

**Golden State Natural Resources Forest Resiliency Project  
January 22, 2024 EJ Stakeholders Listen & Share Session  
Meeting Summary**

*Document prepared by the Institute for Local Government*

Bob opened the meeting to welcome everyone. He emphasized that we are here not only to learn about the project but also to learn from the stakeholder community, answer questions and have an open discussion.

Melissa shared a few housekeeping items and invited a round of introductions

Meeting participants introduced themselves:

- Melissa Kuehne – Senior Program Manager, Institute for Local Government
- Hanna Stelmakhovych – Program Manager, Institute for Local Government
- Patrick Blacklock – CEO, the Rural County Representatives of California
- Maya Khosla - Sonoma County resident working to document Environmental Justice community concerns
- Mary Elizabeth – Stockton resident
- Bob Gutierrez – BG Strategies
- Pat Barret – Center Valley Gender Health Wellness and Strong Advocate of South Stockton
- Esperanza Vielma – Café Coup, EJCW, and Stockton resident
- Kim Robinson – Health Equity Program Coordinators, Reinvent South Stockton Coalition
- RC Thompson – Executive Director, Reinvent South Stockton Coalition
- Steve Peterson – Planning and Design Consultant, Kimley-Horn
- Carolyn Jhaji – Communications Director, RCRC
- Jason Linkewich – Senior consultant, Nexus PMG (joined via Zoom)

Melissa previewed the agenda and shared meeting goals.

Patrick emphasized that community feedback, especially from this group, is incredibly important. The project team is prioritizing community engagement and a transparent environmental analysis.

Patrick provided an overview of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and its role in assisting rural counties, highlighting the connection to the proposed Golden State Natural Resources Forest Resiliency Project (GSNR project) and the pellet manufacturing and transport process. The project aims to reduce high concentrations of fire-prone forest biomass, converting biomass from two forest health projects into industrial pellets at sites in Lassen and Tuolumne Counties. These pellets are then transported by train to the port for shipment to Europe and Asia for industrial use.

Currently, GSNR is in the process of preparing the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), expected to be ready for public and agency review in spring 2024. Community input on concerns and specific study areas is sought. To move forward with the full GSNR project, GSNR will need to secure private partners to fund these efforts.

The presentation was followed by an open group discussion and Q&A, with Melissa and Hanna charting and taking notes to capture the discussion.

## Q&A DISCUSSION

**Comment:** Thank you for providing insight into the process. It is a good practice to adopt a more transparent approach accessible to the general public, employing simple language, especially in areas where residents have firsthand experience with the impacts of various industrial projects in the past.

**Response:** We acknowledge the need for an open and transparent process and want to improve our communication and engagement with the Stockton community.

**Comment:** A trauma-informed engagement approach is needed for this process, particularly in light of past discussions/decisions that did not put people and their interests first. Stockton residents want to know the future impact of these projects. People are scared. In Stockton, people have a lower income ratio and less generational wealth. Your team needs to be open and honest about the potential cost factors and risks of the facilities holding these pellets catching fire. There is history of that. Be ready and prepared for this type of event. Have a financial bond if the pallet catches fire and a plan to support residents in the impacted areas.

**Response:** Thank you. We concur and these types of comments help inform the information that we need to include in the DEIR.

**Question (Q):** What type of response can be expected in the event of a fire?

**Answer (A):** The structure will resemble that of a warehouse consisting of two domes designed to store pellets until large enough for shipment quantities to accumulate. The advanced fire suppression system that utilizes nitrogen would suppress fires quickly. In contrast to traditional technology, these structures will be fully controlled, representing the cutting edge technology in risk management. Dust control measures, including dust collectors, will be in place to minimize dust in the area and contain any potential dust emissions.

**Q:** What types of jobs will this project generate?

**A:** It will generate a mix of jobs, encompassing roles such as loading vessels, along with approximately eight positions for staff at various supervision and quality inspection levels.

