

**Golden State Natural Resources Forest Resiliency Project**  
**Listen & Share In-Person Public Meeting**  
**March 27, 2024**  
**6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.**  
**2101 E. Earhart Ave., Stockton, California 95206**

**Meeting Summary**

*Document prepared by the Institute for Local Government*

**Introductions & Presentation**

Hanna Stelmakhovych (Institute for Local Government) welcomed the participants, shared a few housekeeping items, reviewed the handouts and checked the translation before passing it to Supervisor Kingsley.

Inyo County Supervisor Matt Kingsley (Chair, Golden State Natural Resources) officially opened the meeting, introduced himself and had other the Golden State Natural Resources (GSNR) board members introduce themselves including: Rex Bohn, Humboldt County Supervisor; Geri Byrne, Modoc County Supervisor; and Doug Teeter, Butte County Supervisor.

Steve Peterson (Planning and Design Consultant, Kimley-Horn) shared a brief presentation about the Golden State Natural Resources Forest Resiliency Project (GSNR project), pellet manufacturing and transport process, California Environmental Protection Act (CEQA) process as well as major community feedback themes that the project team has heard. Patrick Blacklock (Executive Director, GSNR) also provided a brief overview of the mission and organizational structure of GSNR. Steve opened the floor for public comment, encouraging participants to keep their comments brief and noting that the purpose of the meeting was for the board members in attendance to hear from everyone. Steve along with Patrick also responded to public comments and questions as feasible.

**Public Comment**

**Comment (C):** I appreciate some board members being present tonight, there appeared to be some lack of board attention to the project overall. It is important to address air quality in Stockton, particularly in advance of bringing in additional trains and ships. Please prioritize the community's interests.

**C:** Suggest exploring potential collaboration with the timber industry to coordinate the production of other products and removal costs. It is necessary to engage with other landowners.

**Response (R):** The project team does not anticipate participating in timber sales; instead, they are focusing on addressing the overgrowth identified by the Forest Service. Due to the density of the growth and the small diameters of stunted trees, the product isn't suitable for timber use. Actions are being taken with guidance from the Forest Service and analyzed through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. GSNR will be implementing forest thinning, not clear-cutting.

**C:** The PowerPoint lists community concerns but doesn't clarify how they are being addressed. Gratitude was expressed that some board members were present and hoped they had a chance to visit parts of the city to see the disinvestment. Concerns were raised about the lack of Zoom recordings for GSNR public

meetings questioning how the public can engage with the board if they are not available at that specific time.

**C:** Treating the forest as a product is a concern. How are excess fire fuels defined? What are the implications when these fuels are no longer available? Will living trees be cut down to make pellets? The roles of the Golden State Finance Authority (GSFA) and GSNR are not clear in terms of how the two agencies are monitored. Are there plans in place to replant trees?

**C:** Request for the project team to respond to questions as they are raised by attendees.

**C:** Concerns were expressed about how removing trees can be considered forest resilience, noting that efforts seem to focus only on markets where there is an ability to make money. Forest fires are most destructive where slash and haul out efforts have been done. Raised questions about the practice of hauling out healthy trees and GSNR partnering with DRAX based on their company history.

**C:** Concerns were raised that burning wood pellets emits more CO<sub>2</sub> than coal, that the production facilities produce chemicals, and harmful emissions are released when burning pellets. They asked how these emissions are offset.

**R:** The CEQA process is underway for each facility, examining the entire process, and those numbers will be shared in the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR), including the background calculations and science behind it. Additionally, a health risk assessment is being conducted for each facility, assessing potential effects on surrounding residents, as well as current and anticipated levels of emissions.

**Question (Q):** If data doesn't look good, what happens?

**Answer (A):** The GSFA and responsible agencies would consider the data and determine if the project should move forward. If there are impacts that can't be mitigated to less than significant, they would need to determine the appropriate mitigation measures.

