5.0 ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

5.1 VISUAL RESOURCES

5.1.1 Setting

5.1.1.1 Regional Setting

The proposed project is located within the Oak Park area of unincorporated Ventura County, California. The visual setting of the residential community of Oak Park, which is situated on a relatively flat area of southeastern Ventura County, is characterized by expansive views of the surrounding undeveloped hills. The Las Virgenes and the Santa Monica Mountains are visible to the south, and the Simi Hills surround the community on the north, east and west. Medea Creek which extends north to south in Oak Park is a salient feature of the community. The visual character of the community is enhanced by the network of undeveloped dedicated open space areas within the community that are managed by Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District (RSRPD), and by the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) beyond to the north and east. The local Oak Park creek habitat has been protected and incorporated into the public open space as Medea Creek Park.

Both the existing and proposed tank sites are within designated open space areas within the jurisdiction of the RSRPD. The A8 site is also located in close proximity to the SMMNRA to the east.

The RSRPD open space areas have been preserved for a variety of reasons including their value as aesthetic areas as well as for public health, public safety and public education (see RSRPD 1986 General Plan for Parks Recreation and Open Space, page II-8). The RSRPD General Plan (page III-11) states that one of the recreational uses of public open space is “visual enjoyment” and recognizes that for many residents of Simi Valley and Oak Park-Agoura, the vistas provided by pristine hillsides and undisturbed natural flora are among the major reasons for their choice of residence. Among the goals of the RSRPD is “to support, encourage and participate in enhancing the appearance of the community by conserving natural assets such as mature native trees, fragile animal habitats, and the lives and lifestyles of endangered species…”

The SMMNRA was established to preserve the scenic, natural and historic as well as public health values of the Santa Monica Mountains (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, July 2002).

a. Scenic Highways. As defined by Ventura County, a scenic Highway is the visible area as seen from a designated or eligible scenic highway that can generally be defined as the “view from the road.” Kanan Road is the only project area road identified in the Ventura County General Plan Resources Appendix, as an eligible county scenic highway (County of Ventura, 1988).

The elevation along Kanan Road in the Oak Park area ranges from about 975 feet to 1,050 feet, whereas, the ground surface elevation at the tank sites are as follows:

- A7 tank site - 1,320 feet to 1,350 feet;
- A8 tank site - about 1,250 feet; and
- Existing Conifer tank site about 1,170 feet.

b. Scenic Area/Feature. A scenic area or feature is defined by Ventura County as a physical area or feature that is visually or aesthetically pleasing. An example cited in the Ventura County Initial Study Guidelines is the area encompassing lakes and the viewshed extending from the lakes to the highest ridgeline surrounding the lakes. The RSRPD open space and SMMNRA may be considered scenic areas although not designated as such by Ventura County, as there are no County designated visual resource areas located within the vicinity of the project site (Ventura County General Plan, Resource Protection Map, December, 1996). Both open space areas include existing water tanks and related facilities.

5.1.1.2 Project-specific Setting

The existing tank site is developed. The proposed A7 tank site is vegetated with sage scrub vegetation. The proposed A8 tank site area is dominated by annual grassland, chaparral and scattered trees. (See Section 6 of the Initial Study presented as an appendix to this EIR for details on the vegetation at the sites.)

The proposed A7 tank site is accessed by recreational Rock Ridge Open Space trails/fire roads including the proposed access road alignment off of Kanan Road. The site can be seen from these trails as well as other trails and peaks within the RSRPD open space system to the north and east, including Oak Canyon Community Park and likely from some homes and streets in the Sutton Crest neighborhood located approximately 0.75 mile east of the site. Extremely distant views of the site are also available from other viewing locations at elevations higher than the site and with unobstructed lines of sight such as certain peaks and ridge trails in the SMMNRA located between Palo Camado and Cheeseboro Canyons about 2.5 miles east of the site and peaks and ridge trails just north of Oak Park community boundary just over a mile away. It should be noted that persons using recreational facilities are considered to be particularly sensitive to views due to the nature of the activities they are involved in and objectives most people have for seeking out recreational trails, open space and related facilities.

The proposed A8 tank site is presently accessed from an unimproved recreational trail off Doubletree Road that extends west to east through the Sunrise Meadows Opens Space and into the Palo Comado Canyon area of the SMMNRA where it connects with the north to south oriented Palo Comado Canyon Trail and a network of other trails. The A8 tank site is visible from the existing RSRPD access trail and its continuation within the SMMNRA. Based upon a review of topographic mapping it appears that the A8 tank site is also visible from certain vantage points and trails within the SMMNRA such as the Ranch Center Trail located about 0.5 mile to the east, Palo Comado Connector (approximately 1 mile to the southeast of the site), the Simi Peak Trail (about 2 miles to the northwest) and the Albertson Motorway (about 2 miles to the north). Distant views of the site are also available from other recreational facilities such as Oak Canyon Community Park and possibly Eagle View Park (located about 1 mile west of and

1.5 miles northwest of the proposed tank site respectively) as well as other viewing locations at elevations higher than the site and with unobstructed lines of sight. Based upon a review of topographic mapping of the area it appears that the site would not be visible from most nearby residences due to intervening topography. However, the tank site and access trail are clearly visible from a short segment of Doubletree Road near its intersection with Aspen Oak Court and likely, the residences with property lines along this segment of Doubletree Road.

Because of the placement of structures and vegetation along much of Kanan Road, an eligible county scenic highway, views of the existing Conifer Tank site are obscured along portions of Kanan Road. However, the site is visible through certain corridors. The A7 tank site is on the top and downward side of a ridge and as such is mostly obscured from view as seen from vantage points on Kanan Road. However, the tank site access (hiking trail/fire road) that extends from Kanan Road to the site extends upslope and is visible from Kanan Road. Views of the proposed A8 tank site and access road from Kanan Road are obscured by existing topography (intervening hills) as well as structures.

