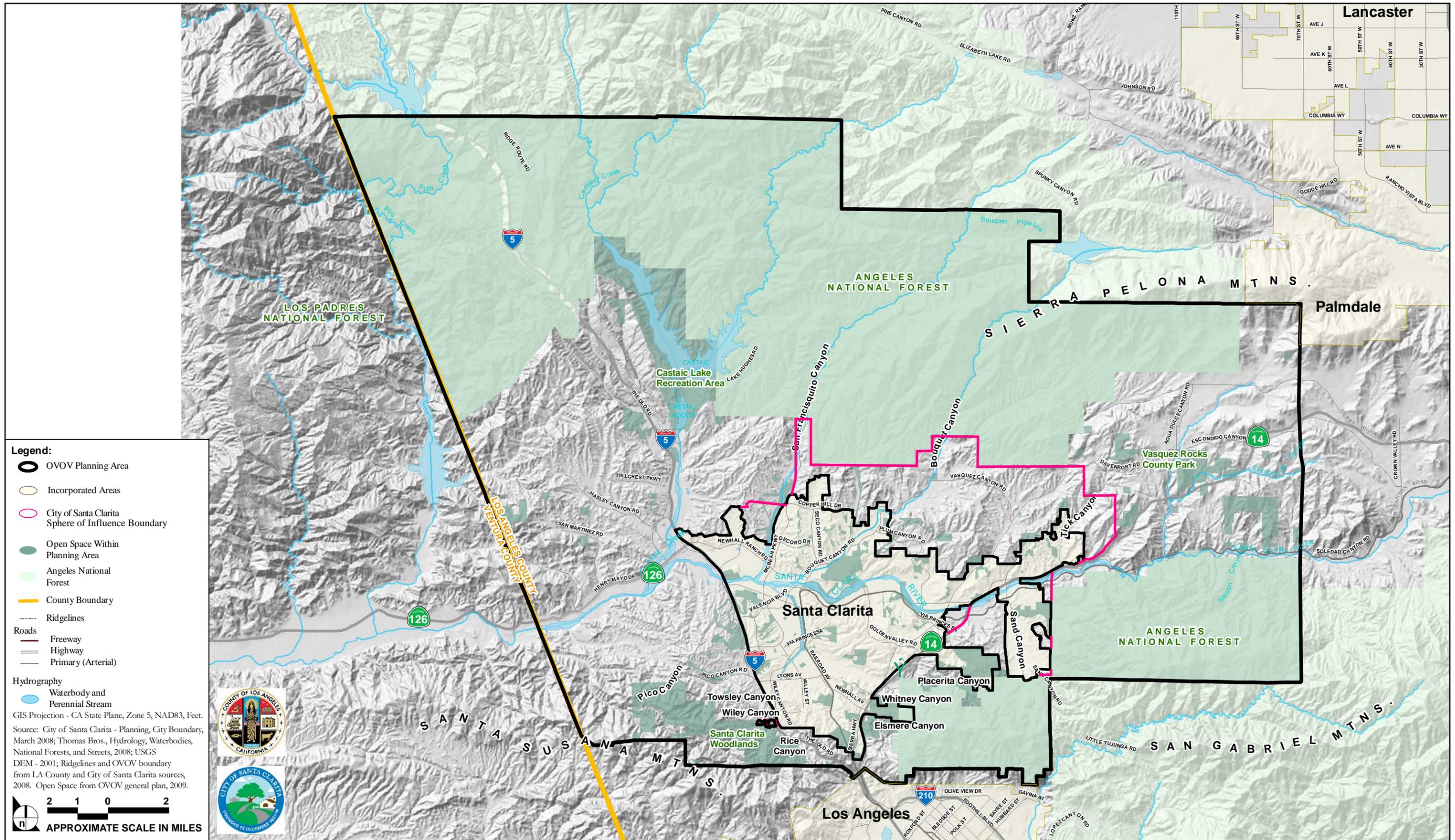
Overview of Scenic Resources

The following overview on scenic resources includes text extracted from the Draft Conservation and Open Space Element of the County's Area Plan (August 2009).

A community's scenic resources contribute to one's experience of "place" and influence the quality of life in that community. "Aesthetic value" refers to the perception of the natural beauty of an area as well as the elements that create or enhance its visual quality. While aesthetic value is subjective, it is typically included as a criterion for evaluating those elements that contribute to the visual quality that distinguishes an area. Most communities identify scenic resources as an important asset, although what is considered "scenic" may differ based on the environmental setting. Scenic resources that define a valley community differ from those that define a coastal or mountain community.

"Scenic resources" can include natural open spaces, topographic formations and landscapes that contribute to a high level of visual quality. These are significant resources that can be maintained and enhanced to promote a desired aesthetic value in the future. Many people associate natural landforms and landscapes with scenic resources, such as oak woodlands, lakes, rivers, streams, and some historical areas. Developed open spaces and the built environment constitute scenic resources and include parks, trails and pathways, nature centers, archaeological, and architectural features.

"Viewsheds" constitute the range of vision in which scenic resources may be observed. They are defined by physical features that frame the boundaries or context to one or more scenic resources. A region's topography can lend aesthetic value through the creation of public view corridors of ridgelines and mountains and through the visual backdrop created by mountains and hillsides. Viewsheds and scenic vistas may include views of a range of resources, whether natural or man made, and are also considered important scenic resources for preservation.



SOURCE: City of Santa Clarita, County of Los Angeles, Valleywide General Plan - March 2009

FIGURE 3.6-1

Scenic Resources within the OVOV Planning Area

Scenic Resources

The following discussion of scenic resources (i.e., major topographic features, woodlands, water bodies, open space, recreational areas, undeveloped land, urban form, beautification and walkable communities, historical resources and landmarks) in the County's Planning Area includes text extracted from the Technical Background Report for the Santa Clarita Valleywide General Plan (February 2004).

The physical characteristics of the County's Planning Area, in conjunction with the large amount of undeveloped land, offer Valley residents and visitors a vast array of open space that provides plentiful scenic opportunities. The visual elements exhibited within these open spaces include major topographic features, woodlands, and rivers and other water bodies as well as green and urban parkways. Historical resources and landmarks may also be included within the open space inventory. Woodlands and floodplain areas are prime examples of scenic resources that derive much of their majesty from quantity; although the health of the resource also substantially affects visual quality, as unhealthy trees and polluted watercourses can substantially diminish the quality of these resources.

Major Topographic Features

Major topographic features within and surrounding the County's Planning Area represent a significant scenic resource since they provide visual relief from the otherwise flat urban horizon. The San Gabriel, Sierra Pelona and Santa Susana Mountains are the most prominent scenic resources. These mountains contain well-defined ridgelines and canyons, as described below.

Ridgelines

Ridgelines project from the lower foothills of the San Gabriel and Sierra Pelona mountain ranges to the Valley floor. Both the County and the City of Santa Clarita (City) have recognized the hillside areas of the Valley to be important resources and have adopted hillside management regulations to restrict development on steeper slopes, but the current hillside ordinances of the two agencies differ as to both process and intent. The County's ordinance applies to average slopes of 25 percent and greater, while the City regulates development on areas with an average cross slope of greater than 10 percent. The ordinances also vary in terms of development requirements for hillside areas. While both the County and the City regulate density of development based upon slope steepness, the City's ordinance also regulates building placement to preserve designated ridgelines. The County has not delineated significant ridgelines throughout the entire Planning Area, but has done so in the Castaic area. As part of the OVOV

planning effort, the County and City plan to reach an agreement on a coordinated approach to ridgeline preservation and hillside protection.¹

Canyons

Sloping from the ridgelines are numerous foothill and canyon zones, which are important scenic resources that have remained undeveloped and in a natural state due to slope constraints. The canyons are characterized by variable terrain that supports a variety of native biota. The following describes major scenic canyon areas in the OVOV Planning Area (see **Figure 3.6-1**).

