4.1 Aesthetics

This section evaluates the Project's potential impacts relating to aesthetics and visual resources and incorporates information regarding the regulatory setting and analysis of viewsheds and visual resources in and around the Project area. This section also describes the environmental setting, regulatory setting, identifies the applicable significance thresholds for impacts, assesses potential impacts of the Project, and recommends measures to mitigate any significant impacts, if applicable. The section also provides a discussion of cumulative impacts. Alternatives are discussed in Chapter 5.0, Alternatives.

A primary purpose of this analysis is to determine if a change to the visual environment would occur, whether that change would be viewed as a positive or negative one, and the degree of any change relative to the existing setting. If the Project has a potential to cause visual impacts, this section specifically defines those impacts.

As described in Chapter 2.0, Project Description, the Project would include the demolition of aboveground infrastructure and remediation of the site, followed by soil stabilization or revegetation of disturbed areas, with some minor long-term operations associated with remediation.

This analysis focuses on the potential for the Project components to result in impacts to visual resources as seen from public locations and roadways. The baseline visual condition is analyzed, visual resources are identified, and a baseline scenic character is established. The analysis methodology evaluates the aggregate effect that the Project may have on the overall visual character of the Project site and surrounding landscape. If a change in character is identified, it is compared to viewers' expected sensitivity, and is reviewed for consistency with applicable County of San Luis Obispo (County) and State of California planning policies. Levels of impact are determined according to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and definitions and County Thresholds of Significance guidance.

4.1.1 Environmental Setting

4.1.1.1 Regional Visual Setting

The regional landscape can be generally characterized as an ancient marine terrace sitting between the Pacific Ocean and the Temattate Hills to the east. Much of the region consists of underlying sand dune complexes along the beach, transitioning to broad inland mesas. Creeks and drainages in the region generally have an east-west orientation as they flow to the ocean. The Santa Maria Riverbed passes to the south of the Project area. The natural landscape typical of the inland portions of the region includes coast live oak woodland, chaparral, and grasslands, with healthy riparian corridors along the creeks and drainages. Unique and adapted plant communities are seen along the immediate coastline and into the dune complex. Large eucalyptus trees were introduced into the region as a timber crop and over the years have established themselves over much of the Nipomo Mesa. The large size of these eucalyptus groves visually dominate many parts of the

regional landscape. The coastal dune complex, which is among the largest of its type in the State of California, extends from the shoreline to as much as approximately two miles inland.

The region is visually defined by an underlying rural character. Agriculture, open space and recreation, larger-lot residences, and light industry make up much of the regional land use (Figure 4.1-1). Over the past few decades, the Nipomo area has been one of the faster growing regions of the County. Extensive planned residential subdivisions and golf resorts have been constructed and are continuing to be developed, resulting in an incremental loss of rural appearance within the region. Although the area is becoming more suburbanized, it still retains much of its rural visual character, due in large part to the abundant cropland, open space, dunes, and proximity to the Pacific Ocean. These attributes contribute to a moderately high visual quality for the region (see Figures 4.1-1 and 4.1-2).

Figure 4.1-1 Regional Visual Character – Looking east toward the Nipomo Mesa

Source: Carr 2023

The combined parcels total 1,642-acres of property owned by Phillips 66 situated between the coastal dunes and the Nipomo Mesa to the northeast. Land use surrounding the property includes golf course and residential development to the northeast, the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (ODSVRA) to the west, and agricultural cropland to the south. Several commercial and light to heavy industrial uses such as auto-dismantlers and storage yards are found immediately east of the property. State Highways 1 and 101 are the primary transportation routes through the region, with Highway 1 passing immediately to the north and east of the Project site. The Southern Pacific Railroad tracks bisect the Phillips 66 property and pass immediately west of

the Santa Maria Refinery (SMR or Refinery) facility. The regional context transitions to the Santa Maria Valley to the south, consisting of broad, flat agricultural croplands which meet the dunes as they approach the coastline. The unincorporated community of Nipomo is located along State Highway 101 and serves as the commercial center of the Nipomo Mesa. The town of Guadalupe is situated on Highway 1 in the Santa Maria Valley south of the Project area. Arroyo Grande to the north and Santa Maria to the east are the largest cities serving the region.

