

## 4.13 AESTHETICS

### 4.13.1 SETTING

The four electric generating plants are located in the greater San Francisco Bay Area, an area that is generally considered to have a scenic resource value. Coastal hills and bay areas are generally highly sensitive to visual impacts. Bay landscapes are commonly open, affording clear views over a range of viewing distances from the immediate foreground to the horizon. Land forms and patterns (e.g., the curve of the shoreline itself) are often distinctive in their shapes, colors, and textures; small changes in existing landscape elements or the introduction of features that are modest in scale may be visually prominent and disruptive. The location of the Potrero Power Plant is surrounded by heavy industrial and commercial uses. The Pittsburg and Contra Costa Power Plants are located in mixed-use areas, while the Geysers geothermal plant units are in rural, unincorporated areas of Sonoma and Lake Counties.

Structures at all four power plants are large-scale, regular and simple in form, and without decorative architectural treatments and exterior ornaments. Structural and operating system components (e.g., framing members and pipes) are open to view. Building materials are predominantly steel and concrete, and colors and exterior finishes are flat and subdued.

The existing visual character of the project sites is determined by the attributes (color, form, texture) of specific site features and by the patterns that the features have assumed as a result of natural and/or cultural processes. Evaluation of potential project impacts on the existing visual character of the site requires analysis of the type and degree of change in visual attributes and patterns that could result from implementation of the project. Because perceptions of changes in the physical characteristics of a site may differ with respect to issues of importance and value, visual analysis methods may incorporate measures of viewer sensitivity in addition to evaluation of the attributes and patterns of site features.

### 4.13.2 LOCAL SETTING

#### **Potrero Power Plant**

The plant is situated on Potrero Point along the western shore of San Francisco Bay, midway between Central Basin to the north and Islais Creek Channel to the south. The visual character of the site is typical of the industrialized portion of San Francisco. The project site is not clearly visible in its entirety from points within one-half mile. A small inlet, referred to as Warm Water Cove, lies just south of the plant. The site elevation ranges from about 10 to 24 feet. San Francisco's southeastern waterfront is an area of light and heavy industry and commercial business. The vicinity includes shipping piers and dry-dock facilities along the waterfront; vehicle storage and impoundment yards to the north; gas stations, warehouses, factories, and various small commercial businesses to the west; and railroad yards and trucking company sites to the south. Residential housing on Potrero Hill is located approximately one-half mile west of the site (see Figures 4.13-1a and -1b).



4.13.1a Aerial view of project site and vicinity.



4.13.1b View of project site from 23rd and 3rd Streets looking east.

SOURCE: Pacific Gas and Electric; Environmental Science Associates

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**Figure 4.13-1**  
Views of the Potrero  
Power Plant Project Site

No scenic routes are identified within the site vicinity, and the facilities are not prominent features in any scenic vistas.

### **Contra Costa Power Plant**

PG&E's Contra Costa and Pittsburg Power Plants are both located in unincorporated areas of Contra Costa County alongside the Bay Delta, which is formed by the confluence of the Sacramento, Mokelumne, and San Joaquin Rivers as they enter the San Francisco Bay. Hence, the plants are often referred to as the "Delta" plants. They are sited on low, flat ground, including some adjacent marshy land, with low hills about three to four miles to the south.

The Contra Costa Power Plant is located about 2.5 miles east of the Antioch town center on the southern bank of the San Joaquin River near the Antioch Bridge. The river system east of the plant is characterized by marshes, wetlands, mudflats and shallow bays. The site is bounded by light manufacturing, undeveloped open space, a chemical manufacturing facility, a boating marina, and parkland. A residential area is located to the southwest. The power plant is visible from several locations in the immediate area (see Figures 4.13-2a and -2b).

