

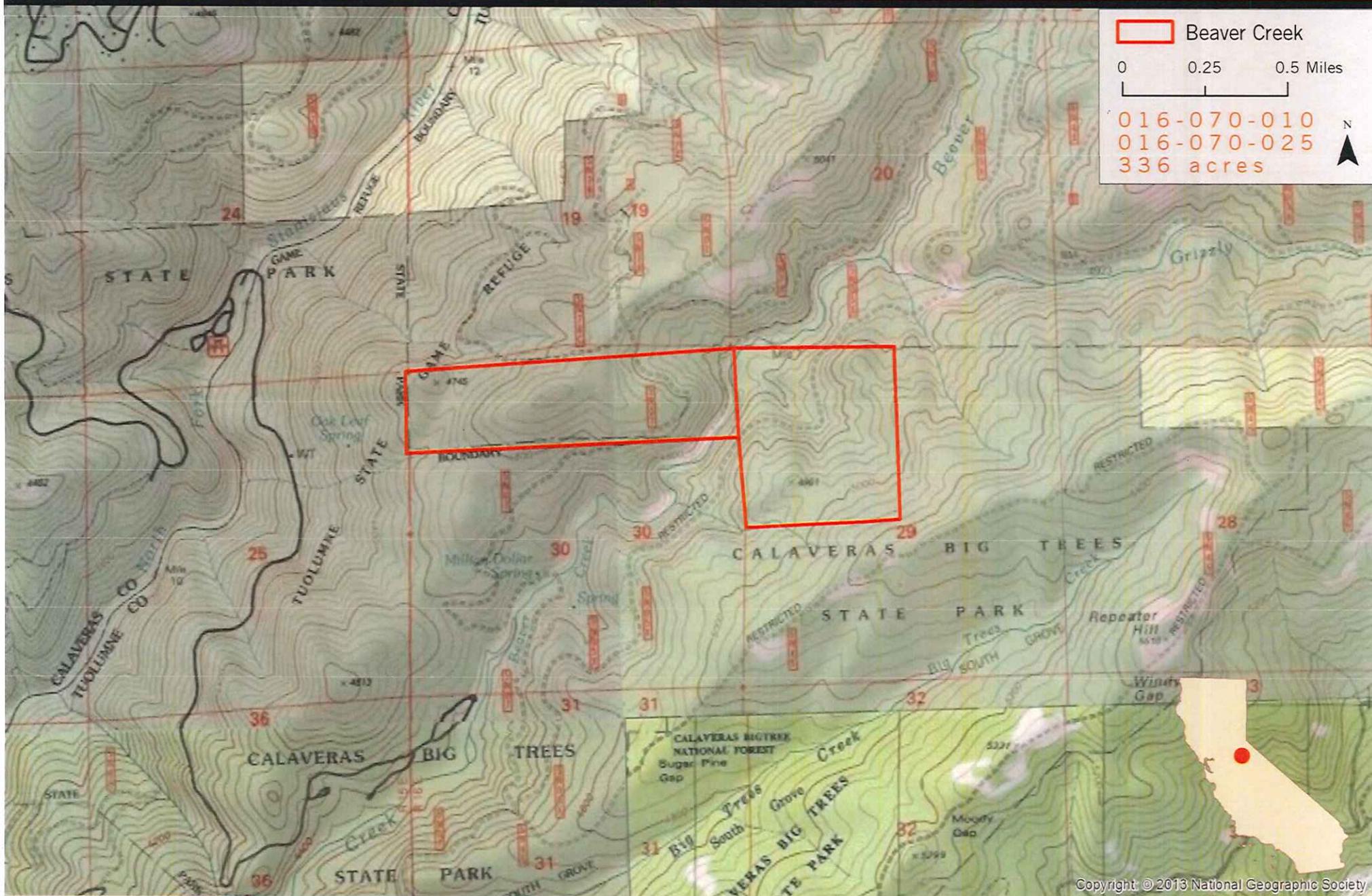
884
Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement Project
Tuolumne County
Upper Stanislaus Watershed



