

3.11 Visual Resources/Light and Glare

3.11.1 Introduction

This section assesses the potential visual and light and glare impacts of the proposed project. Visual resources of the generation plant site were analyzed using a qualitative method that involves characterizing the visual setting, identifying the sensitivity of viewers who would see the project, determining the expected visibility of the project facilities at specific public locations (key viewpoints), and identifying the overall degree of visual change (contrast) introduced by the project facilities, based primarily on visual simulations of the appearance of the facilities.

Visual resources along the transmission line right-of-way were assessed using a more formal method, the Visual Resource Method, developed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). This method was used because parts of the proposed transmission line are located on BLM land, and this methodology has been applied to similar Bonneville projects on western lands. Details about the visual assessment methods can be found in Appendix D.

For both the generation plant and the transmission line, photos were taken from several key areas where different types of viewers could see the project. These key viewpoint locations are shown in Figure 3.11-1 (for the generation plant) and Figure 3.11-10 (for the transmission line). For the generation plant site, computer software was used to add an image of the project facilities to these photos to illustrate how the facilities would look from the key viewing areas. The resulting “before-and-after” images are shown in Figures 3.11-2 through 3.11-9. For the transmission line, a photo is provided to show existing views at each key viewpoint along the route (Figures 3.11-11 through 3.11-17). In some cases where tower locations are known, a simulation of how the new transmission line would appear is also provided. A narrative description is also provided for each of the existing and simulated views.

3.11.2 Existing Conditions

3.11.2.1 Generation Plant

Visual Setting of the Project Site Vicinity

The visual quality of the area within 1 to 5 miles from the project site includes primarily rural and unique/distinctive visual elements. In areas categorized as rural, the landscape exhibits reasonably attractive natural and human features/patterns, although they are not visually distinctive or unusual within the region. The landscape integrity of the area provides some positive visual experiences such as natural open space and agricultural areas. In unique/distinctive areas, the landscape exhibits distinct and memorable visual

features, such as landforms, rock outcrops, or other patterns that are largely undisturbed. These areas usually occur in a rural setting or in open space. Few if any human developments are present.

Human features and patterns in the area can be considered visually distinctive, although they are not unusual within the region. A mixture of crop and forested areas characterizes the site, and vivid green vegetation is dominant during the growing season. Some areas of natural open space remain intact, such as the Two Rivers Habitat Unit of the McNary National Wildlife Refuge. Distant views from higher points in the landscape provide visual interest.

The project site is located on a relatively level bench adjacent to the Columbia River (Lake Wallula). The elevation of the project site is approximately 385 feet, while the typical river elevation is 340 feet. Views of the river can be considered distinctive.

The Horse Heaven Hills rise approximately 5 miles to the west and southwest of the project site (primarily on the west side of the river) and are a distinct feature in the visual landscape. A ridge known as the Butte (elevation 1,140 feet) is the nearest dominant feature in this range; it is located approximately 4.5 miles west of the project site. An eastern extension of the Horse Heaven Hills continues east of the river and south of the project site.

Wallula Gap, approximately 5 miles from the project site, is considered to have unique/distinctive visual quality. Wallula Gap is the relatively narrow, steep-sided gorge where the Columbia River flows through the Horse Heaven Hills. It was formed when the floodwaters of glacial Lake Missoula coursed over the Columbia Basin in a catastrophic event. Wallula Gap has been designated as a National Natural Landmark because of its geologic significance. Elevations exceed 1,100 feet in the vicinity of Wallula Gap, producing local relief of 700 feet or more.

The gently rolling terrain of Eureka Flat characterizes the landscape east of the Columbia River and from northwest to southeast around the project site. This terrace dips gradually toward the Columbia River and is dissected by several small, local drainages that slope from northeast to southwest. The rolling terrace is broken to the north by the Burbank Slough, a backwater of Lake Wallula located about 2 miles north of the project site, and to the south by the bottomlands of the Walla Walla River where it joins the Columbia River. Distant views extend to the Palouse Hills to the east and the Blue Mountains to the southeast. The steep-walled gorge and river scene and the basalt towers of the Twin Sisters provide memorable visual features.

Rural elements within 1 mile of the project site include irrigated agricultural fields and orchards to the north and vacant land to the south and west. Virtually the entire rolling terrace surrounding the project site and extending for many miles to the north and northeast has been developed as irrigated farmland. The dominant visual characteristic of this area is the large-scale crop circle pattern typical of center-pivot irrigation systems. The crop circles in this area are typically 120 to 160 acres in size and 0.5 mile in diameter. The geometric pattern formed by these circles is readily apparent from most

viewing positions that are at least slightly elevated and is quite striking from significantly elevated views.

Some extensive tracts of formerly irrigated lands have been converted to wood fiber farms stocked with cottonwood trees (a deciduous species). The fiber farms are planted in large rectangular blocks, adding another visual element of geometric regularity to the landscape.

Several human features other than those characteristic of farming practices have modified the physical setting. Lake Wallula is an artificial impoundment created by McNary Dam on the Columbia River. The lake is a major transportation artery with a significant volume of tug and barge traffic, and it provides shoreline sites for numerous port and industrial facilities. Located less than 1 mile east of the project site, Lake Wallula may be considered a unique/distinct feature of the immediate area.

The area also includes several transportation features. U.S. Highway 12 is a high-speed, two-lane highway that borders the project site on the west. U.S. Highway 12 has a four-lane freeway configuration farther to the north, and an expansion to four lanes is proposed for the project area. Rail lines run along the west and east boundaries of the project site, and Dodd Road extends from east to west near the northern boundary of the project site.

There are also several electric transmission lines in the area including a 500 kV transmission line running southwest to northeast approximately 3.5 miles east of the project site, a 115 kV line running northwest to southeast about 3 miles northeast of the project site, and parallel single-circuit 69 kV transmission lines extending from east to west approximately 1.5 miles south of the project site.

A petroleum products pipeline runs northwest-southeast less than 1 mile east of the project site. Several water transmission pipelines supplying irrigation water from the Columbia River cross the project site. The PG&E Gas Transmission-Northwest (GTN) pipeline is located approximately 4.8 miles southeast of the project site. Although these pipelines are buried, they represent an industrial element in the project area.

The project site lies in an area that is zoned industrial. Several industrial facilities are visually prominent near the project site. The Boise Cascade Corporation Wallula Mill is an imposing feature located 1.4 miles south of the project site. The Wallula Mill is essentially visible from all directions and is a dominant feature during the day (facilities and plumes of steam/smoke) and night (lights).

The Ponderosa Fibers of Washington deinking plant is adjacent to the Wallula Mill. The Iowa Beef Processors slaughterhouse is also located adjacent to the northeast corner of the project site, and the J.R. Simplot Company feedlot covers several hundred acres next to the eastern boundary of the project site. Several smaller warehouse/industrial facilities are located just northwest of the project site and along Dodd Road. These facilities create an urban/industrial character in the area immediately surrounding the project site.