Figure 4.1-2 Regional Visual Character – Looking north from Oso Flaco Road toward the SMR

Source: Carr 2023

4.1.1.2 The Project Site

The Phillips 66 property is located in the southwestern portion of the County, approximately 2.5 miles east of the Pacific Ocean. The Project property is comprised generally of the vegetated back-dune area inland from the more active Pismo dune complex. The landform and landcover of the property are defined by rolling topography covered primarily by coastal scrub and sparse grasses. Low ridgelines cross the property in an east-west direction, and the overall landform gradually decreases in elevation to the south, toward Little Oso Flaco Creek. Because of the undulating topography, views through and across the property tend to be limited. A few scattered trees can be seen throughout the property, although most of the larger native vegetation is found along the creek near the property's southern edge.

The SMR facility occupies the approximate middle of the property. The SMR's tall stacks and towers can be seen from much of the surrounding area. Because of topography and intervening vegetation, the SMR's buildings and ground-floor activities are mostly blocked from viewpoints to the north and east. Southwest of the property, the landform flattens-out such that viewpoints in that area have the most visual exposure to the SMR facility itself (see Figure 4.1-2). The overall visual character of the SMR presents a heavy-industrial use. Visible on-site elements include the large stacks, storage tanks, the crude oil processing plant itself, aboveground pipes, material storage, large-scale equipment and trucks, railroad tracks, and train cars. Some of the tallest elements include the process water stripper at 128 feet in height with a 5-foot diameter, an associated surge tank at 42 feet high with a 90-foot diameter, and the flare at 200 feet tall with a diameter of 2.5 feet. These were approved in 1990 to exceed the Industrial land use height limits under the currently applicable Development Plan/CDP D890287D.

The majority of the SMR Project site has been leveled, and a large employee parking area is located along its western side. Several paved and unpaved service and access roads are seen throughout and surrounding the facility. The coke processing area is recognized by its noticeably black ground-plane. The SMR facilities are surrounded by chain link and barbed-wire perimeter fencing (see Figure 4.1-3).

Figure 4.1-3 Project Site Visual Character – The SMR as seen from the Highway 1 entry road

Source: Carr 2023

An existing rail spur is located in and near the coke processing area. The coke processing and storage area is highly disturbed and shows an intense heavy industrial use. East of the SMR facility

the landscape becomes more natural in appearance. In this eastern area the undulating back dunes are mostly stabilized with sparse, low-lying vegetation, and the surrounding topography somewhat limits views to the Project site, particularly as seen from viewpoints to the north and northeast (see Figure 4.1-4).

Figure 4.1-4 Project Site Visual Character – The Project site looking west from Highway 1

Source: Carr 2023

4.1.2 Regulatory Setting

Visual impacts resulting from the demolition and remediation Project are within the jurisdiction of the County. The regulatory setting pertaining to visual resources includes the County's review of the proposed development's consistency with various elements of the County of San Luis Obispo General Plan and the San Luis Obispo County Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance, in addition to the provisions in the CEQA Guidelines relating to visual resources. The following goals, policies, and guidelines provide a basis for determining levels of potential impact as well as an indication of aesthetic values and sensitivity to visual change.

County of San Luis Obispo Initial Study Checklist
Will the Project:

a. Create an aesthetically incompatible site open to public view;

b. Introduce a use within a scenic view open to public view;

c. Change the visual character of an area;

d. Create glare or night lighting which may affect surrounding areas; or

e. Impact unique geological or physical features?

Coastal Zone Framework for Planning (Coastal Zone Land Use Element)
Strategic Growth Goal 1: Preserve open space, scenic natural beauty and natural resources. Conserve energy resources. Protect agricultural land and resources (County 2018a).

San Luis Obispo County Coastal Plan Policies

Chapter 10: Visual and Scenic Resources
The Coastal Zone Land Use Element references the California Coastal Act as follows (County 2007):

3025l. The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural landforms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.

Policy 1: Protection of Visual and Scenic Resources
Unique and attractive features of the landscape, including but not limited to unusual landforms, scenic vistas and sensitive habitats are to be preserved, protected, and in visually degraded areas restored where feasible.

Policy 5: Landform Alterations
Grading, earthmoving, major vegetation removal and other landform alterations within public view corridors are to be minimized. Where feasible, contours of the finished surface are to blend with adjacent natural terrain to achieve a consistent grade and natural appearance.

County of San Luis Obispo General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element
Goal VR 1: The natural and agricultural landscape will continue to be the dominant view in rural parts of the county.

