

8 Scenic Resources

Humboldt County's scenic resources, open space lands, coastal areas, forests, and scenic highways, contribute to the County's unique sense of place. Maintaining and enhancing these resources will help maintain the quality of life residents value. In this chapter, existing scenic resources are described, and then a viewshed evaluation is presented for selected areas of the County, showing how scenic resources may be affected by land use changes. In the final section, existing policies are summarized and issues related to scenic resources that were identified during Phase I are listed along with policy options that respond to them.

8.1 EXISTING SCENIC RESOURCES

The range of visual resources in Humboldt County is wide, varied, and numerous. Views include coastline views, mountains, hills, ridgelines, inland water features, forests, agricultural features, idyllic rural communities, and a combination of all of these features. Views are distant and proximate, panoramic and discrete. There are perhaps very few areas of the County where scenic beauty is not evident.

Coastal Views

Humboldt County's varied and extensive Pacific Ocean coastline allows for a wide range of scenic vistas from Highway 101 and from beaches, state parks and Coastal Access points. The County's Local Coastal Program includes a technical study on visual resources, which will be used in evaluating opportunities and constraints within the Coastal Zone. This study, completed in 1979, includes a detailed inventory of local visual resources along the coastline. The study inventories and maps areas of visual concern and identifies areas as "highly scenic" and "visually degraded areas." The extensive inventory includes points offering coastal views in Humboldt County.

Forests

Forestland defines the visual landscape of Humboldt County. Redwood National Park, Six Rivers National Forest, Redwoods State Park, and Kings Range National Conservation Area are all significant, protected forests within the County. Forestland is abundant well beyond these protected areas. The scenic value of these natural resources, viewed both from within or from outside, is of great importance.

Open Space and Agricultural Lands

The rural character of the county is defined by the topography and the views afforded as a result of those natural landforms. The interspersed heavily vegetated areas, such as forests, with open spaces and agricultural lands, as viewed from the changing topography, defines the scenic beauty for which the County is known.

Scenic Highways

Several highways in Humboldt County have unique scenic qualities because of their natural setting. A scenic road is defined as a roadway that in addition to its transportation function, provide opportunities for the enjoyment of natural and scenic resources. Scenic roads direct views to areas of exceptional beauty, natural resources or landmarks, or historic and cultural interest. Although no highways in Humboldt County are “officially designated” as California State Scenic highways, several State Highways are eligible for official designation: Route 36 from Route 101 near Fortuna to the Trinity County line; Route 96 from Route 299 at Willow Creek north to Siskiyou County; Route 101 for it’s entire length in Humboldt County; and Route 299 from Arcata to Willow Creek. Scenic views are also offered from a multitude of County and local roadways.

8.2 VIEWSHED EVALUATION

Deterioration of the scenic qualities of a viewshed can be caused by many factors, including logging and road construction as well as rural subdivision and development. As a result, viewsheds with the highest potential for deterioration are those closest to cities and towns and those near unprotected forestland. A qualitative viewshed analysis for selected viewpoints was conducted to illustrate how GIS data can be compiled and interpreted in order to assess the qualities of a viewshed and it’s sensitivity and susceptibility to deterioration from development impacts. This viewshed analysis also was intended to provide a context for discussing the policy options that are presented later in this chapter.

For the viewshed analysis, visual characteristics at eight key viewpoints were tabulated, using the existing GIS database developed by the County. The sites and the basis for their selection are described in Table 8.1. The location each viewpoint is illustrated in Figure 8-1.

Using the ArcView program, the first step was to determine all of the viewable areas within a five-mile radius from each viewpoint. A full 360-degree view is assumed from each viewpoint. Then, for each of the viewsheds, the following data was compiled: Existing Land Use, Public & Private Land, Parkland & Type of Park, and Planned Land Use. From this data, the sensitivity of the scenic resource to changes in land use, development and timber harvesting can be determined. Viewsheds with high percentages of land planned for timber production, residential uses, or commercial uses have a higher potential for impact; those with high percentages of public or parkland have a lower potential for impact.