The nearest residences are two homes in the northwest corner of the project site in the vicinity of the Dodd Road/U.S. Highway 12 intersection. Other residential areas in the vicinity include the community of Wallula about 2 miles south of the project site, and scattered residential developments in and around Humorist and Burbank, located approximately 3 miles north of the project site.

Visual Setting of the Natural Gas and Makeup Water Supply Pipeline Routes

The proposed route for the natural gas pipeline crosses both the project site and the surrounding area. Within 1 mile of the project site, the natural gas pipeline would cross an area that is urban/industrial in character. The remaining section of the pipeline (to the natural gas pipeline tap) continues through a rural area. The western end of the natural gas pipeline route passes through railroad right-of-way, vacant land, Boise Cascade Corporation fiber farm, and finally near or through several irrigated crop circles.

A number of facilities add linear elements to the landscape where the natural gas pipeline would cross. These elements include irrigation canals, the existing 500 kV Lower Monumental–McNary transmission line, the PacifiCorp 69 kV transmission lines, and the Chevron oil products pipeline right-of-way.

Residences are located in the community of Wallula, south of the proposed natural gas pipeline route. The nearest residences are 0.8 mile west of where the natural gas pipeline would be constructed.

The proposed route for the makeup water pipeline is the same as the natural gas pipeline within 1 mile of the project. The remaining section of the makeup water supply pipeline (to the Boise Cascade fiber farm water wells) continues through a rural area. The southern end of the water pipeline route passes through railroad right-of-way, vacant land, and finally the Boise Cascade farm. The community of Wallula is located within 0.25 mile west of the existing Boise Cascade water wells.

Viewer Types and Sensitivity in the Generation Plant Area

Activities and facilities at the project site would be visible to residents, recreationists, motorists, and workers as described below. The sensitivity of viewers at the eight specific viewpoints evaluated for the project is shown in Table 3.11-1 at the end of this section. The pipeline corridor viewsheds would be similar to those described for the power plant site.

Residents and Recreationists (Moderate to High Sensitivity)

Residential viewers and recreationists who would view the project site for long periods, and for whom the visual landscape is important to daily activities, would have high visual sensitivity. High-sensitivity views are typically of long duration, and occur from residential and recreational areas. These views include elements that dominate the landscape.

Moderate sensitivity to visual changes would be experienced by certain recreational viewers, such as boaters or water-skiers, who do not view the project site for extended periods. Moderate-sensitivity views are typically experienced from highways and local roads where the duration of the view is short to moderate, many of the viewers are frequent users of the travel route, and visual sensitivity could be constrained because orientation of the viewer is focused elsewhere for much of the time.

Three residences are currently within viewing distance of the project site, although actual viewing conditions are influenced by existing vegetation.

The project site is potentially visible (depending on viewing position and intervening visual barriers) to boaters on Lake Wallula from approximately the mouth of Burbank Slough to about the confluence of the Walla Walla River.

There are no developed recreation facilities from which the project site is presently visible (see Section 3.10, Land Use for further detail). However, dispersed recreationists using the Two Rivers and Peninsula Units of the McNary National Wildlife Refuge would probably be able to see structures above a certain height on the project site.

Motorists (Moderate Sensitivity)

Travelers on local roads who do not view the project site for extended periods would experience moderate sensitivity to visual changes.

The most common views of the project site would be from U.S. Highway 12. The project site is visible intermittently along this roadway within about 1 mile north of the project site, and more continuously for up to about 2 miles south of the project site. Travelers on local roads (primarily Dodd Road) have views toward the project site in certain locations. Distant views toward the project site are also possible from locations on local roads west of the Columbia River and on U.S. Highway 730 in the Wallula Gap area.

Some views to the project site, particularly from the north, are at least partially obscured by intervening vegetation such as the row of Lombardy poplars perpendicular to U.S. Highway 12 along the northern edge of the project site.

Workers (Low Sensitivity)

The large number of agricultural and industrial workers near the project site would primarily have low sensitivity. Low sensitivity views are typically those from agricultural or industrial areas where the duration of the view is short and the view may be partially obscured by topography, landscaping, or structures. Workers are also considered to have low visual sensitivity because their primary focus is on their work tasks.

The project site is visible to the many workers (collectively, well over 2,000) employed at the Iowa Beef Processors slaughterhouse, the J.R. Simplot Company feedlot, and other

industrial facilities near the project site. As noted previously, the Boise Cascade Corporation Wallula Mill is presently a dominant element of most of the views to the project site and would remain the dominant element because of its exposed location next to the Columbia River.

Existing Sources of Light and Glare near the Generation Plant Site

The project site is located in a rural area zoned for industrial use. The project site is currently used for irrigated agriculture and does not have existing light sources that are typically associated with developed industrial land uses. Consequently, ambient lighting levels at the project site are relatively low. However, lands adjacent to the project site and in nearby areas support industrial, agricultural, and transportation uses that create a variety of lighting sources. Because of the type and level of development near the project site, ambient lighting levels in the local area are higher than in many rural areas.

The most prominent source of light in the vicinity of the project site is the Boise Cascade Corporation Wallula Mill. This facility occupies over 100 acres and has many lights on principal structures, in parking areas, and distributed around the perimeter of the property. Under normal visibility conditions, lights from the Wallula Mill can be seen from distances of several miles in every direction.

Additional exterior lighting is present on the Ponderosa Fibers deinking plant, located south of the project site and adjacent to the Wallula Mill. Building exterior lighting and parking lot lighting are also visible at the Iowa Beef Processors slaughterhouse and the J.R. Simplot Company feedlot located northeast of the project site, and at several light industrial businesses along U.S. Highway 12 northwest of the project site. Three farmhouses located within 2 miles of the project site are additional minor light sources.

U.S. Highway 12 is another major source of ambient lighting near the project site. Vehicles traveling on U.S. Highway 12 cast light on adjacent properties and represent points of light visible to more distant viewers. Elevated roadside lighting is also present at such major intersections as the crossing with Dodd Road, located about 1.5 miles northwest of the project site; farther north in the vicinity of Burbank; and at Wallula Junction, located 5 miles south of the project site. There are seven roadside light standards at the Dodd Road intersection with U.S. Highway 12. There also are seven light standards at the northern entrance to the Wallula Mill from U.S. Highway 12 (near the southern end of the project site) and nine standards at the proposed construction access road to the plant site from U.S. Highway 12.

Beyond the immediate vicinity of the project site, the density of developed land uses is relatively low and existing light sources are few. Light sources throughout most of the surrounding countryside are limited primarily to exterior lights at scattered farm residences and vehicles on local roads, which generally are lightly traveled. The residential communities of Burbank and Wallula are exceptions to this general pattern. Under favorable sky/cloud conditions, the glow of lights from the Tri-Cities area (Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco) is visible 15 to 20 miles to the northwest.

Near the power plant site, the visual setting of the pipelines is similar to that of the project site. Beyond the immediate vicinity of the project site, the density of developed land uses is relatively low, and there are few existing light and glare sources along the pipelines.

