# 3.1.1.4 Port of Stockton

#### **On-Site Conditions**

The proposed facility would be located at the Port of Stockton, within the City of Stockton (City), directly south of the San Joaquin River and west of Interstate 5 (I-5), as shown in Figure 2-10, Port Location. The Port of Stockton is an active deep water port. The project site currently operates as a port berth and warehousing facility. The project site is located in the West Complex, which was previously a natural wetland known as Rough and Ready Island (Port of Stockton 2023a). The proposed GSNR facility would be located in the northwest quarter of the West Complex, on a relatively undeveloped site bordered by Davis Ave., Boone Dr., Edwards Ave., and Lipes Dr. The project site includes a concrete parking lot in the southeast corner.

The project site is of low visual quality, as a vacant industrial area with a paved, but not well maintained, parking area.

# Surrounding Land Uses

There are a number of surrounding land uses within the project area. The West Complex Development Plan (WCDP), approved in 2004, identifies commercial and industrial parks, as well as other diversified land uses and infrastructure to aid Port activities for the undeveloped areas of Rough and Ready Island. Approximately 75 facilities or businesses operate out of the West Complex as of 2020. The West Complex is characterized by maritime terminals, railroad facilities, large warehouse and storage buildings, and stockpiles of various commodities (Port of Stockton 2023b). Surrounding land is designated as Industrial and Parks and Recreation to the north, Industrial to the east, Industrial and Residential Estate to the south, and Industrial to the west (City of Stockton 2017).

### Scenic Highways

According to Caltrans Scenic Highway Mapping System, there are no officially designated scenic highways that pass by the project site or are near the project site. The closest eligible state scenic highway is SR 4, located approximately 18.8 miles to the west of the project site. The next closest scenic highways are SR 58, an officially designated scenic highway, and SR 4, an eligible state scenic highway, both approximately 19.3 miles to the southwest of the project site (Caltrans 2018).

## **Light and Glare**

The project site is located within an active port. The project site itself is unlit but exposed to existing lighting, including outdoor lighting fixtures on structures, interior warehouse lighting, streetlights, and parking lot lighting. Typical glare associated with the land uses include windows and other metal building siding. Light sources from offsite areas include light from ships, trains, vehicle lights from surrounding roads, and surrounding Port facilities.

#### **Viewers**

As described above in section 3.1.1.2, viewer exposure varies depending on several factors including the angle of view; view distance; relationship to sun angle; the extent of visibility; and viewer screening conditions. Viewer exposure also considers the duration of view based on viewer activity and often relates to speed of travel.

The project site is located along the San Joaquin River to the north and various railroad tracks and roads within the Port. The Port of Stockton is a secured facility. Only authorized employees and visitors would have access to the site. Primary access to the Port is by Navy Drive Bridge, which connects the main Port ("East Complex") with the West Complex. Secondary access is provided by Daggett Road Bridge, on the southern side of the island. Rail access to the West Complex is provided by a railroad bridge north of the Navy Drive Bridge. Public views include boat traffic on the San Joaquin River and Louis Park on the north side of the San Joaquin River. Private views of the site would include residences north of the San Joaquin River and the Stockton Golf and Country Club. The project site is screened from these viewers by the dockside warehouses and multiple rows of interior warehouse buildings. Public viewers at Louis Park or boaters on the San Joaquin River may be considered moderately sensitive.

# 3.1.2 Regulatory Setting

# 3.1.2.1 Federal

#### U.S. Forest Service

In 2019, the lead agency and the U.S. Forest Service signed a Master Stewardship Agreement (MSA) for the general purpose of achieving resilient forests within U.S. Forest Service Region 5, which includes all of the 18 national forests located in California. Individual Sustainable Forest Management Projects to reduce fuel loads and increase resiliency will be implemented through Supplemental Project Agreements and similar stewardship contracting mechanisms (SPAs). (While the MSA applies to the entirety of Region 5, only Sustainable Forest Management Projects within the Working Area described in Section 2.4 are contemplated under the proposed project.) The Forest Service's strategic plan (USDA 2015) includes four outcome-oriented goals:

- 1. Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands.
- 2. Deliver Benefits to the Public.
- 3. Apply Knowledge Globally.
- 4. Excel as a High-Performing Agency

The plan further identifies three strategic objectives for the first goal:

- Foster resilient, adaptive, ecosystems to mitigate climate change.
- Mitigate wildfire risk.
- Conserve open space.

#### National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed on October 2, 1968 to preserve certain selected rivers of the United States possessing outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. The Act designates rivers as a wild, scenic, or recreational river based on certain conditions contained in the Act. Designated rivers shall be required to prepare a comprehensive management plan for such river segment. Each designated river is administered by the federal agencies, or state agencies if the state has established their own Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

## 3.1.2.2 State

# California Scenic Highway Program

The California Scenic Highway Program was created in 1963 with the intent "to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors, through special conservation treatment." The state laws that govern the Scenic Highway Program are Sections 260 through 263 of the Streets and Highways Code. A highway may be designated scenic based on the natural landscape visible by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the views of the highway. The Scenic Highway Program includes both officially designated scenic highways and highways that are eligible for designation. It is the responsibility of local jurisdictions to apply for scenic highway approval, which requires the adoption of a Corridor Protection Program (Caltrans n.d.). In addition, once a scenic highway is designated, the local jurisdiction is responsible for regulating development within the scenic highway corridor. The Lassen Facility is adjacent to an eligible State Scenic Highway. There is no designated or eligible state Scenic Highway within the Tuolumne Facility or Port of Stockton.

#### California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

The California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Resources Code Sec. 5093.50 et seq.) was passed in 1972 to preserve California's designated rivers possessing extraordinary scenic, recreation, fishery, or wildlife values. This act was patterned after the 1968 National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and both share similar criteria and definitions regarding the protection of rivers, the process used to designate rivers, and in the prohibition of new water impoundments on designated rivers. Unlike the national act, the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides protection only up to the first line of permanent vegetation and does not require a management plan for designated rivers. The California Legislature is responsible for classifying or reclassifying rivers by statute, though the Resources Secretary may recommend classifications. State designated rivers may be added to the federal system upon the request of the state Governor and the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. Adding state rivers to the federal system under this act does not require approval of the Legislature or Congress. State rivers added to the federal system are managed by the state.

# 3.1.2.3 Local

# **Lassen County**

#### Lassen County General Plan

Lassen County General Plan, adopted September 1999, contains a Land Use Element, Natural Resources Element, Agriculture Element, Wildlife Element, Open Space Element, Circulation Element, Safety Element, and Seismic Safety Element.

