



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

Document prepared by the Institute for Local Government

Bob opened the meeting with a welcome to everyone, emphasizing GSNR's goal of learning from the stakeholder community, answering questions, and openly discussing the project. He informed the attendees that the website is now live and that recordings and meeting minutes would be available on the Golden State Natural Resources (GSNR) [website](#). Bob reiterated this is an open forum.

Melissa then addressed some housekeeping items and invited everyone to introduce themselves. She noted that the meeting is being recorded, though the room's acoustics might affect the recording quality.

Participants proceeded to introduce themselves.

- Melissa Kuehne – Senior Program Manager, Institute for Local Government
- Hanna Stelmakhovych – Program Manager, Institute for Local Government
- Patrick Blacklock – President & CEO, the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)
- Bob Gutierrez – BG Strategies
- Steve Peterson – Planning and Design Consultant, Kimley-Horn
- Carolyn Jhaji – Communications Director, RCRC
- Jason Linkewich – Senior consultant, Nexus PMG (joined via Zoom)
- Jennifer Reed – Dudek Environmental Consultant (joined via Zoom)
- Gary Graham Hughes – Americas Program Coordinator, Biofuelwatch
- Lueathel Seawood – African-American Chamber of Commerce
- Lisa Vela – San Joaquin County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Pat Barrett – Center Valley Gender Health and Wellness and Strong Advocate of South Stockton
- Julie Dunning – Tree Stockton, EJ advocate
- Jasmine Peterson – Environmental Justice Internal Director, Little Manila and South Stockton resident
- RC Thompson – Executive Director, Reinvent South Stockton Coalition
- Matt Holmes – California Environmental Justice Coalition
- Chris Rouppe – Chief of Staff for Supervisor Miguel Villapudua

Melissa provided a preview of the agenda, shared the meeting goals, and emphasized that the purpose of the meeting is to listen to the community and learn how GSNR can best partner with the community.

Patrick welcomed the participants, highlighting the importance of community feedback, particularly from this group. He outlined some of the feedback the project team has received from the community, including the need for increased engagement and concerns about trains, fire safety and air quality.

Patrick provided an overview of the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and its role in assisting rural counties. He highlighted RCRC's connection to the proposed Golden State Natural Resources Forest Resiliency Project (GSNR project).

There is a need for a commercially sustainable solution to remove biomass from California's forests to improve forest resiliency and help prevent catastrophic wildfire. GSNR's project aims to reduce high concentrations of

fire-prone biomass in California’s forests by procuring and processing biomass into industrial wood pellets at two purpose-built facilities in Lassen and Tuolumne counties. These pellets would then be transported by train to the Port of Stockton for shipment internationally for industrial use. The pellets may then be used as a replacement for coal in countries that are shifting away from coal to meet their sustainability goals. The demand for wood pellets is increasing.

The challenges of wildfires are not unique to rural areas. There is a statewide impact of air pollution from fire smoke, and we all have an interest in making our forests more resilient and reducing catastrophic wildfires.

The Golden State Finance Authority, which is an independent agency, is acting as the CEQA lead agency and its environmental consultants are completing the draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on the project. Once the EIR is certified, the next step would be securing funding partners for implementation of the project. The EIR is expected to be ready for public and agency review in spring 2024. The RCRC team is seeking community input on the process, potential concerns, specific study areas, and the best ways to share the EIR with the general community in the Stockton area.

Currently, there is no agreement with the Port of Stockton. The first step is to complete and certify the EIR so the Port of Stockton has information on environmental impacts before considering a lease agreement for the specific project.

Comment: The California Environmental Protection Act (CEQA) outreach started in November 2022, and now you are back for more scoping.

Answer: We are here to conduct additional community engagement as we continue the development process and before we release the draft EIR. We want to improve our proactive engagement with the community.

Jason and Jennifer shared more information about project.

It is estimated that wood pellets will be delivered from the Lassen County facility to the Port of Stockton via 70 unit trains every year. That amounts to 1 unit train every 4-5 days. From the Tuolumne County facility, GSNR will deliver pellets to the Port utilizing existing unit trains, using 4-8 train cars at a time, that would total to 30 equivalent unit trains per year. Fire safety will be addressed by designing concrete-based domes equipped with a nitrogen system capable of suppressing fires and promptly detecting and containing them. The proposed design prioritizes fire safety. The project is projected to create approximately 8 permanent full-time jobs.

The EIR air quality and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions analyses will assess the project as a whole, considering factors such as location, project components, and emission sources. At the Port, emission sources include trains, ships, storage/conveyance, offroad equipment, and employee vehicles; no heavy-duty trucks are anticipated. Additionally, the team plans to conduct health risk assessments, focusing on issues such as cancer and chronic diseases. Air quality analyses will be conducted for both construction and operations phases. While CEQA activities will primarily address the project's scope, the team intends to incorporate additional information beyond CEQA's scope to address concerns raised by the community. This includes evaluating the wood pellet lifecycle and assessing how the project aligns with local emission reduction initiatives outlined in the AB 617 Stockton's Community Emission Reduction Program (CERP).