**C:** Thank you supervisors for attending. We hope that you will have the chance to visit the Port and the surrounding neighborhood. Many community members were unaware of the meetings and suggested that using social media for advertising when many residents lacked internet access, was not the best approach. Door-to-door outreach and holding meetings at schools or near the Port where the community feels safe were recommended. Environmental Justice (EJ) communities that have historically been marginalized by the state and the Port bear the brunt of the impacts of this project, citing it as an example of environmental racism and increased rail and ship traffic. New CARB requirements will be going into effect for the Port in 2027 and will require an off-site power source. Does GSNR's agreement with the Port accommodate them installing an off-site power source for these ships so they aren't idling. Wood pellets produced and supplied to the UK from the US are responsible for 13-16 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, whereas wildfires in California produce 9 million metric tons. What is the difference between the emissions from fires in California and the burning of wood pellets overseas?

**R:** Regarding two of the questions you mentioned, the EIR will also track emissions from the ships, and those calculations will be shared. Additionally, there is currently no agreement and no lease with the Port.

**Q:** How will the project deal with new/forthcoming CARB requirements?

**A:** The studies are forward-looking and will take into account the forthcoming regulations.

**C:** GNSR reached out to the Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC) and Environmental Justice Coalition for Water (EJCW) to assist with outreach. RSSC conducted canvassing, phone banking and social media outreach to engage with multiple generations and inform residents about workshops and upcoming Draft EIR comment opportunities, handing out over 700 flyers. The outreach approach was resident-centered, focusing on how to get residents engaged and share information. RSSC hopes others will join to support keeping residents informed.

**C:** Residents living near the Port suffer from asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The GSNR project will help to bring in jobs. Unfortunately, no one showed up on Saturday (March 23 Informational Session) despite the information being available on the [website](#). There's a need to come together to work on solutions instead of fighting with each other. No one is currently raising concerns at city hall about the warehouses, for example.

**C:** EJCW has also been conducting outreach. It's always challenging to get people to attend meetings on Saturdays. Given the large area in Stockton, they did what they could. They were not given the outreach opportunity like that with the warehouse projects - the City of Stockton did not make an effort to disseminate information or provide outreach funding.

**C:** Also concerned about warehouses, emphasizing the lack of a cumulative Stockton impacts study. The area is already overburdened. The GSNR project and the approach seem to be trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. The wildfire issue has been misrepresented, citing the example of the devastating Weed wildfire that started at a biomass plant. It is concerning that GSNR's proposal is to build more facilities in areas of the state that are already impacted by wildfires.

**R:** Cumulative impacts will be considered in GSNR's DEIR air quality analysis.

**Q:** If the analysis finds there are significant challenges here, will you change course on locating the project at the Port?

**A:** The CEQA process is all about disclosure to the community and lead agencies. The lead agency (GSFA) will need to consider the results of the EIR and make their decision accordingly.

**Q:** Are you conducting a NEPA process as well?

**A:** The NEPA analysis is in process for the proposed project in the Modoc National Forest. This project is an independent federal action and is likely to conclude at the end of the Spring.

**Q:** Do GSFA and GSNR have the same governing board? Isn't GSFA the lead agency for the project and provided the initial loan for GSNR? The only way for GSFA to recoup its loan is to complete a successful CEQA process, correct?

**A:** GSFA and GSNR are two different organizations and do not share the same board. GSFA is the lead agency for the project. Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) is the umbrella organization. I (Steve) cannot speak to the details of the project's financing; I don't have the details on that information.

**C:** It is against the law to overburden EJ communities, this could potentially lead to a Title 6 lawsuit.

**C:** There is a Planning Commission meeting to discuss the warehouse ordinance, hope to see everyone there.

**Q:** Can you clarify the relationship between RCRC, GSNR, and GSFA?

**Master Response:** Patrick Blacklock, RCRC President and CEO, provided responses to some of the recurring questions/themes. He shared that he works for 40 elected officials across the state who are eager to understand the impacts before making decisions. The impacts will be assessed through a life cycle air quality analysis, even though CEQA does not require it. There are questions about whether the project will move forward. The charge is to promote healthy forests; if the project doesn't meet this charge, it may not move forward. There are also questions about the relationship between agencies, RCRC, GSNR, and GSFA are public agencies and therefore follow the same decision-making procedures and exercise similar discretion as other public entities. The mission is to reinvest in communities. RCRC recognizes that it does not have established relationships in Stockton. These meetings aim to understand how to be a good community partner and determine the community benefit needs. The answers to the raised questions may not be available tonight but will come forth in the coming weeks and months. Forest health is not the only way to serve rural communities; other aspects like broadband are also important.