5.1.1.3 Relevant Plans and Policies

The planning documents with goals and policies relevant to the proposed project and the issue of visual resources include: The Ventura County General Plan including the Oak Park Area Plan and the RSRPD 1986 General Plan for Parks Recreation and Open Space. Specific goals and polices pertaining to the protection of visual resources are presented below.

GP Goal 1.7.11 and OPAP Goal 1.4.1.1. Preserve and protect the significant open views and visual resources of the County.

GP Goal 1.7.1.2. Protect the visual resources within the viewshed of designated scenic highways, lakes and other scenic areas as may be identified by an area plan.

OPAP Goal 1.4.1.2. Ensure that new development minimizes grading and is sensitively designed in order to preserve the natural beauty of the area.

GP Policy 1.7.2.1 and OPAP Policy 1.4.2.1. …discretionary development which would significantly degrade visual resources or significantly alter or obscure public views of visual resources shall be prohibited unless no feasible mitigation measures are available and the decision-making body determines there are overriding considerations.

OPAP Policy 1.4.2.3. Reservoirs shall not be sited on prominent ridgelines and shall be well screened with native vegetation and berms and/or undergrounded if possible.

OPAP Policy 1.4.2.4. Discretionary development should be designed to conform to the terrain….

RSRPD Goal - support, encourage and participate in enhancing the appearance of the community by conserving natural assets such as mature native trees, fragile animal habitats, and the lives and lifestyles of endangered species…

An analysis of project consistency with relevant goals and policies is provided in the project Initial Study which is presented as Appendix A of this EIR. However, these policies are identified here as they pertain to the evaluation of the potential visual impacts of the proposed project.

5.1.2 Impact Analysis

5.1.2.1 Impact Assessment Methodology and Significance Thresholds

This review of potential aesthetic impacts is based on several widely used concepts in CEQA analyses: project visibility, visual dominance, and aesthetic compatibility. The visibility of a project (or a specific component of a project) describes the extent to which the project is visible either from the surrounding community and viewing locations such as scenic and recreational trails. Visibility depends upon the angle and direction of views, extent of visual screening, and the topographic relationship between the viewer and element being viewed. The viewing distance between an observer and the project is also an important part of the level of visual impact associated with project visibility.

Visual dominance describes the extent too which the proposed project may alter the visual landscape. Essentially, this concept is a judgment concerning the visibility of project components. This judgment is made weighing not only project visibility, but the visual contrast between the project and its setting (in relations to scale, form, color and texture).

Visual compatibility describes the extent to which a project is visually characteristic of existing architectural and landscape features which occupy the viewshed.

The project would have a visual impact if it would degrade visual resources or alter or obscure public views. The CEQA Guidelines Section 15382 identifies a "*significant* effect on the environment" as a substantial, or potentially substantial adverse change in any of the physical condition within the area affected by the project…" Additionally, the County of Ventura Initial Study Assessment Guidelines (2006) state that a project that is inconsistent with a specific environmental policy of the County General Plan is considered as having a significant environmental impact. A project that appears to be inconsistent with a goal of the General Plan must be evaluated by the Planning Division in light of other related goals policies and programs of the General Plan in order to determine significance the goals and policies of the community or communities in which it is located usually will have a significant impact. Triunfo Sanitation District as a special district does not need to apply the County thresholds of significance; however, they are provided as guidance in this impact assessment.

5.1.2.2 Project-Specific Impacts

a. Scenic Highways

Short-term Impacts. Removal of the existing tank structure (or partial removal if some portion is left to support cellular antennae) would temporarily introduce construction equipment to the Conifer tank site. Views of such equipment and activity from Kanan Road would be

distant and limited to a few view corridors; therefore, the views from this road would not be significantly degraded by construction activities at the exiting tank site.

Construction activities would introduce equipment and supplies to the selected new tank site including temporary laydown areas. Additionally, earth materials would be exposed during the construction period. Since a portion of the A7 tank site construction area and the associated access road are visible from Kanan Road, construction activities at this site would temporarily, adversely affect views from Kanan Road on a project-specific and cumulative basis if other construction activity occurs on or within the viewshed of Kanan Road at the same time. However, Measure V1 presented in Section 3.0 Project Description and reproduced below has been incorporated into the project, therefore, this impact to an eligible scenic county road is consider less than significant because it is temporary and minimized to the extent feasible.

V1 The District shall prepare and implement a construction "good housekeeping" plan, which will include at a minimum, designation of specific areas for materials and equipment storage, screening of stationary equipment and stockpiles from public views wherever feasible, and site restoration measures developed to minimized the adverse visual impacts of the project and promote public and worker safety.

No such views of the A8 tank site are available from Kanan Road. Therefore, construction activities at the A8 site would not impact views from this eligible county scenic road. However, Measure V1 has been incorporated into the project for all alternatives to reduce general short-term visual impacts including those associated with construction at the A8 site.

All of the pipeline alternatives would include future construction of pipeline within Kanan Road. Additionally, some of the pipeline alternatives require other segments of new pipe installation that could be visible from Kanan Road. Disturbed soil, equipment and materials would be visible during the construction period. However, these impacts to views from this eligible County scenic highway for the installation of pipeline would be temporary as the infrastructure would be subsurface. Additionally, with implementation of Measure V1 which has been incorporated into the project, this visual impact is considered to be a less than significant short-term visual impact on a project-specific and cumulative basis, and less than significant in the in the long-term as the pipelines would be subsurface.