Melissa invited participants to individually review the Q&A handout from the January 22, 2024 EJ stakeholder meeting and then opened the floor for questions and discussion.

Q&A AND LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

Question (Q): Who will be making the final approval? Who will be addressing community concerns?

Answer (A): The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be certified by Golden State Finance Authority, a governmental entity, that is governed by a 40-member board comprised of county supervisors. The decision regarding the project's facility will be made by the Port of Stockton (Port) Commission. The purpose of this meeting (and other community and stakeholder meetings) is to listen to and address the concerns as we prepare the draft EIR.

Comment (C): Thank you for providing an opportunity to participate early in the process and being willing to convene the community to hear and address concerns.

Q: What are the job positions that the project is proposing? Will they be union jobs?

A: The project will introduce eight new positions: track mobile operator, four labor positions, supervisor, terminal operators, and maintenance staff. It has not yet been determined if these jobs will be unionized.

Q: What about the building phase and the number of people employed?

A: The construction phase will last approximately 18 months. The hiring process will include Bid/RFP opportunities with prevailing wage considerations.

Q: Is there a commitment to hire locally?

A: We are open to exploring it. This is the type of community feedback we are looking for.

C: Please use layman's terms and explain concepts. We don't know what AB 617 and CERP are.

A: Understood, we'll make sure to use simpler language and explain those concepts.

C: This project will add to local pollution in our already burdened community. Large trucks often idle near our schools, further contributing to air pollution.

Q: How does the rail get from Oakdale to here? What rail lines will you be using? You say you are not using trucks, but I don't believe it.

A: We are currently in preliminary discussions with rail representatives, and we haven't finalized any contracts yet. However, there are mechanisms in place to ensure that rail transportation is the primary method for delivery. The EIR is the process through which we determine the project's logistics, and it currently only considers the rail option. If, for any reason, we were to propose a supplemental delivery method, such as trucks, we would need to amend the EIR accordingly and undergo additional environmental review. However, we don't anticipate this scenario. Essentially, once the EIR is certified and if rail cannot be used for delivery, the project cannot move forward without further environmental review.

C: The initial EIR notice went out November 2022, but we have not heard about the project since. You need to make sure people are aware of this project.

A: It is duly noted.

Q: What about the cumulative impact with all other projects coming into the Stockton community – hydrogen production, three warehouses, and truck traffic? No one is addressing the cumulative effect on our community, especially on the historically marginalized community that has been experiencing these generational impacts.

A: Currently, the City of Stockton is collaborating with the Port to reroute truck traffic (not related to GSNR's proposed project). For GSNR's project, GSNR is working with other agencies to gather data and comprehend the cumulative impact. This is precisely why we are here today – to understand the types of cumulative impacts we are dealing with and quantify them. These cumulative effects will be evaluated and reported in the EIR.

Follow-up comment: The emissions will not be confined to the rerouted areas.

C: As AB 617 is implemented to reduce localized emission sources, it seems counterproductive as agencies continue to approve more polluting projects. For instance, the City of Stockton prioritizes cutting down trees to repair sidewalks. Although the CERP includes tree planting measures, it appears that little action has been taken.

C: As you engage with this community, it's crucial to recognize the prevailing political climate. We have policies that often prioritize short-term solutions, but what we truly need is a long-term policy that addresses the root cause of the problem. There is a division between those advocating for quick solutions and job creation. Historically, we haven't witnessed significant changes for over 60 years, and the status quo remains largely unchanged.

C: This seems to be another extractive business model. What benefits does the community gain from it? What community benefits are being proposed? Additionally, what are the cumulative impacts of all these projects combined? The construction phase will only last 18 months, and the project is projected to create only 8 jobs. What broader positive impacts will it bring to the community in the long run?

C: What is the business compromise? How about sharing profits with a foundation? It's essential to ask the community about their needs and the resources they require. When creating an industry in a marginalized city like Stockton, there should be something given back to the community.

C: What about all the other agencies and companies that operate here? While we consider the benefits that these projects may bring, we also need to assess their potential health impacts. We are striving for diversity and inclusion. How can we achieve this? Additionally, where will people find jobs if there are no local opportunities? Will they need to seek employment in the Bay Area? It's crucial to prioritize hiring from within the community, including hiring local residents and individuals from diverse backgrounds such as Latinos.

Q: What about additional pathways into jobs such as scholarships, and on the job training programs?

A: We are talking to potential partners and can explore this.

Follow-up comment: Having an advisory committee is another option.

C: Who will be responsible for notifying the affected areas about this project and its potential impacts? It's essential to inform neighborhoods about the arrival of another source of pollution to the area.

C: Inform surrounding neighborhoods and parents about this project generating pollution. Ensure that true informed consent is formed. Inform the parents and homeowners about project's pros *and* cons so that the community can make comparisons.

