

SECTION 4.0

Environmental Checklist and Discussion

4.1 Aesthetics

<i>Issues (and Supporting Information Sources):</i>	<i>Potentially Significant Impact</i>	<i>Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporation</i>	<i>Less Than Significant Impact</i>	<i>No Impact</i>
1. AESTHETICS—Would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.1.1 Setting

The project site is comprised of three properties (the New Brunswick site, the Round Hole site, and the Idaho-Maryland site) located within the foothills of the Sierra Nevada range. The sites are situated on moderately steep hillsides, and, regionally, the land slopes to the southwest. Each of the properties that comprise the project site has been previously used for mining operations, and some contain remnants of removed structures or complete structures associated with past use. The project vicinity is characterized by existing commercial and industrial buildings, some of which extend up to three stories, and limited residential development, interspersed among views of wooded foothills.

The 101-acre Idaho-Maryland site was the location of former mining activities, although structures associated with this former use have been demolished. The site presently includes a lumber mill located in the northern portion of the site, near the intersection of Idaho-Maryland Road and Whispering Pines Lane, and remnants of concrete pier foundations associated with demolished structures. Although the topography of the site varies, it generally slopes from north to south, with a large berm intersecting the site. On-site surfaces are comprised of intermittent concrete surfaces, surrounded by heavy shrub and pine vegetation. The Wolf Creek riparian area at the northern boundary of the Idaho-Maryland site is heavily vegetated with blackberry shrubs.

The areas to the northeast of Centennial Drive and on either side of Whispering Pines Lane have been developed as one- to two-story office buildings with adjacent surface parking lots. Other bordering properties are relatively undeveloped and, similar to the project site, include shrubs and trees. The Idaho-Maryland site is the most visible of the sites because of the upward slope of adjacent foothills and its adjacency to Idaho-Maryland Road. Portions of the Idaho-Maryland site are also visible from Highway 20/49.

The 8-acre Round Hole site is generally vacant, covered by pine trees and shrubs with the exception of an unimproved road, a covered underground shaft that provided access to the former mine, and overhead utility lines, which cross the site near the access road. This property is bordered to the north and east by Idaho-Maryland Road and Brunswick Road, respectively. Areas adjacent to the Round Hole property are generally undeveloped, with the exception of existing one- to two-story office buildings along Whispering Pines Lane, to the southwest of the site. Views of the Round Hole site are generally limited due to trees and shrubs that border the site.

The 37-acre New Brunswick site has been largely disturbed from prior mining operations and activities associated with the adjacent lumber yard, which is now largely abandoned with paved surfaces throughout. Present on-site structures include remnants of ore bins from historical mining activities. A meadow and small pond is situated along the South Fork Wolf Creek, south of the New Brunswick site boundaries. The site vicinity is developed to varying degrees, including rural residential properties to the north and east, a residential development under construction to the north, and the Bohemia Mill site and a reservoir/pond to the south of the property. Similar to the Round Hole site, the New Brunswick site has limited visibility from off-site locations because of trees and shrubs that border the site.

4.1.2 Regulatory Context

The New Brunswick and Idaho Maryland sites are located in unincorporated Nevada County, within the City of Grass Valley's sphere of influence (SOI).¹ The Round Hole site is within Grass Valley's city limits. Pursuant to the Grass Valley Annexation Plan, the Idaho Maryland site is forecast to be annexed into the City of Grass Valley in 2000-2005 and the New Brunswick site is forecast to be annexed into the City in 2015-2020 (Nevada County, 2000). For purposes of this analysis, the Idaho Maryland and the Round Hole sites would be subject to the City of Grass Valley's plans and policies, while the New Brunswick site would remain subject to Nevada County plans and policies. The regulatory context with regard to aesthetics for both Nevada County and the City of Grass Valley is discussed below.

¹ A sphere of influence (SOI) is the probable ultimate physical boundaries and service area of a city as determined by the local agency formation commission (LAFCO) for each county.

