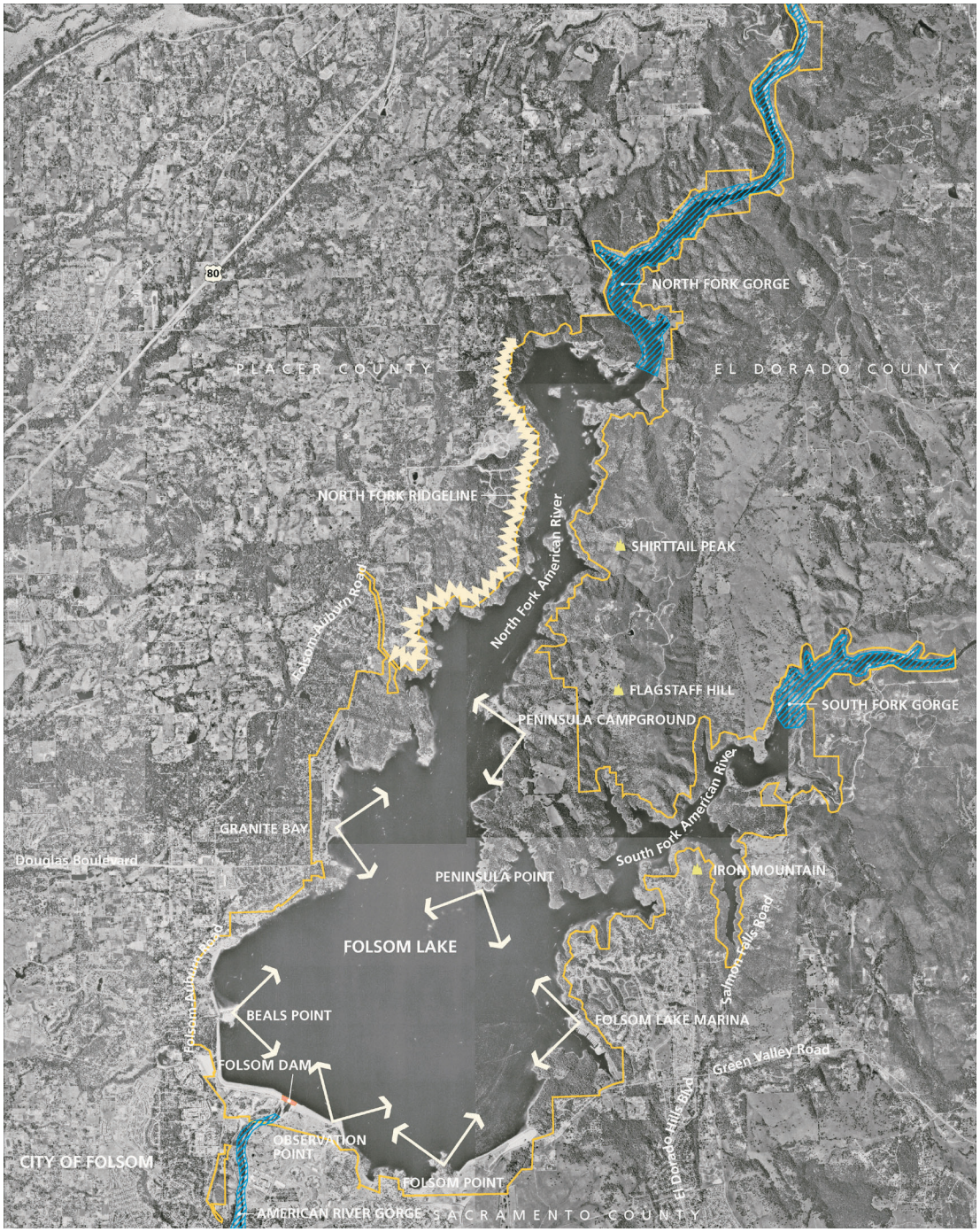


FOLSOM LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA RESOURCE INVENTORY

- Dredge Tailings
- Ridgeline
- Vista Point
- Prominent Hilltops
- River Gorge/Canyon

