NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

State of California
The Natural Resources Agency
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

PROJECT TITLE	Big Hill/Old Oak Ranch Roads Shaded Fuelbreak Project SRA Grant		
PROJECT LOCATION	T2N, R15E, Portion of Sections 3, 8, 9, and 10 MDBM	**COUNTY**	Tuolumne
LEAD AGENCY	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
CONTACT	Roger Petersen		
ADDRESS	18464 Striker Court Sonora, CA 95370	**PHONE**	(209) 532-7424 x 109

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project area is located in northern Tuolumne County along the Big Hill and Old Oak Ranch Roads, approximately 5 miles northeast of the city of Sonora. Project area is defined as 150 feet either side of the designated centerline either the road or ditch. The eastern terminus is the USFS property line at the intersection of Old Oak Ranch Road and the section line between Sections 2 and 3. The western terminus is the intersection of Big Hill Road and Northridge road in the eastern portion of Section 8. The project area ranges from approximately 3,400 feet to 4,000 feet in elevation above sea level. The project is located along Big Hill and Old Oak Ranch Roads and the PG&E Ditch. This is along the main ridge dividing the Stanislaus River Canyon to the north and the more populated areas of Tuolumne County to the South. These roads are major avenues of egress and ingress for the area and critical for suppression efforts as well as health and safety to residents. The area supports an outdoor school, summer camps, as well as numerous private homes. Vegetation type is in the conifer transitional belt and consists of Ponderosa Pine and Chaparral vegetation types. Major tree species include native oaks and conifers, Black Oak (Quercus kelloggii), Canyon and Interior Live Oak (Quercus chrysolepis and wislizenii), Ponderosa Pine (Pinus ponderosa), Sugar Pine (Pinus lambertiana), and Incense Cedar (Libocedrus decurrens). Brush species include manzanita, toyon, ceanothus, poison oak, and bear clover. The conifer component is experiencing a large amount of mortality from bark beetles as years of drought have weakened the trees. This has resulted in a large number of dead standing trees posing threats to safety along the roads and potentially increasing the potential for wildfire spread. The Oak Fire in June of 2015 burned 100 acres a portion of which included this project. The area in Section 10 along Old Oak Youth Ranch Road from the Phoenix Penstock to Old Oak Ranch was affected. The area has been salvage harvested and is currently clear of vegetation. Hardwoods in the area will sprout and will be treated as needed throughout the life of this project. The project consists of fuel break construction and improvement of existing fuel breaks. Construction will consist of pre-commercial and commercial thinning over story trees to reduce crown densities to a level that will not carry a crown fire. Trees will be selected to create an open canopy, 40% crown cover, and improve forest health and vigor. Trees with cavities will be left to maintain wildlife structure. Understory treatments will consists of removal of ground and ladder fuels. Vegetation will be left in open areas so that distance between shrubs or trees is at least twice the height of the plants. Understory trees to be left will be pruned to 10 feet or ½ the live crown whichever is less. Maintenance will treat brush that has re grown since original fuel reduction work was performed. The project area is approximately 116 acres in size. Vegetation removal will consist of hand cutting and piling for burning during a safe burn window, mechanical mastication with light and/or heavy equipment, and/or harvesting using mechanical harvesters or traditional logging techniques. Heavy equipment will be confined to slopes that do not exceed 40%. Trees up to 12 inches DBH may be removed to achieve the necessary spacing needed for achieving a functional fuel break. Larger merchantable trees shall be removed using the Forest Practice Act 1038 Exemption process. Any tree posing a threat to life and safety shall be removed. Grass, forbs and other low-lying ground vegetation will not be targeted for removal. The primary goal is to disrupt the horizontal and vertical continuity of fuels in order to provide a safe and feasible means of defense against the high probability of vegetation fire within the wildland urban interface.

EXEMPTION STATUS

- [x] Categorical Exemption Type/Section: Class *15304- Minor Alterations to Land*
- [ ] Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- [ ] Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)
- [ ] Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- [ ] Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

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REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT

This project fits under portions of 15304- Minor Alterations to Land.

The Class of Exemption to be used is 14 CCR 15304- Minor Alterations to Land. The project consists of constructing, maintaining and improving fuel breaks. A query of the CNDDB did not reveal the presence of any sensitive species. Protection measures for watercourses are consistent with The California Forest Practice Rules. Protection measures for archaeological sites are consistent with the original project and impacts are not expected. All burning will be done in accordance with a permit for the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING

Governor's Office of Planning & Research
NOV 22 2016
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11/21/16

Helg Eng, Deputy Director Date
California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection