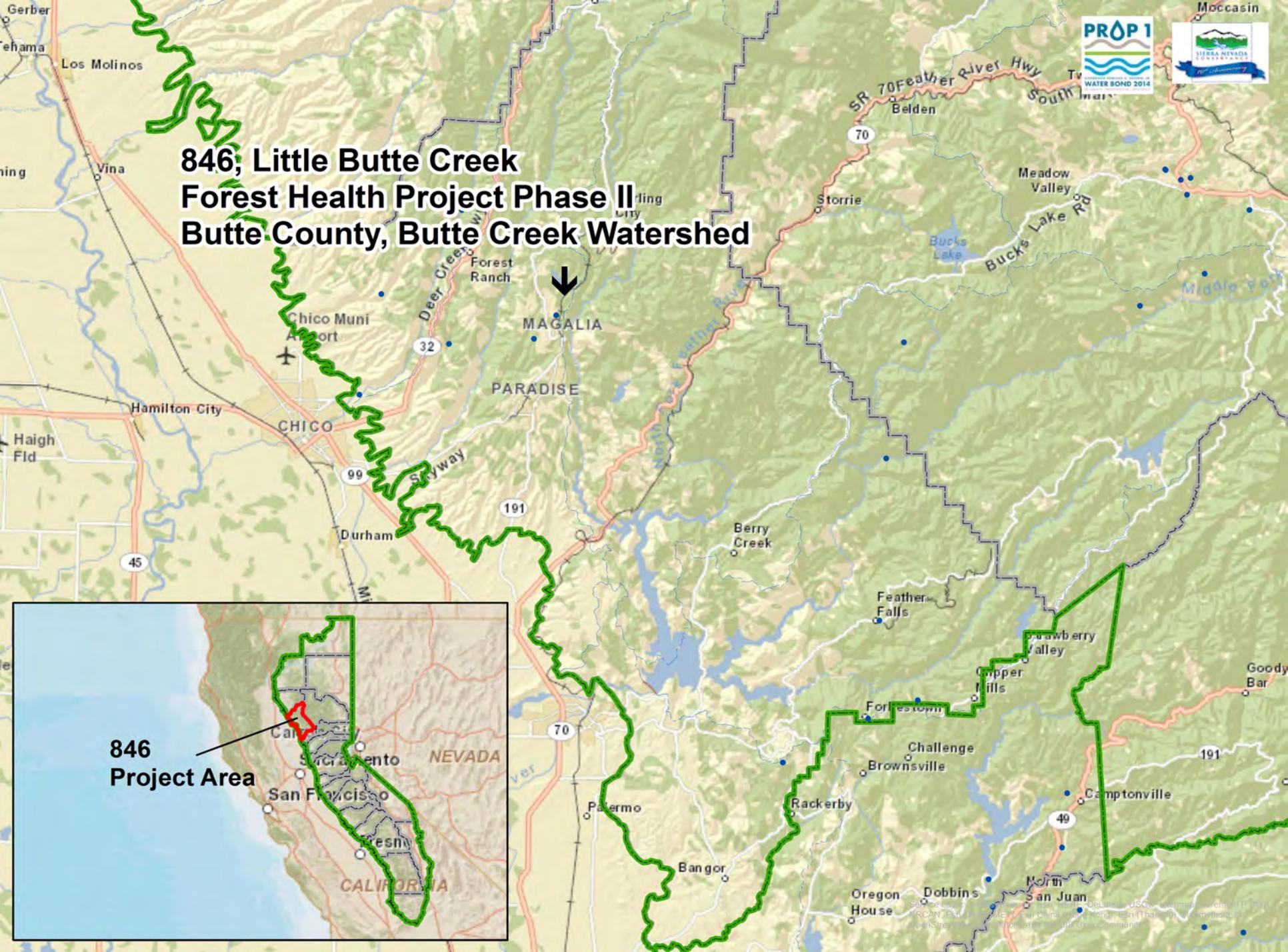
