

This section of the DEIR discusses the impacts of the project on aesthetics and visual character of the existing environmental setting, including the aesthetic qualities of the project site and the overall change in character of the project area with implementation of the proposed project. The primary visual and aesthetic concerns include the change in character of the project site from undeveloped land to rural residential uses, and the potential impacts to views from adjacent viewpoints, including State Route 68, a State scenic highway. Visual impacts were evaluated using a combination of a site reconnaissance, photo documentation, aerial photographs, and review of existing policy documents, including the *Toro Area Plan* (County of Monterey 1983).

### 3.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

#### REGIONAL

The Monterey Bay Area is recognized as one of the most scenic locations within the western United States. This region is known for its magnificent coastline, and majestic beauty. The topography of the region varies from flat, farmed areas to rolling hills with broad valleys, to the steep slopes, rugged canyons and prominent ridges of the Coast Ranges. Elevations in the region range from a low of approximately 30 feet on the floor of Carmel Valley to approximately 3,000 feet for the high ridges and peaks of the Big Sur and Los Padres National Forest areas. Ridges and valleys in the region generally trend northwest-southeast. There are many small creeks in the region vegetated with sycamore, Douglas fir, redwood, bay, oak and willow trees. Hillsides and ridges are vegetated with forests and chaparral shrublands and there are areas of open grassland on slopes and in the valleys.

Monterey County pioneered the scenic highway concept in the State of California. The visual diversity of the surrounding area as seen from its scenic corridors has been widely recognized as a valuable resource of Monterey County. The rural character, rugged terrain, pastoral meadows and hillsides, and the intermixture of vegetation and landform are aesthetically pleasing. Some of the most visually sensitive features that lie within the *Toro Area Plan* planning area are in the vicinity of the project site including: Toro Peak and surrounding ridgelines; the wide scenic corridor of State Route 68 characterized by rolling hills dotted with oak trees, sycamores, and meadows of wildflowers; and the San Benancio/Corral de Tierra corridor, separated by ridgelines between the two sides of the "loop" and which reach a canyon ringed with hills, meadows, and pasture land.

#### LOCAL VISUAL RESOURCES

The project site is located approximately twelve miles east of the City of Monterey and five miles west of the City of Salinas within the area known as Encina Hills in the *Toro Area Plan*. The project site consists of rolling land perched on western facing slopes of the Sierra de Salinas Range and consists of approximately 344 acres of annual grasslands, coast live oak woodland/savanna, coastal scrub and central maritime chaparral. The elevation ranges from approximately 340 feet in the southern portion of the project site to slightly over 1,020 feet in the eastern portion. Views from the project site consist of scenic ridgelines of

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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the Santa Lucia Range, serene valleys of Corral de Tierra, and the City of Salinas. Existing views of the project site from the Meyer Road are shown in photographs in **Figures 2-3a, Project Site Photographs** and **2-3b, Project Site Photographs** in **Section 2.0, Project Description**.

#### SENSITIVE VIEWPOINTS

Areas of visual sensitivity are those areas that may be visible from long distances, for long durations of time, or from public viewing points. They may include particularly distinctive or prominent landforms or vegetation; or they may represent sensitive juxtapositions of line, color, shape, and texture in their composition. Ridgelines, mountain faces, hillsides, open meadows, natural landmarks, and unusual vegetation are visually prominent from various roadways.

Some of the most critical scenic areas within the planning area of the *Toro Area Plan* are the visually sensitive areas that are viewed by the thousands of motorists who travel the scenic corridors daily. According to the *Toro Area Plan*, there are two scenic roads in the planning area: State Route 68 is a State scenic highway and Laureles Grade Road is a designated County scenic route. The Monterey County Board of Supervisors has also designated Corral de Tierra Road, San Benancio Road, Corral del Cielo Road, and Underwood Road as County scenic routes. The project site is located approximately 2,000 feet southeast of State Route 68, between San Benancio Road and River Road. San Benancio Road, a County designated scenic road, provides project site access to and from State Route 68. In addition, the project site is located adjacent to Toro Regional Park and approximately 3,500 feet from Fort Ord Public Lands that is under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which are considered public viewing areas in Monterey County.

