

# MONO COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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To: Richard Kizer, District 9  
Department Transportation  
Advisory Committee (DTAC)

Date: 11/18/98

Re: Scenic U.S. Highway 395 Resolution Package

Dear Mr. Kizer & Members of the DTAC,

It is the intent of Mono County to submit a formal request for Scenic Highway designation for U.S. Highway 395 for a distance of approximately 103 miles, in four sections including the existing designated area, beginning at the Nevada State line, extending southerly to the Inyo County Line. However if for any reason a section of highway does not meet the legislative intent of the California Scenic Highway Program, please designate all other sections of highway which meet the requirements.

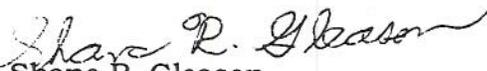
The formal request packet to upgrade these sections of highway from their current "eligible" status to full-fledged "scenic" designation within the California Scenic Highway Program includes:

- The U.S. Highway 395 Visual Resource Assessment Document
- Video of the route
- Resolution of Intent from the Mono County Board of Supervisors
- Applicable ordinances and land use policies for corridor protection
- Topographic maps and Zoning maps
- Letters of support

Ordinances and land use policies which to meet the five minimum requirements under Section 261 of the Streets and Highways code are enclosed to expedite your review. I'm aware that this is usually sent to Caltrans after the resolution packet has been reviewed, but since I have already obtained the information, I felt that to move the process along it should be included.

I want to thank Richard Kizer and Dennis Cadd for their assistance over the past couple of months in preparing this request. Your technical support and willingness to help has made my job much easier.

Sincerely,

  
Shane R. Gleason  
Mono County Planning Dept.

# U.S. HIGHWAY 395 VISUAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

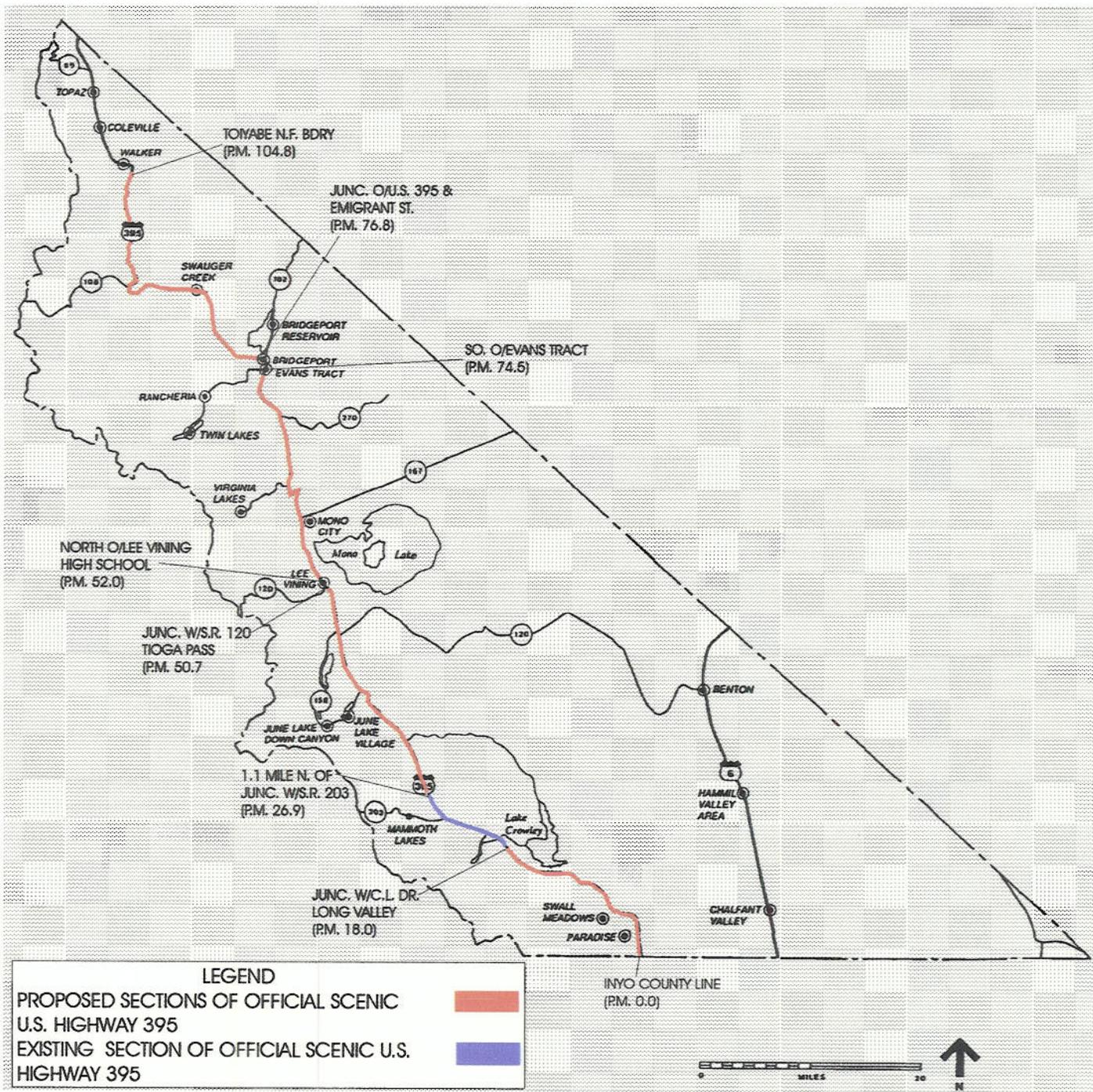


Prepared by;

Shane Gleason

for

THE MONO COUNTY  
PLANNING DEPARTMENT



TOPAZ (P.M. 104.8)

