

4.1 Aesthetics

This section evaluates the potential impacts related to aesthetics and visual resources during construction and operation of the project.

4.1.1 Existing Setting

Concepts and Terminology

Visual or aesthetic resources are generally defined as both the natural and built features of the landscape that contribute to the public's experience and appreciation of the environment. Depending on the extent to which a project's presence would alter the visual character and quality of the environment, a visual or aesthetic impact may occur. Familiarity with the following terms and concepts will aid the reader in understanding the content of this section.

Visual character, visual quality, and visual sensitivity are terms used throughout the analysis, and are defined below.

Visual Character

Visual character is a general description of the visual attributes of a particular land use setting and the unique set of landscape features. The purpose of defining the visual character of an area is to provide the context within which the visual quality of a particular site or locale is most likely to be perceived by the viewing public. For urban areas, visual character is typically described on the neighborhood level or in terms of areas with common land use, intensity of development, socioeconomic conditions, and/or landscaping and urban design features. For natural and open space settings, visual character is most commonly described in terms of areas with common landscape attributes (e.g., landform, vegetation, water features).

Visual Quality

Visual quality is defined as the overall visual impression or attractiveness of a site or locale as determined by its aesthetic qualities (such as color, variety, vividness, coherence, uniqueness, harmony, and pattern). Natural and built features combine to form perspectives with varying degrees of visual quality, which are rated in this analysis as low, moderate, and high, as follows:

Low: The location is lacking in natural or cultural visual resource amenities typical of the region. A site with low visual quality will have aesthetic elements that are relatively unappealing and perceptibly uncharacteristic of the surrounding area.

Moderate: The location is typical or characteristic of the region's natural or cultural visual amenities. A site with moderate visual quality maintains the visual character of the surrounding area, with aesthetic elements that do not stand out as either contributing to or detracting from the visual character of an area.

High: The location has visual resources that are unique or exemplary of the region's natural or cultural scenic amenities. A site with high visual quality is likely to stand out as particularly appealing and makes a notable positive contribution to the visual character of an area.

Visual Sensitivity

Visual sensitivity is the overall measure of a site's susceptibility to adverse visual changes. Visual sensitivity is rated as high, moderate, or low and is determined based on the combined factors of visual quality, viewer types and volumes, and visual exposure. For example, significant adverse impacts are typically unlikely in a setting with low visual sensitivity.

Affected Viewers and Exposure Conditions

Affected viewers and exposure conditions address the variables that affect viewers and their visual exposure. The identification of viewer types and volumes describes the type and quantity of potentially affected viewers within the area. Land uses that derive value from the quality of their settings are considered potentially sensitive to changes in visual conditions. Sensitive viewers are those who have a strong stake or interest in the quality of the landscape and have a greater level of concern towards changes that degrade or detract from the visual character of an area. Examples of viewers with elevated concern for visual quality include recreationists, pedestrians, and tourists.

Regional Visual Character

As stated within the County's General Plan, Humboldt County's varied and extensive coastline allows for a wide range of scenic vistas from roads and highways, and from beaches, state parks, and coastal access points (Humboldt County 2017). The visual character of the Samoa Peninsula is rural and industrial in nature, with a low hills, a mix of herbaceous dunes, vacant land, industrial and commercial facilities, residential development, few tree stands, and overhead utilities.

Local Visual Character and Visual Sensitivity

The dominant visual character in the project area consists of open coastal dunes with low coastal vegetation interspersed with residential homes, commercial uses, and industrial buildings. Telephone and high-voltage power lines cross the peninsula and are visible from multiple vantage points. Views from the project area include dunes and Pacific Ocean to the west, Humboldt Bay to the east, and coastal vegetation throughout and surrounding the project area. Uses within the project area primarily consist of a mix of residences, industrial, and vacant lots. Residential areas include the communities of Samoa, Fairhaven, and Finntown. Industrial areas include two former pulp mill sites (which have been re-purposed for various commercial and industrial uses), a chip export facility with a marine terminal, a biomass power plant, and vacant industrial properties. Commercial facilities include aquaculture, boat repair, potting soil manufacturing, and a recycling transfer station.

