4.1.9 VISUAL RESOURCES

4.1.9.1 SAMP Study Area Existing Conditions

The SAMP Study Area is located in southeastern Orange County. Within the northerly part of the SAMP Study Area are the City of Rancho Santa Margarita and the unincorporated planned communities of Robinson Ranch, Dove Canyon, Las Flores, Coto de Caza, and Ladera Ranch. Regional parks within the SAMP Study Area include Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park, O'Neill Regional Park, Caspers Regional Park, and other permanent open space in unincorporated Orange County. MCB Camp Pendleton in the County of San Diego bounds the SAMP Study Area on the east and southeast. The Cleveland National Forest in Orange County is within the SAMP Study Area. The City of Dana Point is within the SAMP Study Area to the south. To the west in the SAMP Study Area are the cities of Laguna Niguel, San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente, and Mission Viejo, as well as land within unincorporated Orange County.

County of Orange

The natural setting of Orange County provides a diversity of mountains, hills, flatlands, and shoreline. These landforms and associated major canyons, ridgelines, and coastal areas, contribute to the diversity of Orange County's environment. The County is a somewhat rectangular land mass trending approximately 40 miles along the coast of the Pacific Ocean and extending inland approximately 20 miles and covering 798 square miles. It is predominantly an alluvial plain, generally less than 300 feet in elevation in the west and central sections. Several low-lying mesas interrupt the plain along the northern coast. The plain is semi-enclosed by the Santiago Foothills and the Santa Ana Mountains which rise to 5,600 feet on the east, the Puente and Chino Hills in the north, and the San Joaquin Hills to the south. "Saddleback," the twin-peaked heights of the Santa Ana Mountains, serves as a topographical landmark in the county. In addition to the dominant ridgeline of the Santa Ana Mountains, major ridgelines occur in the Lomas de Santiago and the San Joaquin Hills. There are numerous canyons and valleys, including the Santa Ana Canyon, Capistrano Valley, Laguna, Aliso, Wood, Moro, San Juan, Trabuco Santiago, Modjeska, Silverado, Limestone, and Black Star Canyons. Orange County currently provides over 27,216 acres of regional open space. Regional recreation facilities are classified as urban regional parks, natural regional parks, coastal regional facilities, nature preserves, and historical sites.

Resources in the SAMP Study Area also include an urban national forest, the Cleveland National Forest. The County General Plan notes that a substantial open space buffer is needed along the Cleveland National Forest Boundary to minimize inherent conflicts between urbanization and forest wildlife resources and to reduce the potential impacts on urbanization that can arise from wildfires, flooding, landslide, erosion, and siltation. The foothills abutting the Cleveland National Forest boundary have outstanding scenic qualities and significant watershed and wildlife habitat.

City of Dana Point

The City of Dana Point represents the unification of three distinct pre-incorporation communities: Dana Point, Monarch Beach, and Capistrano Beach. The city's maritime identity is derived from its coastal location. Distinct landform features include the "Headland" and coastal bluffs. They are visible from the region's coastline and coastal hillsides. Public views and pedestrian access to the bluffs are significant urban design and public resources of the city. The city's coastline includes a diversity in its beaches, including Capistrano Beach, Doheny State

Beach, Dana Strand Beach, and Salt Creek Beach; each have a distinct character formed by surf conditions, orientation, views, landform background, and access.

Through their creek basins and intervening ridgelines, San Juan Creek and Salt Creek generally divide the City of Dana Point into three areas: Capistrano Beach, Dana Point, and Monarch Beach. The creek basins form visual corridors to/from inland hillsides and ridges.

City of Laguna Hills

The City of Laguna Hills is characterized by steep natural hillsides and natural canyons and watershed areas. Prior to the City's incorporation, Orange County designated several arterial streets as scenic highways as part of the MAPH. Designated corridors exist along five arterial streets in the southern portion of the area and include El Toro Road, Alicia Parkway from Paseo de Valencia south to the City limits; La Paz Road from Paseo de Valencia south to the City limits; Oso Parkways throughout the City; and Moulton Parkway where it traverses through the City and its Sphere of Influence. The development of these roadways included standards for increased landscape and view easements that could accommodate highway beautification areas, paved pedestrian or bike trails, or equestrian trails.