COLEVILLE  
WALKER

TOMABE N.F. BDRY  
(P.M. 104.8)

JUNC. O/U.S. 395 &  
EMIGRANT ST.  
(P.M. 76.8)

108

SWAUGER CREEK

102

BRIDGEPORT RESERVOIR

SO. O/EVANS TRACT  
(P.M. 74.6)

BRIDGEPORT EVANS TRACT

RANCHERIA

TWIN LAKES

370

VIRGINIA LAKES

167

MONO CITY

Mono Lake

NORTH O/LEE VINING  
HIGH SCHOOL  
(P.M. 52.0)

LEE VINING

JUNC. W/S.R. 120  
TIOGA PASS  
(P.M. 50.7)

120

JUNE LAKE  
DOWN CANYON

JUNE LAKE VILLAGE

1.1 MILE N. OF  
JUNC. W/S.R. 203  
(P.M. 26.9)

MAMMOTH LAKES

Lake Crowley

JUNC. W/C.L. DR.  
LONG VALLEY  
(P.M. 18.0)

SWALL MEADOWS

PARADISE

BENTON

HAMMILL VALLEY AREA

CHALFANT VALLEY

# U.S. HIGHWAY 395 VISUAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

## INTRODUCTION

Many visitors to Mono County experience the areas scenery primarily from the highways. As a result, there is a need to preserve the scenic qualities of the highways and the scenic resources, which are visible from the highways. Running in a North-South direction U.S. Highway 395 is the major roadway through Mono County. With sections, designated as part of the Mono County Scenic Highway System by both the State and County. The County would now like to move ahead and have CalTrans designate three of these portions as state scenic highway.

The County has adopted four different portions of U.S. Highway 395 as part of the Mono County Scenic Highway System, and proposes that three of these segments be considered for State Scenic Highway Designation. Gaps between the segments generally contain community development areas with a mixture of uses. Severe restrictions for scenic preservation purposes in these areas would be politically and practically difficult to implement.

The first proposed section of highway begins at the Walker Canyon just south of the town of Walker at paddle marker 104.8 and runs 28 miles to the town of Bridgeport, ending at paddle marker 76.8 the Emigrant Street junction. The scenery along this section includes the West Walker River, the Sonora Junction, Devil's Gate, Huntoon Valley area, Bridgeport Valley, and Bridgeport Lake.

After leaving Bridgeport another portion of scenic highway begins south of Evans Tract at paddle marker 74.5 and runs 22 miles until paddle marker 52.0 north of Lee Vining High School. This scenic stretch of highway includes the Bridgeport Valley, Virginia Creek Canyon, Conway Summit, Mono Basin, Mono Lake, Dana Plateau and Mount Gibbs.

The southern most portion of scenic highway in Mono County begins at paddle marker 50.7 State Route 120 junction and runs a total of 51 miles, including the existing 8.8. miles of State Designated Scenic Highway, until paddle marker 0.0 the Inyo County line. The scenic attributes include, the Mono Craters, June Mountain, Inyo Craters, Deadman Summit, and Sherwin Hill. These rivers, lakes, vistas, valleys and natural resources help to make Mono County the scenic wonderland it is.

## **U.S. HIGHWAY 395 VISUAL RESOURCES**

### **SECTION 1: WALKER CANYON TO BRIDGEPORT VALLEY**

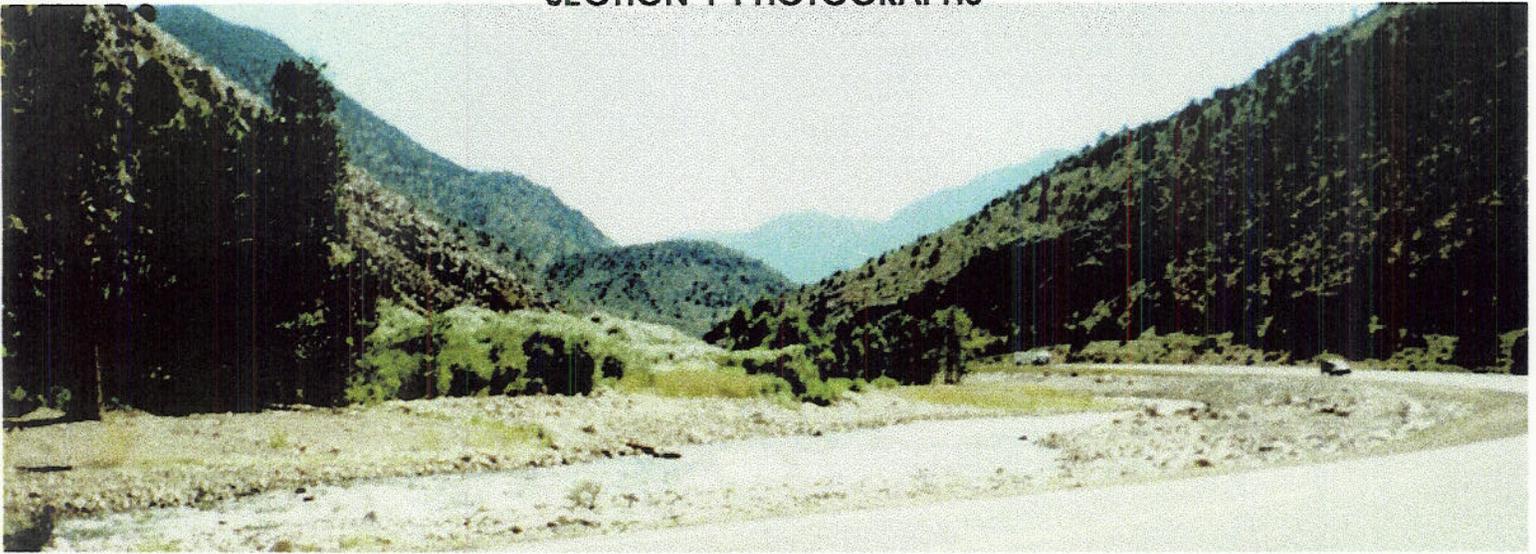
After leaving the town of Walker, at the Toiyabe National Forest Boundary, Scenic U.S. Highway 395, meanders along curves of the West Walker River (See photograph 3). Once in the canyon the rock formations and Jeffrey Pine trees parallel the highway, and the roar of white water can easily be heard (See photograph 4). Due to the flood of 1997, which destroyed the highway through Walker Canyon, grading, cut and fill, and slight soil erosion becomes apparent in particular areas. Fortunately restoration measures have been put in place and vegetation is beginning to grow. Also you may notice various Forest Service signs and campgrounds when traveling through Walker Canyon (See Sign & Structure Inventory). At the south end of the canyon the cliffs begin to fade, and a small grassy valley, surrounded by beautiful mountains appears.

