

3.9 AESTHETICS

This section generally describes the existing visual quality of the creek and publicly accessible viewpoints. It then evaluates the short-term (construction) and long-term (post restoration) impacts of the restoration projects on public views. Mitigation measures are identified as appropriate.

3.9.1 Setting

Environmental Setting

General Setting

Methods

Field visits were conducted in June 2014 with the Streamkeeper to selected sites characteristic of the proposed restoration areas. These included visually accessible locations along lower Putah Creek, from the Putah South Canal Diversion Dam to the Los Rios Check Dam on the west side of the Yolo Bypass. These locations were visually assessed from public roads where road and parking access were available along the riparian corridor. In addition, for the Duncan-Giovannoni site, private orchard roads were used to access the creek. Google Earth satellite imagery was used to supplement these visits for sites that were not visually accessible.

General Visual Character

Agricultural landscapes, the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta (Delta) and marshlands, and oak- and grass-covered hills are the primary aesthetic resources in the Project Area. Prominent scenic resources include marshlands and Delta waters located to the south, the Coast Range extending in a north-south direction west of the Project Area, and expanses of agricultural lands located on either side of the creek in most areas.

Agricultural lands account for more land than any other land use, which, in turn, defines much of the county's visual character, supports wildlife habitats and migration corridors, provides open space and recreational amenities for residents and visitors, and acts as a separator defining the County's cities.

The visual quality of the Upper Reach of the Lower Putah Creek does not vary much along different viewing locations. The typical view is comprised of a narrow row of tall trees on both sides of the creek banks, which lead down to either a still or slowly moving pool, or to a flowing stream. On either side of the creek further from the tops of

the banks are views of flat agricultural land (orchards and field crops) interspersed with farm complexes and residences. The views from areas near the University of California Davis, and the City of Winters are more diverse with a greater mix of buildings and infrastructure from residences, the university, and commercial activity. Typically, the visual character of the creek encompasses the following.

- The creek is seen as a channel cut down into steep banks (see Figure 3.9-1).
- Riparian vegetation including native and non-native trees, shrubs, and various grasses growing in a narrow strip on both sides of the creek. Some views have dense strands of native and non-native vegetation down to the creek channel, whereas other sections are steeper banks with eroding slopes (see Section 3.4, *Biological Resources*, for details) (see Figure 3.9-2).
- Within the channels, either a narrow stream or a wider pool fills the entire channel from bank to bank (see Figures 3.9-3 and 3.9-4).
- Large pools with heavy vegetation around them have formed where gravel mining has deepened and widened the creek, or where diversions have backed up creek waters (see Figure 3.9-5).
- In a few locations, roads and bridges cross the creek, providing visual access to the channel area (see Figure 3.9-6).
- In a few locations, parks or public open space and trails have been constructed alongside the creek (see Figures 3.9-7 and 3.9-8).
- Along most of the study area agricultural fields and orchards abutting the narrow riparian band (see Figure 3.9-9).
- In a few locations, housing has been built near the channel.
- The creek also passes through or near urbanized portions of the University of California Davis campus and the City of Winters, where public views are afforded and where urban development encroaches into creek views.

Visual Access

The majority of the Upper Reach of Lower Putah Creek is only visible to farmers and local residents where the creek channel abuts their property, and is not visible to the public unless they canoe the creek (see Section 3.8, *Land Use*). These private views are seen from private ranch roads and fields.



Figure 3.9-1 View of Putah Creek Showing Steepened Banks



Figure 3.9-2 View of Putah Creek Showing Dense Riparian Vegetation



Figure 3.9-3 View of Narrow, Flowing Area Putah Creek Stream



Figure 3.9-4 View of Wide Pool Area of Putah Creek (Backed Up By Agricultural Diversion Dam)



Figure 3.9-5 View of Pool Area (Former Gravel Pit)



Figure 3.9-6 View of Mature Trees from Mace Road Bridge Over Putah Creek



Figure 3.9-7 View of Creekside Picnic Area on UC Davis Putah Creek Riparian Preserve



Figure 3.9-8 View of Recently Restored Creek Channel and Public Paths at Winters Nature Park



Figure 3.9-9 View of Agricultural Lands Near Putah Creek

Portions of the creek channel are viewable to the public in the few places where there are road/bridge crossings and where roads approach the creek vicinity. The public views generally are of trees and other vegetation along the upland strip surrounding the creek banks. In a few locations, there is also a visual opening to the water. These views of short stretches of the creek or adjacent vegetation can be seen from the following road crossings or adjacent parallel stretches:

- Putah Creek Road
- Holmes Lane
- Winters Road
- Railroad Avenue
- Highway 505
- Boyce Road
- Martinez Lane
- Stevenson Bridge Road/Highway 95-A
- Levee Road

- Pedrick Road/Lincoln Highway
- Highway 80
- Old Davis Road
- Mace Boulevard
- Road 106-A to Yolo Bypass

Portions of the 21-mile Project alignment are accessible to the public from three parks. The most upstream park is Lake Solano County Park, located at the west end of the Project alignment below Lake Solano. Views of the creek also are afforded from Winters Putah Creek Nature Park in the City of Winters, where restoration has already been implemented. Additionally, the public can view the creek at Putah Creek Picnic Area (also called Camp Putah) on Levee Road at the western edge of the University of California, Davis facility. Canoeists also have views of the creek channel from the water.

Views and viewpoints along each reach are summarized below.

Project Area Conditions by Reach

NAWCA/Mariani

The visual character of this reach is dominated by a broad swath of creekside open space/habitat (not publicly accessible), surrounded by orchards and natural forested and open areas. Portions of the alignment may be visible from Putah Creek Road and several houses that lie just outside of the alignment on the southwest side of the creek. There is no formal access to this alignment, therefore views of the channel area are limited to people informally accessing that area from nearby farm roads.

Duncan-Giovannoni

Views of this reach consist of walnut groves that can be seen from Putah Creek Road. The approach to the creek is only visible from the private orchard property (no public viewing access) as a downward sloping embankment with an opening to the creek view where the water area appeared to be a wider span (stagnant pool) than other viewable locations. The vegetation views on this site included grasses, maple trees, dense reeds, blackberry, elderberry, and wild roses.

Winters Putah Creek Nature Park

Views of this reach are afforded from the trails in the Putah Creek Nature Park, as well as from the bridges crossing the creek in the City of Winters. The creek has already been restored in this reach, and views are of a naturalistic creek channel with riparian vegetation. Views also include the historic railroad bridge.

East of 505

In this reach, public views of Putah Creek are available from Highway 505 (crosses above the creek on the west border) and Putah Creek Road. The public views are of small areas of riparian vegetation (as described for the Duncan Giovannoni site), as well as a line of taller trees.

Warren

In this reach, Putah Creek Road diverges south and there are no public views from the road. The creek may be visually accessible from some of the residences in the El Rio subdivision, which is north of the site.

Upper McNamara

Putah Creek Road extends along the western half of the Upper McNamara Pool reach, with a slight public view of trees between the creek and road until Putah Creek Road diverges south. There are no other public viewing locations in this site.

Lower McNamara

Putah Creek Road lies too far south to afford any public views of the creek on this reach. From the surrounding farmland, there may be private views of riparian vegetation and tall trees bordering the creek.

MacQuiddy (Lester)

This reach has essentially same view as previously described in the Lower McNamara reach. Only farm roads may offer predominantly private views of the creek, and rows of trees can be seen in more distant views.

Russell Ranch

Martinez Lane parallels the creek on the Russell Ranch site north of Putah Creek Road. There may be public views of riparian vegetation and tall trees bordering the creek in this reach from Martinez Lane.

Stevenson Bridge

This reach is crossed by Stevenson Bridge and Highway 95-A and thus there are public views of the riparian vegetation and channel area from both crossing points. From the bridge, there are two sections that provide overlooks to the creek including riparian vegetation, slowly flowing water, and pool areas.

Glide Ranch

In the Glide Ranch site, Levee Road crosses Putah Creek from the north shore to the eastern section. There are views of from a few residences situated along the surrounding unpaved roads and from a few other lightly travelled adjacent farm roads. These views are of riparian vegetation, primarily a line of trees visible from the road.

Nishikawa

The public can access the Nishikawa reach by driving up to the back of the riparian zone from Pedrick Road/Lincoln Highway. The creek views are similar to other sites, with a strip of trees and a slow-moving pool of water. There is also a walking path near the creek and through the riparian vegetation of this site, which permits views of the channel and associated vegetation.

Olmo-Hammond-UCD

There is public access from UCD in both directions along the Putah Creek Riparian Preservation Trail, which runs into the Olmo-Hammond-UCD reach (continuing from the Nishikawa site) along the north side of the creek. A paved levee road and a picnic area also provide visual access to the creek by the public. From the trail, there are views of riparian vegetation, large oak trees shading the path, and stagnant pools of creek water.

Highway 80 to Old Davis Road

On this site, Putah Creek is crossed by Highway 80 on the west and Old Davis Road on the east. There are public views of small areas of the creek from these roads. Additionally, a train track and a hiking trail cross the creek and provide public views of riparian vegetation, taller trees on the banks, as well as pooled water in the creek.

Old Davis Road to Mace

There is substantial visual access for pedestrians and drivers to this reach from UC Davis, which is on the north side of Putah Creek. Public views of the creek are available from Levee Road and an adjacent parking lot, from which paths lead down to the creek providing access from the university. Viewers may see a thin strip of trees and a large

stagnant/slow moving pool with green algae. The more distant scenic views include University research facilities to the north leading to Mace Road as well as agricultural landscapes to the south of the creek.

Mace to Road 106A

Road 106A and 5th Street runs along the creek on the south end for the lower third of the alignment. From these roads, there is a public view of Putah Creek as a still pool lined by a thin riparian strip of vegetation and trees. The landscape is agricultural and there are no residences with views of the creek.

Road 106A to Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

This reach is only accessible by farm roads and surrounded by agricultural lands, and thus there are primarily only private views of the creek area. Similar to other sites that are mostly obscured from public view, views are comprised of a thin band of trees and a stagnant pool.

Regulatory Setting

Federal Regulations

There are no applicable State or federal regulations pertaining to visual quality.

State Regulations

There are no applicable State or federal regulations pertaining to visual quality.

Local Regulations and Regional Context

Solano County

The county's scenic resources policies and programs work in two ways. According to the General Plan, the County's scenic resource policies work in two ways: (1) they protect valued landscape features found throughout the county, and (2) they ensure that new urban or rural development within the scenic roadway corridors is developed in a manner that respects and maintains the integrity of the viewsheds (Solano County, 2008, p. RS-5).

Within the *Resources Chapter* of the General Plan, the following policies address visual resources (Solano County, 2008, p. RS-5):

Policy RS.G-4: Preserve, conserve, and enhance valuable open space lands that provide wildlife habitat; conserve natural and visual resources; convey cultural identity; and improve public safety.

Policy RS.G-6: Preserve the visual character and identity of communities by maintaining open space areas between them.

County area and specific plans also contain language aimed at preserving, conserving, and enhancing visual resource values within the target planning area. The plans identify viewsheds or general scenic resources to be protected or improved. Plans that discuss visual resource protection explicitly include the Tri-City and County Cooperative Plan for Agriculture and Open Space Preservation. The scenic resource policies from these plans follow (Solano County, 2008, p. RS-37).

Policy RS.P-35: Protect the unique scenic features of Solano County, particularly hills, ridgelines, wetlands, and water bodies.

Policy RS.P-36: Support and encourage practices that reduce light pollution and preserve views of the night sky.

Policy RS.P-37: Protect the visual character of designated scenic roadways.

There are no State-designated scenic highways in Solano County in general or specifically in the study area (EDAW, 2008, page 4-1-1).

Yolo County

With respect to the study area that encompasses Putah Creek in Yolo County, the visual resources include a mesh of rangeland, crop fields, and riverine landscapes that adjoin developed areas. Yolo County General Plan policies relating to visual character or scenic resources include (Solano County, 2008, pp. LU-29, 30):

Policy CC-1.2: Preserve and enhance the rural landscape as an important scenic feature of the County.

Policy CC-1.3: Protect the rural night sky as an important scenic feature to the greatest feasible extent where lighting is needed.

Policy CC-1.4: Identify and preserve, where possible, landmarks and icons which contribute to the identity and character of the rural areas.

Policy CC-1.5: Significant site features, such as trees, water courses, rock outcroppings, historic structures and scenic views shall be used to guide site planning and design in new development. Where possible, these features shall become focal points of the development.

Policy CC-1.11: Require the development of open space corridors, bicycle paths and trails integrating waterways, scenic areas and County parks where appropriate, in collaboration with affected land owners as a part of Project approval. The intent is to connect each community and city and other special places and corridors, throughout the County.

Policy CC-1.12: Preserve and enhance the scenic quality of the County's rural roadway system. Prohibit projects and activities that would obscure, detract from, or negatively affect the quality of views from designated scenic roadways or scenic highways.

Policy CC-1.13: The following routes are designated as local scenic roadways:

- State Route 128 (Winters to Napa County line)

Policy CC-1.14: Designate other scenic roadways or routes where appropriate using the following criteria: the roadway or route traverses a scenic corridor, water feature, open space area or other interesting or unique areas, both urban and rural and may include bikeways, hiking and riding trails and pedestrian ways.

Policy CC-1.15: The following features shall be protected and preserved along designated scenic roadways and routes, except where there are health and safety concerns:

- Trees and other natural or unique vegetation.
- Landforms and natural or unique features.
- Views and vistas.
- Historic structures (where feasible), including buildings, bridges and signs.

Policy CC-1.16: The following features shall be stringently regulated along designated scenic roadways and routes with the intent of preserving and protecting the scenic qualities of the roadway or route:

- Signage.
- Architectural design of adjoining structures.
- Construction, repair and maintenance operations.

City of Winters

The City of Winters General Plan was adopted in 1992 (does not appear to have a more recent update). The following policy may be relevant to visual quality for Putah Creek (City of Winters, 1992, p. II-69):

Policy VIII.A.6: The City shall promote the creation of a continuous and integrated open space network that includes Putah Creek, Dry Creek, city parks, schools, the golf course, the North Area drainage detention lake, the Open Space Preserve, and landscaped roadways.

3.9.2 Significance Criteria

Criteria for determining significant impacts are based upon the CEQA Guidelines (Appendix G) and professional judgment. These guidelines state that the project would have a significant impact on visual quality if it 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.

Because the Project Description limits construction to be 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., night lighting impacts are not considered further in this EIR.

3.9.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impacts and mitigation measures are described below both generally and by reach. Applicable impacts and mitigation measures for each reach are summarized in Table 3.9-1, at the end of this section.

General Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact 3.9-1: Construction Impacts to Views.

Shorter-term temporary impacts on views would occur during the construction phase when there will be vegetation and tree removal as well as construction equipment. For most of the reaches, construction and final changes would not be visible by more than a few people and mostly seen from a substantial distance. The primary visual impact to all of the sites would be temporary changes in the creek channel's appearance during restoration activities. The aesthetics and views of the riparian zone would be temporarily impacted during the restoration work. The primary visual impact would be the change in the channel's appearance from the removal of riparian vegetation and non-native tall trees, earth moving, storage of equipment near the creek, and potentially construction fencing. The views during these activities would change from existing views of dense vegetation to more barren areas as well as construction equipment and workers in the sites during construction. In some areas, the creek feature would temporarily disappear while the flows would be piped around the construction area.

Construction activities would be done in phases with approximately 3 to 5 miles being restored per year. Because of: 1) the short duration of project construction; 2) the limited extent of each year's work; 3) the limited near-field visibility of most reaches to the public; and 4) the distance of more heavily traveled roads from the corridor, most of the visual impacts associated with construction would not be considered significant. However, in areas with substantial public use and visibility, construction activities such as earth moving, vegetation removal, and equipment storage may negatively affect views during the construction period. Mitigation Measure 3.9-1 would reduce this impact to a **less-than-significant** level.

Mitigation Measure 3.9-1: Construction Fencing and Educational Signage.

In areas where construction activities would be visible to substantial numbers of viewers, SCWA shall place interpretive signage explaining the restoration process and goals. In addition, stockpiles shall be located away from public views and, if that is not

feasible, screening fencing shall be placed to limit public views of equipment storage and soil stockpiles from public paths and recreation areas.

Impact 3.9-2: Long-Term Impacts on Views.

Over the longer term, visual quality would be affected by re-vegetation that would begin with more barren views until the new vegetation grows to sufficiently create wider expanses of green around the restored riparian corridor. In the long-term, both visual quality and visual access would be improved, with elimination of many of the stagnant pools and weedy areas and reestablishment of a more free-flowing creek surrounded by native vegetation. In the long-term, the restoration work would be beneficial to visual quality and therefore the long-term impacts are positive and no mitigation is required.

An example of post-construction visual impacts is afforded by the recently completed Winters Park creek restoration project (see Figure 3.9-8). The Winters Putah Creek Nature Park site is a recreation area with benches and an opening leading to the creek, where there are youth camps and swimming in the creek. The water view is a series of faster-moving creek segments interspersed with small pools. There is also a view of a short downward path to the creek covered in a mix of gravel and surface growth. The view of the creek banks and access path includes vegetation, mostly medium to taller trees creating a shaded setting.

Site-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures*NAWCA/Mariani*

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. However, because of the limited public viewpoints described in the Setting section, this impact would be minimal.

Duncan-Giovannoni

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The reach is crossed by Putah Creek Road, and views from this crossing would be affected during construction. However those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Winters Putah Creek Nature Park

Maintenance activities proposed by the Project would not adversely affect visual quality in this reach.

East of 505

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is crossed by Highway 505 and paralleled by Putah Creek Road. During construction, views from these crossings would be affected, however those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Therefore this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Warren

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach, however, because the reach is not publicly accessible, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Upper McNamara

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is visible from Putah Creek Road. However those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Further, long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Lower McNamara

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach, however, because the reach is not publicly accessible by any road crossings or trails, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

MacQuiddy (Lester)

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach, however, because the reach is not publicly accessible by any road crossings or trails, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Russell Ranch

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach, however, because the reach is not publicly accessible by any road crossings or trails, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Stevenson Bridge

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is crossed by Stevenson Creek Bridge/Highway 95-A. During construction, views from this crossing would be affected. During construction, views from these crossings would be affected, however those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Therefore this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation would be required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Glide Ranch

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. There are no public views from roads or trails. There may be limited views from several houses and farm roads. This impact would be less than significant due to the distance between these properties and the construction activities as well as the limited number of potential viewers. Thus, no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Nishikawa

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is crossed by Pedrick Road/Lincoln Highway. During construction, views from these crossings would be affected, however those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Therefore visual impacts would be less than significant. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Olmo-Hammond-UCD

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The reach is publicly accessible, includes a public picnic/camp area, and is crossed by hiking trails, views from which would be adversely affected during construction. This impact would be reduced to a less than significant level by implementation of Mitigation Measure

3.9-1. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

I-80 to Old Davis Road

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is crossed by several roads and trails: Highway 80 on the West and Old Davis Road on the East as well as a hiking trail and train track. The public views at these crossings and access points would be affected during construction. This impact would be reduced to a less than significant level by implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.9-1. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Old Davis Road to Mace

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is paralleled by Levee Road and crossed by Old Davis Road, and Mace Boulevard. The views of the creek from these crossings would be affected during construction, however those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Therefore visual impacts would be less than significant. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Mace to Road 106A

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach. The site is crossed by Road 106A and 5th Street. During construction, views from these crossings would be affected, however those views are limited and most viewers would be in passing vehicles, with only a few seconds of viewing time. Project construction also would adversely affect views from the City of Davis South Fork Preserve. This impact is significant but would be reduced to less-than-significant by implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.9-1. Long-term impacts on visual quality on this reach would be positive since the reach would be re-vegetated.

Road 106A to Yolo Bypass Wildlife Area

Construction impacts described in Impact 3.9-1 would occur on this reach, and the western edge of this alignment would be visible briefly from cars passing along the Road 106A bridge. In addition, although the site is publically accessible at its lower end, and there may be limited views from farm roads, traffic in the area is generally limited to local agricultural and resource management personnel. Therefore, this impact would be less than significant and no mitigation is required. Long-term impacts on visual quality

on this reach would be positive because stagnant pools would be replaced by a flowing creek and associated riparian restoration.

Table 3.9-1 Summary of Visual Quality Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Sites	Impact 3.9-1 Construction Impacts to Views	Impact 3.9-2 Long-Term Adverse Impacts on Views	Applicable Mitigation Measures
NAWCA/Mariani	LTS	NI	n/a
Duncan-Giovannoni	LTS	NI	n/a
Winters Putah Creek Nature Park	NI	NI	n/a
East of 505	LTS	NI	n/a
Warren	NI	NI	n/a
Upper McNamara	LTS	NI	n/a
Lower McNamara	NI	NI	n/a
Russell Ranch	NI	NI	n/a
MacQuiddy (Lester)	NI	NI	n/a
Stevenson Bridge	LTS	NI	n/a
Glide Ranch	LTS	NI	n/a
Nishikawa	LTS	NI	n/a
Olmo-Hammond-UCD	SM	NI	MM 3.9-1
I-80 to Old Davis Road	SM	NI	MM 3.9-1
Old Davis Road to Mace	SM	NI	MM 3.9-1
Mace to Road 106A	SM	NI	MM 3.9-1
Road 106A to YBWA	LTS	NI	n/a

NI = no impact, LS = LTS = Less than Significant Impact, SM = Significant but mitigatable to less than significant with measures identified in this section, and SU = Significant and Unavoidable, even after mitigation.

