

3.3.9 Aesthetic Resources

The discussion of aesthetic resources is divided into four sections. The affected environment is discussed in Section 3.3.9.1, environmental effects of the Project are discussed in Section 3.3.9.2, proposed conditions are discussed in Section 3.3.9.3, and unavoidable adverse effects are addressed in Section 3.3.9.4.

To provide additional data where existing, relevant, and reasonably available, information from YCWA's PAD was not sufficient to determine the potential effects of the Project on aesthetic resources, YCWA conducted one study (Technical Memorandum 10-1, *Visual Quality on Federal Land*), which can be found on FERC's ELibrary as referenced by the FERC accession number provided in Table E6-2 of Appendix E6 of YCWA's Amended FLA.

3.3.9.1 Affected Environment

This section is divided into two subsections: 1) regulatory context; and 2) existing visual conditions.

3.3.9.1.1 Regulatory Context

The Project is located on federal land and private land primarily in Yuba County, California, and a small portion in Nevada County and Sierra County, California. For this Study, the only federal lands discussed are managed by the Forest Service around Bullards Bar Reservoir, Log Cabin Diversion Dam and Our House Diversion Dam. Lands managed by the Forest Service are referred to as National Forest System lands (NFS lands).

Forest Service

On NFS lands south of New Bullards Bar Reservoir, the North Yuba River and Canyon Creek, the TNF has management authority. On NFS lands north of New Bullards Bar Reservoir, the North Yuba River and Canyon Creek, the PNF has management authority. For day-to-day recreation management, the TNF is the lead Forest. On NFS land managed by the TNF, the TNF LRMP, as amended, established Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) under Forest Standards and Guidelines and Management Area direction that require land management activities meet a designated specific VQO on various areas of NFS land. The VQOs are displayed on a map, the Visual Quality Objective Map dated 1989, provided in the LRMP identified as the Recreation Element. The VQOs are defined under the TNF LRMP, as amended, Standards and Guidelines. For the Project, the pertinent VQOs are "Retention," "Partial Retention" and "Modification." The Retention VQO allows management activities that are not visually evident. The Partial Retention VQO allows management activities that remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. The Modification VQO allows management that may visually dominate the original characteristic landscape, but activities altering the vegetative and land form must borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture, and at such a scale that the visual characteristics are those of natural occurrences within the surrounding area or character type. The VQOs and their definitions are primarily focused on forest land management

activities, but they also apply to existing Facilities and proposed Facilities. In a similar fashion, NFS land managed by the PNF is guided by the PNF LRMP, as amended, established VQOs under Forest Standards and Guidelines and Management Area direction that require land management activities meet a specific VQO on various areas of NFS land. The VQOs are displayed on a map, the Visual Quality Objective Map dated 1988, provided in the PNF LRMP, as amended, identified as the Recreation Element. The VQOs are defined under the PNF LRMP, as amended, Standards and Guidelines. The definitions of the VQOs are the same as the TNF described above, since they are part of a National Visual Management System.

Yuba County

YCWA used a simplified version of the Forest Service Visual Management System to assess facilities located on private land, including land owned by YCWA when it was adjacent to NFS lands. YCWA also identified the visual direction contained in the General Plan for Yuba County. In general, the General Plan has broad goals to maintain or enhance the visual quality of the lands within the county with an emphasis on a policy that states: “*encourage the preservation and enhancement of the natural features of the County, including rivers and areas of scenic beauty, and native vegetation*” (Yuba County 1973). In addition, emphasis is placed on protecting views from scenic highways and other important highways that are specifically named. These highways include Marysville Road and State Highway 49. New Bullards Bar Dam and associated facilities, along with a marina, two boat launches, and several recreation facilities are located in Yuba County on NFS lands and lands owned by YCWA.

Sierra County and Nevada County

Our House Diversion Dam and impoundment straddle the Sierra County/Nevada County line (Sierra County to the north and Nevada County to the south of the line). This is the only YCWA facility in these two counties. Both counties list State Highway 49 as an emphasis for retaining the natural visual quality along the highway corridor. However, Our House Diversion Dam is located deep in the Middle Yuba River Canyon and is not visible from State Highway 49 due to intervening terrain. Therefore, there are no visual concerns for this Facility in regards to Sierra and Nevada County Plan standards and it will not be further addressed.