#### **State Route 68**

In 1968, approximately 13 miles of State Route 68, between State Route 1 and River Road, were designated as a State scenic highway under California's Scenic Highway Programs. State Route 68 is major regional transportation route that connect the cities of Monterey and Salinas and would provide regional access to the project site. In the vicinity of the project site, State Route 68 is dominated by steep slopes on the southern side of the roadway covered in oak woodlands and grasslands and sycamores along El Toro Creek. Rolling hills covered in grasslands and scattered oaks dominate the northern side of the roadway. Development along State Route 68 is concentrated in clusters around Corral de Tierra/San Benancio and Toro Road. The project site may be visible to those traveling eastbound on State Route 68 at the intersection of State Route 68 and Corral de Tierra.

#### **San Benancio Road**

San Benancio Road provides access to the San Benancio Road/Corral de Tierra corridor. It is a two-lane roadway that meanders along the eastern portion of the Corral de Tierra valley. San Benancio Road provides local access to the project site from State Route 68 to

Meyer Road. Steep slopes covered in grasslands and oak woodlands with some rural residential development dominate a majority of the eastern side of the roadway, while flat terrain with rural residential development and dense sycamore and oak trees dominate the western side of the roadway. Due to the steep terrain and dense vegetation along the roadway, the project site is not visible from San Benancio Road.

#### **Toro Regional Park**

The Monterey County Parks Department owns and operates the 4,789-acre Toro Regional Park located along State Route 68 and adjacent to the project site. Toro Regional Park provides 17 miles of nature and equestrian trails; maintains an organized youth group camping area that will accommodate approximately 100 people, maintains an environmental nature center; provides for several large group day use picnic areas; and has nearly 350 picnic tables for day use. There is also an equestrian staging area located in Toro Regional Park for public use and a horse rental facility.

#### **Fort Order Public Land**

The Bureau of Land Management owns approximately 7,200 acres of public land on the former Fort Ord, which is located on the northern side of State Route 68. This public land offer 50 miles of trails that are open every day from dawn to dusk for hikers, mountain bikers, horseback riders, wildlife photographers, and wildflower and plant lovers. According to Eric Morgan at BLM, the trails at the Fort Ord Public Lands are used by approximately 75,000 people per year with 55 percent of those users comprised of hikers, 45 percent of the users comprised of mountain bikers and 5 percent comprised of equestrian users (Personal Communication with Eric Morgan, Bureau of Land Management, March 20, 2007).

#### **LIGHT AND GLARE**

The existing source of light and glare is primarily generated by rural residential development along State Route 68 and the Salinas Valley to the northeast. Minimal street lighting exists along local roadways; however, cars, and trucks traveling along State Route 68 are a potential source of light and glare. Since the area is primarily rural development there are limited sources of light and glare.

#### **3.1.2 REGULATORY SETTING**

##### **CALIFORNIA SCENIC HIGHWAY PROGRAM**

Many state highways are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Preservation and protection of scenic highway corridors from change, which would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways, is the primary purpose of the program. The state laws governing the Scenic Highway Program are in the Streets and Highways Code, Section 260 et seq.

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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California identifies portions of the state highway system and adjacent scenic corridors as areas that require special scenic conservation treatment per Sections 260 and 262 of the California Code of Regulations. The Scenic Highway Program assigns responsibility for the development of such scenic highways within specific planning and design standards while coordinating planning, design, construction, and regulation of land use and development, by state and local agencies, to protect the social and economic values of scenic resources. Regional regulations are established in order to protect the scenic highway and surrounding corridor.

COUNTY OF MONTEREY

#### **Monterey County General Plan**

##### Slopes Greater than 30 Percent

26.1.10 The County shall prohibit development on slopes greater than 30 percent. It is the general policy of the County to require dedication of scenic easement on a slope of 30 percent or greater. Upon application, an exception to allow development on slopes of 30 percent or greater may be granted at a noticed public hearing by the approving authority for discretionary permits or by the Planning Commission for building and grading permits. The exception may be granted if one or both of the following findings are made, based upon substantial evidence:

- A) There is no alternative which would allow development to occur on slopes of less than 30 percent; or
- B) The proposed development better achieves the resource protection objectives and policies contained in the *Monterey County General Plan*, accompanying Area Plans and Land Use Plans, and all applicable master plans.