FIGURE

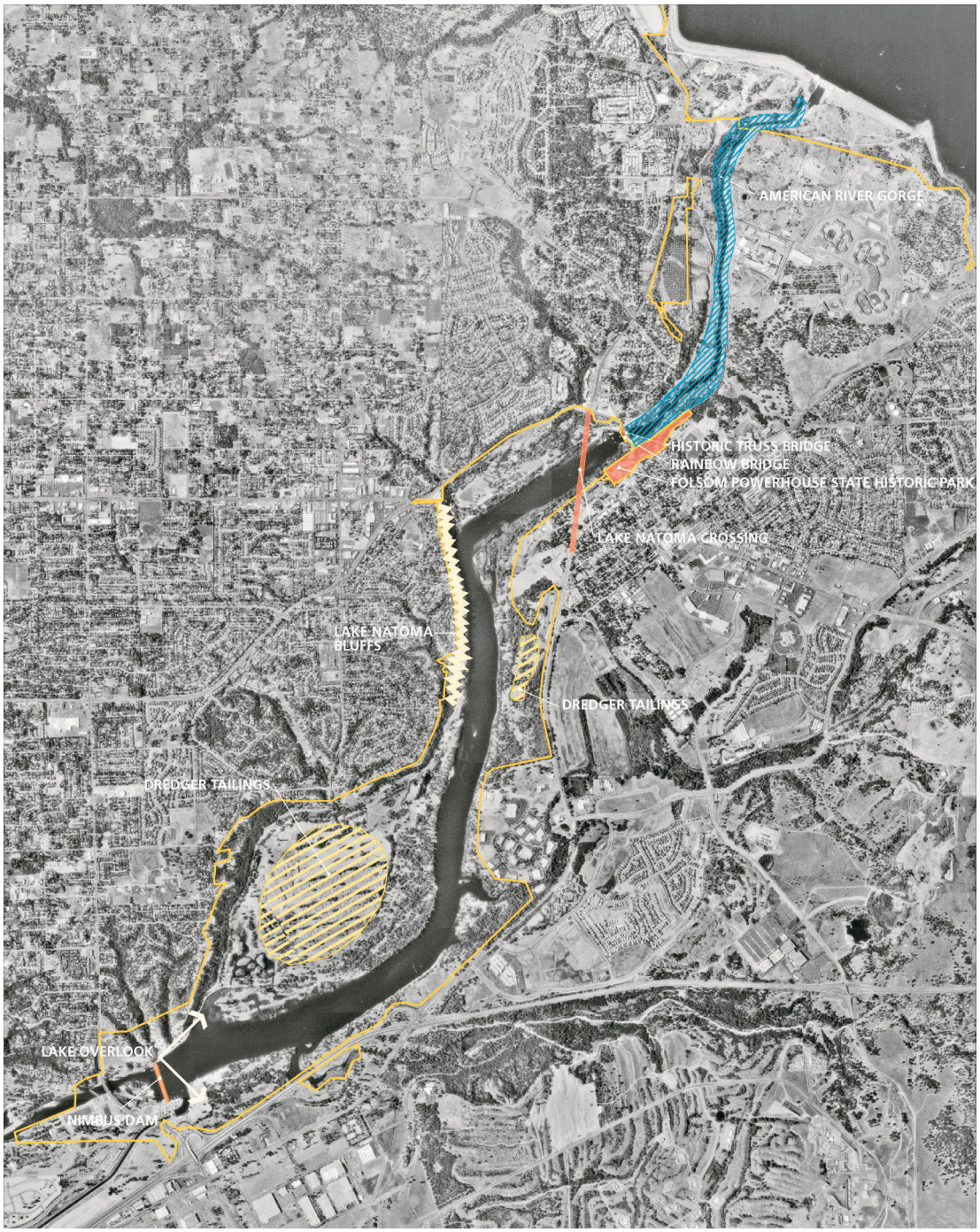
SR-1

Scenic Resources on Folsom Lake

Prepared by
Wallace Roberts & Todd

N

Not to Scale



FOLSOM LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA RESOURCE INVENTORY

- Dredge Tailings
- Ridgeline
- Vista Point
- Prominent Hilltops
- River Gorge/Canyon

FIGURE

SR-2

Scenic Resources on Lake Natoma

Prepared by
Wallace Roberts & Todd

N

Not to Scale

Lake display a range of densities from high end rural ranchette subdivisions to urban small-lot subdivisions.

Along the western side of Folsom Lake, much of the adjacent development is screened from view by both existing vegetation and distance. For example, at Granite Bay, the relatively flat topography and heavily vegetated land area effectively buffers the visitor use facilities from adjacent development. Although a similar setting exists at Beals Point, residential neighborhoods along the western shoreline are visible in the distance due to the beach's location on the west facing side of the point. North of Oak Point, the proximity of urban development becomes much more visible from within the Unit, such as at the Granite Bay equestrian staging area (Photo SR-7). A significant amount of residential development also occurs on the ridgeline overlooking the North Fork of the American River between the North Granite area and Horseshoe Bar.