**Q:** Will you be using electric tractors or fuel/diesel equipment?

**A:** Currently, we are exploring the use of diesel equipment. However, we are open to considering electric vehicles. Presently, all transportation is conducted by rail, and two small mobile units will be responsible for clearing the bottom of the domes. The Port's Clean Air Plan recognizes the benefits of electric vehicles, but private companies operate these. RCRC can potentially advocate for a quicker transition to electric vehicles at the federal level.

**Q:** If you are not using electric tractors, can we conduct a drop-off before it reaches the port and use electric trucks for the remainder of the journey? Is it possible to initiate a project that includes heavy equipment training?

**A:** Regarding electrification, we do not have all the answers tonight. However, training is a viable option, as an example RCRC is exploring a partnership with a community college in Tuolumne County for a heavy equipment program. At the proposed Port site, the unloading carts are automated and electric. The process is predominantly automated, except for general cleanup at the bottom of the domes. There is no dropping or rehandling of the product; it is entirely automated and electric.

**Comment:** I have concerns about extra trucks coming in.

**Response:** It will be transported by rail. We've taken note of the community's preference for more rail transport over trucks. The plan involves utilizing a unit train carrying most of the volume every 4-5 days and the additional 4-8 cars as delivered. Our objective is to prioritize rail transportation and minimize reliance on road transport.

**Q:** How many additional trains, ships, and vessels are expected in this area?

**A:** Approximately 20-30 vessels per year, depending on customer demand.

**Comment:** It has to be a higher number because we don't get these big ships.

**Response:** The vessels have a maximum configuration of 35,000 tons. There are approximately 700 dedicated trains involved in the transportation process.

**Q:** What is the project location within the port?

**A:** The project is situated on the island where the rail site is located. It will be contained within the island and the port facility, specifically on the northeast side where the existing rail is situated. See attached site map.

**Q:** Will hiring be local?

**A:** We want to work with the community to gather input and prioritize local hiring practices.

**Comment:** In the workforce development aspect, planning and hiring within the community is essential, especially for higher-level positions. Develop a plan that involves collaboration with institutions like Delta College and local universities, exploring potential internship pathways (similar to the partnership between the Port of Los Angeles and the community). Housing Authority, for example, provides workforce training and hosted a cohort aimed at EV maintenance. It is important to view the port not just as an independent entity but as an opportunity for working hand-in-hand with the community for mutual development.

**Response:** It is noted. Outside of GSNR's project, there is GoSanJoaquin, a new collaborative involving adult school education providers and industries, that includes a mapped location of programs aligned with industry training. GoSanJoaquin will launch pathway programs to connect industries and educators sometime in spring.

**Q:** What is the plan to accommodate any displacement of unhoused individuals?

**A:** Accommodating homeless residents is not something we initially considered, but we will focus on this issue and define what, if any project-related impacts to unhoused individuals could occur. We can work with the county and organizations to define our potential role in responding to this concern.

**Follow up suggestion:** Consider working with the Housing Justice Coalition and the Reinvent South Stockton Coalition. Many homeless individuals do live around the port area.

**Q:** What will be the environmental toxins in the area from this project? Can you provide information on air quality and greenhouse gas (GHG) analysis? How will the air quality be managed throughout the project's lifecycle, including construction, operation, and the plan's overall lifespan?

**A:** CEQA and Title Plan Permitting includes decade-long consideration of potential impact and the EIR will contain a health risk assessment for the Stockton, Jamestown, and Neubieber communities. The analysis will be conducted in phases, beginning with the EIR, where the community can review the information. We have initiated conversations with the community and the Air District to determine what additional third-party analyses are needed. Once we have all the pieces, we will employ the best available technology to mitigate identified impacts. This information will be shared through online platforms, group sessions, mailing updates, and other forms of engagement.

**Q:** Have you assessed the project's impacts on the community? Specifically, will there be potential toxins in the water, and what additional implications will the increased truck activity have on the neighborhoods?