State

California Scenic Highways Program

The California Department of Transportation administers California's Scenic Highways Program. The only designated scenic route in Nevada County is State Route 20 from near Skillman Flat Campground to 1/2 mile east of Lowell Hill Road. However, a number of state routes are eligible to be designated as scenic routes including the entire lengths of State Routes 49, 89, and 174 and Interstate 80 throughout the County as well as the remainder of State Route 20. The project sites are located to the east and south of State Route 20/49, which is eligible for a scenic route designation; however, the Idaho-Maryland site is the only project site that would be visible from this route.

Local

Nevada County General Plan²

The Nevada County General Plan includes policies related to aesthetic quality, recognizing both natural and developed characteristics that influence the composition of the visual environment. Prominent visual resources within Nevada County are primarily comprised of natural features, including the foothills and ridges, significant oak groves, river corridors, lakes and reservoirs, and open space. Developed scenic resources include scenic highway corridors and historic architecture. The Nevada County General Plan identifies State Route 20³ from near Grass Valley to Interstate 80 near Emigrant Gap, and the entire length of State Route 49 as scenic highways eligible for designation as official state scenic highways. State Route 20 and 49 overlap within the project vicinity, and are located between 1,300 and 2,500 feet northwest of the project area. Policies pertaining to aesthetics and visual resources relevant to the proposed project include the following:

- **Policy 1.14:** Development within the Community Regions shall be consistent with the overall rural quality of life in the County, as demonstrated through sensitivity to resource constraints, provision of interwoven open space as a part of development, and community design which respects the small town or village character of the Community Regions. These criteria shall be accomplished through application of the Comprehensive Site Design Standards in review of discretionary and ministerial projects.
- **Policy 6.2:** The County may utilize clustering of development, as provided in the Land Use policies, to preserve open space within the Rural Regions and to encourage creation of open space which will enhance visual, habitat and other open space values. Such open space may be permanently secured and preserved as open space through permanent easements, dedication to a public agency, permanent trust or other irrevocable means.

² Under the proposed project, Nevada County plans and policies would only apply to the New Brunswick site, which would not be annexed into the City of Grass Valley as part of this proposed project.

³ State Route 20 from near Skillman Flat Campground to 1/2 mile east of Lowell Hill Road has been officially designated as a scenic route since the adoption of the 1995 General Plan.

- Policy 6.9: Development standards for project design, grading, construction and use, established through the Comprehensive Site Development Standards, shall be used in project review of all discretionary project permits to determine open space requirements for each project.

These standards shall provide for consideration of non-disturbance of, and open space setbacks from identified sensitive environmental, biological, or cultural resources, e.g. 100-year floodplains, wetlands, slopes in excess of 30% (excepting access across slopes up to 30%), lakes, ponds, significant historic or archaeological sites/resources, critical wildlife areas, minimization of land disturbance, consistency with the landforms and aesthetic context of the site, temporary and permanent erosion and sedimentation controls, and vegetation retention, replacement and enhancement.

- Policy 18.11: New Commercial, Industrial and Multiple Family development shall utilize fixtures and light sources that minimize night time light pollution.

(Nevada County, 1996).

Western Nevada County Design Guidelines

Pursuant to the direction of the General Plan, the Western Nevada County Design Guidelines (County Design Guidelines) were prepared and adopted by the County Board of Supervisors in 2002. The Design Guidelines implement General Plan Policies and supplement the Comprehensive Design Standards contained within the County Zoning Regulations. They are intended to provide guidance for new development design and for use during the review of land use permit applications as additional criteria for project review. The objectives and policies (checklist items) within the Design Guidelines applicable to the proposed project would relate to signage, lighting, landscaping, circulation and the proposed industrial land use.

Grass Valley General Plan

Policies

The Community Design Element of the City of Grass Valley 2020 General Plan includes the following policy that would be applicable to the proposed project:

- Policy 10-CDI: Require shielding or downward direction of lighting and require that illumination be so arranged as to reflect away from adjoining properties.

(City of Grass Valley, 1999).

Community Design Guidelines

The Grass Valley Community Design Guidelines (Community Design Guidelines) were developed by an Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the City Council. The Design Guidelines rely on the Community Design Element of the General Plan as a framework, and are intended to provide direction as to how new or revitalized developments should look and fit into the community. The Community Design Guidelines are applicable to all development proposals

within the City, including proposed development at the Idaho-Maryland and the Round Hole sites.

