Chapter 4.1 - Aesthetics

4.1.1 Introduction

This section describes the proposed Project’s regional visual character, the visual resources on and near the Project site, the views of the Project site from key viewpoints, and the changes in these views that would result from Project implementation. Because a person’s reaction and attachment to a given viewshed are subjective, visual changes inherently affect viewers differently. The aesthetics section describes the existing conditions of the Project site, the regulatory setting, and discusses the possible impacts from Project implementation as well as any Project mitigation measures needed to reduce these impacts.

The analysis presented in this chapter is based on the qualitative visual changes that would occur as part of the Project, presenting a general analysis of the overall changes that would occur to the visual and aesthetic resources as a result of Project implementation. Photographs and computer-generated simulations are provided to portray proposed changes to the visual character and resources associated with the Project.

Based upon the analysis of the photographs and computer-generated simulations, no significant impacts are expected as a result of the proposed Project. No specific concerns have been raised in response to the Notice of Preparation with regards to the operations at the site affecting aesthetic resources. The environmental analysis contained herein indicates that adverse impacts upon the environment are not expected in regards to aesthetic conditions at the site.

4.1.2 Visual Resources Concepts and Terminology

The concepts and terminology that comprise this visual resources analysis for the proposed Project, as well as the essential proposed Project elements that are evaluated, are described below.

The visual resources of a given area consist of the landforms, vegetation, water features, and cultural modifications (physical changes caused by human activities) that impart an overall visual impression of the area landscape. A number of factors are considered in the evaluation of a landscape’s visual resources and of the potential for one or more visual impacts to occur, including visual quality, viewer sensitivity, landscape visibility, and viewer exposure.

The term "viewshed" refers to the visual qualities of the geographical area that is defined by the horizon, topography, and other natural features that give an area its visual boundary and context, or by artificial developments that have become prominent visual components of the area. In the area of the Project site, the existing viewsheds
are defined primarily by flat, open space. In the distance, the viewshed includes views of surrounding mountains and ridgelines.

4.1.3 Environmental Setting

This section discusses the existing visual conditions of the Project area. Existing visual character of the region and the Project site are addressed.

Regional Setting

There are no state or county-designated scenic highways or sensitive view corridors in the immediate vicinity of the project area (California Department of Transportation, 2009a). There are no designated scenic viewpoints within the areas of the project area. Likewise, there are no designated scenic viewpoints from which the project area is visible. The project is within the viewshed of the traveling public using Bowman Road, Jacks Ranch Road, and Highway 395.

The site is located in an unincorporated area of Kern County. The area around the site is rural and consists of natural hills and ridges and is surrounded by four mountain ranges; the Sierra Nevada on the west, the Cosos on the north, the Argus Range on the east, and the El Paso Mountains on the south.

This area is predominantly vacant, open space. See Figure 4.1-1 for the location of the nearest dwellings to the project site, located approximately one mile from the disposal site, many of which are abandoned. There is no concentration of sensitive receptors located near or around the project site. The nearest community is the City of Ridgecrest which is approximately two miles east from the project site.

Parcels adjacent to the landfill are either designated as open space or natural resources. Waste management activities and the surrounding land uses are considered compatible by the policies of the Kern County General Plan. There are no unique topographic features, scenic resources, or significant historical structures in this area. The main visual characteristic of this area are the natural hills and ridges. The project site itself contains no outstanding visual features.

Project Setting

The Ridgecrest RSLF is located in western Kern County, approximately two miles west of the community of Ridgecrest at 3301 Bowman Road (see Figure 3-1). Primary access to the site is via Bowman Road, 1.25 miles east of Highway 395, entering the site via a paved access road to a gatehouse (see Figure 3-2).

The Project’s landfill and adjacent Kern County Waste Management Department owned properties cover 320 acres. The current permitted disposal area is 91 acres and contains the 78 acre existing refuse limit. The proposed permitted disposal area of 120 acres encompasses the current 91-acre permitted disposal area.
The landfill is an existing facility; it has become an established and accepted part of the landscape. Nevertheless, the project has some visual elements that might be perceived by some as out of place in this area, and it is visibly distinct from the natural landscape due to the disturbed nature of the landfill’s surface.

