SECTION 8.11

Visual Resources

8.11 Visual Resources

8.11.1 Introduction

Section 8.11 evaluates potential visual resource impacts of the Modesto Irrigation District (MID) Electric Generation Station (MEGS) Project (Project), and the consistency of the Project with applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards (LORS), in conformance with applicable guidelines of the California Energy Commission (CEC) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

8.11.2 Laws, Ordinances, Regulations, and Standards

8.11.2.1 Federal

No federal LORS relating to visual resources apply to the proposed Project.

8.11.2.2 State

Scenic Highway Program

No eligible or designated state scenic highways are located within the viewshed of the proposed Project.

California Environmental Quality Act

The CEQA Guidelines define a "significant" effect on the environment to mean a "substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project, including…objects of historic or aesthetic significance." (Cal. Code Regs., Tit. 14 §15382)

Under the CEQA Guidelines, significant visual impacts may result from:

a. A substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

b. Substantial damage to scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

c. Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

d. A new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

8.11.2.3 Local

City Of Ripon General Plan

The Project site and the area where the planned subtransmission line connection to the existing substation is located are designated Heavy Industry according to the 1998 City of Ripon (City) General Plan. Allowable uses in this category include manufacturing, processing, assembling, research, wholesale and storage uses, trucking terminals, railroad and freight stations, public and quasi-public uses, and similar and compatible uses. Adjacent to the north side of the site, the area is designated Heavy Industry. An area designated for High Low Density Residential uses is located north of the Project site about 0.2 mile**.** To the west of the Project site, the area is designated Heavy Industry. Further west, the area is designated Light Industry. Along the east

side of Vera Avenue (approximately 0.4 mile to the west of the Project site), the undeveloped area is designated Low Density Residential. An area designated Park, and developed into a park, is located approximately 0.2 mile northwest of the Project site.

The City of Ripon General Plan includes one visual resource policy that is applicable to the Project, as follows:

- **Circulation and Transportation Policy A4:** The City will consider visual aesthetics and safety aspects in future developments, including landscaping requirements and setback requirements. This policy is in support of the City's Goal A, "to provide a circulation system correlated with existing and proposed land use that contributes to efficient and safe movement of persons, goods, and services within and through Ripon."

The plan's Open Space and Conservation chapter covers open space for the creation and preservation of parks; the maintenance of recreation programs; and the protection of archaeological sites to reduce the impact of urban development on surrounding agricultural and riparian habitat; to conserve air quality; to protect and preserve historically significant buildings, sites, and structures; and to preserve the riparian area along the Stanislaus River (City of Ripon, 1998). However, none of these categories are applicable to the proposed Project.

City of Ripon Zoning Ordinance

The City of Ripon provided several City Zoning Ordinance chapters that are applicable to the Project (Tyhurst, 2003), as follows:

- Chapter 16.12, Use Classification System
- Chapter 16.24, Industrial Districts
- Chapter 16.144, Parking and Loading
- Chapter 16.148, Landscaping and Irrigation
- Chapter 16.152, Fencing and Screening
- Chapter 16.156, Performance Standards
- Chapter 16.172, Signs

Of those, the code sections listed in Table 8.11-1 have been determined to be applicable to the visual resources analysis of the Project.

TABLE 8.11-1
Provisions of the City of Ripon Zoning Ordinance Applicable to the MEGS Project

Provision
Section 16.24.030(A): Trash Enclosures. Fully enclosed trash collection areas must be provided at locations that are readily accessible to occupants and sanitation collectors.
Section 16.24.030(D): Pollution Control. All uses must be planned, developed, conducted, and operated in a manner that noise, smoke, dust, odors, and waste of any kind is purified so as to control pollution of air, soil, or water to meet the standards or requirements of the City.
Table 16.24.2: Industrial Lot and Structure Standards.
Height: 200 feet (use permit required for structures exceeding 200 feet)
Front yard setback: 15 feet
Rear yard setback: 20 feet
Interior side setback: 20 feet
Street side setback: 10 feet

TABLE 8.11-1
Provisions of the City of Ripon Zoning Ordinance Applicable to the MEGS Project

