CASE STUDIES FOR EVALUATING PHOTOSIMULATIONS FOR VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Principle
Avoid foreground visual obstructions

Statement
The presence of objects in the base-photograph's foreground that effectively screen or distract from the proposed visual change should be avoided if possible, and minimized if not.

Explanation
KOPs should be located at viewpoints with meaningful views of a proposed project. This may require consideration of seasonal conditions where views of the project are unobstructed for part of the year but obstructed at other times.

Case Study. Sheldon Solar
Sheldon Solar is a 20 MW solar electric generation facility that will occupy approximately 101 acres in four fields on either side of Route 105. The fieldwork to document and photograph the study area was in early September, when the corn fields were reaching maturity as shown in Figure 1. A second trip was required in order acquire photography for a "worst-case" photosimulation, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Discussion
Identifying a "worst-case" view may require returning for field photography. In areas dominated by deciduous trees, it is best professional practice to document views when leaves are on the trees and after they have dropped. The Sheldon Solar project might have also benefited from a photograph with snow cover since it provides a different color contrast with the project.

It is worth noting that these photographs demonstrate additional visual obstruction problems. The truck in Figure 1 and the car in Figure 2 are passing distractions that would be overlooked by viewers but are permanently frozen in the photographs. The highway sign on the left side of Figure 2 is also an inappropriate obstruction in the photograph that could have been easily avoided.

FIGURE 1. A photograph taken in early September. The Sheldon Solar project is planned for the left side of the road.



FIGURE 2. A photograph taken in October after the corn harvest.



FIGURE 3. A photosimulation of the Sheldon Solar project.



Statement of Limitations: The simulations presented here were entered into the public record as part of a permitting process. They were prepared to be printed on 11-by-17-inch paper. However, in the process of distribution as PDFs they may have been substantially compressed. The figures presented here were clipped from these PDFs, converted to high quality JPGs and their resolution reduced. The original photosimulation has been substantially changed and as presented here should be used only as learning material.

Source: The figures used in this case study are taken from materials submitted to the Vermont Public Service Commission.