

3.2 Aesthetics

This section provides a description of the existing visual and aesthetic resources, as well as potential sensitive receptors in the viewshed of the proposed project, and relevant state and local plans and policies regarding the protection of scenic resources. Effects to the existing visual character of the project area as a result of project-related facilities are considered and mitigation is proposed based on the anticipated level of significance. The information provided in this section is summarized from the *Visual Resources Baseline & Sensitivity Report* prepared by Catalyst Environmental Solutions and the *Glint and Glare Assessment* prepared by SWCA Environmental Consultants. These reports are included as Appendix B and C of this EIR, respectively.

3.2.1 Existing Conditions

Regional

Imperial County encompasses 4,597 square miles in the southeastern portion of California. The County is bordered by Riverside County on the north, the international border of Mexico on the south, San Diego County on the west and Arizona on the east. The length and breadth of the County provide for a variety of visual resources ranging from desert, sand hills, mountain ranges, and the Salton Sea.

The desert includes several distinct areas that add beauty and contrast to the natural landscape. The barren desert landscape of the Yuha Desert, lower Borrego Valley, East Mesa, and Pilot Knob Mesa provide a dramatic contrast against the backdrop of the surrounding mountain ranges. The West Mesa area is a scenic desert bordered on the east by the Imperial Sand Dunes, the lower Borrego Valley, the East Mesa, and Pilot Knob Mesa.

The eastern foothills of the Peninsular Range are located on the west side of the County. The Chocolate Mountains, named to reflect their dark color, are located in the northeastern portion of the County, extending from the southeast to the northwest between Riverside County and the Colorado River. These mountains reach an elevation of 2,700 feet making them highly visible throughout the County. Looking south from the Project site there is a partial view of the Sierra de Los Cucapah Mountain range. The Cucapah mountains add minimal scenic value to the area and run south to Mexico. Across the international border located approximately 12 miles southwest of the Project, Mount Signal is visible from the entire Imperial Valley.

Project Site

The proposed facilities would be located on APN 054-250-31; APN 059-020-001; APN 054-250-017, near the existing Heber Geothermal Energy Complex (HGEC) located at 855 Dogwood Road, Heber, CA. The HGEC is comprised of three stand-alone geothermal power plants: Heber 2, Heber South, and Goulds 2, and is completely devoted to geothermal energy generation. All proposed facilities are located within the Imperial County Geothermal Overlay Zone that allows for Major Geothermal Projects to be permitted via a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) process. Surrounding land uses in the project vicinity are primarily for industrial facilities, energy facilities, and agricultural cultivation. Solar energy facilities and agricultural cultivation are directly west; a construction/aggregates company is adjacent to the south; agricultural operations are present to the north and east; and, geothermal well pads and pipelines are present throughout the local vicinity. Imperial Irrigation District (IID) irrigation canals are also present throughout the project vicinity.

Interstate 8 (I-8), located approximately 4.5 miles directly north, provides primary highway access to the HGEC. Dogwood Road stems off of I-8 and provides immediate access to the project site. From the south, Willoughby Road runs west-east approximately 1,700 feet from the site and connects to Dogwood Road, providing immediate site access. Significant transmission lines and towers are present along Dogwood Road.

The Dogwood Project would be located within the existing HGEC in an area currently used for materials storage and is completely devoid of any vegetation or surface water features. The proposed solar facility sites are presently used for agriculture cultivation. The proposed well pads would also be located in areas presently used for agriculture. The solar facility sites would be located immediately southeast of the HGEC. The new geothermal production wells and associated pipelines will be split between two parcels. Two of these wells would be located within the solar energy sites with a small segment of pipeline developed within the solar sites connecting to the existing pipeline network to the west. A third well would be installed adjacent to an existing geothermal well approximately 1,500 feet east of the HGEC (APN 054-250-017).

The area is characteristically flat with minimal elevation changes throughout the project area. The primary contributor to the otherwise flat project area would be the New River which runs to the south along the project area. Views in this area are characterized by sparse development and agricultural land with minimal topographic features. Residences, transmission lines, sparse vegetation such as trees, and transportation corridors such as roads are discernable throughout the project area.

