

4.2 VISUAL RESOURCES

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is entrusted with the care of public lands containing many outstanding scenic landscapes. By law, the BLM is responsible for managing these public lands for multiple uses. The BLM is also responsible for ensuring that the scenic values of these public lands are considered before allowing uses that may have negative visual impacts.

4.2.1 Proposed Project

4.2.1.1 Affected Environment

Segments 1, 2, and 3 predominantly cross approximately 43.39 miles of landscape that commonly occurs in the Mojave Desert—mountains, basins, sparse vegetation, and sand and gravel basins that drain to salt flats. The approximately 39 miles of BLM-managed land crossed by the fiber optic line is located in BLM Scenic Quality Class III. This classification identifies those landscapes with features common to the physiographic region, as defined by guidelines in the BLM's Visual Resource Inventory Manual (VRM), which allow for a moderate level of change, with activities that may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer.

Segments 1, 2, and 3 are located within and/or immediately adjacent to previously disturbed lands containing existing telephone cable, pipeline, road, transmission, power, and telephone line rights-of-way (ROW). The cable route is within existing street and road ROWs that are previously disturbed and lacking major vegetative growth.

The Proposed Project area is also located within the Mojave National Preserve—a 1.4 million-acre preserve located in the heart of the Mojave Desert.

Cima Road from Interstate 15 (I-15) southeast to Cima Road and Kelso-Cima Road from Kelso Road northeast to Cima Road are County of San Bernardino-designated scenic routes (County of San Bernardino General Plan 2007) that occur along Segment 2. According to the San Bernardino County General Plan Open Space Element, a designated scenic route is a roadway that has scenic vistas and other scenic and aesthetic qualities that over time have been found to add beauty to the county. There are no other county-designated scenic routes crossed or adjacent to the Proposed Project. I-15 northeast to State Route 127 is a California Eligible Scenic Highway; however, there are no officially designated state scenic highways or routes in the Proposed Project area. The scenic resources described above are depicted in Figure 4.2-1: Scenic Resources.

4.2.1.2 Significance Criteria

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), impacts to visual resources would be considered significant if the Proposed Project:

- has a substantial, adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- substantially damages scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- substantially degrades the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;
- creates a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area;
- affects the quality of any scenic resources, or scenic resources having rare or unique values;
- affects views from, or the visual setting of, designated or planned parks, wilderness areas, natural areas, or other visually sensitive land uses;
- affects views from, or the visual setting of, travel routes; and/or views from, or the visual setting of, established, designated, or planned recreational, educational, or scientific facilities, use areas, activities, viewpoints, or vistas.

If the Proposed Project results in impacts beyond the intent of the objectives identified for the VRM Class III, the significance criteria may be exceeded.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), consideration of significant impacts on the human environment is conducted in accordance with Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27, which states the word “significant” used in NEPA requires considerations of both context and intensity (specified in Section 1.2). Following the public comment period, a finding regarding significant impacts will be prepared in accordance with this provision.

4.2.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation

During construction, visual impacts to scenic resources, including the Mojave National Preserve, would result from the presence of equipment, materials, and work crews along the cable route. This equipment may be visible for long distances due to the relatively flat topography of the area. Visual short-term impacts may also result from temporary vegetation crushing, possible minor erosion, and dust created by construction activities. However, impacts would be temporary, short-term, and localized given that the Proposed Project construction would be conducted in specified segments and in a linear fashion.

Once Project construction has been completed, the Proposed Project area would be returned to preconstruction conditions. However, approximately 77 new marker posts along the ROW would be installed. The marker posts would be consistent with the existing marker posts present along the ROW. Therefore, they are not expected to significantly alter the area’s visual character. Further, the marker posts are 6 inches by 6 inches wide and 8 feet to 16 feet tall and composed of wood. Because the majority of the Proposed Project would be installed underground and the marker posts are 6 inches by 6 inches wide, are composed of wood, and would be added to an area where marker posts currently exist, no substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista is expected to occur.

Additionally, because the Proposed Project would be constructed underground, additional sources of lighting would not be required. New sources of lighting or glare would not be created by the marker posts because they are composed of wood.

This level of visual modification and contrast would be consistent with BLM management objectives for a Class III area.

4.2.2 No Action Alternative

Selection of the No Action Alternative, as described in Section 2.5.1 No Action Alternative, would not result in construction of the Proposed Project and potential effects to the visual resources described in Section 4.2.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation would not occur.

Figure 4.2-1: Scenic Resources

Figure 4.2-1: Scenic Resources has been omitted from this document and is included separately as Fig4_2-1.pdf.