Provision
Landscaped lot area: 10 percent
Building coverage maximum percent: 50 percent
Section 144.050 Design of Parking Areas. Design standards are established for the development of off-street parking facilities as follows:
(F) Landscaping and Screening. All parking areas shall be landscaped or screened according to the standards set forth in this Code.
(G) Lighting. All off-street parking areas shall conform to City Standards.
Section 16.148.040: Standards for Landscaping and Irrigation.
(A) Maintenance. Required planting areas must be permanently maintained. Maintained includes: watering, weeding, pruning, insect control, and replacement of plant materials and irrigation equipment, as needed, to preserve the health and appearance of plant materials.
(B) Safety. Landscape materials shall not be located such that, at maturity: they interfere with safe sight distances for vehicular, bicycle, or pedestrian traffic; they conflict with overhead utility lines, overhead lights, or walkway lights; or they block pedestrian or bicycle ways.
(C) Landscaping Plans Required. Each application for a permit must include plans and written material describing all existing trees, including species, height, diameter, and condition, and showing how any applicable site landscaping or planting area requirements are to be met. The degree of specificity of such plans and written material must relate to the permit or request for approval being requested.
(D) Water Efficient Landscape. All new landscaping must be planned to create a water efficient landscape in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 13.06.
(1) Plant materials must be selected for: energy efficiency and drought tolerance; adaptability and relationship to the Ripon environment; color, form, pattern; ability to provide shade; soil retention; and fire resistiveness.
(2) The overall landscape plan must be integrated with all elements of the project, such as buildings, parking lots and streets, to achieve a desirable microclimate and minimize energy demand.
(E) Plant Selection. Plants must be healthy and meet minimum industry standards. Native plants, particularly trees and shrubs, must be considered as the first alternative when selecting plants.
(F) Irrigation Plans. Irrigation plans must be submitted with applications for building permits and for approval of improvement plans required by this Code, and shall contain all construction details for an automatic system including, but not limited to, the following:
(1) Location, type, and size of lines
(2) Location, type, and gallonage of output of heads and/or emitters
(3) Location and sizes of valves
(4) Location and type of controller
(5) Installation details
(6) Location and type of backflow prevention device
(7) Available water pressure and water meter outlet size
(8) Irrigation application schedule and flow rates (Ord. 606, 1999)
Section 16.148.050: Requirements for Parking Areas.
The following requirements apply to all open, off-street parking areas and off-street loading areas, including nonresidential driveways:
(A) One tree shall be required for each 5 parking stalls, or portion thereof, and shall be evenly spaced throughout the parking lot.
(B) Planters that abut parking stalls must be a minimum of 5 feet wide. A minimum 18-inch-wide paved strip shall be added to the adjacent parking stall to allow access to and from vehicles.
Section 16.148.080: Requirements for Industrial Districts. [a]
(A) All areas not used for buildings, parking, walkways, driveways, or other permanent facilities must be

TABLE 8.11-1
Provisions of the City of Ripon Zoning Ordinance Applicable to the MEGS Project

Provision
landscaped.
(B) A minimum 10-foot-wide planting strip shall be required along adjacent streets. The strip must be continuous except where crossed by driveways and walkways.
Section 16.152.030(E): Special Fencing Requirements for Industrial Projects.[b]
(1) Fencing of Front Yards. A fence up to 6 feet may be permitted in the required front yard provided such fencing is constructed of woven wire, wrought iron, or similar transparent material, and does not obstruct vehicular site distance.
(2) Security Fencing. Barbed wire security fencing not to exceed 2 feet in height may be erected on top of required or permitted fencing, except for fencing adjacent to planned or existing residential areas. Electrical fencing adjacent to planned or existing residential areas is prohibited.
Section 152.040: Screening Standards. Screening may be used in any zone, provided a safe sight distance is maintained.[c]
(B) Screening Materials. Screening materials of corrugated plastic or iron, steel, aluminum, asbestos, wood (excluding wood in combination with masonry), or security chain-link fencing are specifically prohibited. Security chain-link fencing may be permitted for commercial and industrial projects if combined with landscaping acceptable to the Review Authority. Unless otherwise specified, barbed wire and slats are not permitted.
Section 16.152.040(E): Special Screening Requirements for Industrial Projects.[c]
(2) Screening of Storage Areas.
(a) Unless otherwise specified, all storage materials and related activities, including storage areas for trash, must be screened so as not to be visible from adjacent properties and public rights-of-way. Screening must be 6 to 8 feet in height. Items stored within 100 feet of a dedicated street or residential zone cannot be stacked higher than 2 feet above the adjacent screen.
(b) Screening shall not be required for a storage area that abuts an existing industrial use or property designed on the General Plan Map for industrial use, provided the storage area is not adjacent to an existing residential use or property designated on the General Plan Map for residential use or a public street.
Section 16.152.040(F): Exterior Lighting Structures. All exterior electrical cage enclosures and storage tanks must be screened from view from access or adjacent streets and residential neighborhoods.[c]
(1) Screening of Roof Equipment. Except in the Industrial Heavy (M-2) District, all roof-mounted mechanical equipment, tanks, ventilating fans, or similar equipment must be visually screened from view from adjacent properties and public rights-of-way. Screening shall not exceed a height of 6 feet from roof level. Required screens shall be architecturally compatible with the building or structure on which they occur.
(2) Exceptions to Height Requirements. The requirements of this Chapter do not apply to uses permitted in any industrial zone which are required to maintain visual screens to a height greater than specified in this Development Code.
Section 16.152.040(G): Maintenance. All required screening materials must be maintained in good condition by the property owner, and whenever necessary, repaired or replaced.
Section 16.156.080: Light and Glare. Exterior lighting must be energy efficient and shielded or recessed so that direct glare and reflections are contained within the boundaries of the parcel, and must be directed downward and away from adjoining properties and public rights-of-way. No lighting shall blink, flash, or be unusually high intensity or brightness. All lighting fixtures shall be appropriate in scale, intensity, and height to the use it is serving. Security lighting must be provided at all entrances and exits.
No use shall cause a glare on lots developed residentially, zoned for residential use, or shown as residential on the General Plan, or cause glare on a street or alley.
Section 16.172.050: Regulations for Zones. Industrial Districts or Industrial Use in the Mixed Use District (M1, M2, MU).
(1) Each lot shall be permitted one freestanding sign for each street frontage, for identification.
(a) The sign may be double-faced.
(b) The sign area shall not exceed 72 square feet per face.
(c) The sign may be illuminated.