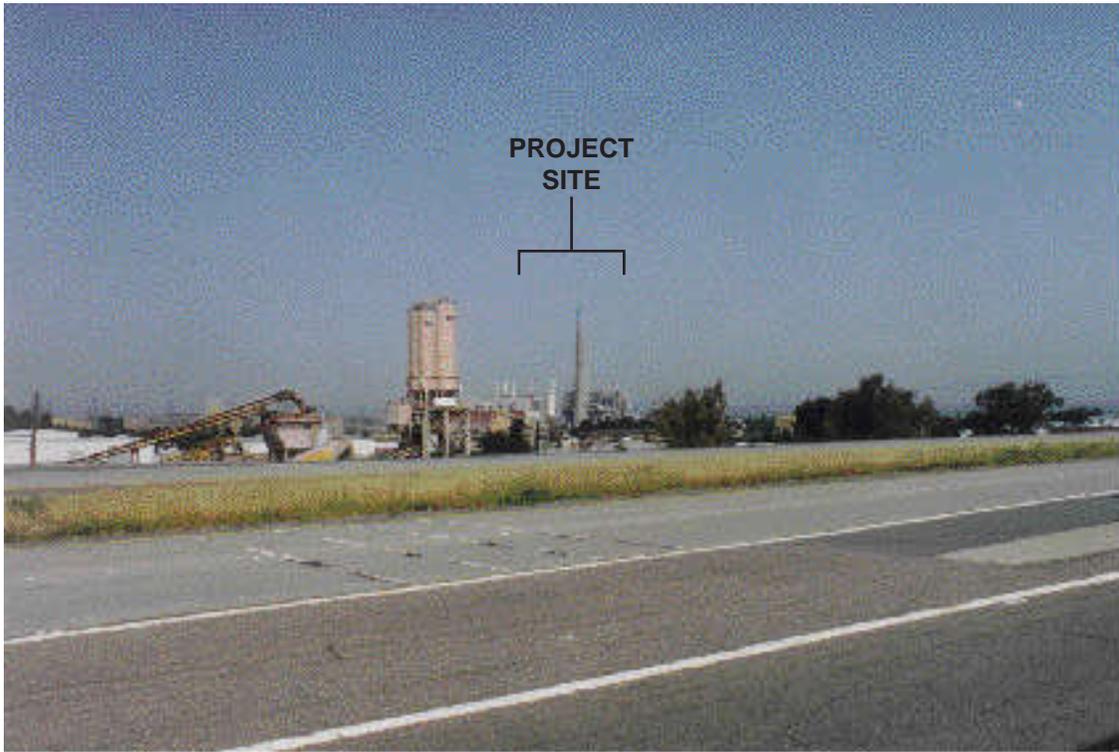
No scenic routes are identified within the site vicinity, and the facilities are not prominent features in any scenic vistas.

### **Pittsburg Power Plant**

The Pittsburg Power Plant is located on Suisun Bay in an unincorporated area on the west side of the City of Pittsburg, about 10 miles upstream from the inland boundary of the Carquinez Strait at Martinez and about five miles downstream from the Contra Costa plant. The site consists of low, flat ground, including mostly unused, low-lying marshy land, with low hills about three to four miles to the south. Site elevation is 6-8 feet above mean sea level. The site is bounded by commercial, residential, and undeveloped open land, including a wetland to the west with an elevation of 0-1 feet above mean sea level (see Figures 4.13-3a and -3b). No scenic routes or vistas are identified within the site vicinity.

### **Geysers Power Plant**

The Geysers plant is located in the Geysers area of the Mayacmas Mountains in Sonoma and Lake Counties, approximately 27 miles northeast of Healdsburg, California. The Mayacmas Mountains range in elevation from approximately 2,500 to over 4,500 feet in this area. Several rivers including Big Sulphur Creek, Little Sulphur Creek, Hot Springs Creek, Bear Canyon Creek, Squaw Creek, and Anderson Creek flow through the Geysers area. All of the generating units are similar in design but all facilities are not identical. The most prominent aesthetic characteristics of all the Geysers units are their cooling towers, steam-supply piping, and steam plumes (see Figures 4.13-4a and -4b).



4.13.2a View of project site from Highway 4 and Oakley Road looking north.



4.13.2b View of project site from Wilbur Avenue looking northeast.