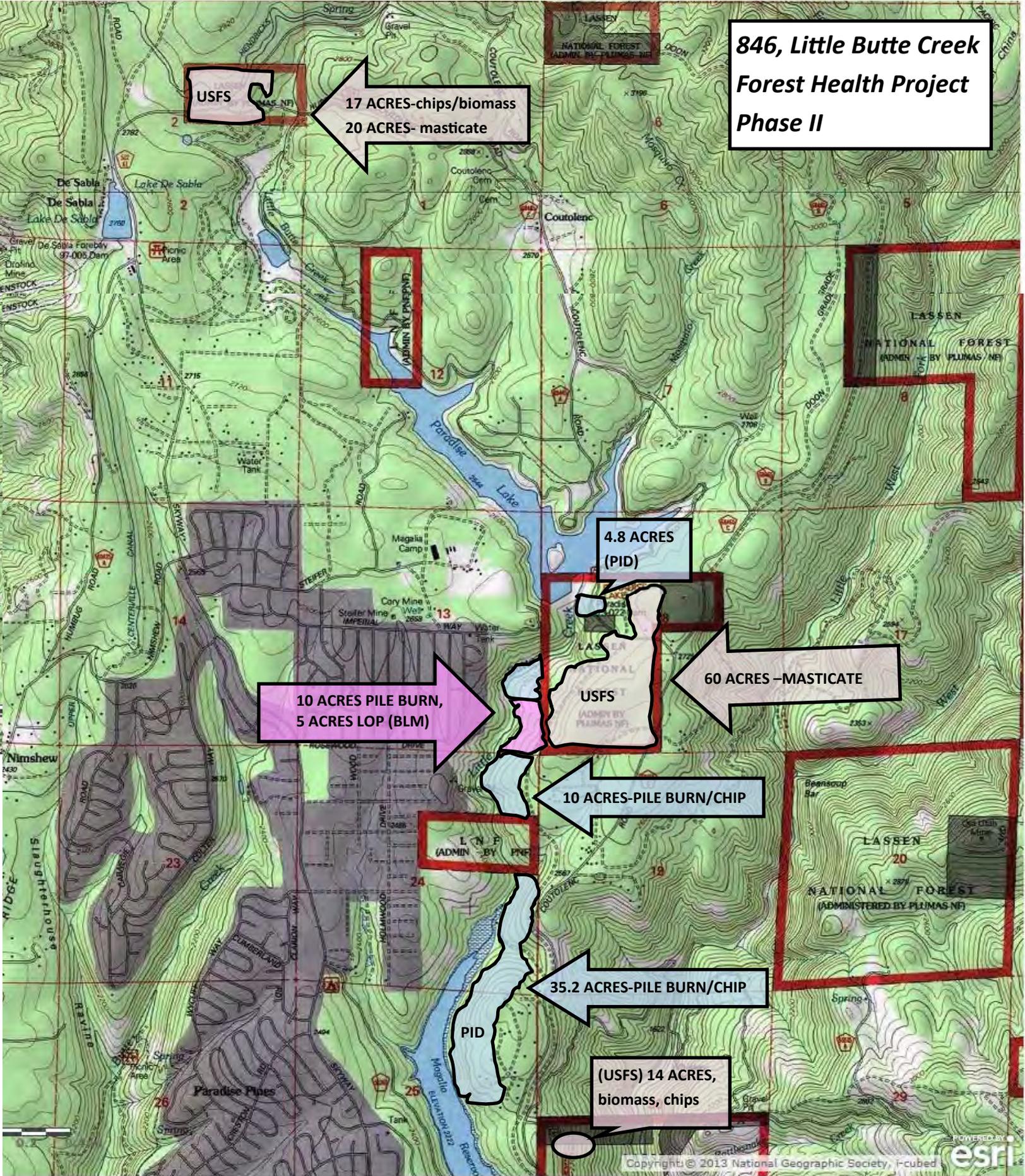