The Sonora Junction area offers a great view of a section of the Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountain Range (See photograph 6). Along the corridor of the Sonora Junction area two intrusions become apparent: The first is a county gravel pit area, fortunately the portion visible from the highway is a cut bank where dirt has been removed. The second intrusion is the Caltrans maintenance station and living quarters. The maintenance station is on the East Side of the highway while the view of the Eastern Sierra mountain range is to the west, therefore the scenic view is not obstructed. Also, located above the Caltrans station, radio towers can be seen. Beyond Sonora Junction, a small hot creek runs along the highway; on cold winter days steam billows up from the creek. The creek is fed by Fales Hot Springs, which was once a bustling hot spring resort (See photographs 7 & 8). About half a mile south of the hot springs, the highway travels through what is called Devils Gate, a historic name resulting from the near impossible pass through which horse and wagon traveled, especially in winter months (See photograph 9). On a high ridge near Devils Gate there is a hollow section of rock called the Devils Eye. Along the Fales Hot Springs and Devils Gate area widely dispersed residential buildings are apparent, but the natural landscape dominates the scenic view. Also at the Devils Gate area power lines run parallel to the highway until Bridgeport. At the south end of Devils Gate the mountains opens up to reveal the Huntoon Valley. The area is surrounded by mountains and offers a great view of an undeveloped valley,

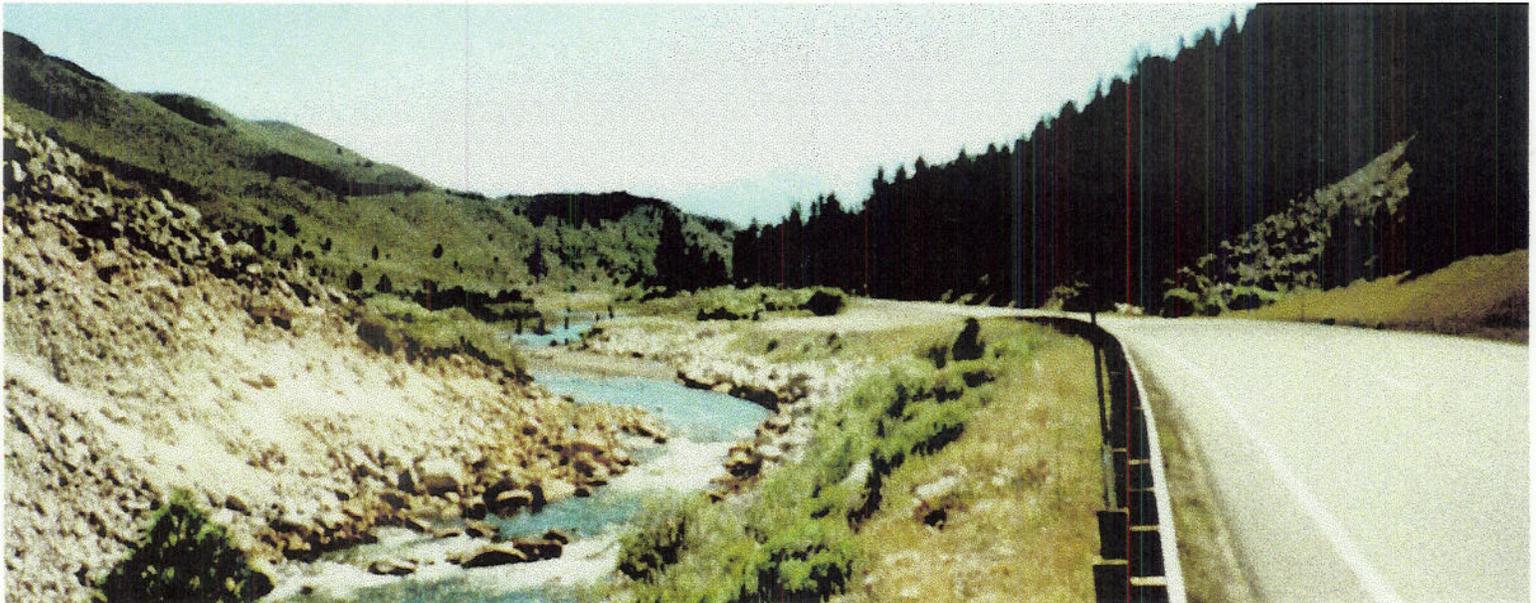
with meandering creek (See photographs 10 & 11). The valley is home to herds of sheep in the spring, summer, and fall months.

