

## 10 SCENIC RESOURCES

### *A. Introduction*

Butte County possesses numerous scenic resources, many of which are found in the natural areas within the unincorporated county. These resources enhance the quality of life for Butte County residents and are a significant attraction that brings tourists to the region. This chapter reviews and summarizes Butte County's key scenic resources, which are mapped on Figure 10-1.

### *B. Regulatory Setting*

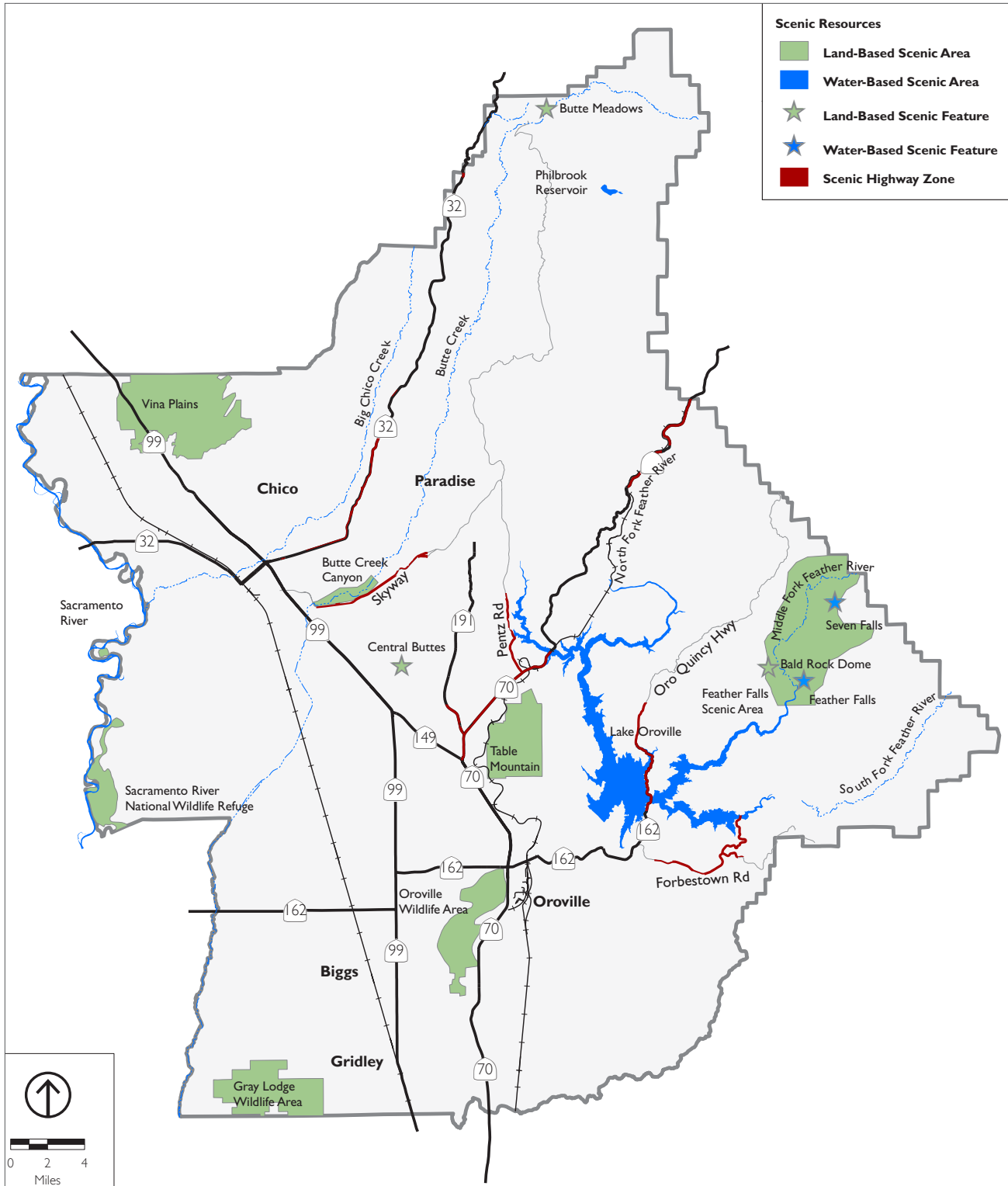
#### **1. State Law Requirements**

State law previously mandated the inclusion of a scenic highways element in a general plan, but it has since become optional. However, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires analysis of impacts on scenic highways and State law requires the general plan to address scenic open space resources. Butte County's current General Plan includes policies and actions aimed at protecting and enhancing scenic areas adjacent to and visible from highways.

#### **2. California State Scenic Highways Program**

California's Scenic Highway Program was created by the State legislature in 1963. Its purpose is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors through special conservation treatment. The State laws governing the Scenic Highways Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Sections 260 through 263.

When a city or county nominates an eligible scenic highway for official designation, it must identify and define the scenic corridor of the highway. Scenic corridors consist of land that is visible from the highway right of way and is comprised primarily of scenic and natural features. Topography, vegetation, viewing distance, and/or jurisdictional lines determine the corridor boundaries. The city or county must also adopt ordinances, zoning, and/or planning policies to preserve the scenic quality of the corridor or document such regulations that already exist in various portions of local codes. These ordinances and/or policies make up the Corridor Protection Program. The status of a proposed State scenic highway changes from "eligible" to "officially designated" when the local governing body applies to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for scenic highway approval, adopts a Corridor Protection Program, and receives notification that the highway has been officially designated a Scenic Highway. State Scenic Highways in Butte County are discussed in Section C.



