HELIX Environmental Planning

NDRC Fuel Breaks Project

Environmental Review Report for CEQA Findings

March 2020 | HCD-01

Prepared for:

State of California Department of Housing and Community Development
2020 W El Camino Avenue, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95833

Prepared by:

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
11 Natoma Street, Suite 155
Folsom, CA 95630

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

amsl	above mean sea level
APE	Area of Potential Effect
BLM	U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management
BTR	Biological Resources Technical Report
CAL FIRE	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CARB	California Air Resources Board
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife/California Department of Fish and Game
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CWRP	Community Watershed Resilience Program
dbh	diameter at breast height
DHPS	Delegated Heritage Program Staff
FYLF	foothill yellow-legged frog
GHG	greenhouse gases
HCD	California Department of Housing and Community Development
HELIX	HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
HPM	Heritage Program Manager
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LOP	Limited Operating Period
MCAB	Mountain Counties Air Basin
MECH	Mechanical Harvesting or Shredding (low ground pressure track-laying machines such as feller bunchers and masticators)
NAHC	Native American Heritage Commission
NDRC	National Disaster Resilience Competition

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS (cont.)

NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
OHV	off-highway vehicle
PAC	Protected Activity Center
PER	perennial
Regional PA	Amendment #1: Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Processes for Compliance With Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act For Management of Historic Properties By the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5)
RWQCB	Regional Water Quality Control Board
SKID	Skidding (rubber-tired skidders and track laying tractors)
SNC	Sierra Nevada Conservancy
STF	Stanislaus National Forest
STF LRMP	Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan
TCAPCD	Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USC	U.S. Code
USEPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
USFS	U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WUI	Wildland Urban Interface
YSS	Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions

Project title:	NDRC Fuel Breaks Project
Lead agency name and address:	State of California Department of Housing and Community Development 2020 West El Camino Avenue, Suite 200 Sacramento, CA 95833
Contact person and phone number:	Patrick Talbott (916) 263-2297
Project County:	Tuolumne County
Grant program:	Community Development Block Grant Program National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC)
Acres:	Approximately 1,808.4 acres

Other Public Agency Review/Permit Required:

Would the project result in:	YES	NO
Alterations to a watercourse (CDFW - Lake and Stream Alteration Agreement)	☐	☒
Conversion of timberland (CAL FIRE - Conversion Permit or Exemption)	☐	☒
Demolition (Local Air District - Demolition Permit)	☐	☒
Soil disturbance over 1 acre (RWQCB - SWPPP)	☐	☒
Fill of possible wetlands (404 Permit - USACE)	☐	☒
Other:	☒	☐

- Burn Permit from the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District (TCAPCD)
- Encroachment permit from California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for work in Caltrans right-of-way
- Encroachment permit from Tuolumne County Department of Public Works for work in County right-of-way

Discuss any above-listed topic item checked Yes and consultation with agencies:

The permits identified are not discretionary but may be required prior to work.
Refer to the discussion of Air Quality in Section 3.3 for a discussion of the burn permit for pile burning activities.
Encroachment permits from Caltrans and the Tuolumne County Department of Public Works for work in State and County rights-of-way.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report is intended for use by the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) staff to document an environmental impact analysis supporting the filing of a Notice of Exemption (NOE) document for a proposed HCD project. Although California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) does not apply for fuel reduction projects undertaken on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) if the primary role of a state or local agency is providing funding or staffing for those projects per Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1) and the project appears to fit within the descriptions for allowable Categorical Exemptions on the portions of the project that occur on private land, this report presents HCD's review for possible "Exceptions" that would preclude finding the project to be categorically exempt as discussed in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2. This report will be filed with the CEQA administrative record for this project to document the environmental impact analysis that was conducted by the Department.