### Natural Resources Element

The Scenic Resources section of the Natural Resources Element includes the following goals and policies relevant to the proposed project with regard to aesthetics:

Goal N-23. Scenic resources of high quality which will continue to be enjoyed by residents and visitors and which will continue to be an asset to the reputation and economic resources of Lassen County.

NR78 Policy. The County has identified areas of scenic importance and sensitivity along state highways and major County roads and has designated those areas as "Scenic Corridors". (Refer to the General Plan land use map and related designations in various area plans, which may also be regarded as "scenic highway corridors".) The County will develop and enforce policies and regulations to protect areas designated as scenic corridors from unjustified levels of visual deterioration.

## Implementation Measures:

- NR-U: The County shall adopt policies to minimize adverse impacts which will significantly deteriorate the scenic qualities of visually sensitive areas.
  - NR80 Policy. In the course of adopting policies pertaining to scenic resources in other general plan elements and area plans, the County may consider additional and more particular policies and measures to protect scenic resources and prevent or reduce the adverse visual impacts of development in visually sensitive areas.

Goal N-24. Protection of the scenic qualities of the county's night sky.

- NR81 Policy. The County shall maintain and enforce policies, development standards and mitigation measures to control lighting generated by development and to minimize the unnecessary adverse impacts of such lighting in the vicinity of the development and on the general scenic qualities of the night sky in the area.
- NR82 Policy. The County will encourage projects within Lassen County but outside the County's jurisdictional authority to include provisions to minimize the adverse intrusion of lighting on the surrounding area and the night sky in general.

Scenic Resources and Scenic Vistas

The County utilizes an evaluation system to classify scenic resources:

- Class I: This classification is given to areas having the greatest scenic resource value because of one or more of the following features:
  - 1. Contains distinctive landscape feature(s).
  - 2. Is subject to significant amounts of public exposure, especially in foreground and middle ground zones (i.e., along State or U.S. highways).
  - 3. Large percentage of observers have high expectations and sensitivity for scenic quality (e.g., recreational tourists).
- Class II: These areas have one or both of the following scenic resource characteristics:
  - 1. Scenic value relatively common to the region.
  - 2. Average sensitivity due to location near local travel routes and residential areas.

- Class III: These areas have one or both of the following scenic resource:
  - 1. Landscapes have relatively minimal scenic distinction from average scenery characteristics of the region.
  - 2. Have low visual sensitivity because of very low levels of public exposure due to isolation of the area.
- Class IV: Class IV areas are generally "urbanized" to the extent that qualities of the natural landscape are
  largely secondary, visually, to the urban landscape. Visual elements are related largely to structural
  improvements or other man-made elements including such features as subdivisions, shopping centers, and
  industrial areas (unless the man-made element is of significant scenic value, e.g., a golf course or reservoir).

The night sky of Lassen County is an important and sensitive scenic resource of the area. The County frequently imposes conditions of approval on projects to require shielding of lights and other measures to provide that lighting is, as much as possible, directed to the areas where it is needed and the adverse effects on the surrounding area is reduced.

### Scenic Highways

The Lassen County General Plan Land Use Map identifies "Scenic Highway Corridors" along all state highways, several county roads, and along some roads in the planning stages. Scenic Corridors identify areas bordering major highways which have significant or sensitive scenic values due to the existence of significant scenic features and the level of public exposure to those areas. The Lassen facility site is located nearby a Scenic Corridor, depicted in the Lassen County General Plan Land Use Map.

The following observations and recommendations for "Scenic Highway Corridors" were included:

- The basic resource of the recreation industry in Lassen County is its natural scenic quality. The quality must be protected, enhanced and appropriately exploited.
- The scenic highway includes the road itself and its right-of-way and the scenic areas traversed as visible from the highway. Thus the scenic corridor in which control should be exerted will vary in width in relation to sight distance from the road.
- The concept of Scenic Highways does not preclude development from occurring within the corridor covered by protective regulations. Appropriate uses along Scenic Highways can include grazing and other agriculture, homes for permanent and seasonal residents and, in planned locations, motels, restaurants and certain other commercial services. However, these basic principles should guide all development within the areas visible from the Scenic Highways:
  - The intensity and location of development should not impair natural scenic qualities.
  - The design of all development should be in character with the natural surroundings.
  - Where some attribute, physical or historic, indicates that an area should be left in its existing or natural state, public ownership or other rights should be acquired to insure preservation.
- The County should adopt an official County Scenic Highway designation for the routes specified. All uses along these routes or visible from them should be subject to special standards and controls which will achieve the broad goals of preserving the scenic qualities of Lassen County (Lassen County 1999).

#### Land Use Element

The Intensive Agriculture designation identifies lands devoted to or having high suitability potential for the growing of crops and/or the raising of livestock on natural or improved pastureland and provide a variety of open space resources including wildlife habitat and scenic resources. The Lassen County General Plan does not identify any scenic vistas in the County (Lassen County 1999). The Lassen project site is designated as Town Center (northern parcel) and Intensive Agriculture (southern parcel).

## Lassen County Code

Title 18 of the Lassen County Code is the County's Zoning Code, which is intended to implement the General Plan. The Lassen Facility site is zoned as General Agriculture (A-1) and Exclusive Agricultural, Agricultural Preserve Combining District (E-A-A-P).

### Chapter 18.16 A-1 General Agricultural District

The intent of the A-1 district is to include all the unincorporated territory of the county not indicated specifically to be used for precise districts of agriculture, residential, commercial, manufacturing, open space, institutional, conservation, timber production, floodplain or airport.

### Chapter 18.66 E-A Exclusive Agricultural District

This district classification is intended to be applied to land areas which are used or are suitable for use for intensive agricultural production purposes and are designated in the general plan as land areas of fertile soils or other favorable agricultural production characteristics within which agricultural preserves may properly be created for purposes of utilizing provisions of law relating to agricultural zoning and agricultural preserves, and to preserve such areas and protect them from the encroachment of incompatible uses.

#### Chapter 18.82 A-P Agricultural Preserve Combining District

This district classification is intended to be applied in combination with other appropriate districts to establish the precise boundaries of agricultural preserves and to provide such additional restrictions upon the use of land as are necessary to comply with provisions of law which are applicable to agricultural preserves.

#### Chapter 18.108 Special Provisions

Section 18.108.155, Lighting, requires that: all lighting, exterior and interior, shall be designed and located so as to confine direct lighting to the premises. A light source shall not shine upon or illuminate directly on any surface other than the area required to be lighted. No lighting shall be of the type or in a location so as to constitute a hazard to vehicular traffic, either on private property or on abutting streets.