Pipeline Alternatives A and B would include the construction of a turnout facility on Kanan Road. For Alternative A, the turnout facility would be housed within an underground facility on the side of the road potentially at the shopping center on the south side of Kanan Road, just west of Lindero Canyon Road. Aboveground facilities at the turnout would consist of one or more electrical cabinets housing power and telemetry equipment and two ventilation pipes. The cabinets would be about 5-feet high, 4 feet wide and 2 feet deep. (Similar equipment is presently located at the northeast corner of Kanan and Lindero Canyon Roads.) For Pipeline Alternative B the turnout would be located at the A7 tank access road on Kanan Road. These facilities are an incongruous element of the landscape; however, they are a typical feature at various locations within the Oak Park community including Kanan Road as they are a necessary component of public domestic water infrastructure. Therefore, while these

project elements may be considered to be an adverse visual impact to the community and Kanan Road, an eligible County scenic highway, they are considered less than significant, because such features are common elements in the existing landscape within the general area for which they are proposed to be located as part of this project. The magnitude of the impact of the turnout facility would be worse for Alternative A than B because the intersection of Kanan and Lindero Canyon Roads is a gateway between the Oak Park and the City of Thousand Oaks and is a heavily traveled intersection. This impact will be further reduced by the implementation of Measure V2, incorporated into the project as described in Section 3.0 of this EIR and presented below.

V2 Aboveground components of turnout facilities and pressure reducing valves shall be minimized in size to the extent practical and will be colored to blend in with the existing surroundings. Landscape plantings should also be incorporated to minimize the visual impact of these facilities as viewed from Kanan Road (and other view corridors as practical).

Pressure reducing valves would be required for all of the pipeline alternatives at the intersection of Kanan and Oak Hills Road. A small segment of pipe would be located above ground as part of this valve system. For the same reasoning as provided for the turnout facility, introduction of a new PRV on Kanan Road would be considered an adverse, but less than significant visual impact which would be further reduced by implementation of Measure V2.

Long-term Impacts. Over the long-term, elimination of the Conifer Tank from its existing site may be considered beneficial to views from Kanan Road and would, therefore, not impact scenic roads. Development of the tank at A8 would confine the tank to an area that is not visible from Kanan Road and would therefore have no long-term impact on scenic roads. However tank development at the A7 tank site would also include the pavement of the existing gravel trail/fire road from Kanan Road (between Churchwood Drive and Benedict Court) to the tank site which would be visible from Kanan Road. However, these alterations would not obstruct views, substantially alter views or substantially degrade views from Kanan Road. Therefore, development of a tank at the A7 site is considered to be consistent with County General Plan Policy 1.7.1.2 and to have a less than significant impact on scenic roads over the long-term.

b. Scenic Area/Feature

Short-term Impacts. As described above, project construction would result in the introduction of construction equipment, materials and disturbed soils/roads to the Oak Park community. Tank construction at either the A7 or A8 sites is expected to take from 10 to 12 months and would be clearly visible to recreational trail users within designated open space immediately adjacent and at a distance from the construction site. The public view from these recreational trails (identified above) would be substantially altered for an extended period of time at either tank site; however, the project incorporates Measure V1 requiring implementation of construction good housekeeping plan which reduces this impact to the extent feasible and the effect is temporary, therefore this impact is considered adverse but less than significant. The short-term visual impact would be greatest for tank construction at A8 site because the

trail/access road at the A8 site is used by are greater number of recreationists than the trail/access road at the A7 site and recreationists are considered to have a high level of visual sensitivity.

Views of pipeline construction and pressure reduction valve installation (and turnout installation for Pipeline Alternatives A and B) would be available from the directly impacted roadways (e.g., Kanan Road, Sunnycrest Drive, Doubletree Road), and other nearby streets and land uses including public trails. Exposure of people to views of pipeline construction is considered to result in an adverse aesthetic effect. However, because these elements of project construction would be concentrated at a given location for only a short period of time, since construction would progress in a linear manner, and Measure V1 has been incorporated into the project, this impact is considered adverse but less than significant. The short-term visual impact would be greater for Pipeline Alternative B than for Pipeline Alternative A (both associated with site A7) because as Pipeline Alternative B is confined mainly to the existing trail access road that would be paved and Pipeline Alternative B would impact a longer segment of public trail. Of the pipeline alternatives associated with the A8 tank site, Alternative E would have the greatest short-term visual impact as it would require the greatest length of new pipeline all within public roads. Pipeline Alternative C would have the longest length of new pipe but a substantial portion of it would be within an open space area that is not highly used by the public. Pipeline D would have the least short-term visual impact as it would have shortest length.

Deconstruction activities associated with tank removal at the Conifer Street site would be visible as a distant view from roadways with uninterrupted lines of sight such as portions of Kanan Road, residential areas (e.g., residences in the north Oak Hills Drive neighborhood) and open space. This may be considered an adverse aesthetic effect; however, because it is temporary and would result in the removal of the tank structure, it is considered less than significant from a short-term perspective and may be considered beneficial from a long-term perspective as described further below.

Long-term Impacts. The A7 site is visible from the adjacent access trail, distant trails, a portion of Oak Canyon Community Park and limited sections of nearby residential neighborhoods (for example Napoleon Avenue). Hikers, bikers and others using the trail adjacent to the site are the persons who have the best view of the site. However access to the tank site is steep which limits the use of this trail in comparison some other local trails such as the trail at the A8 site. The A7B alternative would introduce a belowground tank with ground modification and appurtenant structures above ground to the site as shown on Figure 3.

Figure 10 shows a point of view diagram illustrating three selected locations from which the A7 tank site can be seen. These perspectives were selected as representative locations from areas offering the best public views of the site.