##### Scenic Highway Policies

Monterey County has long been identified as among the nation's leaders in the development of scenic roadways. The County's Scenic Highway System is composed of roads and highways that have been designated by the state as State scenic highways or County scenic routes. Although the project site is not within a scenic corridor or a "visually sensitive" area, portions of the project site are potentially visible from State Route 68, a State scenic route. Relevant County policies for protecting and enhancing these scenic roadways include:

40.2.1 Additional sensitive treatment provisions shall be employed within the scenic corridor, including placement of utilities underground, where feasible; architectural and landscape controls; outdoor advertising restrictions; encouragement of area native plants, especially on public lands and

dedicated open spaces; and cooperative landscape programs with adjoining public and private open space lands.

- 40.2.2 Land use controls shall be applied or retained to protect the scenic corridor and to encourage sensitive selection of sites and open space preservation. Where land is designated for development at a density that would diminish scenic quality, should maximum permissible development occur, the landowner shall be encouraged to voluntarily dedicate a scenic easement to protect the scenic corridor.

#### Ridgeline Development Policy

Monterey County places high value on maintaining its scenic and rural character and restricting development on ridgelines within the County is one way of doing so. Policies have been developed to avoid development on all ridgelines visible from public viewpoints within the County, unless a special permit is granted. The *Monterey County General Plan* defines ridgeline development as “development on the crest of a hill which has the potential to create a silhouette or other substantially adverse impact when viewed from a common public viewing area.”

- 26.1.9 In order to preserve the County’s scenic and rural character, ridgeline development will not be allowed unless a special permit is first obtained. Such a permit shall only be granted upon findings being made that the development, as conditioned by permit, will not create a substantially adverse visual impact when viewed from a common public viewing area. New subdivisions shall avoid lot configurations, which create building sites that will constitute ridgeline development. Siting of new development visible from private viewing areas may be taken into consideration during the subdivision process.

#### Light and Glare Policy

- 26.1.20 All exterior lighting shall be unobtrusive and constructed or located so that only the intended area is illuminated, long range visibility is reduced, and off-site glare is fully controlled.

#### **Toro Area Plan**

#### Visual Sensitivity Policies

- 7.2.3 The preservation of oak trees in the Toro area shall be promoted by discouraging removal of healthy trees with diameters in excess of eight inches.
- 26.1.6.1 Within areas of visual sensitivity as indicated on the *Toro Visual Sensitivity Map*, no development shall be permitted without a finding by the Board of

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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Supervisors or its designee that such development will not adversely affect the natural scenic beauty of the area. Additionally, areas of visual sensitivity shall be reviewed critically for landscaping and building design and siting which will enhance the scenic value of the area.

26.1.7.1 The County shall encourage in the Toro area, the use of optional design and improvement standards as described in Article VI of Title 19 of the Monterey County Code.

40.2.6 Density transfer shall be allowed from the acreage within the critical viewshed to other contiguous portions of the same ownership, but must meet all other area and general plan policies.

40.2.7 Where Plan policies would prohibit any development on a parcel, the density allowed by the land use designation shall be permitted in the critical viewshed.

#### Ridgeline Development Policy

26.1.9.1 Development on ridgelines and hilltops or development protruding above ridgelines shall be prohibited. Additionally, only minimal development on steeper and critical viewshed slopes shall be allowed.

#### Light and Glare Policy

26.1.20.1 Lighting of outdoor areas shall be minimized and carefully controlled to preserve the quality of darkness. Street lighting shall be as unobtrusive as practicable and shall be consistent in intensity throughout the Toro area.

### **Monterey County Zoning Ordinance**

#### Design Control Policies

The project site is zoned "Rural Density Residential" within a "Design Control District" (RDR [5.1-D]). The *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance* defines regulations for those areas designated as "D" (Design Control) districts. They are considered areas of the County that require protection of the public viewshed, neighborhood character, and to assure the visual integrity of certain development without imposing undue restrictions on private property are often designated with Design Control Zoning (Title 21 Chapter 21.44). This designation regulates the location, size, configuration, materials and colors of structures and fences through a design approval process.

21.44.010 Regulations for Design Control Zoning Districts or "D" Districts are provided in this section. The purpose of this zoning is to regulate the location, size, configuration, materials and colors of structures and fences in order to protect the public viewshed, neighborhood character and to assure the visual

integrity of certain development without imposing undue restrictions on private property. Construction of any structures in the "D" District requires submittal of a Design Approval Application prior to the issuance of building permit.