New Navy Base Road provides access to the project area and runs in a predominantly north-south direction connecting to the communities of Arcata and Eureka via State Route (SR) 255. New Navy Base Road is designated by Humboldt County's scenic mapping project as having coastal zone scenic views, and has one lane in each direction through the project area with a shoulder of varying width on both sides. On the northern approach to the project area, views for both northbound and southbound travelers of New Navy Base Road and SR 255 primarily include residences, coastal dunes, and coastal vegetation. Views from New Navy Base Road in the vicinity of the approved Samoa WWTF include residences to the north, commercial uses to the south, a timber yard to the southeast, the Pacific Ocean to the west, and Humboldt Bay to the east.

4.1.2 Regulatory Framework

Federal

There are no federal regulations that apply to the proposed project related to aesthetic or visual resources in Humboldt County.

State

California Scenic Highway Program

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages the California Scenic Highway Program to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from change which would diminish the aesthetic value of lands adjacent to highways. Caltrans designates roadways within each county as “officially designated” scenic highways or “eligible” scenic highway. No “officially” designated state scenic highways are located within Humboldt County. Highway U.S. 101, Route 36, Route 299, and Route 96 are designated as “eligible” state scenic highways; however, those roadways are not in the vicinity of the proposed project, and the project site cannot be seen from them (Caltrans 2011).

California Coastal Act

The Coastal Act encourages local governments to create Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) to govern decisions that determine the short- and long-term conservation and use of coastal resources. These LCPs can be thought of as the equivalent of General Plans for areas within the Coastal Zone. Local Coastal Programs must be consistent with the policies of Coastal Act, and protect public access and coastal resources.

Section 30251 of the Coastal Act states, in part, the following:

The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas...

Regional and Local

Humboldt County has designated an area west of an approximately 1.8 mile segment of New Navy Base Road as “Coastal Zone Scenic Views”. The designated area extends from the community of Samoa to just south of Bay Street within the project area (Humboldt County 2018).

Humboldt County General Plan.

The following policy from the Humboldt County General Plan is applicable to the project with regard to aesthetic resources:

SR-G1 Conservation of Scenic Resources. *Protect high-value scenic forest, agriculture, river, and coastal areas that contribute to the enjoyment of Humboldt County’s beauty and abundant natural resources.*

Humboldt Bay Area Plan

The following policies from the Humboldt Bay Area Plan (the Local Coastal Program that is included in the General Plan for coastal areas) are applicable to the project with regard to aesthetic resources.

3.40 VISUAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

- 30251 *The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.*

B. DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

2. Protection of Natural Landforms and Features

Natural contours, including slope, visible contours of hilltops and treelines, bluffs and rock outcroppings, shall suffer the minimum feasible disturbance compatible with development of any permitted use, and the following standards shall at a minimum secure this objective:

- a. *In permitted development, land form alteration for access roads and public utilities shall be minimized by running hillside roads and utility corridors along natural contours where feasible, and the optional waiving on minimum street width requirements, where proposed development densities or use of one- way circulation patterns make this consistent with public safety, in order that necessary hillside roads may be as narrow as possible.*

3. Coastal Scenic Area

In the Coastal Scenic Area designated in the Area Plan Map (Indianola area), it is the intent of these regulations that all developments visible from Highway 101 be subordinate to the character of the designated area, and the following uniform standards shall apply to all development within said area, in addition to other applicable policies of this plan:

- a. *New industrial and public facility development shall be limited to:*
- (1) *Temporary storage of materials and equipment for the purpose of road and utility repair or improvement provided that this is necessary to the repair or improvement, and no feasible site for storage of equipment of material is available outside such area.*
 - (2) *Underground utilities, telephone lines, and above-ground lines consistent with Sections 3.14 and 3.26 (Industrial/Electrical Transmission Lines).*