Along the eastern side of Folsom Lake in El Dorado County, nearby urban and rural residential development is more apparent and has substantially altered the visual character of the Unit in some locations. This is most evident at Brown's Ravine and at Old Salmon Falls, where residential development hugs the Unit boundary on bluffs above these facilities, and on Iron Mountain above New York Creek where it meets the South Fork of the American River. At Brown's Ravine, large homes are clearly visible from the marina area, Hobie Cove, and the day use area (Photo SR-8). This northern view is in stark contrast to other directions that contain oak-studded hillsides, the marina basin, and the open waters of Folsom Lake. A similar situation exists at the remote Old Salmon Falls lower parking area and trailhead. The sense of remoteness are enhanced at this site by the high quality views west toward the oak-covered hills of the peninsula. In contrast, views to the south include large homes on the hillside above the trailhead (Photo SR-9). Although not immediately adjacent to the Unit, new residential development south of Green Valley Road in the area of the Mormon Island Wetland Preserve is clearly visible from the trail along the top of Mormon Island Dam. From this vantage point, the growing suburban neighborhoods of the El Dorado Hills area spread to the south and east (Photo SR-10). Finally, the area adjacent to the Folsom Point entrance at East Natoma Street is now the site of a large large religious assembly facility which significantly changes the character of this entrance to the Unit (Photo SR-11). An attempt by the City of Folsom to preserve nearby parcels adjacent to the Unit boundary as open space failed and further development entitlements have been granted.

On Lake Natoma, views from the Unit are generally more limited and of higher quality due to the dense riparian vegetation along the shoreline and the Lake Natoma Bluffs. Effective screening of the surrounding urban neighborhoods contributes to a more intimate and secluded park-like setting compared to the far larger and more spacious Folsom Lake. Views in the southern portion of Lake Natoma tend to be of lower quality due to Nimbus Dam and associated power transmission lines and other facilities. At the Lake Overlook, residential development abuts the Unit boundary adjacent to the unpaved parking area at the horse assembly area and trailhead. A low earthen berm provides the only separation between the Unit and the neighborhood. Immature trees in the rear yards of these homes do little to provide screening (Photo SR-14). From certain vantage points, the office and industrial buildings that abut Lake Natoma in the area of Blue Ravine Road can be seen from trails along the eastern shoreline; however, heavy vegetation and dredger tailings in the area do much to screen this development from view.

At Nimbus Flat, the Unit gateway at Hazel Avenue north of the interchange with Highway 50 is well landscaped once you pass the gate booth. However, the entrance drive between Hazel Avenue and the gate is less visually appealing than other entrances on Lake Natoma. North of the entrance drive is the South Folsom Canal, which separates this area from the CSUS Aquatic Center (Photo SR-12). A poorly maintained chain-link fence encloses the canal. South of the entrance drive is a Caltrans park-and-ride lot that also serves as a Goodwill donations drop-off point in the form of a parked transport trailer. Neither the canal nor the parking lot are adequately screened from the entrance to Nimbus Flat. Further, the gateway sign for the Unit is located in the Hazel Avenue right-of-way adjacent to the lot (Photo SR-13). Overall, this gateway to the Unit is not in keeping with the park-like setting that visitors encounter once they pass through the gate.

It should be noted that Lake Natoma is part of the American River Parkway under the 1985 American River Parkway Plan. As such, the County of Sacramento has authority over land uses adjacent to Lake Natoma within unincorporated Sacramento County. The County applies a Parkway Corridor (PC) Combining Zone in such areas to ensure land use compatibility and reduce visual intrusion on natural amenities.[4]