- Placerita Canyon, running east and west in the southerly portion of the OVOV Planning Area, is characterized by shaded oak groves, a seasonal stream lined with cottonwoods, willows and sycamores, sandstone formations, and many other plant and animal communities. Its historic “Oak of the Golden Dream” is the site of California’s first gold discovery in 1842, and is a designated State Historic Landmark. The Canyon contains a seasonal waterfall and hiking trails, including a trail leading to the top of the Santa Clara Divide in the San Gabriel Mountains. From this vantage point, one can view the entire Santa Clarita Valley to the north and the San Fernando Valley to the south, with long-range views beyond. The Placerita State Park and Nature Center is located within the canyon.
- Whitney Canyon is located at the intersection of Sierra Highway and Newhall Avenue, just east of State Route 14 in the OVOV Planning Area, and serves as the gateway to Angeles National Forest and the Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor. Due to its location between Elsmere and Placerita Canyons, Whitney Canyon is the middle link for the continuation of the Rim of the Valley Trail Corridor and the natural wildlife corridor through these canyons into Towsley Canyon and the Santa Clarita Woodlands. The canyon area contains oak forests, waterfalls, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and a riparian watershed area; 442 acres are publicly owned for preservation as natural open space, through a partnership between the City of Santa Clarita and a conservation authority.
- Elsmere Canyon lies within the Angeles National Forest, near the intersection of Sierra Highway and Newhall Avenue, east of State Route 14 in the OVOV Planning Area. Encompassing 2,700 acres, about half the canyon area is within the National Forest. Like other canyons in the OVOV Planning Area, Elsmere Canyon has served as a popular film site for western movies. A proposal to locate a landfill in the Canyon was withdrawn in 2004 based on public concerns about environmental quality, and in 2007 the property owner donated 400 acres of Elsmere Canyon to the Mountains and Recreation and Conservation Authority for use as an open space preserve. Elsmere canyon contains abundant wildlife, riparian habitat, coastal sage, and oak woodlands, and provides a wildlife corridor from the Santa Susana Mountains to the San Gabriel range.
- Bouquet Canyon, in the northerly portion of the OVOV Planning Area, follows the course of Bouquet Creek, generally from Bouquet Reservoir south to the junction of Bouquet Canyon Road and Soledad

¹ Draft Conservation and Open Space Element of the *Draft Los Angeles County General Plan* (September 2008).

Canyon Road. The canyon contains oak, willow, and sycamore groves, and the development character north of Saugus is rural.

- San Francisquito Canyon runs north and south from Saugus to Green Valley in the OVOV Planning Area, and is a rural environment supporting numerous equestrian ranches. The Canyon also contains sites of historic significance, such as the Harry Carey Historic Ranch.
- Sand Canyon, located in the eastern portion of the City's Planning Area, runs northward from the steep slopes in the Angeles National Forest to the Santa Clara River floodplain. The character of the canyon ranges from heavy woodland to large, rustic rural estates with abundant trees. Views from the upper reaches of the canyon include the valley floor.
- Pico Canyon, located in the northern portion of the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park in the western portion of the OVOV Planning Area, has been used extensively for oil extraction. The canyon was once occupied by Mentryville, an oil boomtown, and now contains valley and coast live oaks and views of the valley floor. The Mentryville historic site is contained within a State Park.
- Towsley Canyon, located in the central portion of the Santa Clarita Woodlands Park in the OVOV Planning Area, offers visitors a diverse natural area. Evidence of Native American heritage and early California oil interests are visible, along with unique geologic formations in "The Narrows." The Canyon contains numerous hiking trails along with Ed Davis Park.
- Tick Canyon lies in the Soledad Basin and is a tributary of the Santa Clara River channel, between Mint Canyon to the west and Tapia and Spring Canyons to the east, in the OVOV Planning Area. The Canyon was mined for various minerals during early settlement of the Valley.
- Wiley Canyon forms a portion of the pass through which Interstate 5 passes as it enters the OVOV Planning Area from the south. The upper reaches of the canyon provide a sense of enclosure and include views of scrub-filled hillsides and stands of oak trees, while the northerly portion of the canyon offers expansive views of the Santa Clarita Valley.
- Rice Canyon is located south of Wiley Canyon in the southwestern portion of the OVOV Planning Area, and offers views of rugged topography, coastal sage scrub, and stands of oak trees.

Woodlands

The Angeles National Forest and Los Padres National Forest are large undeveloped and protected tracts of land within the County's Planning Area. Oak woodlands within these forests also extend into rural portions of the County's Planning Area, contributing to its rural and scenic character. Oak woodlands occur in scattered locations, primarily in the southerly portions of the County's Planning Area, and contain a diverse habitat including six species of oak. Cottonwood-willow riparian forests are found primarily along the Santa Clara River and its tributaries.

Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs) are identified in the unincorporated areas of the OVOV Planning Area by the County of Los Angeles as ecologically fragile or important land, or as providing habitat for sensitive animal and plant communities such as oak woodland and cottonwood-willow riparian forest areas. These SEAs support a variety of woodland habitat, including oak and riparian woodlands. The woodlands include Interior Live Oak Woodland, Valley Oak Woodland, Coast Live Oak Woodland, and Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest. Interior Live Oak Woodland is located at the southern boundary of the OVOV Planning Area, abutting the Angeles National Forest and the Santa Susanna Mountains ridgeline. Valley Oak Woodland is concentrated in a single location south of State Route 126 and west of Interstate 5. Coast Live Oak Woodland exists in a limited number of pockets in the southern portions of the OVOV Planning Area. The oak woodland habitat is extremely diverse, containing six species of oak. Southern Cottonwood-Willow Riparian Forest borders the Santa Clara River and its tributaries.

Water Bodies

Rivers and streams located in canyon bottoms provide scenic visual relief from urbanization as well as habitat for wildlife. A river or streambed is a significant visual feature that influences the character of an area by providing (1) visual relief from the urbanized area, (2) a habitat for migrating birds, and (3) the topographic low point to which all land drains. The following are major water bodies of scenic value in the County's Planning Area (see **Figure 3.6-1**).

- The Santa Clara River flows approximately 100 miles from its headwaters near Acton to the Pacific Ocean, and is one of only two natural river systems remaining in Southern California, providing the County's Planning Area with a unique scenic resource. The Santa Clara River flows east to west through a valley formed between the Santa Susana Mountains and the Transverse Ranges. Over 4,000 acres of high quality riparian habitat have been preserved in a natural state along the length of the River. Some of the major tributaries to the Upper Santa Clara River watershed include Castaic Creek, San Francisquito Canyon, Bouquet Canyon, Sand Canyon, Mint Canyon, Oaks Springs Canyon and the South Fork of the Santa Clara River. Newhall Creek, Placerita Creek, and Towsley Creek are tributaries to the South Fork.
- Castaic Lake is a major water body within the northern portion of the OVOV Planning Area, and consists of two separate lakes: the main Reservoir and the Lagoon. The main Reservoir is a V-shaped body of water with approximately 34 miles of shoreline. The west side of the lake is surrounded by parkland and sandy beaches. The Lagoon feeds Castaic Creek, a significant tributary to the Santa Clara River.
- Bouquet Creek and San Francisquito Creek are major tributaries to the Santa Clara River, and are two of the few perennial creeks in the County's Planning Area. Bouquet Creek is unchannelized from the city limits to Bouquet Reservoir, where it has neither levees nor any concrete bottoms.

- Newhall Creek, Placerita Creek, and Towsley Creek are tributaries to the South Fork of the Santa Clara River, which in turn is a tributary to the main Santa Clara River. Newhall Creek enters the South Fork near 16th Street.
- Sand Canyon and Oak Springs Canyon flow south to north into the Santa Clara River.

Open Space and Recreational Areas

Open space in the OVOV Planning Area includes portions of the Angeles National Forest, agricultural uses, public and private recreational uses such as parks, trails, golf courses, and other areas reserved for passive recreation, and land zoned as open space. Open space also includes vacant lands (i.e., lands that are abandoned farmland) and undeveloped lands. Bodies of water, such as the Santa Clara River, and water storage facilities are also considered to be open space areas. Agricultural land is an important aesthetic resource and has wildlife habitat value. Cultivated fields and grass pasture contribute to the open appearance of the landscape as well as the working landscape.

Park and recreational facilities are significant scenic resources dispersed throughout the OVOV Planning Area. Specifically, there are two state parks, the Castaic Lake Recreation Area, and Placerita Canyon State Park, which are operated by the County, and located within the County's Planning Area (see **Figure 3.6-1**).

- The Castaic Lake Recreation Area is a major recreational and scenic resource in the northwest section of the OVOV Planning Area. The Castaic Lake Recreation Area includes 8,800 acres and consists of two separate lakes.² The main Reservoir has approximately 34 miles of shoreline. On the south side of the dam is the Afterbay, or Lagoon. Parkland and sandy beaches surround the west side.
- Placerita Canyon State Park and Nature Center is situated in the transition zone between the San Gabriel Mountains and the Mojave Desert, located approximately 5 miles east of Newhall, in the unincorporated portion of the OVOV Planning Area. Designated as a State Historic Landmark, the purpose of Placerita Canyon State Park is to preserve and protect the site of the first discovery of gold in California in 1842. This area contains sandstone formations, seasonal streams and riparian oak woodlands, as well as stands of cottonwood and native sycamore trees. In addition, the location provides significant linkages between the Angeles National Forest, the Santa Susana Mountains, the Simi Hills, and the Santa Monica Mountains.
- Vasquez Rocks Park, located in the unincorporated community of Agua Dulce northwest of State Route 14, is an area of unique geologic formations that has been the site of hundreds of films. Sculpted by seismic activity along the Elkhorn fault, the rock formations were compressed, folded, and tilted as much as 50 degrees up to nearly 150 feet in height. Erosion has shaped the coarse-grained yellow sandstone into jutting and sweeping formations interspersed with shale and basalt layers.