3.11.2.2 *Transmission Line and Associated Facilities*

Landscape Setting

The greatest numbers of viewers of the proposed transmission line would be on U.S. Highway 730 west of the corridor along the Columbia River, while areas near the transmission line are generally sparsely populated. Views from high use areas such as U.S. Highway 730, recreation areas, and other major roads are referenced in this section. The proposed transmission line parallels an existing 500 kV line for most of its length, except for the portion occupied by the PacifiCorp transmission line to the north of the 500 kV line and the Wallula-Smiths Harbor segment.

To facilitate the discussion of visual impacts, the transmission line right-of-way has been divided into six areas, called visual assessment areas, because the entire project would not be visible from a single view.

Key viewpoints were selected to represent each visual assessment area. Each viewpoint represents a point of interest, but the views are directed toward the proposed transmission line. Seven key viewpoints were selected for analysis. Refer to Figure 3.11-10 for locations of visual assessment areas and key viewpoints.

Table 3.11-2 at the end of this section summarizes the visual assessment areas and key viewpoints along the transmission line right-of-way. The following paragraphs describe the existing conditions in each visual assessment area.

Visual Assessment Area 1: Wallula Area

Key viewpoints in Assessment Area 1 include the Wallula Power Project View (Figure 3.11-11) and the Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument Viewpoint (Figure 3.11-12).

In this assessment area, the transmission line corridor is located through irrigated agricultural lands between the generation plant site (approximately 2 miles northwest of Wallula) and Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Railroad, approximately 1 mile south of Wallula. This assessment area is about 4 miles long and characterized by views of irrigated agricultural landscape. It includes the community of Wallula and views of the Columbia River/Lake Wallula to the west. For travelers on U.S. Highway 12 looking west, views include the Boise Cascade Corporation Wallula Mill and Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument. Looking southwest, views of Wallula Gap provide a dramatic scenic feature.

The proposed transmission line would be visible to the east by travelers on U.S. Highway 12. Residents of Wallula would view the proposed transmission line from over 0.5 mile distance. The proposed transmission line would be partially screened from views to the east by low hills and vegetation. Existing transmission towers of the Lower Monumental–McNary line are visible to the east as well; however, the Wallula-Smiths Harbor towers would be closer.

Visual Assessment Area 2: McNary State Wildlife Recreation Area

The key viewpoint in Assessment Area 2 is the McNary State Wildlife Recreation Area View (Figure 3.11-13).

The transmission line corridor in Area 2 continues from the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern railroad and extends to Wallula Junction (where U.S. Highway 12 extends east to the City of Walla Walla, Washington). Major points of interest in this 1-mile segment include Smiths Harbor (a lake associated with the confluence of the Walla Walla River and Columbia River), the Walla Walla River, the Columbia River/Lake Wallula, Madame Dorian Memorial Park and Bridge, and the McNary State Wildlife Recreation Area (MSWRA). From U.S. Highway 12, views include nonirrigated, natural landscape and recreational areas to the east, and the Columbia River/Lake Wallula to the west.

The transmission line alignment crosses the Walla Walla River and the MSWRA about 1 mile east of U.S. Highway 12. From U.S. Highway 12, motorists would have some views of the proposed transmission line, although this entire segment of line is adjacent to the existing line.

Visual Assessment Area 3: Plateau Above Columbia River

The key viewpoint in Assessment Area 3 is the Plateau View North (Figures 3.11-14a and 3.11-14b).

From Wallula Junction, the transmission line corridor extends southwest for approximately 13.5 miles. Area 3 includes a dramatic Juniper Canyon feature but is largely characterized by rolling hills above the plateau. From U.S. Highway 730, scenic views consist of high vertical relief to the southeast and the Columbia River to the northwest. On the northwest side of the Columbia River is a backdrop of more steep terrain. The proposed corridor would not be visible from U.S. Highway 730 in this area.

The proposed transmission line across the plateau would be located through fields of dryland agriculture with elevations reaching to 1,630 feet. Hatch Grade Road provides access up to the plateau and transmission line corridor from the north. From the plateau within the transmission line corridor, viewers have extensive views of the river valley.

Visual Assessment Area 4: Hat Rock

The key viewpoint in Assessment Area 4 is the Hat Rock State Park View (Figure 3.11-15).

Area 4 extends from milepost 195 on U.S. Highway 730 (existing substation) south to State Highway 207 through sagebrush-covered rolling hills, grasslands and occasional junipers. Views in the south portion of this assessment area include agricultural fields and grassy meadows. Between U.S. Highway 730 and the Columbia River shoreline, the existing landscape consists of rolling hills with clumps of sage. Hat Rock State Park is located toward the south end of this segment, north of U.S. Highway 730.

Neither the existing nor the proposed transmission line corridor is visible from U.S. Highway 730 over most of this assessment area. Viewers on U.S. Highway 730 can see the transmission line over the lower hills near the south end of the area as the distance between U.S. Highway 730 and the transmission line decreases. The distance of the transmission line from U.S. Highway 730 ranges from 2,300 feet to 1 mile within Area 4.

Visual Assessment Area 5: U.S. Highway 730

The key viewpoint in Assessment Area 5 is the Highway 730 Roadside Southwest Viewpoint (Figures 3.11-16a and 3.11-16b).

Area 5 extends 2.1 miles southward from State Highway 207 to the McNary Switchyard South Corridor through rolling terrain and basalt foothills. The transmission line corridor is level with U.S. Highway 730.

The transmission line corridor predominantly crosses irrigated agricultural fields, scattered farmhouses, and Craig Road. The proposed transmission line would be highly visible from U.S. Highway 730 due to its close proximity (approximately 600 feet minimum).

Visual Assessment Area 6: McNary Lock and Dam

The key viewpoint in Assessment Area 6 is the McNary Lock and Dam Viewpoint (Figure 3.11-17).

The transmission line corridor extends for approximately 0.8 mile from U.S. Highway 395 to the McNary Substation South Corridor. The visual assessment area landscape lies between the intersection of U.S. Highway 730 and U.S. Highway 395 and the McNary Substation. This area is composed of existing transmission lines converging into the main switchyard area. Dry, grassy fields dominate the landscape.

Visual Quality

The visual quality of the areas surrounding the transmission line corridor includes areas that are urban/industrial, rural, and unique/distinctive in terms of visual quality (see Appendix D for discussion of visual quality categories).

The Boise Cascade Corporation Wallula Mill, the Iowa Beef Processors slaughterhouse, the J.R. Simplot Company feedlot, the Ponderosa Fibers of Washington deinking plant, smaller light industrial operations in the area, the communities of Wallula and McNary, McNary Dam and Powerhouse, railroads, and existing transmission lines promote an “urban/industrial” character.

“Rural” elements within the study area include agricultural fields and grazing land. The dominant rural visual characteristics include the dramatic topography with dry hills, Lake Wallula, and agricultural areas. In general, many of the natural and agricultural landscape features and patterns are attractive and interesting, but they are not visually distinctive or unusual within the region.