- b. *All permitted development shall be subject to the following standards for siting and design except for structures integral to agricultural use and timberland management subject to CDF requirements for special treatment areas.*
- (1) *Siding and roofing materials shall not be of reflective materials, excepting glass and corrugated roofing. Solar collectors for on-site use shall be permitted and exempt from this standard.*
 - (2) *The highest point of a structure shall not exceed 30' vertically measured from the highest point of the foundation, nor 40' from the lowest point of the foundation.*
 - (4) *Vegetation clearing for new development shall be minimized. New development on ridgelines shall be sited adjacent to existing major vegetation, prohibiting removal of tree masses which might destroy the ridgeline silhouette, and limiting the height of structures so that they maintain present ridgeline silhouettes.*

4. Coastal View Areas

In Coastal View Areas as designated in the Area Plan, it is the intent of these regulations that no development shall block coastal views to the detriment of the public; and the following uniform standards and conditions shall apply to all development other than agricultural development and timberland management subject to CDF regulations for special treatment areas in said areas, and to specified developments in Coastal Scenic Areas, in addition to standards identified in the Area Plans:

- b. *New industrial and public facility development shall be limited to:*
- c. *Where the principle permitted use is commercial or industrial, the proposal shall include a detailed plan for exterior design of all structures and signs, and this plan shall be the subject of public hearings at which the following findings shall be made:*
- (1) *That the development does not block any part of the view to the coast or coastal waterways as viewed from public roads in a vehicle.*
 - (2) *That the exterior design, lighting and landscaping combine to render the overall appearance compatible with the natural setting as seen from the road.*
 - (3) *That no development, other than landscaping, signs, utilities, wells, fences, and a driveway for access to the public road where required, be located within 50 feet of the public road.*
 - (4) *That all feasible steps have been taken to minimize the visibility of parking areas from the public road.*
- e. *Where the principle permitted use is commercial or industrial, the proposal shall include a detailed plan for exterior design of all structures and signs, and this plan shall be the subject of public hearings at which the following findings shall be made:*

The HBAP defines “highly scenic areas” as generally including:

- 1) landscape preservation projects designated by the State Department of Parks and Recreation in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan;
- 2) open areas of particular value in preserving natural land-forms and significant vegetation, or in providing attractive transitions between natural and urbanized areas; and
- 3) other scenic areas and historical districts designated by cities and counties.

County Code

The Approved Samoa WWTF site is located within the “D” combining zone of the Humboldt County Code, which provides design review for conformance of new development with the policies and standards of the General Plan, and a design review process where neighborhoods within the same zone district desire to preserve or enhance the area’s historical, cultural or scenic values.

4.1.3 Evaluation Criteria and Thresholds of Significance

For the purpose of this EIR, the evaluation criteria and significance thresholds summarized below are used to determine if the project would have a significant effect related to aesthetics. The following questions are from CEQA Guidelines’ Appendix G Environmental Checklist Section I. Would the project:

- a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
 - Major alteration of a view from a scenic vista or major obstruction in viewed area towards a scenic vista
 - Consistency with HBAP Section 3.40 VISUAL RESOURCE PROTECTION, B. DEVELOPMENT POLICIES
 - Affect coastal zone scenic views from New Navy Base Road
- b. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?
 - Affect a scenic resource within 200 feet of a roadway designated as scenic by Caltrans
- c. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
 - High visual contrast or change as defined in Section 4.1.4 (Methodology)
- d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or night-time views in the area?
 - Consistency with Humboldt County General Plan Policy SR-S4 (Light and Glare)

4.1.4 Methodology

The approach to evaluating the effect of the proposed project under the CEQA significance criteria is discussed below:

Scenic Vistas

This evaluation is applicable to project features that would be located on or disrupt access to a scenic vista, or result in significant visual changes within its viewshed. Scenic vistas are viewpoints that provide expansive views of a highly valued landscape. Scenic vistas may be officially recognized or designated, or they may be informal in nature (e.g., mountain peaks, expansive views). The General Plan was reviewed to determine scenic vistas in the project area.