# **Tuolumne County**

## Tuolumne County General Plan

The Tuolumne County General Plan, updated December 2018, contains Section A: The Tuolumne County Built Environment, Section B: The Tuolumne County Economy, Section C: The Tuolumne County Community, and Section D: The Tuolumne County Natural Environment.

#### Natural Resources Element

Chapter 16 of Section D, Natural Resources Element, includes the following objectives and policies relevant to the proposed project with regard to aesthetics:

Goal 16A. Balance property rights with the conservation of the environment and rural character of the County, which contributes to the quality of life of residents, encourages tourism and supports economic development.

Policy 16.A.5. Conserve scenic resources, landmarks and the natural landscape.

Policy 16.A.6. Encourage the protection of clusters of native trees and vegetation and outstanding individual native and non-native trees which help define the character of Tuolumne County.

### Implementation Programs:

- **16.A.k:** Establish an incentive program to retain existing vegetation, such as Heritage Trees, stands of oak woodlands, or clusters of native shrubs within new development.
- 16.A.I: Maintain the Premature Removal of Native Oak Trees Ordinance.

#### Scenic Resources and Scenic Vistas

The visual character within the unincorporated county is predominantly rural with dispersed small-town communities surrounded by open expanses consisting of agriculture, native vegetation, and low-density rural residential development. The topographic diversity of Tuolumne County ranges from the mountainous landscape and steep canyons of the High Sierras in the east to the foothills and gently undulating plains in the west. Deep river canyons are cut into the western slope of the Sierra Nevada in Tuolumne County. In their upper reaches in the higher Sierra, rivers and glacial sculpturing have carved massive granite cliffs (County of Tuolumne 2018).

The Tuolumne County General Plan identifies three vista points officially designated by Caltrans, located on SR 120 at post miles (PM) 19, 21 and 44. PM 19 and 21 can be found at Don Pedro Lake, and PM 44 "Rim of the World" overlooks the canyon containing the South Fork of the Tuolumne River (County of Tuolumne 2018). The Tuolumne Facility site is not within viewing distance of these vistas.

### Circulation Element

## Scenic Highways

Tuolumne County does not currently have any officially designated State Scenic Highways; however, Tuolumne County identifies portions of SR 49, 108, and 120 to be locally designated scenic routes. A scenic route is one which traverses an area of outstanding scenic quality (County of Tuolumne 2018).

## **Tuolumne County Code**

Title 17 of the Tuolumne County Ordinance Code is the County's Zoning Code, which is intended to implement the General Plan. The Tuolumne Facility site is zoned as M-2 (Heavy Industrial).

## Chapter 17.40 - Heavy Industrial District, or (M-2) District

The purpose of the M-2 district is to provide an area for heavy industry. Permitted uses in the M-2 district include processing agricultural products, sawmills, and general manufacturing.

# Chapter 17.54 - Height Regulations

The height limit for structures in the M-2 zoning district is fifty feet from grade. Height limits may be extended through approval of a use permit. The additional height granted by the use permit shall be added to the required side yard setback.

# City of Stockton

## City of Stockton General Plan

Adopted in December 2018, the City's 2040 General Plan provides a comprehensive plan for the growth and development of the City. The plan is comprised of four (4) separate Elements: Land Use, Transportation, Safety, and Community Health.

#### Land Use Element

Section 3, Land Use Element, includes the following objectives and policies relevant to the proposed project with regard to aesthetics:

- Policy LU-1.3. Improve the visual quality of the urban environment to be more welcoming and inviting at key gateways and travel corridors into the city.
  - Action LU.1.3C: Require the incorporation of scenic views, including open space features like waterways, wetlands, natural landscapes, and parks, into design of the built environment.
- Policy LU-5.2. Protect natural resource areas, fish and wildlife habitat, scenic areas, open space areas, agricultural lands, parks, and other cultural/historic resources from encroachment or destruction by incompatible development.

## Scenic Resources and Scenic Vistas

The city's location within the greater San Joaquin Valley and proximity to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta also reinforce the importance of avoiding impacts to sensitive natural, cultural, and scenic resources (City of Stockton 2017).

## City of Stockton Municipal Code

Municipal Code Title 16 Development Code is used to implement Stockton's General Plan by: classifying and regulating the uses of land and structures within the City of Stockton; protecting and promoting the public health, safety, and general welfare; and preserving and enhancing the aesthetic quality of the City. The project site is designated as industrial (City of Stockton 2017).

## Chapter 16.16.020 - Zoning districts established

The PT zoning district is applied to areas of the City that are operated by "port districts" as formed under the Harbors and Navigation Code Section 6210 et seq., for the operation of port facilities, including wharves, dockage, warehousing, and related port facilities. The PT zoning district is consistent with the Industrial and Institutional land use designations of the General Plan and the Rough and Ready Island Development Plan for the Port of Stockton (as applicable).

# Chapter 16.24.150 - PT (port) zoning district standards

The project site is zoned as PT (Port) District (City of Stockton 2023). The uses of land allowed within the PT (port) zoning district shall be in compliance with the Rough and Ready Island Development Plan for the Port of Stockton, California (development plan) within the area specified in the plan.

#### Port of Stockton

# West Complex Development Plan

As part of long-term planning for the West Complex, the Port identified and considered the types of development and operations that could occur based on existing infrastructure, approved land uses, and future regional consumer demand. The West Complex Development Plan (WCDP) was approved in 2004, along with certification of WCDP EIR. The Development Plan covers future uses within the approximately 1,459-acre West Complex, commonly known as Rough and Ready Island.

# 3.1.3 Thresholds of Significance

The significance criteria used to evaluate the project impacts to Aesthetics are based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. According to Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, a significant impact related to Aesthetics would occur if the project would:

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- In nonurbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

# 3.1.4 Impact Analysis

# 3.1.4.1 Methodology

Following professionally accepted practice in visual analysis, visual impacts that cross a threshold of "substantial adverse effect" are defined as a consequence of three primary factors: (1) the existing scenic quality and character of an area (landscape attributes), (2) the level of viewer exposure and concern with visual change (viewer sensitivity), and (3) the level of actual change to existing visual character and quality caused by the project as seen by a given viewer group (FHWA 2015). The overall visual sensitivity, including the sensitivity and exposure of viewers, is established. This rating is then considered with the level of expected visual change experienced by key (existing) viewer groups and caused by the project to arrive at an assessment of potential impacts and their significance.