The Wallula Gap, Horse Heaven Hills, and the Columbia River can be considered unique/distinctive. The area immediately surrounding the Wallula Gap is largely undisturbed, and with the exception of transportation facilities, affected by few manmade developments.

Viewer Types and Sensitivity

As described earlier for the generation plant area, each view along the transmission line right-of-way was given a sensitivity level rating which reflects public concern for scenic quality (see Table 3.11-2 at the end of this section for discussion of sensitivity level from each viewpoint).

In general, areas such as the McNary State Wildlife Refuge Area and Hat Rock State Park were found to have a medium to high sensitivity level rating because of the recreational users, the amount of use, and the nature of the area as a park and wildlife refuge area. Recreational sightseers tend to be sensitive to changes in visual quality. Areas used by large numbers of people are assigned a higher sensitivity rating because of the high number of viewers. The plateau above the Columbia River, on the other hand, has a low sensitivity rating since the area is primarily used by a small number of people such as maintenance workers, agricultural workers, and local residents.

3.11.3 Impacts of the Proposed Action

3.11.3.1 Generation Plant

Construction

Construction of the power plant and access roads would result in low to moderate overall visual impacts, depending on the numbers and types of viewers of the project site and the temporary nature of the construction.

Construction would involve the use of heavy machinery, temporary storage and office facilities, and temporary laydown/staging areas. These structures and pieces of equipment would be stored on and adjacent to the project site in an existing rural and industrial area. Structures and equipment related to construction activities would be similar to the industrial features already surrounding the project site.

Construction of the natural gas and water supply pipelines is not expected to result in significant visual impacts because of the temporary and transitory nature of construction.

Light and Glare

Lighting at the project site during construction would be temporary. Construction activities would occur on the project site over a 24-month period, primarily during daylight hours. Glare from construction vehicles may cause temporary impacts on the project site and local roads. Although Dodd Road and U.S. Highway 12 are already heavily used, the construction traffic would incrementally increase light and glare impacts. Construction lighting and traffic would therefore cause low to moderate impacts to viewers in the surrounding area, depending on the location of the viewers.

Construction of the pipelines would have impacts similar to those occurring during construction of the plant.

Operation and Maintenance

The tallest feature of the power plant would be the two HRSG stacks (each 175 feet in height). Other structures on-site, including the turbine buildings, combustion gas turbine-generators, cooling towers, administration building, warehouse, water treatment building, auxiliary boiler stack, and water storage tanks, would range from 15 to 98 feet in height.

Trees and large shrubbery would be installed by the applicant around the perimeter of the project site. When fully mature, the tree screening would largely shield all nearby views and all except the upper third of the HRSG stacks from the distant views from the north, west, and south. A detailed revegetation plan would be developed over the next 9 months. The number of years to maturity would depend on the age of the trees when purchased. If deciduous trees were used, the mitigation would largely be lost.

Potential visual impacts were evaluated from eight viewpoints in the vicinity of the project site (see Figure 3.11-1). These viewpoints represent views of the site that would be seen by nearby residents, travelers on U.S. Highway 12 and local roadways, boaters on the Columbia River, and workers in nearby industrial areas. The viewpoints and associated impacts of the project are summarized in Table 3.11-1 at the end of this section and briefly described below.

Viewpoint 1: East of U.S. Highway 12, Looking South toward Residence near Northwest Corner of Project Site.

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-2a and 3.11-2b. To some extent, the existing vegetation (including the orchard and windbreaks adjacent to the residence) would screen construction activities at the project site. However, views from the residence would be extended in duration, and the construction activities would be a visual disruption in the existing viewscape for this residence. Development of the proposed project would cause a high impact during construction. After the tree screen is planted and fully grown (during long-term power plant operation), visual impacts would decrease to moderate. Impacts would be greater until the tree screen matures and during the winter when the trees would not have leaves.

Viewpoint 2: Looking East from U.S. Highway 12 toward Project Site

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-3a and 3.11-3b. The proposed power plant and tree screening cover would become a dominant visual element from this rural location. Development of the proposed power plant would cause moderate visual impacts to highway travelers, depending on the specific viewing location along the highway. During the winter (when the trees have no leaves to help screen the plant) and before the plant site landscaping matures, impacts would be greater.

Viewpoint 3: U.S. Highway 12, Looking Northeast from Temporary Construction Access Road

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-4a and 3.11-4b. The proposed power plant and tree screening cover would become a dominant element of the landscape from this rural location. Development of the proposed power plant would cause low to moderate visual impacts to highway travelers, depending on the specific viewing location along the highway. During the winter (when the trees have no leaves to help screen the power plant) and before the plant site landscaping matures the impacts would be greater.

Viewpoint 4: Looking North from U.S. Highway 12, from Overpass East of Wallula Mill

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-5a and 3.11-5b. The proposed project would generally expand industrial elements in the viewscape. This would constitute a low to

moderate impact on travelers, depending on the specific viewing location along the highway.

Viewpoint 5: Looking East from McNary National Wildlife Refuge

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-6a and 3.11-6b. The proposed project and associated tree screening would moderately dominate the viewers' field of vision, if the affected viewscape were seen from the east bank of the river near the project site. The project would cause low to moderate visual impacts to viewers on the Columbia River, with the level of impact varying depending on the type of viewer. Recreational boaters, who would be focused on the scenery, would likely experience higher impacts than barge operators who would be more focused on work activities.

Viewpoint 6: Toothaker Road Looking East toward Project Site from across the Columbia River

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-7a and 3.11-7b. The project would result in low to moderate visual impacts to viewers in this area because of the vegetative screening around the plant and the distance to the plant site across the river.

Viewpoint 7: Looking Southwest from Iowa Beef Slaughterhouse (Northeast of Project Site)

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-8a and 3.11-8b. The tree screen around the plant site would moderate the view of the power plant in this industrial setting. The proposed power plant would result in a low visual impact to travelers along Dodd Road, depending on the specific viewing location along the road.

Viewpoint 8: Looking South from Dodd Road

This viewpoint is shown in Figures 3.11-9a and 3.11-9b. The tree screen around the plant site would moderate the view of the power plant in this industrial setting. Development of the proposed power plant would cause low to moderate visual impacts to Dodd Road travelers, depending on the specific viewing location along the road.

Plumes

Periodically, plumes would be visible emanating from the cooling tower and turbine. Modeling was performed to determine the anticipated size and likely duration and occurrence of the plumes. Potential impacts of the plumes such as reduced visibility (fogging) are discussed in Section 3.2, Air Quality.

Pipelines

Because the natural gas and makeup water supply pipelines would be buried, operation of the pipelines would not cause visual impacts in the project area.

Light and Glare

Lighting would be permanently installed for operational safety and security at the project site. Glare from maintenance and employee vehicles during operation of the proposed power plant would occur on Dodd Road and U.S. Highway 12. The vehicles would be expected to incrementally increase glare impacts along Dodd Road and U.S. Highway 12.

The applicant proposes the following measures to reduce light and glare.