Monterey County is required to review architectural projects to confirm compatibility of the development with the surrounding character of the land. Development in a highly sensitive area must minimize its impact on the viewshed. If compelling circumstances are demonstrated, exceptions to the above requirements may be considered.

#### 3.1.3 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

##### METHODOLOGY

Available information pertaining to aesthetics and visual sensitivity within the project site was reviewed during this analysis, including but not limited to: *Monterey County General Plan* (Monterey County 1982), *Toro Area Plan* (Monterey County 1983), and *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance* (Monterey County 2000). Analysis of potential aesthetic impacts is based upon field review of the project site and surrounding areas, photographs of visual vantage points on and in the vicinity of the project site and a review of Monterey County's plans and policies. The approach adapted for this visual assessment used the visual impact assessment system outlined by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as described below. For purposes of this EIR, the discussion focuses on the views from State Route 68 and San Benancio Road based on their scenic designations.

##### Resource Evaluation

Existing conditions of aesthetic resources are identified through the visual features or resources of the landscape; the character and quality of those resources relative to overall regional visual character; and the sensitivity of views of visual resources. With the preliminary baseline (existing) condition established, changes to the landscape by a proposed project are then systematically evaluated for the degree of impact. The degree of impact depends on both the magnitude of change in the visual character and quality and viewers' responses to and concern for those changes.

##### Criteria for Visual Assessment

The appearance of the landscape is evaluated using the following three criteria and descriptions of the elements of form, line, color, and texture. These elements are the basic components used to describe visual character and quality for most visual assessments.

- *Vividness* is the visual power or memorability of landscape components as they combine in striking or distinctive visual patterns.

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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- *Intactness* is the visual integrity of the natural and human-built landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements; this factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes, as well as in natural settings.
- *Unity* is the visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape considered as a whole; it frequently attests to the careful design of individual components in the landscape.

#### Viewer Sensitivity

Viewer sensitivity is based on the visibility of resources in the landscape, the proximity of viewers to visual resources, the elevation of viewers relative to visual resources, the frequency and duration of views, the number of viewers, and the viewers' expectations.

One criterion for identifying the importance of views is related in part to the position of the viewer relative to the resource. An area of the landscape that is visible from a particular location (e.g., an overlook) or series of points (e.g., a road or trail) is defined as a viewshed. To identify the importance of views as resources, a viewshed may be broken into distance zones of foreground (0.25 to 0.5 miles from viewer), middle ground (3 to 5 miles from viewer), and background (more than 5 miles from viewer). Resources that are higher in elevation than the viewer generally tend to take on greater visual importance than resources located at a lower elevation than the viewer.

Visual sensitivity also depends on the number and type of viewer, and the frequency and duration of views. Generally, visual sensitivity increases with an increase in the number of viewers, the frequency of viewing (e.g., daily or seasonally), and the duration of views (i.e., how long a scene is viewed). Visual sensitivity is higher for views seen by people who are driving for pleasure. Views from recreation trails and areas, scenic highways, and scenic overlooks are generally assessed as having visual sensitivity.

#### STANDARDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The following thresholds for measuring a project's environmental impacts are based on CEQA Guidelines and standards used by the County of Monterey. For the purposes of this EIR, impacts are considered significant if the following could result from implementation of the proposed project:

- 1) Have adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- 2) Damage scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway;
- 3) Degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings;  
or



- 4) Create new source of light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

#### PROJECT IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

#### **Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Vista**

**Impact 3.1-1** Implementation of the proposed project would result in permanent alteration of site conditions that may affect scenic vistas from State Scenic Route 68, San Benancio Road, Toro Regional Park and/or Fort Ord public land owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This would be considered a **potentially significant impact**.

According to the *Toro Area Plan*, the project site is located outside the area designated as “area of visual sensitivity” and the “critical viewshed” as shown in **Figures 3.1-1A, Visual Sensitivity and Scenic Highways Map** and **3.1-1B, Critical Viewshed Map**. However, the project site is zoned “Rural Density Residential” within a “Design Control District” (RDR [5.1-D]), which regulates the location, size, configuration, materials and colors of structures and fences through a design approval process. In addition, the project site is located approximately 2,000 feet southeast of State Route 68, a state scenic highway; approximately 1,200 feet from San Benancio Road, a County designated scenic route; adjacent to Toro Regional Park; and Fort Ord Public Land owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Due to the steep terrain, dense vegetation, and distance from the roadway, the project site would not be visible from San Benancio Road. However, portions of the project site may be visible from State Route 68, Toro Regional Park and/or Fort Ord BLM land, which are considered public viewing areas.

