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PORT OF COLUMBIA

# ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT [Draft]

## US165 Columbia Port Commission Improvement Project

## LaDOTD No. H.016021

## Caldwell Parish

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| APE | area of potential effects |
| AQCR | air quality control region |
| BMP | best management practice |
| CAA | Clean Air Act |
| CWA | Clean Water Act |
| COC | Columbia Port Commission |
| DLD | Drainage and Levee District |
| EJSCREEN | Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool |
| ESA | Endangered Species Act |
| EV | Electric Vehicle |
| HUC | Hydraulic Unit Code |
| IPaC | Information Planning and Consulting |
| LaDOTD | Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development |
| LDOTDP3 | Louisiana Department of Transportation & Development Port Priority Program |
| LDWF | Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries |
| NAAQS | National Ambient Air Quality Standards |
| NAC | Noise Control Act |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| NHPA | National Historic Preservation Act |
| NLCD | National Land Cover Database |
| NPDES | National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System |
| NRCS | Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| NRHP | National Register of Historic Places |
| NWI | National Wetlands Inventory |
| O&M | operations and maintenance |
| OSHA | Occupational Safety and Health Administration |
| RCRA | Resource Conservation and Recovery Act |
| ROW | right-of-way |
| SHPO | State Historic Preservation Office |

| | |
|---|---|
| SWPPP | Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan |
| T&E | threatened and endangered |
| TPF | Truck Parking Facility |
| TWS | temporary workspace |
| UPRR | Union Pacific Railroad |
| USACE | United State Army Corps of Engineers |
| USCB | United States Census Bureau |
| USDA | United States Department of Agriculture |
| USEPA | United States Environmental Protection Agency |
| USFWS | United States Fish and Wildlife Service |
| USGS | United States Geological Survey |
| USHUD | United States Department of Housing and Urban Development |

# 1. PROPOSED ACTION

## 1.1 Introduction

The Port of Columbia is an Inland Port located on the Ouachita River in Louisiana. Columbia Port Commission (Port) proposes to construct an approximately 86-acre Truck Parking Facility with Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (TPF) on State Highway 165 (Hwy 165) in Caldwell Parish, Louisiana **(Figure 1)**. The Port was awarded funds under the FY2023 RAISE Grant from the Louisiana Department of Transportation & Development (LaDOTD) Port Priority Program (LDOTD PPP) for development of the project. This environmental report (ER) is written to evaluate the impacts the TPF may have on associated environmental resources. This ER describes Site Alternatives for potential to affect the environment, and cumulative impacts. The Port is using this ER to identify and evaluate the potential environmental effects resulting from two alternatives: 1) No Action Alternative and 2) Proposed Action Alternative, the TPF.

## 1.2 Purpose and Need of the Proposed Action

The ***purpose of the TPF Project*** is to improve safety for trucks and other motorists and mitigate community impact and concerns of increased truck traffic on Highway 165 **(Figure 2)**. Through this project, Port will do the following:

- Improve truck highway safety with the construction of access roads at Hwy 165 for trucks to enter and exit the TPF;
- Increase the amount of parking areas within the region for trucks, cars, and recreational vehicles (RVs);
- Provide a public rest stop with amenities, including walking trail, picnic and food truck area, RV sewage and gray water collection, and restrooms; and
- Enhance the availability of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in the area.

The ***TPF Project need*** is to provide critical truck parking areas with EV charging stations within the Region. Currently, there are no truck rest areas or commercial truck fueling stations with available parking located along the 100 miles of Hwy 165 between U.S. I-20 (Monroe) and U.S. I-49 (Alexandria). The Port proposes to meet this need by developing the TPF to service the existing traffic on Hwy 165 as well as to assist with the future increase of truck activity at the Port's multimodal initiative planned nearby.

The following facts verify the need for the proposed facility in the region:

- The nearest public truck parking facilities are more than 60 miles away and are located on I-20. The Tremont East/Westbound rest areas provide 92 truck parking spaces and 122 car spaces with no EV charge stations in Lincoln Parish at I-20 mile-marker 95, approximately 60 miles from the Port. The Mound Rest Area has 12 truck parking spaces and 114 car spaces with no EV charge stations in Madison Parish at I-20 mile-marker 184, approximately 85 miles from the Port.
- There is no EV Charge stations for cars or trucks located along the 100-mile stretch of Hwy 165 between I-20 and I-49.

- The nearest private truck gas stations for north bound traffic with parking are in Monroe on I-20. The Pilot Travel Center in West Monroe is approximately 30 miles from the Port with 100 parking spaces for cars and trucks. Love's Truck Stop in Monroe is approximately 36 miles from the Port with parking for 75 trucks.
- The nearest north bound EV charge stations are located approximately 30 miles in Monroe, Louisiana. Monroe has a total of 27 EV Charge stations scattered amongst five locations.
- The nearest private truck gas stations for south bound traffic with parking are in Alexandria on I-49 approximately 60 miles from the Port with 55 parking spaces for trucks.
- The nearest south bound EV charge stations are located approximately 65 miles in Alexandria, Louisiana. Alexandria has 30 EV Charge stations scattered amongst 6 locations.
- The State of Louisiana previously operated a small rest area (5 trucks and 10 cars) in Caldwell Parish; however, it was removed during the expansion Hwy 165 to four lanes and for financial reasons never reopened. The 100-mile stretch of Hwy 165 from Monroe to Alexandria is without a public or private facility which can accommodate parking, forcing the drivers to park in undesignated areas and deviate operations to accommodate Hours of Operation (HOS) rules.
- Improved highway access, parking, and amenities for additional truck traffic to/from Port's future 400-acre multimodal industrial complex.

### 1.3 Description of the Proposed Action

The Port intends to construct and operate a TPF designed to service both north and south bound traffic on Hwy 165 and to eliminate left-hand turns entering and exiting the facility. The access roads for the TPF have also been designed to assist with managing and mitigating increased traffic at the Port (250 trucks/day). The facility will provide 50 truck parking spaces and 100 car parking spaces. The layout of the Truck Parking Facility with access roads is provided as Figure 3.

The Port also proposes to install EV Charge Stations at the TPF for six trucks and six cars. The EV Stations will be able to quickly charge vehicles as well as operate 18 wheelers during HOS breaks required by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The Port will operate these EV Charge Stations using solar energy for power.

LaDOTD PPP has awarded $2.75 million dollars to assist with constructing access roads for the Port's expansion (State Project No.H.014968 (324) Truck Access Road). The LaDOTD has also awarded the Port $1.5 M to assist with the purchase of additional acreage for the Port expansion (State Project No. H.014968), which includes approximate 86 acres for the TPF. These committed funds will be used as non-federal match.

# 2. ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives considered include the No-Action Alternative and Site Alternatives. This section compares alternatives to the purpose, need, and siting criteria of the TPF, while also remaining feasible and offering the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative.

## 2.1 No-Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Port would not construct the TPF, and the Region would still be without critical truck parking areas with EV charging stations. If the No-Action Alternative is selected, environmental and resource impacts associated with the project would be avoided, but the intended results of the project would not be realized. The No-Action alternative is being considered here, as required by the NEPA process, to provide a baseline with which impacts of the preferred alternative may be compared. The No-Action Alternative would not require funding through the LDOTPP. The current condition of the existing truck parking shortage and absence of EV charging stations in the area would continue to be a safety risk to the community and truck drivers.

## 2.2 Site Alternatives

The Port considered several factors during its evaluation of the four potential alternative sites to meet the purpose and need of the proposed TPF **(Figure 3**). A location for the facility was sought given the following siting criteria:

- Availability to the Port: Feasibility of property acquisition by the Port and receptiveness of local residences and businesses.
- Location and Parcel Size: The property is within a 2-mile radius from the Port's future 400-acre multimodal industrial complex on the Ouachita River. The property is also large enough and optimally situated to eliminate left-hand turns for trucks entering / exiting the highway, which are inherently unsafe for the anticipated 250 trucks per day traffic at this location. See Figure 3.
- Matching Funds: The location qualifies for LaDOTD Port Priority Program (PPP) Funds.
- Synergy / Economic Development: The location provides for multiple economic development opportunities aligned with the Port's strategic initiative.
- Environmental Impact: Potential impacts to land use, aesthetics, floodplains, ecology (Waters of the United States [WOTUS] and critical habitat threatened and endangered species), and cultural resources. Figures 4 - ?

### 2.2.1 Alternative 1: Riverton Rail Overpass South Underpass

The Port selected the Riverton Rail Overpass South Underpass (Riverton South) property as the preferred alternative for the new TPF. It is located along the south bound side of Highway 165 near the intersection with Riverton Campground Road, 7-miles north of the town of Columbia. The facility is bound to the west by the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and the Ouachita River is approximately 1/3-mile west of the UPRR. The preferred site for the new TPF was chosen after comparing the criteria and the ability to meet the purpose and need of the Project. Evaluation of the Riverton Project and environmental-based criteria is as follows:

- Availability to the Port: The Port successfully negotiated agreements with the landowners to purchase the necessary property for the TPF, which is a critical step in the development of an infrastructure project.