- Where economically feasible, all new equipment and fencing would be constructed of materials that restrict glare. The exterior materials of the completed plant facility would consist of painted metal and masonry. A flat light brown color would be used for structures and equipment to reduce glare and help the power plant blend with the existing development in the project vicinity. Windows in the administration building would be glazed to prevent glare.
- To reduce off-site impacts from lighting, light fixtures would be directed toward the middle of the property and away from the outer project site boundaries. The project would be developed and operated consistently with industrial light and glare provisions of the Walla Walla County Zoning Code. The plant stacks would be illuminated in accordance with FAA Advisory Circulars No. 70/460-2H (Proposed Construction and/or Alteration of Objects that May Affect the Navigation Space) and 70/460-1G (Obstruction Marking and Lighting), as well as U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service draft guidance on siting, construction, and operation and decommissioning of communication towers (September 14, 2000). Where practical, outdoor lighting would be restricted to low-intensity lamps, such as sodium or mercury vapor lamps. Switchyard lighting would be maintained at 2 foot-candles.

Operational lighting and traffic would therefore cause low to moderate impacts to viewers in the surrounding area, depending on the location of the viewers. Because the water and gas pipelines would be buried 5 feet below ground, there would be no light and glare impacts from pipeline operation and maintenance.

3.11.3.2 *Transmission Line and Associated Facilities*

This visual impact assessment compares the degree of contrast between the existing landscape before and after construction of the project. The evaluation generally follows BLM methods. The key steps in the process include describing the proposed project in each visual assessment area, selecting key views within those areas and preparing photosimulations, conducting the visual contrast rating, and comparing the contrast rating for consistency with the visual class management objectives described earlier. Details of the assessment method are provided in Appendix D.

The potential visual impacts of the proposed transmission project include temporary visual changes introduced by construction of the project and permanent visual changes resulting from the ongoing presence (operations and maintenance) of the transmission line. Since the centerline of the proposed transmission line would be parallel to and generally 200 feet from an existing transmission line over most of its length, impacts would predominantly result from adding additional structures and transmission lines to views of an existing transmission line.

Bonneville has included within the project design and project description several measures to mitigate visual impacts and to minimize potential light and glare. The impacts of the proposed transmission line construction, operation, and maintenance are assessed with the assumption these measures are implemented.

- Conductors used for the transmission system would be non-reflective.
- Insulators used for the transmission system would be non-luminous.
- In visually sensitive areas, new structures would be sited near existing structures and would use a similar structure type. This practice would lessen visual clutter that can result when different types of structures are visible in a vast open landscape.
- Ground-disturbing activities would be minimized.
- Visibility of access roads in highly sensitive areas would be minimized through proper placement and alignment.
- All construction vehicles would be washed to control noxious weed infestations.
- Wherever possible, existing roads would be utilized to minimize new road construction.
- Properly functioning drainage control devices would be maintained.
- Construction on steep slopes and geologically unstable areas would be minimized.
- Building steep road grades would be avoided.
- Degraded road surfaces would be repaired.

Construction

During construction, visual impacts would result from construction of access roads, clearing of vegetation, construction of steel lattice towers, and stringing of conductors. Construction of the Smiths Harbor Switchyard would include clearing, grading, and construction of the new facility. Visual impacts during construction would include

- views of construction equipment in the right-of-way and at the switchyard site,
- views of road cuts in some areas prior to restoration,
- views of construction staging areas,
- views of cranes and/or helicopters during structure assembly, and
- dust plumes from construction vehicles.

Construction impacts would be temporary. Impacts would be most apparent for people traveling on sections of nearby roads such as southern portions of U.S. Highway 730. Short-term visual impacts within the plateau above the Columbia River would be negligible because public use is low.

Operation and Maintenance

The visual assessment areas are found to have low impact levels, with the exception of Area 5, which is discussed below and has a medium rating. Over most of the project length, the proposed transmission line parallels an already existing transmission line with similar structures and does not represent an entirely new element in the viewscape. The contrast presented is generally low. Table 3.11-2 (at the end of this section) and the following paragraphs summarize the visual resource impacts for each key viewpoint along the right-of-way.

Visual Assessment Area 1: Wallula Area

The visual impact in Assessment Area 1 would be low. The proposed transmission line would be seen in the middleground in views from U.S. Highway 12. In Area 1, viewers from U.S. Highway 12 would have a short view duration. Views from the Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument focus mostly on the scenic Wallula Gap and not the proposed project because of the different angle of observation.

Near the corridor of the transmission line, the project would be prominent in the agricultural landscape. However, most viewers near the corridor are farmers, and their major focus is the agricultural fields. In the southern portion of this area, new structures would be similar and adjacent to existing structures. This factor would minimize the apparent visual contrast of the new towers.

Visual Assessment Area 2: Wallula MSWRA

Because of the distance of U.S. Highway 12 from the proposed project (about 1 mile), short duration of the view, and location of new structures adjacent to existing ones, the new structures would be seen but would not attract attention. The MSWRA view is located between U.S. Highway 12 and the proposed transmission corridor. From this view, the contrast between the proposed transmission line and other existing features surrounding it would not be high because the new structures would be similar and adjacent to existing transmission structures. The impact level would be low.

Near the transmission line corridor, the visual contrast of the new structures would demand attention and would not be overlooked by the average observer such as campers under the transmission line within the MSWRA. However, this factor would affect relatively few viewers. The few users directly under the transmission line would experience medium impacts.

Visual Assessment Area 3: Plateau Above Columbia River

There would be no impact from U.S. Highway 12 or the Columbia River, a low impact within the proposed transmission line corridor, and low impact from bluffs west of the Columbia River.

The proposed project would not be visible from U.S. Highway 730 in this area because of the difference in elevation (approximately 1,200 feet). Within and east of the corridor, the proposed transmission line would attract attention because of the structure's relative scale in relation to the fields of grassland above the plateau (see Figure 3.11-14b). Since there is limited traffic on the access road leading to the plateau and activity is restricted in this area and east of the corridor, the number of casual observers is low.

To the northwest on bluffs above the Columbia River, the corridor may be visible from higher locations. Adding a second set of structures and conductors might increase light in late evening hours from the transmission line to these locations.

Visual Assessment Area 4: Hat Rock

The impact level would be low. The distance between the proposed project and U.S. Highway 395 and U.S. Highway 730 is 1 to 2 miles in this area. The proposed project could be seen but would not attract attention. Viewers from Hat Rock State Park and residents in that vicinity would have a distant view of the proposed project but would only see it when they leave the Hat Rock State Park. Also, the proposed project would be over 1 mile away, and rolling hills appear in the foreground.

Near the corridor, the contrast of the new transmission line would be prominent in the landscape because of its scale in relation to the low-lying agricultural fields. The major focus of viewer attention is the agricultural fields because most viewers along the corridor would be agricultural workers.

To the northwest on bluffs above the Columbia River, the corridor may be visible from higher locations. Adding a second set of structures and conductors might increase light in late evening hours from the transmission line to Hat Rock State Park.