Source: PlaceWorks, Butte County General Plan 2030 Setting & Trends Report, 2007.  
 Butte County Geographic Information Systems; US Forest Service.

Figure 10-1  
 Scenic Resources

### *C. Existing Conditions*

#### **1. Scenic Highways and Corridors**

This section describes various scenic highways and corridors, which are considered so either by virtue of their official designation by the State, through their identification as a County Scenic Highway in the General Plan 2030 Conservation and Open Space Element, or through application of the Scenic Highway (-SH) Overlay Zone.

Some of the scenic highways and corridors in Butte County traverse State-owned lands, where development poses little threat to the viewshed. Others pass through areas that are privately held, such as portions of the following: Forbestown Road east of Lake Oroville above 2,000-foot elevation; Highway 162 on the south side of Lake Oroville and north of the North Fork of the Feather River; Highway 70 north of Oroville and west/north of Table Mountain; and Highway 149 south of the Central Buttes and west of Table Mountain.

##### **a. State Scenic Highways**

Although there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways in Butte County, Highway 149 near Highway 70 and Wicks Corner is considered an eligible State Scenic Highway.

##### **b. County Scenic Highways and Corridors**

The General Plan 2030 Conservation and Open Space Element recognizes Highway 70 north of the Highway 149 intersection and a portion of Highway 32 south of Forest Ranch as county scenic highways.

##### **c. Scenic Highway (-SH) Zoning**

The Butte County Zoning Ordinance uses the Scenic Highway Overlay Zone (-SH) to establish standards to preserve the natural aesthetic qualities of areas visible from roadways designated as scenic highways by the State of California or the Butte County Board of Supervisors. Roads subject to the -SH overlay zone are illustrated on Figure 10-1. As shown on the figure, these include portions of Highway 32 north of Chico; Highway 70 north of the Highway 149 intersection; the Skyway with its expansive views of the Northern Sacramento Valley and Coast Range; the southern portions of Highway 191 and Pentz Road; the portion of Highway 162 along Lake Oroville; Forbestown Road; and Lumpkin Road.

