3.1 AESTHETICS/VISUAL

3.1.1 SETTING

Visual Character of the Region and Project Vicinity

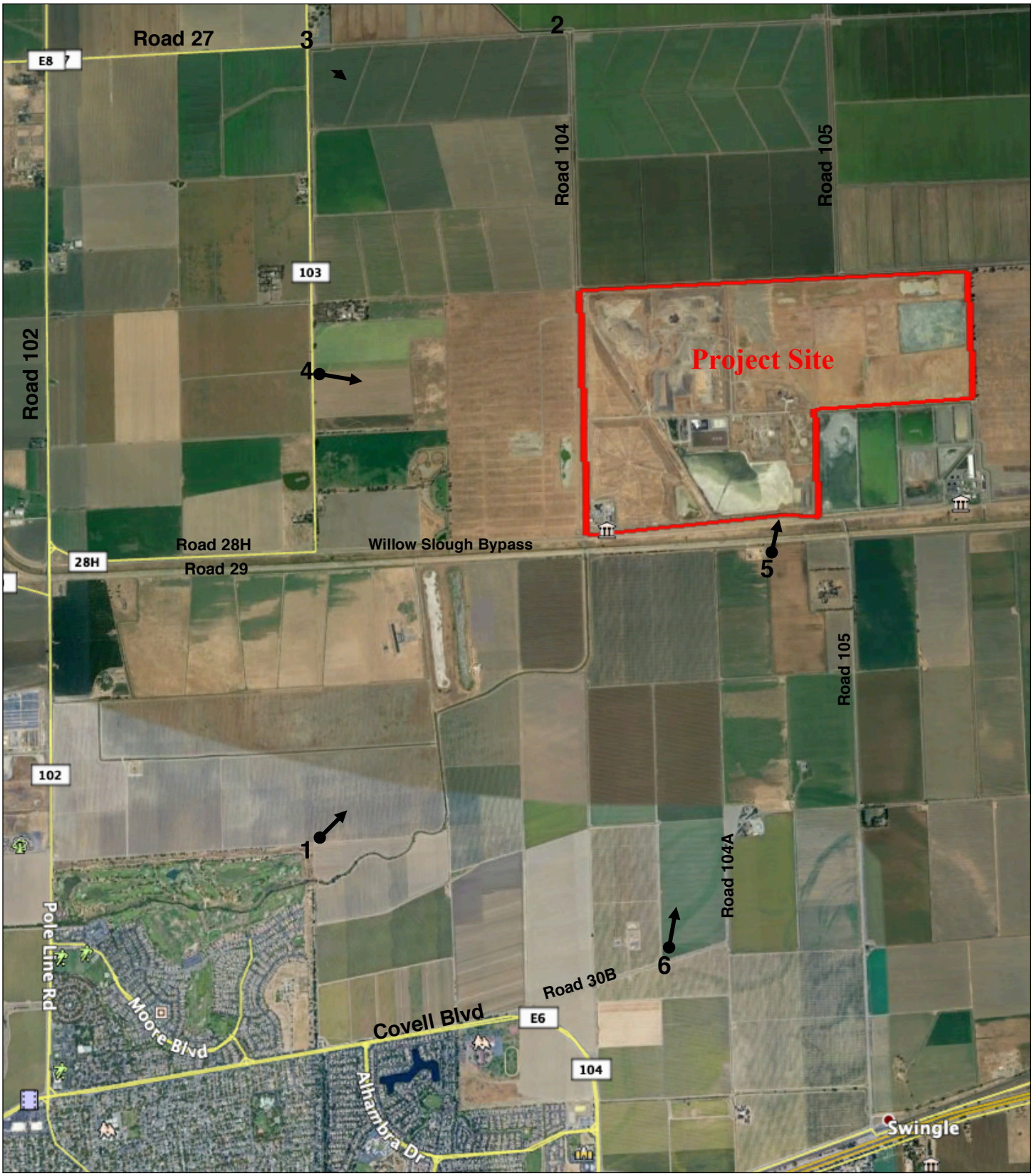
The Yolo County Central Landfill (YCCL) is in a rural landscape. The visual character of the Project vicinity is shaped by agricultural land uses and the broad, flat expanse of the Sacramento Valley. The surrounding landscape includes farm buildings and houses, clusters of trees, local waterways, roads, power lines and other utilities. The YCCL rises above the valley floor and is visible from some distance. The YCCL rises above the treetops as a broad mound. On clear days, the Coast ranges are visible to the west, and to the east the Sacramento skyline and the peaks of the Sierra Nevada.

Compared to the surrounding landscape, the YCCL has more vertical height. At a distance, it appears to be a natural feature. Upon closer approach, its engineered contours and the nature of its use become apparent, and the site has an unnatural, industrial appearance.