Scenic Vista

Scenic vistas are typically expansive views from elevated areas. They may or may not be part of a designated scenic overlook or other area providing a static vista view of a landscape. The project site is located in a rural portion of Imperial County and is not located within an area containing a scenic vista designated by the State or the County's General Plan (Imperial County 2021).

Scenic Highways

According to the Conservation and Open Space Element, no State scenic highways have been designated in Imperial County (Imperial County 2016). According to the Caltrans California Scenic Highway Mapping System, the project site is not located within a state scenic highway corridor, nor are there any state scenic highways located in proximity to the project site (Caltrans 2018). The nearest road segment considered eligible for a State scenic highway designation is the segment of the Sunset Cliffs Boulevard/State Route 98 west of Ocotillo. The project site is located approximately 29 miles east of Ocotillo; therefore, it would not be visible from the project site.

Light, Glare, and Glint

Glare is considered a continuous source of brightness, relative to diffused light, whereas glint is a direct redirection of the sun beam in the surface of a PV solar module. Glint is highly directional, since its origin is purely reflective, whereas glare is the reflection of diffuse irradiance; it is not a direct reflection of the sun.

The proposed project is located in a rural undeveloped area of Imperial County. The majority of the light and glare in the project area is a result of motor vehicles traveling on surrounding roadways, airplanes, and farm equipment. Local roadways generate glare both during the night hours when cars travel with lights on, and during daytime hours because of the sun's reflection from cars and pavement surfaces. Nighttime light which is currently emitted from the existing HGEC facility.

Visual Character

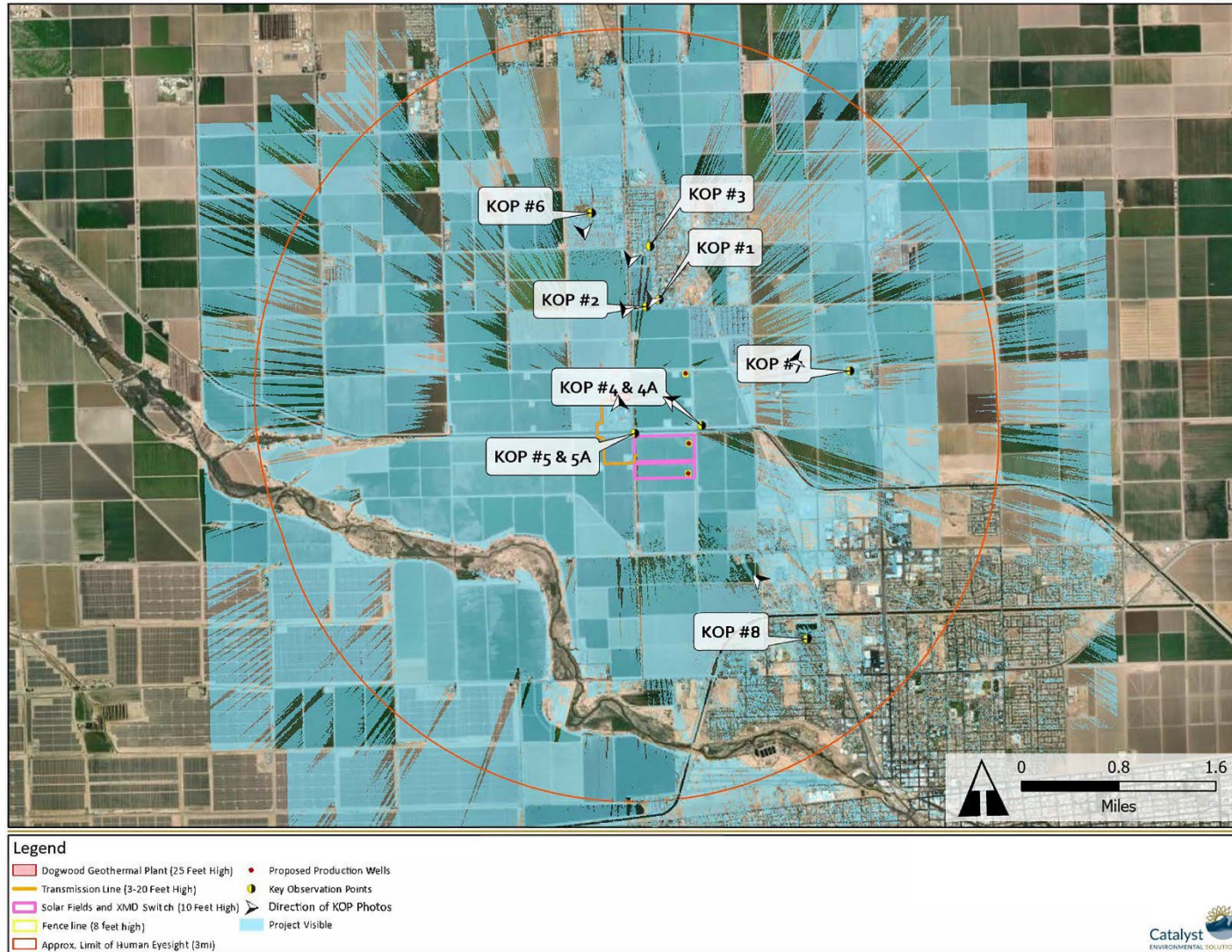
Field surveys were conducted on March 9, 2023, to locate and document visually sensitive areas. During the survey, field staff photographed the existing conditions and visibility of the project area from various potential Key Observation Points (KOPs).

