



857
Bucks Lake Project
Plumas County
North Fork Feather Watershed



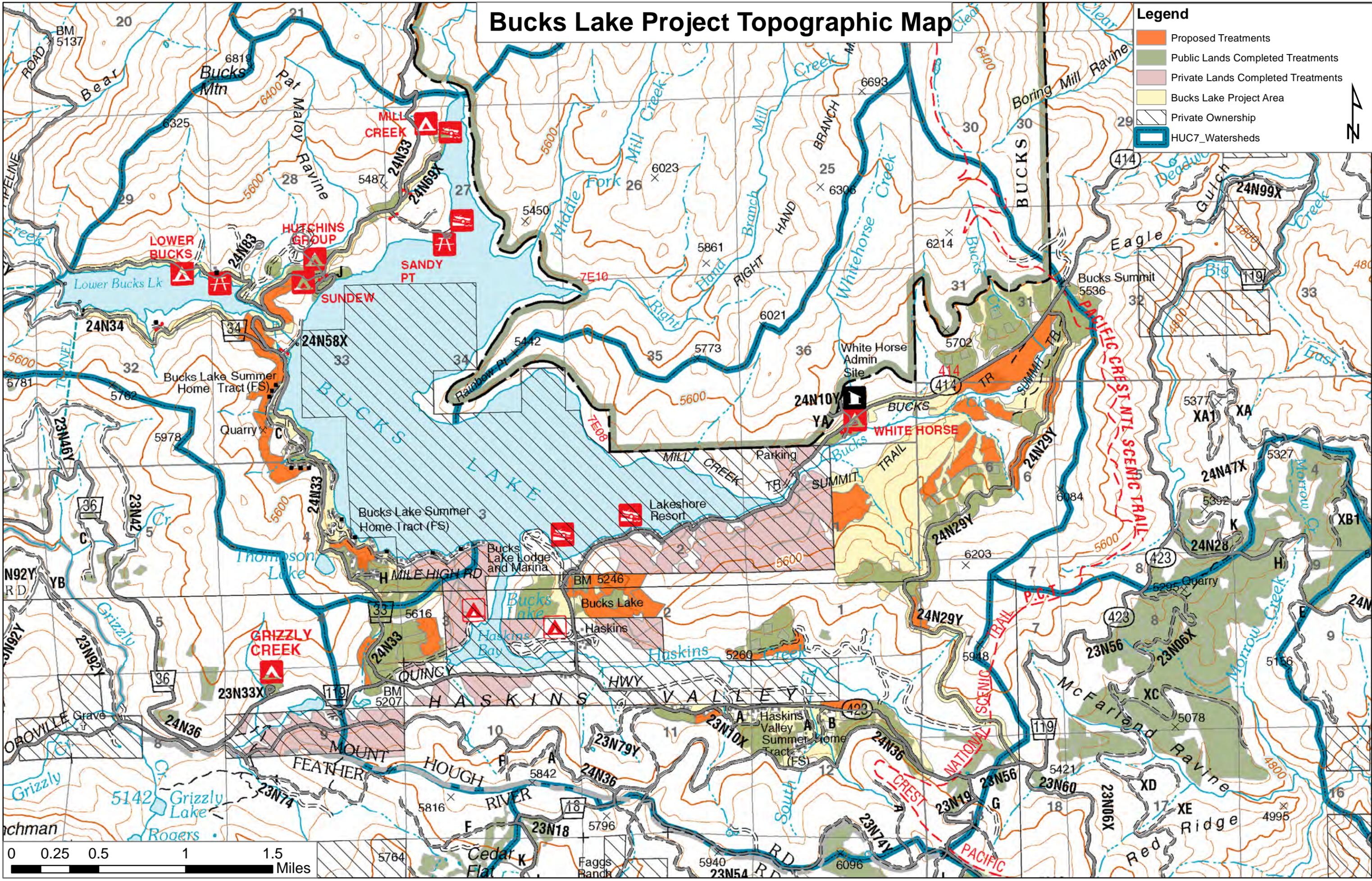
857
Project Area



Bucks Lake Project Topographic Map

Legend

- Proposed Treatments
- Public Lands Completed Treatments
- Private Lands Completed Treatments
- Bucks Lake Project Area
- Private Ownership
- HUC7_Watersheds



**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY**

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

Applicant: Plumas County Fire Safe Council

Project Title: Bucks Lake Project

Subregion: North Central

County: Plumas

SNC Funding: \$464,025.00

Total Project Cost: \$575,925.00

Application Number: 857

Final Score: 89.75

PROJECT SCOPE

Bucks Lake in Plumas County is 15 miles west of the town of Quincy at an elevation of 5,161 feet. The 1,827 acre lake is surrounded by thick overgrown forests. High elevation snowmelt and precipitation from these watersheds contribute significant amounts of water to the North Fork of the Feather River and powers hydroelectric facilities downstream, along the Feather River canyon.