The proposed project consists of expanding a series of shaded fuel breaks in Tuolumne County on private and federal land (Bureau of Land Management [BLM]- and U.S. Forest Service [USFS]-administered land). The project is a collaborative effort which is being conducted under the oversight of the HCD and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC). The USFS Stanislaus National Forest (STF) will be implementing the fuel break activity and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) staff will be providing support and facilitating STF implementation activities.

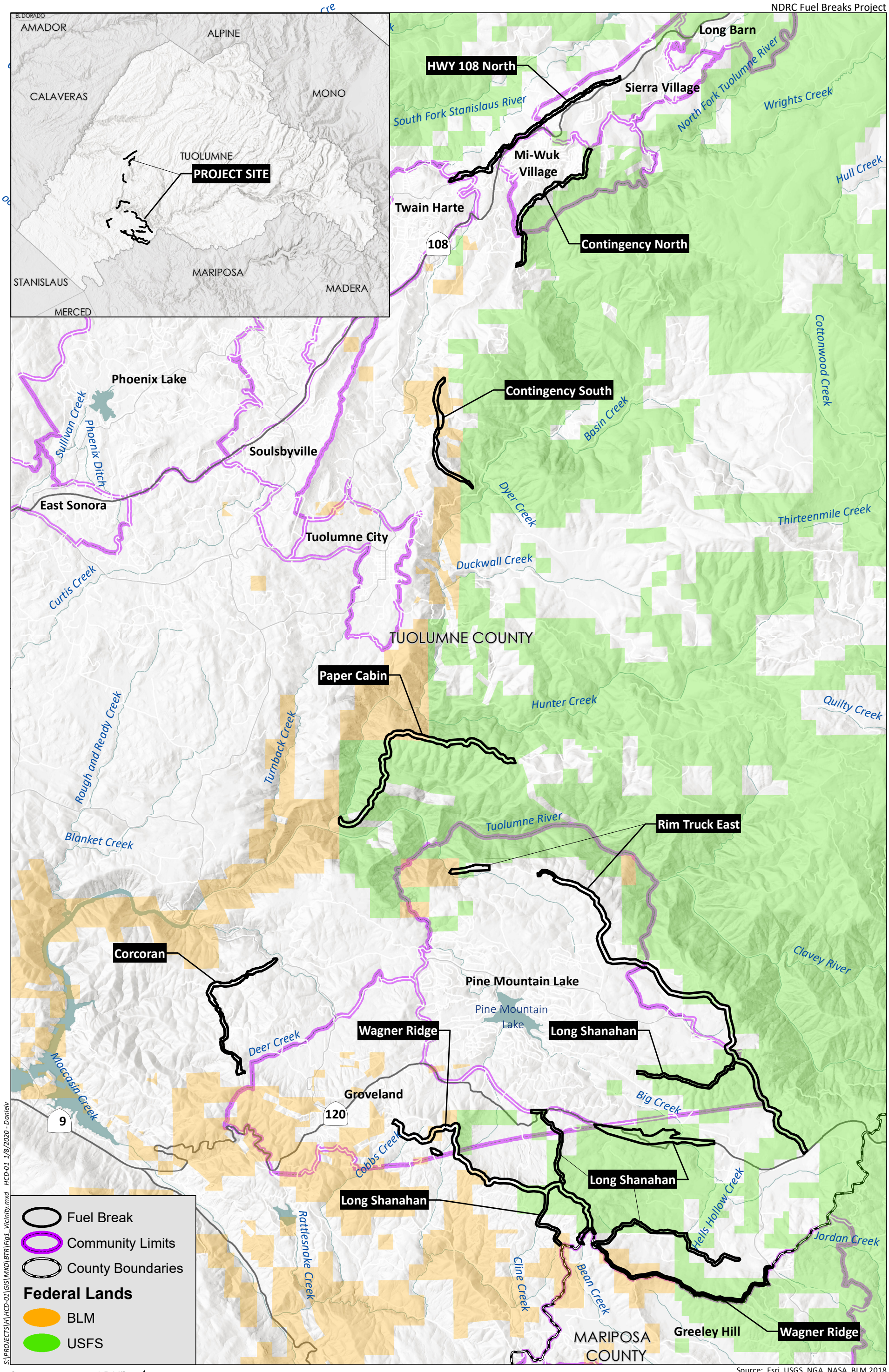
The proposed project also requires analysis pursuant to NEPA because it will occur partially on federal land, and because implementation is financed with federal funds from the Community Development Block Grant Program National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC). Review pursuant to CEQA is required because the project would partially occur on private lands, and lands controlled by State and local agencies, and because HCD is taking a discretionary action to fund the project activities.