Several landfill ancillary facilities are located at the site, including a 10’x20’ manufactured gatehouse at the site entrance, a 50,000-gallon water tank, a 70’ commercial scale, a 50’ x 100’ permanent special waste facility (Ridgecrest Special Waste Facility), and a concrete pad with a landfill gas treatment system that utilizes activated carbon to remove volatile organic compounds. These facilities have modified the natural topography and visual appearance of the site.

Perimeter fencing, consisting of non-slatted chain-link, surrounds the landfill. There is no decorative landscaping currently on site.

Visible parts of the landfill, depending on the viewing location, include soil stockpiles, graded and filled areas, and the access road. The landfill operation equipment, such as compactors and bulldozers, may be visible from some locations.

The gatehouse, Special Waste Facility, and landfill gas treatment station are in the northeast part of the project area and have outdoor lights that are used as needed to provide safety for staff and public. Additionally, the Ridgecrest RSLF may use ancillary lighting equipment to adequately illuminate the operations. These light sources are sited and designed so that light from the landfill site does not spill over onto adjacent land uses. There are small amounts of glare associated with light reflecting off of on-site equipment and vehicles traveling to and from the landfill using the on-site access road to deposit refuse.

4.1.4 Regulatory Setting

4.1.4.1 Federal

There are no federal laws, regulations, or standards related to aesthetics that are applicable to the proposed Project.

4.1.4.2 State

California Scenic Highway Program

California’s Scenic Highway Program was created by the Legislature in 1963. Its purpose is to protect and enhance the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors, through special conservation treatment. The California poppy serves as the logo for the scenic highway program and signs with the logo are placed along officially designated routes. The state laws governing the Scenic Highway Program are found in the Streets and Highways Code, Sections 260 through 263.
A highway may be designated as scenic, depending upon how much of the natural landscape can be seen by travelers, the scenic quality of the landscape, and the extent to which development intrudes upon the traveler’s enjoyment. The State Scenic Highway System includes a list of highways that are either eligible for designation as scenic highways or have been officially designated. The status of a proposed state scenic highway changes from eligible to officially designated when the local governing body applies to the California Department of Transportation for scenic highway approval, adopts a Corridor Protection Program, and receives notification that the highway has been officially designated a Scenic Highway (California Department of Transportation, 2009b).

There are no state or county-designated scenic highways or sensitive view corridors in the immediate vicinity of the project area (California Department of Transportation, 2009a). There are no designated scenic viewpoints within the areas of the project area. Likewise, there are no designated scenic viewpoints from which the project area is visible. The project is within the viewshed of the traveling public using Bowman Road, Jacks Ranch Road, and Highway 395.

4.1.4.3 Local

Kern County General Plan
The Kern County General Plan includes policies related to aesthetics and light and glare in Chapter 1, which is the “Land Use, Open Space, and Conservation Element” (Kern County, 2004a). The policies and implementation measures in the General Plan applicable to the proposed Project are outlined below.

Light and Glare (Section 1.10.7 of the Kern County General Plan)

- **Policy 48.** Encourage the use of low-glare lighting to minimize nighttime glare effects on neighboring properties.
- **Implementation Measure AA.** The County shall utilize CEQA Guidelines and the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance to minimize the impacts of light and glare on adjacent properties and in rural undeveloped areas.

Smart Growth (Section 1.10.8 of the Kern County General Plan)

- **Policy 49.** Discretionary development projects should be encouraged to incorporate innovative or “smart growth” land use planning techniques as design features as follows:
  
g. Aesthetically pleasing and unifying design features that promote a visually pleasing environment.
The Kern County General Plan includes policies related to aesthetics and scenic route corridors in Chapter 2, which is the “Circulation Element” (Kern County, 2004a). Scenic Route Corridors are discussed in Section 2.3.9 of the Kern County General Plan.

**Kern County General Plan: Circulation Element**

In 1992, the Kern County Board of Supervisors rescinded the Kern County 1974 Scenic Highways Element. Consequently, Kern County has the discretion to designate local scenic routes if circumstances warrant such designation.