After passing through the undeveloped valley the highway travels through a short canyon. Once through the canyon, there is a spectacular view of Bridgeport Valley and encircling mountain range greets the eye (See photographs 12 & 13). Originally called Big Meadow, the fertile valley offers a truly glorious setting of open range and grassland. Also, at the northeast section of the valley lies Bridgeport Lake (See photograph 13). Jagged spires of Matterhorn Peak and the Sawtooth Ridge dominate the skyline above the valley. At the north end of Bridgeport Valley a small cluster of residential buildings used by the Forest Service employees exists. Although these buildings aren't screened well they do not obstruct the scenic view. Further into the Bridgeport Valley an off-site billboard has been constructed. The sign is about six feet long and four feet wide, and is colored green which helps blend it into the valley. The intrusions as a whole are minimal, only about 5% of the section is effected by minor or moderate intrusions. The twenty-eight miles of scenic highway ends as you enter the Town of Bridgeport at the Emigrant St. Junction.

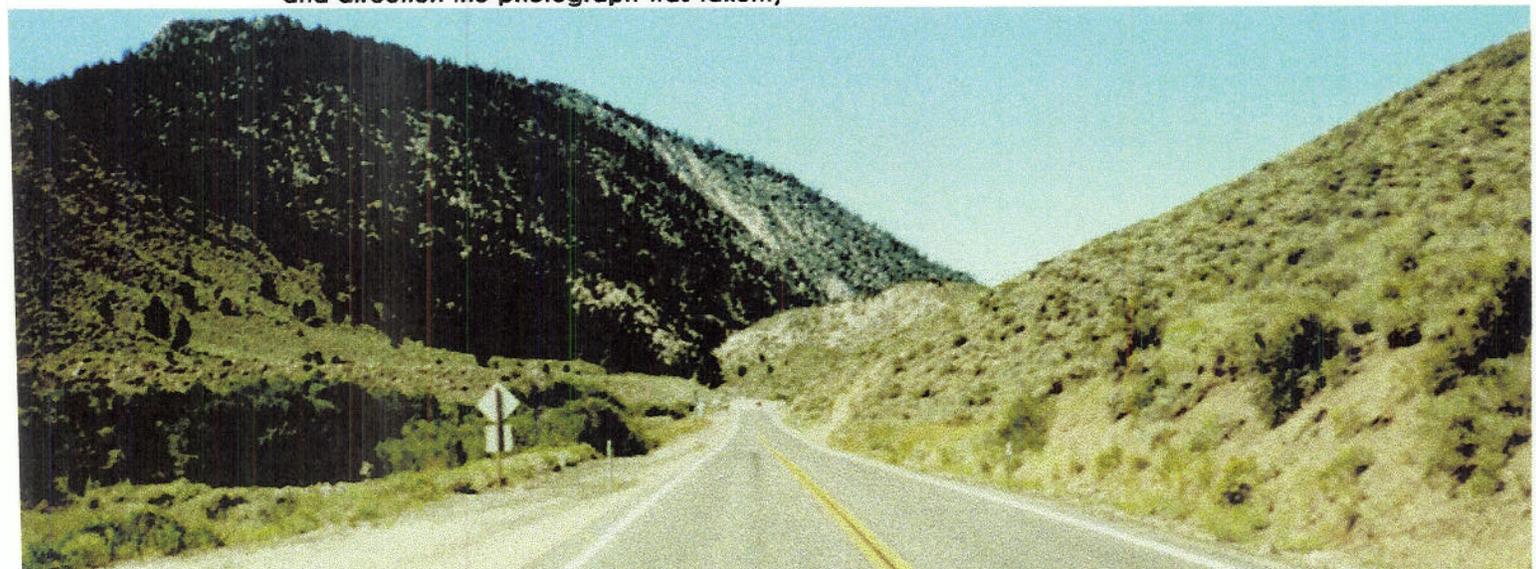
## SECTION 1 PHOTOGRAPHS



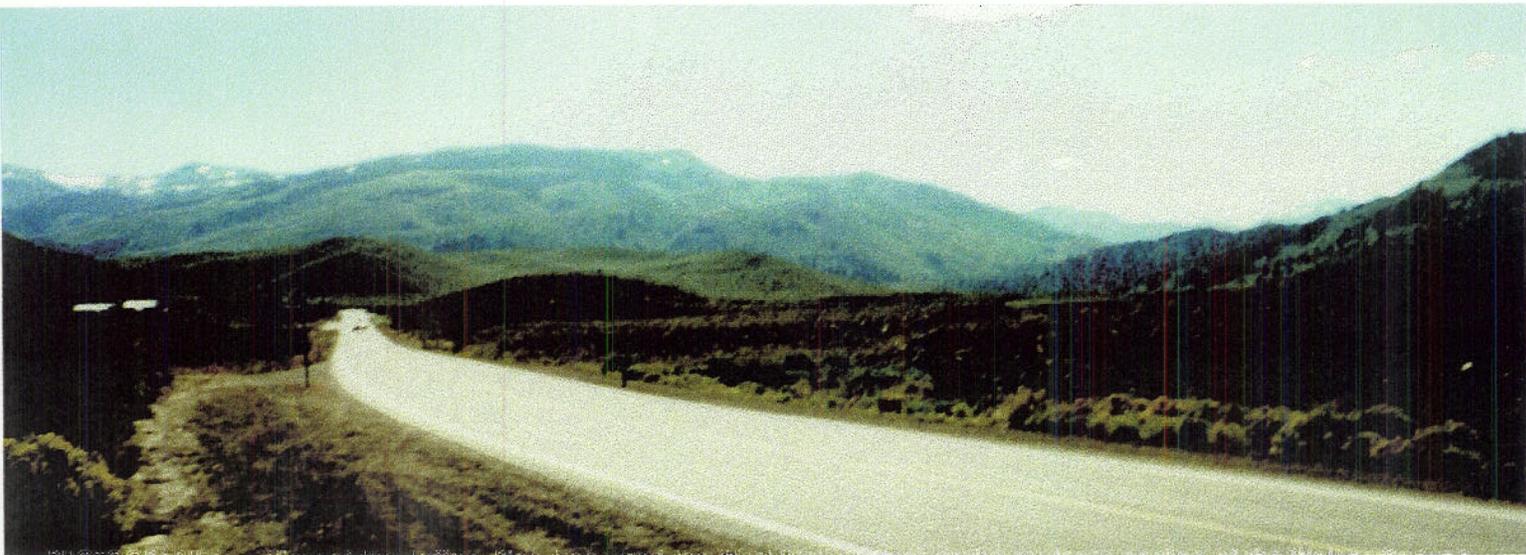
**PHOTOGRAPH 3** Captures the mountainous terrain of the north end of Walker Canyon and the whitewater of West Walker River. [See Map 2 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.]