- Location and Parcel Size: The Riverton South location is adjacent to the Port's future 400-acre multimodal industrial complex. A primary consideration for the TPF was enhancing safety, particularly by eliminating left-hand turns for trucks entering and exiting both the TPF and the Port. Left-hand turns on busy highways are inherently dangerous, especially for large trucks, as they require crossing multiple lanes of traffic. The Riverton Rail Overpass South Underpass location resolved this issue, significantly improving safety for the approximately 250 trucks per day projected to use the facility. The proximity to the Port also provided a direct, safe route for truck traffic, reducing the risk of accidents.

- Matching Funds: This location qualified for LaDOTD PPP funds. These funds had already been secured by the Port and were specifically designated for property acquisition and the construction of an access road to the Port. The ability to utilize these matching funds was a significant financial advantage, as it allowed the Port to leverage state funds in conjunction with federal grant opportunities.

- Synergy / Economic Development: The South Underpass location provided numerous economic development opportunities that aligned with the Port's strategic growth initiatives. The TPF would not only improve logistics and operations at the Port but also open up future opportunities for development, including potential public-private partnerships in clean energy sectors. These synergies were essential for justifying the operational and maintenance (O&M) costs associated with the TPF. The Port is actively pursuing Clean Energy Grants to develop a hydrogen generation and distribution facility, a 5 MW solar farm, and EV charging stations, all of which could benefit from the TPF's integration into the Port's broader infrastructure plans.

- Environmental Impact: Much of the property is in the Special Flood Hazard Zone (~100-year flood) as shown on the FEMA National Flood Insurance Rate Map (Appendix A). The Port conducted a WOTUS survey of the property and found a relatively small area of wetlands and small perennial stream and ditches. The Port will either avoid or permit and mitigate any permanent impacts to WOTUS through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). There is no critical habitat for threatened or endangered species at this location {U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] IPaC; Appendix B); however, the Federally proposed endangered species, the Tricolored Bat range includes the location.

### 2.2.2 Alternative 2: Old Cotton Gin

The Old Cotton Gin property located on the south bound side of Highway 165 and approximately one mile north of the overpass for the UPRR, was initially considered due to its proximity to the Port's future multi-modal industrial expansion and the willingness of the landowners to sell. However, it failed to meet several critical criteria.

- Availability to the Port: The landowners were receptive to selling 300 acres to the Port for the TPF project.

- Location and Parcel Size: The property is sufficiently sized and located within a two-mile radius of the Port's future multi-modal industrial expansion. However, the location posed

significant safety challenges, because the Port is not able to eliminate the left-hand turns for trucks entering the TPF from Highway 165. The site was only accessible from the southbound side of US 165, meaning trucks traveling northbound would need to make a left-hand turn across the four-lane highway to access the facility. This scenario significantly increased the risk of accidents and did not align with the Port's goal of improving transportation safety. Safety was a primary issue for the Port, and the inability to address left-hand turns was a major reason for rejecting this site.

- Matching Funds: The site did not qualify for the available LaDOTD PPP funds, which were tied to improving safety by eliminating left-hand turns. These funds were critical to the project's financial feasibility. Without them, the Port would have faced significant funding shortfalls, as the state funds could not be used at a location that did not meet the necessary safety criteria.

- Synergy / Economic Development: The Old Cotton Gin site also failed to justify the O&M costs associated with the TPF. The Port has a significant O&M budget for the TPF, and the justification of these expenses is contingent on the facility's utilization by the Port and its tenants to improve operations and generate economic development opportunities. The location did not offer the same potential for synergies as the Riverton South site. The Port is focused on these initiatives as part of its broader strategy to promote sustainable transportation and reduce carbon emissions, and the Old Cotton Gin site did not align with these goals.

- Environmental Impact: The Old Cotton Gin property is in the Special Flood Hazard Zone (100-year flood) as shown on the FEMA National Flood Insurance Rate Map (Appendix A). The Port identified two ditches that cross portions of the property identified on USFWS National Wetland Inventory (NWI) Map . There is no critical habitat for threatened or endangered species at this location (USFWS IPaC; however, the Federally proposed endangered species, Tricolored Bat, range includes the location. The property appears to be 100% in agricultural use, so suitable habitat is likely not present.

### 2.2.3 Alternative 3: Ouachita River Bridge Underpass

The Port evaluated the Ouachita River Bridge Underpass (Kenney Property), located adjacent to US 165 northbound overpass of the Ouachita River, between Henderson and Queen Roads. The location was ultimately rejected due to several factors.

Availability to the Port: The landowners were willing to sell parcels to the Port; however, the cost of acquiring the 20 acres needed for the TPF at the Kenney Property was higher than at other locations, primarily due to existing building structures on the property. While the site had some advantages, such as existing access roads that could have reduced construction costs, the overall expense of developing the Kenney Property outweighed the benefits. The Port also determined that the location did not offer enough economic development opportunities to justify the higher costs.

- Location and Parcel Size: The property is sufficiently sized, but more than five miles from the Port's future multi-modal industrial expansion, making it too far to meet the Port's proximity criteria. The distance would have increased transportation costs and inefficiencies, negating many of the benefits of the TPF. While this location would have

eliminated left-hand turns for trucks entering and exiting the TPF, it would not have addressed left-hand turn safety issues at the Port itself. The Port required a solution that improved safety for both the TPF and the Port, and the Kenney Property did not meet this need.

- Matching Funds: The Kenney Property did not qualify for LaDOTD PPP funds, as it did not meet the safety criteria tied to eliminating left-hand turns at both the TPF and the Port. This absence of matching funds significantly affected the financial viability of the site.

- Synergy / Economic Development: The Kenny Property did not justify the O&M costs associated with the TPF, primarily due to distance from the future port expansion. The Port has a significant O&M budget for the TPF, and the justification of these expenses is contingent on the facility's utilization by the Port and its tenants to improve operations and generate economic development opportunities.

- Environmental Impact: The Kenney Property is in the Special Flood Hazard Zone (~100-year flood) as shown on the FEMA National Flood Insurance Rate Map. The Port did not identify any surface water on the property that could potentially qualify as WOTUS using the USFWS NWI. However, the Ouachita River and associated freshwater emergent wetlands and Brown Lake are near the property. There is no critical habitat for threatened or endangered species at this location however, the Federally proposed endangered species, the Tricolored Bat range includes the location.

### 2.2.4 Alternative 4: Riverton Rail Overpass North Underpass

The Riverton Rail Overpass North Underpass (Riverton North) was another strong contender for the TPF, but it faced insurmountable challenges related to property ownership.

- Availability to the Port: An agreement with the property owner faced insurmountable challenges. The primary obstacle was the refusal of the landowner to sell the property. The landowner was firmly opposed to the development of a biofuel facility at the Port and indicated that he would not engage in any discussions about selling the land. Without the ability to acquire the property, the Port was forced to abandon this site. Additionally, Reynolds Estate, which had agreed to sell land for the selected Riverton South site, opposed the development of an access road at the North Underpass due to concerns about truck traffic near their homes. As part of the purchase agreement with the Reynolds Estate, the Port committed not to build an access road in this area, further complicating the potential for developing the North Underpass location.

- Location and Parcel Size: The Riverton North location is within one mile of the Port's future 400-acre multimodal industrial complex. This location also satisfied the critical safety criteria by eliminating left-hand turns for trucks entering and exiting both the TPF and the Port. This made it one of the safest options under consideration.

- Matching Funds: The North Underpass also qualified for LaDOTD PPP funds, which could have been used as matching funds for the federal grant, providing a strong financial incentive for selecting this location.

- Synergy / Economic Development: Similar to the Riverton South, the Riverton North property offered significant opportunities for expanding the Port's economic development

initiatives. It would have supported clean energy projects, logistics improvements, and other Port growth strategies.

- Environmental Impact: The Riverton North location is in the Special Flood Hazard Zone (~100-year flood) as shown on the FEMA National Flood Insurance Rate Map. The Port did not identify any surface water on the property that could potentially qualify as WOTUS using the USFWS NWI. There is no critical habitat for threatened or endangered species at this location (USFWS IPaC); however, the Federally proposed endangered species, the Tricolored Bat range includes the location.