Table 8-1 Viewshed Points

<i>View point</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Location Description</i>	<i>Basis for Selection</i>
1	Highway 101 south of Orick	Highway 101 curves tightly and views are possible east to the Redwood Creek Valley and west to the Pacific Ocean.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views both inland and to the coast. - Development potential in the Orick CPA - Developable Rural Residential land in viewshed
2	Highway 101 at Big Lagoon Park	Views are possible of Big Lagoon, between Highway 101 and the Coastline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views both inland and to the coast. - Developable Rural Residential land in viewshed - Parkland in viewshed
3	Highway 101 north of Arcata and south of Mckinleyville,	Development potential, key roadways (101 & 299), coastal views, and the western end of the Mad River Valley come together at this point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views inland (to the Mad River Valley) and to the coast. - Developable Rural Residential land in viewshed - Parkland in viewshed
4	Highway 101 north of Fortuna	This area is evaluated as a series of points in order to simulate a changing-view driving experience. If traveling north, Humboldt Bay, the Coast, and Eureka are in the view; if traveling south, the coastal ranges are in the view.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developable Rural Residential in viewshed (Eureka CPA) - Parkland in viewshed - Public land in viewshed
5	Highway 211 north of Ferndale	This area is evaluated as a series of points in order to simulate a changing-view driving experience. Traveling southbound, views of coastal ranges and the town of Ferndale exist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ferndale lies in-between US 101 & southerly views. - Developable Rural Residential land in viewshed - Public land in viewshed
6	Highway 101 in the Redway-Garberville-Benbow CPA	Forestland, vegetation, and varied topography are visible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developable Single-Family Residential in viewshed - Developable Rural Residential land in viewshed - Parkland in viewshed
7	Highway 36 near Grizzly Creek State Park	Forestland, vegetation, and varied topography are visible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forestland in Viewshed
8	Highway 299 near Willow Creek	Forestland, vegetation, and varied topography are visible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developable Rural Residential land in viewshed - Parkland in viewshed

Source: Dyett & Bhatia, 2002

According to Table 8-2, viewsheds from points 4, 5, and 6 are highly susceptible to changes in the character of the scenic resources from impacts as a result of residential development, while viewsheds from points 2, 4, 5, and 6 are highly susceptible from impacts as a result of timber production. Viewsheds from points 4, 5, and 6 are especially susceptible to deterioration due to their potential for view degradation by both development and timber production. A significant amount of parkland & open space is located within viewsheds 1,2, 4, 5 and 8; presenting both an opportunity and a cause for view preservation.

Table 8-2: Existing Land Uses In Viewsheds (Acres)

<i>Land Use</i>	<i>Viewpoint 1</i>	<i>Viewpoint 2</i>	<i>Viewpoint 3</i>	<i>Viewpoint 4</i>	<i>Viewpoint 5</i>	<i>Viewpoint 6</i>	<i>Viewpoint 7</i>	<i>Viewpoint 8</i>
Agriculture & Grazing	347	-	34	11,960	11,569	330	-	-
Commercial	-	-	-	61	17	2	-	3
Heavy Industry	-	-	-	56	9	9	-	-
Incorporated Cities	-	-	-	1,550	426	-	-	-
Multi-Family Residential	-	-	1	30	11	1	-	2
Open Space/Parks	770	781	15	372	301	3	-	133
Public & Semi-Public	1	16	-	335	182	1	-	1
Rural Residential	110	67	64	305	521	428	-	203
Single Family Residential	1	-	12	22	56	10	-	-
Timber Production	155	2,575	8	530	653	753	160	25
Tribal Lands	-	1	-	-	31	-	-	159
Vacant Land - Urban	2	-	3	225	31	1	-	2
Vacant Land - Unclassified	134	142	15	255	210	198	-	64
Other (ROW, Water)	511	7,441	23	383	1,382	9	-	-
Total	2,030	11,024	175	16,085	15,367	1,735	160	592

Source: Dyett & Bhatia, 2002

The amount of public land within a viewshed also contributes to the potential for preservation of the viewshed, as public land is more easily protected than private land. As illustrated in Table 8-3, viewsheds 1, 2, 4, 5 and 8 include a significant amount of public land.