**PHOTOGRAPH 4** View of the Jeffrey Pine trees and the West Walker River at the southern portion of the Walker Canyon with a view of the Eastern Sierra Nevada in the distance. [See MAP 3 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.]



**PHOTOGRAPH 5** Looking at the entrance of the Walker Canyon from the southern end. [See Map 3 for the location and the direction the photograph was taken.]



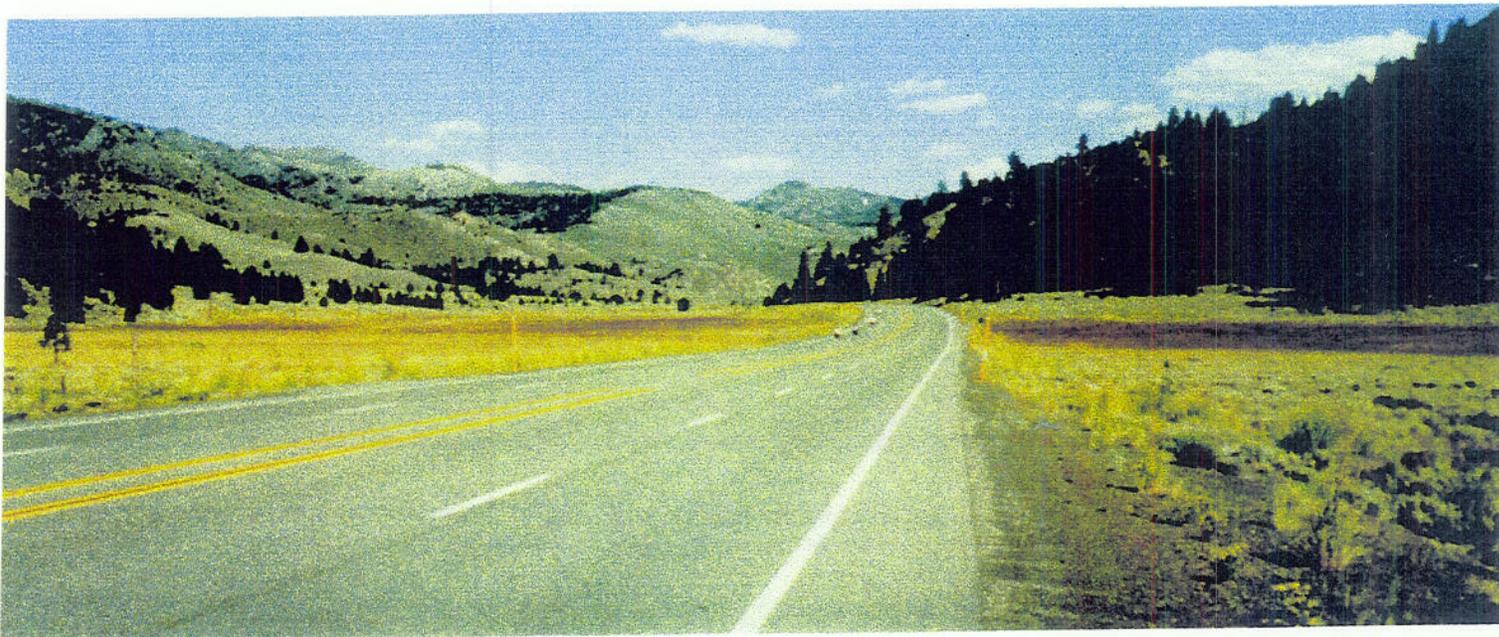
**PHOTOGRAPH 6** View of Sonora Junction and the surrounding Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountain Range with snow capped tops. (See MAP 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)



**PHOTOGRAPH 7** Looking at the Fales Hot Springs area with Devils Gate in the distance. (See Map 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)