## 2.3 Comparison of Alternatives

The Port evaluated four alternative site locations for the TPF to determine whether each site would meet the purpose and need of the project, optimally located and available for purchase, and avoid or reduce impacts to sensitive environmental resources and receptors. Table 2-1 summarizes and compares the siting criteria and environmental impacts of the Site Alternatives. The shaded cells in Table 2-1 indicate a negative criteria rating. The preferred Riverton South alternative has the fewest number of negative criteria ratings of the four alternatives considered. The results of the analysis identified the Riverton South site as the preferred action alternative. This location was seen as a proactive investment in addressing and minimizing the potential adverse impacts of increased truck traffic on near-Port residents. By situating the TPF in a way that would buffer residential areas from the noise, emissions, and congestion associated with trucking, the Port demonstrated its commitment to environmental justice and community development. The Riverton South location received no opposition from nearby communities, a significant consideration in any infrastructure project. The infrastructure investment was designed to mitigate negative impacts, improving the overall relationship between the Port and the surrounding communities.

**Table 2-1: Impact Summary and Comparison of Alternatives by Environmental Resource**

| Siting Criteria | Site Alternatives | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Preferred Alternative 1 Riverton South** | **Alternative 2 Old Cotton Gin** | **Alternative 3 Ouachita River Bridge Underpass** | **Alternative 4 Riverton North** |
| **Availability to Applicant** *Local residences & business are receptive* | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| **Location** *Within 2-mi. of Future Port Expansion* | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| **Location** *Safe Highway entry / exit for trucks* | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| **Qualifies for Matching Funds** | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| **Synergy** *With Port Strategic Initiatives* | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS** | | | | |
| **In 100-Year Flood Zone** | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Unavoidable Water of the U.S.** | No | No | No | No |
| **Restrictive Critical Habitat** | No | No | No | No |

# 3. THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT (EXISTING CONDITIONS) AND POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

This section outlines the baseline environmental conditions that could be impacted by the Proposed Action and assesses the potential effects on identified resources. The evaluation of environmental impacts is conducted on varying geographic scales as deemed appropriate based on the project scope and the impacted resource. For instance, soil impacts are evaluated only within the immediate area of soil disturbance; however, quality impacts are evaluated on a watershed level due to the potential for impacts outside of the immediate project footprint.

Effects on each resource can vary in degree or magnitude, from a slightly noticeable change to a total change in the environment. For this analysis, the intensity of effects would be classified as de minimis, minor, or moderate. The intensity thresholds are defined as follows:

- *Not applicable*: Resource does not occur in project area.
- *De minimis*: A resource would not be affected, or the effects would be at or below the level of detection, and changes would not be of any measurable or perceptible consequence.
- *Minor*: Effects on a resource would be detectable, although the effects would be localized, small, and of little consequence to the sustainability of the resource. Mitigation measures, if needed to offset adverse effects, would be simple and achievable.
- *Moderate*: Effects on a resource would be readily detectable, long-term, localized, and measurable. Mitigation measures, if needed to offset adverse effects, would be extensive and likely achievable."

## 3.1 Project Setting

This 86-acre TPF Project will construct on portions of the 124-acre tract of land owned by John Wesley Crump IV / Reynolds (Parcel ID 10054500) and 87 acres of land owned by Mark Hatton & Edgar G. Carr (Parcel ID 10056990), according to the Caldwell Parish interactive geographic information system (GIS), Tax Year 2024 mapping application. Parcels near or directly adjacent to the project site are private, commercial, public water utility, or owned by the Port. The Project will result in the purchase or sale of land to enable the Port to construct the access road, TPF, and amenities building **(Figure X).**

The Site is located approximately 1/3-mile east of the Ouachita River, separated from the river by agricultural land and the UPRR. The UPRR forms the west boundary, and Hwy 165 is the east boundary of the TPF. Much of the facility is in the 100-yr floodplain of the local rivers and bayous located both east and west of the proposed TPF. The facility is in a low lying, low relief area of agricultural/crop land.

According to the National Pipeline Mapping System, there are no gas transmission or hazardous liquid pipelines that cross the TPF. No overhead utility lines or aboveground utility infrastructure exists within the project area.

## 3.2 Land Use

The project study area encompasses approximately 86 acres in Caldwell Parish. Current land use in the project area is represented in Figure 2. As demonstrated in the figure, predominant land use in the vicinity of the Project is agricultural with limited usage by commercial and establishments.

Construction of the Proposed Action will result in the direct conversion of 86 acres of agricultural land use to industrial/commercial land use. This land conversion would be de minimis due to the small size of the project footprint relative to the amount of agricultural land throughout the Region.

## 3.3 Stakeholder Engagement

The Port has made a strong effort to engage a broad range of stakeholders, both prior to the submission of the grant application and following the award of the contract for the TPF. These outreach efforts have been central to ensuring transparency, garnering community support, and aligning the project with local socioeconomic and environmental justice goals.

The Port has conducted and participated in numerous meetings for key local stakeholders, through the Caldwell Parish Industrial Board, Caldwell Parish Police Jury, Caldwell Workforce Development Board, and Columbia Port Commission. These meetings were held with two primary objectives:

1. To inform stakeholders about the Port's proposed grant application for the TPF and to solicit their input and support.
2. To update stakeholders on the progress of the Project after the grant was awarded, including discussions about the next steps in the development of the TPF.

By engaging these entities, the Port was able to ensure that the proposed Project aligned with local needs and that stakeholders were given an opportunity to provide input, which has helped to build a foundation of support for the TPF.

The consensus among the community is that the TPF is being developed not just as a logistics and transportation infrastructure project but as a service to the community. This sentiment has been shaped by the Port's efforts to position the TPF as a solution to the potential adverse impacts of truck transportation, such as traffic congestion and environmental pollution. The TPF is seen as a proactive measure to minimize the community's exposure to these issues while supporting the growth of the Port and local economy.

In line with environmental justice principles, the Port has made efforts to ensure that the project benefits the local community without disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations. The development of the TPF is being positioned as an infrastructure improvement that will help mitigate some of the negative effects of increased truck traffic due to the Port's growth. By providing a designated space for truck parking, the facility will reduce congestion and limit the environmental burden on nearby residents, thereby promoting a healthier and safer environment for all.

The Port recognizes that maintaining open lines of communication and fostering transparency are essential to successful long-term collaboration with the community. To this end, the Port is committed to continuing its outreach efforts as the TPF project progresses. Future meetings will focus on keeping the community and stakeholders informed about the Project's timeline, potential

impacts, and opportunities for further collaboration. This approach ensures that the TPF remains a community-driven project that aligns with both the Port's economic goals and the needs of the local population.

## 3.4 Environmental Justice

Executive Order (EO) 12898 ("Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations") was signed into law on February 11, 1994. The EO "directs federal agencies to make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high adverse human health or environmental effects of its activities on minority and low-income population" (FEMA, n.d) This directive is intended to reduce discrimination under federal activities that could affect human health and the environment. The FHWA Order 6640.23A and the DOT Order 5610.2(a) establishes policies and procedures for these agencies to use in complying with Executive Order 12898.

To evaluate potential effects on environmental justice, Geosyntec accessed the Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN; Appendix B), which was created by USEPA to provide mapping and reporting resources for the protection of public and environmental health. Table 3-3 provides demographic data for Caldwell Parish as compared to the State of Louisiana.

**Table 3-1: Demographic Characteristics for the Project Area**

| **Population, 2020 Census** | **Caldwell Parish** | **Louisiana** |
|---|---|---|
| Population, 2020 | 9,645 | 4,657,757 |
| Population, 2010 | 10,132 | 4,533,372 |
| Percent (%) Change, 2010–2020 | -4.8% | 2.7% |
| **Racial Demographics, 2020 Census** | **Caldwell Parish** | **Louisiana** |
| White alone | 7,646 | 2,657,652 |
| Black or African American | 2,534 | 1,464,023 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 19 | 31,657 |
| Asian | 42 | 86,438 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 221 | 322,549 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 3 | 1,911 |
| Some Other Race | 57 | 142,699 |
| Two or More Races | 344 | 273,377 |
| **Income & Poverty, 2018-2022** | **Caldwell Parish** | **Louisiana** |
| Median Household Income | $47,707 | $57,852 |
| Persons in Poverty (%) | 21.1 % | 18.9 % |
| Per Capita Income ($) | $28,491 | $32,981 |

Source: USCB 2010, USCB 2020

In accordance with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Order 6640.23A and the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) Order 5610.2(a), a minority means a person who is Black, Asian American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or Hispanic (regardless of race). Therefore, the total population minus the "white alone" population was used to determine the minority population. Furthermore, NEPA guidance provided by the CEQ states that minority populations should be identified for areas where the minority population exceeds 50 percent, or the minority population percentage in the affected area is meaningfully greater than the minority population percentage in the general population. Additionally, the NEPA guidance provided by CEQ states low-income populations should be identified using the annual statistical poverty threshold from the Bureau of Census' Current Population Reports on Income and Poverty.

