

## 3.14 AESTHETICS

In order to evaluate the specific visual resources and viewer sensitivity in the project vicinity, the site and adjacent areas were analyzed in terms of visual quality and character. A qualitative description approach is used to evaluate the visual resources as objectively as possible. In general, key views are visible to sensitive viewers; contain elements that are considered visually important; provide scenic vistas or views of visually important areas; and have a high quality of topographic relief, a variety of landscaping, rich colors, impressive scenery, and/or unique built features.

### 3.14.1 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

#### SUBLEASE BOUNDARY

The sublease boundary generally slopes south from Durfee Avenue toward Lario Creek and the San Gabriel River. The sublease boundary includes developed areas the Whittier Narrows Nature Center (WNNC), outbuildings, and the County Police Substation, and undeveloped recreational open space (undeveloped).

The WNNC (approximately 1,917 sf) is a one-story pale yellow wood-framed structure with dark green-trimmed windows and a reddish-brown shingled roof. The building is predominantly rectangular, but rooms have been added on either end in a U-shape format. The WNNC is an older structure dating from approximately 1955 or 1956. The exterior of the building has been maintained in relatively good repair. Access to the building is provided by several concrete paths which lead to an entry verandah that shades the building itself. A low stone fence, which separates the verandah from the lawn, slopes north up to the WNNC. The front of the building faces the lawn in the interior of the site. A chain link fence and the back of the building with some vegetation are visible from Durfee Avenue. From the interior of the site, the WNNC appears shadowed and blends into the background of the site.

The Los Angeles County Police Substation is located approximately 20 to 25 feet east of the WNNC. It is a smaller single-story structure of similar appearance as the WNNC. Unlike the WNNC, the exterior of the County Police Substation building is characterized by various utilities, including down pipes and a heating unit. The windows are covered by security bars. The structures likely date from a similar period as the WNNC building, though the exterior is not in as good a state of repair. The exterior paint is chipped and stained in places. The building has the appearance that it has not been painted in recent years. The stairs to the entrance are old and worn. As with the WNNC, the County Police Substation faces into the site. The back and side of this building are visible from Durfee Avenue.

A restroom/storage facility and an outdoor classroom are located southwest of the WNNC and a maintenance building/garage is located east of the entry driveway. Like the other structures, these are single-story. The restroom/storage facility is a flat-roofed structure. The outdoor classroom is a brick

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structure with dark-green trim and a reddish-brown shingled roof. These buildings are located in the interior of the site and are not visible from Durfee Avenue.

The entry driveway leads to an asphalt surface parking lot located down-slope from the WNNC. The parking lot provides angle parking for approximately 33 cars and 2 bus parking spaces. A landscaped median separates the parking lot from the main lawn and existing buildings. Other mature vegetation separates the southern boundary of the parking lot from the adjacent open spaces areas in the Whittier Narrows Natural Area (Natural Area).

The remainder of the sublease boundary consists of open space of the Natural Area. Trails, both concrete and packed gravel surface, weave throughout the project site and adjacent areas taking visitors past open grasslands, shrubs, and trees. Signs and numbered posts alert visitors to specific features, provide directional information, and educate visitors about the Natural Area's biological and historical features.

#### **SURROUNDING SETTING**

The surrounding setting area is comprised of a mix of developed areas and the Natural Area. Specifically, Zone 1 Ditch channel (also referred to as Lario Creek) and the San Gabriel River parallel to the project site along the southern boundary of the Natural Area located approximately 0.25 miles south of the sublease boundary. Three transmission lines cross the San Gabriel River and Los Angeles Rio Hondo Creek onto the Natural Area property south of the sublease boundary. The Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch is located approximately 200 feet east of the sublease boundary. The ditch is only fed by runoff from Durfee Avenue and does not carry water at all times of the year. The remainder of the Natural Area located south, west, and east of the sublease boundary is open space. This portion of the Natural Area adjacent to the sublease boundary generally slopes south toward Los Angeles Rio Hondo Creek and the San Gabriel River. Other than signage and the fence separating the Natural Area from the river, there are no structures in this part of the Natural Area. As such, it appears as uninterrupted open space.

South El Monte High School is located directly north of the sublease boundary across Durfee Avenue. The play fields and parking lots of the school are located closest to the project site. The school is characterized by large areas of lawn separated by wide concrete paths which lead to 2-story light-colored buildings. The buildings are set back a minimum of 160 feet from Durfee Avenue.

Durfee Avenue is a 4-lane road with a center turning lane and parking on both sides of the street. Curbs and sidewalks are located on the north side of the street. A curb is located on the south side of Durfee Avenue, but no sidewalk is provided. A mix of one- to 2-story commercial, industrial, multi-family residential, parking, and storage uses is located along Durfee Avenue west of the sublease boundary. This includes a 2-story red and white commercial building located directly adjacent to the WNNC. The Los Angeles County Assessor's Office is located on the eastern boundary of the Natural Area. This 2-story brown brick structure is at a higher elevation than the Natural Area, and a large brick wall at the rear of the building separates it from the Natural Area. The Robert S. Joe Commemorative Ditch is located in the

portion of the Natural Area between the sublease boundary of the proposed action and the County Assessor's Office.