TABLE 8.11-1
Provisions of the City of Ripon Zoning Ordinance Applicable to the MEGS Project

Provision
(2) Each lot of one acre or more in size shall be permitted one monument sign, and it may be used in conjunction with a freestanding sign for identification. On lots of less than one acre in size, a monument sign may be used as an alternate to the freestanding sign.
(a) The sign may be double-faced.
(b) Sign area shall not exceed 30 square feet per face.
(c) The sign shall not exceed 5 feet in height above the adjacent pavement surface.
(d) The sign shall not be placed closer than 100 feet to any freestanding sign on the same, or any adjacent site.
(e) The sign shall be no closer than 25 feet from a driveway which intersects the public right-of-way, or any sidewalks, driveways, etc., on the same, or any adjacent site.
(f) the sign may be illuminated.
(3) Each lot shall be permitted one wall sign for each street frontage.
(a) Sign area shall not exceed 20 percent of the building facade on which it is attached.
(b) The sign may be illuminated.
(4) Multi-occupant complexes shall be permitted one freestanding sign for each street frontage for complex/occupant identification, and may list the name(s) of the complex and the occupant(s).
(a) The sign may be double-faced.
(b) Sign area shall not exceed 72 square feet per face.
(c) The sign may be illuminated.
(5) Except where otherwise provided for in this Chapter, freestanding signs in any industrial zone shall be placed in landscaped areas, and shall not exceed 20 feet in height above the adjacent pavement surface.

[a] The City has indicated that landscaping is required for a minimum of 10 percent of the site. Landscaping outside of the facility perimeter fence and within the plant will achieve this goal (Tyhurst, 2003a).

[b] The City suggested that the Applicant propose its 10-foot-high security fence with barbed wire, and the City will review it during its review of the SPPE Application. A Building Permit may be necessary to include a fence that is taller than that permitted by Chapter 16.152.030(E) (Tyhurst, 2003b).

[c] The City indicated that screening would not be required for the project, within an Industrial District, beyond fencing and landscaping outlined in the Zoning Ordinance chapters listed in this table (Tyhurst, 2003b).

Source: City of Ripon, 2002.

8.11.3 Setting

8.11.3.1 Project Viewshed

The viewshed is the surface area that is visible from a given viewpoint or series of viewpoints. It is also the area from which that viewpoint or series of viewpoints may be seen. The Project's potential viewshed has been estimated as an aid in identifying the views that could be affected by implementing the Project.

The boundaries of the area of potential visibility around a project are considered to be about 3 miles from it. This is because elements of a view that are 3 miles or more away are considered to be a part of the background, the landscape zone in which little color or texture is apparent, colors blur into values of blue or gray, and individual visual impacts become least apparent (USDA, 1973). A potential viewshed with a 3-mile radius is a conservative approach because it does not take into account land use activities such as buildings or existing vegetation that may obscure a view; thus, it overstates project visibility. For the Project, a viewshed with less than a 1-mile radius is appropriate due to the developed nature of the area. Figure 8.11-1 (all figures are located at the end of this section) shows

areas within the 1-mile boundary that are expected to have unobstructed views of the Project and areas that are expected to have partially or fully obstructed views of the Project site.

As shown in Figure 8.11-1, intermittent and/or partially obstructed views of the Project site and vicinity may occur along State Route 99 (SR 99) and at the freeway interchanges. These views depict an industrialized setting (e.g., water tanks, grain silos, industrial buildings).

8.11.3.2 Visual Character of the Regional Landscape, Project Site, and Vicinity

Our understanding of the visual environment is based on the visual character of objects in the environment and the relationships between those objects. Two attributes comprise visual character: pattern elements and pattern character.