Using the EJSCREEN tool with data from the 2018–2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates for 2022, the population of Caldwell Parish is primarily white (79.3 percent), which is less diverse than that of the state (57 percent). Caldwell Parish supports only a small minority population. Both the No Action Alternative and the Preferred Alternative will not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations since census data did not reflect minority populations in the Project area. This finding are consistent with FHWA Order 6640.23A.

The 2018-2022 median household income for Caldwell Parish ($45,707) was lower than that compared to the State of Louisiana ($57,852). In addition, the 2022 percentage of persons in poverty for Caldwell Parish was 21.1 percent, above that of the State of Louisiana. As a result, there is a greater potential for impacts, both beneficial and adverse, that are disproportionately high on low-income populations in the greater Caldwell Parish area. This is also reflected in the low 2018-2022 Per Capita Income in Caldwell Parish ($28,491) which is 14% lower than that for the State of Louisiana ($32,981).

The Port has begun work on a multi-million dollar infrastructure investment into the transformation of our Port into a 400-acre Multimodal Industrial Complex with improvements to the connectivity between the Ouachita River, Union Pacific Railroad and LA Hwy 165. The majority of the funds for this investment project have been secured from LaDOTD PPP ($15 million), La Capital Outlay ($2 million), Delta Regional Authority ($500,000), USDA Rural Development ($184,000) and DHS ($1 million). These grants were awarded during the FY2022 to assist with the development of the Columbia Port. The TPF is a critical component of the Multimodal Industrial Complex.

The temporary workforce and addition of 150 permanent jobs will greatly benefit the local community. In addition to providing jobs for a mix of labor categories, the local community will benefit from increases in tax revenue, and revenue to local businesses for goods and services generated by the temporary construction workforce and users of the TPF. Loding and local purchases for primarily consumables, fuel, and miscellaneous construction-related materials will be needed for construction of the TPF. There is no anticipated cost increase for police, fire protection, medical facilities, schools, roads, or other community infrastructure.

## 3.5 Public Lands and Recreational Areas

The Port will construct a TPF for truck and car traffic on Hwy 165. The area immediately surrounding the project site is mostly agricultural land, as discussed in Section 3.2. According to

aerial imagery, there is a public USACE boat ramp and the Riverton Lake Campground within approximately 0.5-miles south of the project area. The listed parks or other recreation areas nearest to the project site include Grayson Recreation Park (14-miles to the southeast), and the Charles Allen Nature Preserve (8-miles to the south).

Construction and operation of the TPF would have no short- or long-term impacts to any of the recreational areas listed above or to any other recreational areas in the vicinity of the project. The nearby recreational areas are separated from project site by the UPRR. Other sites are separated by Hwy 165 and lateral distance from the TPF.

### 3.6 Cultural Resources

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on historic properties. Historic properties are defined as archeological sites, standing structures, or other historic resources listed in, or eligible for, listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The below ground disturbance footprint of the project is 2-ft. in depth and will occur within the previously disturbed farmland soil and within a previously surveyed area. As necessary, Port will comply with SHPO requirements related to preconstruction survey or monitoring. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated to cultural resources. If undiscovered resources are identified during excavation, then the Port will stop work and SHPO will be contacted.

The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) has nine places designated on the NRHP website and three places having statewide significance. Significant places include Breston Plantation House, Landerneau Mound and Shepis Building, Blanks House and Downtown Columbia Historic District, none of which are in or near the Project area. Prominent architectural styles found in Caldwell Parish are Greek Revival, Bungalow/Craftsman and Gothic.

The No Action Alternative will have no building or construction, so no adverse effects due to no ground disturbances will occur as a result.

### 3.7 Section 4(f) Properties

Under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act (49 USC 303), FHWA and the DOT may not approve the use of land from a publicly-owned park, recreation area, wildlife or waterfowl refuge, or historic (eligible in National Register of Historic Places [NRHP]) site unless a determination is made that: 1) there is no feasible and prudent alternative, and 2) the action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from use. Within the project area, there are no publicly-owned parks, recreation areas, or wildlife and waterfowl refuges. There were no historic sites identified in the Project area. Therefore, Section 4(f) does not apply to the proposed Project.

### 3.8 Tribal Resources

The Tribal Directory Assessment Tool (TDAT), created by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (USHUD), assists in identifying Tribal Nations with connections to specific land areas. In the project area within Caldwell Parish, the tool identified seven Tribal Nations. These nations are:

- Apache Tribe of Oklahoma

- Caddo Nation of Oklahoma
- Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
- Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana
- Jena Band of Choctaw Indians
- Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians
- Seminole Tribe of Florida

The Port has initiated consultation with the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) of the above tribes: The consultation letter contained a description and location of the project and requested confirmation from the THPO of "no effect" on known historic properties or resources. At the time of this submittal, no response has been received. Copies of tribal correspondence are contained in Appendix X.

## 3.9 Aesthetics

Aesthetic resources are those resources that contribute to the visual characteristics and appeal of an area, including its natural and manmade features. Aesthetic resources include elements such as scenic views and visual quality. Aesthetics are an important consideration because changes to the visual character of an area can have significant impacts on the surrounding community and ecosystem. The regional geography in this area is primarily agricultural and woodlands with small rural communities. The surrounding landscape is plowed agricultural fields, crossed by Hwy 165, Riverton Camp Road, UPRR, and sparse small commercial / industrial businesses. Based on the level of development, the project area is of limited aesthetic value, with sparse natural areas and a fragmented riverine woodland.

Impacts on visual and/or aesthetic resources will primarily occur during construction as a result of vegetation clearing and the presence of construction equipment within the Project Site. Construction-related visual and aesthetic impacts will be temporary, will decrease with distance from areas of active construction, and will cease following the completion of construction and successful restoration.

Minor visual impacts will occur from the operation of the TPF. The facility will be located in a rural area with low density residential and agricultural use. The Port will retain existing trees as practicable to provide a visual buffer around the proposed TPF.

The Project will result in short-term impacts aesthetics of the area due to increased traffic and construction equipment. However, in the context of existing land uses, these temporary impacts are considered de minimis for the purposes of the EA.

## 3.10 Topography and Geology

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) 1976 7.5-minute series topographic map, the average elevation of the Project Site (Site) is approximately 65 feet above sea level and is generally level throughout the property except for a streambed and drainage ditches that transect and parallel the Site along with drainage furrows across the property.

The Site is in the Holocene alluvial plain of the Ouachita and Beouf Rivers characterized by level to undulating soils on natural levees along current and former channels of the rivers and low-level soils between natural levees. The surface geology is alluvial, consisting of sandy and gravelly channel deposits and sandy to muddy natural levee deposits.

Regionally, the TPF is on the western edge of the Mississippi Interior Salt Basin between the Monroe Uplift and LaSalle Arch, and east of the Richland-Caldwell Paleoridge.

## 3.11 Soils and Prime Farmland

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service for Caldwell Parish indicates the Site soil component is primarily Rilla (Rg) silty loam, well drained, low runoff with 1-3% slope; with lesser amounts of Hebert (He) and Gallion (Go) silty loam, somewhat poorly drained, low runoff with a 0-1% slope, depth to water table 1 -3 feet. Soil does not meet the requirements for a hydric soil. The acreage is prime farmland.

**Table 3-2: Soil Type within Project Footprint**

| SOIL TYPE | ACREAGE AMOUNT | PRIME FARMLAND |
|---|---|---|
| Rilla (Rg) | 71 | Yes |
| Gallion (Go) | 14 | Yes |
| Hebert (He) | 1 | Yes |

Rilla (Rg) series consists of very deep, well drained / low runoff, moderately permeable soils that formed in silty and loamy alluvium. This soil type is found within the floodplain situated on nearly level to gently sloping natural levees along the Ouachita River, as well as in both its active and abandoned channels. Depth to water table can be 48 to 72 inches. Most areas containing Rilla series soils are cleared and used for cultivation of cotton, soybeans, corn, or pasture (USDA 2002c). Rilla series soils are classified as prime farmland of statewide or local importance soils (USDA 2022b).

Gallion (Go) series consists of very deep, well drained / negligible runoff, moderately permeable soils that formed in loamy alluvium. These soils are in the floodplain on nearly level topography found on natural levees along the Ouachita River and the present and abandoned channels of the regional rivers. Depth to water table can be more than 80 inches. Gallion series soils are classified as prime farmland of statewide or local importance soils (USDA 2022b).

Hebert (He) series consists of very deep, somewhat poorly drained, low runoff, moderately slowly permeable soils that formed in silty alluvium. This soil type is in the floodplain and found on natural levees along present and abandoned channels of the Ouachita River and other nearby rivers. The depth to the water table ranges from is 18 to 36 inches. Hebert series soils are classified as prime farmland of statewide or local importance soils (USDA 2022b).