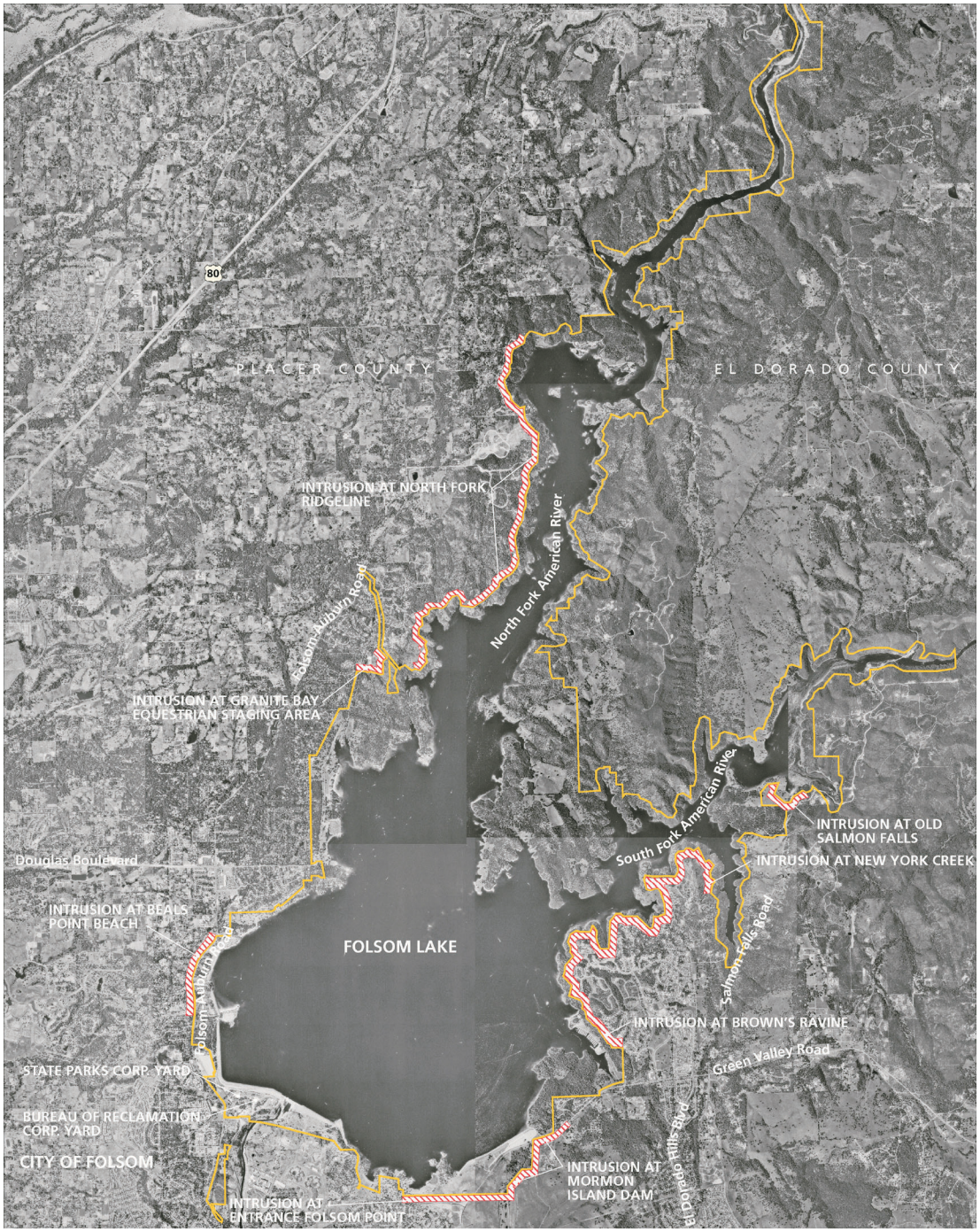
Built Features within the Unit

In several locations throughout the Unit, built features or human intervention detract from the overall visual quality and ultimately the visitor experience. These features include the dams, parking lots, utility corridors, and temporary structures associated with park activities. In addition, the seasonal fluctuations in the water level of Folsom Lake has significant visual implications.

Dams

Although the damming of the American River at Folsom resulted in the creation of the Unit, Folsom Dam, Nimbus Dam, and their associated earthen levees and appurtenances detract from the natural character of the Unit's setting. This is particularly the case on Folsom Lake in late autumn when the surface water elevations are at their lowest of the season. It is at this time that significant portions of the Folsom Dam and levee elevations are visible above the water line. At Folsom Dam, this elevation can be as much as eight stories and extending a length of 1,400 feet.[5] In spring when Folsom Lake is full, the exposed elevation at Folsom Dam can be as little as 14 feet. Folsom Dam also includes a four-story tower on the dam crest that is silhouetted against the sky when viewed from the Lake. Since the Nimbus Dam is an afterbay structure designed to reregulate flows into the American River, surface water elevations on Lake Natoma vary by only four to seven feet.[6] As a result, little of the Nimbus Dam elevation is exposed and the structure appears less intrusive from Lake Natoma. These dams are large engineered structures and have the significant negative impact on water views in the Unit.

[4] County of Sacramento, *Sacramento County Zoning Code, Sec. 235.*, date unknown.
[5] U.S. Department of the Interior, date unknown.
[6] Ibid.



FOLSOM LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA RESOURCE INVENTORY

