4.13 AESTHETICS

Would the proposal:	Potentially Significant Impact	Potentially Significant Unless Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Affect a scenic vista or scenic highway?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Have a demonstrable negative aesthetic effect?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Create light or glare?	☐	☐	☒	☐

SETTING

Regional Setting

The three power plants are located along the California coastline and San Francisco Bay, areas that are generally considered to have scenic resource value. Coastal areas are also generally highly sensitive to visual impacts. Coastal landscapes are typically open, affording clear views over the range of viewing distances from the immediate foreground to the horizon. Land forms and patterns (e.g., the curve of the shoreline itself) are often distinctive in their forms, colors, and textures; small changes in existing landscape elements or the introduction of features that are modest in scale may be visually prominent and disruptive. The Oakland power plant is surrounded by heavy industrial and commercial uses. The Morro Bay and Moss Landing power plants, however, are located in scenic areas in close proximity to recreational uses.

Structures at all three power plants are typically large-scale, regular and simple in form, and without decorative architectural treatments and exterior ornaments. Structural and operating system components (e.g., framing members, and pipes) are open to view. Building materials are predominantly steel and concrete, and colors and exterior finishes are flat, and subdued.

Local Setting

Morro Bay

The Morro Bay Power Plant is located on a 140-acre site (including the off-site fuel farm) located within San Luis Obispo County in the City of Morro Bay. The facilities on the site, which include boilers, turbogenerators, and turbines, have a utilitarian, industrial appearance that is determined by their functions and lack of decorative elements. Surrounding land uses include light industry, commercial businesses (including a hotel), marine uses, residences, and

recreational facilities. A mobile home park and the Lila Keiser Park are located on the north side of the site. Estero Bay, Morro Rock, and the Pacific Ocean are located to the west of the site. Morro Rock, a large rock outcropping (approximately 2,000 feet across at its widest point) that projects out of Morro Bay approximately 2,000 feet southwest of the project site, is a visually distinctive regional landmark along the coast. Morro Rock is accessible to the public.

Highway 1, a designated scenic highway, extends along the eastern site boundary. The boilers, generators, and smokestacks of the existing Morro Bay plant partially obstruct scenic views of the Pacific Ocean from Highway 1. In addition, the smokestacks, which are the tallest structures in this part of the coastal zone, create high contrast with surrounding natural landscape features and are prominent visual features in views along the coast and from inland vantage points.

The power plant site is primarily level. The majority of the site is paved and devoid of vegetation; however, clusters of mature trees are located along the eastern boundary. These trees partially screen the power plant facilities from Highway 1. The power plant is a dominant feature in easterly views from Morro Rock.

The off-site fuel tank farm is located about 3.8 miles northeast of Morro Bay, in a remote area of the coastal hills that range in elevation from approximately 570 to 650 feet. This site consists of five aboveground fuel oil tanks and a displacement diesel fuel oil storage tank. Agricultural lands used for cattle grazing surround the site. Clusters of mature trees are located in the southern and eastern portions of the site.

Moss Landing

The Moss Landing Power Plant is located on a 380-acre site located near the Monterey County coastline, east of the community of Moss Landing and within the Coastal Zone. Facilities on the site include boilers, turbine engine generators, and associated facilities, which are industrial in appearance. The plant is located inland from the Moss Landing Harbor in an area of light industry, agricultural lands, recreational beaches, and tidal wetlands. The Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve borders the northern site boundary, and agricultural lands are located to the east of the site. Highway 1, a state-designated scenic highway, extends along the western site boundary. The boilers, generators, and smokestacks of the existing Morro Bay plant partially obstruct scenic views of Elkhorn Slough from Highway 1 and the community of Moss Landing. In addition, the smokestacks, which are the tallest structures in this part of the coastal zone, create high contrast with surrounding natural landscape features, which differ markedly in scale, form, colors, and textures, and are prominent visual features in views along the coast and inland.

The majority of the site is paved and devoid of vegetation. Plant facilities are clearly visible from Highway 1. Clusters of mature trees are located primarily in the eastern portion of the site. Surface elevations at the power plant site range from zero to approximately 30 feet, with slopes ranging from zero to two percent.