The 1981 Farmland Protection Policy Act (Code of Federal Regulations title 7, part 658) mandates that federal agencies assess impacts to prime and unique farmland before they are permanently converted to land uses incompatible with agriculture. Prime farmland soils, as determined by USDA NRCS, have the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing

crops suitable for the area. Furthermore, the prime farmland designation also denotes adequate and consistent water supply from precipitation or irrigation; favorable temperature and growing season; acceptable soil pH, salt and sodium content; and non-excessive erodibility or water saturation. The criteria for determining and defining these lands are established by the relevant state or local agencies in collaboration with USDA.

Under the No Action Alternative, no impacts would occur to existing prime farmland soil characteristics or uses.

Under the Proposed Action, approximately 86 acres of prime farmland soil would be disturbed during grading and paving construction. Approximately 71-acres of Rilla silt loam, 14-acres of Gallion loam, and 1-acre of Hebert silt would be temporarily or permanently impacted. The direct impact from the disturbance and removal from biological production of approximately 86-acres of prime farmland soil would be de minimis due to the small size of the project footprint relative to the amount of the same soils throughout the Region. Upon completion of construction, the temporarily disturbed areas would be revegetated with a mixture of native plant seeds and nursery-grown plants or allowed to revegetate naturally.

## 3.12 Aquatic Habitat

Aquatic habitats refer to areas within streams, lakes, or wetlands that can support certain species of fish, amphibians, mollusks, and other aquatic wildlife through their life cycles. In the project area, the land is mainly dry, except for an intermittent stream, a plowed drainage feature, and perimeter ditches that traverse the property between the UPRR and Hwy 165 (Figure XX). The intermittent characteristic of the features indicate that except during seasonal rainfall, the stream is anticipated to be dry for other periods of the year and therefore not suitable for aquatic wildlife.

As there is a lack of aquatic habitat within the Project area, de minimis impacts to this resource are expected to occur for both the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action.

## 3.13 Water Resources

### 3.13.1 Surface Water

The project area lies within the surface water drainage area referred to as the Boeuf Watershed (Hydraulic Unit Code [HUC] 08050001) and Louisiana DEQ Subsegment LA080904 Bayou Lafourche from the headwaters to Boeuf River near Columbia, all within the Ouachita River Basin (Appendix / Map).

The Site is generally flat, with ditches running along the UPRR and Hwy 165 on either side of and crossing the property, an intermittent stream, and pond at the northern end of the Site. The general area slopes away from the Ouachita River approximately 1/3-mile west for facility, and towards Bayou Lafourche more than 4-miles to the east of the TPF.

USEPA maintains the Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters, a list of water bodies in the United States that do not meet water quality standards under the Clean Water Act (CWA). These water bodies are impaired due to various pollutants or stressors such as excessive nutrients, sedimentation, bacteria, and other contaminants. The receiving segment of the Bayou Lafourche is listed as impaired on the 2024 Louisiana 303d for fecal coliform on primary contact recreation. It is listed as Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) low priority (Appendix XX).

Under the Proposed Action, de minimis impacts to waterways would occur during construction and operations phases because stormwater will be controlled by permits, portable restrooms will be provided and properly managed during construction, and the permanent facilities will be connected to a nearby a permitted wastewater treatment plant.

### 3.13.2 Groundwater

The Mississippi River Alluvial Aquifer is a primary source of fresh groundwater water throughout Caldwell Parish. The Mississippi River Alluvial (MRA) Aquifer extends east-west from the Ouachita River to the Mississippi River and north-south from the Louisiana – Arkansas state line to Central Louisiana, covering 33,000 square miles. MRA Aquifer is poorly to moderately well sorted, *fine*-grained to medium-grained sand near the top, grading to coarse sand and gravel in the lower portions. It is confined by layers of silt and clay of varying thicknesses and extent. The MRA Aquifer is hydraulically connected with the Mississippi River and its major streams. Water levels are generally within 30 to 40 feet of the land surface and fluctuate seasonally in response to rainfall and river stage. Secondary sources of fresh groundwater are the Cockfield Aquifer and the Sparta Aquifer in the Project area.

Groundwater use in Caldwell Parish includes domestic, irrigation, public water supply, and industrial. Louisiana Department of Natural and Energy Resources (LDENR) SONRIS records show 98 active domestic water wells in Caldwell Parish, of these 87 are Mississippi River Alluvial Aquifer (MRA) wells and the remainder are Ouachita Alluvial, Cockfield, Sparta, and Upland Terrace Aquifers wells. The number and type of other active water wells in Caldwell Parish include 104 irrigation wells, 28 public supply wells, and seven industrial wells. There is a total of eleven active water wells near the proposed project including two domestic, two municipal public supply, and seven irrigation wells. The two municipal public supply wells are located at or near the southwestern project boundary and owned by East Columbia Water System.

Under the Proposed Action, construction will not penetrate the primary aquifer, since foundation depths will be approximately 2-ft below ground surface. Based on the proposed construction, design, and operation of the facility, the proposed project will have de minimis effect on the nearby water wells.

### 3.13.3 Wetlands

The USACE defines wetlands as “areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions” (USACE 1987). The USACE identifies wetlands based on three primary characteristics: hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soils, and wetland hydrology. Impacts to wetlands are regulated by the USACE and USEPA in accordance with Section 404 of the CWA.

A USACE jurisdictional determination (JD) was provided for the Site. Wetlands were delineated within the wooded area within the center of the property (Figure X). Under the Proposed Action, approximately 0.12 acres of WOTUS may be directly impacted by gravel road constructed across the intermittent stream bed associated wetlands. The project will either avoid or modify the stream and wetlands in coordination with the USACE. Indirect impacts to the WOTUS features could occur from pollutants entrained in stormwater runoff. Impacts from sediment-laden stormwater will be minimized using BMPs.

## 3.14 Floodplain

EO 11988 mandates that federal agencies take measures to minimize occupancy of floodplains. This order prohibits federal funding for construction in the 100-year or 500-year floodplains unless no practical alternatives exist. The NEPA compliance process follows a similar decision-making framework, aligned with the objectives outlined in the Eight-Step Decision-Making Process. Key steps include identifying the floodplain location, providing public notice, analyzing impacts, evaluating alternatives, mitigating adverse impacts, re-evaluating alternatives based on new information, publicly announcing the decision, and ultimately implementing the proposal with appropriate mitigation measures.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Panel Map 22021C0175C shows that most of the site falls within the 1% annual chance flood zone, commonly referred to as the 100-year flood zone. Additionally, a review of the LSU Ag Center website confirms that the effective FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map categorizes the site within this same 1% floodplain. It is designated as Zone A, a Special Flood Hazard Area, where no base flood elevation has been determined.

The project area lies beyond the protection of the Ouachita River levee system. The 100-year floodplain extends beyond the levee, encompassing much of the area, including most of the project site. The Proposed Action includes the construction of public amenities and an office building on a raised pad to reduce the impact of flood events on the structures. Additionally, a retention basin will be incorporated as part of the site design to offset the footprint of the raised pad. The proposed alternative project will have a de minimis effect on the floodplain.

## 3.15 Transportation

The major roadways near the project are Hwy 165 and an adjacent minor roadway Riverton Campground Road is in a rural agricultural area. Hwy 165 receives traffic from I-20 located approximately 23-miles north and Hwy 84 located approximately 37-miles south of the proposed project. The project abuts the UPRR on the west side of the project.

Under the No Action Alternative, no change would occur to vehicle traffic on the local roadways.

Under the Proposed Action, roadway transportation would experience short-term, minor impacts from increased traffic and heavy equipment use on the surface streets; however, would supply a parking area and amenities for both truck and car traffic on Hwy 165. The increase in traffic would be localized to the immediate vicinity of the project site and would be highest where vehicles and equipment turn off Hwy 165 onto the access route. During operations, the facility would prohibit left turns for trucks, and truck traffic will utilize right turn maneuvers to access the facility which will require road improvements. Implementation of the proposed road improvements would result in no adverse long-term impacts to traffic flow along U.S. 165 during the day-to-day operations of the facility.

The Proposed Action would have a positive impact on safety for trucks and motorists entering and exiting Highway 165 to access the TPF.

## 3.16 Ecosystem Resources

The proposed Project site is located within the Mississippi Alluvial Plain, specifically in the Arkansas/Ouachita River Holocene Meander Belts and Backswamps ecoregions. In Louisiana,

these ecoregions extend from the northern Louisiana state line south into northern Catahoula Parish.

The Arkansas/Ouachita River Holocene Meander Belts ecoregion features a flat floodplain shaped by the meandering paths of the lower Arkansas and Ouachita rivers. It is characterized by point bars, natural levees, swales, and abandoned channels marked by meander scars and oxbow lakes. Soils on natural levees are coarse-textured and well-drained, while those in abandoned channels and swales tend to be poorly drained clays. Overall, these soils have less organic matter compared to the Northern Holocene Meander Belts. Much of the native forest has been cleared for agriculture, primarily corn, cotton, and soybeans. This ecoregion once contained one of North America's largest wetland systems, but constructed levees now limit the Mississippi River's overflow, allowing for extensive farming. In Louisiana, major crops in the northern and central regions include cotton, corn, soybeans, pasture, and rice (Daigle, J.J., et al., 2006, Ecoregions of Louisiana).