For this EIR, a scenic vista is defined as a publicly accessible viewpoint that provides expansive views of a highly valued landscape. Scenic vistas are those accessible from public vantage points, such as public roadways and parks. A viewpoint that is accessible only from private property is not considered a scenic vista. Viewpoints that have been designated by a local, state, or federal agency are assumed to meet this definition. Highly valued landscapes generally refer to views of expansive open space areas or other natural features, such as mountains, undeveloped hillsides, large natural water bodies, or coastlines. Certain urban settings or features, such as a striking or renowned skyline, may also represent a scenic vista.

Scenic highways are designated under the State Scenic Highway Program, described in Section 3.1.2.2. For purposes of this EIR, an eligible highway is treated as a designated scenic highway. For lighting and glare, the proposed project was compared to existing sources of lighting glare. Local lighting regulations are considered where applicable.

# 3.1.4.2 Project Impacts

Impact AES-1 The project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

# **Feedstock Acquisition**

Sustainable Forest Management Projects

Feedstock for manufacturing of wood pellets will be wood byproducts sourced from Sustainable Forest Management Projects on California's private, state, tribal, and federal timberlands. Feedstock acquisition would not include construction or operation of structures or infrastructure. Public views may be affected by activities, such as the removal of dead or hazardous trees or brush, construction of shaded fuel breaks, and forest thinning operations, that would occur during active implementation of the Sustainable Forest Management Projects. These types of activities would not block any views, dominate a viewshed, or significantly disrupt views from a scenic vista. Moreover, these activities are subject to Project Design Features, as described in Section 2.4, to ensure protection of aesthetic values. PDF-AES-4 addresses scenic vistas. Additionally, as described in Chapter 2, feedstock acquisition would not occur in certain designated areas (which presumably have a higher potential for scenic vistas), including federally designated wilderness areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or National Monuments. Feedstock acquisition activities would occur primarily within federal and state forests, and private lands that are zoned for timberland production. As described further in Impact AES-3, the intent of these activities in the long-term is to improve forest health, which in turn maintains visual quality. This impact would be **less than significant.** 

#### **Wood Pellet Production**

## Lassen Facility

As described in Section 3.1.2.3, the Lassen County General Plan does not identify any scenic vistas in the County (Lassen County 1999), and is not within the viewshed of a highly valued landscape that would meet the definition of a scenic vista. The project would not affect scenic vistas and **no impact** would occur.

# **Tuolumne Facility**

As described in Section 3.1.2.3, the Tuolumne County General Plan identifies three vista points officially designated by Caltrans, located on SR 120 at post miles (PM) 19, 21 and 44. PM 19 and 21 can be found at Don Pedro Lake, and PM 44 "Rim of the World" overlooks the canyon containing the South Fork of the Tuolumne River (County of Tuolumne 2018). The project site is located approximately 6.7 miles from PM 19, approximately 8.5 miles from PM 21, and approximately 25.5 miles from PM 44. The Tuolumne Facility site is not within viewing distance of these vistas, nor within the viewshed of any other areas or natural or artificial features that otherwise meet the definition of a highly valued landscape; therefore, **no impact** would occur.

## Transport to Market

#### Port of Stockton

The City of Stockton identifies the greater San Joaquin Valley and proximity to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to be important scenic resources of the City. The Port of Stockton is within the Legal Delta of the Sacramento San Juaquin Delta, as shown in Figure 3-6 of the City of Stockton General Plan (City of Stockton 2018). The proposed project would include a new wood pellet storage and loadout facility, including a rail unloading system, two storage domes, and a ship loadout system. The project features would be similar to the surrounding Port of Stockton features; therefore, the port of Stockton would have a **less than significant** impact on scenic vistas.

Impact AES-2 The project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

## **Feedstock Acquisition**

#### Sustainable Forest Management Projects

Feedstock for manufacturing of wood pellets will be wood byproducts sourced from Sustainable Forest Management Projects on California's private, state, tribal, and federal timberlands. These activities will occur primarily within federal and state forests, and private lands that are zoned for timberland production. As described in Chapter 2, activities directly adjacent to a state scenic highway corridor will be more limited, including the removal of dead or diseased trees, and the thinning of overcrowded stands of trees, underbrush, and "ladder fuels" in order to reduce wildfire risk. Not all of the existing vegetation would be cleared, and large trees would remain, vividness, intactness, and unity of views would remain, therefore their presence would not substantially affect views from a from a state scenic highway. Moreover, these activities are subject to Project Design Features, as described in Section 2.4, to ensure protection of aesthetic values. PDF-AES-4 addresses views from state scenic highways. This impact would be **less than significant.** 

#### **Wood Pellet Production**

## Lassen Facility

According to the California State Scenic Highway System Map, there are no officially designated scenic highways that pass by the project site or are near the project site. However, the project site is approximately 0.1 miles from an eligible state scenic highway, SR 299 (Caltrans 2018). Furthermore, the Lassen County General Plan Land Use Map identifies "Scenic Highway Corridors" along all state highways, several county roads, and along some roads in the planning stages. Scenic Corridors identify areas bordering major highways which have significant or sensitive scenic values due to the existence of significant scenic features and the level of public exposure to those areas. The Lassen site is therefore considered to be within a scenic highway viewshed for purposes of analysis.

As discussed in Section 3.1.2.3, the County General Plan utilizes an evaluation system to classify scenic resources (Class I, II, III, VI). Class I describes areas having the greatest scenic resources. As described in Section 3.1.2.3, one of the criteria for a site to be classified as Class I is if the site is subject to significant amounts of public exposure, especially in foreground and middle ground zones (i.e., along State or U.S. highways) (Lassen County 1999). Because the project site is located close to an eligible state scenic highway, SR 299, the site may be classified as containing Class I scenic resources. However, the project site does not contain any "distinctive landscape features" (in the language of the General Plan), which also indicates a lack of scenic resources. In addition, according to the General Plan, the concept of a scenic highway does not preclude development from occurring within the corridor. Development within scenic corridors is allowed if: the intensity and location of the development does not impact natural scenic qualities; the design of all development is in character with the natural surroundings; and where some attribute, physical or historic, indicates that an area should be left in its existing or natural state, public ownership or other rights are acquired to insure preservation (Lassen County 1999). The site is largely flat, with few trees, composed primarily of disturbed grasslands with some wetland vegetation at the southern end. The site includes a gravel slab, internal roadways, a water tower, and a pump house. While the project site is visible in the middle ground from SR 299, the foreground includes existing (offsite) industrial buildings and infrastructure. The project site contains a 102-foot-tall water tower. The water tower and pump house, which are not historic (see Section. 3.4, Cultural Resources), would not be removed as part of the project. The facility would contain three pellet silos with heights of 100 feet on the eastern side of the site, near the rail siding, and south of the water tower. The conveyor system serving the silos would add an additional 10 to 12 feet. The stacker reclaimer located on the southern end of the site (farther from the highway) would have a central structure 90 feet high, with a boom that can reach a maximum height of 132 feet (at full extension). This structure is of open steel construction without siding or walls, which lessens the visual impact as well as reducing the potential for glare. The chip piles, which are located on the southern end of the site next to the stacker reclaimer, would have a maximum height of 84 feet. As described in Section 3.10, the development of the project is consistent with the allowed development and intensities under the zoning designation.