² State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation 2003

The County Department of Parks and Recreation currently maintains 16 developed County's Planning Area parks comprising 1,355 acres, as shown in **Figure 3.16-1, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Resources**. The County also has two state owned parks comprising an acreage of 9,041 acres. These parks range from local parks such as the 2.2-acre Tesoro Adobe Park to regional parks such as the 224.3-acre William S. Hart Park. The City of Santa Clarita Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services currently maintains 20 City parks totaling 245.9 acres. These parks range in size from slightly more than 0.5 acre to 80 acres, and include numerous recreational facilities included in the City's neighborhood, community, special-use facilities, and regional parks. The City's Central Park is a multi-use park intended to serve the entire metropolitan region of the Santa Clarita Valley, and is classified as a regional park. This park provides facilities for league sports, cultural enrichment, historical protection, and passive open space.

Other open spaces that can be considered scenic resources include undeveloped lands, floodways, and specialized facilities such as golf courses that provide amenities to visitors and residents. Cemeteries, schoolyards, and landscaped developments are also considered scenic resources since they provide contrast from adjacent uses based on landscaping quality, size, and configuration of open space.

Many open space areas that have remained undeveloped or that have been "naturalized" provide important habitat for wildlife. Natural open space linkages may include open space dedications, easements, or greenbelts. Open space elements can also be found within large-scale development projects including but not limited to public plazas, entry courts, and planned development common areas.

Undeveloped lands

Much of the land in the northern, eastern, and western portions of the OVOV Planning Area remains undeveloped. East of Canyon Country, large tracts of undeveloped property border State Route 14, extending to the boundaries of the Angeles National Forest. Similarly, much of the area to the west of Interstate 5 and along State Route 126 remains as open space or agricultural land. Open space and agricultural lands throughout the OVOV Planning Area provide a buffer to the County and City's built environment and convey a scenic sense of rural character.

Urban Form, Community Design, and Beautification

At a macro scale, looking at the distribution of land uses throughout the Santa Clarita Valley, development has been shaped by the National Forest lands occupying the mountain ranges to the north, east, and south of the Valley communities. The Land Use Map of the Area Plan has reinforced the concentration of urban land uses within the central portions of the Valley by designating significant open

space and non-urban rural residential uses between more developed areas and the National Forest lands. The intent of these designations is to maintain urban uses within the flatter portions of the Valley that have access to infrastructure, roads, and public facilities, and to minimize encroachment of urban development into hillside areas. The overall urban form has also preserved open space near the Santa Clara River throughout most of the Valley, in order to protect water quality and provide scenic views, recreational trails, and habitat preservation.³

At the intermediate scale, or neighborhood level of urban form, the Area Plan provides opportunities in some areas to create more urban environments with mixed uses, walkable pathways, and ready access to public transit. At the scale of site-specific development, the Area Plan contains policies to encourage the maintenance of neighborhood character in the various villages throughout the planning area, and to ensure that each new development incorporates measures for pedestrian accessibility, multi-modal opportunities, water conservation and quality, energy conservation, and other similar measures.

Urban Form

Urban form refers to the combination of individual elements in the built environment which together make up the cities and neighborhoods. Elements include houses, schools, parking lots, shopping centers, streets, parks, business centers, offices, and public buildings. The physical setting and history of the Santa Clarita Valley have combined to create several distinctive communities, each with its own special character, development patterns, and lifestyles. Communities within the City of Santa Clarita include Newhall, Valencia, Saugus, and Canyon Country. Subcommunities include Sand Canyon, Placerita Canyon, and Hasley Canyon. Communities on unincorporated County land include Agua Dulce, Northlake, Castaic, Val Verde and the proposed Newhall Ranch Specific Plan. Topographically, many neighborhoods are separated from adjacent development by ridgelines or canyons. The location of the Santa Clara River and Interstate 5, both of which transect the OVOV Planning Area, also act as barriers that separate communities. The following text describes examples of urban form that are presently found within the County's Planning Area.

Residential Neighborhoods

Residential neighborhoods can be characterized as either Traditional Residential, Suburban Subdivision, Rural Large Lot Homes, or Mixed Density. These categories are defined below.

³ Los Angeles County Preliminary Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, October 2008.

Traditional Residential. This urban form typifies much of the older residential developments. Streets are laid out in an interconnected grid with houses set back at generally consistent distances from the street, often with extensive front yard landscaping and parkways. Houses are designed to open to the street, with garages located to the side or rear. These neighborhoods were typically built during the 1930-50s, and exhibit a diversity of architectural styles. Newhall exemplifies this urban form.

Suburban Subdivision. This type of neighborhood locates residences on lots along a curvilinear street pattern, often with cul-de-sacs. Houses generally exhibit a single architectural type with limited variety. Many of these homes are fronted by the garage with the housing unit oriented inward way form the street. Stevenson Ranch and Castaic typify these neighborhoods.

Rural Large Lot Homes. This type of neighborhood is often separated from commercial and urban centers. Homes are often custom built by individuals, rather than produced in tracts by a single developer. Building sizes vary and architectural styles tend to reflect the rural and desert character of the Santa Clarita Valley. Agua Dulce contains examples of these neighborhoods.

Mixed Density. This type of neighborhood incorporates a variety of housing types including single-family detached and attached units, low-rise townhomes, and garden apartments. Only a few mixed density neighborhoods, which are primarily newer developments, exist in the County's Planning Area. Newer neighborhoods in Stevenson Ranch exhibit the mixed-density form.

Commercial Districts

Commercial districts can be characterized as either a Commercial Corridor, Commercial Corridor Strip Center, Main Street Corridor, Regional Shopping Center Mall, Regional Center, or Community Center. These categories are defined below.

Commercial Corridor. Typical of older retail areas, mixed commercial districts contain small retail shops, located on comparatively small lots (typically 10,000 to 18,000 square feet), with no or limited parking to the rear of shops. Storefronts are generally located along the sidewalk and are architecturally similar. Large windows open to the sidewalk allowing passersby to view retail goods. Building mass is homogenous and typically limited to one-or two-story structures.

Commercial Corridor (Auto-oriented, independent buildings). In this particular type of commercial corridor, parcels are usually developed as a single building, set back from all property lines on a single parcel. These one-story buildings typically have simple box-like massing and lack a unique or

distinguishing architectural style. Paved surface parking is located in front of or to the sides of buildings with minimal landscaping. Much of this construction was occurred between the 1950s and 1980s.

Commercial Corridor Strip Center. Similar to the preceding category, the strip center locates shops and businesses to the rear of parcels along the street corridor with expanses of parking lots along the frontage. The strip center is often developed on large lots, (typically 20,000 to 100,000 square feet), versus the smaller scale auto-oriented blocks. Multiple driveways provide access to the center. There is little variation in the building design, and distinct massing of elements is not evident. Strip centers may be one to two stories tall.

Main Street Corridor (Town Center). Similar to a traditional “Main Street,” retail shops are arranged in a pedestrian-oriented development in this district type. Buildings are adjacent to the sidewalk and close to the street, but far enough to facilitate enhanced streetscape and pedestrian amenities. Parking is angled or directly accessible to the front of shops. Buildings are medium to low scale, of varying mass, with elevations that are modulated, articulated, and visually transparent to provide a sense of comfort and safety for pedestrians.

Regional Shopping Center Mall. The regional shopping mall is typically situated on sites exceeding 40 acres and contains multiple tenants in an integrated complex surrounded by parking. The shopping mall is characterized by large massing and scale, and is often two to three stories. Shopping malls are typically more architecturally appealing than “big box” retail centers and usually exhibit greater façade articulation. The Stevenson Ranch Marketplace is a prime examples of the shopping mall.

Regional Centers (Retail Big Box). These are large, “superblock” developments with extensive parking lots. Buildings are bulky, box-like structures with little variation in massing. These structures also exhibit little building modulation or articulation, focusing on function rather than form. Costco is an example of this type of center.

Community Centers (Supermarket, or Super-Drug). Similar to large, regional centers, these contain buildings with multiple tenants abutted by large parking areas and are developed at a smaller scale (typically on 10- to 14-acre parcels). Buildings exhibit greater modulation and articulation, and generally differentiate massing. Grocery stores, drug stores and other retail uses and community services are located in these centers. Ralphs and Walgreens are examples of these centers.

Industrial Districts

Industrial districts can be characterized as either Campus Business Park or Traditional Heavy Industrial. These two categories are defined below.

Campus Business Park. The business park is typically a collection of medium to large scale buildings developed within a landscaped, campus-like setting. Landscaped parking lots surround each building or group of buildings.