#### State Route 68

The proposed home sites located on Lots #7, #11, and #17 are potentially visible from State Route 68. However, the steep and rolling terrain adjacent to the State Route 68 provides a natural screen which limits visibility of the project site from the highway and limits the visibility to the project site in the foreground. In addition, portions of project site are zoned within a “Design Control District”. The purpose of the “Design Control” zoning district is to protect the public viewshed, neighborhood character, and assure the visual integrity of the development in scenic areas. The intent of the “Design Control District” is to guide development while preserving the scenic qualities of the ridgeline area, views from State Route 68, and the scenic and rural quality of the project vicinity. The “Design Control District” would be applicable the entire area of both parcels. Therefore, all 17 residential lots would be subject to the requirements of Section 21.44.010 of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance*. Section 21.44.010 of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance* applies specific design standards and additional design review prior to approval of new development, including regulation of the location, size, configuration, materials and colors of proposed structures in order to guide development. The architectural review process would ensure that the scenic quality of the project site and vicinity is not diminished with implementation of the proposed project per Section 21.44.030 of the *Monterey County*

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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*Zoning Ordinance* (Title 21). Therefore, the impact to views from State Route 68 would be considered **less than significant**.

#### Toro Regional Park

Toro Regional Park lies adjacent to the project site along the majority of the eastern boundary. The project applicant has committed to donating approximately 154-acres of the remainder parcel by deeding the property to the Monterey County Parks Department as an expansion of the adjacent Toro Park pursuant to Section 66428(a)(2) of the Subdivision Map Act. No development is proposed on the remaining 26-acres of the remainder parcel at this time. The approximate locations of homesites have been sited to comply with the 30 percent slope and ridgeline regulations of the *Zoning Ordinance* (Title 21), minimize the amount of tree removal, and limit the construction of new roadways, as shown on **Figure 2-5, Vesting Tentative Map**. Most development is proposed downslope from Toro Regional Park trails and therefore would not be significantly visible from Toro Regional Park. However, if development were allowed on the higher elevation knoll adjacent to Toro Regional Park, the proposed project may have a substantially adverse affect on the scenic vista as viewed from Toro Regional Park. This would be considered a **potentially significant impact**. The following mitigation measure would limit development within the potential viewshed of Toro Regional Park.

#### Mitigation Measure

**MM 3.1-1** Prior to recording the Final Subdivision Map, Monterey County Planning Department shall require that the project applicant designate the knoll located along the eastern boundary of Lot #1 as a “scenic easement.” The Final Subdivision Map shall identify the areas within a “scenic easement” and note that no development shall occur within the areas designated as “scenic easement.”

Implementation of mitigation measure **MM 3.1-1** would ensure that development does not occur adjacent to Toro Regional Park by prohibiting development at the knoll located along the eastern border of Lot #1, which would ensure that the viewshed from Toro Regional Park would be protected. Therefore, this impact would be reduced to a **less than significant** level.

#### Fort Ord Public Land (BLM)

The Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Fort Ord public land is located approximately 3,500 feet north of the project site. Although the project site has rolling terrain and is heavily wooded in areas, there is the potential for portions of project site to be visible from Fort Ord public land. Due to the elevation and distance between the project site and the Fort Ord public land, Lots #1 through #4 and Lots #12 through #16, to a lesser extent, may be visible from the trails. However, this development would not be considered ridgeline development. Due to the elevation of the trails, a significant amount of development within the valley is visible from portions of the trails. The project site is located within a “Design Control District” and is subject to the requirements of Section 21.44.010 of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance* (Title 21), which specific design standards and

*Insert Figure 3.1-1a (Visual Sensitivity)*

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*Insert Figure 3.1-1b (Critical Viewshed)*

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additional design review prior to approval of new development, including regulation of the location, size, configuration, materials and colors of proposed structures in order to guide development. The architectural review process would ensure that the scenic quality of the project site and vicinity is not diminished with implementation of the proposed project per Section 21.44.030 of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance* (Title 21). Therefore, the impact to views from Fort Ord public lands would be considered **less than significant**.