### 4.1.5 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

According to the Department of Transportation’s Scenic Highway Mapping System for Kern County, California, and the Kern County General Plan, these roads are not designated as State or County designated scenic highways, nor do sensitive view corridors exist in the immediate vicinity of the project area. There are no designated scenic viewpoints within the project area. Likewise, there are no designated scenic viewpoints from which the project area is visible. While there are no adopted State Scenic Highways in Kern County, the California Scenic Highways Master Plan designated three state highways (SR 58, SR 14, and SR 41) in Kern County as “Eligible State Scenic Highways.” However, these three eligible state scenic highways are not within the viewshed of the Project area (Kern County GIS, 2010).

#### 4.1.5.1 Methodology

The potential impacts associated with the proposed Project are evaluated through a comparison of the anticipated Project effects on aesthetic resources. The evaluation of Project impacts is based on the significance criteria adopted by the County in the Kern County CEQA Implementation Document, which the County has determined to be appropriate criteria for this Draft EIR.

To determine the visual impacts, specific viewpoints were identified. Viewpoints are generally selected for one or two reasons: 1) the location provides representative views of the landscape along a specific route segment or in a general region of interest; and/or 2) the viewpoint effectively captures the presence or absence of a potentially significant Project impact in the location. Viewpoints are typically established in locations that provided high visibility to a relatively large number of viewers and/or sensitive viewing locations such as residential areas, recreation areas, and vista points. These viewpoints are identified in detail under Section 4.1.5.3 below which assesses potential proposed Project impacts.

Photographs were taken at the viewpoints to both record the existing context of the major proposed Project components and provide baseline photographs, which were utilized for preparing simulations of the proposed Project and the analysis of its potential visual impacts. All photographs were taken with a lens that is the equivalent to the view seen by the human eye (i.e., neither telephoto nor wide angle).
Five potentially sensitive viewpoints close to the landfill were selected as locations for visual simulations (See Figure 4.1-1). The five viewpoints selected for analysis are:

- **View 1**: From the southeast corner of the intersection of Bowman Road and Highway 395, looking east.
- **View 2**: Slightly west of the intersection of Jacks Ranch Road and Bowman Road on Bowman Road, looking southwest.
- **View 3**: From the intersection of Dolphin Avenue and Jacks Ranch Road, looking west.
- **View 4**: From the side of Highway 395, 2 miles south of Bowman Road, looking northeast.
- **View 5**: From the side of Highway 395, 1.5 miles south of Bowman Road, looking east.

Visual simulations were developed from each of these viewpoints to represent the view of the landfill, as is, at the current permitted height and permitted disposal acreage of 2,572 feet MSL and 91 acres, respectively and the view at the proposed expanded height and permitted disposal acreage of 2,592 feet MSL and 105 acres, respectively. The impedance of the view of the surrounding mountain ridgelines from these viewpoints from the current permitted height and area compared to the proposed height and area was evaluated for each location.

The visual simulations were prepared through computer modeling and digital compositing with base photographs taken from each viewpoint. The first step of the simulation process was to photograph existing conditions. Next, three-dimensional computer models of the landfill were developed using computer-aided design and drafting (CADD) data provided by the project engineers. The computer models were scaled and matched to the site photographs using common reference points. After electronically compositing the computer model with the site photograph, soil cover was manually added using digital editing software.

To determine the impacts of light and glare from the proposed landfill project, typical sensitive uses such as residences in the vicinity of the landfill were identified. The sources and amounts of light and glare that would occur on the landfill site as currently permitted were compared with the amount of light and glare that would occur at the proposed expanded landfill.
4.1.5.2 Thresholds of Significance

The Kern County CEQA Implementation Document and Kern County Environmental Checklist state that a project would have a significant impact on aesthetics if it would:

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;
- b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limit 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; and/or
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

4.1.5.3 Impacts of the Proposed Project

The impacts of the proposed Project are evaluated below. If appropriate, relevant mitigation measures are identified.