# 846; Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project Phase II Butte County, Butte Creek Watershed



# 846, Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project Phase II



- Legend:**
- Paradise Irrigation District (PID)
  - Lassen National Forest (USFS)
  - Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY**

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program  
Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1)**

**Applicant:** Butte County Fire Safe Council

**Project Title:** Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project Phase II

**Subregion:** North Central

**County:** Butte

**SNC Funding:** \$379,693.00

**Total Project Cost:** \$443,293.00

**Application Number:** 846

**Final Score:** 89.5

**PROJECT SCOPE**

The project is located in the community of Magalia in Butte County, home to approximately 11,000 residents. The community is situated in a mixed conifer forest between the Little Butte and Butte Creek watersheds and the west branch of the Feather River. The project is located within a collection area of drinking water supply for the Town of Paradise. The treatment areas are part of larger planning and completed fuels projects in the community by US Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Butte County Fire Safe Council (e.g., SNC Grant 474 - Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project Phase 1).

The project will complete fuel treatments on 176 acres of overgrown forest lands owned by the Paradise Irrigation District, USFS, and BLM to reduce wildfire risk, protect watershed tributaries to water storage facilities, and promote watershed health.

Treatment methodologies will include thinning, pile burning, chipping, masticating, and pruning of overstocked conifer forest. Due to lack of alternative biomass utilization infrastructure, material will be scattered or burned. Improved forest conditions resulting from the project will benefit the quality of ground and surface water by reducing the chance of intense wildfires and subsequent soil erosion, opening the forest for better water absorption, and encouraging native species and more diverse wildlife habitats.

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Contracts completed with CCC and private contractors	April 30, 2016
Implementation: forest health thinning work (photo points)	May 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018
Firewise Education (newsletter, tour and web postings)	May 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018.
Monitoring (GPS mapping, pre and post photo documentation)	May 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018.
Six Month Progress Reports (4)	October 1, 2016 April 1, 2017 October 1, 2017 April 1, 2018
Final Report and Deliverables Due	August 1, 2018
<b>FINAL PAYMENT/FINAL PAYMENT REQUEST</b>	<b>August 1, 2018</b>

## PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Direct*	\$345,175.00
Administrative**	\$34,518.00
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$379,693.00</b>

\* Direct: Direct costs are expenses necessary to acquire, construct, or to adapt property to a new or different use, or to improve property including land, buildings, and equipment. The property/expense must have a useful life longer than one year. Direct expenses should also include costs directly attributable to the project such as performance measure reporting, project management, billing, signs, etc.

\*\* Administrative: Shared expenses associated with the administration of a project and may not exceed 15 percent of the total SNC grant request for direct costs. Examples of administrative costs include the costs of operating/maintaining facilities, general expenses, general administration, etc.

## PROJECT LETTERS SUPPORT/OPPOSITION

- Support
  - CAL FIRE/Butte County Fire Department
  - Bare on the Ridge
  - Butte County Office of Emergency Management
  - Paradise Fire Safe Council
  - California Conservation Corps
  - Butte County Air Quality Management District
  - Paradise Pines Property Owners Association

- Paradise Irrigation District
- The Bureau of Land Management
- US Forest Service

## **PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

There are four Performance Measures common to all grants. In addition, grantees are required to include between one and three project-specific measures. Performance Measures listed here represent those proposed by applicants and may be modified through further discussion with SNC staff.

- Acres of Land Improved or Restored

# Notice of Exemption

Form D

**To:** Office of Planning and Research  
P.O. Box 3044, Room 212  
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

**From:** (Public Agency) \_\_\_\_\_

County Clerk  
County of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Address)

Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Location - Specific: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Location – City: \_\_\_\_\_ Project Location – County: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Exempt Status: **(check one)**

Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);

Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));

Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));

Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: \_\_\_\_\_

Statutory Exemptions. State code number: \_\_\_\_\_

Reasons why project is exempt: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Agency

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_ Area Code/Telephone/Extension: \_\_\_\_\_

**If filed by applicant:**

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.

2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project?      Yes      No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by Lead Agency

Date received for filing at OPR: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed by Applicant

Revised 2005

**Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project (continued):**

Paradise Irrigation District (PID) lands, 111 acres of National Forest (NF) lands, and 15 acres managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land management. (BLM) The project involves thinning of brush, ladder fuels, and overstocked conifer forests. Specific treatments include hand thinning, and pile burning or chipping on 60 acres of PID and BLM lands; hand thinning, and lop and scatter of materials on 5 acres of BLM land; hand thinning and chipping of 31 acres of NF lands; and mastication of 80 acres of NF lands.