3.3.9.1.2 Existing Visual Conditions

The facilities and features of the Project are located in the northern Sierra Nevada mountain range (character type) and more specifically within the sub-region of flat ridge tops and steep valley zone. The dominant visual character for the New Bullards Bar Reservoir area is a continuous cover of mixed conifer forest along with oaks and madrone. Madrone, live oak, and black oak are a significant component of the mixed conifer forest in the New Bullards Bar Reservoir area. Log Cabin Diversion Dam and Our House Diversion Dam are included in this area, but both are located in the lower parts of the steep valley walls. The mixed conifer is composed primarily of ponderosa pine, white fir, and Douglas fir with a sprinkling of sugar pine. The forest vegetation is vigorous and dense with medium to fine texture and medium to dark green in color. In the winter, the conifers keep the hillsides looking predominantly green. In the spring, the hillsides look a brighter yellow/green due to new growth on the conifers and new

leaves on the deciduous trees. The terrain is rolling to flat ridge tops interspersed with deep valleys. Natural rock outcroppings and cliff faces are not common to see in the flatter terrain, but do show up along the steep valley walls that cut through the flat ridge tops and rolling hills. Red, yellow, and white soils along the shoreline are exposed when the New Bullards Bar Reservoir water surface level drops. Visual contrast of Project facilities is determined by comparing to the conditions as described above.

The Project reservoir and impoundments provide an additional scenic asset to the landscape. The public takes advantage of these assets by hiking, biking, fishing, boating, camping, and picnicking on or nearby these reservoirs. Most of the recreation focus is on New Bullards Bar Reservoir because it provides one of the largest water features in the area and public access is encouraged through trails, boat ramps, campgrounds and a marina. In contrast, Log Cabin Diversion Dam and Our House Diversion Dam impoundments do not provide recreation facilities. Overall, the dams, recreation facilities, and other Project facilities tend to blend into the landscape from most viewpoints. However, New Bullards Bar Dam, Emerald Cove Marina, and the moored boats, including houseboats, exhibit strong visual contrast due to light colors, uniform textures, and geometric shapes seen in the foreground and near middle ground from Marysville Road, Sunset Vista Point, Dam Overlook, Cottage Creek Boat Launch, Emerald Cove Marina, and boats on the southern part of the reservoir.

3.3.9.2 Environmental Effects

This section includes a description of the anticipated effects of YCWA's proposed Project, which includes YCWA's proposed PM&E measures (Appendix E2) on aesthetic resources. The section is divided into the following areas: 1) effects of construction-related activities; 2) effects of continued Project O&M.

YCWA's proposed Project includes the following conditions related to aesthetic resources.

- Proposed Condition GEN6: Review of Improvements on NFS Land
- Proposed Condition RR1: Implement Recreation Facilities Management Plan
- Proposed Condition VR1: Implement Visual Resource Management Plan

Refer to Appendix E2 for the full text of the proposed condition. Each condition is discussed below, including how the condition would protect or enhance aesthetic resources. Implementation of these conditions would help to assure that the effects of the proposed Project on aesthetic resources would be less than significant. All of the above conditions have been tentatively agreed to by the Forest Service and other agencies (Table 2.2-6).

3.3.9.2.1 Effects of Construction-Related Activities

YCWA's proposed Project includes the construction of several facilities, including New Colgate Powerhouse TDS, the New Bullards Bar Dam Auxiliary Flood Control Outlet, modifications to Our House Diversion Dam and Log Cabin Diversion Dam fish release outlets, modifications to

Lohman Ridge Diversion Tunnel Intake and the construction of various recreation facilities. The new facilities and anticipated construction are described in Section 2.2.1.