Through review of the proposed development and as part of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared for the Project, consideration will be given to siting in unobtrusive locations, height of structures, visually effective setbacks, lighting, and other Project-specific visual concerns.

Goal VR 2: The natural and historical character and identity of rural areas will be protected.

Policy VR 2.1 Develop in a manner compatible with Historical and Visual Resources

Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that are compatible with the natural landscape and with recognized historical character, and discourage designs that are clearly out of place within rural areas.

Policy VR 2.2 Site Development and Landscaping Sensitivity

Through the review of proposed development, encourage designs that emphasize native vegetation and conform grading to existing natural forms. Encourage abundant native and/or drought-tolerant landscaping that screens buildings and parking lots and blends development with the natural landscape. Consider fire safety in the selection and placement of plant material, consistent with Biological Resources Policy BR 2.7 regarding fire suppression and sensitive plants and habitats.

Goal VR 7: Views of the night sky and its constellations of stars will be maintained.

Policy VR 7.1 Nighttime Light Pollution

Protect the clarity and visibility of the night sky within communities and rural areas, by ensuring that exterior lighting, including streetlight projects, is designed to minimize nighttime light pollution (County 2010b).

Title 23 Coastal Zone Land Use Ordinance (CZLUO)

23.04.210 - Visual Resources

e. General Visual Standards for Coastal Development. Notwithstanding subsections (a)-(d) above, all development requiring a coastal development permit must be consistent with the requirements of Coastal Plan Visual and Scenic Resource Policies 1-11 as applicable (County 2014).

23.04.320 - Outdoor Lights

The standards of this section are applicable to all outdoor night-lighting sources installed after the effective date of this Title, except for streetlights located within public rights-of-way and all uses established in the Agriculture land use category. No land use permit is required for lighting facilities, though an electrical permit may be required by Title 19 of this code.

a. Illumination only: Outdoor lighting is to be used for the purpose of illumination only, and is not to be designed for or used as an advertising display, except as provided by Sections 23.04.300 et. seq. (Signing).

b. Light directed onto lot: Light sources are to be designed and adjusted to direct light away from any road or street, and away from any dwelling outside the ownership of the applicant.

c. Minimization of light intensity: No light or glare shall be transmitted or reflected in such concentration or intensity as to be detrimental or harmful to persons, or to interfere with the use of surrounding properties or streets.

d. Light sources to be shielded:

   1) Ground illuminating lights: Any light source used for ground area illumination except incandescent lamps of 150 watts or less and light produced directly by the combustion of natural gas or other fuels shall be shielded from above in such a manner that the edge of the shield is level with or below the lowest edge of the light source. Where any light source intended for ground illumination is located at a height greater than eight feet, the required shielding is to extend below the lowest edge of the light source a distance sufficient to block the light source from the view of any residential use within 1,000 feet of the light fixture.

   2) Elevated feature illumination: Where lights are used for the purpose of illuminating or accenting building walls, signs, flags, architectural features, or landscaping, the light source is to be shielded so as not to be directly visible from off-site.

e. Height of light fixtures: Free-standing outdoor lighting fixtures are not to exceed the height of the tallest building on the site.

Chapter 5: Site Development Standards

23.05.034 - Grading Standards

d. Landform alterations within public view corridors. Grading, vegetation removal and other landform alterations shall be minimized on sites located within areas determined by the Planning Director to be public view corridors from collector or arterial roads. Where feasible, contours of finished grading are to blend with adjacent natural terrain to achieve a consistent grade and appearance.

g. Revegetation: Where natural vegetation has been removed through grading in areas not affected by the landscape requirements (Section 23.04.180 et seq. - Landscape, Screening and Fencing), and that are not to be occupied by structures, such areas are to be replanted as set forth in this subsection to prevent erosion after construction activities are completed. [Amended 1993, Ord. 2649]

Land Use Circulation Element Planning Area Standards - South County Coastal Area Plan

Combining Designations:
Industrial: Union Oil

The following standards apply to the large industrial area west and south of State Route (SR) 1 currently occupied by the SMR and the Santa Maria chemical plant. (LCP) (County 2018b):

l. Permit Requirements. Any proposed modification or expansion of the existing Refinery or coke oven or the construction of partial oil and gas processing facilities to service off-shore derived oil and gas that involves land area beyond that presently developed requires Development Plan approval and shall be subject to the following: (LCP)

   c. Screening of the facilities from public view through height limitations, careful site design, artificial contoured banks and mounding, extensive landscaping, and decorative walls and fences. (LCP)

d. Any part of the facilities that cannot effectively be screened by the above methods shall be painted with non-reflective paint of colors that blend with the surrounding natural landscape. (LCP)