#### **Substantial Adverse Effect on a Scenic Resource**

**Impact 3.1-2** Implementation of the proposed project would result in permanent alteration of site conditions that may damage scenic resources. This would be considered a **potentially significant impact**.

The project site consists of 344 acres of rolling land perched on western facing slopes of the Sierra de Salinas Range and is comprised of annual grasslands, coast live oak woodland/savanna, coastal scrub and central maritime chaparral. The proposed project would change the character of the project site from undeveloped land currently used for grazing to rural residential uses with the development of 17 residential lots ranging in size from 5.13 acres to 23.42 acres and a 180-acre remainder parcel; construction of roadways and infrastructure; and removal of approximately 79 oak trees. The construction of 17 residential units on lots averaging approximately ten acres in size is consistent with the surrounding rural residential uses in the project vicinity and is less dense than one unit per 5.1 acres, which is the zoning designation for the project site. **Figure 2-5, Vesting Tentative Map** shows the approximate locations of home sites, which have been sited to minimize the amount of tree removal and limit construction of new roadways. The project applicant has committed to donating approximately 154-acres of the 180-acre remainder parcel by deeding the property to the Monterey County Parks Department as an extension of the adjacent Toro Park. Tree removal at the project site would be required to be in compliance with Section 21.64.260.C.1 of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance*. In addition, implementation of mitigation measure **MM 3.3-3b** would require that for every tree removed, the project applicant replace tree species at a 3:1 ratio, which would result in planting approximately 237 trees, which would increase the overall quantity of oak trees on the project site with implementation of the proposed project.

The portion of the project site that is to be subdivided includes approximately 97 acres of land that exceeds 30 percent slope. Policy 26.1.10 of the *Monterey County General Plan* prohibits development on slopes greater than 30 percent. Monterey County Planning Department requires dedication of a scenic easement on slopes of 30 percent or greater. The following mitigation measure has been provided to ensure consistency with Policy 26.1.10 of the *Monterey County General Plan* and that the proposed project would have a **less than significant impact** on State Route 68 and the public viewshed.

#### Mitigation Measure

**MM 3.1-2** Prior to recording the Final Subdivision Map, Monterey County Planning Department shall require that the project applicant designate all land that

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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exceeds slopes of 30 percent as “scenic easements” in accordance with Policy 26.1.10 of the *Monterey County General Plan*, except where roadway improvements have no other alternative. This includes land exceeding 30 percent slopes within the 17 residential lots and the remainder parcel. The Final Subdivision Map shall identify the areas within a “scenic easement” and note that no development shall occur within the areas designated as “scenic easement.”

Implementation of mitigation measure **MM 3.1-2** would ensure consistency with Policy 26.1.10 of the *Monterey County General Plan* by designating slopes greater than 30 percent on the project site as “scenic easements.” Implementation of the proposed project in accordance with Section 21.44.030 of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance* (Title 21) would provide additional architectural review, which would ensure that the scenic quality of the project site and vicinity is not diminished. Therefore, the visual resources impact associated with the proposed project would be reduced to a **less than significant** level.

#### **Ridgeline Development**

**Impact 3.1-3** Implementation of the proposed project would result in alteration of site conditions that may be visible when viewed from common viewing areas, such as Toro Regional Park, BLM public land and State Route 68. However, the proposed residential units are sited at the lowest elevation or are located in the foreground of hillsides of higher elevation; therefore, they shall not create a silhouette. In addition, the Design Control District zoning designation requires that future residential development on the project meet specific design standards and is subject to additional design review prior to development approval to ensure protection of the public viewshed. Therefore, this would be considered a **less than significant impact**.

According to Section 21.66.010.D of the *Monterey County Zoning Ordinance*, a use permit for ridgeline development may be approved only if the development will not create a substantially adverse visual impact when viewed from a common public viewing area. Ridgeline development is considered development on the crest of a hill, which has the potential to create a silhouette or other substantially adverse impact when viewed from a common public view area. In the vicinity of the project site, many existing large residential single-family homes are visible near the ridgeline when traveling either eastbound or westbound on State Route 68. Monterey County may grant a use permit for ridgeline development on existing residential lots of record, not for proposed residential lots. Therefore, no new residential development is permitted along the ridgeline.