Scenic Vistas, Public Views, and Significant Features

There are few scenic vistas or public vantage points that include views of YCCL. The predominant views of the YCCL are from the roads in the immediate vicinity, including County Road (CR) 27, CR 28H, CR 29, CR 103, CR 104, and CR 105. There are intermittent views of the site, that are usually partly or fully obscured by trees and other intervening landscape features, from CR 102, and even less frequent views from State Route (SR) 113. The site is not visible from Interstate 80. The YCCL can be seen from several residences in the vicinity, particularly from homes to the west along CR 103 and CR 102: and to the south, across Willow Slough Bypass on CR 29 and along CR 30B. There are no residences to the east with views of YCCL. **Figure 3.1-1** identifies six vantage points with views that include the YCCL and that are considered in this analysis. **Figure 3.1-2** (Vantage Points 1 & 2), **Figure 3.1-3** (Vantage Points 3 & 4) and **Figure 3.1-4** (Vantage Points 5 & 6) present existing views toward the landfill. These vantage points were selected to show representative views of the landfill from the surrounding areas.

SR 128 in Yolo County was recently added as a State Scenic Highway under Assembly Bill 998 (2019). The 2030 Yolo County General Plan designates several local scenic highways: State Route 16 from the Colusa County line to Capay, State Route 128 from the City of Winters to the Napa County line, County Roads 116 and 116B from the Town of Knights Landing to the eastern terminus of County Road 16, County Roads 16 and 117 and Old River Road from the northern terminus of County Road 117 to the City of West Sacramento and South River Road from Jefferson Boulevard from City of West Sacramento city limits to the Sacramento County Line (Yolo County, 2009). YCCL is not visible from any of these local scenic highways.



Source: RCH Group, 2020

Figure 3.1-1
Vantage Point Location Map

Vantage Point 1

Vantage Point 2

Source: RCH Group, 2020

Figure 3.1-2
Existing Views from Vantage Points 1 and 2

Vantage Point 3

Vantage Point 4

Source: RCH Group, 2020

Figure 3.1-3
Existing Vantage Points from Viewpoints 3 and 4

Vantage Point 5

Vantage Point 6

Source: RCH Group, 2020

Figure 3.1-4
Existing Vantage Points from Viewpoints 5 and 6

Findings of the 1992 YCCL Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

The 1992 YCCL Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluated the potential effects of previous changes to the landfill. The analysis concluded that there would be no significant effects on visual resources, and that no mitigation measures were required.

Findings of the 2005 YCCL EIR

The 2005 YCCL EIR analyzed the potential aesthetic impacts of development of an off-site non-specific soil borrow area. The 2005 YCCL EIR also determined that there would be significant and unavoidable impacts with mitigation included related to the physical changes in the landfill's form associated with the proposed height increase, the development of a materials recovery facility's (MRF) impact on aesthetic views, and potential glare being introduced from anaerobic bioreactors.

Mitigation measures included strategic plantings of tall, native trees to screen views of the landfill from public vantage points and rights of way, designing the massing and exterior treatment of the proposed MRF structure to mimic a typical large agricultural structure, using covers with low reflective properties on the anaerobic bioreactors, locating the soil borrow area outside of the viewshed of any designated or candidate scenic highway and restoring the soil borrow area after it has been mined to an appropriate use, such as open space or wildlife refuge to provide a harmonious scenic vista.

Regulatory Setting

2030 Countywide General Plan for Yolo County

The Land Use and Community Character Element of the 2030 Countywide General Plan seeks to preserve and foster the rural character of the unincorporated area of the County. The element includes the following policies pertaining to Aesthetics that are relevant to the Project:

> *Goal CC-1*: Preservation of Rural Character. Ensure that the rural character of the County is protected and enhanced, including the unique and distinct character of the unincorporated communities.
>
> *Policy CC-1.2*: Preserve and enhance the rural landscape as an important scenic feature of the County.
>
> *Policy CC-1.3*: Protect the rural night sky as an important scenic feature to the greatest feasible extent where lighting is needed.
>
> *Policy CC-1.8*: Screen visually obtrusive activities and facilities such as infrastructure and utility facilities, storage yards, outdoor parking, and display areas, along highways, freeways, roads, and trails.

California Code of Regulations Title 27

In addition to the 2030 General Plan's goals and policies pertaining to visual quality, Title 27 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR) requires landfills to control litter, which can have adverse effects on visual quality, as follows:

> *§20830 Litter Control*: Litter shall be controlled, routinely collected, and disposed of properly. Windblown materials shall be controlled to prevent injury to the public and personnel. Controls shall prevent the accumulation, or off-site migration, of litter in quantities that create a nuisance or cause other problems.