Separate NEPA documents will be prepared for the STF activities affecting USFS lands, for the BLM activities affecting BLM lands, and for HCD as the NEPA Responsible Entity on behalf of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 Project Location

The project area is in the western Sierra Nevada, in Tuolumne County, California. The project consists of eight distinct fuel breaks located between Wagner Ridge in the south and State Highway 108 in the north (Figure 1). The size and location by Township (T), Range (R), Mount Diablo Meridian for each fuel break is listed in Table 1 below.



Source: Esri, USGS, NGA, NASA, BLM 2018

HELIX Environmental Planning

Vicinity Map

Figure 1

Table 1
LOCATION AND SIZE BY FUEL BREAK

Fuel Break	Approximate Size (acres)	USGS Quadrangle	Township, Range and Section
Highway 108	125.7	Twain Harte	T03N, R16E, Sections 25, 34-36 and T02N, R16E, Sections 3-4
Contingency North	102.5	Twain Harte	T02N, R16E, Sections 1, 2, 10, 11, 14, 15
Contingency South	85.6	Twain Harte/Tuolumne	T02N, R16E, Sections 21, 28, 33, 34
Paper Cabin	214.9	Tuolumne	T01N, R16E, Section 20, 21, 27-29
Rim Truck East	405.2	Tuolumne/Groveland/Jawbone Ridge	T01S, R16E, Section 1-4, 12, 25 and T01S, R17E, Sections 7, 17, 18, 20, 28, 33
Corcoran	108	Moccasin	T01S, R15E, Sections 11, 12, 14, 23
Long Shanahan	404.5	Groveland	T01S, R16 E, Section 25, 26, 35, 36 and T01S, R17E, Section 19, 20, 29, 20, 31 and T02 S, R16E, Section 2 and T02S, R17E, Section 5, 6
Wagner Ridge	362	Groveland	T01S, R16E, Section 27, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36 and T02S, R16E, Section 1, 2 and T02 S, R17 E, Section 5-8

2.2 Environmental Setting

Existing land uses in the project area include existing fuel breaks, roads, rural residences, timberlands, utility corridors, transportation corridors, and recreation. Land management in the project area includes STF, BLM, Sierra Pacific Industries, Pacific Gas and Electric, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and individual private landowners. The 2013 Rim Fire burned over 257,000 acres east of the project area. The proposed fuel breaks on Paper Cabin Ridge and Clements Road lie on the westernmost edge of the Rim Fire (Paper Cabin and Rim Truck East Fuel Breaks); the remainder of the proposed fuel breaks are 2 to 5 miles west of the Rim Fire burn area.

Land uses inside the project area are similar to those that surround it. Nearby towns include Mi-Wuk Village, Sierra Village, Confidence, Twain Harte, Tuolumne, Big Oak Flat, and Groveland. Major roads near the project site include Highway 108, Highway 120, Tuolumne Road, and Ferretti Road. Figure 1, Vicinity Map, depicts the locations of the nearby towns and major roadways.

The project covers approximately 1,808.4 acres, approximately 882.6 acres of USFS (STF) lands, 161.3 acres of BLM lands, 46.2 acres of State and local agency lands and/or easements, and 718.3 acres of private lands.