City of Laguna Niguel

The City of Laguna Niguel is characterized by its hilly terrain. The city is a predominately detached single-family residential community with expansive open space resources. Approximately 88 percent of the city's potential development areas have been developed. Approximately one-third (3,677 acres) of the city is in open space and recreational areas. This includes natural open space corridors, hillsides, parks, and greenbelts. Inclusive of adjacent County of Orange open space resources (e.g., Aliso and Wood Canyons Regional Park and Salt Creek Regional Park, Aliso Creek Greenbelt), the city has access to over 5,000 acres of open space. The open space character of the city is emphasized by its hillsides/ridgelines and canyon areas.

City of Mission Viejo

The City of Mission Viejo is a predominately built out jurisdiction; over 94 percent of the city has been developed. The City General Plan notes that most of its open space and biological habitat has been replaced by development. The eastern portion of the city contains natural resources, including steep slopes, canyons, and drainage courses. Steep slopes along the city's eastern boundary form an edge between the city and Arroyo Trabuco Creek. Hillsides along the west side of Trabuco Creek contain slopes of over 30 percent and are considered a scenic resource. However, the majority of the city is relatively flat.

City of Rancho Santa Margarita

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita has been developed as a series of planned communities. Development within each planned community is predominately residential. Low-scale commercial development is concentrated east of SR-241 and Santa Margarita Parkway; business park uses are west of SR-241. Open space surrounds the developed portions of the City to maintain the natural landscape. Approximately 66 percent of the city is designated for passive open space or active park use. Ridgelines and vista points in the city include Trabuco Canyon, Live Oak Canyon, Plano Trabuco, Ashbury Canyon, Cochise Canyon, and Bell Canyon. Water resources include Lake Santa Margarita, the Upper Oso Reservoir, Tijeras Canyon Creek, and Trabuco Creek. Several small tributaries are also located within open space

areas. Viewscape corridors in the city are: Santa Margarita Parkway (west of the city boundary between the city boundary and Avenida Empresa), Plano Trabuco Road (south of Santa Margarita Parkway and north of Robinson Ranch Road), Trabuco Canyon Road (between Live Oak Canyon Road and Plano Trabuco Road), Live Oak Canyon Road (El Toro Road and Trabuco Canyon Road), and El Toro Road. Goals of the city's General Plan include the maintenance of community character through the protection of scenic resources and vistas.

City of San Juan Capistrano

The City of San Juan Capistrano is visually characterized as a valley traversed by three creeks and surrounded by natural hillsides. The objectives of the City, with respect to visual character include (1) the preservation and promotion of those characteristics of the community which create a sense of place, (2) preservation of the historical character of the city, and (3) preservation and enhancement of the natural features which contribute to the visual character of the city. Because 40 percent of the city would be preserved for permanent open space, open space areas form a large part of the visual character of the community. The design criteria contained in the General Plan Community Design Element imposes design constraints on development to address the protection of the natural hillsides and various views created by the hillsides; the protection and enhancement of other natural features (e.g., major creeks and floodplains); the preservation and enhancement of the historical character of the community; the harmonious incorporation of new development into existing public and private development; and the maintenance of the community's "small-village, rural atmosphere."

City of San Clemente

The City of San Clemente is characterized as a largely beachfront community as a result of its location along the coastal hillside adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. The City also has a network of trails that span the City from the beach, up the canyons, and along its ridgelines. These trails have been designed to provide a safe walking, hiking, and riding experience while maintaining San Clemente's coastal rural environment. The ridgeline trails provide views of the coast and coastal canyons in adjacent wildlife reserves. San Clemente is bordered on two sides by protected wildlands; the City is bound geographically by the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains to the northwest, San Mateo Creek to the east, the Pacific Ocean to the southwest, and the San Juan Creek to the northwest. As stated in the City of San Clemente's General Plan, Scenic Highways Element, it is the goal of the City to maintain the visual quality and scenic views along designed corridors where they contribute and become an essential part of the community's urban fabric, and to enhance existing view corridors along scenic corridors and to identify opportunities for the designation of new corridors.