Therefore, while considered a scenic corridor for purposes of this analysis, there are no scenic resources at the project site that would be affected by the project. The project, while not directly adjacent to the highway, is visible in the middle ground view from the highway (see Figure 3.1-1). The project would be visible for a relatively short term period by vehicular traffic on the highway, and would not obscure or affect other scenic resources visible from the highway. Therefore, the impact would be **less than significant**.

## **Tuolumne Facility**

According to the California State Scenic Highway System Map, there are no officially designated state scenic highways that pass by the project site or are near the project site (Caltrans 2018). Although there are no officially designated state scenic highways in Tuolumne County, the General Plan identifies portions of SR 49, 108, and 120 to be locally designated scenic routes (County of Tuolumne 2018). SR 108 is located approximately 3.7 miles to the north of the project site, SR 120 is located approximately 4.5 miles to the northeast of the project site, and SR 49 is located approximately 4.6 miles to the northeast of the project site. The project site is not located within the vicinity of an officially designated, eligible, or locally designated state scenic highway. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway. No impact would occur.

## **Transport to Market**

## Port of Stockton

According to Caltrans Scenic Highway Mapping System, there are no officially designated scenic highways that pass by the project site or are near the project site (Caltrans 2018). The City of Stockton identifies the greater San Joaquin Valley and proximity to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to be important scenic resources of the City (City of Stockton 2018). The Port of Stockton is not within view of these important scenic resources. Therefore, the Port of Stockton component of the project would have **no impact** on scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

### Impact AES-3

In nonurbanized areas, the project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings. In an urbanized area, the project would not conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality.

## **Feedstock Acquisition**

## Sustainable Forest Management Projects

The Sustainable Forest Management Project would occur in nonurbanized areas, primarily within federal and state forests, and private timberlands. U.S. Forest Service Region 5 includes all of the 18 national forests located in California, where many of the feedstock activities are expected to occur. Feedstock acquisition activities would, by design, reduce vegetation within project sites. However, the intent of such projects is that significant vegetation would remain and that growth of mature trees would be improved by reducing overcrowding. Improvement of forest health and resiliency would have visual benefits. Moreover, these activities are subject to Project Design Features, as described in Section 2.4, to ensure protection of aesthetic values. PDF-AES—1 addresses transition between treated and untreated areas. PDF-AES-2 addresses staging areas. PDF-AES-3 addresses screening of public trails and recreational areas. Reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire risk, which results in substantial adverse visual change, will help maintain visual quality of forest lands and other open space (shrub and grasslands). The reduction of timber "monocultures," and non-native species, will also have a positive visual effect, returning treated closer to native conditions, and allowing reintroduction of natural fire processes. The overall visual impact of these activities would be less than significant.

#### **Wood Pellet Production**

# Lassen Facility

CEQA Section 21071 defines an "urbanized area" as "(a) an incorporated city that meets either of the following criteria: (1) has a population of at least 100,000 persons, or (2) has a population of less than 100,000 persons if the population of that city and not more than two contiguous incorporated cities combined equals at least 100,000 persons." Both Nubieber (population 31) and Bieber (population 145) are unincorporated communities (Data USA 2020a). Therefore, the Lassen site is analyzed as a nonurbanized area.

Figure 3.1-3, Elevation Drawing of Lassen Facility, shows the westerly elevation of the proposed project. This elevation would be most visible from Babcock Road, looking east. The proposed project would result in the construction of a wood pellet production facility on a previously partially developed site. The facility would include a woodyard, green processing area, drying area, pellet mill, product storage, and loadout area. The stacker reclaimer, located on the southern end of the site (farther from the highway) would have a central structure 90 feet high, and a boom with a maximum height of 132 feet (at full extension). The chip piles adjacent to the stacker reclaimer would have a maximum height of 84 feet. The three pellet silos would be 100 feet in height (with an additional 10 to 12 feet of the conveyor system). Facility buildings would be 15 to 65 feet in height, except for the rail loading building which would be 75 feet.

The proposed project site is located on a portion of a larger property that included a mill site (which is not part of the proposed project site) and an area used by the mill operators (and currently used by SPI) to load rail cars. The existing site includes a railroad siding, a gravel deck, internal roadways, a well pump house and a 102 foot tall water tower. The stacker reclaimer or pellet silos would not be substantially taller than the existing water tower. The project would increase the amount of development on the project site. However, the project would be consistent with the character of the site's historic uses and surrounding development (including the agricultural chemical plant to the west and the remaining mill structures to the north). The building design and height would not be out of character for the project vicinity. The stacker reclaimer or pellet silos would not be substantially taller than the existing water tower, and would be further from the public views. As noted, the existing visual quality is low to moderate. The project would be subject to design review as part of the County's conditional use permit, which will ensure the project quality is consistent with community standards. The visual impact would therefore be less than significant.

### **Tuolumne Facility**

CEQA Section 21071 defines an "urbanized area" as "(a) an incorporated city that meets either of the following criteria: (1) has a population of at least 100,000 persons, or (2) has a population of less than 100,000 persons if the population of that city and not more than two contiguous incorporated cities combined equals at least 100,000 persons." The closest city to the project site is Jamestown. According to Data USA, as of 2020, the City of Jamestown has a population of 3,379 persons (Data USA 2020b). Thus, the Tuolumne site would be analyzed as a nonurbanized area.

Construction of the Tuolumne Facility would result in a new wood pellet processing facility, including a security house, a rail loading building, pellet storage silos, pellet storage & loadout baghouse, chip storage pile, a reclaimer at the highest position of the chip storage pile, and various smaller wood processing buildings. The stacker reclaimer would be the tallest structure on site, with a central structure 72 feet high, and a boom with a maximum height of 107 feet. The stacker reclaimer is of open steel construction without siding or walls. The chip

piles adjacent to the stacker reclaimer would have a maximum height of 69 feet. The pellet storage silos would be approximately 100 feet in height, with an additional 10-12 feet for the conveyor. Facility buildings would be 15 to 75 feet in height. The more intense building development would be further from the public views, east of the existing American Wood Fibers facility. Figure 3.1-4, Elevation Drawing of Tuolumne Facility, shows the western elevation of the facility. While portions of this elevation may be visible from La Grange Road, due to existing structures (such as the American Wood Fibers facility) and vegetation, the entire facility would not be visible from a public viewpoint.