3.1.2 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Significance Criteria

Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) *Guidelines* states that a Project would result in a significant impact to Aesthetics if it would:

- 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 non-urbanized area, 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 an urbanized area, would the Project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; or,
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.1.1: The Project could affect views from Vantage Point 1, views from Wildhorse Golf Course and adjacent recreational use path on the outskirts of the City of Davis, approximately 1.5 miles southwest of the southern edge of the YCCL, looking northeast. (Less than Significant)

Figure 3.1-2 (Vantage Point 1) presents the current view of the YCCL from the northeast edge of the Wildhorse Golf Course and adjacent recreational use path. This vantage point is typical of other distant views of the site from the area along Road 102 and Covell Blvd. From this vantage point, there are several orchards and trees that visually screen the landfill. Due to the existing screening from the orchards and distance from the Project site, it is unlikely that the proposed Project elements would be distinctly visible from this vantage point. Thus, the proposed Project elements would not substantially degrade the existing visual character. This impact would therefore be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.1.2: The Project could affect views from Vantage Point 2 and Vantage Point 3, views from the intersection of Road 27 and Road 104, approximately 1 mile north of the northern boundary of the YCCL, looking southeast. (Less than Significant)

Figure 3.1-2 and **Figure 3.1-3** (Vantage Point 2 and Vantage Point 3) present the current view of the YCCL from approximately 1 mile north of the YCCL, looking southeast. This view shows agricultural fields that end at the YCCL. The main features that are visible from Vantage Point 2 are the northern landfill face and part of the western landfill face and the existing tall steel radio tower. The Project would develop new facilities in the northern area of the landfill that may be visible from these vantage points. However, due to the distance of the northern area of the landfill to these viewpoints, it is unlikely that development of new facilities would substantially degrade the existing visual character. This impact would therefore be less than significant, and no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.1.3: The Project could affect views from Vantage Point 4, views from Road 103, approximately 1 mile west of the western edge of the YCCL, looking east. (Less than Significant)

Figure 3.1-3 (Vantage Point 4) presents the current view of the YCCL from one mile west of the landfill site, looking east. This view shows agricultural fields that end at the landfill. From this vantage point, the western face of the landfill Waste Management Units (WMUs) 2, 3, 4 and 5 are the main visible features of the YCCL. Except for the stormwater treatment system and discharge facility, the Project elements would be east of the western face of the landfill. The proposed solar PV system on closed landfill units would be on top of closed WMUs 1-5, but due to the distance from closed landfill units to Vantage Point 4, it is unlikely that ground-mounted PV panels would substantially degrade the existing visual character. Due to the screening the western face of the landfill provides, it is unlikely that the proposed Project elements would be visible from this vantage point. Thus, the proposed Project elements would not substantially degrade the existing visual character. This impact would therefore be less-than-significant, and no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.1.4: The Project could affect views from Vantage Point 5, views from south of Willow Slough Bypass, approximately 600 feet south of the southern edge of the YCCL, looking north. (Less than Significant)

Figure 3.1-4 (Vantage Point 5) presents the current view of the YCCL from approximately 600 feet south of the YCCL, looking north. The main features that are visible from Vantage Point 5 are the existing tall steel radio tower and the landfill gas (LFG)-to-energy facility that appears as a white building to the west and the planned compost facility to the east. The central working faces of the landfill (WMU 6H, WMU 7J, WMU 7L and WMU 7N) are also slightly visible from Vantage Point 5. As discussed above, the 2005 YCCL EIR required the planting of appropriate native trees along the southern boundary of the YCCL to help screen the YCCL from vantage points that are south of the YCCL and to break-up the dominance of the mass of the landfill on the landscape (as a mitigation measure). Due to this, trees were planted along the southern boundary of the YCCL and are now visible from this vantage point. The proposed Project elements (e.g., the biomass gasification facility, future surface impoundment, the floating photovoltaic [PV] solar array, and the solar PV system on closed landfill units) would be somewhat screened from this vantage point by the existing trees and topography, thus the proposed Project elements would not substantially degrade the existing visual character. This impact would therefore be less-than-significant, and no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.1.5: The Project could affect views from Vantage Point 6, views from Road 30B, approximately 1.5 miles south of the southern boundary of the YCCL, looking north. (Less than Significant)

Figure 3.1-4 (Vantage Point 6) presents the current view of the YCCL from approximately 1.5 miles south of the YCCL, looking north. Vantage Point 6 shows agricultural fields stretching away to the YCCL. The main features that are visible from Vantage Point 5 is the southern boundary of the site that appears as a distant hill feature. At this distance, it is very unlikely that development of any of the proposed Project elements would be visible. The proposed Project elements would not substantially degrade the existing visual character. This impact would therefore be less-than-significant, and no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.1.6: The Project activities at the YCCL could result in creation of increased amounts of windblown litter leaving the site. (Less than Significant)

Several proposed Project elements at the YCCL could cause increases in the amount of litter in the vicinity of the site. However, a properly implemented litter control program would be capable of ensuring that the incremental increase in litter that could result from these activities would be minimized. The YCCL's existing litter control program includes use of movable litter fences and daily collection of windblown litter by site personnel has shown to be effective in preventing litter from blowing off-site. Continued implementation of this program, with adjustments as necessary to ensure compliance with 27 California Code of Regulations (CCR) 20830, would ensure that this program remain effective. This impact would therefore be less-than-significant, and no mitigation is required.