New Bullards Bar Dam Auxiliary Flood Control Outlet

Construction of the new Auxiliary Flood Control Outlet would have a less than a significant effect on aesthetic resources. Most of the work would occur within the river canyon and underground, which is not viewable by the public. The work near the dam and at the laydown areas would be noticeable, but of short duration and in areas near the dam where the public is accustomed to viewing dam features. Outside of the short-term visibility of the construction equipment and staff in near the dam, the work, which would be located on YCWA lands, would remain consistent with Yuba County's visual direction, which emphasizes protecting views from scenic highways and other important highways, including Marysville Road where the work occurs. Once completed, the work would not impact the existing Project recreation site (Dam Overlook) long-term that provides a scenic view of New Bullards Bar Reservoir, the downstream river canyon and the New Bullards Bar Dam which is a scenic asset and part of the existing visual condition. YCWA would obtain all necessary permits and approvals for the work, and would adhere to all permit terms and conditions, which is expected to partially mitigate any aesthetic impacts. More specifically, YCWA's proposed Condition VR1 provides direction, including consultation with the Forest Service, on how to address and mitigate visual impacts from modifications to Project facilities on NFS lands, such as the new Auxiliary Flood Control Outlet.

New Colgate Powerhouse Tailwater Depression System

Construction of the new TDS at New Colgate Powerhouse would have less than significant effects on aesthetic resources because construction would occur over a very short-term; most of the work would occur within the powerhouse; the minor construction-related work outside the powerhouse (e.g., laydown of equipment) would be consistent with the visual character of the New Colgate Powerhouse and Switchyard area; and, with the exception of a few river recreationists, the area is not viewed by the public.

Modifications to the Fish Release Outlets at Our House Diversion Dam and Log Cabin Diversion Dam

Construction of the new fish release outlets would have less than significant effects on aesthetic resources because construction would occur over a very short-term; the work would be consistent with the visual character of the Our House and Log Cabin diversion dam areas; and, with the exception of a few river recreationists, the area is not viewed by the public.

In addition, YCWA would follow the requirements of proposed Condition VR1, which is described above, obtain all necessary permits and approvals for the work, and would adhere to all permit terms and conditions, which is expected to mitigate any aesthetic impacts.

Modifications to Lohman Ridge Diversion Tunnel Intake

Construction of the new gate at Lohman Ridge Diversion Tunnel intake would have less than significant effects on aesthetic resources because construction would occur over a very short-term; the work would be consistent with the visual character of the diversion tunnel intake; with the exception of a few river recreationists, the area is not viewed by the public; and YCWA would follow the requirements of Condition VR1, which is described above, and all necessary permits and approvals.

Recreation Facilities Rehabilitation and Enhancements

Construction of the various recreation facility rehabilitations and enhancements would have a minor effect on aesthetic resources. Specific locations undergoing major rehabilitation and construction would be closed during construction, so most recreational users would be in other areas, which are visually screened by thick vegetation from construction activities. The most visible elements of construction would likely be modifications to the recreation water system and new facilities (i.e., Kelly Ridge Campground and Dark Day RV Dump Station) near Marysville Road. The Kelly Ridge Campground and Dark Day RV Dump Station modifications would be readily visible by the public passing in vehicles on Marysville Road. However, some vegetative screening exists between Marysville Road and these two work areas; and laydown and staging areas exist within each site and are set back from and not visible by passing vehicles on Marysville Road. In addition, the work would also be consistent with the Modification VQO that allows management to visually dominate the original characteristic landscape, but borrow from naturally established form, line, color, or texture. The development of both new recreation facilities would follow these guidelines for facilities on NFS land as guided in YCWA's proposed Condition RR1. The modifications to the recreational water system would primarily be visible to the public from vehicles along Marysville Road in the limited locations where the water line is immediately adjacent to Marysville Road. In these locations, construction crews and equipment would be visible but for short periods. Much of the water line alignment that parallels Marysville Road is set back 50 to 100 ft from the edge of Marysville Road, which is heavily vegetated with both large trees and ground-level vegetation to screen the construction work except of some potential construction equipment staged alongside Marysville Road. Regardless, for all of these modifications, YCWA would follow the requirements of Condition VR1, which is described above, and all necessary permits and approvals.