The Moss Landing tank farm is located directly east of the power plant and contains five storage tanks. This site is surrounded primarily by agricultural uses. Surface elevations at the tank farm site range from approximately 15 to 50 feet. Slopes range from about 10 to 40 percent, with maximum slopes occurring only in the northeastern corner of the tank farm site. Vegetation includes mature trees and grassland.

Oakland

The Oakland Power Plant is located within Alameda County on a two-acre site located adjacent to Martin Luther King Jr. Way in the western part of the City of Oakland. Plant facilities include turbogenerators, combustion turbines, and fuel tanks. These industrial facilities are visually compatible with the heavy and light industrial and commercial uses that surround the site.

The site is generally level and devoid of vegetation except for stands of mature trees that are located along the western and northern site boundaries. These trees only partially screen the plant facilities in views from Martin Luther King Jr. Way. The facilities are not prominent features in the foreground of any scenic vistas; however, storage tanks and stacks may be discernible in panoramic views from the East Bay hills.

CHECKLIST ISSUES

a) Scenic Vistas and Scenic Highways

Morro Bay

Existing plant facilities are visible in easterly views from Morro Rock, a publicly accessible and scenic landmark. Plant facilities are also partially visible from Highway 1, a state-designated scenic highway that extends along the eastern boundary of the Morro Bay power plant site. Although substantial construction or expansion at the site is not foreseeable, future construction would not in any event likely alter substantially the existing visual character of the site itself because it is currently almost entirely developed with power plant facilities. Therefore, the impact on scenic vistas and highways would be less than significant.

Moss Landing

As stated above, the Moss Landing power plant is visible from Highway 1 and the community of Moss Landing. The visual character of Moss Landing is primarily characterized by scenic and visually fragile natural features, such as Elkhorn Slough, Moss Landing State Beach, and Moss Landing State Wildlife Area. Existing landscape elements are characterized by subtle forms, colors, and textures and thus are vulnerable to visual intrusion that may be caused by introduced features that create strong contrasts. Facilities at the power plant partially obstruct views of Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve from these vantage points. Aside from any minor construction activities to separate the property transferred (such as fences or driveways).

Any future construction at the plant site is not foreseeable as a result of the project; therefore, the project would not further intrude on scenic views.

The Moss Landing power plant is located within the Coastal Zone, as defined by the North County Land Use Plan and Local Coastal Program (1982). The Local Coastal Program contains policies that encourage the protection of views of the Moss Landing community, harbor, and dunes from Highway 1. Because the project would not adversely affect scenic views from Highway 1, it would not be inconsistent with Local Coastal Program policies. Therefore, the impact on scenic vistas and highways would be less than significant.

Oakland

No designated scenic routes are identified in the vicinity of the Oakland Power Plant, and plant facilities are not prominent in any scenic vistas. The existing facilities are visible in views from the East Bay hills. However, because no foreseeable visible modifications would be made as a result of the project, the impact on scenic vistas and highways would be less than significant.

Conclusion

Because the project would not affect any scenic vistas and highway, this impact would be less than significant.

b) Negative Aesthetic Effects

Morro Bay

No future modifications of the Morro Bay power plant are reasonably foreseeable as a result of the project; therefore, the project would not increase or emphasize any adverse visual contrasts with the surrounding landscape. For this reason, the potential impact of negative aesthetic effects would be less than significant.

Moss Landing

No future modifications of the Moss Landing power plant are reasonably foreseeable as a result of the project; therefore, the project would not increase or emphasize adverse visual contrasts with the surrounding landscape. Although the plant site is located within a scenic landscape that includes important visual features such as Elkhorn Slough and Moss Landing State Beach, the project itself would not contribute to any negative aesthetic effect. For this reason, the potential impact of negative aesthetic effects would be less than significant.

Oakland

No future modification of the Oakland power plant is reasonably foreseeable as a result of the project. For this reason, the impact to the existing visual qualities of the site would be less than significant.

Conclusion

Because the project would not result in negative aesthetic effects, this impact would be less than significant.

c) Light and Glare

The project would not introduce any reasonably foreseeable additional sources of reflected sunlight or glare to the plant site vicinities from windows, automobiles, and other reflective surfaces. Additional sources of night lighting (e.g., vehicle headlights) would be minimal.

Conclusion

Because substantial changes to light and glare conditions would not be anticipated at any of the plants to be divested, this impact would be less than significant.