Visual Assessment Area 5: U.S. Highway 730

The impact level would be medium. The proposed structures would present an obvious contrast from the existing structures to viewers on U.S. Highway 395 and U.S. Highway 730 (see Figure 3.11-16b). The contrast would be due to the transmission structure size and scale at its location approximately 550 feet south of U.S. Highway 730. Two factors reduce the visual impacts: the average viewer would be in a vehicle, moving at highway speeds, and the duration of the view would be relatively short. From U.S. Highway 730, the proposed transmission line would be noticeable, but the contrast in relation to the

existing transmission line would be low to moderate because the project would be parallel to the existing transmission line.

Within the corridor, the contrast would be dominant in the landscape and would not be overlooked by the average observer. In this case, agricultural and maintenance workers who pass through the area on a regular basis are the casual observers. These individuals may not be highly sensitive to change. Recreational users driving to and from Hat Rock State Park would have a medium sensitivity.

Visual Assessment Area 6: McNary Lock and Dam

The impact level would be low. Given the numerous transmission facilities in the surrounding environment, the proposed transmission line would blend in with other existing transmission lines and structures, thus moderating the contrast of this added element.

The town of Umatilla is approximately 2 miles west of the project and, given the distance and the existing transmission lines in the area, the project would be noticeable but would not demand attention. The impact for viewers crossing the Columbia River on U.S. Highway 82 would be low to moderate. Viewers overlooking the project (about 1 mile away) would also see the influence of the existing transmission lines and structures at the McNary Substation on the adjacent Columbia River scenery.

3.11.4 Impacts of Alternatives

3.11.4.1 Alternative Tower Height and Longer Span Design

The alternative would not substantially increase visual impacts during construction over the proposed action. The use of higher, more widely spaced structures in the alternative would increase operational visual impacts because higher structures would have increased contrast with existing structures and the landscape. However, the alternative would include the larger towers only in Visual Assessment Area 3 across the plateau above the Columbia River. Because the number of viewers is low in this area, and the proposed and existing transmission line would not be visible from U.S. Highway 730 in this area, the number of viewers impacted would be low. The level of impact would be acceptable for the Class IV landscape. The alternative does not include the larger towers in the other visual assessment areas, where these larger towers would increase visual impacts to higher levels than the proposed action.

3.11.1.1 Alternative Alignment near McNary Substation

There is not expected to be any difference between the two options. Both options are in an area with numerous transmission towers and lines.

3.11.4.2 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no visual or light and glare impacts associated with the proposed project. Viewsheds would remain in their current condition.

3.11.5 Mitigation Measures

There are no additional mitigation measures required for potential impacts to the visual environment beyond those committed to in the project design and project description.

3.11.6 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Conversion of land use on the project site from agricultural to industrial would permanently change the visual character of the project area. Certain viewers may find these visual changes objectionable. Plumes from the cooling tower and turbine would also be visible from many locations under certain conditions (see Section 3.2, Air Quality, for further discussion).

The proposed transmission line segments would create visual impacts that are acceptable for the visual class in which they are located. No known unavoidable adverse visual impacts would occur.

Table 3.11-1. Description of Key Viewpoints and Summary of Impacts for the Generation Plant Site

Viewpoints and Figure Numbers	Existing Conditions and Viewer Sensitivity	Visual Impacts of the Project
<p>Figure 3.11-2a shows Viewpoint 1 (East of U.S. Highway 12, Looking South toward Residence near Northwest Corner of Project Site).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-2b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Visual quality is rural. Sensitivity is high because of the residential use, long-term exposure to views of the site, and the closeness of the view (less than 0.5 mile away).</p>	<p>Existing vegetation would partially screen construction activities. Views from the residence would be extended in duration, and construction activities would be a visual disruption. Development of the proposed project would cause a high impact during construction. After the tree screen is planted and full grown, visual impacts would decrease to moderate. Until the trees mature and during winter the impact would be greater.</p>
<p>Figure 3.11-3a shows Viewpoint 2 (looking East from U.S. Highway 12 toward Project Site).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-3b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Visual quality along U.S. Highway 12 varies from rural (crop circles, plantations/orchards, and natural areas) to urban/industrial (slaughterhouse, feedlot, deinking plant, and Wallula Mill).</p> <p>Sensitivity is moderate for travelers along Hwy. 12 because of limited and intermittent view duration, and moderate dominance of the project site landscape in the field of vision.</p>	<p>Proposed power plant and tree screening would become a dominant visual element resulting in moderate visual impacts to highway travelers, depending on the specific viewing location. During winter and before the plant site landscaping matures, impacts would be greater.</p>
<p>Figure 3.11-4a shows Viewpoint 3 (U.S. Highway 12, looking Northeast from Temporary Construction Access Road).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-4b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Sensitivity is moderate for travelers along Hwy. 12, as described for Viewpoint 2.</p>	<p>Proposed power plant and tree screening would become a dominant element resulting in low to moderate visual impacts to highway travelers, depending on specific viewing location. During winter and before landscaping matures, impacts would be greater.</p>
<p>Figure 3.11-5a shows Viewpoint 4 (looking North from U.S. Highway 12, from Overpass East of Wallula Mill).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-5b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Sensitivity is low to moderate for travelers along Hwy. 12 because Wallula Mill and Ponderosa deinking plant adjacent to the overpass are already part of the viewscape. Viewers have limited and intermittent views of project site, and the site would have only moderate dominance in their field of vision.</p>	<p>Proposed project would generally expand industrial elements in the viewscape, resulting in a low to moderate impact on travelers, depending on specific viewing location.</p>
<p>Figure 3.11-6a shows Viewpoint 5 (looking East from McNary NWR).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-6b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Use of the Columbia River is industrial and recreational in character (e.g., boaters and barge operators). Dominant industrial view to the south would be of the Wallula Mill.</p> <p>Sensitivity is moderate for viewers on the river because there are a relatively small number of viewers who experience a limited to moderate duration of exposure, and the project site only moderately dominates the field of vision.</p>	<p>Proposed project and tree screening would moderately dominate the field of vision from the east bank of the river near the project site, resulting in a low to moderate visual impact to viewers on the Columbia River. Level of impact would vary depending on type of viewer. (Recreational boaters would likely experience higher impacts than barge operators.)</p>