Traditional Heavy Industrial. Traditional industrial areas are typically independently developed sites containing industrial buildings that have continuous, unarticulated facades and homogenous massing. Parking areas with limited landscaping surround the buildings.

Architectural Styles

Each neighborhood or community defines the community characteristics that are considered appropriate for that area. For example, residents in Canyon Country have endorsed rustic and natural building styles with emphasis on materials such as wood, stone, and enhanced paving. Because of its historical character, development in Newhall is subject to a Special Standards District and the Downtown Newhall Specific Plan standards.

Within the County's Planning Area, the design standards for Newhall Ranch are outlined in the adopted Specific Plan. The Community Standards Districts adopted by Los Angeles County maintain desired design characteristics in Agua Dulce and Castaic (see **Regulatory Framework** below for additional information on Community Standards District).

Beautification and Walkable Communities

The County and City seek to create an attractive outdoor urban environment that promotes walkability, and provides a common approach to streetscape design and landscaping along arterial streets and highways and major gateways. Urban parkways are streets in which the presence of high-quality landscaping lends a positive visual character. Major urban parkways usually have landscaped medians that add green space to the streetscape. Secondary urban parkways include locations where mature trees, perhaps originally planted as windrows, dominate the streetscape. Policies and implementation measures have been included in the Land Use Element to promote coordination between the City and the County on uniform approaches to streetscape design, including plant materials, hardscape, and street furniture.

Paths, such as bike and equestrian trails, link and interconnect land uses and areas of activity. Numerous paths traverse the national parks and other hillside areas within the OVOV Planning Area, and provide views of woodlands and topography as well as a place of relative seclusion from the urban environment. A path may also be a formal “paseo” or informal passage route such as a road that serves to provide a quality open space network that is spatially distributed throughout an area. Recent planned developments, such as those in Valencia, have incorporated paseos to provide links between residential areas and other uses.

Another area in which the County and City can coordinate beautification efforts is the provision of unified signs, especially for regional trails, trail heads, and open space and preserve areas. Consistent furniture such as bus shelters, benches, and trash cans can be used to unify streetscapes throughout the Valley.⁴

Historical Resources

The Santa Clarita Valley has an extensive history representing the early settlement of California, the initial development of California’s resources, and historic filming sites for Hollywood westerns. This heritage has been extensively preserved in the numerous historical sites throughout the OVOV Planning Area. Not only are these sites historical and cultural resources, but many are also considered scenic resources, as they are representative of and provide glimpses into the Valley’s rich past. Historical resources can help to define the visual character of an area by contributing to a sense of place, maintaining a visual link to an area’s past, and providing glimpses of historical views. Historic resources within the County’s Planning Area considered to have scenic value include, but are not limited to, The Oak of the Golden Dream, where gold was first discovered in California in 1842, and Mentryville, which was established in 1876 as California’s pioneer oil town.

Landmarks

A landmark is a significant reference point, often identified by a structure, landscape feature, or freestanding element. Landmarks commonly have singularity, allowing them to be distinguished from features surrounding them. They also provide visual and functional points of reference for residents and visitors within the community, contributing to a distinct sense of place. Landmarks often have architectural, historical, archeological, and/or cultural significance, and many of the historic places and features described above would be considered landmarks. Examples of landmarks in the County’s

⁴ Los Angeles County Preliminary Draft Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, October 2008.

Planning Area include the St. Francis Dam Disaster Site, Beale's Cut, the Oak of the Golden Dream and Vasquez Rocks.

Viewsheds

The following discussion of regional, local and dark sky viewsheds includes text extracted from the Technical Background Report for the Santa Clarita Valleywide General Plan (February 2004).

A "viewshed" is a view corridor from a vantage point to landscapes or features that exhibit high visual quality. A viewshed may be categorized as a regional viewshed, local viewshed, or dark sky viewshed, as defined below:

- Significant Regional Viewshed—A viewshed where a significant number of prominent visual features unique to the Santa Clarita Valley can be identified.
- Significant Local Viewshed—A viewshed where a significant number of prominent visual features unique to the Santa Clarita Valley or the City of Santa Clarita can be identified, but that are secondary in quantity or nature to a Significant Regional Viewshed.
- Dark Sky Viewshed—A location away from artificial or urban light sources, which preserves the nighttime view of stars, planets, constellations, and other celestial bodies.

Viewsheds can be adversely affected by the urbanization of natural areas such as prominent slopes or woodlands. Viewsheds are also sensitive to adverse changes in air quality since smog obscures long-range visibility.

Regional Viewsheds

The Angeles National Forest, the Los Padres National Forest and their ridgelines provide an important visual backdrop for much of the County and City Planning Areas. The forestlands provide long-distance viewsheds from numerous locations in the County's Planning Area including the bottom of the Valley, hillsides, and ridgeline locations. Furthermore, since the County Planning Area is surrounded by mountain ranges, one may obtain panoramic views of the surrounding mountains from primary roadways and numerous locations on the Valley floor.

Scenic drives provide mobile views of a wide variety of topographic and biological features. Extensive, uninterrupted views of wide expanses of land, as well as more intimate vistas along shorter, secluded road segments, are often available. These drives not only provide an important scenic resource for residents, but are often the only aesthetic experience for visitors or passersby.

Scenic vistas are available along Interstate 5, State Route 14, and State Route 126. These vistas are surrounded by undisturbed mountains, ridgelines, and national forest as well as new development, and provide picturesque views. Of these roadways, Interstate 5 and State Route 14, which run through the pass between the Los Angeles Basin and the Santa Clarita Valley, also serve as natural gateways to the Santa Clarita Valley, providing the first views of the area, its topography and vegetation. As development increases, encroachment into hillside areas and high-density development in close proximity to these gateways, particularly where mass grading is required, could adversely affect the visual quality of the entries into the County and City's Planning Area. Similarly, development in close proximity to roadways that provide scenic views for motorists could degrade the natural, sweeping quality of the views provided, particularly if such development occurs in high densities or involves tall structures that could obscure long-range views.

In addition to the major highways, scenic views and vistas can be found along roads through various canyons, including Soledad Canyon Road, Bouquet Canyon Road, San Francisquito Canyon Road, Sand Canyon Road, Placerita Canyon Road, Sierra Highway, Golden Valley Road, Lake Hughes Road and Vasquez Canyon Road. Many of these scenic drives traverse oak- and sycamore-studded canyons along winding streambeds.

The following describes the roadways that offer scenic viewsheds through the County's Planning Area (see **Figure 3.6-1**).

- State Route 14 traverses the OVOV Planning Area southwest to northeast, and reaches an elevation over 3,000 feet above sea level at Escondido Summit in Acton (outside the eastern boundary of the OVOV Planning Area).
- Interstate 5 crosses the OVOV Planning Area south to north. The segment of Interstate 5 between Interstate 210 near Tunnel Station and State Route 126 near Castaic has been studied for nomination to the California Scenic Highway program.
- State Route 126 between Santa Paula (outside of the OVOV Planning Area) and Interstate 5 near Castaic offers views of mostly undeveloped and/or agricultural lands and occasional vistas of the Santa Clara River. This segment of State Route 126 has also been studied for nomination to the California Scenic Highway program.
- Soledad Canyon Road runs east/west along the Santa Clara River through a mostly undeveloped and scenic river canyon. Soledad Canyon is a major migration corridor for birds and other wildlife.
- Bouquet Canyon Road runs north/south from Saugus in Santa Clarita to Leona Valley, including the Bouquet Canyon Reservoir. In Saugus, the road is a four- to six-lane thoroughfare with a bike lane along part of its journey. Approximately 1 mile from the Santa Clarita City Limits, ranches and open space replace the residential development.

- Placerita Canyon Road, south of State Route 14, winds past the Disney Movie Ranch through an oak- and chaparral-studded canyon, past the Placerita Nature Center, and loops north to connect with Sand Canyon Road.
- San Francisquito Canyon Road runs north/south from Saugus in Santa Clarita to Elizabeth Lake.
- Lake Hughes Road runs north/south from Castaic to Lake Hughes. It was built by the California Conservation Corps in 1936; a portion of the original highway runs underneath Castaic Lake.
- Sierra Highway parallels State Route 14 from the southwestern portion of the OVOV Planning Area, turning north approximately four miles east of its junction with Interstate 5. Sierra Highway then travels through the rural community and ranches of Agua Dulce, turning south once again to cross State Route 14 in Acton. The area surrounding this highway is mostly rural, especially in the eastern portion of the OVOV Planning Area.
- Sand Canyon Road exists as a predominately two lane undivided roadway that provides for north/south travel between Sierra Highway and Placerita Canyon Road. Sand Canyon Road is designated on the proposed Highway Plan as a Secondary Highway between Sierra Highway and Soledad Canyon Road, as a Major Highway between Soledad Canyon Road and Lost Canyon Road, and as a Limited Secondary Highway between Lost Canyon Road and Placerita Canyon Road/Little Tujunga Canyon Road. From its southern terminus near Placerita Canyon Road, access to the San Fernando Valley communities of Sunland and Tujunga is possible via a connection with Little Tujunga Road Canyon through the Angeles National Forest.
- Golden Valley Road exists as a four lane to six-lane roadway that provides for north/south travel between Soledad Canyon Road and the State Route 14 freeway, and which will ultimately be extended north to connect with Newhall Ranch Road. A northerly segment also exists south of Plum Canyon Road, which will ultimately be extended south to Newhall Ranch Road. It is designated on the proposed Highway Plan as a Major Highway between Newhall Ranch Road and the State Route 14 freeway, and as a Secondary Highway between Plum Canyon Road and Newhall Ranch Road. Golden Valley Road ultimately will be part of the Cross-Valley Connector, which will provide a seamless connection between the Interstate 5/State Route 126 junction and the State Route 14/Golden Valley Road interchange.