#### **SENSITIVE VIEWERS**

General viewer groups include staff of the facility and the sublease boundary and the Natural Area, students and teachers of the South El Monte High School, employees of the commercial uses adjacent to the sublease boundary, and passing motorists.

- **Staff:** The sublease boundary is always staffed with County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (LACDPR) personnel who run the WNNC and maintain the site. Staff sees the site every day and knows all parts of the site.
- **Visitors:** Visitors tend to come to the site regularly and experience it at a relatively slow pace. As such, visitors are considered to be highly sensitive viewers.
- **Students and Teachers:** South El Monte High School, located directly opposite the sublease boundary, sits at a higher elevation than the project site. Therefore, there is a direct middle-distance view of the sublease boundary from a number of the classroom windows and the playfields. Regular visual exposure to the site renders students and teachers moderately sensitive to changes in the visual environment.
- **Commercial users:** People using the commercial sites along Durfee Avenue tend to be either employees or those with business at these commercial sites. As such, the purpose for their trip would be unrelated to the WNNC. Employees may experience longer duration views; however, employees would be likely to drive past the site at relatively fast speeds. This category of viewers would have moderate to low sensitivity to changes in the visual quality of the project site
- **Motorists:** The sensitivity of motorists passing the site varies depending on the purpose of their trip. In general, based upon their travel speed, fleeting views, and focus on driving, motorist sensitivity is considered low.

#### **3.14.2 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

##### **COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES GENERAL PLAN**

The County of Los Angeles General Plan provides guidelines for future resource allocation across the county. The following policies and goals of the General Plan are relevant to the proposed action (County of Los Angeles 1993).

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**Table 3.14-1 Los Angeles County General Plan Policies and Goals Relevant to the Action**

General Plan Section	Policy/Goal
Revitalization (p. 27)	Goal 33. Protect and enhance the visual uniqueness of natural edges and encourage superior design of major entryways.
Conservation, Preservation, and Recreation (p. 142)	Policy 24. Support preservation of heritage trees. Encourage tree planting programs to enhance the beauty of urban landscaping.

Source: LADRP 1993.

#### 3.14.3 CRITERIA FOR SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS

The action would result in significant effects if it would:

- When considered as a whole, the alternative would result in an adverse change to sensitive viewers that would be characterized as a moderate or strong contrast in comparison to existing conditions;
- The action would be inconsistent with the visual quality goals and objectives of the County of Los Angeles General Plan.

#### 3.14.4 PROJECT EFFECTS ON AESTHETICS

##### 3.14.4.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, the WNNC and associated facilities would continue to operate on the site as under current conditions. No changes to the visual environment would occur as a result of this alternative and there would be no adverse effect on sensitive viewers. In addition, No Action Alternative would not conflict with the County's visual quality goals and objectives. Therefore, this alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse impact on aesthetics

##### 3.14.4.2 18,230 SF ALTERNATIVE

Under the 18,230 sf Alternative, the interpretive center would be dominant in the middle-ground. More native landscaping would be installed around the interpretive center, creating the appearance of a fully landscaped area compared to the existing slope of trees and non-native grass. The 2 large London planes in the existing view would be retained as part of the 18,230 sf Alternative. Because of its larger size relative to the existing WNNC, the new interpretive center would dominate this view under the 18,230 sf Alternative. This represents a noticeable change from the existing view that would be evident to site staff and visitors. However, under the 18,230 sf Alternative, the elements of the view of the new interpretive center would become more unified and thus more memorable. The sublease boundary would continue to retain its character as part of the Natural Area and the area surrounding the interpretive center would be more connected with the intent of the facility, which is to provide watershed education and educational programs related to site's location in the Natural Area. Although the visual setting would change, these

changes would not substantially degrade the existing character of the sublease boundary from this viewpoint.

In addition to these views from within the sublease boundary, the proposed interpretive center would be visible from public vantage points along Durfee Avenue and from South El Monte High School, as well as from the adjacent commercial uses located to the west of the sublease boundary. Although motorists would recognize a change in the visual environment at the site, these views would be fleeting and would not be particularly memorable. They would mostly see the back of the interpretive center and the site landscaping that would be installed between the building and the street as a buffer. Further, some of the existing trees located in the area between the existing WNNC and the roadway would be retained. Views from the adjacent commercial structure would be minimal because there are no windows on the side of the commercial building facing the project site. In addition, the commercial building blocks views of the project site from its parking lot. Native vegetation would be planted along the boundary between the project site and adjacent commercial building. Further, there are no windows or open areas along the side of the commercial building adjacent to the project site that would provide a view into the sublease boundary. The commercial building employees and their visitors would have the same visual experience as motorists because they would be driving by the site to get to or leave the commercial building.