**Reasons why project is exempt: (continued):**

Trees will be removed and thinned to improve forest health and reduce fire risk using methods that will protect water quality and improve habitat values. The project consists of minor land alterations involving the removal of surface vegetation and ladder fuels. The USFS and BLM conducted an environmental analysis pursuant to NEPA for the federal lands within the project, and the PID reviewed the project activities on PID lands and found the project was exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304. SNC independently reviewed the USFS and BLM NEPA documents and the PID Notice of Exemption and concurred with their findings. Database searches were conducted to identify known biological and archaeological resources in the project vicinity, and the project has been designed in a manner that would not affect identified sensitive resources. The project will implement Standard Operating Procedures, Best Management Practices, and avoidance measures to avoid adverse environmental impacts.

**NOTICE OF EXEMPTION**  
**CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15304**

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 84 Grant Application Number 846**  
**Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project Phase II**

**Description of Activities**

The Butte County Fire Safe Council, a non-profit 501c(3) organization, is requesting \$379,693 in funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program for site improvement/restoration activities on approximately 176 acres. Implementation of the Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project Phase II will reduce fuel loads on 176 acres of forested lands, which includes 50 acres of Paradise Irrigation District (PID) lands, 111 acres of National Forest (NF) lands, and 15 acres managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. (BLM). The project involves thinning of brush, ladder fuels, and overstocked conifer forests. Specific treatments include hand thinning, and pile burning or chipping on 60 acres of PID and BLM lands; hand thinning, and lop and scatter of materials on 5 acres of BLM land; hand thinning and chipping of 31 acres of NF lands; and mastication on 80 acres of NF lands. Forest management activities will utilize hand crews, chippers, and masticators.

The project includes elements that will avoid detrimental environmental impacts including the following:

1. Snags that provide wildlife habitat will be retained.
2. Areas of wetlands or riparian areas will be avoided.
3. Elderberry plants and rare or endangered species will be avoided.
4. Trees greater than 8 inches in diameter at breast height will be retained.
5. Shrub or small tree vegetation may be retained if it does not occur adjacent to trees and do not meet the definition of a ladder fuel.

In addition, the project incorporates the measures identified in the NF and BLM joint EIS for the Concow Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, which are incorporated as into the design of the proposed project. The EIS, including a listing of mitigation measures that have now been incorporated as part of the proposed project, are available at the link below:

[http://www.fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet!/ut/p/c5/04\\_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gDfxMDT8MwRydLA1cj72BTUwMTAwgAykeaxRtBeY4WBv4eHmFYT4GMHkidBvgAl6EdleDXIvfdRJuM3388jPTdUvyA2NMMgyUQQAYrgQmg!!/dl3/d3/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS9ZQnZ3LzZfS000MjZOMDcxT1RVODBJN0o2MTJQRDMwODQ!/?project=10083](http://www.fs.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsinternet!/ut/p/c5/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os3gDfxMDT8MwRydLA1cj72BTUwMTAwgAykeaxRtBeY4WBv4eHmFYT4GMHkidBvgAl6EdleDXIvfdRJuM3388jPTdUvyA2NMMgyUQQAYrgQmg!!/dl3/d3/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS9ZQnZ3LzZfS000MjZOMDcxT1RVODBJN0o2MTJQRDMwODQ!/?project=10083)

**Reasons Why the Project is Exempt**

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a categorical exemption provides for an exemption from CEQA environmental documentation requirements for a class of projects determined not to have a significant effect on the environment. Categorical Exemptions are addressed in Article 19 of the CEQA Guidelines, where a list of 32 classes of projects has been identified. Projects falling within one of these classes of projects are generally exempt from the provisions of CEQA.

***CEQA Guidelines Section 15304: Minor Alterations to Land***

The Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project, Phase II is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4, which consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes. The minor land alterations proposed by the project involve the hand thinning and removal of brush and trees less than 8 inches dbh for forestry purposes, resulting in improved forest health and reduced fire risk, on approximately 176 acres; and the site forestry work will not result in significant adverse impacts.