Local Viewsheds

The significant topographic and natural resources in the OVOV Planning Area provide local viewsheds to neighborhoods in the unincorporated areas. Examples of local viewsheds include views of hillsides and ridgelines from residential developments. Another type of local viewshed includes views contained within a single canyon. For example, Pico Canyon Service Road provides local views of the canyon and slopes as it ascends to canyon headwaters.

Dark Sky Viewsheds

Dark sky viewsheds are generally available in less urbanized areas, such as in the canyons and canyon roads in the Valley. Areas from which dark sky viewsheds are available include Bouquet Canyon, San Francisquito Canyon, Pico Canyon, Castaic Lake, and the Angeles National Forest.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

County of Los Angeles

Existing Plans

The County regulates scenic open space primarily through its General Plan and Area Plans. Policies and programs of the General Plan directed toward the management and protection of the scenic qualities of these areas constitutes the Open Space Plan of Los Angeles County. Open space lands may be subject to additional controls through special management areas such as National Recreation and Forest areas, SEAs, mineral resource areas, hazard areas, and areas subject to cultural heritage protection.

The County adopted the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan in 1984 with a comprehensive update in 1990 to address specific planning issues within the Santa Clarita Valley. Areas with special significance for resource preservation were depicted on the Land Use Map of the Area Plan, including Open Space, Hillside Management, Significant Ecological Areas, and Floodways/Floodplains. The Area Plan contained a Scenic Highways Plan and plans for Trails and Bikeways, along with goals and policies to promote preservation of open space and conservation of resources. Hillside development policies were included for areas with slopes of 25 percent or greater.

The County has also adopted ordinances to regulate and protect natural resources, including native oak trees, water quality, significant ecological areas, and hillside development. In 2007 the County recently updated the Master Trails Plan for the Santa Clarita Valley, and has made numerous improvements to park and open space areas.⁵

Hillside Management

To preserve the natural beauty of hillsides in the unincorporated County, land use activities that may result in environmental degradation are subject to regulations and design guidelines that limit hillside development based on slope, soil, natural drainage channels and seismic and fire hazards. By imposing

⁵ Draft Conservation and Open Space Element of the *Draft Santa Clarita Valley General Plan* (July 2008).

these design conditions, a more sensitive development occurs in a manner that respects the natural topography and biological resources of the area. To this end, the County utilizes the Hillside Management Ordinance and the Hillside Management Conditional Use Permit (CUP) as regulatory mechanisms to consider potential environmental degradation and hillside alteration in areas where the slope is 25 percent or greater. Design guidelines for projects in Hillside Management Areas include the following:

- Minimize grading and removal of native vegetation.
- Preserve distinctive natural features and existing topographical forms.
- Preserve prominent skyline ridge silhouettes; locate roads and structures below skyline ridges.
- Design circulation routes that incorporate existing contours; undulating road patterns, cul-de-sacs, split roadways and varying grades.
- Incorporate hiking, bicycle, walking and equestrian trails where appropriate; integrate trails and open space with existing networks.
- Vary lot sizes, setbacks and building orientation and elevations to ensure views and avoid monotony.
- Preserve steep hillsides by clustering buildings and using other innovative site design approaches.
- Use flag lot design where essential to reduce grading.
- Preserve significant trees and habitats, natural watercourses, wildlife corridors and distinctive natural features.
- Consider the project's appearance from higher, lower or adjacent roads or development.
- Place water tanks and other unsightly forms below ridgelines and in a bermed and naturally landscaped area.

Community Standards Districts

Community Standards Districts (CSDs) are established as supplemental districts to provide a means of implementing special development standards contained in adopted neighborhood, community, area, specific and local coastal plans within the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, or to provide a means of addressing special problems which are unique to certain geographic areas within the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. The County has developed CSDs for Castaic and Agua Dulce to address planning issues and set specific guidelines for development within these two communities. Regulations in the Castaic CSD include lot size requirements for new homes, hillside development restrictions, provisions for trail connections and protection of native vegetation, and

buffering between incompatible uses. In addition, the Castaic CSD limits the expansion of trucking-related uses in the Castaic center and prohibits clustered subdivisions in the Hasley Canyon and Sloan Canyon areas. The Agua Dulce CSD includes guidelines for trail preservation, hillside development, native landscaping, signage and outdoor lighting.⁶

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Significance Thresholds

In order to assist in determining whether a project will have a significant effect on the environment, the *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines*, Appendix G identify criteria for conditions that may be deemed to constitute a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in physical conditions.

Potentially significant impacts on aesthetics resources would occur if the proposed Area Plan would:

- Have a substantial adverse 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 which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

This impact analysis section evaluates the potential effects of the proposed Area Plan goals, objectives, and policies on aesthetic and scenic resources within the County's Planning Area using the *State CEQA Guidelines* thresholds of significance.

Scenic Vistas

Impact 3.6-1 Implementation of the proposed Area Plan could result in a potentially significant impact on a scenic vista.

As previously discussed, scenic vistas within the County's Planning Area are both panoramic and focal. The ridgelines of the Sierra Pelona, San Gabriel and Santa Susana Mountains provide panoramic views of

⁶ Draft Conservation and Open Space Element of the *Draft Los Angeles County General Plan* (September 2008).

the Santa Clarita Valley. Scenic vistas of these mountains are extensively offered from primary roadways and other vantage points throughout the Valley floor as well as the County's trail system. Scenic drives through the canyons and the highways leading into the Valley offer more focused scenic vistas. The scenic resources that compose scenic vistas include major topographic features such as ridgelines and canyons, woodlands, biological resources, water bodies, open space, parkland, and historic resources.

The proposed Area Plan would designate land for urban uses throughout the County's Planning Area. Presently vacant lands could become developed with urban uses. If unregulated, new development under buildout of the proposed Area Plan has the potential to degrade the quality of existing scenic vistas. For example, hillside development could result in mass grading of ridgelines and other natural topographic features as well as the removal of vegetation, including native woodlands. Development on the Valley floor could obstruct long-range views of the surrounding mountains if new structures have prohibitive building heights and placement. Development within open space areas could adversely impact the quality of vistas offered along local scenic drives and the major highways leading into the Valley.

In order to reduce these potential impacts resulting from development, several policies in the proposed Area Plan related to the preservation of topography, open space, woodlands, and other scenic resources would promote the protection of scenic vistas. **Policies CO 6.5.1** and **6.5.2** specifically promote the maintenance of designated routes, gateways, and vista points by considering scenic views at major entry points to the Valley, and establishing scenic routes and adopting guidelines to maintain their character. Additionally, vistas would be maintained by minimizing smog, restricting the establishment of billboards and removing those that currently obstruct scenic views, restricting building heights and requiring undergrounding all new utility lines (**Policies CO 6.6.2–6.6.5**).

While the above policies are aimed specifically at preserving scenic vistas, most applicable policies from the proposed Area Plan are designed to enhance and protect scenic resources that contribute to the County's valued views. In order to minimize adverse impacts to the natural environment, which provides scenic resources in the County's Planning Area, the proposed Area Plan would promote infill development such that urban uses are concentrated within the Valley center (**Policy CO 1.5.5**). Similarly, it would allow density transfers and clustering to encourage the retention of open space (**Policy CO 10.2.5**). By concentrating growth near or within the developed portions of the Valley floor, open space would continue to provide a scenic landscape and backdrop to the County's Planning Area.

For development that does occur on open space, Area Plan policies would conserve the hillsides, canyons, and ridgelines by limiting hillside development. Grading techniques that mimic the natural

topography, revegetation of graded slopes, setbacks from ridgelines, designating additional open space, erosion control measures, and minimal use of large retaining walls are all ways in which the County would preserve scenic slopes (**Policies CO 2.2.1 –2.2.6**).