As discussed in Section 3.1.2.3, the height limit in the M-2 zone is 50 feet. This may be exceeded through the approval of a conditional use permit, if the side setback is increased by a distance equal to the additional height granted. For the project, the silos (112 feet) would exceed the 50-height limit by 62 feet. The silos are located 160 feet from the western property line (which is the BSNF rail line). The stacker reclaimer can range from 72 feet to 107 feet high at full extension. The stacker reclaimer is located over 200 feet from the eastern property line. In addition, existing water towers on the site are approximately 100 feet in height.

The proposed project site is located on property previously developed as a wood product facility (which ceased operation in mid-2020). As described in Section 3.1.1.3 the site contains existing structures ranging in height from 20 to 100 feet. The site, as a former industrial site, is generally of low visual quality, with the more agricultural northerly portion of moderate quality. The project would introduce additional structures. The tallest structures, the stacker reclaimer and the storage silos, would not be much taller than the existing water towers. The new buildings would be consistent with existing structures, although floor area would be increased. Overall, the character and quality of the site would not be substantially changed, therefore, the impact would be **less than significant**.

# **Transport to Market**

#### Port of Stockton

CEQA Section 21071 defines an "urbanized area" as "(a) an incorporated city that meets either of the following criteria: (1) has a population of at least 100,000 persons, or (2) has a population of less than 100,000 persons if the population of that city and not more than two contiguous incorporated cities combined equals at least 100,000 persons." As of July 1, 2022, the US Census Bureau estimated the population of the City of Stockton to be 321,819 persons (US Census Bureau 2022). Thus, the Port of Stockton would be considered an urbanized area under CEQA for the aesthetics analysis.

The project site is zoned as PT (Port) District (City of Stockton 2023). According to City Municipal Code Section 16.20.020, Industrial land uses such as warehouses, wholesaling and distribution are permitted in the PT Zone The proposed project would not conflict with the site's zoning and no impact to zoning would occur.

Development of the project would include a new wood pellet storage and loadout facility, including a rail unloading system, two storage domes, and a ship loadout system. The storage domes would be the highest project structure, at 151 feet in height (see Figure 3.1-5, Elevation Drawing at Port of Stockton Facility). While this is taller than the surrounding warehouses, the domes are not out of character with the Port, which contains similar domes to the east. In addition, the domes would not be near public viewpoints. The domes would be setback from the viewers on the north side of the San Joaquin River. The ship loadout system would include an elevated conveyor from the dome to the ship berth. This system would not be taller than the existing warehouses and would not represent a change in the visual character of the project area. Overall, the facility components would not create a visual impact inconsistent with the existing visual character and quality of the area. The project site is located in the Port of

Stockton West Complex, which has historically been used for port related activities, including warehousing. The project is visually compatible with the industrial development within the Port.

Therefore, the visual impact of Port of Stockton component of the project would be less than significant.

Impact AES-4 The project may create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

# **Feedstock Acquisition**

# Sustainable Forest Management Projects

Because the Sustainable Forest Management Projects would be in natural and vegetated areas, no substantial light or glare is currently generated from these areas. As discussed above, rural areas may have additional light sources. Feedstock acquisition would not result in new sources of lighting. Activities would be conducted during daylight. Light reflected from vehicles and equipment could result in glare to nearby viewers; however, it would be temporary and often located in rural areas and within vegetation, thereby reducing its visibility. This impact would be **less than significant.** 

#### **Wood Pellet Production**

## Lassen Facility

The project site is partially developed as a former wood processing sawmill. The site includes railroad siding, a gravel deck, internal roadways, a well pump house and water tower. The majority of project site is undeveloped areas consisting of non-native grassland with a mix of annual grasses and forbs, mowed agricultural fields, upland ditches, seasonal wetlands, and a seasonal wetland swale. The project would include demolition of the existing structures and the construction of a new wood pellet processing facility, including a woodyard, green processing area, drying area, pellet mill, project storage, and loadout area. Development and operation of the project would introduce new sources of lighting and glare on the project site.

As described in Section 3.3.1.2, existing of-site sources of light and glare include lights from trains, vehicle lights from SR 299 and nearby roads, light and glare from the agricultural chemical company and residences to the west of the project site, and light and glare from the historical remanufacturing/mill buildings to the north of the project site are received on the project site. Typical off-site lighting consists of exterior night lighting, street lighting, and security lighting, in addition to windows and other glass or metal expanses that may result in minimal localized glare.

The majority of construction activities associated with the Project would occur 6 days per week, during the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.. In the event that work is required outside the standard construction hours (to reduce traffic or other impacts), lighting would be focused directly on work activity areas and would be temporary. As such, nighttime construction lighting impacts would be less than significant.

Upon completion, operations would consist of feedstock receiving and pellet production. Operations would be active 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, with up to 4 weeks total downtime allotted for planned and unplanned outages once at capacity. Feedstock deliveries would occur primarily during weekday daytime hours. As the project is operational 24 hours per day, and requires external lighting for operations and safety, there is potential for light trespass (light spillover onto adjacent properties) as well as to contribute to "sky glow" (the brightening of the night sky due to uncontrolled or excessive manmade lighting). While lighting would comply with Title 24 and local

requirements, due to size of the project, the rural nature of the project site, and the proximity of neighboring properties, the project could result in a **potentially significant** impact. However, with implementation of **MM-AES-1**, impacts would be reduced to less than significant.

# **Tuolumne Facility**

The project site is partially developed as a wood processing facility, which was in active operation until mid-2020. The project site includes buildings, stockpiling and staging areas, paved and gravel roadways, gravel lots, and other features associated with this pre-existing facility. The project would include demolition of the existing structures and the construction of a new wood pellet processing facility, including a woodyard, green processing area, drying area, pellet mill, project storage and loadout area. Because the existing wood processing sawmill is not presently in active operation, development and operation of the project would introduce new sources of lighting on the project site. However, the project site is adjacent to an existing, active wood shavings plant, which produces light and glare at the project site.

The majority of construction activities associated with the project would occur 6 days per week, during the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. In the event that work is required outside the standard construction hours (to reduce traffic or other impacts), lighting would be focused directly on work activity areas and would be temporary. As such, nighttime construction lighting impacts would be less than significant.