**No Exceptions to a Categorical Exemption**

Categorical exemptions represent activities that generally do not result in significant environmental impacts. However, there are six exceptions to categorical exemptions, defined in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2. Generally, a categorical exemption does not apply if a project would occur in certain specified sensitive environments, would affect scenic resources within an official state scenic highway, or would be located on a designated hazardous waste site. In addition, a categorical exemption would not apply if the project causes substantial adverse changes in the significance of a historical resource or would be considered significant within the cumulative context. Table 1 identifies the exceptions from CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 and includes a brief rationale as to why each exception does not apply to the Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project, Phase II.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Categorical Exemption Exceptions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2)</b>	
<b>Exception</b>	<b>Applicability</b>
<p>(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may impact an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.</p>	<p>The goals of this approximately 176- acre forestry project are to restore health to the forested areas near the community of Magalia, preventing catastrophic wildfires and protecting drinking water supplies for the town of Paradise.</p> <p>The project work consists of minor land alterations involving the removal of brush and small trees by hand crews, chippers, and masticators. The project work does not involve activities in or adjacent to streams or waterbodies, nor will project work occur on areas know to contain hazardous substances. The project activities will not occur in locations that contain known significant cultural or biological resources</p>
<p>(b) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.</p>	<p>The site forest management activities will not adversely affect environmental resources, and will therefore not contribute to any cumulative environmental impact in relation to other restoration projects in the region. The project will result in beneficial effects to the region's forests, creeks, watersheds, associated lands, and adjacent neighborhoods by providing wildfire risk reduction, and natural resource management and protection. In addition, the project area was evaluated as part of the Concow Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project EIS, which evaluated a larger management program that would treat 1,510 acres in nearby areas, and by the PID pursuant to CEQA. These analyses found that the project, in combination with other nearby forest management treatments would not result in significant cumulative impacts.</p>
<p>(c) Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a</p>	<p>The site improvement/restoration project will not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.</p>

<p>significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.</p>	<p>Specific environmental topics are addressed below:</p> <p><b>Aesthetics.</b> The site forest management treatments will result in a minor change in the appearance of the forested areas near the community of Magalia due to the removal of brush and small diameter trees. However, the project will maintain the project area as a conifer forest, and will have minimal long-term effects on the project area’s visual character. All proposed management practices such as site preparation, thinning, and burning can be conducted with limited visibility or detection from surrounding properties. In addition, the project is intended to prevent catastrophic wildfire, which could otherwise occur and result in aesthetic impacts.</p> <p><b>Agriculture/ Forestry.</b> The project site does not contain any grazing or agricultural resources; consequently, the project will have no impact on agricultural resources. The project will reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on approximately 176 acres by thinning dense conifer stands, thereby helping to protect these forest resources from catastrophic wildfire.</p> <p><b>Air Quality/GHGs.</b> The project activities will result in nominal fugitive dust, particulate, and mobile source emissions. Mobile source emissions will be limited to those associated with vehicle trips to/from the project sites, and use of mechanized equipment. Mechanized equipment will be used for forest management activities (i.e., chainsaws, chipper, and masticator). Activities that emit fugitive dust and particulate (i.e., smoke) will be conducted in compliance with a permit from the Butte County Air Quality Management District, which includes measures to minimize emissions. Nearby sensitive receptors will not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations. The project will not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the region’s applicable air quality plan and will not violate any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation.</p> <p><b>Biological Resources.</b> No sensitive biological resources will be affected by the project. Biological surveys were conducted on the US Forest Service and BLM lands as part of the Concow Hazardous Fuels EIS, and standard</p>
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operating practices and mitigations were incorporated into the project to avoid impacts on biological resources. The EIS found that the project as it is currently designed would have no significant effects on biological resources.

A search of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) was also completed in December 2015. The CNDDDB found no occurrences of special status wildlife species within the project area. The CNDDDB search identified a Bald Eagle (a CDFW fully-protected species) nest site in the vicinity of the project area on private land north of Magalia Reservoir. Bald Eagle activity at the nest site has not been observed since 1999, and it is unknown if the nest is still active. The nest site is approximately 0.35 miles from the project site, which is greater than the 0.25-mile distance within which project noise could affect the species, per US Fish and Wildlife Service guidance. In addition, the project consists of thinning small diameter trees and brush, which would not affect habitat components used by the species for roosting or foraging (i.e., mature trees, open water).