3.3.9.2.2 Effects of Proposed Project Operations and Maintenance

YCWA assessed three dams, one marina, two boat ramps with parking areas, and several campgrounds associated with the Project. This assessment is documented in detail in Technical Memorandum 10-1, *Visual Quality on Federal Land* (YCWA 2012h). All of the facilities on or near NFS lands met the PNF and TNF land management visual direction from background and most from middle ground. At less than 1 mi, Dark Day Boat Launch started to show contrast with the surrounding landscape and exhibited strong visual contrast in the foreground (0.5 mi and less) viewed from boats on New Bullards Bar Reservoir. This was the same case for the houseboat rentals, Emerald Cove Marina, New Bullards Bar Dam, and Cottage Creek Boat Launch all seen from boats, and from Marysville Road and Sunset Vista Point. The moored

rental houseboats and marina exhibited strong visual contrast due to light, reflective colors of the house boats, the boxy and angular shapes of the house boats, and docks associated with the Marina. Cottage Creek Boat Launch and New Bullards Bar Dam exhibited strong visual contrast due to the straight lines, geometric shapes, and large uniform smooth texture shapes introduced into the landscape. In these cases of strong visual contrast, the facilities do not meet TNF and PNF VQOs. In addition, the draw down of New Bullards Bar Reservoir over the summer season results in strong visual contrast as increased bright red/orange and white unvegetated soils are exposed to view around the rim of the reservoir. Due to strong visual contrast, the draw down does not meet TNF and PNF VQOs. However, the drawdown is recognized as a feature of the reservoir that cannot be mitigated.

YCWA's proposed Condition GEN6 would require YCWA to: 1) obtain the special use authorization before beginning any ground-disturbing activities on NFS lands outside the FERC Project boundary; and 2) obtain a construction temporary special use authorization from the Forest Service before beginning any ground-disturbing activities on NFS lands outside the FERC Project boundary. These requirements would allow for YCWA and the Forest Service to address any visual resource issues during the authorization process.

YCWA's proposed Condition RR1 pertains to recreation facilities, including rehabilitation and expansion of existing facilities and development of new recreation facilities. When during the term of the new license YCWA proposes to rehabilitate, replace, expand or develop new recreation facilities, the *Recreation Facilities Management Plan* includes measures to address visual resources for each recreation facility. Specifically, YCWA would address in the Site Development Plan the site-specific visual measures consistent with Condition VR1, *Visual Resources Management Plan*.

Proposed Condition VR1 would implement visual mitigation measures needed to reduce the visual contrast of facilities on NFS lands or adjacent to NFS lands. The mitigation proposed is to paint the white fuel storage tanks associated with Emerald Cove Marina a grey/green or dark brown or screen the tanks with a wooden fence. An additional painting mitigation is to paint the flood gate controls and housings for New Bullards Bar Dam a grey/green that matches existing structures already painted a grey/green. The third mitigation measure is to provide visual enhancement at Sunset Vista Point through vegetation removal to maintain the view of the reservoir from the picnic facilities at the Vista Point Observation Site.

3.3.9.3 Proposed Measures Recommended by Agencies or Other Relicensing Participants in Comments on DLA That Were Not Adopted by YCWA

None of the comments that were filed on YCWA's DLA included proposed measures or additional studies regarding aesthetic resources.

Subsequent to filing the DLA, the Forest Service and YCWA reached agreement on the three conditions listed above. YCWA believes the collaborative agreements adequately address all of the Forest Service's concerns regarding Project-related effects on aesthetic resources on NFS lands.

3.3.9.4 Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Constructed related effects on visual quality, which are unavoidable, are expected to be less than significant. They will be short-term and very local, and, in most cases, they will be consistent with the character of the area and viewable by few members of the public.

Some Project facilities on NFS lands managed by the PNF and TNF do not meet Forest LRMP directions for visual quality. However, these inconsistencies between the Project and the LRMPs occur primarily in foreground and near middle ground views from New Bullards Bar Reservoir or from nearby roads and trails. The unavoidable adverse impacts are considered minor due to the localized nature of the impacts and the nature of the inconsistencies. In addition, the inconsistencies are considered minor because the public using the areas are generally accustomed to these features and understand the function and purpose of such facilities, which are found throughout the Sierra Nevada. Also, the facilities pre-date the LRMP and, in many cases, the steep terrain precludes other functional options where facilities might fit in the landscape with less visual impact. Implementation of the proposed conditions will mitigate the Project's visual impacts in the years ahead.

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