Considering transportation by train and operations at the port, there will be additional greenhouse gas emissions.

**A:** As noted above, a health risk assessment will be conducted and shared in the EIR. We are going through Title V stationary sources permitting. We are doing calculations and modeling. Aside from the rail activity for Stockton, there isn't a significant generation of products that qualify as toxic and carcinogenic. The primary impact is associated with train operations.

**Q:** How much dust will this project generate?

**A:** The pellets are pressed together during manufacturing and transportation. Dust collection and suppression processes will be implemented during the unloading and loading phases to ensure that dust is effectively removed from the air and contained.

**Q:** Why did the Port of Richmond turn down this project?

**A:** The Port of Richmond is a private port, and the port operator has recently faced litigation with the city of Richmond related to a coal terminal. The port chose not to proceed with additional projects that could pose a legal risk. They are prioritizing maintaining positive relations with the city. When initiating this project, we initially approached Richmond due to its advantageous transportation positioning. However, Stockton is also a viable alternative and was considered from the project's inception.

**Q:** If the standard procedure fails, what is the notification process to the community?

**A:** It takes time for the particles to accumulate, and one can tell which facility is well managed and which is not. Operational procedures will be in place to promote safe operating procedures and good housekeeping. There will also be well defined notifications in the event an incident occurs. Additionally, we will examine mishaps at other facilities to identify and implement additional mitigation factors.

**Follow-up Comment:** It might be challenging to track due to other dust and pollution sources in the port.

**A:** Will trains be idling or moving?

**Q:** While we may be impacted by traffic en route to the island, the plan is to minimize waiting times. We haven't gotten to developing the specific train schedules, but can explore options to prevent congestion.

**Comment:** The pellet production process generates emissions, and it's crucial to be transparent about the potential presence of toxins and dioxins. Lay out the process as it is. Openly discuss that forest cleanup doesn't always align with forest resilience projects, as natural fires also play a role in maintaining ecological balance. Recognize that this is a subject of debate and emphasize the need to acknowledge the project's entire life cycle, including its environmental implications.

**Response:** We did receive similar comments. While the CEQA process sets the project boundaries, we will address these life cycle questions as best we can, including citations from the available peer-reviewed science.

**Q:** San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD) is the permitting agency. Are there any other Air Districts involved?

**A:** Lassen County Air Pollution Control District and Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District.

**Q:** Whatever rail lines you are planning to use, can you try to reassess the routes to avoid transit at grade routes that cross traffic.

**A:** This comment was noted and alternative routes can be explored.

**Q:** When are you starting this project?

**A:** Moving forward will depend on completing CEQA and the permitting process, as well as securing project funding. We are actively seeking partners and exploring issuing bonds to support the project.

**Q:** Is the Port of Stockton on board with this project?

**A:** We have conducted initial, largely-informal coordination with the Port, but we have not presented with or signed any agreements for leasing Port property. The Port has not expressed a formal opinion on our project at this stage. The CEQA process is our primary focus at this time so that all environmental information and impacts can be submitted to the Port for consideration prior to seeking any formal approvals.

**Q:** Is the 20-year agreement with the Forest Service available on the website?

**A:** We can post it on the website.

**Q:** Are the railcars automated?

**A:** The railcars are similar to grain carts with a bottom feed drop chute. We are currently considering whether to lease or purchase them. If the railroads have these cars in their fleet, they may offer lease rates. However, dispatchable cars are not typically available, so there may need to be a mixed solution.

**Q:** Regarding air quality, will the public be able to participate in public monitoring?

**A:** We have not gotten to that mitigation measure, but we are open to working with you and the public to identify transparent monitoring mechanisms.

**Q:** Regarding GHG reduction, will combustion GHG be included in the study?

**A:** The entire project will be studied. There will be a study and literature review on the topic.

**Q:** Is there a possibility that this project may not proceed if these elements don't come together?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** What revenues will the project generate, and who will receive them?