The assessment of existing visual conditions were made based on professional judgment that considered sensitive receptors and sensitive viewing areas in the project vicinity. A total of eight locations were identified as KOPs. Figure 3.2-1 depicts the photo-documented KOP and the direction to which the photographs were taken. The existing visual character of the project site is dominated by agricultural uses. Existing features within the project site and surrounding area contributing to the existing visual form are existing solar farms, local roads, and overhead utilities.

The viewer's distance from landscape elements plays an important role in the determination of an area's visual quality. Landscape elements are considered higher or lower in visual importance based on their proximity to the viewer, which contribute to a project area's overall viewshed. Generally, the closer a resource is to the viewer, the more dominant, and therefore visually important, it is to the viewer.

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Figure 3.2-1. KOPs and View Direction



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

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KOP 1: View from Heber Elementary School

KOP 1 is Heber Elementary School located at 1052 Heber Avenue, Heber, CA approximately 0.66 miles northeast of the project at the closest edge (Figure 3.2-2). The primary view is located on the corner of 14th Street and Heber Avenue, the major transportation corridor to Heber Elementary School, looking south/southwest down Heber Avenue. The view is representative of views from the nearest traffic and resident dense location with a view of the project. The view is characteristically residential with Heber Avenue serving as the main viewing corridor. Residential buildings obstruct the view of the existing HGEC. There is a mountain range present in the background but has low scenic quality, and views of Mount Signal are completely obstructed by residential buildings. Existing transmission lines are visible in the distance along the horizon and some vegetation provides screening of the project area.

KOP 2: View from Closest Residence to the North

Views from KOP 2 represent the closest residence to the north located at 20 East Fawcett Road approximately 0.5 miles from the project site (Figure 3.2-3). The project site as well as the existing HGEC are visible from this location. The existing view is characteristically flat in the foreground and middle ground, consisting primarily of tan and green agricultural land. Existing transmission lines heading southbound along Dogwood Road are present in front of the existing Heber 2 facility. The existing facility appears as dark low lying uniform squares and rectangles against the horizon. Sparse trees are present off to the west. Mount Signal is visible off to the west.

Figure 3.2-2. KOP 1



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-3. KOP 2



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

KOP 3: View from Heber Childrens Park

KOP 3 is located at Heber Childrens Park, 39 Crane Lane, Heber, CA approximately 1 mile north/northeast of the project site (Figure 3.2-4). The area is characterized by a park with a primary-colored recreational structure, open space, and a comparatively medium density of trees. The area is also characterized by residential building structures, transparent fencing in the foreground, and solid white fencing in the background. Local transmission lines and streetlights are visible throughout the foreground. The view of the current project location or any of its associated facilities or transmission lines is completely obstructed by neighborhood residences and surrounding vegetation in the foreground.

KOP 4: View from Closest Residence to the South/Southeast

KOP 4 is from the closest residence approximately 0.75 miles south/southeast of the project site located at 104 Jasper Road, Heber, CA (Figure 3.2-5). From the closest edge of KOP 4 looking to the west/northwest, the existing geothermal facilities and transmission lines area visible in background. The view from KOP 4 is characteristically flat with an agricultural field in the middle ground. In the foreground, vegetation, chain-link fencing, and transmission lines are present. These features provide a combined moderate obstruction of the existing power plant area.

KOP 4A: View from Closest Residence to the South/Southeast

KOP 4A is from the closest residence approximately 0.25 miles south/southeast of the project site located at 104 Jasper Road, Heber, CA (Figure 3.2-6). The landscape is characteristically flat and agricultural with vertical distribution line poles and visually soft lines to connect them. An IID water canal is present in the immediate foreground. Beyond the canal, low-lying vegetation that are shades of tan and green, a vertical water pump, and existing transmission lines are present. In the background, Mount Signal is visible with sparse buildings and vegetative figures in front of it along the horizon.

KOP 5: View from Intersection of Dogwood Road and Willoughby Road

KOP 5 is located at the intersection of Dogwood Road and Willoughby Road approximately 1,000 feet south of the Heber 2 facility (Figure 3.2-7). Looking toward the project site, medium density transmission lines and poles are present in the foreground, reducing in apparent size as they continue north along Dogwood Road. Additionally, an IID canal is present in the foreground with a bridge connecting both sides of Dogwood Road. Dense vegetative features in front of the project area provide screening from the road so that only the tops of the geothermal plants are visible.

Figure 3.2-4. KOP 3



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-5. KOP 4



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-6. KOP 4a



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-7. KOP 5



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

KOP 5A: View from Intersection of Dogwood Road and Willoughby Road

KOP 5A is located at the intersection of Dogwood Road and Willoughby Road and looks south toward the proposed solar facilities, directly across Willoughby Road (Figure 3.2-8). The area is characteristically flat agricultural land. There are limited features visible from KOP 5A with minimal transmission lines and no vegetation obstructing the view in the foreground aside from flat green/tan grassland. Existing transmission lines, sparse buildings and thin, dense, vegetation is visible approximately 1 mile away and further.

KOP 6: View from Margarito “Tito” Huerta Jr. Park

KOP 6 is located at the furthest edge of Margarito “Tito” Huerta Jr. Park at the intersection of West Hawk Street and Palm Avenue, approximately 1.25 miles north of the proposed geothermal facility (Figure 3.2-9). The area is characterized by dense residential buildings and some vegetative features with Palm Avenue serving as a viewing corridor to the project area. Transmission lines can be seen in the middle ground. The Heber 2 geothermal units can be seen in the background facing south down Palm Avenue. Residences and vegetation provide some screening of the existing geothermal units.

KOP 7: View from Mountain View Cemetery

KOP 7 is located at 895 Scaroni Road, Calexico, CA approximately 2.3 miles southeast of the project site (Figure 3.2-10). Looking northwest from the back of the cemetery, the tops of the Heber 1 site are visible however Heber 2 facilities are not visible from this KOP. The area is characterized by expansive and flat agricultural land present in the foreground. Some chain link fencing as well as northbound transmission lines are present. Existing structural features such as generation plants and buildings as well as sparse vegetative features such as trees are present along the horizon.

KOP 8: View from Las Casitas Park

KOP 8 is located at 600 JM Ostrey Street, Calexico, CA southeast of the project site (Figure 3.2-11). Facing northwest toward the project, the project area is not visible from the highest point in Las Casitas Park. The area is characterized by vegetative features and a soccer field with multiple goals throughout the foreground and middle ground. An earthen berm in the background provides a level visual barrier, completely obstructing the view of the project area. Vertical transmission poles and the tops of vegetative features are visible behind the berm providing additional screening of the project area.

Figure 3.2-8. KOP 5a



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-9. KOP 6



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-10. KOP 7



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

Figure 3.2-11. KOP 8



Source: Appendix B of this EIR

3.2.2 Regulatory Setting

This section identifies and summarizes laws, policies, and regulations that are applicable to the project.

State

California Department of Transportation

Caltrans manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to the scenic corridor.

Local

Imperial County General Plan

The Imperial County General Plan contains policies for the protection and conservation of scenic resources and open spaces within the County. These policies also provide guidance for the design of new development. The Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan provides specific goals and objectives for maintaining and protecting the aesthetic character of the region. Table 3.2-1 provides an analysis of the proposed project's consistency with the Conservation and Open Space Element Goal 5. Additionally, the Circulation and Scenic Highways Element of the General Plan provides policies for protecting and enhancing scenic resources within highway corridors in Imperial County, consistent with the Caltrans State Scenic Highway Program.

Imperial County Land Use Ordinance, Title 9

The County's Land Use Ordinance Code provides specific direction for lighting requirements.

DIVISION 17: RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES, SECTION 91702.00 – SPECIFIC STANDARDS FOR ALL RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS

- (R) Lights should be directed or shielded to confine direct rays to the project site and muted to the maximum extent consistent with safety and operational necessity.

Table 3.2-1. Consistency with Applicable General Plan Conservation and Open Space Policies

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
<p>Goal 5: The aesthetic character of the region shall be protected and enhanced to provide a pleasing environment for residential, commercial, recreational, and tourist activity.</p>	<p>Consistent</p>	<p>As described in Section 3.2.3, the proposed project would result in changes to the existing visual character of the project site. However, the proposed project would not result in a significant deterioration in the visual character of the project site or surrounding area from public viewpoints.</p>
<p>Objective 5.1: Encourage the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the desert and mountain landscape.</p>	<p>Consistent</p>	<p>As described in Section 3.2.3, The project's facilities are consistent in nature to the landscapes existing visual character. The development of the Dogwood Project will be built within and directly adjacent to ongoing operations at the HGEC. The combined solar facilities would be visible but would add an overall weak contrast to the existing character of the landscape. Views from most of the key KOPs used in the analysis of aesthetic impacts indicate weak to no contrast with the existing setting.</p> <p>The Imperial County General/Zoning Plan allows for Major Geothermal Projects on the project site and, taking into account the existing power plants, the proposed project would not substantially impact the visual character of the site or its surroundings.</p>

Source: County of Imperial 2016

3.2.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Thresholds of Significance

Based on CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, project impacts related to aesthetics are considered significant if any of the following occur:

- 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
- In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality

- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

Methodology

The analysis prepared for this report relied on the *Visual Resources Baseline & Sensitivity Report* (Appendix B of this EIR) and the *Glint and Glare Analysis* (Appendix C of this EIR).

The methods used to determine the project site's existing conditions and the subsequent change with the implementation of the project was determined using aerial and ground level imagery in conjunction with aerial topography. Field surveys were conducted in March 2023 to locate and document visually sensitive areas. During the survey field staff photographed the existing conditions and visibility of the project area from various potential KOPs. The locations of the eight KOPs in relation to the project site are presented in Figure 3.2-1.

Three aspects of the project were considered for visual impact analysis performed in ESRI's ArcGIS Pro geospatial desktop tool; these include the proposed geothermal facility (approximately 25 feet tall) and the two solar facilities (approximately 10 feet tall, aggregated into one square). The blue area in Figure 3.2-1 represents visibility based on the topography of the area. This means the Dogwood solar arrays, Heber 2 solar arrays, Dogwood OEC, and distribution line are all visible from that location at 6 feet off ground surface (human height) with no natural existing topographical obstructions. The extent of the model extends to 3 miles which is the maximum distance of human sight.

The following steps were taken in analyzing visual impacts of the project:

1. Describe the existing visual setting, including any sensitive viewer groups (i.e., baseline conditions);
2. Identify key viewpoints for visual assessment;
3. Describe or depict the visual appearance of the project at the KOPs.
4. Assess the visual changes that would be introduced by the project and the viewer response based on defined attributes which are neither good nor bad. Change in visual character cannot be described as having good or bad attributes until compared with viewer responses to the change;
5. Determine the degree of visual impact;
6. Proposed methods to minimize adverse impacts

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.2-1 Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

Scenic vistas are typically expansive views from elevated areas that may or may not be part of a designated scenic overlook or other area providing a static view of a landscape. During construction, the use of standard construction equipment including, but not limited to, trucks, cranes, and tractors would be required. The presence of this equipment within the project site during construction would alter views of the area from undeveloped land (with exception of proposed facilities within the existing HGEC) to a construction site. However, the views of construction activity from the surrounding vicinity would be temporary and would not involve any designated scenic vistas as there are no designated

scenic vistas in the project vicinity. Therefore, impacts to a scenic vista are considered less than significant during construction.