884
Project Area

Esri, HERE, DeLorme, NGA, USGS, NPS

Bureau of Land Management, Esri, HERE, DeLorme, NGA, USGS, NPS



**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY**

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

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Applicant: | Save the Redwoods League |
| Project Title: | Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement Project |
| Subregion: | South Central |
| County: | Tuolumne |
| SNC Funding: | \$500,000.00 |
| Total Project Cost: | \$680,000.00 |
| Application Number: | 884 |
| Final Score: | 86.75 |

PROJECT SCOPE

The Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement Project lies on a 320-acre parcel of forestland purchased from Sierra Pacific Industries by Save the Redwoods League. The parcel lies at approximately 4,500 feet in elevation, sits about three miles from the town of Arnold, and is bordered to the south by Calaveras Big Trees State Park (CBTSP). Approximately 0.3 miles of the perennial Beaver Creek, a tributary within the Stanislaus River watershed, runs through the site. Vegetation is classified as Sierran Mixed Conifer and is primarily dominated with white fir and incense cedar, but still contains ample quantities of Douglas fir, ponderosa and sugar pine, California black oak, and other significant riparian species. The site also contains a single 226-foot tall, 6.5-foot diameter Giant Sequoia; the largest naturally grown, unprotected tree of its kind.

The parcel contains large swaths of new growth from past clear-cut logging and dense, homogenous second-growth forest that are heavy in fuels and in poor health. This project will increase forest health and watershed resiliency by hand-thinning 150 acres of understory trees. Additional work to be completed includes pruning the residual trees to remove ladder fuels and increase tree vigor. Slash will be removed through a combination of mastication, pile-burning, and lop-and-scatter techniques.

Save the Redwoods League will implement a vegetation management plan that is consistent with neighboring Calaveras Big Trees State Park, designed to restore forest conditions to a more heterogeneous and resilient structure. With this approach, these stands could be maintained in the future through the use of prescribed fire. Additionally, the overall goal is to transfer this land to CBTSP to be enjoyed by the public and

maintained for long-term carbon storage and watershed protection. Save the Redwoods League has been actively collaborating with CBTSP to make this transition as soon as possible following the completion of these forest treatments.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

| PROJECT TASKS & DELIVERABLES | TIMELINE |
|--|---|
| 6-month Progress Report | Mar & Sep 2017 Mar & Sep 2018 Mar & Sep 2019 |
| Flag Boundaries and Final Site Prep | Oct – Dec 2016 |
| Fuels Treatment | Oct – Nov 2016 Apr – Nov 2017 Apr – Nov 2018 Apr – June 2019 |
| Pile Burning | Dec 2016 – Mar 2017 Dec 2017 – Mar 2018 Dec 2018 – Mar 2019 Dec 2019 |
| Conduct Final Quality Control Measures and Site Clean-Up | June – Dec 2019 |
| FINAL PAYMENT/FINAL PAYMENT REQUEST | Jan 1, 2020 |

PROJECT COSTS

| PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES | TOTAL SNC FUNDING |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Direct* | |
| Site Restoration Work | \$423,150.00 |
| Project Management and Oversight | \$68,870.00 |
| Prop 1 Signage Requirement | \$1,500.00 |
| Project Monitoring and Reporting | \$6,480.00 |
| Administrative** | \$0.00 |
| GRAND TOTAL | \$500,000.00 |

* 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
 - Paul Prescott, President, Calaveras Big Trees Association
 - Mike Borean, Director/Secretary, Greater Arnold Business Association
 - Jenny Hatch, Executive Director, Sierra Nevada Alliance
 - Jess C. Cooper, District Superintendent, Central Valley District, California Department of Parks and Recreation
 - Jeanne Higgins, Forest Supervisor, Stanislaus National Forest, United States Forest Service

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) Sierra Nevada Conservancy
11521 Blocker Drive, Suite 205
Auburn, CA 95603