4.1.9.2 RMV Planning Area Existing Conditions

The RMV Planning Area has a variety of visual characteristics. Visually prominent on-site features include the undeveloped natural character of portions of the RMV Planning Area with grasslands, woodlands, and streambeds. The natural terrain contains plains, hillsides, and ridgelines, ranging from gently sloping to steep, with elevations of approximately 60 feet to a maximum of 1,326 feet above msl.

As addressed in Chapter 4.1.4, Land Use, the RMV Planning Area contains many man-made improvements and ongoing operations visible from on and off the site, including but not limited to nurseries, roadways, wireless facilities, communications towers, research and aerospace testing facilities, concrete processing, and mining operations.

Ridgelines

As shown on Figure 4.1.9-1, there are approximately 217,804 lineal feet of ridgelines within the RMV Planning Area. The RMV Planning Area is visually defined by higher elevation ridgelines surrounding the site located along several of its boundaries. These ridgelines include, from Ortega Highway at the western project entry clock-wise around the RMV Planning Area:

- A portion of an Unnamed Ridge is located just within the northwest RMV Planning Area boundary. This ridge visually separates this portion of the RMV Planning Area (proposed Planning Area 1) from existing residential neighborhoods in the City of San Juan Capistrano north of Ortega Highway.

- West Chiquita Ridge runs north-south along the westerly RMV Planning Area boundary. This ridge separates Ladera Ranch from this portion of the RMV Planning Area.

- Chiquadora Ridge runs northeast-southwest separating the northern portion of the RMV Planning Area (proposed Planning Area 2) from Coto de Caza and Riley Wilderness Park.

- Gobernadora Ridge runs north-south along a portion of the northeastern RMV Planning Area (proposed Planning Area 3). The ridge separates this portion of the RMV Planning Area from Caspers Regional Park.

- North Verdugo Canyon Ridge runs southwest-northeast and separates the northern RMV Planning Area boundary from Caspers Regional Park and the Cleveland National Forest.

- East Gabino Canyon Ridge runs southwest-northeast and separates proposed open space within the RMV Planning Area from the Cleveland National Forest.

- South Talega Ridge is just south of the RMV Planning Area. Running in a southwest to northeast direction, the ridge visually separates the southern portion of the RMV Planning Area from MCB Camp Pendleton.

- Radio Tower Ridge, located along the southwest RMV Planning Area boundary, separates this portion of the RMV Planning Area from existing land uses in the cities of San Juan Capistrano and San Clemente and from the Prima Deshecha Sanitary Landfill. With the exception of Radio Tower Ridge, these ridgelines are a part of larger ridgeline system that extends off the RMV Planning Area. The majority of backdrop ridgelines or ridgelines that silhouette the skyline to the northeast, east, and southeast of the RMV Planning Area are off-site ridgelines. Many of the ridgelines that bound the RMV Planning Area visually shield much of the site from surrounding areas.

Recreational Areas

Three public regional recreational areas are located to the north and east of the RMV Planning Area (Exhibit 4.1.9-1):

- Thomas F. Riley Wilderness Park, a 523-acre County of Orange Regional Park

- Caspers Wilderness Park, an 8,500-acre County of Orange Regional Park

- Cleveland National Forest, a 460,000-acre national facility

Existing views of the RMV Planning Area from these recreational areas (primarily from campgrounds) are limited by native vegetation and natural landforms. Pedestrian riding and hiking trails that extend to higher points in these parks have views into the RMV Planning Area.

Light and Glare

Light from the RVM Planning Area is currently limited to scattered residences and businesses located throughout the RMV Planning Area and from traffic along Ortega Highway and Antonio Parkway. Off-site uses in the surrounding communities to the north, west, and south (i.e., Coto de Caza, Ladera Ranch, San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente, and MCB Camp Pendleton) generate light from street and other outdoor lighting. Glare is limited because most on- and off-site uses in the area are constructed of non-reflective materials.