Upon project operation, and with implementation of the proposed infrastructure, the overall visual character of the project site would change. However, given that there are no scenic resources or vistas within proximity to the project site, project operation would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. Impacts are considered less than significant.

Mitigation Measure(s)

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.2-2 Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

The project site is not located within a state scenic highway corridor, nor are there any state scenic highways located in proximity to the project site (Caltrans 2018). The nearest road segment considered eligible for a State scenic highway designation is the segment of the Sunset Cliffs Boulevard/State Route 98 west of Ocotillo. The project site is located approximately 29 miles east of Ocotillo; therefore, it would not be visible from the project site. Therefore, no impacts to scenic resources within any state scenic highways would occur.

Mitigation Measure(s)

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.2-3 In non-urbanized areas, would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

The project's facilities are consistent in nature to the landscape's existing visual character. The development of the Dogwood Project will be built within and directly adjacent to ongoing operations at the HGEC. The combined solar facilities would be visible but would add an overall weak contrast to the existing character of the landscape. Views from most of the key KOPs used in the analysis of aesthetic impacts indicate weak to no contrast with the existing setting.

During the construction phase, a crane may be visible to travelers on Dogwood Road or in the vicinity of the project site. This impact would not substantially degrade public views in the area, which already include energy facilities and transmission lines. Moreover, crane use is anticipated to be temporary (less than nine months) and would be removed from the project site after construction of the proposed facilities is complete; resulting in a less than significant impact.

The Imperial County General/Zoning Plan allows for Major Geothermal Projects on the project site and, taking into account the existing power plants, the proposed project would not substantially impact the visual character of the site or its surroundings. Therefore, impacts associated with degrading the existing visual character or quality of the project site are considered less than significant.

A discussion of the potential impacts of the project at KOP 1 through KOP 8 are discussed below:

KOP 1: View from Heber Elementary School. The north side of the Dogwood solar facility and the gen-tie lines would be detectable against the current landscape but contribute an overall weak to moderate level of contrast. From a level elevation, the Dogwood solar facility would appear as a generally dark uniform rectangle in the background of the KOP. Portions of the landscape obstructed by the Dogwood solar facility would be the bottom half of existing transmission lines, and the silhouettes of indistinguishable building structures in the background. The proposed medium voltage distribution line associated with the project would be co-located (attached via trays) with the existing pipeline that runs west before turning north to cross the Beech Drain and Main Canal at the existing above-ground pipeline span. The cable would continue to follow the existing pipeline alignment and connect into the Dogwood OEC. The proposed medium voltage distribution line would generally blend with existing linear features, such as transmission lines, in the project vicinity.

KOP 2: View from Closest Residence to the North. Approximately half of the Dogwood Project's northside and the combined solar facilities would be visible from KOP 2. The project would contribute an overall weak to moderate level of visual contrast against the existing view. The Dogwood Project would generally blend in shape, scale, and color with the existing Heber 2 facility and surrounding features. The combined solar facilities would be the most prominent portion of the project from KOP 2. The combined solar facilities would blend in against the background of dark space vegetative features and surrounding facilities as a dark metallic horizontal bar. The combined solar facilities would not obscure the mountain view. The view of Mount Signal would remain unobscured by the proposed project.

KOP 3: View from Heber Childrens Park. The view of the project site including its associated facilities or transmission lines would remain completely obstructed by existing neighborhood residencies and surrounding vegetation. Therefore, the proposed project would not contrast with the existing landscape of KOP 3.