San Luis Obispo County General Plan Agriculture Element
Open Space Goal (OSG1) states as an objective to "Identify, protect, sustain, and where necessary restore and reclaim areas with (scenic) characteristics." Agricultural Policy (AGP30b.3) says that "development should use natural landforms and vegetation to screen development whenever possible." Agricultural Policy (AGP30b.4) states that "in prominent locations, to encourage structures that blend with the natural landscape or are traditional for agriculture" (County 2010a).

The San Luis Obispo County Design Guidelines
This document prepared by the County Department of Planning and Building consists of "design objectives, guidelines and examples that will help retain and enhance the unique character of the unincorporated communities and rural areas of San Luis Obispo County" (County 1998).

The following design objective applies to the Project site: RC-7e-Artificial slopes that are visible to the public should match the natural contours in the immediate vicinity.

4.1.3 Thresholds of Significance

The determinations of significance of the demolition and remediation Project impacts are based on applicable policies, regulations, goals, and guidelines defined by CEQA and the County. In addition to comparing the Project to relevant policies and standards, the aesthetic resources assessment identified which specific criteria contribute most to the existing quality of each view, and if change would occur to that criteria as a result of the Project. If a change in visual condition was identified, this change was analyzed for its potential effect on the existing scenic character. This analysis was combined with the potential number of viewers from public vantage points, their sensitivities, and viewing duration in order to determine the overall level of impacts. Specifically, the Project would be considered to have a significant effect on the environment if the effects exceed the significance criteria described below.

For the purpose of this study, short-term visual impacts were considered to be those changes that would be visible for a duration of five years or less. Long-term impacts would be those alterations to the visual environment that would be in effect for a period greater than five years.

4.1.3.1 California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines

The significance of potential aesthetic resources impacts are based on thresholds identified within the County's Initial Study and Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. According to the Guidelines, aesthetic impacts would be considered significant if the Project would:

a. Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista;

b. Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway;

c. In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings (public views are those that are experienced from publicly-accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality; or

d. Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

The CEQA threshold related to scenic resources, threshold b), does not apply because the Project is not within the view corridor of any Officially Designated State Scenic Highway.

4.1.4 Impact Assessment Methodology

The findings of this study are based on multiple field visits conducted over several weeks during June, July, and December 2023, and include review of the site as well as the surrounding area. Resource inventories were conducted both on foot and from moving vehicles, during the day and nighttime. Existing visual resources and site conditions were photographed and recorded. Assessment of Project elements and programs were based on plans and descriptions provided by the Project Applicant. County planning documents and previous studies relevant to the Project and surrounding area were referred to for gaining an understanding of community aesthetic values.

Locations of proposed demolition, remediation, and restoration elements were identified based on descriptions, site plan information and conceptual drawings provided by the Project Applicant. The heights of existing landscape and built elements were used as visual scale references for determining overall Project visibility.

The Project site was then viewed from all potential public viewer group locations on SR 1, Oso Flaco Road, and all other roads and public viewpoints in the vicinity. Resulting from this initial review, representative viewpoints were determined for further analysis, based on dominance of the site within the view, duration of views, and expected sensitivity of the viewer group. Of those representative viewpoints, Key Viewing Areas (KVAs) were selected which would best illustrate the visual changes proposed by the Project. Photo-simulation viewpoint locations were compared to the Key Viewing Areas identified by the analysis. Once verified for accuracy and appropriateness of location, the simulations were used to quantify potential Project visibility and to assess related impacts. Images of the existing views, along with photo-simulations of the Project can be seen in Figures 4.1-6 through 4.1-9. The four KVAs listed in Table 4.1.1 were selected to represent the extent and quality of views to the Project from the surrounding area. A corresponding map of the KVA locations is shown in Figure 4.1-5.