The CNDDDB search identified a recorded occurrence from 1984 of Mildred's clarkia, a California rank 1B.3 plant in the project vicinity. The 1984 observation included a vague handwritten map, and it is not known whether the occurrence was located within the project area. Botanical surveys conducted by the US Forest Service to support the Concow Hazardous Fuels EIS and surveys by CalFire in support of adjacent forestry projects did not identify Mildred's clarkia in the project vicinity. The project activities include hand thinning of small diameter trees and mastication of brush within dense stands of brush. Mildred's clarkia is not known to grow in dense patches of brush, and it is not expected to occur in areas targeted for mastication. Hand thinning and chipping/burning of small diameter trees would not result in substantial ground disturbance that would affect Mildred's clarkia. Because the species is not known to occur within the project area, and project activities are not likely to affect the species if it was present on site, the project would not result in a significant effect on the species.

**Cultural Resources.** See (f).

	<p><b>Geology/Soils.</b> The forestry activities would not expose people or structures to loss, injury, or death due to seismic activity or unstable soils. The work planned as part of the project would not occur in wetlands or riparian areas. Treatment activities would incorporate temporary erosion control measures to minimize the potential for soil loss.</p> <p><b>Hazards/Hazardous Materials.</b> See (e).</p> <p><b>Hydrology/Water Quality.</b> See (a) and Geology/Soils.</p> <p><b>Noise.</b> Forestry activities will generate temporary noise. However, given that project activities will be limited to daytime business hours (the least sensitive hours of the day), and the limited extent to which these activities could expose sensitive receptors to increased noise levels, the project will not cause significant noise effects.</p> <p><b>Transportation.</b> There will be limited additional trips on local roadways during project implementation. No vehicular transportation over sensitive habitat will occur. The vehicles will not block traffic and no traffic delays will occur due to restoration activities.</p> <p><b>Other CEQA Issues.</b> The project will have no effect on land use, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, recreation, or utilities and service systems.</p>
<p>(d) Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.</p>	<p>State Route (SR) 70, approximately 6.5 miles to the southeast of the project area is eligible for designation as a scenic highway. The project area is not visible from SR 70 and the proposed project would not result in the removal of, or damage to, any trees, rock outcroppings, historic buildings or other resources within the viewshed of a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.</p>
<p>(e) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.</p>	<p>The project is not located on a site which is included on a hazardous waste site contained on a list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.</p>
<p>(f) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance</p>	<p>No prehistoric or historic resources will be affected by the project. An archaeological survey was conducted for the US Forest Service and</p>

of a historical resource.

BLM lands within the project area as part of the Concow Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project EIS. All cultural resources on federal land will be flagged by a US. Forest Service archeologist and avoided during project implementation.

An archeological records search was conducted in January 2016 for the 50 acres of PID lands included in the project area. This search found no prehistoric or historic resources within the project area. The records search identified one prehistoric and six historic resources within 1/8<sup>th</sup> mile of the project site. None of the resources within 1/8<sup>th</sup> mile would be affected by project implementation. One nearby historic resource, a historic railroad grade, serves as a forest access road, which may be used to access the project area. The project includes no grading or access improvements that would affect the integrity of the historic railroad grade.

The SNC used information from the Native American Heritage Commission, and a map of ancestral tribal territories that was prepared for the CA Water Plan to identify tribal groups that may have information on cultural resources within the project area. The SNC contacted the KonKow Valley Band of Maidu and the Estom Yumeka Maidu Tribe of Enterprise Rancheria in October 2015 to solicit information on tribal resources potentially affected by the project. Those tribal groups did not identify tribal resources within the project area. In addition, the Butte County Fire Safe Council has coordinated with the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria during the development of the project. Thus tribal group did not identify tribal resources that would be affected by the project, and they will be harvesting forest vegetation for traditional uses prior to implementation of the project.

If previously undiscovered resources are encountered or suspected during project implementation, work would be halted immediately and would not resume until the area is cleared by qualified individuals. No work would occur in the vicinity of sensitive cultural resources. The project would not result in an adverse change in the significance of any archaeological or historical resource and will not disturb or destroy any human remains or paleontological resources.