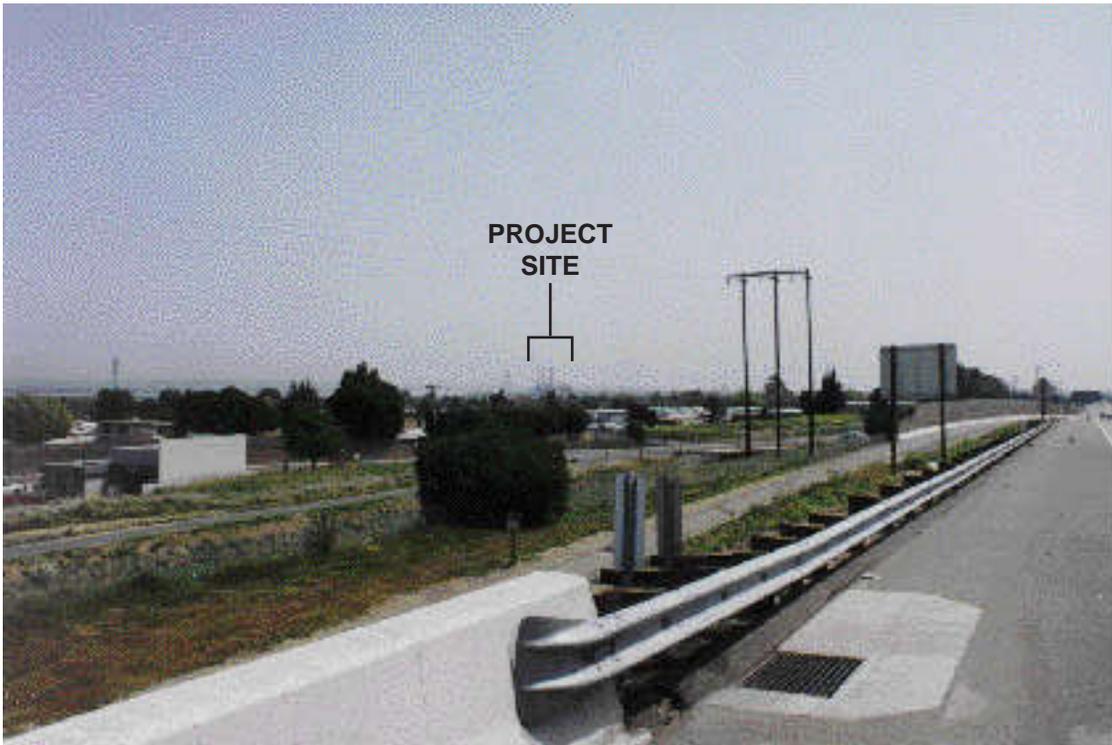
SOURCE: Pacific Gas and Electric; Environmental Science Associates

Divestiture of Electric Generation Assets / 980125 ■

**Figure 4.13-2**  
Views of the Contra Costa  
Power Plant Project Site



4.13.3a Aerial view of project site and vicinity.



4.13.3b View of project site from Highway 4 and the intersection of Railroad Boulevard.



4.13.4a Aerial view of Geysers Unit 17.



4.13.4b Aerial view of Geysers Unit 16 showing steam plumes.

### 4.13.3 PLANS AND POLICIES

#### ***SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA POWER PLANTS***

The types of proposed projects, activities, and facilities under consideration at the San Francisco Bay Area plants do not conflict with the overall intent of either the City of San Francisco General Plan (City and County of San Francisco, 1995) or the Contra Costa County General Plan (Contra Costa County, 1996). No policies regarding urban design or scenic resources were found to be in conflict with the proposed project as identified in the Pittsburg General Plan (City of Pittsburg, 1988) or the Antioch General Plan (City of Antioch, 1988).

#### ***SONOMA AND LAKE COUNTY POWER PLANTS***

The Sonoma County General Plan (Sonoma County, 1991) categorizes its scenic resources into three components: open space community separators, scenic landscape units, and scenic highway corridors. The Sonoma County Geysers units are located in the northeastern section of the county in the Mayacmas Mountains. None of these geothermal units are located in designated scenic resource areas. However, the Sonoma County General Plan (Sonoma County, 1991), under Section 2.2 “Policy for Scenic Landscape Units,” does recognize the Mayacmas Mountains as “important visual relief from urban densities,” and as “highly valuable scenic lands.”