Pattern elements include the form, line, color, and texture of an object. The form is the visual mass, bulk, or shape of the object. The line is introduced by the edges of objects or parts of objects. The color of an object is its reflective brightness (light or dark) and its hue (red, blue, or yellow). Texture is the surface coarseness of the object. Awareness of these pattern elements attenuates with distance.

The visual contrast of an environment can be traced to its pattern character components: dominance, scale, diversity, and continuity. Elements in a landscape may be visually dominant because of position, extent, or contrast of basic pattern elements. Scale is the size relationship between a landscape element and its surroundings. Visual diversity is the number, variety, and intermixing of visual pattern elements. Continuity is the uninterrupted flow of pattern elements of a landscape and the maintenance of the visual relationship between connected or related landscape components.

The primary forms in the Project vicinity are the industrial buildings and facilities located to the north and east of the Project site; the residential structures to the west; the wireless cable tower to the southwest; the wastewater treatment ponds to the south; the nearby subtransmission line poles (including those that would be upgraded as part of the Project); the road network to the west, north, and northeast of the site; and the planned roads to the east and south. To the south and east of the Project site, the primary forms are the trees and river and riparian area. These features provide a variety of angled, vertical, and horizontal lines as well as form, color, and texture variety.

The variety in colors in the Project vicinity is demonstrated by the green hues at the undeveloped Project site, the tree grove to the east, and the riparian area to the south; the nearby residential and industrial buildings; and the brightness provided by the reflection of the sun off the light colored buildings. Texture is provided by the grass and bare soil at the Project site.

The dominant feature near the Project site is the 499-foot-high wireless cable tower. This feature near the Project site is the largest landscape element in terms of scale. The human-made development near the Project site is typical of an urban environment. South of the site, the dominant visual feature is the river and its riparian corridor.

Visual diversity is provided in the area by the mixture of the natural and human-made environment, and the variety of form, line, color, and texture provided by the ground surface and vegetation.

Continuity is demonstrated by the inter-relatedness of the forms in the landscape, i.e., the concentration of industrial development in the immediate area (to the north and east), and the residential development to the west. It is also exhibited by the strong lines provided by the natural and human-made structures in the area; the combination of colors; and the textures afforded by the natural environment.

8.11.3.3 Visual Resources

The visual resources of a landscape are the stimuli upon which the actual visual experience is based; therefore, the existing resources of the visual environment in the regional landscape and Project area are inventoried and analyzed. The inventory categories are landforms, types of water bodies, vegetation communities, land use, and the types of development present.

The City of Ripon is located in north-central California within the Central Valley, an area that has been converted to a combination of uses that includes urban, agriculture, and open space uses. Other uses include the system of waterways, freeways/highways, and railroads within the valley. These uses, except for the open space, are indicative of a highly engineered, altered landscape. Towns and cities have developed along the freeways within the valley, and beyond these urbanizing areas, agricultural areas and open spaces exist.

The City of Ripon is bisected by SR 99. It is an urbanized area that consists of residential, commercial, and industrial land uses. It is surrounded by agricultural areas with the Stanislaus River forming its southern boundary. The landscape in the vicinity of the City is relatively flat. The City's landscape exhibits the urban character of a small town that is growing. Its central core consists of commercial, service, light and heavy industrial, and residential uses. To the west and east of the central core land uses are primarily residential, with some recreational (golf course) uses. Due to the developed nature of the City, the character of the landscape is highly altered.

The visual resources of the landscape of the Project site and vicinity are a mixture of natural physical landscape elements (undeveloped open space, Stanislaus River, riparian habitat, and forest grove) and the human-made elements (residential, commercial, and industrial development; wireless cable tower; subtransmission lines and poles; and roads). The MEGS Project site is located in the south-central portion of the City. The landscape of the Project site consists of nearly level terrain adjacent to an industrialized area. The land use in the Project vicinity is a mixture of residential, commercial, and industrial uses; utility and transportation corridors; recreation lands; and undeveloped open space.

To the east of the Project site are industrial land uses and SR 99, and to the south are the City's wastewater treatment plant ponds and the Stanislaus River. Industrial land uses also exist to the north, east, and northeast. To the west of the Project site is vacant undeveloped land that is designated for industrial uses according to the City's General Plan.

Several industrial facilities in the Project vicinity emit water vapor plumes. The locations of these plume sources are shown on Figure 8.11-1. Photos of plumes being emitted by existing facilities are shown on Figures 8.11-3 and 8.11-6.

8.11.3.4 Visual Quality

Aesthetics includes not only the character of the visual experience (pattern elements and pattern character) but also its quality. The enjoyment or interpretation of a landscape is subjective, yet there is public agreement that the visual resources of certain landscapes have high visual quality. For example, high visual quality is recognized in both natural landscapes (such as the Grand Canyon) and urban landscapes (such as the San Francisco skyline). Therefore, the character of a landscape and its components may vary greatly, and both landscapes may be considered exceptional. A project in an area with high visual quality does not always have an adverse effect on the visual quality of that landscape.