Visual Intrusion from Development

FIGURE

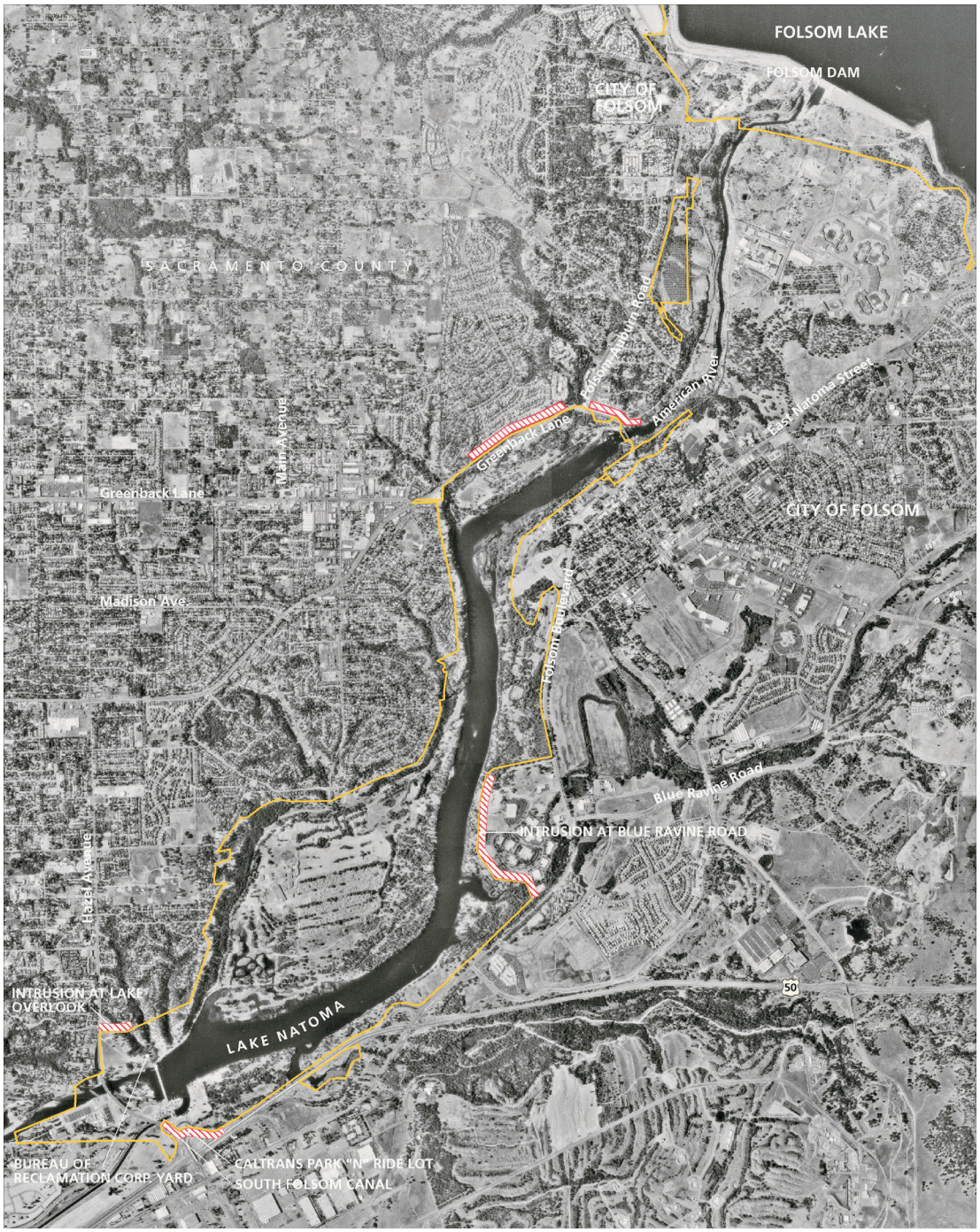
SR-3

Elements Detracting from Scenic Resources and Visual Quality on on Folsom Lake

Prepared by
Wallace Roberts & Todd

N

Not to Scale



FOLSOM LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA RESOURCE INVENTORY

Visual Intrusion from Development

FIGURE

SR-4

Elements Detracting from Scenic Resources and Visual Quality on on Lake Natoma

Prepared by
Wallace Roberts & Todd

N

Not to Scale

Parking Lots

The combination of large numbers of vehicles with large trailers requires the provision of substantial areas of parking. However, more than any other park facility, the large unbroken parking lots at the key day-use facilities tend to degrade the visual quality of these recreation areas. For instance, the main beach parking area at Granite Bay, nearly 5 acres in size, includes no internal or perimeter planting (Photo SR-15). Further, no planting exists at Folsom Point where the ramp parking lot measures almost 7 acres. The same situation exists at the 5-acre Negro Bar boat ramp parking lot (Photo SR-16). While the Granite Bay main boat launch parking area (6 acres) is broken up by internal planting above the high waterline, it is widely distributed and provides little visual relief (Photo SR-17). Similarly, the parking area at the Folsom Dam Observation Point is a huge area of asphalt immediately adjacent to the public roadway, in the foreground of views of the lake by passing motorists. Although the issue of parking capacity in the Unit is a significant one, their implication for the visual experience of the Unit user must be considered.

Utilities

There are several locations within the Unit where utility lines interrupt the scenic landscape and reduce the quality of views from significant vista points. The main utility through the Unit is the Western Area Power Administration high-tension electrical transmission line between the Nimbus Dam substation to the Folsom Dam substation. The corridor right-of-way is 150 feet wide. The line extends from Nimbus Dam north along the western shoreline of Lake Natoma to Mississippi Bar.[7] The line crosses Lake Natoma at the bend near Willow Creek and follows the eastern shoreline to a point just south of the Lake Natoma Crossing. The line crosses the lake once more and follows the western shoreline along the American River Gorge to Folsom Dam.[8] Clearly visible from several vantage points in the Mississippi Bar and Negro Bar areas, the towers and overhead lines are significant foreground features when viewed from Lake Natoma and the Lake Overlook (Figures 18). A municipal electrical utility line passes through the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park along the eastern shore of Lake Natoma (Photo SR-19). Despite the history of the Folsom Powerhouse, this utility line is not related to the facility and significantly reduces the quality of views of the Powerhouse buildings and detracts from their historic quality. Various utility structures and appurtenances are associated with electrical power generation at both Folsom and Nimbus dams. In addition, a 42-inch pipeline carrying water from Folsom Lake to the Folsom Prison and the City of Folsom runs from the base of Folsom Dam.[9]