The Arkansas/Ouachita River Backswamps ecoregion features flat areas, swales, and natural levees along the Arkansas and Ouachita rivers, where water collects in swamps, oxbow lakes, ponds, and sloughs. The landscape is primarily covered with natural levee deposits, which support native willow oak and water oak instead of species suited to wetter conditions. Drainage canals and ditches are common, and this artificial drainage, along with the sandy levee deposits, facilitates extensive farming in the region. Key crops include soybeans, corn, cotton, and rice, though forests and forested wetlands are also present (Daigle, J.J., et al., 2006, Ecoregions of Louisiana).

### 3.16.1 Vegetation

Vegetation in the project area is primarily dominated by agricultural crops, with other plant life associated with the levee and levee toe. The topography of the project area is generally flat to rolling. Most of the area has been converted to anthropogenic uses—mainly transportation and agriculture. Dominant species are native and introduced grasses. Small trees are present along the levee slope and riparian corridors. Vegetation in the area is routinely mowed and/or disced for agricultural and ROW maintenance.

The Proposed Action would occur in an agricultural landscape environment on vacant land. Native vegetation in the region would not likely be affected directly by the TPF Project. There may be little to no impact on common vegetation given the lack of habitat with or adjacent to the proposed project area.

Under the No Action Alternative, existing vegetation management practices would not change. The area would continue to be mowed for ROW maintenance, and the agricultural areas would not be impacted.

During construction, invasive species could be introduced through the loss of existing ground cover and the trucking in of materials from outside the region. Invasive species can outcompete many native species in disturbed (open ground) conditions. However, because the temporary workspaces are relatively small and impacts will occur primarily within existing agricultural land, the potential for large scale establishment of invasive species is negligible.

Impacts to vegetation would be limited for the Proposed Action to the immediate construction footprint and temporary workspaces. Following construction, vegetation will regrow naturally, or

crops will be replanted within the agricultural field. Therefore, impacts to vegetation would be temporary and de minimis.

The proposed project area is in predominantly agricultural use within the Mississippi Alluvial Plain. The agricultural land is studded with poor-quality, fragmented woodlands and riparian corridors. Agricultural fields typically provide poor wildlife habitat for large species, though some smaller species such as rodents and certain birds may forage and nest within agricultural fields.

### 3.16.2 Terrestrial

Louisiana's terrestrial landscape is diverse with forests, prairies, marshes, coastal plains, frontlands, backlands, and barrier islands. Louisiana is home to a variety of plant and animal life, including alligators, snakes, birds, mammals, fish and shellfish.

Typical wildlife that can occur and pass through the proposed project area include the long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), Beaver *(Castor canadensis)*, Common Gartersnake (T*hamnophis sirtalisheal*), white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and rodents such as tree squirrels, mice, rats, and moles.

Under the No Action Alternative, no changes would occur to the landscape and no impacts on wildlife are expected.

Under the Proposed Action, a temporary disturbance is anticipated across open land, accompanied by increased traffic along Hwy 165. Short-term impacts on wildlife populations are expected, primarily stemming from land disturbance and elevated noise levels within the temporary workspaces. These disruptions may lead to temporary displacement, stress, or potential injury to individual animals unable to vacate the workspace. Any disruption to habitat types can induce alterations in the breeding, feeding, nesting, and rearing activities of species that inhabit those areas.

Caldwell Parish is not designated as a wildlife management area, refuge, or conservation area by the LDWF.

## 3.17 Threatened and Endangered Species

The Endangered Species Act (ESA; United States Code [USC] title 16, chapter 35), administered nationally by USFWS, was enacted to conserve the ecosystems upon which threatened and endangered (T&E) species depend and to conserve and recover those species. An endangered species is defined by the ESA as a species in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant part of its range. A threatened species is one that is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant part of its range. The ESA also designates critical habitats, which are habitats identified as essential to the conservation of a listed species. Per the ESA, it is against the law to harm, hurt, shoot, pursue, lure, wound, kill, destroy, harass, gig, spear, ensnare, trap, capture, or collect (or attempt to engage in such conduct with) any threatened or endangered species or to adversely impact critical habitat.

A list of federally T&E species was obtained from the USFWS Information Planning and Consulting (IPaC) tool and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) database in October 2024 to evaluate whether T&E species could occur within the proposed project area. The IPaC returned three T&E species and 11 migratory bird species that could occur within or

surrounding the project area or could be directly or indirectly adversely impacted by the project. Habitat requirements and impacts of the federal action are also discussed in detail for each listed species in Appendix C.

The LDWF maintains a database of rare, threatened, and endangered species that are protected under state law. The following sections will provide information on the environmental consequences that the proposed action could have on T&E species within and near the project area.

**Tri colored Bat (Federal Status: Proposed Endangered; State Status: None)**

On September 13, 2022, USFWS announced a proposal to list the tricolored bat (TCB) as an endangered species under the ESA. The decline of the TCB is primarily caused by WNS. The species' range, which includes 39 states and 4 Canadian provinces, extends into Central America.

During the winter, TCB typically hibernate in caves, but in southern regions where caves are scares, they also use tree cavities, Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*), and artificial structures such as bridges, culverts and abandoned water wells (Newman et al. 2021). According to the USFWS *Range-wide Indiana Bat and Northern Long-Eared Bat Survey Guidelines, suitable su*mmer habitat for TCB includes generally defines TCB potentially suitable summer habitat as "wooded habitats where they roost forage and travel and may include some adjacent and interspersed non-forested habitats such as emergent wetlands and adjacent edges of agricultural fields, old fields, and pastures" (USFWS 2023). TCB primarily roost in woodlots with, which can be living or dead leaves on large broadleaf trees (especially oaks), Spanish moss, and Usnea (*trichodea)* lichen. They have also been observed roosting in human-made structures (bridges, barns, porches), small trees with roost substrates, pine needles of shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*), live branches of Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) and eastern cedar (Juniperus virginiana), abandoned gray squirrel nests, and the exfoliating bark of birches (Betula spp.).

Preferred TCB foraging habitat includes edges of large forest clearings, edges of riparian corridors, and open water. USFWS IPaC identified no critical habitat for TCB is present within the Project Area.

The TCB has the potential to occur within the project area, but it is unlikely to be affected by the Proposed Action as any potential roosting habitats have already been converted for agricultural use or other human developments

**Monarch Butterfly (Federal Status: Proposed Endangered)**

The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is currently a candidate species and is not yet listed or proposed for listing. While there are generally no Section 7 requirements for candidate species, the USFWS encourages agencies to seize any opportunities for conservation.

The range of the monarch butterfly encompasses the entire U.S. lower 48 states and Hawaii. In many regions where monarchs are present, monarchs breed year-round. Individual monarchs live in temperate climates, such as eastern and western North America, undergo long-distance migration, and live for an extended period. In the fall, in both eastern and western North America, monarchs begin migrating to their respective overwintering sites. This migration can take monarchs distances of over 3,000 kilometers and last for over two months. In early spring (February–March), surviving monarchs break diapause and mate at the overwintering sites before dispersing. The same individuals that undertook the initial southward migration begin flying back

through the breeding grounds and their offspring start the cycle of generational migration over again.

Although the monarch butterfly may potentially occur within the project area, it is unlikely to be affected by the Proposed Action, as no milkweed host plants have been observed and nectar sources for adult butterflies are limited.

**Alligator Snapping Turtle (Federal Status: Proposed Threatened; State Status: Endangered)**

The Alligator snapping turtle has been federally proposed as a threatened species. It is the largest freshwater turtle species in North America. Historically, its range spanned the southeastern U.S., extending from east Texas to northern Florida, and reaching as far north as Indiana, Illinois, southeastern Kansas, and southeastern Oklahoma.

This species primarily inhabits freshwater bodies and river systems, thriving in a range of habitats including lakes, swamps, canals, oxbows, and brackish waters. Although they spend most of their lives in water, females venture onto land to nest in sandy soils, sometimes up to 200 meters from the water's edge. Threats to their population include commercial and recreational hunting, bycatch, and habitat loss and degradation (USFWS 2021).

The Alligator snapping turtle has the potential to occur within the project area, but it is unlikely to be affected by the Proposed Action, as any potential nesting habitats have already been converted for agricultural use or other human developments.