Another focus of the Area Plan is to conserve biological resources and ecosystems, which provide scenic relief from the built environment. The proposed Area Plan would promote tree planting, habitat restoration, revegetation, increased open space, and the concentration of development into previously developed, urban areas that avoid impacts to wetlands, woodlands, heritage trees, floodplains, water bodies and threatened habitat (**Policies CO 3.1.1–3.1.4, 3.1.6, 3.1.8, 3.1.10, 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, 3.2.4, 3.3.2, 3.3.4, 3.3.5, 3.5.3, and 3.6.5**).

The Area Plan also seeks to protect historical and culturally significant resources, which contribute to more localized, focal scenic vistas in the County’s Planning Area. The proposed Area Plan would enforce preliminary review of alternations to these resources (**Policies CO 5.1.1 and 5.1.2**).

The Area Plan supports the use of designated parkland or open space to preserve scenic landforms such as the canyons, significant ridgelines and unique geologic formations like Vasquez Rocks (**Policies CO 6.1.1–6.1.3**), scenic water bodies such as Castaic Lake and the Santa Clara River (**Policies CO 6.3.1 and 6.3.2**), and scenic habitat including oak woodlands and coastal sage (**Policies CO 6.4.1 and 6.4.2**).

Other proposed policies are designed to enhance parkland and open space, which, due to their lack of development, form natural components of scenic vistas. These goals would be met through the addition of trails to scenic viewpoints (**Policy CO 9.2.6**), providing a natural greenbelt buffer surrounding the Valley (**Policy CO 10.1.1**), preserving the Santa Clara River corridor as open space (**Policy CO 10.1.2**), maintaining existing open space, and obtaining additional open space (**Policies CO 10.1.3–10.1.5, 10.1.9 and 10.1.14**). Additionally, the proposed policies would require open space within new development projects to equal 20 percent of the site area, connect to adjacent open space when feasible, and incorporate existing significant trees, vegetation, terrain or water features (**Policies CO 10.2.1, 10.2.2, and 10.2.4**).

Proposed Area Plan Policies

Policy CO 1.5.5: Promote concentration of urban uses within the center of the Santa Clarita Valley through incentives for infill development and rebuilding, in order to limit impacts to open space, habitats, watersheds, hillsides, and other components of the Valley’s natural ecosystems.

- Policy CO 2.2.1:** Locate development and designate land uses to minimize the impact on the Santa Clarita Valley's topography, minimizing grading and emphasizing the use of development pads that mimic the natural topography in lieu of repetitive flat pads, to the extent feasible. (Guiding Principle #8)
- Policy CO 2.2.2:** Ensure that graded slopes in hillside areas are revegetated with native drought tolerant plants or other approved vegetation to blend manufactured slopes with adjacent natural hillsides, in consideration of fire safety and slope stability requirements.
- Policy CO 2.2.3:** Preserve designated natural ridgelines from development by ensuring a minimum distance for grading and development from these ridgelines of 50 feet, or more if determined appropriate by the reviewing authority based on site conditions, to maintain the Santa Clarita Valley's distinctive community character and preserve the scenic setting.
- Policy CO 2.2.4:** Identify and preserve significant geological and topographic features through designating these areas as open space or by other means as appropriate.
- Policy CO 2.2.5:** Promote the use of adequate erosion control measures for all development in hillside areas, including single family homes and infrastructure improvements, both during and after construction.
- Policy CO 2.2.6:** Encourage building and grading designs that conform to the natural grade, avoiding the use of large retaining walls and build-up walls that are visible from offsite, to the extent feasible and practicable.
- Policy CO 3.1.1:** On the Land Use Map and through the development review process, concentrate development into previously developed or urban areas to promote infill development and prevent sprawl and habitat loss, to the extent feasible.
- Policy CO 3.1.2:** Avoid designating or approving new development that will adversely impact wetlands, floodplains, threatened or endangered species and habitat, and water bodies supporting fish or recreational uses, and establish an adequate buffer area as deemed appropriate through site specific review.

- Policy CO 3.1.3:** On previously undeveloped sites (“greenfields”), identify biological resources and incorporate habitat preservation measures into the site plan, where appropriate. (This policy will generally not apply to urban infill sites, except as otherwise determined by the reviewing agency).
- Policy CO 3.1.4:** For new development on sites with degraded habitat, include habitat restoration measures as part of the project development plan, where appropriate.
- Policy CO 3.1.6:** On development sites, preserve and enhance natural site elements including existing water bodies, soil conditions, ecosystems, trees, vegetation and habitat, to the extent feasible.
- Policy CO 3.1.8:** On development sites, encourage tree planting to provide habitat and shade to reduce the heat island effect caused by pavement and buildings.
- Policy CO 3.1.10:** To the extent feasible, encourage the use of open space to promote biodiversity.
- Policy CO 3.2.1:** Protect wetlands from development impacts, with the goal of achieving no net loss (or functional reduction) of jurisdictional wetlands within the planning area.
- Policy CO 3.2.2:** Ensure that development is located and designed to protect oak, sycamore, and other significant indigenous woodlands. (Guiding Principle #9)
- Policy CO 3.2.4:** Protect biological resources in the designated Significant Ecological Areas (SEAs) through the siting and design of development which is highly compatible with the SEA resources. Specific development standards shall be identified to control the types of land use, density, building location and size, roadways and other infrastructure, landscape, drainage, and other elements to assure the protection of the critical and important plant and animal habitats of each SEA. In general, the principle shall be to minimize the intrusion and impacts of development in these areas with sufficient controls to adequately protect the resources. (Guiding Principle #10)
- Policy CO 3.3.2:** Cooperate with other responsible agencies to protect, enhance, and extend the Rim of the Valley trail system through Elsmere and Whitney Canyons, and other areas as appropriate, to provide both recreational trails and wildlife corridors linking the Santa Susana and San Gabriel Mountains.

- Policy CO 3.3.4:** Support the maintenance of Santa Clarita Woodlands Park, a critical component of a cross-mountain range wildlife habitat corridor linking the Santa Monica Mountains to the Angeles and Los Padres National Forests.
- Policy CO 3.3.5:** Encourage connection of natural open space areas in site design, to allow for wildlife movement.
- Policy CO 3.5.3:** Pursuant to the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, protect heritage oak trees that, due to their size and condition, are deemed to have exceptional value to the community.
- Policy CO 3.6.5:** Ensure revegetation of graded areas and slopes adjacent to natural open space areas with native plants (consistent with fire prevention requirements).
- Policy CO 5.1.1:** For sites identified on the Cultural and Historical Resources Map (Figure CO 6), review appropriate documentation prior to issuance of any permits for grading, demolition, alteration, or new development, to avoid significant adverse impacts. Such documentation may include cultural resource reports, Environmental Impact Reports, or other information as determined to be adequate by the reviewing authority.
- Policy CO 5.1.2:** Review any proposed alterations to cultural and historic sites identified in Table CO 1 or other sites which are so designated, based on the guidelines contained in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Properties (Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 1, Part 68, also known as 36 CFR 68), or other adopted County guidelines.
- Policy CO 6.1.1:** Protect scenic canyons, as described in Part I of this element, from overdevelopment and environmental degradation.
- Policy CO 6.1.2:** Preserve significant ridgelines, as shown on Figure CO 7, as a scenic backdrop throughout the community by maintaining natural grades and vegetation.
- Policy CO 6.1.3:** Protect the scenic quality of unique geologic features throughout the planning area, such as Vasquez Rocks, by including these features within park and open space land where possible.

- Policy CO 6.3.1:** Protect the shores of Castaic Lake to preserve its scenic quality from development.
- Policy CO 6.3.2:** Protect the banks of the Santa Clara River and its major tributaries through open space designations and property acquisitions, where feasible, to protect and enhance the scenic character of the river valley.
- Policy CO 6.4.1:** Preserve scenic habitat areas within designated open space or parkland, wherever possible.
- Policy CO 6.4.2:** Through the development review process, ensure that new development preserves scenic habitat areas to the extent feasible.
- Policy CO 6.5.1:** In approving new development projects, consider scenic views at major entry points to the Santa Clarita Valley, including gateways located at Newhall Pass and along Lake Hughes Road, Route 126, Bouquet Canyon Road, Sierra Highway, State Route 14, and other locations as deemed appropriate by the reviewing authority.
- Policy CO 6.5.2:** Establish scenic routes in appropriate locations as determined by the reviewing agency, and adopt guidelines for these routes to maintain their scenic character.
- Policy CO 6.6.1:** Enhance views of the night sky by reducing light pollution through use of light screens, downward directed lights, minimized reflective paving surfaces, and reduced lighting levels, as deemed appropriate by the reviewing authority.
- Policy CO 6.6.2:** Improve views of the Santa Clarita Valley through various policies to minimize air pollution and smog, as contained throughout the Area Plan.
- Policy CO 6.6.3:** Restrict establishment of billboards throughout the planning area, and continue abatement efforts to remove existing billboards that impact scenic views.
- Policy CO 6.6.4:** Where appropriate, require new development to be sensitive to scenic viewpoints or viewsheds through building design, site layout and building heights.
- Policy CO 6.4.5:** Encourage undergrounding of all new utility lines, and promote undergrounding of existing lines where feasible and practicable.

- Policy CO 9.2.6:** Provide trails to scenic vistas and viewpoints.
- Policy CO 10.1.1:** Provide and protect a natural greenbelt buffer area surrounding the entire Santa Clara Valley, which includes the Angeles National Forest, Santa Susana, San Gabriel, and Sierra Pelona Mountains, as a regional recreational, ecological, and aesthetic resource. (Guiding Principle #5)
- Policy CO 10.1.2:** The Santa Clara River corridor and its major tributaries shall be preserved as open space to accommodate storm water flows and protect critical plant and animal species, as follows: (Guiding Principle #6)
- a. Uses and improvements within the corridor shall be limited to those that benefit the community's use of the river in its natural state.
 - b. Development on properties adjacent to, but outside of the defined primary river corridor shall be:
 - i. Located and designed to protect the river's water quality, plants, and animal habitats by controlling the type and density of uses, drainage runoff (water treatment) and other relevant elements; and
 - ii. Designed to maximize the full range of river amenities, including views and recreational access, while minimizing adverse impacts to the river.
- Policy CO 10.1.3:** Through dedications and acquisitions, obtain open space needed to preserve and protect wildlife corridors and habitat, which may include land within SEA's, wetlands, woodlands, water bodies, and areas with threatened or endangered flora and fauna.
- Policy CO 10.1.4:** Maintain and acquire, where appropriate, open space to preserve cultural and historical resources.
- Policy CO 10.1.5:** Maintain open space corridors along canyons and ridgelines as a way of delineating and defining communities and neighborhoods, providing residents with access to natural areas, and preserving scenic beauty.
- Policy CO 10.1.9:** Preserve forested areas, agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and corridors, wetlands, watersheds, groundwater recharge areas, and other open space that provides nature carbon sequestration benefits.

- Policy CO 10.1.14:** Protect open space from human activity that may harm or degrade natural areas, including but not limited to off road motorized vehicles, vandalism, campfires, overuse, pets, noise, excessive lighting, dumping, or other similar activities.
- Policy CO 10.2.1:** Encourage provision of vegetated open space on a development project's site, which may include shallow wetlands and ponds, drought tolerant landscaping, and pedestrian hardscape that includes vegetated areas.
- Policy CO 10.2.2:** Encourage that open space provided within development projects be usable and accessible, rather than configured in unusable strips and left-over remnants, and that open space areas are designed to connect to each other and to adjacent open spaces, to the extent reasonable and practical.
- Policy CO 10.2.4:** Seek opportunities to incorporate site features into the open space of a project design, which may include significant trees, vegetation, terrain, or water features, to provide thermal, acoustic, and aesthetic benefits.
- Policy CO 10.2.5:** Where appropriate, allow density transfers and clustering to encourage retention of open space, provided all residential lots meet the applicable minimum lot size requirements of the Land Use Element and the Zoning Ordinance, including Community Standards Districts.

Effectiveness of Proposed Area Plan Policies

The proposed policies are designed to guide growth near or within the developed portion of the Valley floor in order to preserve the existing rural and open space character of the County's Planning Area; provide for the permanent preservation or restoration of important natural and built scenic resources; incorporate open space within developed areas; conserve view corridors, skylines, and scenic vistas; and impose restrictions on development activities that may adversely affect scenic resources. Since the above policies restrict impacts on those features comprising scenic vistas (ridgelines, biological resources, open space, and historic resources) and scenic vistas in general, potential impacts on scenic vistas from implementation of the proposed Area Plan would be less than significant.

Scenic Highways

Impact 3.6-2 **Implementation of the proposed Area Plan could result in a potentially significant impact to scenic resources within a locally designated scenic highway such as State Route 126.**

There are no designated state scenic highways in the City of Santa Clarita or elsewhere in the Santa Clarita Valley, including the unincorporated areas. State Route 126 is designated as an eligible State scenic highway, but is not officially designated. Los Angeles County designates State Route 126 as a "First Priority Scenic Route" which is proposed for further study, but presently has no regulatory restrictions placed on it.

As there are no state scenic highways in the County's Planning Area, no proposed Area Plan policies address scenic resources specifically within a state scenic highway. However, several policies address the impact on scenic resources within the County Planning Area's locally scenic corridors, which are discussed under **Impact 3.6-1** above. For example, several policies are intended to maintain the scenic character of designated routes, gateways, and vista points along roadways. **Policy CO 6.5.1** states that scenic views at major entry points to Santa Clarita Valley should be considered in the approval of new development projects. **Policy CO 6.5.2** states that scenic routes in appropriate locations and guidelines for the maintenance of their scenic character should be established. Implementation of these policies would protect existing scenic corridors and better enable the future designation of a state scenic highway within the County's Planning Area.

Proposed Area Plan Policies

See **Impact 3.6-1** for policies related to the protection of scenic resources including historical sites, ecosystems, landforms, water bodies, and geological formations.

Effectiveness of Proposed Area Plan Policies

See **Impact 3.6-1** for a discussion of the effectiveness of policies designed to protect scenic resources. However, since no state scenic highways are located within the County's Planning Area, implementation of the proposed Area Plan would not affect scenic resources within a state scenic highway. No impact would occur.

Visual Quality and Character

Impact 3.6-3 Implementation of the Area Plan could result in a potentially significant impact to the existing visual character or quality of the County's Planning Area.

Buildout of the proposed Area Plan would introduce new uses to the County's Planning Area. If unregulated, new development could be inconsistent with the desirable visual character and quality for the County's Planning Area. Visual character refers to architectural design standards, the distribution of open space, streetscape design, and other visual features or amenities that define the community. In order to reduce potential inconsistencies, the proposed Area Plan includes several policies in the Conservation and Open Space and Land Use Elements designed to maintain the County Planning Area's rural character and ensure visual consistency and continuity with the existing natural and built environment.

The proposed Area Plan would establish certain design standards and concepts to uphold the aesthetic valued by the community. Proposed policies would encourage the creation of healthy, high quality neighborhoods, which includes requiring architectural design treatment and articulation along all sides of new housing to promote continuity of architectural scale and rhythm and avoid the appearance of blank walls, especially long facades adjacent to major arterial streets (**Policies LU 3.4.8, 6.5.3, and 6.5.4**). The proposed Area Plan also encourages the use of high quality, durable, and natural-appearing materials, and designs and architectural styles that incorporate classic and timeless architectural features (**Policies LU 6.5.1 and 6.5.2**).

The visual quality of streetscapes and public spaces is also addressed. The inclusion of plazas, courtyards, seating areas, public art, and water features within commercial centers, business parks, and civic facilities would enhance public space (**Policy LU 6.2.1**). Trailheads would be enhanced with landscaping, seating, and information kiosks (**Policy LU 6.2.2**). The Area Plan also promotes the beautification of streetscapes and gateways to the community, planting of street trees, development of unified landscape plans for major arterials traversing the Valley, undergrounding of utility lines for new development, and prohibition of new billboards (**Policies LU 6.3.1–6.3.5**). Additionally, planting trees and providing more natural vegetation in lieu of impervious surfaces within parking lots would enhance the County Planning Area's built environment (**Policies CO 3.5.1 and 3.6.2**).

Parkland and open space, which provide visual relief within the urban setting, are also valued visual characteristics of the County's Planning Area. Proposed policies include ensuring that new parkland is developed throughout the County's Planning Area based on a standard of 5 acres of parkland per

1,000 residents (**Policy CO 9.1.1**). Furthermore, new residential development projects would need to provide adequate park facilities to meet the needs of future residents (**Policy CO 9.1.9**). Local and community parks should be within reasonable distance of residential neighborhoods so that they are well integrated, and the Santa Clara River should continue to be a recreational focal point providing natural ecosystems and a buffer for sensitive habitat (**Policy CO 9.1.2, 9.1.3, 9.1.7, and 9.1.13**). Additionally, the Area Plan promotes converting vacant lots to community gardens where appropriate (**Policy CO 10.1.8**). All these measures would enhance and increase the total acreage of interspersed open space within the County's Planning Area.