Pedestrians traveling along Durfee Avenue and students and visitors at South El Monte High School would have the same view of the sublease boundary. Because of its larger size relative to the WNNC, the new interpretive center would dominate this view under the 18,230 sf Alternative. This represents a noticeable change from the existing view that would be evident to viewers located across Durfee Avenue. The interpretive center would appear new and modern with abundant new native landscaping. However, it would not be out of context with the existing site building. It would still look like a nature center as opposed to looking like a residence or an office building. The proposed interpretive center would be finished in a similar color scheme as the existing WNNC. In addition, landscaping would be installed along the road to soften the view of the interpretive center from Durfee Avenue and restore it to a natural setting similar to the existing conditions. As such, under the 18,230 sf Alternative, the view from across Durfee Avenue would become more unified and thus more memorable. Although the visual setting would change, these changes would not substantially degrade the existing character of the sublease boundary or surrounding area from this viewpoint. There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effect on sensitive viewers. In addition, the 18,230 sf Alternative would not conflict with the County's visual quality goals and objectives. Therefore, this alternative would have no adverse impact on aesthetics.

#### **3.14.4.3 14,000 SF ALTERNATIVE (PROPOSED ACTION)**

Aesthetic and visual impacts associated with this alternative would be similar to those associated with the 18,230 sf Alternative in that a new modern nature center and abundant native landscaping would be installed in the sublease boundary. The interpretive center would be approximately 4,230 square feet smaller than the 18,230 sf Alternative and the parking lot would be reduced by 34 parking spaces.

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However, the existing site features that would be replaced would be similar. The proposed facilities as part of the 14,000 sf Alternative, as with the 18,230 sf Alternative, would act to improve the visual integrity of the scene, providing greater unity between elements and compositional harmony. Under the 14,000 sf Alternative, the elements of the view of the new interpretive center would become more unified and thus more memorable. The sublease boundary would continue to retain its character as a nature center and the area surrounding the interpretive center would be more connected with the intent of the facility, which is to provide watershed education and educational programs related to site's location in the Natural Area. Although the visual setting would change, these changes would not substantially degrade the existing character of the sublease boundary from this viewpoint. There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effect on sensitive viewers. This alternative would be consistent with the County's visual quality goals and policies. Therefore, this alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse impact on aesthetics.

#### **3.14.4.4 10,000 SF ALTERNATIVE**

Aesthetic and visual impacts associated with this alternative would be similar to those associated with the 18,230 sf Alternative in that a new modern interpretive center and abundant native landscaping would be installed in the sublease boundary. However, the interpretive center would be approximately 8,230 square feet smaller than the 18,230 sf Alternative and the parking lot would be reduced by 67 parking spaces. As such, the amount of site disturbance would be substantially less than that of the 18,230 sf Alternative. Further, the existing site features that would be replaced would be similar. Under the 10,000 sf Alternative, the elements of the view of the new interpretive center would become more unified and thus more memorable. The sublease boundary would continue to retain its character as an interpretive center and the area surrounding the interpretive center would be more connected with the intent of the facility, which is to provide watershed education and educational programs related to project site's location in the Natural Area. Although the visual setting would change, these changes would not substantially degrade the existing character of the sublease boundary from this viewpoint. The proposed facilities would act to improve the visual integrity of the scene, providing greater unity between elements and compositional harmony. There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effect on sensitive viewers. This alternative would be consistent with the County's visual quality goals and policies. Therefore, this alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse impact on aesthetics.

#### **3.14.4.5 2,800 SF ALTERNATIVE**

The only visible change to the sublease boundary under the 2,800 sf Alternative would be the new interpretive center and some native landscaping. Although the visual setting would change, these changes would not substantially degrade the existing character of the sublease boundary from this viewpoint. There would be no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effect on sensitive viewers. This alternative would be consistent with the County's visual quality goals and policies. Therefore, this alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse impact on aesthetics.

### **3.14.5 MITIGATION MEASURES**

No mitigation measures are required.

### **3.14.6 SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

#### **3.14.6.1 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Because no action would be taken on the project site, No Action Alternative would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on aesthetics.

#### **3.14.6.2 18,230 SF ALTERNATIVE**

See Section 3.14.6.4 below.

#### **3.14.6.3 14,000 SF ALTERNATIVE (PROPOSED ACTION)**

See Section 3.14.6.4 below.

#### **3.14.6.4 10,000 SF ALTERNATIVE**

In areas where the new interpretive center would be visible under the 18,230 sf Alternative, 14,000 sf Alternative, or 10,000 sf Alternative, it would generally improve the visual integrity of the scene, providing greater unity between elements and compositional harmony. These alternatives would have no direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effect on aesthetics.

#### **3.14.6.5 2,800 SF ALTERNATIVE**

The only visible change to the site under the 2,800 sf Alternative would be the new interpretive center and some native landscaping. No substantial adverse direct, indirect, or cumulative visual adverse effect would occur.

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