**C:** A year and a half ago, there was no desire to conduct any meetings or outreach in Stockton. Community concerns have still not been addressed.

**C:** GSNR's mission is not solely focused on forest resilience but rather on economic recovery. Stockton cannot bear additional impacts on its quality of life and the cumulative impacts that make this project unpalatable. Information about this meeting was shared with Stockton City Councilmembers and candidates for Council, only one candidate is in attendance.

**Q:** Can you respond to the previous comment about economic recovery?

**A:** The absolute driving factor is forest health. Studies published by the Nature Conservancy and the University of British Columbia support this approach. While the project does need to be financially sustainable, the primary mission is focused on forest health.

**Q:** If the primary focus isn't about money, then why pellets?

**A:** Relying on federal infrastructure one-time dollars isn't sustainable. There is a need to find a commercially viable response to ensure long-term sustainability. Pellets make economic sense and can fund forest health projects on an ongoing basis.

**C:** There is a need to find commercially viable options because rural communities have been neglected by the state. This is a real opportunity for collaboration and working together.

**Q:** Was there a feasibility analysis of other options that were considered before deciding on pellets?

**R:** A business case had to be made, and GSNR found this to be a viable process.

**C:** Under CEQA, a lead agency must be a public agency.

**R:** GSFA is a public agency.

**Q:** Can the business feasibility study be shared?

**A:** While the document is not posted on the website, copies can be provided upon request.

**C:** Industry has significantly impacted the community over generations and the community is now trying to reclaim community health. There is a need for real solutions to the climate crisis that also provide genuine opportunities to the community. It is concerning to only being given 30 days for the EIR review when they had requested 60-90 days, especially considering the community is already overburdened.

**C:** I would like to echo the community's concerns regarding health and safety. There are repeated issues of fires at ports associated with biomass projects and their cumulative impacts. This project will emit climate pollution at all stages—from cutting down trees and truck trips to facilities to facility emissions, trains, ships, and burning overseas, resulting in a net increase in carbon pollution. In California, climate change is the key driver of wildfires. In hot, windy climates, logging will not stop wildfires nor reduce smoke impacts. We should be protecting forests rather than thinning them. There is a need for real solutions that will protect the community, the climate, and the forest.

**C:** I've witnessed climate change's devastating impacts on communities in the Southwest US and am worried about similar impacts coming to California, particularly affecting EJ communities. It's concerning that port commissioners are not present at the meeting and questioned the relationships with companies like Drax.

**R:** There is no agreement with the Port yet.

**C:** GSNR sent an agreement to the Port in November. Many people at the Port were not aware of this agreement. If the Port doesn't sign this agreement, they won't have advanced access to the EIR and won't be able to add mitigation measures for Stockton. Thank you for including the cumulative air quality impacts, will the cumulative impacts of trains also be included?

**R:** The information will be part of the baseline data for the EIR.

**C:** While there's no agreement in place with rail companies, rail companies are hard to work with. How does the community of Oakdale feel about this? It's the only way to get trains from Tuolumne to Stockton."

**R:** Outreach was conducted in Tuolumne.

**C:** We absolutely need an extension to comment on EIR.

**C:** When will the Zoom recordings of GSNR meetings be posted?

Steve thanked participants for the comments and shared that GSNR looks forward to continuing to work with the community. Please sign up on the sign-in sheet so we can stay in contact.

**Public Comment and Meeting Wrap-up**

Supervisor Kingsley closed public comment related to the GSNR project and opened public comment on items not on the agenda. There were no additional public comments.

Supervisor Kingsley mentioned that, as county supervisors, they have experience in working with communities on controversial issues. The board members who were present appreciated hearing the informed and high-level comments during tonight's meeting and will ask staff to continue engagement and address the feedback received.