The -SH Overlay Zone allows the same permitted and conditionally permitted uses as the base zone, subject to the requirements of the Overlay Zone, including development standards and findings for approval. Development within the -SH Overlay Zone is intended to feature high quality architectural design, preserve views from the highway, and maintain existing topographic features on the site. When approving a development within the -SH Overlay Zone, the review authority considers the architectural design of the proposed structures and how the project will maintain existing views of scenic resources as viewed from the public right-of-way. The review authority also considers how the site will be graded to preserve natural features on the site and whether the landscaping associated with the project complements the scenic qualities of the site and surrounding areas.

## 2. Natural Scenic Resources

Butte County encompasses an outstanding variety of natural vistas and landscapes. The following section describes the significant scenic resources found in the county, as appeared in the existing Butte County General Plan. These various resources are mapped in Figure 10-1 and include the following:

- ◆ **Table Mountain Spring Floral Area.** The lava flow that now tops Table Mountain brings an explosion of color each year in the form of native wildflowers. Over 3,300 acres of North Table Mountain is protected as an ecological reserve by the State Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- ◆ **Central Buttes.** Rising from the valley floor, these geologic features are remnants of the surrounding landform that eroded around them over the millennia. Many of these buttes are visible from State Routes 99, 149 and 70.
- ◆ **Sacramento River and its Riparian Corridor.** Some of the county's richest habitat and most beautiful views are found along the Sacramento River and its associated riparian corridor. State and federal agencies have acquired significant portions of the riparian corridor to help protect this resource.
- ◆ **Butte Creek Canyon.** The Skyway provides views to a dramatic and panoramic display of the topographic and geologic features of Butte Creek Canyon. A portion of this canyon is protected as an ecological reserve by the State Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- ◆ **Lake Oroville.** Lake Oroville provides many scenic vistas from several highways that traverse its shores, while providing an assortment of recreational activities for residents and visitors.

- ◆ **Philbrook Lake.** Pacific Gas and Electric Company owns the Philbrook Reservoir, a tranquil mountain lake nestled between several scenic mountain outcroppings.
- ◆ **Feather Falls Scenic Area Features.** The Feather Falls Scenic Area, part of the Plumas National Forest, includes granite domes, such as Bald Rock, and waterfalls, such as Feather Falls and Seven Falls.
- ◆ **Seasonal Scenic Resources.** Many tourists visit the orchards in the valley areas of Butte County during the early spring when almonds and other trees are blossoming.

### 3. Scenic Water Resources

Butte County has an abundance of water resources that contribute to the county's visual character. These include both linear waterways and surface water bodies. While some of these resources are included among those described in Section C.2, above, this section provides additional information on those and other important scenic water resources in the county.

#### a. Rivers, Streams, and Creeks

Butte County is part of the Sacramento River watershed and is bounded by the Sacramento River on its west side. Numerous streams and rivers drain runoff from the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountains southwesterly across the county into the Sacramento River. Of these waterways, the most significant are Butte Creek, Big Chico Creek and the North, Middle and South Forks of the Feather River. These rivers pass through rugged terrain, which often obstructs visual access to the water. Nevertheless, they are significant visual features within the county. A 77.6-mile portion of the Middle Fork of the Feather River has federal Wild and Scenic River status.<sup>1</sup>

#### b. Surface Water Bodies

Also significant as visual features are Butte County's lakes and reservoirs. Few natural lakes exist in the county, although numerous reservoirs have been built to provide domestic and irrigation water, hydroelectric power, recreation, flood control and watershed management. The most visually significant of the county's water bodies are Lake Oroville, which covers over 15,500 surface acres and has 167 miles of shoreline, along with Thermalito Forebay and Afterbay. Other important reservoirs in the county include Concow Reservoir, Paradise Lake, Magalia

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<sup>1</sup> National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Feather River (Middle Fork), California. Accessed February 20, 2021. <https://www.rivers.gov/rivers/feather.php>

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Reservoir, Philbrook Lake, Lake Madrone, Ponderosa Reservoir, and Lake Wyandotte. Figure 12-1, in Chapter 12, Water Resources, maps the locations of these water bodies.