The Community Design Guidelines are applicable throughout the community and identify design guidelines by land use categories, including commercial, office, industrial, multi-family and special planning areas. Guidelines for each land use relate to site design, architectural characteristics, streetscape design, circulation, lighting and signage.

The Community Design Guidelines also include additional design criteria for certain areas within the City deemed unique to the community because of their visual design characteristics, proximity to the downtown core, historic characteristics, visual prominence, or redevelopment potential. The Idaho Maryland Road Area, identified in the Community Design Guidelines as one of these special planning areas. Although none of the three project sites are contained within this special area, the Idaho Maryland site is within proximity, to the south and east of the Idaho Maryland Road Area (City of Grass Valley, 1999).

4.1.3 Impacts Discussion

Methods

The effort to analyze impacts to aesthetic resources in the project area included a review of relevant local and regional plans including the Nevada County General Plan, Grass Valley Annexation Plan, the City of Grass Valley General Plan, the California Department of Transportation Scenic Highway Program as well as the Idaho-Maryland Mine Permit Applications, specifically focusing on the environmental assessment, photo renderings and lighting plans for each of the proposed project sites.

Results

All mining activities would be conducted up to 5,000 feet below surface; therefore, this analysis focuses on aboveground facilities.

Impact 4.1-1: Implementation of the proposed project could result in short-term visual impacts due to construction activities. This would be a potentially significant impact.

Project construction activity would occur in three phases over an approximate four and a half year period (see Chapter 3, *Project Description*, for detailed construction phasing.) Construction activity would be the greatest at the Idaho-Maryland site, where new development would be concentrated. At this site, most construction would occur within the first year and a half (Phase I), when most new buildings would be constructed. All construction activities and siting would be contained within each of the sites. Construction activity would occur between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and no nighttime construction requiring special lighting would be performed. Visual impacts resulting from construction activities (e.g., new roadway and building construction, installation of equipment, movement of supplies, trucks, and work crews) would be visible from off-site locations and State Route 20/49 (which is eligible for

State scenic highway designation), Idaho Maryland Road, and Whispering Pines Road. While visual impacts associated with construction would be temporary, they would nonetheless be potentially significant because construction is scheduled to occur for approximately two years. To reduce temporary construction-related visual impacts, the project applicant could provide additional vegetative screening along the Idaho Maryland site perimeter.

Impact 4.1-2: Operation of the proposed project could result in long-term visual impacts due to construction activities. This would be a less than significant impact.

Although the City of Grass Valley General Plan and the Nevada County General Plan both acknowledge the importance of both the natural resources (lakes, wooded foothill terrain, etc.) and developed areas that characterize the city and county, neither specifically identify scenic vistas within the project vicinity. The project vicinity is characterized by existing commercial and industrial buildings, and residential development, some of which extend up to three stories, interspersed among vegetation and views of wooded foothills.

Each of the project sites has been used for prior mining activities, and includes on-site structures, or remnants of past structures. New development proposed as part of the project would alter the visual conditions, with the greatest change occurring at the Idaho-Maryland site where many of the new structures would be constructed.

Project construction, as described in more detail in the *Chapter 3, Project Description*, would extend up to between 30 and 50 feet above ground level for certain project elements, and would also include improvements to on-site access and circulation and landscaping. Existing trees and shrubs bordering and throughout the sites would be maintained to the extent feasible. Although new development would be visible from certain public vantage points in the vicinity including Idaho Maryland Road, and would alter immediate or foreground views of the sites, the project would not obstruct or result in a substantial adverse effect to prominent visual resources including the foothills and ridges, significant oak groves, river corridors, lakes and reservoirs, and open space, as these scenic resources are not located on the project site or project vicinity. Views of the foothills in the distance to the south would continue to be available under project conditions.

The project would not substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway.