Visual Quality

Visual quality or visual character impacts are assessed by estimating the amount of visual change introduced by a project's components, the degree to which visual changes may be visible to surrounding viewer groups, and the general sensitivity of viewer groups to landscape alterations. As such, visual changes are always considered in the context of a site or locale's visual sensitivity (as described in the setting). Visual changes are assessed from publicly-accessible or neighborhood viewpoints and measured by two factors:

Visual Contrast would be significant if it results in regraded landforms, alteration or elimination of ridgelines, and changes introduced by a project that result in landscape colors, textures, and scale of visual components that are inconsistent with the natural surroundings (changes to form, line, color, texture, and scale in the landscape);

Degradation of Visual Quality would be considered significant if a project severely alters or displaces specific scenic resources composed of striking landform features, aesthetic water bodies, mature stands of native/cultural trees (e.g., historic hedgerows), or historic structures.

These factors were used to evaluate the extent and scale of visual quality alterations relative to the project improvements.

4.1.5 Impact Analysis

Impact AES-1: Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

This impact analysis addresses CEQA Guidelines Appendix G checklist item I.a) identified in Section 4.1.3.

A scenic vista is a viewpoint that provides an expansive view of a highly valued landscape. Humboldt County's Web GIS identifies coastal zone scenic views along New Navy Base Road from Samoa south to just south of Bay Street within the project area (Humboldt County 2018).

Construction

Construction equipment, materials, and workers would be located along the proposed sewer pipeline alignment, at the location of the Approved Samoa WWTF, and within the designated staging areas (see Figure 3-3 in Chapter 3).

New Navy Base Road, designated by Humboldt County's scenic mapping project as coastal zone scenic views, is located west of the project construction area. The majority of the project site is not visible from New Navy Base Road. Project construction locations that would be visible from New Navy Base Road include

the Approved Samoa WWTF site and the nearby construction staging area, the in-road collection system south of Fairhaven, and the construction staging area at the Samoa Air Field.

The Approved Samoa WWTF site is partially visible from New Navy Base Road if travelers on the road look landward. However, the Approved Samoa WWTF site and nearby construction staging area are partially obscured by existing vegetation and distance. Similarly, the construction staging area at the Samoa Airfield is partially obscured by vegetation and distance. The temporary presence of the construction materials and workers, as well as the construction activities, would be visibly distant and similar to the existing industrial facilities near the site, and would not adversely affect views of the Pacific Ocean when traveling or stationed along New Navy Base Road. In addition, in-road construction on the southern portion of New Navy Base Road would be temporary and within an area of existing development (the road). These changes to the views along New Navy Base Road would be minor, temporary, and would generally be visible only to the public in the immediate vicinity of the active portion of construction.

Furthermore project construction would not affect natural landforms or features, would follow standards for siting and design, and would be consistent with the HBAP Section 3.40 VISUAL RESOURCE PROTECTION, B. DEVELOPMENT POLICIES. In addition, the project would be subject to the "D" combining zone design review requirements to ensure the conformance of new development with the policies and standards of the General Plan, and to provide for a design review process where neighborhoods within the same zone district desire to preserve or enhance the area's historical, cultural or scenic values.

The impact on scenic vistas from project construction would be **less than significant**.

Operation

The project collection system and disposal system pipelines would be installed in existing roadways. Upon completion of the project within Navy Base Road, there would not be any readily discernible alterations to the visual nature of the roadway or any obstructions to the existing scenic vistas. New Navy Base Road would be repaved and striped consistent with existing conditions.

The project's collection system includes three pump stations, which would be located underground. A small 8-foot by 12-foot building would be constructed near each pump station to house an emergency generator, the power service, and control panel. The project includes concrete basins and other low-lying facilities at the Approved Samoa WWTF, as well as an 8-foot by 12-foot building to support the disposal system pump station.

The project facilities would be located east of New Navy Base Road, while the scenic coastal vista is west of New Navy Base Road. Therefore, the project facilities do not have the potential to block or interfere with the coastal view from New Navy Base Road. In addition, the majority of the project's facilities are located underground or would be physically small and low-lying. The project does

not include any large or tall structures that would block or obscure scenic vistas. Therefore, impact from project operations would be **less than significant**.