**Impact 4.1-1: The proposed Project would substantially alter the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.** The recycling/waste diversion area may be relocated in the future to some other portions of the Project site with convenient access for customers, such as near the gatehouse area. The area would be used to sort and store recyclables from incoming waste loads. The relocated area would be similar to the existing recycling/waste diversion area, and is therefore expected to have a less than significant impact to the visual resources of the Project area. The potential trans-load facility may be located near the site entrance in the eastern buffer area and its appearance would be similar to the existing special waste facility, and will therefore have a less than significant impact on aesthetic resources.

The existing site is visibly distinct from the natural landscape due to the disturbed nature of the landfill’s surface areas. The landfill is an existing facility; it has become an established and accepted part of the landscape. The proposed Project would alter the visual character of the site and the surrounding area by increasing the waste footprint from 78 acres to 105 acres, with the installation of a landfill liner within the remaining 14 acres of the current permitted unlined area and an additional 13 acres of proposed permitted unlined area, for a net increase of 27 acres, and also increase the elevation waste through a 20-foot vertical expansion.

Borrow soil will be taken from the existing borrow area (the future horizontal expansion area) and from the proposed borrow area in the eastern buffer (see Figure 3-10). Borrow soils used for daily operational purposes may be stockpiled for later use. It is not expected that the soil stockpiles will have a height greater or equal to the landfill due to the fact that soils will be excavated on an as needed basis, only stockpiling enough soil for a short duration of time. Therefore, stockpiled soils are expected to have a less than significant impact to the visual resources of the Project area.
Figures 4.1-2 through 4.1-6 show the landfill from each viewpoint shown on Figure 4.1-1 at the current permitted height of 2,572 feet MSL and 78 acres; and at the proposed Project height of 2,592 feet MSL over 105 acres.

**Visual Simulation from Intersection of Bowman Road and Highway 395 (Viewpoint 1)**

The visual simulation of Figure 4.1-2 is from the perspective of the corner of the intersection of Bowman road and Highway 395 (Viewpoint 1), looking east toward the landfill. From this viewpoint, the Argus Range can be seen in the distance as well as the flat open space surrounding the Project site. The fill area of the permitted landfill contrasts with the surrounding area because of the current soil cover and lack of vegetation. The proposed vertical and horizontal expansion blocks the view of the base of the Argus Range, however, this is considered a less than significant impact due to the relatively minor decrease in the available viewshed, which is already obstructed by the current landfill.
Viewpoint 1 – Visual Simulation of Ridgecrest Recycling and Sanitary Landfill: Existing and Future View of Proposed Landfill Expansion

Figure 4.1-2
Visual Simulation from the Intersection of Jacks Ranch Road and Bowman Road (Viewpoint 2)

The visual simulation of Figure 4.1-3 is slightly west of the intersection of Jacks Ranch Road and Bowman Road on Bowman Road, looking southwest toward the landfill (Viewpoint 2). This viewpoint was selected because the nearest sensitive receptor is located near this point at 828 S. Jacks Ranch Road, approximately 1.3 miles from the center of the landfill. The landfill cannot be seen from this dwelling therefore the location closest to this receptor with a view of the landfill was selected. The landfill is within the viewshed of the traveling public using Bowman Road and Jacks Ranch Road.

The proposed landfill vertical and horizontal expansion simulated in Figure 4.1-3 is obvious because of the manufactured shape of the landfill and contrasts with the surrounding area due to soil cover. The view of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range is already partially blocked by the existing landfill embankment, therefore the implementation of the proposed Project would not result in significant obstruction of the viewshed.

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View at Current Permitted Height

View of the Proposed Landfill Expansion

Viewpoint 2 – Visual Simulation of Ridgecrest Recycling and Sanitary Landfill: Existing and Future View of Proposed Landfill Expansion
Figure 4.1-3
Visual Simulation from Dolphin Avenue and Jacks Ranch Road (Viewpoint 3)

The visual simulation of Figure 4.1-4 is from the perspective of looking west from the intersection of Dolphin Ave. and Jacks Ranch Rd., toward the landfill. A number of dwellings, most of which are abandoned, are located at this intersection; both roads are not paved. This viewpoint was selected because it is the viewpoint of the largest impacted population; the City of Ridgecrest.