The project sites do not include rock outcroppings or historic buildings that would be affected by the proposed project. The Round Hole and the New Brunswick sites would not be visible from State Route 20/49, a nearby highway that is eligible for State scenic highway designation, due to their distance from the highway and intervening vegetation. The Idaho-Maryland site, however, would be visible from a portion of the highway corridor as the site is approximately 1,300 to

2,500 feet southeast of State Route 20/49. This corridor traverses mostly through forested areas outside of the project area, but in the project vicinity, views of developed areas of the City of Grass Valley are available, including residential, commercial, and industrial uses. Although the site was previously developed as a mine, presently the site is largely undeveloped, with the exception of the Hap Warnke Mill located at the northern portion of the site, comprised of concrete remnants on the site's demolished structures and paved areas with intervening vegetation. The project would alter views of the site from the highway corridor through the introduction of new structures, removal of concrete surfaces and intervening vegetation, and reuse of the former industrial site. Since no scenic resources are located on the project site, and since State Route 20/49 is not an officially designated scenic highway, impacts would be considered less than significant. The proposed project would also integrate new landscaping features, and would be consistent with City (the Idaho-Maryland and Round Hole sites) and County (the New Brunswick site) Design Guidelines.

The project would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

The project would alter the visual conditions at the three individual sites comprising the proposed project. The character of the project vicinity is diverse, and includes a mix of land uses reflected by the presence of industrial buildings, office buildings, a hospital, single-family homes, and dense pine trees and shrubs. Development at the Round Hole and the New Brunswick sites would be consistent with the industrial characteristics of the area and development at the Idaho-Maryland site would be consistent with the nearby office buildings and industrial structures in the area. Each of the sites would retain existing vegetation to the extent feasible, and the Idaho-Maryland site would also include landscaping adjacent to Centennial Drive and around the visitor center and parking area. A site specific discussion of each of the sites is provided below.

The Idaho-Maryland site would be redeveloped to accommodate the mining and ceramics plant operations. The project would construct a number of buildings (extending between 30 and 50 feet in height), a perimeter fencing, a surface parking area, improve existing circulation routes, perform on-site grading and stockpile materials from the mine, and include landscaping throughout the site (see **Figure 4.1-1**). Proposed development on the site would alter the visual conditions, and such changes would be visible from off-site locations.

Development on the Idaho-Maryland site would be clustered by use, with the visual characteristics of each area defined by use. The visitor's center (one building up to 30 feet in height), surface parking area, and office space (one building up to 40 feet in height) would be situated in the southwest portion of the site. On-site landscaping features would be concentrated in this area and picnic tables for both visitors and employees would be provided. The visual conditions of the northern portion of the site would be characterized as industrial, reflective of the concentration of land uses in this area that would support mining operations. The northwest portion of the site would include stockpiles of subsurface materials, the mine entrance, surface

FIGURE 4.1-1
8.5x11 color

belt conveyors, a water treatment system with a nearby settling pond and storm water detention pond. With the exception of the surface belt conveyors, these uses would be relatively low in height. To the east of this area, the industrial character would be maintained with the construction of a gold processing plant and a ceramics plant (each 50 feet in height), a power substation, inside storage and a trash pick-up area. Outdoor storage areas would be interspersed throughout the site, and the outdoor tile storage area would comprise much of the southeastern portion of the site. Fencing would be installed around the perimeter of the entire Idaho-Maryland site.

The project would alter the Idaho-Maryland site conditions and, compared with existing uses, the proposed development would appear as an intensification of industrial development. However, these changes would not necessarily constitute an adverse effect. The proposed structures would be consistent with existing development in the vicinity, and the project would not result in a substantial change from historic mining operations and the current lumber mill. The site would appear as an extension of existing industrial uses and would be bordered by existing trees. Given that the site reflects prior industrial use through the presence of fragmented concrete piers and surfaces, as well as the existing lumber mill, this intensified development would not be considered a substantial degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the site.

The Round Hole site includes an existing covered underground shaft that provided access to the former mine. Under the proposed project, the site would continue to provide an underground ventilation shaft. A new single-level, 15-foot tall hoist house constructed from steel would be located over the top of the shaft opening and adjacent to the existing access road. The existing site access, which intersects with Whispering Pines Lane, would also be improved to a gravel surface as part of the project (see **Figure 4.1-2**). No other structures would be proposed for this site. The hoist house would be setback from the parcel boundaries and screened from off-site views by existing trees that border the site and are located throughout the area. Additionally, given that the proposed structure would not exceed 15 feet in height, it would not likely be visible from off-site locations.