Other Structures and Activities

Three corporation yards exist within the Unit and significantly impact key views. Both the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) and Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) yards located on Folsom Dam Road are poorly screened from the roadway and lend an industrial feel to the area. This stretch of roadway between the intersection with Auburn-Folsom Road and the Folsom Dam is a major Unit gateway and includes a Park monument

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[7] Western Area Power Administration, *Draft Environmental Assessment for Right-of-Way Maintenance in the Sacramento Valley, California,* May 2002, pg. 3-3.
[8] Ibid., pg. 3-3.
[9] Ibid.

sign, manicured lawns, and ornamental planting. The third yard is a BOR facility located on the western shore of Lake Natoma below the Lake Overlook (Photo SR-18). As with the high-tension electrical transmission line described above, the yard is a significant feature in the foreground view of Lake Natoma from Lake Overlook. Further, the yard is clearly visible from the eastern shore at Nimbus Flat.

Additional activities that adversely affect visual quality within the Unit include the use of temporary storage facilities by concessionaires and security fencing in specified areas. The storage facilities, 20-foot long white metal transportation containers, are used to store boating equipment at the Negro Bar beach, Granite Bay main beach and boat launch, and the Willow Creek day use area (Figures 20-22). These containers sit awkwardly on the park landscape, sharply contrasting with the natural character of their setting. Due to the importance and sensitive nature of the dams, security fencing is necessary in several key areas, particularly areas where the public would otherwise have access. However, this fencing is often in various levels of disrepair and reduces visual quality from many vantages within the Unit. One example of security issues impacting the scenic resources of the Unit is from the Lake Overlook. From this point, an old chain-link fence interrupts southern views and a guardrail intended to restrict off-road vehicle access does little to improve views out from the overlook (Photo SR-23).

Exposed Shoreline of Folsom Lake

Seasonal fluctuation in water levels results in considerable impact on the visual quality of Folsom Lake. The highest elevations occur in late winter or early spring when storm and snowmelt runoff fill the reservoir; the lowest in late fall or early winter following the dry season. As a result, the elevations drop continuously—up to about 70 feet in normal years—from the start of the peak recreation season around Memorial Day through the season's end at Labor Day. Unlike bodies of water under tidal influence or natural riparian corridors as found upstream in the South and North Forks of the American River, Folsom Lake does not have the advantage of habitats that can adapt to such large changes in environmental condition. This leaves much of the exposed shoreline devoid of vegetation. The relatively gradual slope to the lake bottom results in a greater area of exposed shoreline with lower water levels, resulting in the "bathtub ring" effect common to California reservoirs. As Folsom Lake shrinks over the course of the recreation season, so does the quality of the views along its 75-miles of shoreline (Figures 24-26). This condition is further exacerbated by visitors who drive their vehicles out onto the exposed slopes, causing rutting and erosion of the exposed areas. In some years, this condition is mitigated by a striking display of wildflowers along shorelines with a particular aspect, including along the eastern shoreline between New York Creek and Old Salmon Falls.

External Views

Public views of the Unit from external viewpoints are limited due to the topography of the area, the heavy vegetation within the Unit boundaries, and the nature of land ownership around the Unit. Views from private property, particularly of Folsom Lake, are impressive as reflected by the high-end residential estate development occurring around that lake. In El Dorado County, this style of development commands the hills along the majority of the eastern boundary of Folsom Lake to Salmon Falls. As this development extends from Salmon Falls Road north of Green Valley Road, property size increases dramatically as Folsom Lake views become a major selling factor. Along the western boundary of Folsom Lake in Placer

County, most of the choice properties with lake views have been developed. In addition, several exclusive gated subdivisions currently exist on the ridge above the Lake. As a result, few clear public access points exist from which to view Folsom Lake. This situation also applies to Lake Natoma, where the lands abutting the Unit boundary that afford the best vantage points are existing residential neighborhoods with little public access.

Views from Area Roadways

Local roadways that pass through the Unit afford the best public views from external locations. These public views are distinctive since the only way to pass through the Unit is by one of five crossings. The five crossings serve as important gateways to the Unit and provide views of high quality. The visual experience at each crossing is as different as the views they provide; the visual experience also depends on a number of other important factors, such as travel direction, travel speed, and roadway elevation. In the case of the latter, the elevation provided by the bridge crossings results in ideal vantages. It should be noted that, with the exception of the crossing at Folsom Dam, all crossings accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic which allows for more leisurely enjoyment of the views.