In order to protect and enhance the surrounding tributary watersheds and their associated water quality and supply, riparian ecosystems, wildlife habitat and recreational values, the Bucks Lake Project will treat 342.5 acres of Plumas National Forest (PNF) land. Methodologies include hand thinning, grapple piling, pile burning, mastication, and follow-up prescribed fire to lighten overstocked conditions. This treatment will be the last phase of the larger 1,511 acre Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project. Additionally, this project contributes to a large scale effort by the Plumas National Forest to create landscape level Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZ) that increase resiliency to high-intensity wildfires. By implementing treatments planned in the Bucks Lake area a strategic healthy forest network will be fully connected, optimizing the benefits of the work that is already completed in the Bucks Lake area and other surrounding DFPZs.

The PNF has committed an in-kind contribution of \$89,000 to implement prescribed burning as a strategy to manage the area more consistent with a natural fire regime.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

PROJECT TASKS & DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Contract solicitation and awards	Oct – Nov 2016
Implementation: hand thinning, grapple piling, mastication, piling. (Pre- and post-project photo points, mapping, as-built maps)	Nov 2016 – Sep 2017
Pile burning and PNF's follow-up prescribed burning (pre- and post-project photo points, mapping)	Sep 2017 – Nov 2018
Six month progress reports (4)	March 1, 2017 September 1, 2017 March 1, 2018 September 1, 2018
Final Report and Deliverables Due	December 1, 2018
FINAL PAYMENT/FINAL PAYMENT REQUEST	December 1, 2018

PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Direct*	
Project Management	\$5,000.00
Implementation (hand thin, grapple pile, mastication)	\$398,500.00
Administrative**	
Administrative Costs	\$60,525.00
GRAND TOTAL	\$464,025.00

* 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
 - Plumas County Board of Supervisors
 - Feather River Stewardship Coalition

PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

There are four Performance Measures common to all grants. In addition, grantees are required to include one to 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

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION
CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15304

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 84 Grant Application Number 857
Bucks Lake Project

Description of Activities

The Plumas County Fire Safe Council seeks funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program for site improvement/restoration activities on approximately 342.5 acres of federal land in the Plumas National Forest. The proposed project is the remaining piece of the larger Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project which includes 1,511 acres of forest management activities, 13 miles of road improvements for watercourse and watershed protection, and 1,500 feet of watercourse restoration. This project was evaluated by Plumas National Forest in the Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment, which found the project would not have significant adverse environmental effects. The proposed Bucks Lake Project will complete this comprehensive large-scale forest restoration project.

The purpose of the Bucks project is to protect and enhance the watersheds of Bucks Lake, Haskins Creek, Lakeshore, and Pat Maloy Ravine through forest restoration treatments. This area is a water source vital to renewable energy creation and the State Water Project. By treating the remaining 342.5 acres of the Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, water quality will be preserved, timing of flows will be maintained or improved, and the severity of damage from potential wildfire will be greatly mitigated. The areas that will be treated are within immediate proximity to the wildland-urban interface of the Quincy, CA community.

The proposed project area consists of three treatment methods:

- 251.4 acres of hand thinning and piling including a 60-acre aspen stand
- 74.6 acres of grapple piling
- 16.5 acres of mastication

Hand thin units will have trees less than 8" DBH removed, hand piled, piles burned and understory burning during the next burn season, weather and resources permitting. Grapple piling units will include piling exiting ground fuels with the cutting and piling of trees less than 8" DBH. Piles will be burned. The mastication unit will involve masticating brush and trees under 8" DBH, leaving trees on a 25-30-foot spacing and retaining all hardwoods over 3" DBH. Aspen Units will be hand thinned, removing conifers under 8" DBH with removal of the downed material. Prescribed fire and pile burning will be utilized to bring the land into balance with a more natural fire regime, releasing the dormant seed bank, and better preparing the land for the chance of withstanding a wildfire.

The project includes resource protection measures to reduce or avoid potential adverse environmental effects, which can be found in the Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment: http://data.ecosystemmanagement.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=18963.

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 Bucks Lake Project 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 mastication of brush and trees less than 8 inches dbh, and pile grappling exiting ground fuels of trees less than 8 inches dbh, which will result in improved forest health and reduced fire risk on approximately 342.5 acres. This 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 Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project.