**A:** There are many variables which will impact net revenue, some of which simply won't be known until the project is completed and fully funded. However, if revenue is generated, we would like to engage with the community to explore reinvestment opportunities.

**Q:** What is the size of the project sites in Tuolumne and Lassen Counties?

**A:** 58.5 acres in Tuolumne County and 298 acres in Lassen County

**Q:** What is the total funding needed for this project?

**A:** Approximately \$525 million.

**Q:** Will the rail go all the way in, or is there another drop-off component?

**A:** That isn't defined yet. The intent is to have the track available on the island to ensure that storage does not conflict with limited space.

**Comment:** The port is undergoing electrification. Consider checking if the SJVAPCD has additional funding for electrification and lower emissions at the last point.

**Response:** Yes, there is a potential opportunity for such a partnership.

**Comment:** Regarding the air quality analysis, you have to make hard estimates about the age of the rail, type of idling, and timing at various junctions, if the rail goes through an intermodal facility - these details need to be spelled out, as there is pollution associated with rail operations.

**Comment:** The EIR is a long and complex document. A 30-day comment period is not enough.

**Response:** Our goal for the document is to be as concise and accessible as possible.

**Comment:** Ensure that the community is informed about the potential impacts and keep updated on the progress of CEQA. Currently, things are still uncertain, particularly regarding rail impacts. It should be made clear. There should be air monitoring that is available to the public. Stockton is the most vulnerable port in CA.

**Comment:** Transparency is key, considering what has happened with other warehouses.

**Response:** We commit to making information readily available.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS**

Melissa asked the group to share suggestions for future community engagement:

- Include the Q&A from today's session in future engagements.
- Provide a printed version of the project page, considering limited internet access in South Stockton.
- Ensure language access with Spanish, Punjabi, Tagalog, and Hmong translations.
- Extend the CEQA timeline to a 60-day comment period and host multiple workshops for presentations and discussions, each focusing on specific CEQA sections.
- Allocate stipends for nonprofits to aid in outreach and project flyer.
- Conduct larger meetings to educate the community on the CEQA process before the commenting period, and host listening sessions with the community with at least two sessions in various locations and clear signage for direction locations: Conway Homes, Pixie Woods, Louis Park, Mount Diablo Area, Victory park.
- Avoid using acronyms and comprehensively explain environmental terms and processes for the public's understanding.
- Consider using text messages and radio, including Capital Public Radio, for outreach efforts.
- Provide a three-week notice for community meetings.
- Consider Saturday late morning as an ideal meeting time, as 5 pm may not be optimal.
- Prioritize safe meeting locations in Stockton, such as St. George church, Fair Grounds (where the flea market is. The facility can be too big, though. Signs are needed), Maya Angelou Library. (Food bank can pass out the food). VanBuskirk Community. Sierra Vista Community Center. Stribley Park.
- Offer hybrid meeting formats.
- Record all future meetings and have recordings accessible online.