Mitigation Measures

None required.

Impact 3.1.7: The Project elements at the YCCL could result in creation of a new sources of light and glare. (Significant)

Glare is the sensation produced by luminance within the visual field that is sufficiently greater than the luminance to which the eyes are adapted to and can cause annoyance, discomfort, or loss in visual performance (Illuminating Engineering Society, 2018). The proposed Project elements, in particular the floating solar array that would sit afloat the water storage reservoir and the solar PV system on closed landfill units, would not create a substantial or significant source of glare. PV panels are designed to absorb as much of the sun's energy to generate electricity. Solar panels are made from formulated glass that only reflects approximately 10 percent of light they receive. In addition, solar panels have much lower reflective properties than regular glass. Any light reflecting from the solar arrays will drop off rapidly with distance (Jacobs Engineering, 2018). As discussed in Impact 3.1.4 above, the floating solar array and solar PV system on closed landfill units would be somewhat screened by the existing trees and topography, further reducing any potential glare impacts. Therefore, glare impacts would be less-than-significant.

Several proposed Project elements at the YCCL would require new sources of exterior lighting (such as lighting fixtures) that could emit new sources of light at the YCCL. The 2030 Yolo County General Plan includes Policy CC-1.3, "Protect the rural night sky as an important scenic feature to the greatest extent where lighting is needed." Uncontrolled lighting has the potential to illuminate public rights of way or adjacent properties and potentially the rural night sky. Therefore, this impact would be significant.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1.7: New lighting for Project Elements shall be arranged and controlled so as not to illuminate public rights of way or adjacent properties (i.e., downward facing lighting fixtures, dark sky friendly lighting fixtures, etc.).

Level of Significance after Mitigation

The implementation of Mitigation Measure 3.1.7 would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

Impact 3.1.8: Development of a non-specific off-site soil borrow area could degrade the visual character of the vicinity near the selected site. (Significant)

The Project includes development of an off-site non-specific soil borrow area. The location of the soil borrow area has not been identified, but the Division of Integrated Waste Management (DIWM) estimates that up to a 640-acre parcel would be needed. DIWM would ideally obtain the parcel of land that would adjoin or be near the existing YCCL. Based on the current location of the YCCL, the most likely areas would be characterized as rural non-developed agricultural land, with isolated farm buildings and houses, clusters of trees, local waterways, roads, power lines and other utilities. Soil borrow activities from an off-site non-specific soil borrow area would include removal of any natural vegetation from the area being excavated, and removal of several feet of soil. Any candidate property would be surveyed for any important biological, archaeological, or historical resources. DIWM would obtain a parcel that would likely not be in an area where operations could damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway. Further, it is unlikely that the non-specific soil borrow area would be visible from any County-designated scenic roadway or scenic roadways.

Sensitive receptors and users of highways, freeways, roads, and trails nearby the future off-site borrow area could experience changes to the visual environment including earthwork moving equipment used for soil excavation, transport, and reclamation, topography alterations and new sources of lighting. Based on the areas near YCCL, it is unlikely that any of these potential visual changes would be highly visible to residences and roadways due to the depth of excavation that lowers beneath the surface horizon. Therefore, any aesthetic changes resulting from the off-site borrow area are not expected to cause a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista or nearby public vantage points. Regardless, because the site could be anywhere in the general vicinity of the YCCL, without mitigation development of the non-specific off-site borrow area could have significant adverse impacts to sensitive roadway views or nearby sensitive receptors (including nighttime views). This would therefore be a significant impact of the Project.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure 3.1.8a: Consistent with 2030 Yolo County General Plan Policy CC-1.8, development of the future off-site borrow area shall include visual screening along highways, freeways, roads, and trails. Visual screening could include retaining existing trees and vegetation, new landscaping or screen trees, or another option approved by the County.

Mitigation Measure 3.1.8b: The off-site borrow area shall implement hours of operation that reduce or eliminate adverse effects of the off-site borrow area nighttime activities on nearby sensitive receptors, or operations controls such as directed lighting.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

The implementation of Mitigation Measures 3.1.8a and 3.1.8b would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

3.1.3 REFERENCES

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