Computer-generated visual simulations of the A7B Tank Alternative were prepared by Videoscapes to illustrate the change in view from three selected view locations with the development of the A7B Tank Alternative at this site. Figure 11 shows an existing (February 2007) view of the A7 tank site looking northwest from the site access trail. Figure 12 shows a simulation of the constructed A7B Tank Alternative as viewed from the site access trail. As can

be seen from the simulation, tank site fencing and a few minor appurtenant structures (i.e., vault covers, vent and pole) can be seen from this view perspective. (Please note that all project infrastructure has been modeled at sizes as shown on the project plans [e.g., fencing is five feet tall]; however, based upon the elevation at the point of view relative to the project site, distance of the point of view location relative to the modeled infrastructure and spatial relationship of familiar existing reference objects to simulated features the simulated features in the figures may appear different than one would intuitively expect. This effect is particularly noticeable for figures 12 and 19.)

Figure 13 shows an existing view (February 2007) of the A7 tank site from Napoleon Drive at Lindero Canyon Road. Figure 14 shows a simulation of Tank Alternative A7B from this view corridor. As can be seen from the simulations ground surface alteration can be seen with the A7B Tank Alternative from this view perspective.

Figure 15 shows the A7 tank site as viewed from the northern end of the Oak Canyon Community Park access road (near the last picnic table). Figure 16 shows a simulation of Tank Alternative A7B as seen from this view location. As can be seen from the simulation, ground modification can be seen from this location.

As depicted in the simulations referenced above, Tank Alternative A7B would result in a modification of the vegetation at the site, introduce fencing, appurtenant tank facilities (e.g., vent, vault covers) and a paved road. Additionally, the access road to the tank from Kanan Road would be paved. The portion of the trail/access road providing access to the A7 site gets very limited use relative to other nearby trails. The proposed paved road would not be visible from viewpoints to the north and east because of the topography of the area. However, the road may be visible from the back yards of homes in the neighborhood to the west and as part of distant views from trails south of the site.

As described above, the A7B alternative would alter the existing natural condition of the A7 tank site and introduce some man-made features to the site, but may not necessarily be considered to significantly alter the view and degrade the scenic resource assuming appropriate revegetation of the site and use of visually compatible materials for proposed improvements, as proposed in Measures V3 and V4 incorporated into the project as identified in Section 3.0 of this EIR and presented below. Therefore, the A7B alternative is considered to have an adverse, but less than significant visual impact, and is considered to be consistent with the intent of Ventura County General Plan and Oak Park Area Plan goals and policies and the RSRPD goal pertaining to the protection of visual resources and views considering the nature of the project as a necessary element of public infrastructure and the efforts incorporated into the project to protect visual resources.

V3 Landscaping comprised of native species shall be established at the tank site as soon as practicably possible after completion of construction. The objective of this landscaping will be to return the vegetative condition of the site to a condition that resembles the adjacent open space landscape to the maximum extent practicable and minimize the visual impact of any aboveground structures. Surface color for all aboveground structures will be an earth tone selected to

visual blend with the surrounding landscape to the extent feasible. A biologist/natural landscape specialist shall be retained by the District to work with the design team in generating and implementing a landscaping plan appropriate for the project site.

V4 Road improvements and any new drainage features shall be constructed of materials that are visually compatible, to the maximum extent practical, with the existing surrounding environment and designed to create the least amount of environmental disturbance while maintaining its function.

Like the A7 tank site, the A8 site is visible from the public access trail/road that extends through it. It is also visible from distant trails including those in the SMMNRA. The site can also be seen from a short portion of Doubletree Road and likely a few residences as identified above. Hikers, bikers and others using the trail adjacent to the site are the persons who have the best view of the site. The A8B alternative would introduce a belowground tank with ground modification and appurtenant structures aboveground to the site as shown on Figure 6. Figure 17 shows a point of view diagram illustrating three selected locations from which the A8 tank site can be seen.

As was done for the A7 tank site alternative, computer-generated visual simulations of the A8B Tank Alternative were prepared by Videoscapes to illustrate the change in view from the three selected view locations with the development of the A8B Tank Alternative. Figure 18 shows a view of the A8 tank site from the site access road looking east. Figure 19 shows a simulation of the A8B Tank Alternative as seen from the site access road looking east. (Please note that all project infrastructure has been modeled at sizes as shown on the project plans [e.g., fencing is five feet tall]; however, based upon the elevation at the point of view relative to the project site, distance of the point of view location relative to the modeled infrastructure and spatial relationship of familiar existing reference objects to simulated features the simulated features in the figures may appear different than one would intuitively expect. This effect is particularly noticeable for figures 12 and 19.)The proposed project elements visible from this perspective include the landscaped berm, fence, relocated wildlife “Guzzler” and widened gravel trail/access road.

Figure 20 shows a view of the A8 tank site from Doubletree Road near Clearhaven Drive looking east. Figure 21 shows a simulation of Tank Alternatives A8B as viewed from Doubletree Road. Under the A8B alternative only ground surface modification and the relocated wildlife watering station are visible after project construction from this view location. As with the view from the existing trial, the proposed project elements visible from this perspective include the landscaped berm, fence, relocated wildlife “Guzzler” and widened gravel trail/access road; however the view is more distant.

Figure 22 shows the A8 tank site as viewed from a trail in the SMMNRA looking west. Figure 23 shows a simulation of Tank Alternative A8B as viewed from the selected SMMNRA trail. As can be seen from the simulation Tank Alternative A8B is hardly noticeable from this vantage point. The roof vent is the most notable proposed project feature as shown on the simulation. However, this feature should be less noticeable than shown because of the

incorporation of Measure V3 which includes using earth tone colors on all aboveground structures in order to reduce visual incompatibility with the surroundings.