Significance

Less than Significant

Mitigation

None Required

Impact AES-2:

Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings and historic buildings within a State scenic highway?

This impact analysis addresses CEQA Guidelines Appendix G checklist item I.b) identified in Section 4.1.3.

There are no officially designated State Scenic Highways within Humboldt County (Caltrans 2011). There are roadways designated as “eligible” state scenic highways; however, those roadways are not in the vicinity of the proposed project, and the project site cannot be seen from them. Therefore, the project would have **no impact** on a scenic resource within a State scenic highway.

Significance

No Impact

Mitigation

None Required

Impact AES-3:

Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?

This impact analysis addresses CEQA Guidelines Appendix G checklist item I.c) identified in Section 4.1.3. The project area is located within a rural setting, with small areas of residential, industrial, and commercial uses within the project area.

Construction

As noted under Impact AES-1 above, during construction, staging areas as well as active construction zones would consist of construction activities, equipment, materials, and workers. The construction activity would occur along portions of Vance Avenue, Bendixsen Street, Lincoln Avenue, New Navy Base Road, and portions of adjoining streets, as well as at the Approved Samoa WWTF site. The construction zones and/or staging areas would be visible or partially visible to the public when utilizing the above listed roadways.

The temporary impact on the visual character of the site and surroundings, during construction, would be **less than significant**.

Operation

Following construction, the project facilities located in-road would be located underground and out-of-sight. As described in Impact AES-1, some project improvements to the Approved Samoa WWTF would be above-ground, however those facilities would be small in footprint and low-lying. The facilities would not be obtrusive to the existing environment, but would be consistent with the existing land use mix of industrial, rural residential, and open space. Therefore, the project’s impact on the visual character of the site and area would be **less than significant**.

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation **None Required**

Impact AES-4: Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or night-time views in the area?

This impact analysis addresses CEQA Guidelines Appendix G checklist item I.d) identified in Section 4.1.3.

Under current conditions, the project area includes lighting typical of residential, commercial, and industrial areas including street lighting and lighting of buildings and parking lots. Nighttime construction is not anticipated; therefore, no lighting would be used during project construction. The project does not include the addition of any new lights or lighted facilities; therefore, the project would not create a new source of substantial light. Finally, the above-ground project components would be constructed of low or non-reflective material, such as concrete or coated metal, and would not result in daytime glare. Therefore, the project would have **no impact** from a new light source or glare.

Significance *No Impact*

Mitigation **None Required**

4.1.6 Cumulative Impacts

Impact: AES-C-1: Would the project result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to a cumulative impact related to aesthetic resources?

Project construction and operation would have no impact for affecting scenic resources within a scenic highway or creating a new source of substantial light or glare; therefore, the project would not contribute to a cumulative impact related to these criteria.

Project construction and operation would result in a less than significant impact to scenic vistas and the existing visual character of the project area. The project facilities would be visually consistent with the existing industrial, residential, and open space characteristics of the project area. The Manila CSD Modernization area is not visible from the project area and, therefore, does not contribute to cumulative visual impacts in the project area. The Samoa Airfield Onsite Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS) would be located near the southern portion of the project, and the Samoa Townsite Master Plan (STMP) would be located at the northern boundary of the project. As with the proposed project, the Samoa Airfield OWTS would be largely located underground. The Coast Seafoods project is located near the project site at the RMT II site; which contains existing industrial development. This Draft EIR assumes that the Coast Seafoods project facilities would be aesthetically consistent with the existing industrial facilities at the RMT II site.

The STMP certified EIR identifies aesthetics mitigation consisting of vegetative screening. This screening is anticipated to be placed along Vance Avenue to

screen the Approved Samoa WWTF from off-site view. The vegetation would also screen the project's proposed improvements to the WWTF, further minimizing the project's potential aesthetics impacts. Therefore, visual character would not be significantly altered and it is not anticipated that a cumulatively considerable aesthetic impact would occur. The project's contribution to impacts to a scenic vista or visual character would not be cumulatively considerable.

Significance *Less than Significant*

Mitigation **None Required**

4.1.7 References

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). 2011. California Scenic Highway Program.

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