Vegetation in the project area is dominated by coniferous forests in the higher elevations, oak woodlands and grasslands in lower elevations, and montane chaparral in previously disturbed areas (existing fuel breaks) at all elevations.

2.3 Proposed Action

The project would reduce ladder fuels and establish eight 300-foot-wide shaded fuel breaks totaling 22 linear miles (approximately 1,808.4 acres). Most of the areas proposed for treatment would expand existing fuel breaks. Treatments would begin in 2020 and be completed in 2021.

Treatment prescriptions will be determined for a given area based on vegetation characteristics, proximity to residences and infrastructure, slope, and the presence of sensitive resources. The treatments may include a combination of hand or machine felling of trees, mechanical or hand piling and pile burning, and masticating brush and smaller trees. All standing and fallen dead trees would be treated.

Where economically feasible, on USFS lands, timber would be harvested and removed under a USFS timber contract. On BLM lands, all live and dead trees to be treated would be assessed for highest and best use, and if BLM chooses to not extract the material due to a balance of economic, ecological, and public safety reasons, it would be piled and burned. No timber would be sold from private properties in the project area.

Selected live trees less than 12-inches diameter at breast height (dbh) would be treated and trees up to 16 inches dbh may be extracted from USFS and BLM lands where a timber sale is feasible and required to meet desired spacing and reduction of ladder fuels. The residual trees would be spaced to break up the vertical and horizontal continuity of the fuels, reduce crown contact to less than 10 percent, and to achieve an average crown spacing of between 5 feet and one full crown width. Removal of oaks would generally be avoided.

2.3.1. Mechanical Treatments

Mechanical Mastication

Masticators would be used to grind and chip small diameter trees and brush to increase horizontal spacing of residual trees and remove ladder fuels.

Machine Piling

Bulldozers or grapple pilers may be used to pile small trees and brush for future burning. Piles will be a minimum of 25 feet from residual trees and free of soil to the greatest extent possible. Piles would be constructed at least 25 feet from any sensitive areas such as archaeological sites and all drainages. Piling would include all down logs and standing dead trees. Bulldozers may also be used to rehabilitate staging areas, skid trails, and landings by ripping to reverse the effects of soil compaction.

Ground-Based Extraction

If timber is harvested, it would be conducted on portions of USFS and/or BLM lands only using conventional logging equipment, which may include feller bunchers and rubber tire skidders. Existing landings along fuel breaks and roads would be used to minimize impacts where possible. Live trees up to 16 inches dbh would be removed if they are ladder fuels and/or if the desired shaded fuel break structure cannot be attained through the removal of smaller trees and brush alone.

On BLM lands, all potential timber and biomass would be assessed by BLM Forester and sold for highest and best use or disposal, at the discretion of the BLM, by use of BLM permit or contract. Trees deemed too small or defective for timber must be assessed for firewood or biomass use (biomass fuel, particle board, or other non-timber forest product). Whether or not the material is transported, the proponent would still estimate the total green tons cut, to be reported to the BLM.

2.3.2. Hand Treatments

Hand treatments include using chainsaws to cut brush and trees. Hand treatments would primarily be used on steep slopes (generally, slopes greater than 35 percent with pitches up to 40 percent) and other areas where equipment use is not appropriate or possible. Hand piles would be created for burning at a later time and the same buffers listed above would apply. If needed, hand lines would be created around burn piles to increase control over pile burning.

2.3.3. Pile Burning

Pile burning is proposed as a follow-up treatment and would be conducted in accordance with all state and federal laws including air quality regulations and a site-specific burn plan would be developed for the project.

2.3.4. Herbicide Treatments (USFS Lands Only)

On USFS lands only, future maintenance of recolonizing vegetation would be done with the herbicide glyphosate. Directed herbicide applications would target only brush species that could create ladder fuel into the overstory trees and/or high fuel loading within these areas. This would include most ceanothus species and other taller/sprouting species such as manzanita. Herbicides could be used up to three times over a 10-year period after implementation of the initial treatments and would be applied by hand.