KOP 4: View from Closest Residence to the South/Southeast. The overall contrast of the project on the surrounding landscape from KOP 4 would be weak. The Dogwood Project would only be partially visible from KOP 4. The visibility of the project area from KOP 4 is partially obstructed by vegetation in the foreground. The size and color of the Dogwood Project would be consistent with the existing facilities and would not deviate from the silhouette line of buildings to the north/northwest. The proposed medium voltage distribution line associated with the project would be co-located (attached via trays) with the existing pipeline that runs west before turning north to cross the Beech Drain and Main Canal at the existing above-ground pipeline span. The cable would continue to follow the existing pipeline alignment and connect into the Dogwood OEC. The proposed medium voltage distribution line would generally blend with existing linear features, such as transmission lines, in the project vicinity.

KOP 4A: View from Closest Residence to the South/Southeast. The proposed solar facilities would present a moderate to strong contrast to the existing landscape. The combined solar facilities would be prominent features and be visually bold against the overall landscape character visible from KOP 4A. The rectangular shape of solar panels would contribute a generally uniform and symmetrical rectangle form across the view of the foreground. Portions of the sparse building and vegetative features in the background of the landscape would be obstructed. The proposed medium voltage distribution line associated with the project would be co-located (attached via trays) with the existing pipeline that runs west before turning north to cross the Beech Drain and Main Canal at the existing above-ground pipeline span. The cable would continue to follow the existing pipeline alignment and connect into the Dogwood OEC. The proposed medium voltage distribution line would generally blend with existing linear features, such as transmission lines, in the project vicinity.

KOP 5: View from Intersection of Dogwood Road and Willoughby Road. The Dogwood Project would present a weak contrast to the existing landscape. The dense vegetative features in front of the Dogwood Project would provide screening so that only the rectangular tops of the facility would be visible. The Dogwood Project would obstruct the current view of the existing Heber 2 facility however it would only increase the relative size of the existing form at the top of the vegetation line. The project would assimilate color, line, and texture to the existing setting. The proposed medium voltage distribution line associated with the project would be co-located (attached via trays) with the existing and proposed pipeline that runs west before turning north to cross the Beech Drain and Main Canal at the existing above-ground pipeline span. The cable would continue to follow the existing pipeline alignment and connect into the Dogwood OEC. The proposed medium voltage distribution line would generally blend with existing linear features, such as transmission lines, in the project vicinity.

KOP 5A: View from Intersection of Dogwood Road and Willoughby Road. The combined solar facilities would result in a moderate to strong contrast with the existing character of the surrounding landscape. The combined solar facilities would add a prominent rectangular in form with vertical features underneath to the foreground of an otherwise flat area. The combined solar facilities would appear dark and metallic against an otherwise green and tan area. The existing transmission lines, sparse buildings and thin, dense, vegetation would mostly be obstructed by the combined solar facilities.

KOP 6: View from Margarito “Tito” Huerta Jr. Park. The project would add a weak level of contrast with the existing character of the surrounding landscape. From this KOP, the Dogwood Project would be situated behind the existing Heber 2 facility and is almost completely obstructed. The tops of the facility would be partially visible in the background. However, they would significantly assimilate with the existing form, color, line, and texture of the existing facility landscape. The proposed medium voltage distribution line associated with the project would be co-located (attached via trays) with the existing and proposed pipeline that runs west before turning north to cross the Beech Drain and Main Canal at the existing above-ground pipeline span. The cable would continue to follow the existing pipeline alignment and connect into the Dogwood OEC. The proposed medium voltage distribution line would generally blend with existing linear features, such as transmission lines, in the project vicinity. The combined solar facilities would not be visible from KOP 6 and therefore would not contribute to the contrast of the landscape.

KOP 7: View from Mountain View Cemetery. The project would have no contrast with the existing characteristic landscape of KOP 7. The view of the project site or any of its associated facilities would be completely obstructed by existing buildings, vegetative features, and transmission lines along the horizon. The project would blend in with the current energy generation activities (i.e., geothermal, solar, production wells, pipelines, etc.) in the immediate vicinity.

KOP 8: View from Las Casitas Park. The project would have no contrast with the existing characteristic landscape of KOP 8. The view of the project site or any of its associated facilities would be completely obstructed by the earthen berm, existing buildings, vegetative features, and transmission lines along the horizon. The project would blend in with the current energy generation activities (i.e., geothermal, solar, production wells, pipelines, etc.) in the immediate vicinity.