Table 4.1.1 Key Viewing Areas (KVA)

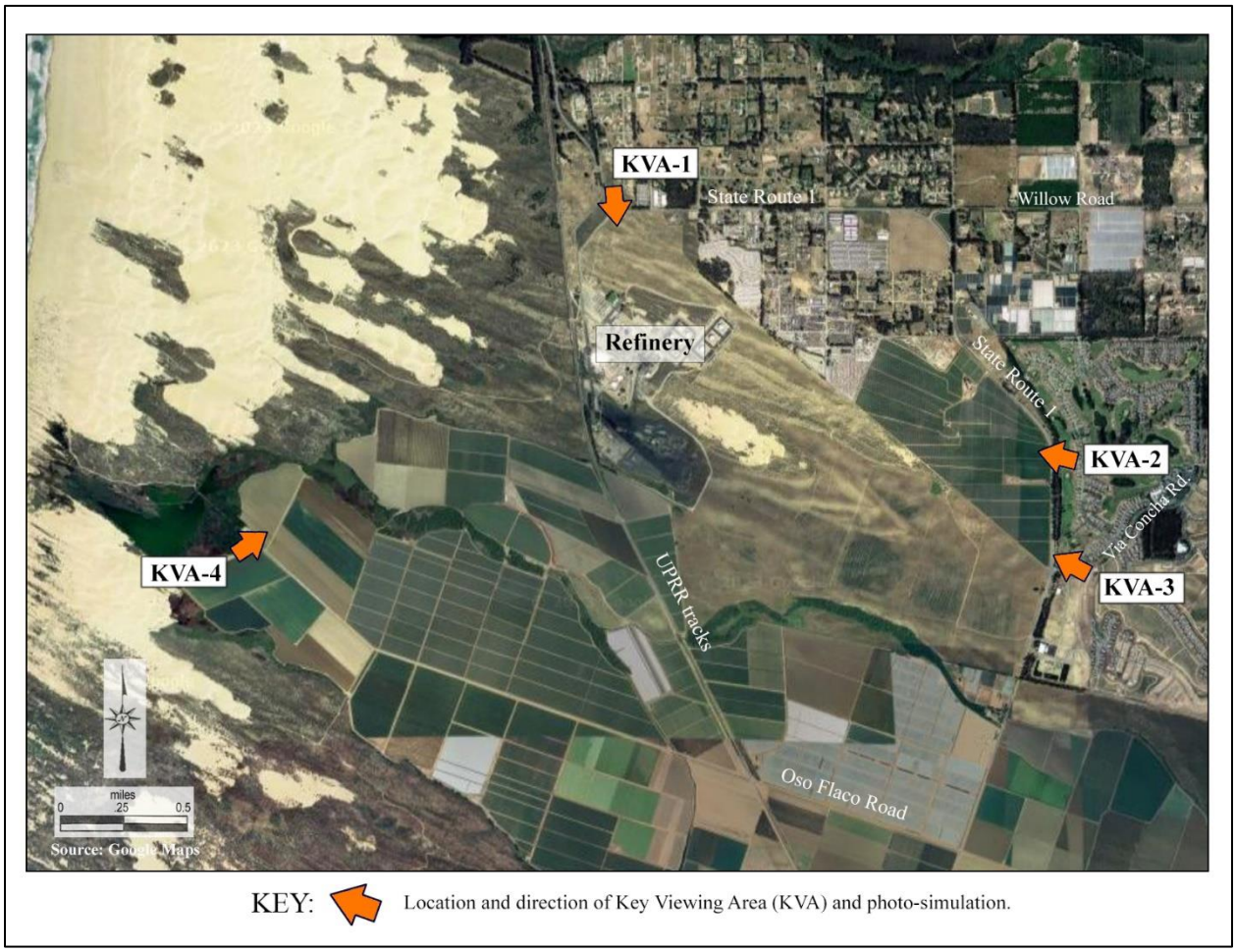
KVA	Location	Figure Number
KVA-1	State Route 1 near the SMR entrance	4.1-6
KVA-2	State Route 1 approximately 0.3 mile north of Via Concha Road	4.1-7
KVA-3	Via Concha Road	4.1-8
KVA-4	Oso Flaco Lake Parking Area on Oso Flaco Road	4.1-9

Project Visibility

From State Route 1

The proposed removal of the SMR would be visible from various sections along SR 1. Currently, the existing SMR can be seen from SR 1 north of the site, near the entry road to the SMR facility (see Figure 4.1-6). Between that area and a location approximately 0.4 mile north of Via Concha Road, intervening topography and existing development generally precludes views to the SMR. Travelling northbound on SR 1 east of the Project, the existing facility comes into view at a point just south of Via Entrada Road and continues along the highway for approximately one mile. From all viewpoints along SR 1, the existing facility is most noticeable by its taller vertical elements and storage tanks (see Figure 4.1-7).