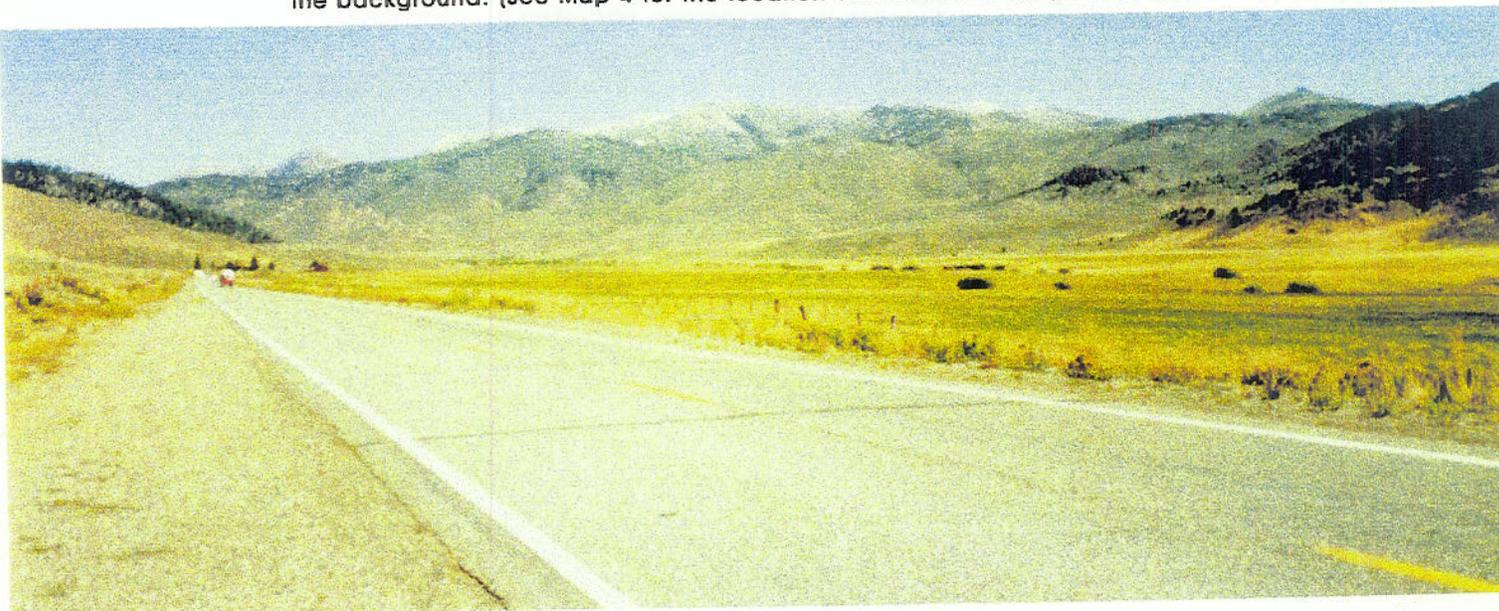
**PHOTOGRAPH 8** View from the northern portion of the Fales Hot Springs area with the snow capped Eastern Sierra Nevada Mountain range in the background. (See MAP 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)



**PHOTOGRAPH 9** Captures the Southern end of the mountainous terrain of the Devils Gate area. (See MAP 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)



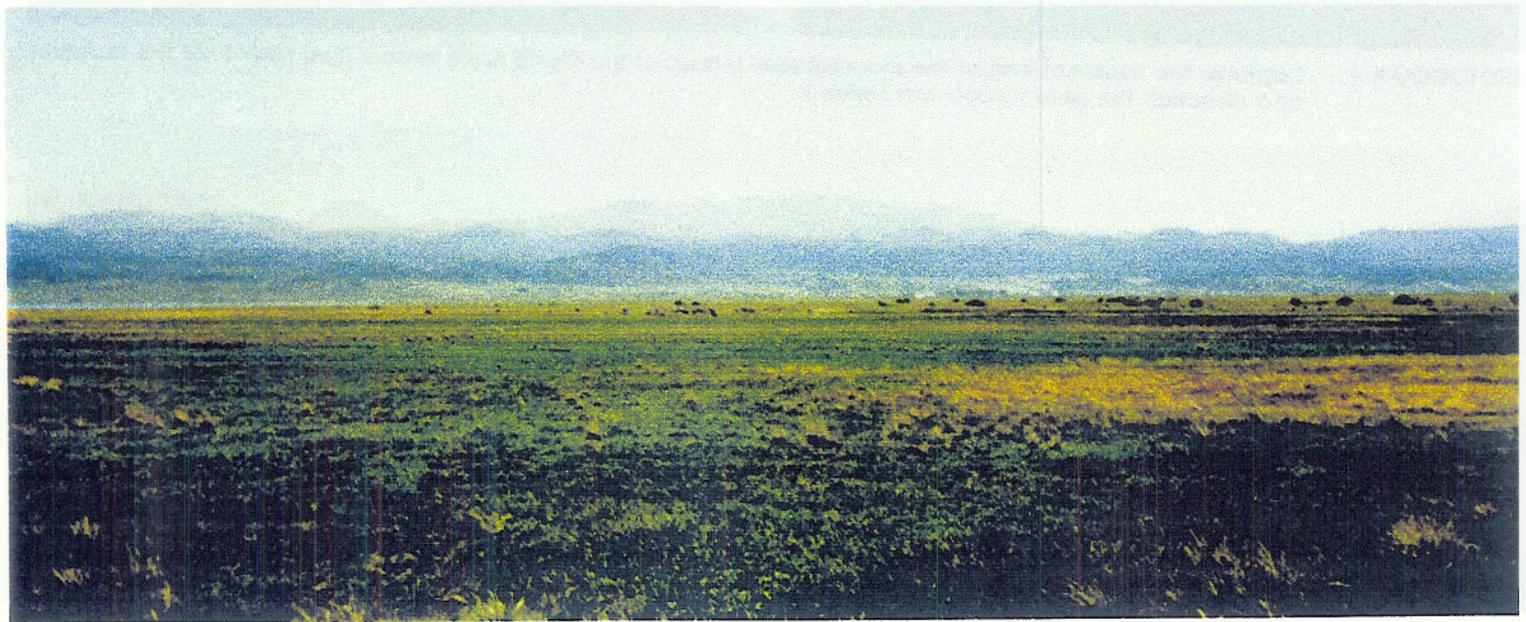
**PHOTOGRAPH 10** Looking at the northern portion of Huntoon Valley with the view of sagebrush covered hills in the background. (See Map 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)



**PHOTOGRAPH 11** Looking at the northern portion of Huntoon Valley with a view of sagebrush covered hills in the background. (See MAP 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)



**PHOTOGRAPH 12** Looking at the western section of the lush green Bridgeport Valley with the glacier filled Sawtooth Range in the background. (See MAP 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)