Many factors affect the sensitivity of scenic resources in a viewshed such as: the existing natural quality of the views and degree of development or degradation that is visible; the extent to which the viewshed can be viewed from public viewing points (e.g., whether travelers on the highways can see the view from both directions and whether the view is relatively brief (a few seconds) or of a longer duration. If specific developments are proposed within the viewshed, a more detailed analysis may be warranted to determine these factors and to assess the degree of intrusion in existing views.

Figure 8-1: Viewshed Locations

*Humboldt County General Plan Update
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Figure 8-2: Viewsheds

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Table 8-3: Public and Private Land in Viewsheds

<i>Land Use</i>	<i>Viewpoint 1</i>	<i>Viewpoint 2</i>	<i>Viewpoint 3</i>	<i>Viewpoint 4</i>	<i>Viewpoint 5</i>	<i>Viewpoint 6</i>	<i>Viewpoint 7</i>	<i>Viewpoint 8</i>
Public Land								
Acres	775	791	9	645	870	4	0	290
Percent	51	22	6	4	6	0	0	49
Private Land								
Acres	743	2,792	143	15,058	13,115	1,722	159	302
Percent	49	78	94	96	94	100	100	51
Total*	1,518	3,583	152	15,703	13,985	1,726	160	592

* These Totals do not match total acreages in Table 8-1 as land designated "Other (ROW, Water)" is not included here.

Source: Dyett & Bhatia, 2002

8.3 POLICY ISSUES

This section focuses on scenic resource issues from a public policy perspective. In evaluating existing and future conditions and land use options, the County must consider the various policy options for the issues identified in Phase I of the General Plan Update, which are summarized in the Critical Choices Report. These key questions help frame the issues for policy options for scenic resources. As background, the existing policies in the General Plan are presented, followed by a discussion of issues and policy options that respond to them. The policy evaluation worksheets for scenic resources are in the Appendix. These worksheets are provided as a tool for members of the public to evaluate policy options and indicate preferences for accepting, modifying, or rejecting these options.

EXISTING POLICIES

The County's General Plan (Framework Plan) contains the following scenic resource policies, all of which are related to scenic highways. In addition to these goals and policies, the Framework Plan includes a lengthy set of standards applicable to the development of a County scenic route system.

GOALS

1. Establish a system of scenic routes that will increase the enjoyment of, and opportunities for, recreational and cultural pursuits and tourism in the County.
2. Conserve, enhance, and protect scenic resources observable from scenic routes.

3. Provide multiple recreational uses, trails, roadside rests, picnicking and observation points when appropriate on present or future publicly owned lands adjacent to scenic routes.
4. Recognize the dual scenic and economic value of lands planned or zoned for the growing and harvesting of timber and other agricultural products by maintaining continued resource harvesting and production along scenic routes.

POLICIES

The following policies serve as guidelines for the development of a scenic route system, and for the preparation of specific Scenic Route Plans.

1. The Scenic Routes System shall be developed and implemented through the adoption of specific Scenic Route Plans. The impetus for preparing Scenic Routes Plans should come from the Board of Supervisors, landowners or interested citizens. Except for Scenic Route Plans initiated by the Board of Supervisors, a petition of support signed by 25% or more of the property owners within the proposed scenic route shall be required to undertake any Route Study.
2. The Scenic Route System shall be consistent with adopted County and City General Plans, and shall be coordinated with local, state and federal agencies.
3. When considering Scenic Routes where regulations may have to be applied to productive or potentially productive natural resources, primary consideration shall be given to sound resource harvesting and management.
4. In both urban and rural areas, uses normally permitted by the General Plan and by zoning shall be allowed in Scenic Routes, except that scenic resources within officially designated Scenic Routes may be preserved and enhanced by supplementing normal zoning regulations with special height, area and setback regulations; by providing architectural and site design review; by regulating billboards, signs not relevant to the main use of the property, obtrusive signs, and automobile wrecking yards and junkyards. Design and location of signs may be regulated to prevent proliferation of unsightly signs along roadsides.
5. Specific development controls for any proposed Scenic Route shall be identified and adopted in the specific Scenic Route Plan for such route. The nature and type of controls may vary from route to route, and specific controls adopted for any one route or route segment do not necessarily apply to other routes within the scenic route system.
6. In regard to proposed development projects, the intent of the specific Scenic Route Plan shall be to render projects as aesthetically pleasing or as compatible with surroundings as possible, but not generally to determine whether or not the project itself should occur.