Table 1 Categorical Exemption Exceptions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2)	
Exception	Applicability
<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 342.5-acre forestry project are to restore health to the forested areas near the community of Quincy, CA, preventing catastrophic wildfires and protecting drinking water supplies, and improving downstream aquatic resources.</p> <p>The project work consists of minor land alterations involving the removal of brush and small trees by hand crews and masticators. The project work will not occur on areas know to contain hazardous substances, nor will project activities 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 proposed project was evaluated by the Plumas National Forest as part of the larger Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Environmental Assessment, which evaluated the cumulative impacts of a larger project area, including 1,511 acres of forest management activities, 13 miles of road improvements for watercourse and watershed protection, and 1,500 feet of watercourse restoration. The Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project EA determined that the project would not adversely affect environmental resources, and would therefore not contribute to any cumulative environmental impact in relation to other projects in the region. The project would 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</p>

	<p>protection. Consequently, the proposed 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 significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.</p>	<p>The site improvement/restoration project will not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Specific environmental topics are addressed below:</p> <p>Aesthetics. See Recreation and Scenic Resources.</p> <p>Agriculture/ Forestry. 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 342.5 acres by thinning dense conifer stands, thereby helping to protect these forest resources from catastrophic wildfire. Project activities are expected to have a minor effect on the distribution of forestry vegetation.</p> <p>Air Quality/GHGs. Forest treatments involving burning would be conducted under smoke management plans and permits obtained by Plumas NF staff that would dictate the quantity, duration, and conditions under which burning could occur. Smoke monitoring would take place and ignition suspended if poor conditions develop. Nearby sensitive receptors will not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations; however, smoke would likely be visible from some communities during burning. Dust emissions from vehicle traffic would be spread out over time, and controlled by water application. 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>Biological Resources. No sensitive biological resources will be affected by the project. A biological assessment/biological evaluation (BA/BE) was carried out to assist with evaluation of the project effects on sensitive animals in the EA. The EA concluded that the project would have no effect on the following species: valley elderberry longhorn beetle, California red-legged frog, hardhead minnow, foothill yellow-legged frog, northern leopard frog, pond turtle, greater</p>

sandhill crane, Swainson's hawk, Townsend's big-eared bat, and Western red bat. The project would have an effect on individuals, but not result in a trend toward federal listing, or loss of viability for the following species: mountain yellow-legged frog, willow flycatcher, great grey owl, California spotted owl, northern goshawk, bald eagle, California wolverine, Sierra Nevada red fox, American manna, pacific fisher, and pallid bat.

Botanical resources were evaluated in the EA. This evaluation included a review of all of the listed or proposed rare species with the potential to occur in the study area. Information sources included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife List for the Plumas National Forest, USDA Forest Service Region 5 Sensitive Species list (USDA 2006), Plumas NF rare plant records and vegetation maps, and California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) records, and reconnaissance field surveys. The EA determined that the project would not adversely affect any Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Region 5 Sensitive species. This determination is based on the negligible direct and indirect effects to individuals or areas of suitable habitat; lack of individuals known or expected to occur within the project area; or absence of suitable habitat within the project area for these species.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy performed a subsequent review of the CNDDDB and CA Native Plant Society database to determine whether there were additional biological resources subject to CEQA that were not evaluated in the EA, including state-listed species. This analysis found that there would be no additional biological resources that would require CEQA analysis. The Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog was appended for coverage under the USFWS Programmatic ESA Consultation/Biological Opinion for the project, and Watch List/Special Interest species that could occur in the project area are limited to *Stellaria longifolia*. The current prescription for this species would be avoidance and protection from ground disturbance.

The proposed project activities would slightly increase the risk of noxious weed introduction by creating conditions that favor noxious weed establishment; however, implementation of

standard management practices and monitoring would result in a low risk of introduction and spread.

Cultural Resources. See (f).

Geology/Soils. The forestry activities would not expose people or structures to loss, injury, or death due to seismic activity or unstable soils. Project best management practices (BMPs) and design features would assure that significant impacts to water quality and beneficial uses would not occur. The extent of detrimental soil disturbances would not be of a size or pattern that would result in significant change in production potential or soil hydrologic function. Moreover, proposed stream restoration and road drainage improvements would benefit water quality and aquatic habitat.

Hazards/Hazardous Materials. See (e).

Hydrology/Water Quality. See Geology/Soils.

Noise. Forestry activities will generate temporary noise. However, given that project activities will be limited to daytime (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.

Recreation and Scenic Resources. All of the alternatives would have some temporary negative effects on recreation and visual quality as a result of closures, noise, dust, and smoke. The project is nevertheless compliant with the Plumas National Forest Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class for the area, and the goals and policies of the Pacific Rim Trail, Plumas National Forest, Big Creek section. The project would have long-term benefits to the forest and recreation area, as a result of fuels reduction and therefore a reduced risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Transportation. 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 project activities.

Other CEQA Issues. The project will have no

	effect on land use, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, or utilities and service systems.
(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.	The project area is not visible from a scenic highway, and 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.
(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.	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.
(f) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.	<p>No prehistoric or historic resources will be affected by the project.</p> <p>A literature review, files search, and heritage resource inventory were conducted for the Bucks Lake Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project. Based on this review, 39 heritage resource sites were found within the proposed project area. No sites were evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places and are considered potentially eligible for listing. These sites have all been flagged for avoidance. By adhering to the flag & avoid policy there would be no effects to any heritage resources in this project area.</p> <p>All cultural resources on federal land will be flagged by a US. Forest Service archeologist and avoided during project implementation. 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.</p>