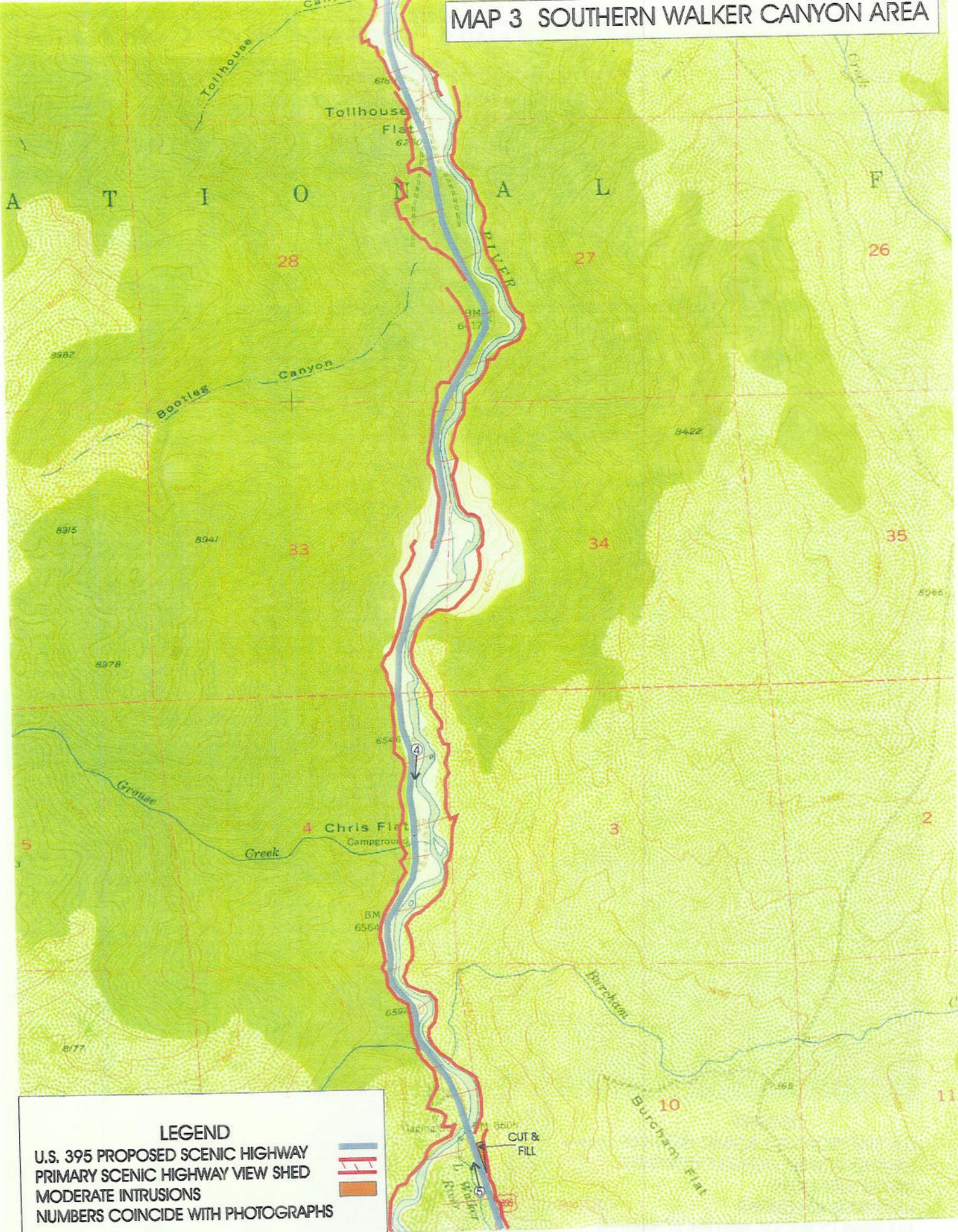


**PHOTOGRAPH 13** View of Bridgeport Valley with Potato Peak at the center and Bridgeport Lake to the left. (See MAP 4 for the location and direction the photograph was taken.)

# MAP 2 NORTHERN WALKER CANYON AREA



MAP 3 SOUTHERN WALKER CANYON AREA



**LEGEND**

- U.S. 395 PROPOSED SCENIC HIGHWAY
- PRIMARY SCENIC HIGHWAY VIEW SHED
- MODERATE INTRUSIONS
- NUMBERS COINCIDE WITH PHOTOGRAPHS



# **SCENIC HIGHWAY CORRIDOR PROTECTION PLAN**

## **FOR U.S. HIGHWAY 395, Mono County**

On October 8, 1999 the Departmental Transportation Advisory Committee (DTAC) voted unanimously to approve the County of Mono Resolution Package. The Package was submitted as part of the process for obtaining State Scenic Highway designation for a 92-mile segment of Route 395 from the Inyo/Mono County line to just south of the town of Walker. The route would connect with an existing scenic portion to create a 101-mile long scenic corridor.

In order to proceed with the designation process, the County is now submitting a Corridor Protection Plan consisting entirely of currently existing county-wide land use ordinances and policies. The five areas addressed in the protection plan as required by Caltrans' Guidelines for the Official Designation of Scenic Highways are:

- Regulation of Land Use (density and allowable land uses)
- Site Planning (review authority for proposed developments)
- Prohibition of off-site outdoor advertising, and control of on-site advertising
- Control of earthmoving and landscaping (grading and landscaping requirements)
- Design and appearance of structures and equipment (utility structures etc.)