Figure 4.1-5 Key Viewing Area (KVA) Map



Source: Carr 2023

Accordingly, the construction activities involving removal of these taller, more visible existing Refinery elements would also be noticeable from SR 1. In general, most of the existing buildings and ground-level elements are less visible due to surrounding landform and vegetation patterns. The removal of those lower elements may be visible from segments of SR 1 but would be less noticeable in the overall landscape.

Figure 4.1-6 Existing and Proposed Views from KVA-1 (State Route 1 near the SMR Entrance)

Source: Carr 2023

Figure 4.1-7 Existing and Proposed Views from KVA-2 (State Route 1 approximately 0.3 mile north of Via Concha Road)

Source: Carr 2023

Proposed ground-level remediation efforts including temporary stockpiles would be difficult to see from SR 1. Taller construction equipment such as cranes and excavators would be somewhat visible during the active demolition phase of the Project. In the long term, the visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project.

From Residential Areas East of State Route 1
The SMR can be seen from public roadways and paths within the Trilogy residential development east of SR 1. Westbound Via Concha Road and portions of Louise Lane provide views to the existing facility, similar to those from along SR 1 in this area (see Figure 4.1-8). The SMR is most noticeable by its vertical structures, which extend above the horizon, and the storage tanks. A portion of the existing coke processing area and railroad spur along the southern portion of the facility can also be seen.

From these residential streets the construction activities involving removal of the SMR, particularly the tall components, would be visible in the distance. The proposed minimal contour grading in Area 6 and site restoration efforts would also be partially noticeable in some areas. In the long term, the visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project.

From Oso Flaco Road
The demolition and remediation Project would be intermittently seen from locations along Oso Flaco Road at viewing distances ranging from approximately one mile to 1.3 miles away. The Project would also be visible from the Oso Flaco Lake public parking area (see Figure 4.1-9). Currently the tall, vertical elements and the storage tanks are the most noticeable components of the SMR due to their visual contrast with the mostly natural surrounding landscape.

Although the viewing distances from Oso Flaco Road somewhat reduce the visual presence of the facility, the existing vertical Project elements can be clearly seen extending above the horizon line and the distant hills. In the long term, the visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project.

From Amtrak Passenger Trains
The Union Pacific Railroad tracks pass immediately west of the SMR, and Amtrak passenger trains using the tracks provide close viewing opportunities of the existing SMR. Because of this close proximity, many of the individual elements of the SMR are easily discernable, in addition to the highly industrial overall context, although only for a brief period of time while the train is passing.

From this vantage point the construction phase and removal of the majority of the existing above ground structures would also be easily seen. Short-term construction and remediation efforts would be part of the view. The existing switch yard, transmission line, parking lot, guard shacks and some paved roads would remain and would be seen by viewers from this area. Although views of Area 6, Coke Pile, are blocked by vegetation and intervening topography, glimpses of grading and vegetation restoration activities may be visible. In the long term, the visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project.

Figure 4.1-8 Existing and Proposed Views from KVA-3 (Via Concha Road)

Source: Carr 2023

Figure 4.1-9 Existing and Proposed Views from KVA-4 (Oso Flaco Lake Parking Area on Oso Flaco Road)

Source: Carr 2023

From the California Coastal Trail
The California Coastal Trail parallels SR 1 along the Trilogy development frontage. The Coastal Trail in this area is separated from the highway at most locations by mature trees. Views to the SMR can however be seen though gaps in the vegetation. Similar to the views from SR 1 in this area, the SMR is recognizable by its taller, vertical elements and its storage tanks. As seen from this recreational path, the construction removal activities at SMR would be noticeable in the distance to the west. The proposed contour grading and site restoration efforts would also be seen from this area. In the long term, the visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project (California Coastal Commission 2024).

From the De Anza Trail
The Historic Juan Bautista de Anza Trail corridor passes through the eastern portion of the Project site. This somewhat wide swath is considered to be the general route the explorer and his party traversed through the area. This historic route is commemorated in part by the establishment of the Juan Bautista de Anza recreational trail. In the Project vicinity, this recreational trail follows the alignment of the California Coastal Trail just east of SR 1. As such, views to the SMR as well as views of the demolition and remediation Project are the same as those described from the Coastal Trail (National Park Service 2013).

