

Appendix 4A Summary of Impacts to Scenic Quality and VRI

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4A.1 SCENIC QUALITY RATING AND VRI IMPACTS

Section 4.18 assessed the Project’s potential impacts to visual resources based in part on its conformity with Visual Resource Management (VRM) objectives. The discussion below addresses potential for the Project to result in effects that would reduce the Visual Resources Inventory (VRI) rating on lands administered by BLM. Inventories identify Scenic Quality Rating Units (SQRUs) within each field office. Ratings of SQRUs inform broader VRI ratings. This analysis concludes that Project effects would not substantially alter any SQRU ratings and would thus not lead to impacts to existing VRI ratings.

The Project would cross 13 SQRUs in the Yuma Field Office and two SQRUs in the Palm Springs South Coast Field Office (see Table 4A-1). Ratings for SQRUs are expressed as A, B, or C, with A identifying highest scenic quality. Ratings reflect the following scoring system (BLM 1986):

- A = 19 and above
- B = 12-18.5
- C = 11.5 or less

Table 4A-1 Scenic Quality Rating Units Crossed by the TWL Project

BLM FIELD OFFICE	SQRU # / NAME	SQRU RATING	SQRU SCORE
Yuma	1 – Harquahala Plain	C	9
	2 - Eagletails	A	20.5
	6 – Cemetery Ridge	B	14.5
	45 – Colorado River	A	23.5
	46 - Weaver	C	11
	47 – Palo Verde Valley	B	12
	54 – Dome Mountains North	B	16
	56 – Dome Mountains South	B	15.5
	57 – La Posa North	C	11
	58 – Plomosa Mountains North	B	14.5
	59 – Ranegras Plain	C	9.5
	61 – La Posa South	C	10
	63 – New Water/Dripping Springs	B	18
Palm Springs / South Coast	36 – Blythe Valley	B	12.5
	21 – Chuckwalla Valley	B	12

SQRUs rated A or B with lower scores within the range above have potential to be reduced in rating as a result of Project impacts. The Scenic Quality Inventory and Evaluation Chart allows for a reduction under Cultural Modifications where “(m)odifications add variety but are very discordant and promote strong disharmony” (BLM 1986). Of the SQRUs potentially crossed by the Project, the following units have low enough scores where a decrease in scenic quality resulting from Project impact could potentially reduce the rating class: Eagletails (A rating, SQRU Score of 20.5), Palo Verde Valley (B rating, SQRU Score of 12), Blythe Valley (B rating, SQRU Score of 12.5), and Chuckwalla Valley (B rating, SQRU Score of 12). Each is addressed below.

The Eagletails unit is approximately 22 miles long on a northwest to southeast axis within the VRI study area. Segment p-05 would cross this unit for approximately 0.7-mile on an east-west axis, following the existing DPV1 transmission line. Given the limited direct impact to the unit and the location of the impact within the unit, the Project would not change the overall SQRU rating. Due to topography and remote location, there would be limited visibility of Segment p-05 within this unit. SQRUs rated as A may be more sensitive or disproportionately impacted by development because of their relatively high level of scenic quality. However, because the Project would follow an existing transmission line, mimicking visual patterns, the impact to scenic quality would be minimal; therefore, changes to the unit would not be warranted.

The Palo Verde Valley unit extends nearly 30 miles on a north-northeast-to-south-southwest axis, just west of the Colorado River in California. A number of Project segments cross the central portion of the SQRU. These segments include all or part of the following:

- Segment ca-04 (approximately 0.25 mile; east-west orientation)
- Segment x-09 (approximately 0.8 mile; northeast – southwest orientation)
- Segment x-10 (approximately 1.3 miles; north-south orientation)
- Segment x-11 (approximately 2 miles; east-west, north-south, and northwest – southeast orientation)
- Segment ca-05 (approximately 1.1 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment ca-01 (approximately 1.1 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment p-15w (approximately 3 miles; east-west orientation)

Possible routes range between 3 and 4.5 miles in either an entirely or mostly east-to-west orientation. With the exception of the moderately densely developed area along the Colorado River, along the eastern edge of the SQRU, all of these segments pass through active farmland, where cultivated fields are separated by roads, levees, and other rectilinear features contributing to what appears to be a sparsely populated but entirely managed landscape. Transmission facilities exist in views, including the DPV1 transmission line with which Segment p-15w would be aligned. Such agricultural uses characterize the majority of this SQRU, though the degree to which the lands near Project segments is developed is notably higher. Given such conditions, the impact to scenic quality in this portion of the SQRU would be minimal and changes to the unit would not be warranted.

The Blythe Valley unit extends approximately 22 miles from its northernmost portion to its southernmost. All or part of the following Project segments would cross this SQRU:

- Segment ca-05 (approximately 5.5 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment ca-06 (approximately 2.25 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment ca-07 (approximately 0.5 mile; west-northwest – east-southeast orientation)
- Segment ca-01 (approximately 3 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment ca-02 (approximately 3.25 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment x-12 (approximately 1.25 miles; north-south orientation)
- Segment x-13 (approximately 2 miles; north-south orientation)
- Segment p-15w (approximately 3.5 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment p-16 (approximately 4 miles; east-west orientation)

Possible route distances across this SQRU range between 7 and 13 miles, in either a direct or staggered east-to-west orientation. Project segments in this SQRU pass south of the city of Blythe and north of the community of Ripley. Agricultural lands characterize this portion of the Project, despite its proximity to population centers of varying size. The existing DPV1 transmission line passes through this area, just north of Ripley. As in the Palo Verde Valley unit, the developed, agricultural landscape of this portion of the Blythe Valley SQRU is better suited than its sparser portions to the north to absorb a modification like the Project, and such alterations would not be likely to substantially alter scenic quality for the entire SQRU. Changes to the scenic quality rating would not be warranted.

The Chuckwalla Valley SQRU is comparatively larger than other SQRUs crossed by the Project in California. It extends more than 15 miles to the north of the Project's western terminus, more than 10 miles to the west and more than 13 miles to the southwest, beyond the Mule Mountains. The following Project segments would be entirely or partially within this SQRU:

- Segment ca-07 (approximately 2.7 mile; east-southeast – west-northwest, then east-west orientation)
- Segment ca-09 (approximately 2.6 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment ca-02 (approximately 0.3 mile; east-west orientation)
- Segment x-15 (approximately 1.4 miles; north-south orientation)
- Segment x-16 (approximately 2.3 miles; north-south orientation)
- Segment x-19 (approximately 1 mile; south-southwest orientation)
- Segment p-16 (approximately 0.8 mile; east-west orientation)
- Segment p-17 (approximately 2.9 miles; east-west orientation)
- Segment p-18 (approximately 2.6 miles; east-west orientation)

Possible route distances across this SQRU range between 7 and 13 miles, either northwesterly, westerly, or southwesterly to northwesterly. All potential routes would pass through a landscape that contrasts substantially with the agricultural lands to the east. The Project would be within an area dedicated to energy production and transmission. While the Mule Mountains area a scenic backdrop to the area, any route of the Project would appear within a local area that includes existing solar energy developments, transmission lines (DPV1), and the Colorado River substation. The Chuckwalla Valley SQRU includes expansive lands that are sparsely developed, save for utility-scale solar energy developments, and which are characterized by memorable and vivid topography. These areas are north of the Project's western terminus, however, and the addition of transmission segments here, in an area bounded by the DPV1 transmission line to the south and I-10 to the north, would not substantially alter the scenic quality of the entire unit. Changes to the SQRU rating would not be warranted.

4A.2 REFERENCES

BLM. 1986. Visual Resource Inventory. BLM Manual 8410.