C: How can you prevent negative PR? Show preventive measures by taking action and collaborating with community-based organizations (CBOs); discuss the pros and cons and establish an advisory committee.

C: Engage with public health professionals and seek their insights. Let's hear directly from them to gain a better understanding of the potential health impacts and considerations associated with the project.

C: This project is unnecessary, especially considering that global warming impacts all regions regardless of where materials are transported. Have we considered engaging with stakeholders regarding project impacts in other parts of the state? For instance, emissions from this project may travel and settle in the Yosemite Valley. It's essential to think beyond immediate concerns and consider the broader impacts on future generations, including our children.

Q: What is the benefit for children from this project?

A: One of the supervisors who initiated this project was a Mariposa County Supervisor and served a decade as the Deputy Superintendent/Chief Operating Officer of Yosemite National Park. Over the last 20 years, we've observed a rise in wildfire smoke from catastrophic wildfires due to unsustainable forest management practices. Studies indicate the direct impacts of wildfire pollution on children, including reduced school performance, lower test scores, and fewer school days.

Follow-up comment: Catastrophic fires are also unpredictable and sporadic.

C: We need to establish leadership precedents by prioritizing sustainable solutions, collaborating with South Stockton residents, and ensuring that project benefits reach them. Clearing forests is cheaper for individuals compared to implementing underground wiring to prevent catastrophic wildfires. We must consider the long-term environmental and community benefits. Thank you for allowing us to share our perspectives on what is happening in Stockton. This is a great project.

Q: Portions of the project locations appear to be on tribal land. Have you reached out to the tribes, and if so, what was the content of those conversations?

A: We have contacted the Chicken Ranch Rancheria Me-Wuk Indians of California, who hosted one of GSNR's public meetings in Tuolumne County. They support this forest solution. Overall, GSNR's tribal outreach is ongoing. Additional details will be provided through the environmental review process as appropriate and with utmost respect to tribal interests.

Follow-up comment: Talk to Restore the Delta, as they can connect you with tribal governments.

Q: Are you anticipating 100 tons of air pollution annually? Is that an accurate statement? It's likely that the actual amount will exceed that estimate.

A: The EIR is where the numbers will be presented to the public to review, critique and correct. Currently, there are many moving parts in the process. We've had an initial meeting with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to approve the air pollution measuring methodology, but the models are not yet complete.

Q: Are you extending the EIR timeline to allow for more thorough study? Take additional time to ensure the study is comprehensive.

A: No timeline extension has been determined at this time. We are currently focusing on refining the project description and engaging with various stakeholders to learn and understand their concerns. Our aim is to approach this process in partnership with the community. We recognize that establishing an industrial facility comes with significant responsibility. As we continue discussions with numerous groups, we are committed to

retaining control and staying true to the mission, regardless of the private partners we may engage with to bring this project to fruition.

C: A safety plan is crucial. In the event of a fire breaking out, have a coordinated emergency response. Talk to all relevant agencies, including the city, schools, fire department, and others, to ensure effective communication and collaboration in managing emergencies.

C: The Golden State Finance Authority finances the CEQA process and holds the authority to make the final decision on the EIR/certify EIR. Is that a conflict of interest?

Q: Ensure a minimum of 60 days for comments once the EIR is released. What is the anticipated EIR release date? It's crucial to dedicate significant effort to inform residents when the CEQA is available for review.

A: We are currently working on several analyses that will undergo internal review and then be reviewed by the lead agency. We will keep you informed about the anticipated release date. However, it is unlikely to be released before the end of March.

C: GSNR needs to collaborate with the community and empower residents and CBOs to disseminate information to the people of South Stockton. It's important to strategically canvass to actively engage and inform individuals in the area.

Hanna summarized suggestions and comments that we've heard during the meeting and asked the group if anything was missing. Bob closed the meeting by discussing the next steps, which included getting on the email list, participating in the Doodle poll for a larger March community meeting, and collaborating with local organizations to inform the community.

Additional suggestions and action items:

- Use clear, simple language when discussing the project.
- Have Patrick present the information.
- Ensure widespread awareness of the project.
- Investigate cumulative impacts from all Stockton projects generating new pollution.
- Explore community benefit models and other opportunities for giving back to the community. Consult with the community on potential benefits, such as local employment, career pathways, and scholarships.
- Notify neighborhoods, parents, and homeowners if project will bring additional pollution.
- Provide truly informed consent by sharing the project's pros and cons for community comparison.
- Consult with public health professionals and involve them in the process, including presenting to the community.
- Connect with Restore the Delta to reach more tribal governments.
- Take adequate time for comprehensive EIR analysis and consider extending public comment periods for review.
- Engage with schools within the 3-mile project radius. Notify parents and hold school listening sessions.
- Confirm rail capacity and provider commitments.
- Develop a safety plan and community bond in case of fire outbreaks.
- Ensure community engagement is accessible and literacy-friendly. Translate materials into at least three languages: Spanish, Hmong, and Tagalog. Collaborate with CBOs.