A belowground tank (A8B alternative) would result in a modification of the vegetation at the site, introduce fencing, appurtenant tank facilities (e.g., vent, vault covers) and a paved road. Tank Alternative A8B would alter the existing natural condition of the A8 tank site, but may not necessarily be considered to significantly alter the view and substantively degrade the scenic resource, assuming proper revegetation of the site as proposed with implementation of Measures V3 and V4 which have been incorporated into the project description, as fencing and small structures (e.g., wildlife watering station) are not uncommon in the existing natural landscape of the area. It should be noted that Tank Alternative A8B would have a gravel surface rather than vegetated surface but this would not be visible from the primary trail adjacent to the tank because of the proposed vegetated berm that would partially surround the tank as shown on Figure 4. Therefore, the A8B alternative would have an adverse, but less than significant visual impact, and is considered to be consistent with the intent of Ventura County General Plan and Oak Park Area Plan goals and policies pertaining to the protection of visual resources and views considering the nature of the project as a necessary element of public infrastructure and the efforts incorporated into the project to protect visual resources.

In summary, over the long-term, the project would result in a beneficial visual effect from the removal of the existing Conifer Tank. However, as stated above, construction of the new tank would introduce land disturbance and tank-associated facilities to a presently undeveloped open space area that is used for recreational purposes under both the A7B and A8B alternatives. Persons using recreational open space are considered to have a high level of concern with respect to the scenic resources and views offered from the recreational site. Thus, the new tank may be seen as a degradation of the visual resources of the recreational area in which it is located. As stated above, the trail at the A8 tank site gets more use by the public, therefore surface alteration would have the greatest effect at this site. However, the tank at the A7 site would introduce pavement to the approximately 1,600 linear feet long widened access road which is a substantive alteration of the existing visual condition of the A7 site. The A8 site does not include road pavement. However, due to the limited use of the portion of the access road/trail that would be paved at the A7 site and the high level of trail use at the A8 site, the A8B Tank Alternative is considered to have the greatest visual impact as it would affect more viewers.

5.1.2.3 Cumulative Impacts

There is only one known cumulative project that would occur in the vicinity of the proposed project. That is construction of new support structure(s) to provide the cellular service antennae with the same line-of-sight presently provided at the Conifer Tank mount. However, because the project would result in the removal of the existing tank at the Conifer site, it would not result in an adverse contribution to cumulative visual impacts associated with activities at the existing Conifer Tank site.

5.1.3 Mitigation Measures

No additional mitigation beyond that incorporated into the project is required; however, the District upon further consideration of fencing requirements proposes the following.

V4 The fencing surrounding the belowground tank will be 42 inches (3.5 feet) in height, rather than the originally proposed 5 feet height.

5.1.4 Residual Impacts

Residual impacts are less than significant for either the A7B or A8B Tank Alternatives. However, the existing visual condition of the selected tank site will be altered and since the sites are presently natural open space, this will be considered adverse to most viewers.

5.2 RECREATION/OPEN SPACE

5.2.1 Setting

5.2.1.1 Regional Setting

Outdoor recreation in natural open space provides opportunities for the enjoyment of scenic beauty as well as opportunities for activities such as healthful exercise (e.g., walking, hiking, horseback riding, biking and jogging), and learning about and enjoying nature. One of the key purposes of planned public open space systems is to allow for the development of trails that provide people access to areas of open space for their enjoyment.

Public open space, developed recreational facilities and trails are provided to the Oak Park community by the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District (RSRPD). The RSRPD is a special district formed by vote of the people in 1961 (RSRPD web site, November 2006). The District is governed by a five-member, elected, policy-making Board of Directors, and administered by a professionally trained and experienced General Manager and staff. The area served by the RSRPD includes 113 square miles which is bound by the Ventura County line on the east and south, extends west to the edge of the city limits of the City of Moorpark, and north to the Oak Ridge area of the Santa Susana Mountains. RSRPD manages 3,378 acres of park and public open space lands, of which 594 acres are developed, 446 acres are undeveloped; and 2,338 acres are public open space (to be left in a natural state).

RSRPD has a multi-purpose public recreational Trail Map Master Plan, which is included in the District's General Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Space (1986) and is also incorporated in the Oak Park Area Plan Land Use Plan and Circulation Map (Figure 7 of the Oak Park Area Plan, see Appendix D of this EIR). The Plan begins with an existing backbone system running east to west from the Santa Susana Pass to Oak Park County Park in the City of Simi Valley (along the Arroyo Simi). Lateral trails are shown radiating out from the Valley floor along each tributary channel, extending to the ridgelines on either side of the valley. East-west trails extend along the ridgelines of the Santa Susana Mountains on the north and the Simi Hills on the south. The objective of the plan is to establish a trail system that will extend out in all directions and to all perimeters of the District and will allow users to start from the valley floor,

follow one tributary to the ridge line on either side and return along another tributary. Trails extending into the Park District boundaries would connect with trails in the adjacent park districts including the Conejo Recreation and Park District (CRPD) to the west (CRPD open space and facilities are administered by the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency), Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) to the east and north, and Los Angeles County (Agoura Hills and Santa Monica Mountains trails) to the south. Proposed trails within the Oak Park as identified in the Plan area appear to be mostly if not completely in place.

According to National Park Service staff (Smeck, written communication March 2007), Simi Hills national parkland covers over 16,000 acres of protected open space – an area that rivals the combined acreage of Point Mugu State Park and the National Park Service's Circle X Ranch. There are 50 miles of public trails through the parkland. The Simi Hills offer some of the best parkland views and provide visitors a place to realize physical and emotional benefits. Visitation to the trails of the SMMNRA tops 550,000 with Cheeseboro Canyon/Simi Hills one of the most popular sites. Visitors range from tourists from other countries to repeat visitors from local communities. The Simi Hills are an area of national significance that is uniquely available to and greatly enjoyed by the residents of Oak Park.