Coastal Zone

The following is a summary of visual resources policies presented as part of the Local Coastal Program:

For all coastal areas

- Protect views to the ocean and “scenic coastal areas.”
- Minimize alterations to natural landforms.
- Keep new development compatible with its setting.
- Restore visually degraded areas.

For “scenic” coastal areas

- Keep new development “subordinate” to its setting.
- Protect unique characteristics of special communities that are popular visitor destinations for recreational use.

ISSUES AND POLICY OPTIONS

Developing a policy structure for protecting and maintaining visual and scenic resources within the County involves a three-step process. Step one is to create an inventory of visual and scenic resources to be protected, step two is to evaluate these resources, identify potential threats and priorities for resource protection, and step three is to create a framework for the protection. The County’s coastal visual resources were inventoried in 1979 – this inventory could provide a starting point and could be updated to reflect current conditions.

Each key question or issue raised in the Critical Choices Report that relate to scenic resources is discussed below. Based on County and public input, these policy options will be refined. Some of these options also will shape preparation of “sketch plans” (generalized land use plans for accommodating future development), while others will be implemented through zoning and subdivision regulations or other programs.

ISSUE

- *What criteria should be used in identifying high value visual resources?*

In order to create a comprehensive framework for protecting visual resources, visual assets should be inventoried and assessed for value. This inventory will create a basis for a set of policies by which to manage these visual resources. Developing a visual resource inventory involves two components: 1) develop criteria by which a County asset is deemed a “visual resource” and 2) analyze data about these visual resources. Candidate visual resources include:

- Scenic roadways, including highways eligible for state scenic status.
- Coastal zone areas
- Public parkland & open space resources, including trail systems

Scenic qualities that should be identified might include but are not necessarily limited to:

- Rural-open grazing or grassland
- Rural-intensive cultivation, usually orchards or vineyards
- Deep commercial forest and public lands
- Inland hills, valleys and ridges (close-up, distant, panorama)
- River views
- Ocean views
- Historic or culturally significant sites
- Unique natural areas or geologic formations
- Small rural communities.

This initial list of policy options (8.1 and 8.2, below) provides the basic tools by which the preservation of visual resources can occur. Subsequent policies address the manner in which preservation could occur.

Option 8.1 Establish a GIS-based visual resources inventory. The inventory, developed using the above-listed criteria, would serve as the framework for viewshed maintenance and protection programs. Scenic roadways identified under initiatives described in the existing General Plan policies could either be folded into the overall visual resource inventory or developed separately. The database would include information such as land uses within viewsheds, potential for development, potential for logging, clear cutting or mining, parkland, public land, and other information. The database would enable the County to evaluate potential impacts to viewsheds from rural development, thereby enhancing their ability to protect and maintain the visual resources in the County.

Option 8.2 Develop a Visual Quality Assessment Metric. Such a metric has been developed by agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. The purpose of the metric is to “score” visual resources on a number of criteria, including: the topography of visual landforms; type, abundance, variety, and color of vegetation; presence and proximity of

water; public importance or significance of views; and other criteria. The higher a visual score, the more important the resource. This visual score should be maintained or improved. Development or land action that reduces the visual score would not be approved unless mitigation or compensation benefits justified approval.

ISSUE

- *Are there innovative protection programs that optimize community and private property interests?*

The most typical set of policy initiatives for visual resource protection are Scenic Highway initiatives. The scenic routes policies in the current General Plan provide an excellent basis for more detailed policy direction. These policies deal with either a) the inventory, designation, and creation of scenic routes or b) the maintenance and preservation of views from these routes. The overriding thrust of these policies is to provide for the protection and enhancement of the County's scenic highway environment while protecting the rights of property owners within scenic corridors to the maximum extent possible. Additional policies could enhance these policies and provide protective measures for features scenic resources other than scenic highways.