Upon completion, operations would consist of feedstock receiving and pellet production. Operations be active 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, with up to 4 weeks total downtime allotted for planned and unplanned outages once at capacity. Feedstock deliveries would occur primarily during weekday daylight hours.

As the project is operational 24 hours per day, and requires external lighting for operations and safety, there is potential for light trespass (light spillover onto adjacent properties) as well as to contribute to "sky glow" (the brightening of the night sky due to uncontrolled or excessive manmade lighting). While lighting would comply with Title 24, due to size of the project, the rural nature of the project site, and the proximity of neighboring properties, the project could result in a **potentially significant** impact. However, with implementation of **MM-AES-1**, impacts would be reduced to less than significant.

#### Transport to Market

#### Port of Stockton

The proposed facility would be located at the Port of Stockton within the northwest quarter of the West Complex, on a relatively undeveloped site. As described in Section 3.1.1.4, approximately 75 facilities or businesses operate out of the West Complex as of 2020. The West Complex is characterized by maritime terminals, railroad facilities, large warehouse and storage buildings, and stockpiles of various commodities (Port of Stockton 2023b). The Port of Stockton is already developed and well lit. While the project may require additional lights at the storage facility, these lights would not introduce substantial light compared to the project vicinity, and would not be near any sensitive receptors. The proposed project would have a **less than significant** impact.

# 3.1.4.3 Cumulative Impacts

The project would not result in cumulatively considerable impacts to scenic views or scenic resources within state scenic highways, or to the visual character and quality of the project sites.

## **Feedstock Acquisition**

Cumulative projects, described in Section 3.0, would be located on federal and state forests, and private lands that are zoned for timberland production. These projects, particularly commercial timber projects, have the potential to impact visual quality. Vegetation management and defensible space activities may also affect visual quality, but given the objectives of these projects, to reduce density but not eliminate vegetation, and to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire, the impact is less likely to be significant. As described in Section 3.1.4.2, direct impacts to visual character and quality from feedstock acquisition would be less than significant. In addition, other cumulative projects are not likely to be within the same viewshed. Therefore, for the reasons described above, impacts to aesthetics would not be cumulatively considerable.

#### Wood Pellet Production

# Lassen Facility

The project would not impact a scenic vista, and there are no cumulative projects that would visually interact with the proposed project. The project would have a less than significant impact scenic resources within the SR 299 corridor. No cumulative projects have been identified that would impact this corridor in the vicinity of the project (the cumulative area is Big Valley, as described in Section 3.0). The proposed project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings, and no cumulative projects have been identified within the viewshed of the project site.

#### **Tuolumne Facility**

The Tuolumne County General Plan identifies three vista points. However, as previously described, the vista points along scenic routes are not in close proximity to the Tuolumne Facility project site. The project would not affect a scenic highway corridor, and therefore would not interact with other cumulative projects. The proposed project would not have a significant impact on visual character or quality. Cumulative projects in the County may result in visual changes, but would not occur within the same viewshed as the proposed project.

## **Transport to Market**

#### Port of Stockton

The City of Stockton identifies the greater San Joaquin Valley and proximity to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to be important scenic resources of the City. However, the cumulative projects and proposed project would not affect an identified scenic vista at the project site. There are no officially designated scenic highways that are near the project site, therefore, cumulative projects would not impact scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Cumulative projects at the Port of Stockton may result in visual changes. However, these development projects are consistent with the zoning district and development standards, as is the proposed project. In combination with

planning future development, the project would not result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a cumulative impact to visual character and quality.

The project would not result in a cumulatively considerable increase in light or glare.

## **Feedstock Acquisition**

The proposed feedstock acquisition activities would not introduce new sources of light or glare and would not result in a cumulatively considerable impact.

#### Wood Pellet Production

While there are no cumulative projects close enough to the proposed site that lighting may interact or overlap, cumulative "sky glow" is a concern. Cumulative projects that do not properly shield or direct lighting downward may contribute to this cumulative impact. However, the implementation of MM AES-1 would reduce project contributions to this effect to a less than cumulatively considerable level.

## Transport to Market

### Port of Stockton

The Port of Stockton is a developed, well-lit area. Cumulative projects would introduce new light sources, but would not represent a substantial increase. In addition, cumulative projects would also be required to comply with existing lighting standards to reduce lighting and glare impacts. Therefore light and glare impacts at the Port would not be cumulatively considerable.

# 3.1.4.4 Mitigation Measures

## **Feedstock Acquisition**

## Sustainable Forest Management Projects

No mitigation measures are required as impacts would be less than significant.

### **Wood Pellet Production**

#### MM-AES-1

GSNR shall install shielded, downward directed lights at the pellet facilities. GSNR shall install the minimum number of lights and intensities for the intended use and use timer or motion-controlled lighting where feasible. All exterior lighting shall be retained on-site and shall be designed not spill onto adjacent properties or illuminate directly on any surface other than the area required to be lighted. A photometric plan shall be prepared and submitted as part of the building permit application for the pellet facilities to demonstrate compliance with this measure.

## **Transport to Market**

### Port of Stockton

No mitigation measures are required as impacts would be less than significant.

# 3.1.4.5 Significance After Mitigation

Impacts AES-1 through AES-3 would be less than significant and do not require mitigation.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure (MM) AES-1 would reduce the impact of Impact AES-4 to **less than significant**. The measure would ensure that project lighting at the Lassen and Tuolumne sites are designed to avoid light trespass onto neighboring properties, and to reduce "sky glow." This MM is consistent with Lassen County General Plan Policy NR 82 and Code Section 18.108.155. Impacts for feedstock acquisition activities and transfer to market (Port of Stockton) would be less than significant and do not require mitigation.