Viewpoints and Figure Numbers	Existing Conditions and Viewer Sensitivity	Visual Impacts of the Project
<p>Figure 3.11-7a shows Viewpoint 6 (Toothaker Road looking East toward Project Site from across the Columbia River).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-7b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Sensitivity is low to moderate for viewers along Toothaker Road (or any location across the Columbia River) because of tree screening of the project, limited views, intermittent view duration, and extended viewing distance (more than 3 miles) to the project site. Dominant view would be of Wallula Mill because of its exposed location on the Columbia River.</p>	<p>Project would result in low to moderate visual impacts because of vegetative screening around the plant and distance to the plant site across the river.</p>
<p>Figure 3.11-8a shows Viewpoint 7 (looking Southwest from Iowa Beef Slaughterhouse, Northeast of Project Site).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-8b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Sensitivity is low to moderate for viewers at the slaughterhouse. Although these viewers would be focused on their work, the project site is dominant in their field of vision because of proximity. This represents the first view seen by travelers heading west on Dodd Road as they pass the Iowa Beef slaughterhouse west building.</p>	<p>Tree screening around the plant site would reduce views of the plant, resulting in a low visual impact to travelers along Dodd Road, depending on specific viewing location.</p>
<p>Figure 3.11-9a shows Viewpoint 8 (looking South from Dodd Road).</p> <p>Figure 3.11-9b shows this same view with the power plant in place.</p>	<p>Sensitivity is low for travelers along Dodd Road north of the project site because of the industrial character of the location off Dodd Road and near the Iowa Beef slaughterhouse.</p>	<p>Tree screening around plant site would reduce views of the plant, resulting in low to moderate visual impacts to Dodd Road travelers, depending on specific viewing location.</p>

Table 3.11-2. Description of Key Viewpoints and Summary of Impacts for Transmission Line Right-of-Way

Viewpoints and Figure Numbers	Existing Conditions			Impacts		
	Scenic Quality Rating	Sensitivity Level ^a	Visual Resource Management Class ^b	Contrast Rating ^c	Impact Level ^d	Summary of Impacts
Visual Assessment Area 1: Wallula Power Project View						
Figure 3.11-11 (Wallula Power Project View) depicts existing transmission line looking north from an access road located approximately 1 mile east of community of Wallula.	Rating C (view fairly common to the physiographic region). Subtle color variation, little variety or contrast in vegetation, and no influence of adjacent scenery to influence overall visual quality.	Low to Medium Area is sparsely populated. Typical viewers include agricultural workers who may not be highly sensitive to visual change.	Class III (outstanding and common scenic qualities are evident with moderate viewer sensitivity). Management objective: Partially retain the existing landscape character. Level of change to characteristic landscape should be moderate.	Weak/Moderate on Hwy. 12. Moderate in the corridor.	Low. The level of contrast is consistent with the Class III visual resource rating given to this view. (Changes may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer).	Proposed transmission line would be seen in the middleground in views from Hwy. 12. Highway travelers would have short view duration. Views from Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument focus mostly on Wallula Gap, not the proposed project, because of the angle of observation. Near the transmission line, the project would be prominent. However, most viewers are farmers whose major focus is agricultural fields. In the southern portion of this area, new structures would be similar and adjacent to existing structures, minimizing visual contrast of the new towers.
Figure 3.11-12 (Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument Viewpoint) depicts the view looking south from Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument located just off of Hwy. 12.	Rating C (view fairly common to the physiographic region). The most dramatic view is southwest to Wallula Gap, but the view to the gap is affected by views of railroad cars parked on the siding in the foreground.	Medium Proposed corridor, while visible, is not located within the view toward Wallula Gap. Most viewers would be visitors to Fort Walla Walla Historical Monument. Although number of users could be moderate, their sensitivity to a new element of the built environment, which is not located in the view toward Wallula Gap, would be low. Adjacent setting includes several industrial elements such as the railroad, Wallula Mill, the Ponderosa deinking plant, and Hwy. 12.	Class III (see above).			
Visual Assessment Area 2: McNary State Wildlife Recreation Area View						
Figure 3.11-13 depicts a typical view from the MSWRA lookout facing east to the proposed transmission line.	Rating B (combination of outstanding and common). Views include interesting elements of vegetation, color, and water. Adjacent scenery and bodies of water in the MSWRA enhance overall visual quality, making this view more appealing than average for the area. Existing towers are visible in the background.	Medium to High Most users are visitors and recreationists. Recreational sightseers may be highly sensitive to the proposed transmission line approximately 0.5 mile away.	Class II (outstanding scenic quality and high visitor sensitivity). Management objective: Retain existing landscape character. Level of change to characteristic landscape should be low.	Moderate/Strong on Hwy. 12 and in the Wildlife Refuge.	Low to medium. The contrast rating for views from Hwy. 12 and in the corridor is consistent with a Class II visual resource (contrast may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer). The few users directly under the transmission line would experience medium impacts.	Because of the distance of Hwy. 12 from the proposed project (about 1 mile), short duration of view and location of new structures adjacent to existing ones, new structures would be seen but would not attract attention. From MSWRA view, contrast between proposed transmission line and existing features would not be high because new structures would be similar and adjacent to existing ones. Contrast would not be overlooked by campers under the transmission line within MSWRA, but this factor would affect relatively few viewers.