## 3.18 Protected Birds

Aside from state-listed and federally listed T&E species, there could be several bird species found in Calwell County that are protected by other federal statutes like the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

**Bald and Golden Eagles**

The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is no longer classified as a threatened or endangered species at either the state or federal level; however, it remains protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. This legislation prohibits the take, sale, purchase, barter, transport, export, or import of any bald or golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), alive or dead, as well as any parts, nests, or eggs associated with these birds.

Bald eagles prefer to make their nests in tall conifers that extend above the forest canopy in late-successional forests, but they will also utilize different types of nest sites when large conifers are not available. Nests are built close to the trunk, high on the tree but below the crown. Nests can be up to 6 feet in diameter and 4 feet tall and will be reused yearly by the same pair. Nest sites are often chosen for their proximity to large bodies of water, and they show a preference for less heavily developed areas.

Golden eagles usually nest on cliffs, but they may also build nests in trees or in human-made structures including windmills, observation towers, nesting platforms, and electrical transmission towers. Nests average 5–6 feet wide and 2 feet high, enclosing a bowl about 3 feet by 2 feet deep.

Based on the characteristics of the project area, bald eagles and golden eagles are anticipated to be present. Consequently, they are not expected to be impacted under the No Action Alternative.

However, under the Proposed Action Alternatives, it is important to note that bald eagles breed from September 1 to July 31. To minimize disturbances to nesting grounds, implementing BMPs and scheduling activities to avoid these areas during the breeding season is recommended.

**Migratory Birds**

Bird species are especially abundant in this region as the project is located within the Mississippi flyway and in proximity to the Ouachita River. The IPaC identified 11 migratory avian species of particular concern, including the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*), Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*), Kentucky Warbler (G*eothypis formosa*), Least Tern *(Sternula antillarum*), Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*), Prairie Warbler (*Setophaga discolor*), Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*), Red-headed Woodpecker *(Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), and Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*).

Migratory birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which prohibits the killing or harassment of these species, including unintentional take. The USFWS IPaC system has identified species of interest for the project area along with their estimated occurrence times. It's important to note that all migratory bird species are protected under this legislation.

The project area is located within agricultural fields and adjacent a Highway 165 and a UPRR. Based on the current land use within the project area, most migratory bird species are unlikely to find suitable nesting habitat. Migratory birds present within the project area are likely to be transient individuals using the area for foraging rather than nesting. The exception are bird species that are attracted to bare ground, such as kildeer, which prefer nesting on flat open areas.

Impacts to migratory birds from the construction activities are most likely to occur during vegetation clearing based on the existing habitat types.

## 3.19 Utilities and Infrastructure

The proposed project area does not contain any gas transmission pipelines or hazardous liquid pipelines according to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) mapping system (Attachment X – PHMSA PL Map). Powerlines run east to west along Hwy 165.

The development of truck parking infrastructure may increase needs for land use, sanitation, water supply, and solid waste disposal. However, it is not expected to significantly impact routine public services, as regular traffic along Hwy 165 typically continues to the nearest rest area. This proposed development could help alleviate traffic congestion by providing an additional rest area for travelers. Construction activities during development are not expected to generate significant wastewater. The proposed TPF and EV charging station would not have a significant impact on current treatment operations due to a slight increase in wastewater generation from this development.

The Proposed Action Alternative, if there are underground and/or overhead utilities, the proposed project would require the relocation or adjustment of these utilities. Any utilities with the potential to be impacted would be identified prior to any ground disturbing activities. At that time, coordination with utility owners and service providers would occur to develop adjustment plans. In the event of utility adjustments, the implementation of effective management strategies to minimize disruption to both the utilities and their customers would take place.

## 3.20 Air Quality

Ambient air quality is protected by federal and state air quality standards. The USEPA establishes National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established under the Clean Air Act (CAA) to protect human health and welfare. Primary standards protect human health, including sensitive populations such as children, the elderly, and asthmatics. Secondary standards set limits to protect public welfare, including protection against reduced visibility and damage to crops, vegetation, animals, and buildings. NAAQS have been developed for seven "criteria air pollutants", including nitrogen dioxide ($NO_2$), carbon monoxide (CO), ozone, sulfur dioxide ($SO_2$), particulate matter less than or equal to 2.5 microns in aerodynamic diameter ($PM_{2.5}$), particulate matter less than or equal to 10 microns in aerodynamic diameter ($PM_{10}$), and lead (Pb), and include levels for short-term (acute) and long-term (chronic) exposures. Each NAAQS is expressed in terms of concentration level and an associated averaging period. The current NAAQS for these criteria pollutants are summarized in Table X.

Table X National Ambient Air Quality Standards

| Pollutant | Averaging Period | Primary | Secondary | Form |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| $NO_2$ | 1-hour | 100 ppb | -- | 98th percentile of 1-hour daily maximum concentrations, averaged over 3 years |
| | Annual | 53 ppb | 53 ppb[1] | Annual Mean |
| $SO_2$ | 1-hour | 75 ppb[1] | -- | 99th percentile of 1-hour daily maximum concentrations, averaged over 3 years |
| | 3-hour | -- | 0.5 ppm | Not to be exceeded more than once per year |
| CO | 1-hour | 35 ppm | -- | Not to be exceeded more than once per year |
| | 8-hour | 9 ppm | -- | Not to be exceeded more than once per year |
| $PM_{10}$ | 24-hour | 150 µg/m$^3$ | 150 µg/m$^3$ | Not to be exceeded more than once per year on average over 3 years |
| $PM_{2.5}$ | 24-hour | 35 µg/m$^3$ | 35 µg/m$^3$ | 98th percentile, averaged over 3 years |
| | Annual | 9.0 µg/m$^3$ | 15.0 µg/m$^3$ | Annual mean, averaged over 3 years |
| $O_3$ | 8-hour | 0.070 ppm | 0.070 ppm | Annual fourth-highest daily maximum 8-hour concentration, averaged over 3 years |
| Pb | Rolling 3-month | 0.15 µg/m$^3$ | 0.15 µg/m$^3$ | Not to be exceeded |

Notes:

[1] The level of the annual $NO_2$ standard is 0.053 ppm. It is shown here in terms of ppb for the purposes of clearer comparison to the 1-hour standard level.

Air quality control regions (AQCR) are areas established by the EPA and local agencies for air quality planning purposes, in which State Implementation Plans describe how the NAAQS would be achieved and maintained. The AQCRs are intra- and interstate regions, such as large metropolitan areas, where improvement of the air quality in one portion of the AQCR requires emission reductions throughout the AQCR. Each AQCR, or portion thereof, is designated based on compliance with the NAAQS, for each pollutant. Designations fall under three main categories: "attainment" (areas in compliance with the NAAQS); "nonattainment" (areas not in compliance with the NAAQS); or "unclassifiable." Unclassifiable areas are treated as attainment areas for the purpose of permitting a stationary source of pollution. Areas that have been designated

nonattainment but have still demonstrated compliance with the ambient air quality standard(s) are designated maintenance for that pollutant. Maintenance areas may be subject to more stringent regulatory requirements to ensure continued attainment of the NAAQS pollutant.

Caldwell Parish is in an area of attainment for all criteria pollutants.

Under the No-Action Alternative, current agricultural activities would continue. No changes would occur that would result in additional impacts to current air quality.

Construction of Proposed Action is expected to take approximately X months to complete. Emissions from fuel-burning internal combustion engines (e.g., transportation trucks, heavy equipment, generators, etc.), as well as dust, are expected to be generated during construction activities. Under the Proposed Action, ground-disturbing construction activities would adhere to local, state, and federal air quality standards. BMPs would be implemented to control dust and minimize air quality hazards, thus the project would have a de minimis effect on air quality in the area. To reduce emissions, fuel-burning equipment run times will be kept to a minimum, and engines will be properly maintained. These emissions will be minor and temporary and will not have long-term impacts on the local or regional environment.

Under the proposed action, operation of the TPF will result in additional vehicle travel in the project area and air emissions from idling trucks while at the facility. Mobile sources such as automobiles and trucks are exempt from obtaining a permit from the LDEQ (LAC 33:III.507.B.1.c). No other emission sources have been identified for the TPF. Vehicle emissions from idling trucks would result in de minimis effects on air quality. Measures will be implemented to minimize idling emissions while vehicles are parked at the facility.

### 3.21 Climate Change

Based on the location of the Project, the effects of climate change on the Proposed Action will most likely consist of disruption of services resulting from extreme weather events. Flooding or severe storms could damage the facility, interrupt power and water supplies, and make it difficult for trucks and the public to access the TPF. To reduce the impact caused by disruption of service, the Port will follow its emergency preparedness plan. The Port is accustomed to preparing for and responding to extreme weather events. The Port also intends to have a generator on-site to keep essential power needs met.

The Proposed Action will have de minimis impact on climate change as there are de minimis anticipated emissions of greenhouse gases and de minimis removal of critical habitats and biodiversity.