2.3.5. Management Requirements and Design Criteria

The proposed treatments were developed by CAL FIRE and the STF, in accordance with the management direction contained in the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (STF LRMP; 1991), as amended. Incorporation of the applicable management requirements as design criteria are standard practice by STF to meet the goals and objectives for management of the Forest. While the proposed

project also includes non-USFS lands, the project is being implemented as a cooperative effort. Therefore, the management requirements and design criteria identified by the STF would apply for the entire project and are incorporated into the project design. Additional management requirements and design criteria specific to actions on BLM lands are also included to address possible timber harvest on BLM lands. Standards and guidelines pertinent to resources with the potential to be affected by the project are presented below:

Sensitive Wildlife Species

General Special-Status Species

Notify the District wildlife biologist if any special-status species is discovered during project implementation so that protective measures can be applied, if needed.

Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog and Western Pond Turtle

1. Within 165 feet of Big Creek and 150 feet of Hell's Hollow Creek:

    a. Pre-implementation surveys by a qualified biologist shall be conducted within 14 days prior to all implementation activities or during the breeding season prior to implementation within the 165-foot buffer of Big Creek in the Long Shanahan Fuel Break.

    b. No equipment shall be allowed to cross Big Creek.

    c. Hand felling, hand-piling, and end-lining may be conducted at any time once a qualified biologist confirms foothill yellow-legged frog (*Rana boylii*; FYLF) are not present. If FYLF are present, the aquatic biologist will consult with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) on appropriate monitoring and protection requirements prior to operations beginning. No mechanical felling within the buffers.

    d. Avoid working within the 165-foot buffer of Big Creek after the first major rains in the fall when FYLF, if present, may be moving upslope toward tributaries and overwintering sites. Work may resume within five days after.

    e. Preference is to hand-pile and burn or end-line material. Burning will only take place when water is in the creek because FYLF and western pond turtles are very likely to be in aquatic habitats and away from burn piles when water is present. If hand-piling or end-lining are not practicable, mechanical piling equipment may be used, but only when water is in the creek. Limit the number of paths used by mechanical piling equipment to the minimum amount necessary to achieve the objective.

2. If FYLF or western pond turtle are observed within the project area, inform the project aquatic biologist of the sighting immediately and cease operations that

may impact the animal. The frog will be allowed to leave the work area on its own. The aquatic biologist will notify CDFW within 24 hours if FYLF is found. No FYLF will be handled without first contacting CDFW.

California Mountain Kingsnake

1. Any California mountain kingsnake encountered in the project site during project activities will not be harassed and will be allowed to leave the area of its own accord. A qualified biologist may handle a snake in order to relocate it out of the project site.

Nesting Birds

1. Pre-implementation surveys for northern goshawk, great gray owl, and California spotted owl will be conducted by a qualified biologist prior to implementation when vegetation treatments are planned in suitable nesting habitat during the breeding season (see species specific dates below).

    a. For the northern goshawk, maintain a Limited Operating Period (LOP) prohibiting vegetation treatments within 0.25 miles of active nests during the breeding season (February 15 to September 15).

    b. For the great gray owl and the California spotted owl, maintain a LOP prohibiting vegetation treatments within 0.25 miles of active nests during the breeding season (March 1 to August 15).

    c. The LOPs described above may be waived on a case by case basis if a biologist determines that breeding disturbance is unlikely to occur given the intensity, duration, timing, and specific location of the project activity.

2. Native birds and active nests that are discovered during the above-mentioned nesting bird surveys or during implementation will not be taken, possessed, or destroyed.