Three criteria have been used to evaluate the visual quality of the Project site and vicinity: vividness, intactness, and unity. None of these by itself is equivalent to visual quality; all three must rate high to indicate quality. Vividness is the memorability of contrasting landscape components as they combine in striking and distinctive visual patterns. Intactness is the visual integrity of the natural and human-made landscape and the degree to which the landscape is free from visual encroachment. Unity is the visual harmony of the landscape (compatibility of landscape elements) when considered as a whole.

Vividness of the Project site and vicinity includes an assessment of the landforms, land cover, and human-made development of the area. The vividness rating of the Project area and vicinity is considered low-to-moderate. No landform relief exists to contribute to the memorability of the view. In addition, no water bodies are present at the Project site, and the water bodies immediately south of the site are wastewater treatment ponds. The human-made development in the area contributes to the vividness of the view by the contrast it provides against the natural landscape (the undeveloped Project site); however, neither the human-made landscape nor the Project site are considered striking or distinctive. The tree grove to the east of the Project site contributes to the vividness of the view, but it is not the dominant feature in the area.

Intactness of the Project site and vicinity is demonstrated by the concentration of industrial development near the site (on Fifth Street) and along South Stockton Avenue, and is considered moderate because of the inter-relatedness of the human-made landscape there.

Unity of the landscape is shown by the mixture of natural elements and human-made alterations. There is a minimal connection between the natural landscape (undeveloped Project site, tree grove to the east, and river corridor to the south) and the human-made facilities (industrial facilities, cable tower, roadways, and subtransmission lines). Overall, the landscape elements of the Project site and vicinity have low visual unity.

The overall visual quality of the Project site and vicinity (including the subtransmission line to be upgraded and along South Stockton Avenue where the gas line would be located), when considered in its industrial context, is considered low to moderate.

8.11.3.5 Viewer Characteristics

Viewer Groups, Exposure, and Sensitivity. The quality of the visual experience depends on the visual resources and the viewer response to those resources. When characterizing viewers, the following must be considered: the type of viewer group; the viewer exposure (their location, number of people in group, and duration and frequency of their view); and

viewer sensitivity (viewer activity, awareness, and values). The viewer groups can be classified as three types:

- Residents living in residences to the west and north of the Project site
- Recreationists visiting the City of Ripon Veterans Park to the northwest of the Project site
- Employees employed at the industrial facilities to the north, east, and south
- Drivers and passengers traveling in vehicles along Vera Avenue, Sixth Street, Seventh Street, and the extensions of Doak Boulevard and South Stockton Avenue

Photos demonstrating the views, landscape character, and visual quality afforded to the various types of viewers (receptors) were taken during the site reconnaissance visits that were conducted in December 2002 and January 2003. The locations where these photos were taken and the direction that the camera was focused are shown in Figure 8.11-1. These photos and their associated viewers and view locations are listed below:

- **Photo 1** shows the recreationist view from the Jack Tone Golf Course (Figure 8.11-2) looking northeast toward the Project site. The golf course is approximately 0.9 mile southwest of the Project site. The Project site can be seen in the distance to the right of the white buildings (Nulaid Foods Inc.) that are shown left of photo center. The Project site extends near the 499-foot-high wireless cable tower shown to the right of photo center. As shown in the photo, the view of the site is partially obscured by vegetation in the undeveloped field directly east of and across the street from the golf course. The City of Ripon has indicated that the undeveloped field shown in the photo will be developed into the Poppy Hills residential subdivision, thus screening the future long-distance view of the Project site from the golf course (Tyhurst, 2002b).
- **Photo 2** shows the project site view looking east from the approximate western boundary of the site (Figure 8.11-3). The Nulaid Foods Inc. buildings are shown toward the left of the photo, and a plume emitted from that facility is seen. The grove of trees shown in the distance is the western boundary of the Fox River Paper Company land.
- **Photo 3** shows the employee view looking west from the northern boundary of the Project site toward the residences on Vera Avenue (Figure 8.11-4). These residences are approximately 0.4 mile west of the Project site and are the closest sensitive receptors to the Project that currently have a direct view of it. The undeveloped fields to the west of the Project site will be developed into industrial facilities, thus screening the future view of the Project site from the residences on Vera Avenue.
- **Photo 4** shows the residential view looking south from Walnut Street just south of its intersection with Fourth Street (Figure 8.11-4). As shown, this is a residential street, and an apartment exists at the southern end of the street (center of photo). To the left of the apartment building, the white building that is in the distance is the upper portion of the Nulaid Foods Inc. facility that is located just north of the Project site. It is possible that the tops of the tallest Project features may be visible from this location.
- **Photo 5** shows the employee view looking southwest along the road that provides access to the Fox River Paper Company facility, and along which the subtransmission

line linking the Project to the existing electrical substation (located approximately 0.25 mile northeast of the Project site) will be built (Figure 8.11-5). Shown in the photo is the existing 17-kV subtransmission line, which is supported by wooden poles that are approximately 39 feet tall. The conductors shown on the right side of this photo connect into the existing substation. The Project would include the upgrade of the subtransmission line poles with poles that would be about 20 feet taller than the existing poles. The new poles would support two 69-kV subtransmission lines with a 17-kV line underbuild. Due to the taller new poles, spacing between the poles may be increased, resulting in one less wood pole being needed. A steel pole may be needed at the western end of the alignment (shown at the left side of the photo).