5.2.1.2 Project-specific Setting

The proposed alternative tank sites are located within open space that is in the jurisdiction of the RSRPD. The A7 tank site is located within the Rock Ridge Open Space and is adjacent to a segment of the Rock Ridge Trail. The site can be most easily accessed from trailheads off Kanan Road and the Oak Canyon Community Park; however, numerous other trailheads which provide access to the Rock Ridge Open Space exist within the northwestern portion of the community.

The A8 tank site is located in the Sunrise Meadows Open Space and is adjacent to the Sunrise Meadow Ridge Trail (southwest corner of the intersection of two legs of the trail). The Sunrise Meadow Ridge Trail leads to the trail system within the SMMNRA the boundary of which is located about 100 to 300 feet east of the proposed tank. The extension of the Sunrise Meadow Ridge Trail within the SMMNRA is known as the Doubletree Connector or Ranch Center Connector. The tank site is most easily accessed from the Sunrise Meadow Ridge trailhead off Doubletree Road; however, other trailheads within the Sunrise Meadows Open Space and the SMMNRA also provide trail access to the A8 tank site.

The trails adjacent to the two tank sites are links in a regional trail system that is used extensively by hikers, bikers and other outdoor enthusiasts. The Sunrise Meadow Ridge trail segment adjacent to the A8 site is also on the course of The Great Race half marathon. This is a professionally produced annual fund raising event and is identified as one of the largest running events in Los Angeles (The Great Race web site).

According to the National Park Service, the park entrance at Doubletree Road (A8 Tank site) is a popular secondary entrance to Simi Hills parkland. The Simi Hills Comprehensive Design Plan completed by the National Park Service in 2002, proposes cooperation with the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District to construct a small off-road parking lot and trailhead at the Doubletree entrance. One of the most popular trail loops includes entrance at Doubletree

road, with a crossover into Cheeseboro Canyon using the Ranch Center Trail. The Ranch Center Trail, an old ranch road connecting canyons, offers expansive vistas that keep development comfortably distant from park visitor's views.

Padre Associates' staff members have been to the A7 and A8 tank sites on several occasions in 2006 and 2007. It has been noted that the trail adjacent to the A8 tank site, Sunrise Meadow Ridge Trail, receives substantially more use by recreationists than the trail at the A7 tank site, Rock Ridge Trail. For example on one weekday morning in February (Thursday, February 15, 2007, 10:00 AM) three separate recreationists (walkers) accessed the trail in a period of fifteen minutes. Whereas during a similar time period (weekday morning), no recreational trail users were seen on the trail at the A7 Tank site. On Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, May 26, 2007, (late morning) seven people were observed hiking on the trail at the A8 site in about a 15-minute time period. Whereas, two people were seen on the trail from the Oak Canyon Community Park that goes to the A7 tank site during a similar time period on that day (early afternoon). However, later that day two other people were observed hiking up the trail from the Oak Canyon Community Park toward the A7 site as observed from the end of the Oak Canyon Community Park. Public input thus far confirm the popularity of the trail at the A8 site.

5.2.1.3 Relevant Plans and Policies

The planning documents with goals and policies relevant to the proposed project and the issue of recreational resources include: The Ventura County General Plan including the Oak Park Area Plan and the RSRPD 1986 General Plan for Parks Recreation and Open Space. Specific goals and polices pertaining to the protection of recreational resources that are applicable to the proposed project are presented below.

OPAP Goal 3.2.1.4. Protect public access to hills and recreation areas.

GP Goal 3.2.1.5 (1). Preserve for the benefit of all the County's residents the continued wise use of the County's renewable and nonrenewable resources by limiting the encroachment into such areas of uses which would unduly and prematurely hamper or preclude the use or appreciation of such resources.

GP Goal 3.2.1.5 (4). Retain open space lands for outdoor recreational activities, parks, trails, and for scenic lands.

OPAP Goal 3.7.1. To the maximum extent feasible, ensure project consistency with the plans of the National Parks Service, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, and the City of Thousand Oaks.

(The OPAP states that the federal state and local agencies identified above have adopted plans that embrace land use issues in the Oak Park area, the plans may, therefore, also be relevant to the proposed project).

OPAP Policy 3.7.2. All development and subdivision of land shall be consistent with the Santa Monica Mountains Comprehensive Plan.

An analysis of project consistency with relevant goals and policies is provided in the project Initial Study which is presented as Appendix A of this EIR. However, these policies are identified here as they pertain to the evaluation of the potential visual impacts of the proposed project.

5.2.2 Impact Analysis

5.2.2.1 Impact Assessment Methodology and Significance Thresholds

The County of Ventura Initial Study Guidelines thresholds state that a project will have a significant impact on recreation if it would cause an increase in the demand for recreation when measured against standards provided in the Guidelines. A project will also have a significant impact on recreation if it would impede future development of recreation-parks facilities and/or regional-trails/corridors. The CEQA Guidelines Section 15382 identifies a "*significant* effect on the environment" as a substantial, or potentially substantial adverse change in any of the physical condition within the area affected by the project…" Additionally, the County of Ventura Initial Study Assessment Guidelines (2006) state that a project that is inconsistent with a specific environmental policy of the County General Plan is considered as having a significant environmental impact. A project that appears to be inconsistent with a goal of the General Plan must be evaluated by the Planning Division in light of other related goals policies and programs of the General Plan in order to determine significance the goals and policies of the community or communities in which it is located usually will have a significant impact. Triunfo Sanitation District as a special district does not need to apply the County thresholds of significance; however, they are provided as guidance in this impact assessment.

