

High density parcel sections (residential), National Historic and Scenic trails, and Scenic (National and State) Highways and Byways were mapped with a 3/4-mile High Sensitivity buffer where foreground views of high sensitivity viewers of the project would be expected (Exhibit 3).

## **Scenic Quality**

Scenic quality, using the classic BLM or Forest Service (USFS) methodologies, was not inventoried and mapped for the entire study area because of the expense to conduct such an analysis over a 250,000 square mile area. However, mapping of existing visual management classes on public lands and national forest, and the mapping of other special management areas during the regional study meets the intent of identifying the landscape character and scenery according to the MFSA rules. For example, areas of exclusion, high resource sensitivity, moderate resource sensitivity, and low resource sensitivity were mapped based on the land use, visual, and special area inventory found in the MSTI analysis.

During data collection and inventory, BLM VRM Classes and USFS VQOs were inventoried for those lands where they had been established by the agencies and data was available. Areas identified as USFS VQO Preservation or BLM VRM I were identified as exclusion areas. These areas are typically rare, unique, pristine, high quality landscapes. Wilderness Areas, Recommended Wilderness Areas, and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), which are generally pristine, high quality landscapes, were also mapped as part of the inventory and identified as exclusion areas (e.g., VRM Class I). This combination of mapping of agency management objectives and mapping of Wilderness Areas, Recommended Wilderness Areas, and WSAs resulted in identifying the highest quality landscapes located within the study area.

Areas identified as USFS VQO Retention or BLM VRM II were identified as high sensitivity areas. These areas are typically high quality, somewhat rare landscapes with limited development. National and State Scenic, Historic, and Back Country Highways and Byways were identified within the study area. Potential foreground view areas were identified with a 3/4-mile buffer zone and considered to be high sensitivity. These areas often have a higher level of scenic quality than might typically be found in the surrounding area because of agency efforts to preserve the character of these features and their surrounding landscape.

Areas identified as USFS VQO Partial Retention or BLM VRM III were identified as moderate sensitivity level areas. These areas are typically moderate quality, somewhat common landscapes. Areas identified as USFS VQO Modification and Maximum Modification or BLM VRM IV were identified as low sensitivity areas. These areas are typically the lowest in quality or most common.

Additionally, park, recreation, and preservation areas that are dedicated as park land or open space by a governmental agency, recognized as nationally or regionally significant preservation or recreation areas, or formally designated unique or undisturbed natural areas were identified as part of the land use study. These areas, by nature of their designation and status as protected areas, generally are considered to have a higher level of scenic quality than the surrounding landscape. Other Special Management Areas inventoried include BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Nation Wildlife Refuges, National Historic Sites, National Battlefields, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Research Natural Areas, and State Wildlife Management Areas, all of which are similarly considered to be of higher scenic quality

Finally, mapping areas of visual sensitivity to change also was done in the regional study, and these areas generally correlate with potential expected scenic quality.

Although the entirety of the study area was not inventoried for scenic quality; the combined inventory of agency management classes, scenic areas, visually sensitive areas, Wilderness Areas, Recommended Wilderness Areas, and WSAs; and additional mapping of park, recreation, and preservation areas as part of the land use study provides a generally complete inventory of the highest quality landscapes in the study area, where rare or unique features and general scenic quality are protected. Additionally, although areas of lower scenic quality were not generally inventoried outside of those areas with identified USFS VQOs or BLM VRMs, the land use study identifies urban/developed and agricultural land uses, which are generally common in nature, and thus are typically considered to have a low level of scenic quality.

## **Visual Compatibility**

Visual compatibility generally refers to the ability of any landscape to absorb the proposed alteration without loss of landscape character or general scenic quality. The visual resources study identified areas of exclusion, high resource sensitivity, moderate resource sensitivity, and low resource sensitivity, which were mapped based on the inventory information collected. These classes of visual sensitivity generally correlate with potential expected visual compatibility levels and levels of development in the landscape, with exclusion areas, which are typically pristine, the least able to absorb alteration and low resource sensitivity areas, which are typically the most developed landscapes, the most able to absorb alteration.