The Lake County General Plan (Lake County, 1981) states that the most significant effect of the geothermal power plant on aesthetic quality is the “cooling towers and accompanying steam plumes in a relatively undisturbed landscape.”

### 4.13.4 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The CEQA Guidelines state that a project would have a significant effect on the environment if it would result in a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect, such as producing new light or glare, obstructing scenic vistas open to the public, or creating an aesthetically offensive sight that is open to public view (Governor’s Office, 1997).

Guidance in determining adverse and potentially significant aesthetic effects according to CEQA is provided in several sections of the CEQA Guidelines. Appendix I, the “Environmental Checklist Form,” of the CEQA Guidelines contains three criteria for identifying aesthetic impacts:

- Introduction of new sources of light or glare;
- Obstruction of scenic highways, vistas or views open to the public; and
- Creation of an aesthetically offensive site open to public view.

### 4.13.5 IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

**Impact 4.13-1: Potential changes in operational activities by a new owner and minor construction activities would not produce new sources of light or glare in the project vicinity. (Less than Significant)**

The transfer of ownership may require relatively minor construction, which would likely be limited to activities necessary to separate the divested generating units from on-site transmission and distribution equipment, ownership of which would be retained by PG&E. Such minor construction activities, which would be conducted during daylight hours, would not produce new light or glare. Although the project could result in increased levels of plant operation and electricity generation, the project would not introduce any additional sources of reflected sunlight or glare to the plant site vicinities from windows, automobiles, and other reflective surfaces. Any additional sources of night lighting (e.g., vehicle headlights) would be minimal. Because substantial changes to light and glare conditions would not be anticipated at any of the plants to be divested, this impact would be less than significant.

***Mitigation Measures Proposed as Part of Project***

None.

***Mitigation Measures Identified in this Report***

None required.

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**Impact 4.13-2: The project would not result in the change or obstruction of scenic highway views or vistas open to the public or the creation of an aesthetically offensive site open to public view. (Less than Significant)**

Existing views from or of the site would not change or be physically blocked, reduced in area, or reconfigured by elements of the proposed project. Moving view sequences of the project sites or of existing site features, such as views from a vehicle traveling along a roadway or from a pedestrian path, would not be shortened or interrupted by the proposed project.

Plumes generated from plant operations may increase or decrease in frequency as a result of the divestiture, but the physical characteristics of the plumes would not change. Changes in the operations due to the proposed divestiture of the geothermal plant are not anticipated to affect the physical characteristics of the units or the aesthetic impacts of these towers, piping, or plumes. Because this project involves the transfer of existing facilities, only minimal visual or aesthetic effects are anticipated. Significant modification of the facilities would require permits that would trigger review and thus offer opportunities to address any potential changes in the nature or degree of visual and aesthetic effects. Because no major modifications would be made as a result of the project, the potential impacts on scenic vistas, views open to the public, or highways would be less than significant.

***Mitigation Measures Proposed as Part of Project***

None.

***Mitigation Measures Identified in this Report***

None required.

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**REFERENCES – Aesthetics**

Antioch, City of, *Antioch General Plan*, 1988.

Contra Costa County, *Contra Costa County General Plan*, July 1996.

Governor's Office of Planning and Research, *CEQA Statutes and Guidelines*, 1997.

Lake County, *Lake County General Plan*, November 1981.

PG&E, *Proponent's Environmental Assessment: Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Proposed Sale of Four Bay Area Electric Generating Plants*, before the Public Utilities Commission of the State of California, January 14, 1998a.

PG&E, *Proponent's Environmental Assessment: Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Proposed Sale of the Geysers Geothermal Power Plant*, before the Public Utilities Commission of the State of California, January 14, 1998b.

Pittsburg, City of, *Pittsburg General Plan*, 1988.

San Francisco, City and County of, *San Francisco General Plan, South Bayshore Plan*, December, 1995.

Sonoma County, *Sonoma County General Plan*, 1991.