The fill area of the permitted landfill contrasts somewhat with the surrounding area because of the soil cover, but can also be identified by the horizontal line of the flat top of the landfill. The proposed landfill vertical expansion in Figure 4.1-4 is obvious in the simulated view because of the flat-topped, manufactured shape of the landfill in line with the natural ridgeline form of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the background. The proposed vertical expansion may block additional small areas of this distance hillscape. This is considered a less than significant impact due to the relatively minor decrease in the available viewshed, which is already obstructed by the current landfill.
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View at Current Permitted Height

Future View of the Proposed Landfill Expansion

Viewpoint 3 – Visual Simulation of Ridgecrest Recycling and Sanitary Landfill: Existing and Future View of Proposed Landfill Expansion

Figure 4.1-4
Visual Simulation from Side of Highway 395, 2 Miles South of Bowman Road (Viewpoint 4)

The visual simulation of Figure 4.1-5 was taken from the side of Highway 395, two miles south of Bowman Road, looking northeast. From this viewpoint, the Argus Range can be seen in the distance. The fill area of the permitted landfill contrasts with the surrounding area because of the current soil cover and lack of vegetation. The proposed vertical and horizontal expansion blocks the view of the base of the Argus Range, however, this is considered a less than significant impact due to the relatively minor decrease in the available viewshed, which is already obstructed by the current landfill.
Viewpoint 4 – Visual Simulation of Ridgecrest Recycling and Sanitary Landfill:
Existing and Future View of Proposed Landfill Expansion
Figure 4.1-5
Visual Simulation from Side of Highway 395, 1.5 Miles South of Bowman Road (Viewpoint 5)

The visual simulation of Figure 4.1-6 was taken from the side of Highway 395, 1.5 miles south of Bowman Road, looking east. This view is similar to the view discussed above. From this viewpoint, the Argus Range can be seen in the distance. The fill area of the permitted landfill contrasts with the surrounding area because of the current soil cover and lack of vegetation. The proposed vertical and horizontal expansion blocks the view of the base of the Argus Range, however, this is considered a less than significant impact due to the relatively minor decrease in the available viewshed, which is already obstructed by the current landfill.
View at Current Permitted Height

Future View of the Proposed Landfill Expansion

Viewpoint 5 – Visual Simulation of Ridgecrest Recycling and Sanitary Landfill:
Existing and Future View of Proposed Landfill Expansion
Figure 4.1-6
The impacts resulting from the implementation of the proposed Project would be less than significant.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation will be required.

**Level of Significance:** Impacts are less than significant.

**4.1.5.4 Cumulative Impacts of the Proposed Project**

**Impact 4.1-2: The proposed Project may have cumulative impacts to aesthetics.** Cumulative impacts are two or more individual impacts that, when considered together, are considerable or that compound or increase other environmental impacts. The cumulative impact scenario for the Project includes 7 specific projects identified by Kern County, 33 specific projects identified by the City of Ridgecrest, and build out of the Kern County General Plan (see Tables 3-6 and 3-7).

A cumulative impact analysis first identifies whether a cumulatively significant impact exists in the given resource area. If so, it determines whether the Project will make a considerable contribution to that impact. Where a cumulative impact is severe, even a small contribution may be considerable (Section 15130(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines).

There are no scenic resources or vistas within the viewshed of the proposed Project. All planned projects within the proposed development area would be required to comply with Kern County General Plan goals, policies and implementation measures regarding Aesthetic Resources, described in the Regulatory Setting section above. No mitigation measures are recommended. The cumulative impacts would be less than significant with the Project’s consistency with the Kern County General Plan.

**Mitigation Measures:** No mitigation will be required.

**Level of Significance after Mitigation:** Impacts are less than significant.

**4.1.5.5 Feasible and Reasonable Mitigation Analysis**

It is not anticipated that this proposed Project would result in significant impacts to aesthetic resources based on the above analysis. No mitigation will be required as aesthetic impacts were determined to have a less than significant rating.