The approximate locations of the proposed residential units are sited at the lowest elevations of each parcel or are located in the foreground of hillsides higher elevations, as shown in **Figure 2-5, Vesting Tentative Map**. A majority of the project site is located at lower elevation than Toro Regional Park, at a similar elevation as the BLM public land and



at a higher elevation than State Route 68. Due to the higher elevation of Toro Regional Park and BLM public land being located approximately 3,500 feet north at a similar elevation it is not likely that the proposed residential units would create a silhouette or other substantially adverse impact when viewed from recreation trails located Toro Regional Park or BLM public land, which would be considered ridgeline development. Due to the siting of the residential units, the steep hillsides, and dense vegetation surrounding the project site, the proposed project would not create a silhouette. In addition, the Design Control District zoning designation requires future residential designs to meet specific design standards and is subject to additional design review prior to development approval that ensures protection of the public viewshed. Therefore, the proposed project would not be considered ridgeline development and the impact would be considered **less than significant**.

#### **Create New Sources of Light or Glare**

**Impact 3.1-4** The proposed project would introduce new sources of lighting that could adversely affect the existing visual resources in the area. The increased residual glare and light would be considered a **potentially significant impact**.

A detailed lighting plan is not available at this stage of development. However, the proposed project will introduce new light sources including, but not limited to, street lighting, and interior and exterior lighting of the proposed residential uses. Stationary light sources have the potential to adversely affect adjacent properties through a “spillover” effect.

New light sources would result in a greater overall level of light at night adjacent to the project site, thus reducing night sky visibility, affecting the general character of the area. Policy 26.1.20 in the *Monterey County General Plan* states that “All exterior lighting shall be unobtrusive and constructed or located so that only the intended area is illuminated, long range visibility is reduced, and off-site glare is fully controlled.” If lighting associated with the proposed project is not consistent with Policy 26.1.20 in the *Monterey County General Plan* this could be considered a **potentially significant impact**.

#### Mitigation Measure

**MM 3.1-4** Prior to issuance of building permits, Monterey County Planning Department shall require that the project applicant prepare and submit a detailed lighting plan that indicates the location and type of lighting that will be used at the project site. The lighting plan shall be consistent with Section 18.28 of *Monterey County Code*, to minimize glare and light spill. All external lighting shall be indicated on project improvement plans, subject to review and approval by the County of Monterey.

### 3.1 AESTHETICS AND VISUAL SENSITIVITY

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Preparation and implementation of a detailed exterior lighting plan for the proposed project would reduce this impact to a **less than significant** level by minimizing potential light and glare at the project site and on surrounding areas.

#### CUMULATIVE IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

##### Cumulative Degradation of Visual Character

**Impact 3.1.5** The proposed project in combination with cumulative development would add to the urbanization of the project site, resulting in a visual change within a rural setting. However, policies in the *Monterey County General Plan* and *Toro Area Plan* would address cumulative visual effects and subsequent design review of proposed development on the project site would ensure a limited impact on the visual character of the area. Therefore, the cumulative visual impacts would be considered a **less than significant cumulative impact**.

The proposed project in combination with cumulative development would continue to urbanize the area around Corral de Tierra/San Benancio Road. The *Monterey County General Plan* anticipates the minimal development in Corral de Tierra/San Benancio Road area. The overall change in the visual character of the project area from primarily undeveloped grazing land to approximately 17 residential units on 164 acres would result in a permanent change. Although the proposed subdivision will increase the residential development in a rural community, the project is consistent with the rural density residential zoning requirement of a minimum of 5.1 acres, with an average density of 9.64 acres per residential unit. The project site is adjacent to Toro Regional Park, which will remain permanently undeveloped. The project applicant has committed to donating approximately 154-acres of the 180-acre remainder parcel by deeding it to the Monterey County Parks Department as an extension of the adjacent Toro Park. Policies in the *Monterey County General Plan* and *Toro Area Plan* that emphasize preservation of the rural environment, implemented over time, would address cumulative visual effects. In addition, the entire project site is subject to additional design review in order to ensure limited impact of visual character. Therefore, the proposed project's contribution to the cumulative degradation of visual character in the region would be considered **less than significant**. No mitigation measures are necessary.

**REFERENCES/DOCUMENTATION**

Monterey, County of. *Monterey County General Plan*. August 1982 with Amendments through November 5, 1996.

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