(Address)

County Clerk
County of Tuolumne
2 S. Green Street, Second Floor
Sonora, CA 95370

Project Title: Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement Project

Project Location - Specific:

The project is located in Tuolumne County, California; centered at approximately 38.26139°N and 120.27222°W

Project Location – City: Arnold, CA

Project Location – County: Tuolumne

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is requested to provide funding to the Save the Redwoods League (League) for forest management and restoration activities on approximately 320 acres of forested land owned by the League.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Save the Redwoods League

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: Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land
- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

The project would result in minor alterations to the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation associated with forest management and restoration activities on 320 acres, including thinning of small trees (less than 12" dbh) by hand crews to improve forest and watershed health and fire resistance and to enhance deciduous vegetation communities. The project includes resource protection measures that would avoid significant impacts on the environment.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Patrick Eidman Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (530) 823-4689

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 884
Beaver Creek Watershed Project

Description of Activities

Save the Redwoods League (League) proposes to treat portions of a 320-acre property to improve watershed and forest health and reduce the risk of wildfire. The property is located in Tuolumne County, approximately 3 miles northeast of the Town of Arnold, and is bounded on three sides by the Calaveras Big Trees State Park (CBTSP). The treatments proposed are intended to facilitate transfer of the property from the League to the CBTSP at some point in the future. Trees on the property consist primarily of ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, and cedar. The property contains a 0.31-mile section of Beaver Creek, although treatment activities would not occur in or adjacent to the creek.

Specific forest management practices would include:

- Non-industrial understory thinning of approximately 150 acres of forest, including removal of all trees smaller than 12" in diameter at breast height (DBH), with conifer removal conducted in hardwood-dominant areas;
- Pruning of approximately 200 trees per acre to improve wood quality and reduce ladder fuels;
- Slash treatment through chipping/mastication, pile and burn, or lop/scatter; and
- Creation of two fuel breaks to link to the property's open fields, buffering the South Grove of the CBTSP.

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 Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement 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 thinning and removal of trees to improve forest and watershed health; the activities would result in reduced fire risk, and the forestry work would 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 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 Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement 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 320-acre forestry project are to restore forest and watershed health, and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire within the subject property, and reduce risks to the adjacent CBTSP.</p> <p>The project work consists of minor land alterations involving the thinning and pruning of non-commercial trees. The project work would occur in forested areas that have not been previously developed, so would not occur on areas known to contain hazardous substances. The project activities would 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 forest management activities would not adversely affect environmental resources, and would therefore not contribute to any cumulative environmental impact in relation to other restoration projects in the region. In fact, the project would result in beneficial effects to the project area forest, creeks, watersheds, associated lands, and adjacent forested areas by providing wildfire risk reduction, and natural resource management and protection.</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 forest restoration project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Specific environmental topics are addressed below:</p> <p>Aesthetics. The forest management treatments would result in a minor change in the appearance of the forested areas near the Town of Arnold and CBTSP due to the selective removal of trees. However, the project would maintain the project area as a conifer and deciduous forest, and would have minimal long-term effects on the project area's visual character. All proposed management practices such as site preparation, thinning, and slash treatment can be conducted with limited visibility or detection from surrounding properties. In addition, one of the project objectives is to prevent catastrophic wildfire, which could otherwise occur and result in severe aesthetic impacts.</p> <p>Agriculture/ Forestry. The project site does not contain any grazing or agricultural resources;</p> |

consequently, the project would have no impact on agricultural resources. The project would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on approximately 320 acres by thinning dense conifer stands (under a non-commercial thinning exemption from Cal Fire), thereby helping to protect these forest resources from catastrophic wildfire. The project would also provide forest buffer zones to protect resources within the CBTSP.