The Hazel Avenue crossing of the American River south of the Nimbus Dam has the highest capacity and travel speed. Here the northbound views are of higher quality than they are southbound. As one travels north across the bridge, the urban landscape of the Highway 50/Hazel Avenue interchange falls behind as the bluff upon which the Lake Overlook lies looms ahead. The oak-studded bluff is in sharp contrast to the urban-developed plain to the south. Looking east, one can clearly see Nimbus Dam in the foreground, the length of Lake Natoma in the mid-ground and in the far distance the foothills of the Sierra. Although the travel speed on this bridge is fairly high, the bridge is long and provides the opportunity to experience the sweeping views.

Lake Natoma Crossing in Folsom connects Folsom Boulevard on the eastern shore with Auburn-Folsom Boulevard on the western shore. The travel speed, crossing angle, and length of the bridge provide an opportunity to observe the green shorelines of Lake Natoma to the west and the Rainbow Bridge and Historic Truss Bridge to the east. However, view quality in this area depends on the direction of travel. The Rainbow Bridge, located just east of the Lake Natoma Crossing, is the shortest of all the vehicle crossings. Despite this, the travel speed is low with high quality views of the new Lake Natoma Crossing and the lake to the west. High quality views also exist to the east of the Historic Truss Bridge with the American River gorge dropping from Folsom Dam in the immediate foreground with Lake Natoma beyond. Eastbound travelers can catch a glimpse of historic downtown Folsom as well as the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park. The fourth crossing, the Historic Truss Bridge, provided the first crossing of the American River in Folsom and now serves as a pedestrian and bicycle bridge. While this crossing provides the best views of the river gorge to the east, the western views of Lake Natoma are partially blocked by the Rainbow Bridge.

The fifth crossing of the Unit is located on the Folsom Dam at the southern limit of Folsom Lake. This low-speed two-lane crossing is more than 1,500 feet long and provides sweeping views of Folsom Lake to the east and of the rugged spillway and the City of Folsom to the west. No pedestrian or bicycle access is provided at this crossing with no stopping along the roadway permitted. In addition, Observation Point at the eastern end of Folsom Dam has been closed for security reasons since September 11, 2001. As a result, the only means of enjoying the views provided from this vantage is by automobile. It is important to note that

the dam road will be closed during construction of the dam raising project. This project is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2005 or 2006 and will not reopen to public travel once the project is complete. A replacement crossing is planned just west of the dam.

Threats to Scenic Resources

The primary threat to scenic resources is from development that is rapidly closing in on the Unit on several fronts. Future development will likely come in the form of estate residential subdivisions on the hillsides above Folsom Lake along the Unit boundary. This threat seems more immediate in unincorporated El Dorado County where several residential estate subdivisions have been approved and new homes that back directly onto Unit lands continue to appear (Photo SR-27). Unfortunately, it is difficult to influence this type of activity outside of the Unit through a State Parks General Plan. With the exception of Granite Bay and the peninsula area, the State owns only a narrow strip of land along the shoreline above the high water mark. As a result, it is difficult to buffer the Unit from surrounding development and screen external views. Furthermore, the topography is such that the State would have to acquire lands between the Unit boundary and the top of surrounding ridgelines in order to protect views from the Unit. Figure SR-5 identifies these land areas on Folsom Lake. Areas for priority acquisition would be the lands not currently developed or approved for development.

Figure SR-5 also shows that the area of the Unit most at risk to this type of development is the peninsula between the two forks of the American River. The peninsula, characterized by rolling hills, open grasslands, and scattered oak and pine groves, represents the largest natural and untouched portion of the Unit (Photo SR-28). Furthermore, the peninsula is the most visible land area from Folsom Lake and its western shore. As residential subdivision development continues to push east along Salmon Falls Road, there is the potential over time for lands currently zoned agricultural to be rezoned as residential, particularly in the peninsula area. If this development were to occur on hillsides and ridgelines visible from within the Unit, then the rugged and untouched character of this area would be lost.

Due to these factors, land acquisition here should be of high priority for the State. Additionally, the State should consider acquiring the western shoreline along the North Fork of the American River in Placer County opposite the peninsula where the topographic conditions are similar. The State is currently considering the purchase of two major parcels totaling almost 1,000 acres adjacent to the existing Unit lands on the peninsula.[10] In this way, the most pristine and rugged natural landscapes within the Unit may be preserved, as will the contribution of these landscapes to a high quality visual resource.

Scenic Resource Issues

This section summarizes the current issues related to the scenic resources of the Unit.

- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit along western shoreline of Folsom Lake, including at Beals Point beach, Granite Bay equestrian staging area, and above North Fork of the American River between North Granite and Horseshoe Bar;

[10] State Parks staff, Personal communication, July 2003.