### 3.22 Noise and Vibration

The Noise Control Act (NCA), enacted in 1972, was designed to address the increasing threat that noise poses to public health and welfare. Major sources of noise include transportation vehicles, machinery, and household appliances. Any sound that interferes with daily activities or degrades the quality of the environment is classified as noise. Noise can vary in nature, being either stationary or mobile, and may occur intermittently or continuously.

According to the FHWA's *Highway Traffic Noise: Analysis and Abatement Guidance*, sound is created when an object moves, causing vibrations in air molecules that travel in waves. The

intensity of sound is measured in decibels (dB), which encompass a wide range of frequencies. However, not all frequencies are detectable by the human ear, necessitating an adjustment for high and low frequencies to better reflect how an average person perceives traffic noise. This adjustment is referred to as A-weighting decibels (dBA). Generally, when sound levels exceed the mid-60 dBA range, outdoor conversations at a distance of three feet can become challenging.

The noise environment surrounding the proposed project area is typical of an agricultural area, with the most common noise source being traffic from nearby Hwy 165 and the adjacent UPRR railroad. Typical sensitive receptors of noise are people, or building uses that may be negatively impacted by prolonged noise exposure such as schools, hospitals, residences, and churches. The area is currently utilized for commercial and agricultural purposes. No sensitive receptors (i.e., residential homes) would fall within the 500-foot noise contour.

Based on the surrounding environment, any additional noise created from the construction or operation of the TPF is likely to be drowned out by, or blend with, the existing surrounding noise environment. Best management practices (BMPs) would be in effect through abatement measures to ensure reasonable effort to minimize construction noise.

The construction of the proposed facility will involve the use of standard construction equipment. Noise emission levels for this equipment typically range from 47 dBA to 85 dBA when measured from 50 feet (Federal Highway Administration [FHWA], 2007).

Under the Proposed Action, noise in the project area will be generated primarily during the daylight hours in an area with no sensitive receptors and will have a de minimis affect.

### 3.23 Reliability and Safety

Currently, there are no truck rest areas or commercial truck fueling stations with available parking located along the 100 miles of Hwy 165 between I-20 (Monroe) and I-49 (Alexandria). The proposed TPF will service the existing traffic on Hwy 165 as well as assist with the increase of truck activity at the Port. A lack of available safe parking forces some truckers to drive longer than is safe while they search for a place to stop to rest or to park illegally, endangering themselves and, when parked on the side of the road, creating a hazard for the motoring public. The absence of designated, well-lit, and secure parking heightens personal risk in terms of driver safety. Lack of parking creates a situation where the driver must decide between parking illegally or driving illegally.

The TPF has been designed to safely service both North and South Bound traffic on Hwy 165. The TPF design eliminates left-hand turns entering and exiting the facility. The access roads for the TPF have been designed to assist with managing and mitigating the increased traffic at the Port (250 trucks/day). The TPF will provide 50 truck parking spaces and 100 car parking spaces. The current lack of designated truck parking can cause higher crash risk from trucks parked in the right-of-way or on side streets. Also, vulnerable roadway users will benefit from non-fatigued drivers as well as reduced impact of trucks venturing off the 4-lane highway to seek parking. For drivers, parking illegally or in undesignated areas often presents the risk to personal health and safety, fines, cargo theft or vehicle damage. The benefits of the TPF are:

- Safety for truck drivers, other motorist, cyclists and pedestrians
- Enhanced security for truck drivers

- Reduced driver fatigue
- Elimination of left-hand turns, undesignated truck parking on side of highway, and reduced highway congestion
- Staging area for emergency responders

Under the Proposed Alternative, impacts to health and safety would be reduced by providing convenient on/off ramps and parking areas for truck drivers and other motorists. This will have de minimis negative effects.

## 3.24 Hazardous Materials/Wastes

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) defines hazardous waste as any discarded material or substance that can pose a threat to human health and the environment if not managed properly. USEPA identifies hazardous wastes based on their properties, which include ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity, and toxicity. Examples of hazardous waste include certain chemicals, pesticides, batteries, electronic waste, and medical waste. USEPA has established a regulatory framework under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) to manage hazardous waste from generation to disposal, including requirements for transportation, treatment, storage, and disposal.

A series of Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments performed for acquisition due diligence were conducted by Eagle Environmental Services, Inc. for the proposed project site in accordance with the American Society for Testing and Materials International Standard E1527-13 between April 28, 2022, and April 12, 2024, at the John Wesley Crump IV etal (formerly the Reynolds Family Property) and the Mark Hatton & Edgar G. Carr Property. No hazardous materials or waste were noted on the TPF portion of the land parcels. Given the current land use in the project area, no hazardous materials are expected to be encountered during the construction phase of the project. However, in the unlikely event that any existing contamination is discovered during construction, it will be removed from the site and disposed of in compliance with applicable state and local regulations.

The hazardous materials required for the Project are those that are essential for the operation of construction vehicles and equipment, such as gasoline, diesel, and fluids. Fueling and servicing of equipment will not occur on the project site, thus minimizing the risk of spills. Because all industry and environmental standards and regulations will be followed as required, the operation of the TPF is expected to have de minimis impact to the public or the environment.

## 3.25 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts analysis is a crucial component in environmental evaluation, particularly in understanding the broader environmental implications of a project. This process involves evaluating the combined effects of multiple actions over time, rather than considering each action in isolation. It encompasses the assessment of the project’s contributions to existing environmental conditions, along with potential future impacts. This analysis typically considers various factors including but not limited to the project's geographic scope and duration, direct and indirect effects on the environment, and interplay with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

Based on the environmental impacts detailed above, the Proposed Action introduces no substantial long-term changes to the existing environmental baseline. The scope of the project is confined to providing roadway improvements, vehicle parking and amenities area for increased safety for the community and automobile drivers and passengers, and safety and compliance for truck drivers with minimal cumulative effects from the alteration of the current roadway and farmland functions.

As a result of this specific project context, it is concluded that all impacts to environmental resources are de minimis. The Proposed Action maintains the status quo without introducing new or additional environmental stressors. Consequently, given the minimal nature of the impacts and their limited scope, a full cumulative impacts analysis is not warranted for this project. This conclusion is based on the understanding that the construction of the truck parking facility will not contribute significantly to cumulative environmental effects when considered in conjunction with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the area.

# 4. IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

A disclosure of irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources is required under 40 CFR 1052. A resource is considered irretrievable when use of the resource prevents it from being used again (i.e., the resource is nonrenewable or renewable only over a long period of time). An irreversible commitment is defined as one whose impacts from its use limit future options and cannot be reclaimed or repaired.

The proposed action to construct the TPF is not irreversible, as the paving could be removed at a future date. Additionally, impacts from the TPF would not be considered irreversible because only de minimis impacts to environmental resources are anticipated.

Some irretrievable resources would be lost during the construction phase of the action, such as labor, construction materials, and the fuel required to run vehicles and construction equipment.

# 5. COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY STATUTES

Compliance with environmental quality statutes is summarized in Table 7-1.

**Table 7-1: Compliance with Environmental Protection Statutes and Regulations**

| Environmental Statute | Compliance |
|---|---|
| Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act, 16 USC 469, et seq. | Full[1] |
| Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, 16 USC 668-668d | Full |
| Clean Air Act, as amended, 42 USC 1857h-7, et seq. | Full |
| Clean Water Act, 33 USC 1857h-7, et seq. | Full |
| Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, 42 USC 9601-9675 | N/A |
| Endangered Species Act, as amended, 16 USC 1531, et seq. | Full |
| Farmland Protection Policy Act, 7 USC 4201-4208 | Full |
| Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations (EO 12898) | Full |
| Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 16 USC 601, et seq. | Full |
| Floodplain Management (EO 11988) | Full |
| Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, 16 USC 460/-460/-11, et. seq. | N/A |
| Migratory Bird Treaty Act, 16 USC 703-712 | Full |
| National Environmental Policy Act, 42 USC 4321, et seq. | Partial[2] |
| National Historic Preservation Act, 16 USC 470a, et seq. | Full |
| Noise Control Act, 42 USC 4901, et seq. | Full |
| Protection of Wetlands (EO 11990) | Full |
| Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, 42 USC 6901, et seq. | Full |
| Rivers and Harbors Act, 33 USC 403, et seq. | N/A |
| Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, 16 USC 1001, et seq. | Full |
| Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 USC 1271, et seq. | N/A |

Notes:
1. Full compliance is defined as having met all requirements of the regulation at the current stage of planning.
2. Partial. Full compliance would be attained upon signing of a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decision document.
EO: Executive Order
USC: United States Code

# 6. LIST OF PREPARERS AND REVIEWERS

# 7. REFERENCES


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# FIGURES

# APPENDIX A



# APPENDIX B
EJSCREEN Results

# APPENDIX C
## IPaC List and Threatened and Endangered Species Tables