- **Photo 6** shows the employee view looking toward the existing substation from the unnamed road near the entrance to the Fox River Paper Company (Figure 8.11-5). The conductors shown on the left side of this photo connect to the poles shown in Photo 5. The Project would include the addition of two bays to the electrical substation.

- **Photo 7** shows the driver and passenger view looking north from south of the approximate location of the planned Doak Boulevard extension that is south of the Project site (Figure 8.11-6). The Project site is shown as the undeveloped vegetated field, and the Nulaid Foods Inc. buildings are shown to the left of photo center. The western boundary of Fox River Paper Company lands is shown as the grove of trees toward the right of the photo. Other industrial development north of the Project site in Ripon is shown near the center of the photo.

- **Photo 8** shows the view looking east from south of the Project site and the planned Doak Boulevard extension (Figure 8.11-6)**.** Existing subtransmission lines are seen in the photo, and the grove of trees toward the left of the photo is the Fox River Paper Company land. Near the center of the photo is the Fox River Paper Company facility and Ripon Cogeneration Inc. plant. These facilities are located approximately 0.25 mile east of the Project site. Water vapor plumes are shown being emitted from both the paper company building and the cogeneration plant shown in the photo.

Residents' Existing Views. Residents are considered to be a sensitive viewer group because of the long-term nature of the Project and the sensitivity with which people regard their places of residence. Also, residents have frequent opportunities to experience the views from their homes, and view duration can be fleeting or lengthy (lasting hours). Residents along Vera Avenue, Sixth Street, Seventh Street, and Robert Avenue have views of varying landscapes and quality, depending on the direction they are facing. The quality of the view toward the Project site is considered low to moderate (Figure 8.11-7a). Sensitive residential viewers from up to approximately 53 residences are represented by this view, when the viewers are in their front yards.

Recreationists' Existing Views. Recreationists are considered to be a sensitive viewer group because they generally value and are more aware of the aesthetic quality of their surroundings than commuters or people at work. This is because their focus is usually on their surroundings and recreational activities. In addition, the recreation activity they are engaging in is usually enhanced by the surroundings. A recreationist view from the south-facing baseball diamond bleacher at the City of Ripon Veterans Park is shown in

Figure 8.11-8a, and the quality of the view toward the Project site is considered low. This view is representative of the view of a bleacher full of viewers, estimated at 50 to 100 people.

Employees' Existing Views. Employees at the industrial businesses located to the north, south, and east of the Project site are not considered to be a sensitive viewer group. This is because their focus in the area is their work, and because they are working in an industrial facility, they are accustomed to the industrialized landscape.

Drivers' and Passengers' Existing Views. Drivers are considered to have lower sensitivity than residents and recreationists because views from the roadway are fleeting and short-term, are obstructed by the vehicle, and the drivers' attention is primarily concentrated on maneuvering the roadway. Although passengers have a longer view opportunity than drivers, they are also considered to have low sensitivity due to view obstructions caused by the vehicle, which shortens their view. It is acknowledged that scenic driving for pleasure is a valid recreational activity and the sensitivity of such viewers should not be ignored. However, because of the industrial nature of the area (resulting in it not being popular for scenic viewing), the few streets in Ripon that afford views of the Project site, the relatively low average daily traffic (ADT) levels on those streets, and the short view time due to the obstructed views within vehicles, these travelers (drivers and passengers) are not considered highly sensitive viewers, and the number of motorist viewers is considered very low.

8.11.3.6 Key Observation Points

Few sensitive receptors were identified during the site reconnaissance visits that were conducted in December 2002 and January 2003. This is because the Project is proposed to be located in an area designated as heavy industry according to the City's General Plan. Industrial land uses exist adjacent to the north, south, and east sides of the Project site. To the west of and adjacent to the Project site, the land is designated for heavy industrial land uses. Further west, the land is designated for light industry, and west of that (approximately 0.4 mile away), the land is designated for residential land uses.

Views from the sensitive receptor locations are considered to be Key Observation Points (KOPs). The KOPs described below are the "before" views of the Project site. Figure 8.11-1 shows the locations where the two KOP photos were taken and the direction that the camera was focused for each photo.