5.2.2.2 Project-Specific Impacts

a. Short-term Impacts. Tank development at either the A7 or A8 tank sites, would result in short-term (approximately 10-12 months) construction activities that would interfere with the use of the adjacent trails. Portions of the trail at the selected site would be within the construction zone of the project and would be used for temporary laydown of materials and possibly equipment. Thus, use of the existing trails would be precluded. However, the District plans to establish a temporary by pass for trail users at the A8 site. Because of the steep topography and location of the A7 tank site relative to the existing trail, development of a temporary bypass trail at this site was not considered a practical or particularly safe option by District staff and the project consulting engineer and was therefore, not initially proposed. However, RSRPD in a letter in response to the Notice of Preparation of this EIR requested that a bypass trail be established at the A7 tank site. Therefore, the District proposes to provide for continued public access at the proposed tank site with two temporary trails, depending on the pipeline and tank construction stage. The trails will be 1 to 2 feet wide, constructed solely by cutting and compressing vegetation. Walking up from Kanan Road, parallel to the existing access road, the trail would branch near elevation 1300. One branch will angle up toward the trail north. When inlet-outlet pipeline construction allows, the other branch would follow the 1300' contour southeast and then angle up to the eastern trail. When inlet-outlet pipeline construction prevents use of the eastern branch, one would first take the branch to the northern trail and then take a temporary trail around the north and east of the tank excavation before

angling south and up to the existing trail. Signs will indicate which trail is appropriate for the construction situation. Measure R1 is incorporated into the project and presented as follows:

R1a During the tank and associated facilities construction period at the A7 and A8 tank sites, TSD shall designate a safe, temporary trail route around the project construction zone. This temporary route shall be abandoned and returned to its pre-project condition within 30 days after the completion of project construction and the original trail route re-established.

The short-term, construction-related recreational impact is considered adverse, but less than significant for either the A7B or A8B Tank Alternative because of the availability of the continued trail access, as well as the numerous alternative trails in the community and the temporary nature of the impact, as use of the trail would be re-established upon construction of the tank.

The short-term impact of Pipeline Alternative A would be less than that associated with Pipeline Alternative B as it would impact a shorter length of public trail. For the A8 site pipeline alternatives, Pipeline Alternative C is the only alternative with a large segment in open space between Kanan and Doubletree Road. However, as local roads are used for biking, short-term recreational impacts can be considered worse based upon the length of pipe impacting a transportation corridor be it trail or road. Thus, Pipeline Alternative C would have the greatest short-term recreational impact because it has the longest length of new pipe (a substantial portion of it would be within an open space area). Alternative B would have the greatest short-term impact as it would require the greatest length of new pipeline (all within public roads). Pipeline D would have the least short-term visual impact as it would have the shortest length (all within public roads).

During the project construction phase, persons recreating in the open space areas near the proposed construction (either within the Rock Ridge Open Space or Sunrise Meadows Open Space, and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area) would experience a reduced quality of their recreational experience while in the vicinity of the project due to the intrusion of project-related noise, dust, exhaust and adverse views. These effects would be short-term (10 - 12 months) and are addressed in detail in Sections C.19, C.3 and C.8 respectively of the Initial Study (see Appendix).

Both the A7 and A8 tank sites include existing wildlife “guzzlers”. These facilities provide an artificial source of water for consumption by wildlife. The District proposes to relocate these facilities within the general area as needed to accommodate tank construction. Wildlife would not have a problem finding the relocated guzzler. However, interruption of availability of this water source would be an adverse impact on wildlife. Additionally, any native amphibians that may be located in the game guzzler would be adversely affected if they were not moved to the relocated guzzler.

b. Long-term Impacts. The proposed project is not expected to cause an increase in demand for recreational facilities including parks and trails, as no housing or commercial/industrial development would be constructed, and therefore no direct or indirect increase in population would result from the proposed project. Additionally, the construction

employees are not expected move to the area and create additional demands on recreational facilities and no new permanent employees are necessary.

Comments on the project's recreational impact have been received from both RSRPD and the National Park Service. These comments are summarized below.

The Assistant General Manager of Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District was previously contacted relative to the significance of a proposed tank to recreation when the Triunfo Sanitation District was focusing an Initial Study on and aboveground tank at the A8 Tank Site only and he stated at that time that the tank must be sited so as to not impact the trail experience in order to avoid a significant recreational impact. In response to the Notice of Preparation for this EIR, RSRPD submitted a letter (see Appendix B of this EIR) stating that "Given the construction, protected vegetation, permanent impacts at both locations, and other things, the Park District recommends Triunfo seriously consider construction of a below ground tank an site A7 with pipe alternative A."

The Superintendent of the National Park Service SMMNRA has stated that Alternative Site A7 is physically and visually removed from the National Recreation Area, and thus would not impact park resources of the visitor experience (Smeck, written communication, March 2007). However, he further stated that Site A8 is immediately adjacent to federal parkland in Palo Comado Canyon, Cheeseboro Canyons and the greater public parkland of the Simi Hills. As such, the placement of a water tank at Tank Site A8 would introduce a large construct of human development within close range of any view along the trail west of the ridgeline. Additionally, visitors would have to walk past the tank on their way into the federal parkland which would alter the existing experience wherein the open-space type parkland experience begins immediately upon walking up the trail after parking on Doubletree Road. Therefore, it was the Superintendent's professional opinion that development of a tank at Site A8 has the potential to cause significant negative impacts to the SMMNRA park resources in the Simi Hills, especially visitor experience. However, this opinion was rendered based upon consideration of aboveground and belowground options. A later letter dated May 31, 2007 states that the NPS' opinion is that a belowground option at the A8 site combined with removal of the Cheeseboro Canyon water tank and Palo Comado pump station would reduce the visual impacts of the A8 site alternative to insignificance and that there would be a net improvement to visual resources and the recreational visitor experience in the Simi Hills. The District has incorporated the following measure into the project:

R2 TSD will attempt to work with Calleguas Municipal Water District in an effort to remove the existing abandoned Calleguas Municipal Water District tank located on the eastern ridge of Cheeseboro Canyon and associated pump station located in Palo Comado Canyon prior to construction of a tank at the A8 alternative site.