Air Quality/GHGs. The project activities would result in nominal fugitive dust, particulate, and mobile source emissions. Mobile source emissions would be limited to those associated with vehicle trips to/from the project sites, and use of mechanized equipment (e.g., chainsaws,). Activities that emit fugitive dust and particulate (i.e., smoke) may be conducted. Necessary permits from Cal Fire and the Tuolumne County Air Quality Management District will be obtained by applicant and contractor for pile burning proposed as part of the project, and such activities would be conducted in compliance with permit conditions, which will include measures to minimize emissions. Nearby sensitive receptors would not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations. The project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the region's applicable air quality plan and would not violate any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation.

Biological Resources. No sensitive biological resources would be affected by the project.

The project area was evaluated for sensitive biological resources through reconnaissance level field surveys and a review of a US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) report for the area, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), and the CDFW Spotted Owl Database.

Based on the above review, no state or federally-listed plant species were identified as known or likely to occur within the project area. However, two federally-listed wildlife species were identified as having Critical Habitat or proposed Critical Habitat within or near the project area; these are the California red-legged frog and the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog. The red-legged frog is not known to occur within the project area, but

the project area is a part of that species' historical range.

The Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog range is within the project area and individuals have been documented within two miles of the property. Resource protection measures included in the project, including avoidance of streams and riparian habitat, would be sufficient to protect Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog habitat.

California spotted owl and Northern goshawk are both present in the vicinity of the project area. Standard operating procedures would include a pre-project survey to determine the presence of nesting sites. If such sites are identified, limited operating periods would be instituted for project activities affect protected activity centers for these species. Workers would also be alerted to the potential presence of these species.

The Townsend's big-eared bat is a candidate for state listing. This species is not known to occur in the project area, however, given the sensitivity of the species to disturbance of roosting sites, any trees that could provide roosting habitat would be noted and avoided during forest management activities.

In accordance with standard operating procedures, invasive vegetative species would be managed during project activities. Activities would include the targeting of invasive species and application of herbicide, as appropriate. Overall there would be a net improvement in the condition of the forest relative to invasive species as a result of project activities.

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.

The work planned as part of the project would not occur in wetlands or stream courses. Best management practices would be employed to limit or prevent soil erosion. No new roads or skid trails would be created as part of the project and vehicular access would be limited to existing roadways.

Hazards/Hazardous Materials. See (e).

| | |
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| | <p>Hydrology/Water Quality. Watercourse Lake and Protection Zones (WLPZs) would be protected according to California Forest Protection Rules.</p> <p>Mineral Resources. Not applicable.</p> <p>Noise. Forestry activities would generate temporary noise. However, given that project activities would 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 would not cause significant noise effects.</p> <p>Population/Housing. Not applicable.</p> <p>Public Services/Utilities. Not applicable.</p> <p>Recreation. No specific recreational developments or improvements are proposed as part of the forest management activities. The property is currently under private ownership and so public access is restricted. The future transfer of the project to public ownership following the implementation of forest treatment practices would facilitate greater recreational opportunities and ultimately lead to a benefit to recreation.</p> <p>Transportation. There would be limited additional trips on local roadways during project implementation. No vehicular transportation over sensitive habitat would occur, and only pre-existing access roads would be used. Vehicles would not block traffic and no traffic delays would occur due to treatment activities.</p> <p>Other CEQA Issues. As identified above, the project would have no effect on land use, hazards and hazardous materials, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, or utilities and service systems.</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. | State Route (SR) 4, approximately two miles to the northwest of the project area is designated as a State Scenic Highway. The project area is not visible from SR 4 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 SR 4. |
| (e) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical | The project is not located on a site which is |

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|---|---|
| <p>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>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 of a historical resource.</p> | <p>No prehistoric or historic resources would be affected by the project. A records search was carried out by the Central California Information Center for historical resources in the area of the proposed project. Based on this review, only one known cultural resource is located within the project area. This resource consists of a historic railroad grade that is now used as a forest road. Project activities would not alter the condition of the road and the resource would not be degraded by the project.</p> <p>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. The project would not result in an adverse change in the significance of any archaeological or historical resource and would not disturb or destroy any human remains or paleontological resources.</p> |