# 3.1.5 References

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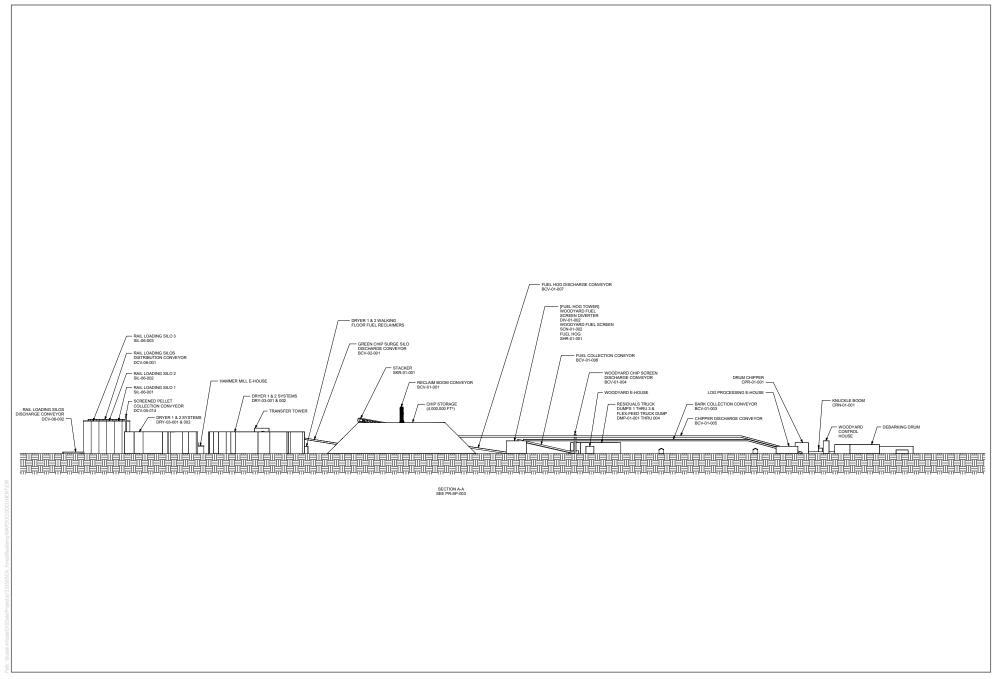
View of Lassen Site from SR 299

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FIGURE 3.1-2
View of Tuolumne Site from La Grange Road
Golden State Natural Resources Forest Resiliency Demonstration Project

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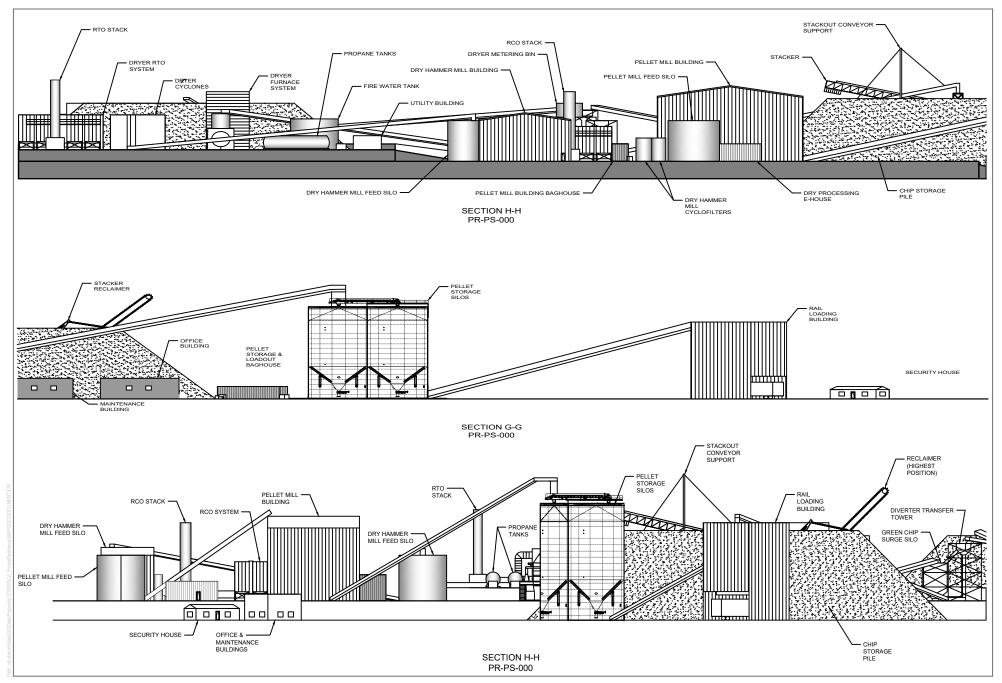


SOURCE: Nexus Project Development Services, 2023

FIGURE 3.1-3 Elevation Drawing of Lassen Facility

3.1 - AESTHETICS

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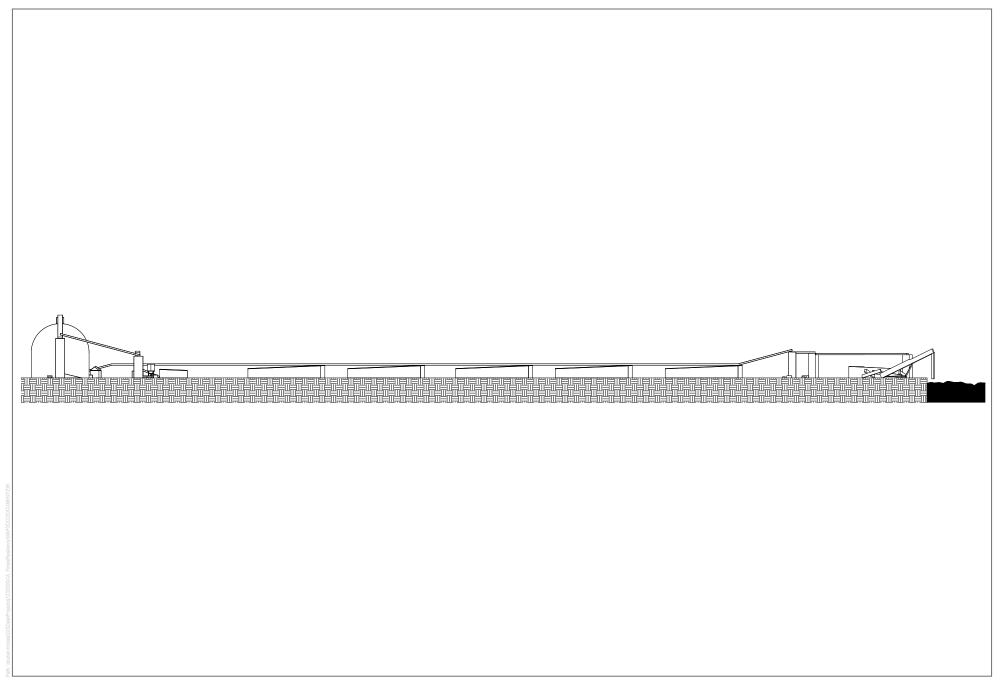


SOURCE: Nexus Project Development Services, 2023

FIGURE 3.1-4 Elevation Drawing of Tuolumne Facility

3.1 - AESTHETICS

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SOURCE: Nexus Project Development Services, 2023

FIGURE 3.1-5

3.1 - AESTHETICS

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