KOP 1 (Figure 8.11-7a) is a view of the Project site from approximately 0.4 mile west of the site, near the Vera Avenue/Sixth Street intersection (southwest corner). This photo was taken at the driveway of a residence located at 1003 Vera Avenue. The driveway is located on Sixth Street. The KOP residence represents the view seen by residential viewers at approximately 28 residences on Sixth Street, up to 18 residences on Seventh Street, 5 residences on Vera Avenue, and 1 or 2 residences on Robert Avenue. The Project site can be seen when residents are in their front yards facing east. In addition, KOP 1 represents the view seen by motorists traveling east on Sixth and Seventh streets and north/south on Vera Avenue.

KOP 2 (Figure 8.11-8a) is a view of the Project site looking south from the south-facing baseball diamond bleacher at the City of Ripon Veterans Park. As shown, this view is partially screened by the cyclone fence that serves to protect game bystanders from stray balls. Views of the Project site are also partially screened by the tennis court facilities at the

park complex, and the industrial buildings located just north of the Project site. This view is representative of what is seen by recreationists, estimated at 50 to 100 people, depending on the number of attendees.

8.11.4 Impacts

8.11.4.1 Environmental Checklist

Table 8.11-2 provides the CEQA Checklist questions that are used in this SPPE Application to assess the significance of potential impacts.

TABLE 8.11-2
CEQA Checklist

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation	Less than Significant	No Impact
Aesthetics—Would the Project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?				X
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?				X
c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?			X	
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?			X	

8.11.4.2 Discussion of Impacts

The impact assessment considers the criteria presented in Table 8.11.2. A discussion of the expected impacts on visual resources from Project implementation is provided below.

Scenic Vistas

No scenic vistas of high visual quality were identified within the viewshed (area of potential visual effect) during the site reconnaissance of the proposed MEGS Project, nor are there any such vistas identified in public policy documents. The Project would thus not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.

Scenic Resources and Routes

As indicated in the discussion of LORS above, there are no state scenic highways within the Project viewshed. The Project would thus not have a substantial adverse effect on scenic resources and routes.

Visual Character/Quality of Project Site and Vicinity

The MEGS Project would not degrade the existing visual character or quality of the Project viewshed, Project site, or its surroundings. Project implementation would not change the

existing vividness, intactness, and unity of the Project site and vicinity. This is because the Project will be developed in an industrial setting adjacent to other industrial development. In addition, the City of Ripon General Plan and Zoning Ordinance indicate that industrial development is planned on the vacant parcels located to the west of the Project site.

The MEGS Project will include an 85-foot-high exhaust stack, a 43-foot-high combustion turbine genertor (CTG), a 40-foot-high cooling tower[1], and 60-foot-high subtransmission line poles. A 10-foot-high non-reflective chain-link fence with vinyl slating and topped with one foot of barbed wire will surround the Project.

As depicted in the photosimulation from KOP 1 (Figure 8.11-7b), showing the currently undeveloped parcels of land between the viewer and Project site, the Project would be visible from this viewpoint. Although visible, it would not significantly degrade the view or visual quality of the area, nor would it change the vividness, intactness, or unity ratings of the current view. Views of the Project would not be out of character with the existing view.

KOP 2 (Figure 8.11-8b) shows the view looking south from the baseball diamond bleacher at the City of Ripon Veterans Park. Even though the fence and fence poles are visible in Figures 8.11-8a and 8.11-8b, this specific location was recommended by CEC staff during a site visit on December 17, 2002. This view is intended to be representative of the view experienced by people sitting in the bleachers at Veterans Park. As shown, the Project is visible in the left half of the photo. The two stacks and the upgraded subtransmission line are the tallest, most prominent new features from this view, and the 499-foot-high wireless cable tower is the most prominent existing feature. The addition of Project features to this view would not significantly degrade the view or visual quality of the area, nor would it change the vividness, intactness, or unity ratings of the current view. This is because of the industrial facilities that are currently in view between the Project site and this KOP.

In addition, the City of Ripon has indicated that the undeveloped parcels of land located to the west of the Project site are General Plan designated and zoned according to its Zoning Ordinance for industrial development, and the land that fronts on the east side of Vera Avenue (directly across from the KOP 1 location) is planned to be residential development. The City has also indicated that it has received expressions of interest to develop this land, although it has not received formal applications for development yet. The project site and undeveloped land to the west has been subdivided and the subdivision map was recorded in February 2003. Once this development occurs on the land to the west of the Project site, in accordance with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, the Project site would be effectively screened from the KOP 1 view. The City concurs with this conclusion (Tyhurst, 2002).

Temporary visual disturbances would occur along the proposed subtransmission line and along the gas pipeline alignment; however, construction activities would be short-term. Construction of these Project linear facilities is not expected to require the removal of ornamental trees or shrubs. However, after the linear facilities are installed, the area disturbed from construction activities would be returned to its pre-construction condition, minimizing the impact on the landscape.