### **Additional suggestions and action items heard during, before and after the meeting:**

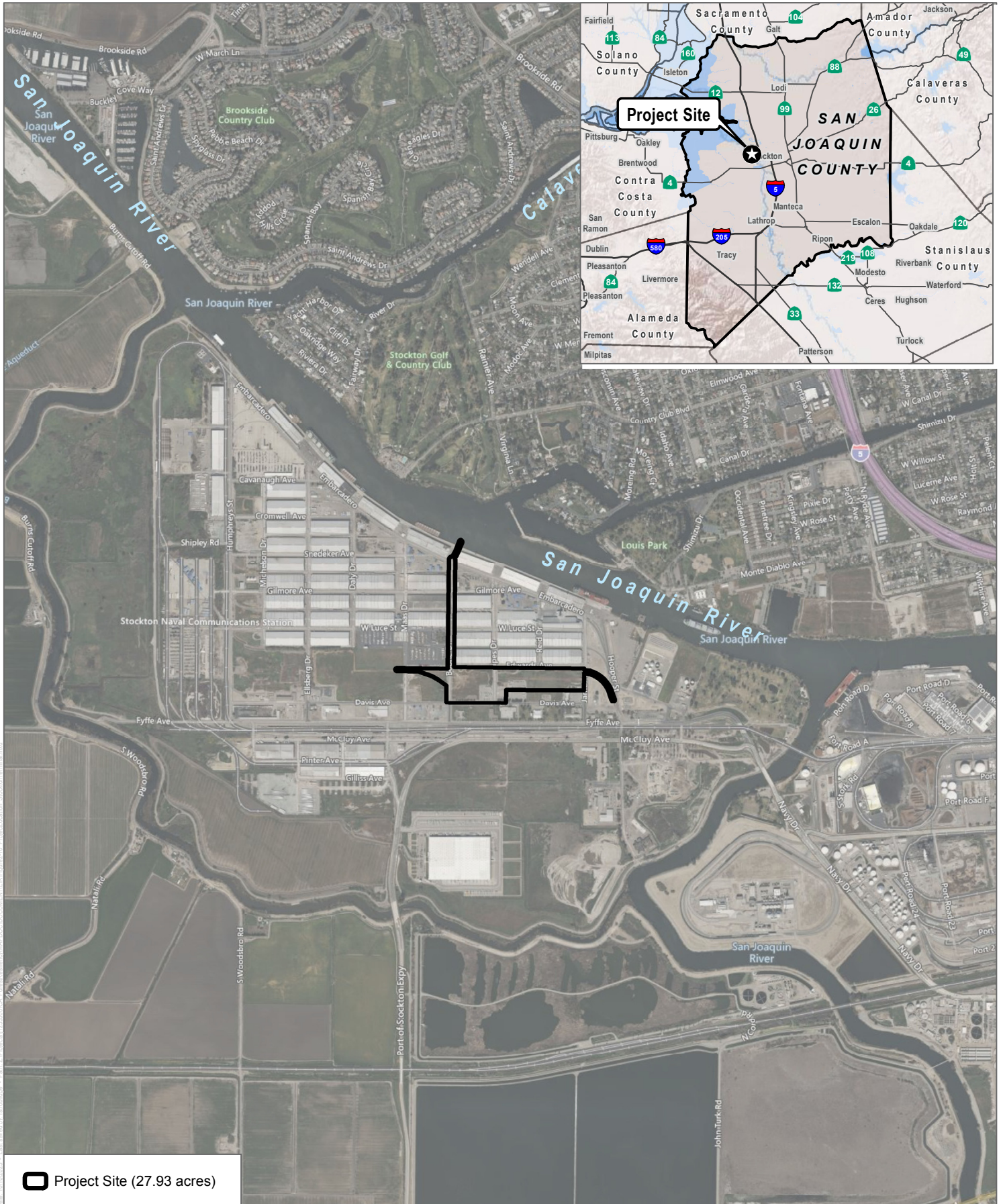
- Send out the notes to attendees.
- Continue these conversations with this group in addition to hosting listening sessions with the community.
- Provide information about mishaps from other pellet processing facilities and suggest additional mitigation measures that the Stockton Port can consider to prevent potential mishaps.
- Share the detailed site map with the community.
- Share the 20-year agreement with the Forest Service on the website.
- Share the revenues projected by the fiscal analysis.
- Survey locations, times, and dates for the next community discussion.
- Host community meetings before the CEQA draft is out to educate the community about what it is and prepare them to provide informed input once CEQA is out.



- Ensure that the impacts of this project (including a long-term impact of 20+ years) are well-understood, measured, and mitigated.

Bob informed the group that he would follow up with the date and locations for the next meeting. Melissa stated that the notes will be shared, expressed gratitude to everyone for attending and participating, and adjourned the meeting.





SOURCE: Bing Maps 2023, San Joaquin County 2021

**FIGURE 2-10**

**Project Location: Port Rough Terminal, Port of Stockton**