The Ventura County thresholds indicate that a project will have a significant impact on recreation if it would impede future development of recreation-parks facilities and/or regional-trails/corridors. No future recreational park facilities are known to be planned for the project impact area and it is presently designated as open space. After project construction, trail access can be resumed unimpeded at either tank site. However, it is logical that an impediment

to the enjoyment of an existing recreational facility or trail would also have the potential for significance. Additionally, the County methodology for assessing recreational impacts requires a review of existing as well as planned trail/corridor systems.

Presently, one of the recreational benefits of the trails at the A7 and A8 tank sites is that they provide people access to a setting wherein they can enjoy the scenic, natural attributes of the open space in which they are located. The construction of either the A7B or A8B Tank Alternative would adversely alter the human experience of nature from the adjacent trails due to the introduction of manmade elements to the site including ground disturbance, installation of fencing and a few appurtenant structures. This alteration can be considered to be relatively minor considering that the tanks would be subsurface, the District would revegetate the selected site and construct structures in a way that would visually blend with the existing environment as identified in Measures V3 and V4 incorporated into the project. Thus, not-withstanding the comments of the RSRPD and National Park Service, the long-term recreational impact of either Tank Alternative A7B or A8B is considered adverse, but less than significant. Tank construction would also have a lesser effect from distant recreational trails that also provide views of the tank sites as the introduction of manmade elements to the site would be less discernable, if at all, from distant trails. Because the A8 tank site is frequented more by recreationists than the A7 site, the adverse impact would be greatest at this site due to the number of persons affected.

As indicated above, over the long-term recreational trail access would be maintained at both the A7 and A8 tank sites with development of any of the tank alternatives. However, at the A7 site, the access road from Kanan Road to the site would be paved, this may be seen as an improvement or detraction to recreational users depending upon whether they see it as easier access or an intrusion of an urban feature into natural open space. At the A8 tank site, the road would be surfaced with all-weather gravel. This may be considered an improvement or deterioration from existing conditions to recreationists based upon their intended use. For example, bikers may prefer the existing hardened natural surface to loose gravel whereas walkers may prefer the gravel. Thus, as a worst case, development of the project could be considered to have a direct adverse effect on existing recreational facilities (trails).

An unintended safety hazard may arise from with pavement of the A7 road particularly because of its steepness. Skateboarders may begin using the road and both skateboarders and bikers may be inspired to speed which could create conflicts with other trail/access road users including district vehicles. This is considered a potentially significant, adverse recreation-related safety impact associated with the proposed paving of the A7 access road.

Ultimately, if the existing Conifer Tank site is not kept in use for cellular phone service purposes, the site will be restored to its original state which will be a beneficial impact of the project.

5.2.2.3 Cumulative Impacts

There are no known cumulative project that would result in cumulative impacts to recreation when considered together with the proposed project.

5.2.3 Mitigation Measures

5.2.3.1 Project-Specific Mitigation Measures

No mitigation beyond that already incorporated into the project is required. However, the following mitigation is recommended to reduce adverse impacts associated with the relocation of the wildlife guzzler at either the A7 or A8 tank site.

R1b The existing wildlife guzzler shall be relocated to an area outside of the construction zone and operational, prior to tank construction. Any native amphibians located in the existing guzzler will be captured by a qualified biologist prior to removal of the existing guzzler and relocated to the new guzzler.

The following measure is proposed to reduce potentially significant safety impacts on the site A7 access road to less than significant.

R3 The District shall install speed bumps or other equally effective measure(s) on the A7 Tank Site access road in order to slow down vehicular and bike traffic and make the road less appealing to skateboarders.

5.2.3.2 Cumulative Mitigation Measures

No significant cumulative recreation impacts were identified. Therefore, no mitigation is required.

5.2.4 Residual Impacts

Recreational impacts are considered to be reduced to less than significant for either the A7B or A8B alternative. However, members of the public may consider any alteration to the existing condition of the open space as a substantial detriment to the recreational experience offered by these spaces. Based upon scoping comments received by public agencies, as summarized above, as well as the public, the recreational impact would be considered greatest with development of a tank at the A8 site.

Figure 10 Point of View Diagram for Tank Site A7 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 11 View of A7 Tank Site from Site Access Trail (View 1) 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 12 Simulation of Alternative A7B as Viewed from the Site Access Trail 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 13 View of A7 Tank Site from Napoleon Drive at Lindero Canyon Road (View 2)
8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 14 Simulation of Alternative A7B as viewed from Napoleon Drive at Lindero Canyon Road 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 15 View of A7 Tank Site from the North end of the Oak Canyon Community Park Access Road (View 3) 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 16 Simulation of Alternative A7B as viewed from the North end of the Oak Canyon Community Park Access Road 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 17 Point of View Diagram for Tank Site A8 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 18 View of the A8 Tank Site from the Site Access Road (View 1) 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 19 Simulation of Alternative A8B as Viewed from the Site Access Road 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 20 View of the A8 Tank Site from Doubletree Road (View 2) 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 21 Simulation of Alternative A8B as Viewed from Doubletree Road 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 22 View of the A8 Tank Site from SMMNRA 8.5 x 11 color

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Figure 23 Simulation of Alternative A8B as Viewed from the SMMNRA 8.5 x 11 color

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