Existing Conditions				Impacts		
Viewpoints and Figure Numbers	Scenic Quality Rating	Sensitivity Level ^a	Visual Resource Management Class ^b	Contrast Rating ^c	Impact Level ^d	Summary of Impacts
Visual Assessment Area 3: Plateau above Columbia River						
Figure 3.11-14a (Plateau View North) depicts a typical view from Hatch Grade Road (elevation 1,070 feet) looking southwest at the transmission line corridor above the Columbia River valley. Figure 3.11-14b depicts this same view with the proposed transmission line in place.	Rating B (combination of outstanding and common). While not necessarily outstanding in quality, the view is more appealing than average for the area because the adjacent scenic view of the river valley is memorable.	Low The area is not within the viewshed of a residential area. The few users of this vicinity would be maintenance crews of the structures, local residents, and field workers.	Class IV (area has features common to the physiographic area and low viewer sensitivity). Corridor is not seen from the highway and is only seen as background by very few viewers from hills northwest of the Columbia River. Management objective: Allows major changes to the landscape. Level of change to characteristic landscape can be high.	None on Hwy. 730. Low within and east of the corridor.	No impact from Hwy. 12 or Columbia River. Low impact within proposed transmission line corridor. Low impact from bluffs west of Columbia River. Contrast rating from the corridor, southeast of the corridor, and areas to the northwest is consistent with the Class IV management designation.	Project would not be visible from Hwy. 730 because of elevation. Within and east of corridor, proposed transmission line would attract attention because of the structure scale in relation to grasslands, but number of casual observers is low. To the northwest on bluffs above Columbia River, corridor may be visible from higher locations, potentially increasing light in late evening hours from the transmission line to these locations.
Visual Assessment Area 4: Hat Rock						
Figure 3.11-15 (Hat Rock State Park View) depicts low rolling hills, looking south across U.S. Highway 730 to the existing Lower Monumental–McNary transmission line and the proposed project corridor.	Rating C (view interesting within its setting, but fairly common within the region). Hat Rock State Park, as a point of interest, moderately enhances the overall visual quality. View from the park to the project corridor includes subtle color variations in the landscape.	Medium to High Primary viewers are visitors to the State Park and residents of the adjacent subdivision. Activities include hiking, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing and water recreational activities. The State Park is a popular recreational destination and could include a large number of viewers during a typical year. State Park visitors would generally be looking toward the Columbia River rather than at the proposed project in the background (1.4 miles from the State Park). The proposed corridor would be visible when viewers leave the State Park and drive toward the proposed project.	Class III (outstanding and common scenic qualities and moderate to high viewer sensitivity). Management objective: Partially retain existing character of the landscape. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate.	Weak/Moderate on Hwy. 730. Moderate near corridor.	Low. Levels of contrast are consistent with Class III management rating (changes may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer).	Proposed project could be seen but would not attract attention. Viewers from Hat Rock State Park and local residents would have distant view of proposed project but only when they leave the State Park. Proposed project would be over 1 mile away with rolling hills in foreground. Near the corridor, contrast of new transmission line would be prominent because of its scale in relation to agricultural fields. Major focus of viewer attention is the fields because most viewers would be agricultural workers. To the northwest on bluffs above Columbia River, corridor may be visible from higher locations. Light observed in late evening hours from the transmission line to Hat Rock State Park may increase.
Visual Assessment Area 5: U.S. Highway 730						
Figure 3.11-16a (Hwy. 730 Roadside View) represents a view looking south from Hwy. 730 and includes views of the roadway, the existing Lower Monumental–McNary transmission line, and the vegetated field beyond. Figure 3.11-16b depicts this same view with the proposed transmission line in place.	Rating C (fairly common to the physiographic region). While the coloration and vegetative textures could be of moderate interest, this view is common to Hwy. 730 travelers in the area.	Medium to High Most viewers are Hwy. 730 travelers (workers, recreationists, residents). The duration of views is about 8 minutes but is repeated for return trips of local travelers. The area has a clearly visible existing transmission line located through undeveloped and irrigated agricultural fields. Many travelers are driving to or from Hat Rock State Park.	Class III (common scenic qualities and high viewer sensitivity). Management objective: Partially retain existing character of the landscape. Level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Project activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer.	Moderate on Hwy. 730. Strong in corridor.	Medium. Contrast rating is consistent with Class III visual resources (contrasts may attract attention from viewers on Hwy. 730 but should not dominate their views).	Proposed structures would present obvious contrast from existing structures to viewers on Hwy. 395, Hwy. 730 because of transmission structure size and scale. From Hwy. 730, proposed transmission line would be noticeable but contrast in relation to existing transmission line would be low to moderate because project would be parallel to existing transmission line. Within the corridor, contrast would be dominant and not overlooked by average observer (agricultural and maintenance workers are the casual observers and may not be highly sensitive). Recreational users driving to and from Hat Rock State Park would have medium sensitivity.

Existing Conditions				Impacts		
Viewpoints and Figure Numbers	Scenic Quality Rating	Sensitivity Level ^a	Visual Resource Management Class ^b	Contrast Rating ^c	Impact Level ^d	Summary of Impacts
Visual Assessment Area 6: McNary Lock and Dam						
Figure 3.11-17 (McNary Lock and Dam Viewpoint) depicts a view to the west of transmission lines entering the McNary Switchyard, approximately 1,500 feet away in Area 6 and just out of the picture.	Rating C (fairly common to the physiographic region). Even with adjacent scenery of the Columbia River moderately enhancing overall visual quality, the view is dominated by transmission structures and lines extending toward the McNary Substation.	Medium Users typically include visitors and tourists of McNary Dam. Although the number of viewers is high because the location is an established lookout, viewer sensitivity to additional transmission lines would be moderate because of the visual dominance of existing transmission lines.	Class III (disturbed scenic qualities and moderate viewer sensitivity). Management objective: Partially retain the existing character of the landscape. Level of change to landscape should be moderate but should not dominate the view of the casual observer.	Moderate on Hwy. 730, in corridor, from Umatilla, and Columbia River.	Low to moderate. Contrast ratings are consistent with Class III visual resource (contrast may attract attention but should not dominate views of casual observer).	Proposed transmission line would blend in with other existing transmission lines and structures. Project would be noticeable but would not demand attention in Umatilla area. Impact for viewers crossing Columbia River on Hwy. 82 would be low to moderate. Viewers overlooking the project (about 1 mile away) would also see existing transmission lines and structures at McNary Substation.
<p>Note: All seven views were identified within the foreground/midground zone. Since this rating is the same for all views, distance zone is not included in the discussion above. The foreground/midground distance zone includes areas seen from highways, rivers, or other viewing locations to a distance of 3 to 5 miles.</p> <p>^aSensitivity level takes into consideration the frequency of use of an area and the user's perceived degree of concern about proposed changes in scenic quality. Each area is rated as having high, medium, or low sensitivity based on use volume and perceived user's attitudes. Sensitivity level analysis is used as an estimate of public concern for scenic quality. Six factors are used to evaluate sensitivity: types of users, amount of use, public interest, adjacent land uses, special land use areas, and other factors (e.g., research or studies indicating visual sensitivity). Each factor is assigned a rating of high (H), medium (M) or low (L); then, an overall rating (H, M, L) is given based on the ratings for the six factors.</p> <p>^bVisual Resource Classes are as follows: Class I: A special classification assigned to congressionally designated superb features such as national wilderness areas or wild sections of national wild and scenic rivers. The management objective is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention. Class II: An area of outstanding scenic quality, high visitor sensitivity, and is viewed as foreground or midground. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Class III: This is an area with outstanding and common scenic qualities, with moderate viewer sensitivity. The level of change to the landscape characteristic should be moderate. Class IV: This is an area with features more common to the physiographic area that has either low viewer sensitivity or is viewed only as background or is seldom seen. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high.</p> <p>^cContrast ratings were assigned to each view by considering distance, angle of observation, length of time project is in view, relativity to size or scale, season of use, light conditions, recovery time, spatial relationships, and atmospheric conditions. Contrast that would be created by the proposed transmission line was then rated as follows: Strong: The contrast demands attention, would not be overlooked by the average observer, and is dominant in the landscape. Moderate: The contrast begins to attract attention and begins to dominate the characteristic landscape. Weak: The contrast can be seen but does not attract attention. None: The contrast is not visible or not perceived.</p> <p>The projected level of contrast was compared to acceptable levels of contrast for the visual resource class of the view as described earlier under existing conditions. The four levels of contrast (none, weak, moderate, and strong) roughly correspond to Classes I, II, III, and IV, respectively. This means that a "strong" contrast rating may be acceptable in a Class IV area but probably would not be acceptable in a Class III area. Acceptable degrees of contrast for each visual resource class are based on BLM definitions: Class I: Acceptable contrasts are primarily natural ecological changes. Class II: Contrasts may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Class III: Contrasts may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Class IV: Contrast may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention.</p> <p>^dImpacts are classified as high, moderate, or low based on the degree of contrast of the project compared to the acceptable level of contrast for that visual resource management class. The following impact levels are used: High: Contrast from the project is substantially greater than acceptable. Medium: Contrast is somewhat greater than acceptable for the visual resource class. Low: Contrast is acceptable for the visual resource class. No Impact: Visual contrast is not perceptible.</p>						