This section of highway is already established as a county scenic highway and is subject to stringent guidelines regarding development patterns and visual resources. Policies for preserving and enhancing visual resources in Mono County focus on protecting views from major travel routes and recreation destinations; improving the opportunity for visitors to view spectacular scenery; designing community and manmade structures to blend and be compatible with the surrounding environment; and coordinating scenic policies of local and federal agencies so they complement each other. Obtaining State Scenic Highway designation for this 101-mile section will help ensure preservation of Mono County's spectacular scenic resources. (See attachment pg. 1-8)

## COUNTY OF MONO

- **Regulation of Land Use (density and allowable land uses)**

Approximately 99% of the land within the scenic corridor is committed to Resource Management, Open Space and Agricultural uses. Most of this area is contained in large federally owned parcels. The Resource Management designation recognizes land uses including but not limited to recreation, water conservation, wetlands and habitat conservation, visual resources and geothermal and mineral resources. The development standards allow a 40 acre minimum parcel size, with a maximum building density of one dwelling per lot and a secondary unit. The maximum population density is 5 people per 40 acres. (See attachment pg. 9-10)

The Open Space designation is intended to protect and retain open space for future generations. These lands may be valuable for resource preservation, such as visual open space, botanical habitat, stream environment zones, and low intensity recreational uses. There is no minimum parcel size but the maximum site disturbance is 10% including lot coverage. (See attachment pg. 13)

The Agriculture designation is intended to preserve and encourage agricultural uses, to protect agricultural uses from encroachment from urban uses, and to provide for the orderly growth of activities related to agriculture. The minimum parcel size along most of the Highway 395 corridor is 40 acres. Most agriculture parcels along the Highway 395 scenic corridor are much greater than 40 acres in size. (See attachment pg. 11-12)

The remainder of the private land within the scenic corridor is zoned Rural Residential, Estate Residential. The Rural Residential designation is intended to permit large lot single family dwelling units with ancillary rural uses in areas away from developed communities. The minimum parcel size is one acre and the maximum lot coverage is 40%. The building density allows for one dwelling and one secondary unit, and the population density allows for one person per acre. Estate Residential has similar intent as Rural Residential with the same development standards. (See attachment pg. 14-17)

Less than one percent of land in the Scenic Corridor is zoned Rural Resort, Commercial, and Mixed Use. Along the corridor these uses would include restaurants, hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts. (See attachment pg. 18-25)

- **Site Planning (review authority for proposed developments)**

The Community Development Department conducts site plan reviews for all development within any county scenic highway corridor. The department utilizes the attached Scenic Highway Design Review Checklist to ensure compliance with visual polices and standards are met. (See attachment pg. 27)

Use Permits are issued following a public hearing by the County Planning Commission. Before issuance, County Planning staff evaluates the proposed project for compliance with local zoning and building ordinances. If a project application is deemed complete and in compliance, the Use Permit is publicly noticed, and is then heard by the Planning Commission. If the decision of the Planning Commission is appealed, the Board of Supervisors will consider the project.

Parcels maps, Subdivision maps, and at times Specific Plans are for more complex or larger projects. These often require the applicant to produce an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) which documents environmental impacts that will result from the development. Mitigations to those impacts are also detailed in an EIR. The Maps, Specific plans and their EIRs are considered by the Planning Commission in fully noticed public hearings. The Planning Commission reviews the project's compliance with General Plan policy and County Ordinances. If the decision for approval by the Planning Commission is not appealed by either the applicant or a member of the public, a permit will be issued. If the decision is appealed to the Board of Supervisors, the Board reconsiders the project in a fully noticed public hearing.

- **Prohibition of off-site outdoor advertising, and control of on-site advertising**

Along with other restrictions as stated in section 19.35.060 of the Mono County Sign Ordinance, there is a county-wide prohibition of off-site billboard advertising of any type. (See attachment pg. 31)

On-site advertising standards are meant to enhance and preserve the unique scenic beauty of Mono County. Signs shall be located in a way compatible with their surroundings in terms of size, shape, color texture and lighting. Also, all freestanding signs in a scenic highway corridor are subject to county use permit requirements. (See attachment pg. 28-32)

- **Control of earthmoving and landscaping (grading ordinance and landscaping requirements)**

If any person performs any land clearing, grading, drainage interference or alterations they must first obtain a grading permit. Along with the grading permit the following site data shall be submitted to the county:

- A. Map showing location of the site involved.
- B. Map showing property boundaries and dimensions of area covered by application.

- C. Plan showing buildings, roads, utilities, or other natural or manmade structures, which may be affected.
- D. A plan drawn at scale which adequately shows the details of terrain and drainage, for the conditions existing before and after the proposed work.
- E. Cross-section of the ground showing both original and proposed ground surfaces with grades, slopes and elevations.
- F. A soil report including descriptions of earth and rock materials involved.
- G. Statement regarding the control of construction methods and materials.
- H. Plans and details of walls, cribbing, slope protection facilities and planting.

When the completed grading permit application, accompanying plans and other data are received, the director shall review the application. The plans with comments by the director will be returned to the civil engineer. The necessary changes shall be made to the drawing and the original returned to the director for review and signature. (See attachment pg. 33-40)

The Scenic Combining Zoning District, which applies to all properties along the Highway 395 Corridor, requires all projects to submit a landscape plan. Mono County Planning Department Landscape and Revegetation Plan requirements are attached. (See attachment pg. 41-43 )

- **Design and appearance of structures and equipment (utility structures, etc.)**

As summarized in the attached Scenic Highway Design Review Checklist, county policies regulate the appearance (design, color, and material of buildings, fences and other accessory structures. (See attachment pg. 27)

The visual impacts of utility corridors and overhead utility lines have become an important issue in community areas and undeveloped areas. The Public Utilities Commission regulates transmission lines; the county has authority over some distribution lines. The Mono County Zoning and Development Code currently requires underground utility lines unless certain findings can be made and a use permit is approved for overhead lines.

The Board of Supervisors has the authority to call public hearings to ascertain whether the public necessity, health, safety or welfare requires the removal of power poles, overhead wires and associated overhead structures within designated areas of the county. If after any public hearing the Board of Supervisors finds that the public necessity, health, safety or welfare requires such removal and underground installation within a designated area, the Board shall, by resolution, declare such area an underground utility district and order underground installation. (See attachment pg. 44-46)