Option 8.3 Coordinate with State and Federal Scenic Roadways initiatives. Currently “eligible” routes should be applied for “officially designated” status. Several County roadways are designated by the State as “eligible” for the State Scenic Highway program. The status of a state scenic highway changes from eligible to officially designated when the local jurisdiction adopts a scenic corridor protection program, applies to CalTrans for scenic highway approval, and has that application approved.

Option 8.4 Complete Scenic Route Plans or Corridor Studies and adopt Scenic Corridor Overlay Zoning. This option affirms current General Plan policy and is a requirement for state designation. The overlay zoning would implement scenic route standards and setback/screening requirements.

Option 8.5 Develop heritage landscape protection provisions. These standards would apply to development in visually sensitive areas. For historic or significant landscapes, a “heritage” program could be enacted in order to protect and maintain landscapes. Such a program is similar to historic preservation for buildings and architectural features. Such programs have worked well where historic rural character is threatened.

ISSUE

- *Where do billboards belong?*

Currently, the County's zoning ordinance allows billboards in CH (Highway Service Commercial), MH (Heavy Industrial), C (Commercial) or U (Unclassified) zones. Pre-existing billboards in other areas that were legally established are considered nonconforming uses. The County does not have an amortization policy which would require these signs to be removed over a certain period of time. The consequence of this fairly standard approach to sign control has led to an excess of billboards in the County, some of them along scenic roadways.

Due to private ownership and investment in income-producing signs, most specifically billboards, removal can be a difficult process. A common method of eliminating non-conforming signs is to allow the non-conforming sign to remain in place for a sufficient time period so as to amortize its cost before requiring its removal. Several California communities have introduced such programs, which are consistent with the California Outdoor Advertising Act. Amortization periods ranging from one year to five years have been held by some California courts to be reasonable, depending on the original capital investment of the structure or sign in question.

The California Outdoor Advertising Act prohibits the placement of billboards in certain areas, including along designated Scenic Highways. If certain County roadways that are currently "eligible" for scenic highway status become officially "designated", billboards along their length would subsequently become non-conforming. Amortization schedules for non-conforming signs are also provided in this state statute.

Policy options that respond specifically to this issue include:

Option 8.6 As part of the scenic corridor overlay zone, develop standards for the placement, type, height, and number of roadway signs. Such zoning would assist in regulating the location, number, and size of highway signs. The sign provisions would include a design review process for signs within the foreground and background of designated scenic corridors. In commercial areas, development bonuses could be given as an incentive for appropriate signage.

Option 8.7 Establish an amortization program to remove billboards along identified scenic corridors over a reasonable time period, consistent with State and Federal law. Existing billboards within scenic corridors shall be removed or relocated out of the corridor. An adequate period of time would be allowed for sign owners to amortize the value of signs. An amortization schedule would be included in the sign ordinance. Such a program would be consistent with the California Outdoor Advertising Act.

Option 8.8 Establish Use Agreements with Outdoor Advertising Companies and Municipalities for the Removal or Relocation of Billboards. Working with municipalities and with billboard owners, relocation agreements could be struck between the County, municipalities, and billboard owners. Such an agreement could be mutually beneficial. Advertisers maintain billboard space and the subsequent revenues; the County eliminates billboards from scenic roadways; and municipalities obtain property tax revenues.

Option 8.9 Establish a Wayfinding Signage Network within the County Such a system would have a unique visual identity, integrate seamlessly with the County's visual landscape, and be used to direct travelers and residents to unique areas within the County. Included into such a system would be directional and informational signs regarding private businesses. Such inclusion would meet businesses needs for outdoors advertising in a less visually damaging manner. Such wayfinding systems have been successful in many communities and on the Federal Interstate Highway system as a method of reducing, eliminating, and compensating for outdoor advertising.

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