From the Industrial-Zoned Area to the North
The upper portions of the SMR can be seen from much of this area. Although Sheridan Road, Gasoline Alley Way and other roadways in this area are relatively close to the existing SMR, the adjacent landform limits views to shorter and ground level elements. Where currently visible, construction activities related to the removal of these taller Refinery elements would be seen. In the long term, these visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project.

From the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area
The upper portions of the SMR facility are visible from the eastern portion of the ODSVRA. Construction activities related to the removal of these facilities would be visible. In the long term, these visually contrasting elements would be removed from view with implementation of the Project.

4.1.5 Project-Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Impact #	Impact Description	Residual Impact
AE.1	Threshold a): Would the Project have a substantial effect on a scenic vista?	Class IV

A substantial adverse impact to a scenic vista would occur if the Project would significantly degrade the scenic landscape as viewed from public roads or from other public areas. The degree of potential impact on scenic vistas varies with factors such as viewing distance, duration, viewer sensitivity, and the visual context of the surrounding area.

The aesthetics section analyzes the extent that the Project would alter the visual quality of the Project site and its surroundings. The specific characteristics that define important vistas are identified, and the Project's effect on those characteristics is assessed. If the fundamental quality of the vistas is substantially reduced, significant impacts would result.

As seen from southern viewpoints such as Oso Flaco Road and a portion of SR 1 near Guadelupe, scenic vistas are defined by the agricultural and natural land uses in the foreground and midground, with the hills framing the background to the northeast. From these vantage points the existing SMR is most noticeable by its tall vertical elements and storage tanks, which currently extend above the horizon and interfere with views of the distant hills.

Existing views from eastern viewpoints such as SR 1, the California Coastal Trail, the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail, and nearby residential areas is considered a quality scenic vista because of the panoramic composition of natural and agricultural land use patterns, sweeping views of the dunes and the coastline, and the Pacific Ocean beyond. These existing views include the SMR facility, portions of buildings and ground disturbance, as well as the noticeable taller elements and tanks. As seen from these sensitive viewpoints, the SMR silhouettes against the sky and reduces the quality of the coastal visual resources and the scenic vista.

The Project would remove the majority of the existing SMR, including all of the most noticeable and visually contrasting vertical elements, storage tanks, buildings, and industrial stockpiles. Removal of these elements would allow undisturbed visual access to the surrounding scenic vistas, including quality views of natural and agricultural land, views of the dunes and coastline, and the Pacific Ocean. Impacts would be **beneficial (Class IV).**

Impact #	Impact Description	Residual Impact
AE.2	Threshold c): Would the Project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings?	Class IV

The Project setting is considered “non-urbanized” based on CEQA Section 15387 which defines “urbanized area” as a central city or a group of contiguous cities with a population of 50,000 or more, together with adjacent densely populated areas having a population density of at least 1,000 persons per square mile.

Project-related actions would be considered to have a significant impact on the visual character of the site if they altered the area in a way that significantly changed, detracted from, or degraded the visual quality of the site or was inconsistent with community policies regarding visual character. The degree to which that change reflects documented community values and meets viewers’ aesthetic expectations is the basis for determining levels of significance. Visual contrast may be used as a measure of the potential impact that the Project may have on the visual quality of the site. If a strong contrast occurred where Project features or activities attract attention and dominate the landscape setting, this would be considered a potentially significant impact on visual character or quality of the site.

Project components that are not subordinate to the landscape setting could result in a significant change in the composition of the landscape. Consideration of potential significance includes analysis of visual character elements such as land use and intensity, visual integrity of the landscape type, and other factors.

As seen from eastern viewpoints such as SR 1, the California Coastal Trail, the De Anza Trail, and portions of residential streets in the Trilogy and Monarch Ridge developments, the visual identity of the Project site and vicinity is mostly defined by working agriculture, rural lands, natural open space, and residential. The SMR complex and other industrial uses are also visible and influence the existing visual character. North of the Project the industrial uses are more evident, however as seen from eastern viewpoints the agricultural and natural landscape character to the south become more visually dominant. As seen from viewpoints south of the Project such as Oso Flaco Road and a short section of SR 1, views toward the Project site are dominated by agriculture in the foreground and midground, with the Nipomo Mesa and inland hills rising up as a backdrop. From these southern vantage points views of the Project site include the mid-ground open space as well as the industrial Refinery and coke processing area.