Figure SR-5: Threats to Scenic Resources in the Unit (This figure to be provided at the completion of GIS analysis)

- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit along western shoreline of Folsom Lake, including at Beals Point beach, Granite Bay equestrian staging area, and above North Fork of the American River between North Granite and Horseshoe Bar;

- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit along eastern shoreline of Folsom Lake, including at Old Salmon Falls, New York Creek, Brown's Ravine, Folsom Point entrance, and Mormon Island Wetland Preserve;

- Visual intrusion of urban development into the Unit on Lake Natoma at equestrian staging area at Lake Overlook and in the area of the office park at Blue Ravine Road;

- Lack of screening of the South Folsom Canal and Caltrans park-and-ride lot that abut the entrance drive to Nimbus Flat;

- Large parking areas without internal or perimeter landscaping detracts from the visual quality of several recreation areas, including at Granite Bay main beach, Folsom Point boat launch, Negro Bar boat launch, Observation Point, Lake Overlook, etc.;

- Interruption of scenic landscape by utility lines and structures, including: Western Area Power Administration high-tension electrical transmission corridor along western shore of Lake Natoma; municipal electrical utility line through Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park; structures and appurtenances associated with electrical power generation at Folsom and Nimbus dams; and 42-inch pipeline carrying water from Folsom Lake to the Folsom Prison and the City of Folsom;

- Unscreened corporation yards impact key views, including the State Parks and Bureau of Reclamation yards located on Folsom Dam Road, and the Bureau yard on the western shore of Lake Natoma below the Lake Overlook;

- Use of temporary metal storage containers by boat equipment concessionaires at several locations, including at Negro Bar beach, Granite Bay main beach boat launch, and Willow Creek.

- Security fencing associated with dam operation areas and corporation yards is unscreened and in levels of disrepair and reduces visual quality from many vantages within the Unit;

- "Bathtub ring" effect of exposed shoreline at low water levels on Folsom Lake significantly affects the visual quality of the reservoir;

- Primary threat to scenic resources continues to be from development closing in on the Unit on several fronts, particularly at Folsom Lake;

- The hillsides and ridgelines of the peninsula in El Dorado County and the western shoreline along the North Fork of the American River in Placer County that are visible from within the Unit are most at risk to visual intrusion from future development; and

- Topography and existing State ownership of land make it difficult to buffer the Unit from surrounding development and screen external views.

Photo SR-1: Panoramic views of Lake Natoma and Sierra Foothills from Lake Overlook.

Photo SR-2: The peninsula area from Folsom Lake displays untouched oak-studded rolling hills.

Photo SR-3: Natoma Bluffs – a significant landscape feature in the Unit.

Photo SR-4: Dredger tailings reflect a unique cultural landscape along the shores of Lake Natoma.

Photo SR-5: Rainbow Bridge with Historic Truss Bridge behind as viewed from Rainbow Rocks.

Photo SR-6: Lake Natoma Crossing mimics the design elements of the earlier Rainbow Bridge.

Photo SR-7: Residential development adjacent to the Granite Bay horse assembly area.

Photo SR-8: Residences on the hills above Hobie Cove at Brown's Ravine.

Photo SR-9: Adjacent residences at the remote Old Salmon Falls lower parking area.

Photo SR-10: Residential development off Green Valley Road as seen from Mormon Island Dam.

Photo SR-11: Gateway to Folsom Point – a missed opportunity to buffer the Unit from development.

Photo SR-12: South Folsom Canal on north side of Nimbus Flat gateway.

Photo SR-13: Caltrans park and ride lot on south side of Nimbus Flat gateway.

Photo SR-14: Residential development adjacent to the horse assembly area at Nimbus Dam Overlook.

Photo SR-15: Granite Bay main beach parking area – 5 acres of asphalt paving.

Photo SR-16: Negro Bar boat launch parking area – 5 more acres of asphalt paving.

Photo SR-17: Planting at Granite Bay boat launch parking area provides little relief.

Photo SR-18: Corporation yard and high tension electrical transmission line at Nimbus Dam affect key views from the southern end of Lake Natoma.

Photo SR-19: An electrical utility line corridor passes through the Folsom Powerhouse State Historic Park.

Photo SR-20: Storage container at Negro Bar beach area.

Photo SR-21: Storage containers at Granite Bay beach.

Photo SR-22: Storage containers at Willow Creek.

Photo SR-23: Southern views from Lake Overlook.

Photo SR-24: Seasonal low water elevations expose Folsom Lake's extensive shoreline area.

Photo SR-25: Exposed shoreline at Beals Point.

Photo SR-26: Folsom Lake recedes from this Granite Bay boat launch area.

Photo SR-27: Lake-view residential estate subdivisions in El Dorado County.

Photo SR-28: The most significant threat to the Unit's scenic resources.

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