[1] Each combustion turbine will have a pre-engineered and prefabricated cooling tower. The cooling towers will be located on steel frames above each chiller, The total height of each cooling tower, including the chillers, is 43 feet. Hoever, the height of the actual cooling towers is 20 feet.

Because of the: (1) industrial nature of the area in which the proposed plant would be constructed; (2) relatively few sensitive receptors that would have views of the proposed plant; (3) existing large structures in the vicinity of the plant that partially obstruct views of the plant; and (4) the development that is planned to occur on the parcels of land located to the west of the Project site, in accordance with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance, potential visual impacts due to the proposed MEGS plant would be less than significant. The plant would be largely screened from KOP 2 viewers by intervening industrial facilities. The Project would be further screened from the KOP 1 view by future planned development in the area. Where visible to viewers, the Project would present a subordinate level of contrast in the context of an already developed industrial setting of low to moderate visual quality. No significant impacts from the MEGS plant are anticipated.

There would be occasional visible vapor plumes emitted by the Project. Plumes emitted from the stack and/or cooling tower would not be present in warm weather. Plumes tend to form in the winter months, at night, and during early morning hours when the temperatures are very low and humidity is relatively high. If fog is present, plumes will not be discernible. Because of the measures MID will implement to reduce lighting at the plant, nighttime plumes that are created will not be illuminated at night and, therefore, will not be highly visible during nighttime hours.

Because of the industrial character of the area and because plumes are emitted from several sources in the vicinity (see Figures 8.11-1, 8.11-3, and 8.11-6), local sensitive receptors are likely accustomed to seeing them. Therefore, the presence of plumes that would occur occasionally at the proposed MEGS plant would not result in a significant impact on the visual character of the area. Plumes occasionally emitted from the proposed plant would not significantly detract from views of the area.

The proposed MEGS plant will create a new source of light at the Project site from the installation of Project facility lighting. Levels of daytime glare at the Project site are not expected to be affected. To minimize Project facility lighting being visible offsite, MID has committed to installing lights that are shielded and directed downward along the walkways. In addition, it has committed to install switches on the Project's taller facilities so that they will only be illuminated when needed. Due to the industrial character of the Project vicinity, the lack of sensitive receptors adjacent to the Project site, and MID's commitment to minimize light emissions offsite, the Project would not create a substantial source of light that would have an adverse effect on its setting, and would thus result in a less-than-significant impact on visual resources.

8.11.4.3 Cumulative Impacts

No significant cumulative visual impacts due to the Project are anticipated. The proposed MEGS plant and proposed subtransmission line and gas pipeline would not result in a significant contribution to cumulative impacts on the landscape character of the Project vicinity. This is because the proposed plant would be sited south of and adjacent to an existing industrial development and the 499-foot-high wireless cable tower already is a prominent feature from this viewpoint.

As discussed above and in Section 8.4, Land Use, the land adjacent to and west of the Project site is designated and zoned for industrial and residential development according to the

General Plan and Zoning Ordinance. Although no applications for projects have been submitted yet for the planned development on this land, it is acknowledged that the development will occur and that interest in the property has been expressed by industrial developers. Once development occurs, views of the Project site from the KOP 1 residence would be further screened, thus eliminating the less-than-significant impact from the Project, further reducing the Project's contribution to cumulative impacts on the landscape. The closest planned visible features to the KOP 1 residence would be new residences. The addition of these new residences to the view would not significantly degrade the view, but would be compatible with the landscape. Because the specifics of the planned industrial development that would be located east of (behind) the planned residences from this viewpoint are not known, what the KOP 1 viewers would see above and beyond the planned residences is also unknown. When those developments are proposed, they will undergo separate environmental (including visual resource) review and they will be located adjacent to an area that is planned and being used for industrial development.

Plumes from the proposed Project would likely occur at the same time as the plumes that are emitted from the other plume sources in the Project vicinity. Existing plume sources are identified on Figure 8.11-1, and photos of existing plumes in the Project vicinity are shown on Figures 8.11-3 and 8.11-6. This is because plumes form only under certain climatic conditions that are conducive to plume formation (i.e., low temperatures and high humidity). The overall frequency of visually dominant plumes seen within the viewshed is not expected to increase from what is currently seen; however, the number of plumes emitted in the viewshed would increase with implementation of the proposed Project. The number of viewers exposed to occasional visually dominant plumes is not expected to increase significantly. Thus, the overall landscape character of the affected environment is expected to remain essentially unchanged**.**

8.11.5 Mitigation

Because no significant impacts have been identified, no mitigation is necessary.

8.11.6 References

City of Ripon. 1998. *The City of Ripon General Plan 2035*. Adopted September 15.

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