Both the Idaho-Maryland site and the Round Hole site are also in proximity to the Idaho Maryland Area, a special planning area identified in the City of Grass Valley's Community Design Guidelines. This area is characterized by a concentration of industrial and heavy commercial uses, with buildings tending to be large scale, "big box" structures. This area is also largely dominated by automobile travel. Therefore, the proposed development at these sites would be considered consistent with the existing visual character of the vicinity.

The existing New Brunswick shaft would remain on the site and would be refurbished to accommodate various uses associated with the proposed mining activities. Additional on-site development would result in the new construction of facilities that would extend up to 50 feet in height (see **Figure 4.1-3**). The existing ore silo adjacent to the shaft would remain on the site, but would not be actively used. Vehicular access to the site, via East Bennett Road, would not be changed by the project. Fencing would be installed around the perimeter of the site. While the project would result in additional structures on the New Brunswick site, new development would not be substantially greater than the existing level of development on the site as structures would be clustered to the south and east of the site to reduce visual impacts. Although new structures

FIGURE 4.1-2
8.5x11 color

FIGURE 4.1-3
8.5x11 color

would be somewhat visible from nearby areas, the project impacts would be minimized by the retention of existing trees bordering the project site, which would screen the site from off-site public views.

In addition to the proposed development's consistency with the existing characteristics of the area, new development would be subject to the design review process by either the County (for the New Brunswick site) or the City of Grass Valley (for the Idaho-Maryland and Round Hole sites) prior to issuance of building permits. This design review would evaluate project consistency with each jurisdiction's respective design guidelines. Therefore, the project would not be expected to substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.

The project would not create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

The project sites are located within a developed area, with nearby commercial, industrial and residential development. Existing land uses and roadways constitute sources of nighttime lighting. Although each of the sites has included past development associated with prior mining operations, there is no existing lighting on any of the sites, with the exception of the Hap Warnke Mill located at the northern portion of the Idaho-Maryland site. Therefore, new development that would occur as part of the proposed project would result in new sources of light and glare.

The proposed project would include exterior lighting located at building entries and exits, along pedestrian and vehicle access ways, and within parking areas. New buildings would also include general lighting of interior use areas.

Exterior lighting would utilize fixtures that would be downcast and shielded where necessary to minimize spill light to off-site locations.⁴ To reduce or eliminate the potential for adverse effects from glare generated by the project, surfaces would be treated with non-reflective treatments as feasible, and light fixtures would be designed to shield the light source, and to aim the light directly downward, preventing direct viewing of the bulb from off-site locations, while illuminating the intended area.

According to the Project Lighting Plan, off-site lighting 'spill' would occur on the Idaho-Maryland site at the northern entrance of the site, near the fire water tank, on the southeast corner of the ceramic tile storage area, directly east of the guard house adjacent to the employee parking area, and along the southern employee access road. At the New Brunswick site, 'spill' would occur at the entrance as well. Generally, 'spill' associated with the proposed project would be considered less than significant because it would occur in relatively few areas that are densely vegetated and would not impact any adjacent urbanized land uses, such as nearby residences or businesses. Additionally, 'spill' at the entrances of the Idaho-Maryland and New Brunswick sites

⁴ "Spill light" is light that falls on off-site receptors and causes additional unwanted illumination at these locations.

is necessary for safety reasons providing identification of the entrances for the public as well as employees accessing the sites; therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

Additionally, each of the sites would be subject to light and glare policies and ordinances for either the County (for the New Brunswick site) or the City of Grass Valley (for the Idaho-Maryland and Round Hole sites). Therefore, the project impact to light and glare would be considered less than significant.

4.1.4 Data Gaps

1. Additional detail is needed regarding the maximum anticipated height of the stockpiles.
2. Does the lumber mill located on the Idaho-Maryland site include existing nighttime operations or any other lighting during nighttime hours?

References – Aesthetics

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