Components of other resource studies are also relevant to visual compatibility of the study area. Geologic stability, soil stability, and potential of erosion of a landscape affect visual compatibility. A landscape prone to landslide, soil slippage, and erosion exacerbates the visual impact of landscape alterations (USFS 1995). An increase in slope generally correlates with an increase in these hazards and a decrease in visual compatibility. The engineering constraints and geohazards study divided the study area into exclusion, high resource sensitivity, moderate resource sensitivity, and low resource sensitivity areas based on slope and other potential geohazards. These sensitivity levels generally correlate to with landscape compatibility levels.

Land use also has an impact on visual compatibility levels. The land use study identified existing land uses including urban/developed and agricultural land uses. These land use areas typically include numerous built structures and heavily altered vegetation patterns. This type of landscape character allows for proposed alterations to be absorbed into the landscape, thus resulting in a generally high level of visual compatibility. Special Management Areas, including Wilderness areas, Recommended Wilderness areas, WSAs, BLM Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Nation Wildlife Refuges, National Historic Sites, National Battlefields, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Research Natural Areas, and State Wildlife Management Areas were inventoried as part of the land use study. These areas, by nature of their designation and status as protected areas, generally have a higher level of general scenic quality than surrounding areas and are typically less able to absorb alterations without loss of landscape character or scenic quality, thus resulting in a generally low level of visual compatibility.

The land use study also identified existing linear facilities, including existing transmission lines, railroads, and major paved roads and highways. Landscapes with existing linear facilities, particularly transmission lines that are similar in scale to the proposed transmission line, are more able to absorb the proposed

Iteration (transmission line) with a limited loss of landscape character than landscapes where no similar elements occur. Thus, areas with existing linear facilities that were identified in the land use study would generally have a higher level of visual compatibility.

### **2.5.3 Cultural Resources**

Cultural resources are protected by Federal and State laws if they are found to have some level of significance under the criteria of the National Register or under State guidance. Most of the cultural resources previously recorded in the Study Area have never been evaluated for National Register eligibility, but hundreds have been evaluated and can form the basis for a sensitivity analysis.

Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), an undertaking, such as construction of a transmission line on Federal land, results in adverse effects to a cultural resource listed in or eligible to the National Register when it alters the resource's characteristics, including relevant features of its environment or use, that qualify it for inclusion in the National Register. Potential impacts could include:

- Physical destruction, damage, or alteration of all or part of the property;
- Isolation of the property from, or alteration of the character of the property's setting when that character contributes to the property's qualification to the National Register;
- Introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the property or alter its setting;
- Neglect of a property resulting in its deterioration or destruction; and
- Transfer, lease, or sale of the property.

For this Siting Study, it is anticipated that potential effects of a transmission line on cultural resources would generally be related to either physical damage (e.g., ground disturbance at an archaeological site, demolition of a historic cabin) or changes in the visual setting (e.g., a transmission line disrupting the view of a historic ranch). Physical disturbance could potentially be an adverse effect for all three classes of cultural resources. A change in visual setting can potentially be a major adverse effect for National Register-listed or eligible architectural resources and for Native American sacred sites, but is usually not a consideration for most archaeological sites because their National Register eligibility is more often tied to scientific importance than to setting.

The approach used in the sensitivity analysis is based in part on a similar analysis performed for a transmission line in Wyoming and Montana by SWCA Environmental Consultants (Bolling and Seddon 2005). For the Townsend-to-Midpoint analysis, sensitivity criteria for cultural resources are defined as follows:

**Exclusion** areas are locations where the siting of transmission lines is essentially precluded. With reference to cultural resources, important components of this category are: 1) areas which contain policies for legally protected resources; 2) areas where government regulations expressly prohibit encroachment; 3) cultural resources of national significance; and 4) cultural resources or natural features of high spiritual value to Native Americans. For this analysis, exclusion areas include:

- Units of the National Park System with a prehistoric or historic theme. These include National Parks, National Monuments, National Historic Sites, National Historic Parks, National