Mitigation Measure(s)

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.2-4 Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

The proposed project would include new sources of nighttime lighting. In addition, this discussion also considers potential glare- and glint-related impacts generated by the proposed solar arrays. This discussion considers each issue under the associated headings below.

NIGHTTIME LIGHTING

Minimal lighting would be required for project operation and would be limited to safety and security functions. All lighting would be directed downward and shielded to confine direct rays to the project site and muted to the maximum extent consistent with safety and operational necessity (Title 9, Division 17, Chapter 2: Specific Standards for all Renewable Energy Projects, of the County's Zoning Ordinance).

If additional lighting should be required for nighttime maintenance, portable lighting equipment would be used. Based on these considerations, and the distance to potential viewers, the proposed project is not anticipated to create a new source of substantial light which would adversely affect nighttime views in the project area, and the impact is considered less than significant.

GLARE AND GLINT

A glint and glare assessment (Appendix C of this EIR) was conducted to analyze the potential glint and glare impacts from the project's solar panels.

The analysis focused on potential glare effects on observation points (OPs) and linear travel routes. An inventory of visual receptors was conducted by reviewing publicly available geographic information system (GIS) data to determine OPs from airport landing and take-off points, residences, travel routes, recreation areas, Heber Elementary School, and the Mountain View Cemetery. Aircraft landing and approach were considered at four airports. Although the project is not located on airport property and therefore is not subject to Federal Aviation Administration jurisdiction under Federal Aviation Regulations Part 77 to protect airspace safety and is located beyond the 2-mile final approach as defined in the Interim Solar Policy, the project applicant has sought to voluntarily apply Federal Aviation Administration ocular hazard standards (78 Federal Register 63276).

Analysis for the project was conducted using the GlareGauge model (also known as Solar Glare Hazard Analysis Tool [SGHAT]) developed by Forge Solar and the U.S. Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratories to evaluate potential glare.

The OPs and route receptors used in the analysis consist of 16 residences, three parks (Margarito Huerta Jr. Park, Herber Childrens Park, and Las Casitas Park), Mountain View Cemetery, Herber Elementary School, and a main travel route (Imperial Avenue).

According to the glint and glare assessment (Appendix C of this EIR), the project has the possibility to create low-potential afterimage (green ocular impact) glare at the Holtville Airport East Runway. The OP will have the potential to experience glare up to 290 minutes per year; the glare would occur from the middle of November to the end of January, between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., for approximately 5 minutes per day from 1.4 to 2.0 miles along the approach path.

The project solar arrays may produce temporary glare during daytime views. However, the face of the solar panels sits in a fixed position toward the east that directs glare away from potential receptors (motorists and residents) along Dogwood Road. The relative impact identified from the potentially sensitive KOP locations shows the solar facilities provide a weak overall contrast and impact to the

existing geothermal and solar area. The geothermal facility would not create a source of glare as there are no reflective surfaces and the building color will assimilate to surrounding facilities. Therefore, the project would have a less than significant impact on daytime views of the area.

Mitigation Measure(s)

No mitigation measures are required.

3.2.4 Decommissioning/Restoration and Residual Impacts

Decommissioning/Restoration

At the end of the project's useful life, all equipment and facilities will be properly decommissioned and dismantled. The project site is relatively flat and primarily characterized by a level elevation. Therefore, no grading or significant landform modifications would be required during decommissioning activities upon site restoration in the future. Although the project site would be visually disrupted in the short-term during decommissioning activities, because extensive grading is not required and these activities would be temporary, the visual character of the project site would not be substantially degraded in the short-term and related impacts would be less than significant.

Residual

Impacts related to potential substantial glare and glint impacts on roadway travelers are less than significant and would not require mitigation measures. Impacts related to substantial alteration of a scenic vista and damage to designated scenic corridor would have no impact, therefore no additional mitigation measures are required. Changes to visual character of the project area would be less than significant and would be transitioned back to their prior (pre-project) conditions following site decommissioning. Based on these conclusions, implementation of the project would not result in residual significant unmitigable impacts on the visual character of the project area or add substantial amounts of light and glare.