From most surrounding vantage points, although the existing SMR occupies a relatively small portion of the overall viewshed, its appearance as a highly industrial facility is in stark contrast with the surrounding predominantly rural and agricultural setting. The noticeability of the SMR is increased by the visibility of the tall, vertical elements which often extend above the horizon and are visually inconsistent with generally rounded and horizontal-oriented forms of the dunes and agricultural landscape.

By removing the SMR facility, including the most noticeable and visually incompatible vertical elements, storage tanks, buildings, and industrial stockpiles, as seen from most viewpoints the Project would increase the site's compatibility with the surrounding rural and agricultural visual character. Following demolition and remediation, the Project site would be transformed from the existing heavy industrial use.

The Project proposes to leave or repave many existing Refinery surface components such as parking areas, roads, fencing, and the switching station. Although the Project's overall visual benefit would be substantial, as seen from closer viewpoints such as Amtrak passenger trains, the remaining paved parking lots, roads, remediation support structures, and fencing would continue to be noticeable. From this closer vantage point, to the casual observer with no knowledge of the Refinery's prior existence, the site would continue to appear as a semi-industrial or utility-oriented development, although to a less extent due to the removal of the vertical elements of the SMR (buildings, towers and tanks).

The SMR demolition along with the majority of remediation activities are estimated to occur within the first five years of the Project. During this phase the site would undergo a substantial amount of activity, including large construction equipment, truck and other vehicle traffic, temporary storage of materials and stockpiles. Some of these activities would be noticeable from surrounding public viewpoints. Where visible, these activities would not be inconsistent with the heavy industrial character of the existing Refinery. In addition, any potential increase in viewer sensitivity would likely be moderated by a public perception of the inherent temporary nature of most construction projects. Project impacts would be **beneficial (Class IV).**

Impact #	Impact Description	Residual Impact
AE.3	Threshold d): Would the Project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	Class IV

The Project would result in a significant impact if it subjected viewers from public roads or residences to a substantial amount of point-source lighting visibility at night, or if the collective illumination of the Project resulted in a noticeable spill-over effect into the nighttime sky, increasing the ambient light over the region. The placement of lighting, source of illumination, and fixture types combined with viewer locations, adjacent reflective elements, and atmospheric conditions can affect the degree of change to nighttime views. The degree of impact caused by night lighting would consider the type of lighting proposed by the Project along with the lighting reasonably expected to be generated by future Project build-out.

The current light levels in the area vary greatly. The SMR facility is a substantial source of light, and security and operational lighting is highly visible every night of the year. Coastal fog, which occurs often, increases visibility of the lighting by creating a noticeable atmospheric glow surrounding the facility. The other sources of night light are the auto-related industrial area to the north, and the residential areas to the north and east. SR 1 creates nighttime lights in terms of headlights and streetlights at intersections. The lights of Guadalupe can be seen in the distance to the south. The surrounding agricultural areas show very few lights. Looking southwest from SR 1, the eastern portion of the Project site currently emits minimal nighttime lights. Nighttime views to the northwest show a significant amount of light associated with the SMR and coke processing facility.

By demolishing the SMR, the Project would remove all of the higher-level equipment lighting associated with the SMR. Some perimeter lighting along the fenceline would remain, and security lights on the guardhouses and substation, but most light sources currently visible from public areas would be removed. This removal of lighting would substantially reduce a primary source of existing light and glare affecting the surrounding area. Project impacts would be **beneficial (Class IV).**

4.1.6 Mitigation Measure Impacts to Other Issue Areas

As no mitigation measures are proposed for aesthetics, there would not be any impact from the mitigation measures on other issue areas.

4.1.7 Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative section addresses how this Project may contribute to a change in visual quality when viewed along with other existing and reasonable future development in the area (per CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130).

Portions of the Nipomo Mesa have experienced moderate amounts of new development in the last several years. That development has been mostly residential, with golf resort developments the

most prevalent. Few new or expanded industrial uses have appeared in the local landscape, with the exception of the proposed Caballero Battery project, which would be located far enough away from the Project site that overlapping aesthetic impacts would not occur. The other cumulative projects listed in Chapter 3.0, Cumulative Study Area, which are in the vicinity of the Project, are more non-industrial uses and would fit the existing visual character of the area. By removing the existing highly noticeable SMR, the visual quality of Project site and surrounding area would substantially improve and would reduce or moderate the potential cumulative effect of existing and reasonably anticipated development in the area.

4.1.8 References

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