Furthermore, the proposed Area Plan promotes the protection of scenic resources that form the County Planning Area's natural setting. **Policies CO 6.1.1 and 6.1.2** protect scenic canyons from overdevelopment and environmental degradation and preserve significant ridgelines as a scenic backdrop by maintaining natural grades and vegetation. This includes distancing new development from ridgelines, the Santa Clara River corridor, and stream banks, and maintaining the scenic backdrop of foothills and canyons through specialized construction techniques (**Policy CO 6.1.3**). (Other policies direct the conservation of biological resources and forest land, which would be accomplished by discouraging off-road vehicle use, maintaining fuel modification zones, and protecting the urban-forest interface area from overdevelopment (**Policies CO 3.4.2 and 3.4.5**). Additionally, adherence to the policies identified under **Impact 3.6-1** would reduce impacts on the scenic resources that contribute to the visual quality and character of the County's Planning Area.

Proposed Area Plan Policies

Policy CO 3.4.2: Consider principles of forest management in land use decisions for projects adjacent to the National Forest, including limiting the use of invasive species, discouraging off-road vehicle use, maintaining fuel modification zones and fire access roads, and other measures as appropriate, in accordance with the goals set forth in the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan.

Policy CO 3.5.1: Continue to plant and maintain trees on public lands and within the public right-of-way to provide shade and walkable streets, incorporating measures to ensure that roots have access to oxygen at tree maturity, such as use of porous concrete.

Policy CO 3.6.2: Reduce impervious surfaces and provide more natural vegetation to enhance microclimates and provide habitat. In implementing this policy, consider the following design concepts:

- Consideration of reduced parking requirements, where supported by a parking study and/or through shared use of parking areas;
- Increased use of vegetated areas around parking lot perimeters; such areas should be designed as bioswales or as otherwise determined appropriate to allow surface water infiltration;
- Use of connected open space areas as drainage infiltration areas in lieu of curbed landscape islands, minimizing the separation of natural and landscaped areas into isolated “islands”;
- Breaking up large expanses of paving with natural landscaped areas planted with shade trees to reduce the heat island effect, along with shrubs and groundcover to provide diverse vegetation for habitat.

Policy CO 9.1.1: Common park standards shall be developed and applied throughout the Santa Clarita Valley, consistent with community character objectives, with a goal of five acres of parkland per 1,000 population. (Guiding Principle #36.a.)

Policy CO 9.1.2: A range of parkland types, sizes, and uses shall be provided to accommodate recreational and leisure activities. (Guiding Principle #36.b)

Policy CO 9.1.3: Provide local and community parks within a reasonable distance of residential neighborhoods.

Policy CO 9.1.7: Establish appropriate segments of the Santa Clara River as a recreational focal point, encouraging a beneficial mix of passive and active recreational uses with natural ecosystems by providing buffers for sensitive habitat.

Policy CO 9.1.9: Ensure that new development projects provide a fair share towards park and recreational facilities, phased to meet needs of residents as dwelling units become occupied, pursuant to the Quimby Act (California Government Code Section 66477) and local ordinances as applicable.

Policy CO 9.1.13: Provide passive areas for natural habitat, meditation, bird-watching, and similar activities in parks, where feasible and appropriate, including meditation gardens, wildflower and butterfly gardens, botanic gardens, and similar features.

Policy CO 10.1.8: Encourage the use of vacant lots as community gardens, where appropriate.

- Policy LU 3.4.8:** Require architectural design treatment along all sides of new housing to promote continuity of architectural scale and rhythm and avoid the appearance of blank walls (360 degree enhancement).
- Policy LU 6.1.1:** Designate ridgelines throughout the planning area, and preserve these ridgelines from development by encouraging a minimum distance for grading and development from these ridgelines of 50 feet, or more if determined preferable by the reviewing authority based on site conditions.
- Policy LU 6.1.2:** On the Land Use Map, designate publicly owned portions of the Santa Clara River corridor and its major tributaries as Open Space.
- Policy LU 6.1.3:** Ensure that new development in hillside areas is designed to protect the scenic backdrop of foothills and canyons enjoyed by Santa Clarita Valley communities, through requiring compatible hillside management techniques that may include but are not limited to clustering of development; contouring and landform grading; revegetation with native plants; limited site disturbance; avoidance of tall retaining and build-up walls; use of stepped pads; and other techniques as deemed appropriate.
- Policy LU 6.2.1:** Promote the inclusion of plazas, courtyards, seating areas, public art, and similar features within commercial centers, business parks, and civic facilities visited by the general public.
- Policy LU 6.2.2:** Provide and enhance trail heads where appropriate with landscaping, seating, trash receptacles and information kiosks.
- Policy LU 6.3.1:** Promote planting of street trees throughout urban areas in the Santa Clarita Valley.
- Policy LU 6.3.2:** Develop compatible landscape plans for major arterials traversing the Santa Clarita Valley, including landscaped medians and parkways, and implement these plans in both County and City of Santa Clarita areas, where feasible and appropriate based on right of way and other conditions.
- Policy LU 6.3.3:** Enhance major entrance points to the community, including on and off ramps from Interstate 5 and State Route 14; entrances along State Route 126; and at the

northern and southern entrance points on Sierra Highway, where feasible and appropriate.

- Policy LU 6.3.4:** Require undergrounding of utility lines for new development where feasible, and plan for undergrounding of existing utility lines in conjunction with street improvement projects where economically feasible.
- Policy LU 6.3.5:** Restrict the establishment of billboards within the planning area.
- Policy LU 6.5.1:** Require use of high quality, durable, and natural-appearing building materials, pursuant to the ordinances developed through the County's Green Building Program.
- Policy LU 6.5.2:** Encourage the use of designs and architectural styles that incorporate classic and timeless architectural features.
- Policy LU 6.5.3:** Require architectural enhancement and articulation on all sides of buildings (360 degree architecture), with special consideration at building entrances and corners, and along facades adjacent to major arterial streets.
- Policy LU 6.5.4:** Evaluate new development in consideration of its context, to ensure that buildings create a coherent living environment, a cohesive urban fabric, and contribute to a sense of place consistent with the surrounding neighborhoods.

Effectiveness of Proposed Area Plan Policies

The above policies address the preservation of the rural character of the County's Planning Area by regulating the placement of incompatible land uses (i.e., development adjacent to Angeles National Forest), streetscapes, urban landscaping, incorporation of additional parkland and public open space (i.e., plazas and courtyards), architectural standards and signage. Coordination between the County and City on urban form, beautification, and community design, will help develop the regional character of the OVOV Planning Area. Based on implementation of the proposed policies and the existing regulatory framework, impacts on the County Planning Area's visual character and quality would be less than significant.

Light and Glare

Impact 3.6-4 **Implementation of the Area Plan would not create a new source of substantial light or glare that would potentially affect day or nighttime views in the area.**

Implementation of the Area Plan would introduce new sources of light and glare to the County's Planning Area through additional street lighting, parking lot lighting, commercial signage, residential lighting, and other sources of illumination typically found within urban settings. Excessive levels of nighttime illumination can interfere with views of the night sky and be a nuisance to neighborhoods and other sensitive receptor locations. In order to reduce the potential for these adverse impacts, the proposed Area Plan includes several policies to reduce the generation of light and glare.

Policies in the Area Plan are designed to minimize light trespass, sky-glow and glare to a level needed for security and comfort by eliminating unnecessary lighting for landscaping and architecture and requiring the reduction of light levels during non-business nighttime hours (**Policies CO 3.6.1** and **8.3.9**). In order to protect views of the night sky and reduce glare, the proposed Area Plan also promotes the use of light screens, downward directed lights, and minimized reflective paving surfaces (**Policies CO 6.6.1** and **8.2.4**). Furthermore, policies designed to protect open space from new development would also limit the creation of new light and glare sources (**Policy CO 10.1.14**; refer to **Impact 3.6-1**).

Proposed Area Plan Policies

Policy CO 3.6.1: Minimize light trespass, sky-glow, glare, and other adverse impacts on the nocturnal ecosystem by limiting exterior lighting to the level needed for safety and comfort; reduce unnecessary lighting for landscaping and architectural purposes, and encourage reduction of lighting levels during non-business nighttime hours.

Policy CO 6.6.1: Enhance views of the night sky by reducing light pollution through use of light screens, downward directed lights, minimized reflective paving surfaces, and reduced lighting levels, as deemed appropriate by the reviewing authority.

Policy CO 8.2.4: Establish maximum lighting levels for public facilities, and encourage reduction of lighting levels to the level needed for security purposes after business hours, in addition to use of downward-directed lighting and use of low-reflective paving surfaces.

Policy CO 8.3.9: Limit excessive lighting levels, and encourage a reduction of lighting when businesses are closed to a level required for security.

Effectiveness of Proposed Area Plan Policies

The above policies would limit light and glare generation by establishing techniques for light screening and shielding, restricting the use of unnecessary light during non-business nighttime hours, restricting the use of decorative lighting, and protecting open space. With incorporation of these policies, impacts from new sources of light and glare would be less than significant.

MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

No mitigation measures are required.

SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPACT WITH MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

Potential impacts on aesthetics resources from implementation of the proposed Area Plan would be less than significant; no mitigation measures are required.