3. BLM Managed Lands: As feasible, project implementation on BLM lands will occur between September 16 to February 14 to avoid disrupting nesting birds or their nests during the breeding season. Should project activities occur on BLM lands during the breeding season (February 15 to September 15), a qualified biologist will first survey the project area for migratory birds. The surveys will be conducted within 14 days prior to implementation of the work. If the area surveyed has not been treated within 14 days, the area must be surveyed again. If birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act are found nesting in the project site, a 100-foot buffer will be established to avoid disturbance of the nests. The qualified biologist will mark sites to be avoided during vegetation removal or will be on-site during the work. Management requirements and design criteria applicable to the project for protecting raptors and other native birds will apply.

Special-Status Plants

1. Botanical surveys will be conducted during the appropriate blooming season prior to project implementation in suitable habitat that occurs in areas that were not included in the 2019 botanical surveys (e.g., private properties that did not grant permission to enter in 2019).

2. All known sensitive plant occurrences will be flagged for avoidance prior to project implementation. Notify the STF District botanist of any new sensitive plant occurrences discovered during project implementation.

3. Place all burn piles a minimum of 25 feet from known sensitive plant occurrences.

Riparian Conservation Areas and Jurisdictional Waters

1. Table 2 identifies mechanized equipment requirements.

2. No staging, fueling, maintenance, or cleaning of vehicles, equipment, or tools will take place inside a Riparian Conservation Area as defined in Table 2 below.

Noxious Weeds

1. Standard USFS contract provisions for equipment cleaning are applied to mechanized activities, including washing of heavy equipment prior to its arrival at the work site and following completion of work in known infested areas. This serves to reduce the risk of import/export of weed propagules to/from the project site resulting in spread of existing weed populations. All heavy equipment brought to this project that leaves roads must be free of soil, mud (wet or dried), seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain seeds or propagules. Dust or light dirt is not a concern.

2. Flagged weed populations will be avoided by project activities where feasible, and, if unavoidable, the weeds will be treated prior to contract initiation. If practicable, burn piles will be placed in existing weed populations to reduce the risk of weed propagules being introduced to adjacent weed-free locations and to suppress the regrowth of weeds.

Table 2
OPERATING REQUIREMENTS FOR MECHANIZED EQUIPMENT OPERATIONS IN RIPARIAN CONSERVATION AREAS

Stream Type[1]	Zone	Width (feet)	MECH[2]	SKID[3]	Operating Requirements
PER/INT/SAF	Exclusion[4]	0-15	Prohibited	Prohibited	N/A
PER/INT/SAF	Exclusion	15-50	Allowed	Prohibited	N/A
PER/INT/SAF	Transition	15-50	Allowed	Prohibited	Remove operation-created debris from stream channels unless prescribed for resource benefit. Retain remaining obligate riparian shrubs and trees (e.g., willows, alder, aspen). Do not damage streambanks with equipment and retain sufficient vegetation to maintain streambank stability.
PER/INT/SAF	Transition	50-100	Allowed	Allowed	Use existing skid trails except where unacceptable impact will result. The number of crossings should not exceed an average of two per mile.
PER/SAF	Outer	100-300	Allowed	Allowed	Density and intensity of skid trails will gradually increase as distance increases from the Transition Zone.
INT	Outer	100-150	Allowed	Allowed	Density and intensity of skid trails will gradually increase as distance increases from the Transition Zone.
EPH	Exclusion[5]	0-15	Prohibited	Prohibited	N/A
EPH	Exclusion	15-25	Allowed	Prohibited	N/A
EPH	Transition	25-50	Allowed	Allowed	The number of crossings should not exceed an average of three per mile.

[1] **PER**=Perennial; INT=Intermittent; EPH=Ephemeral; SAF=Special Aquatics Features (lakes, meadows, bogs, fens, wetlands, vernal pools, and springs).
[2] **MECH**=Mechanical Harvesting or Shredding (low ground pressure track-laying machines such as feller bunchers and masticators).
[3] **SKID**=Skidding (rubber-tired skidders and track laying tractors).
[4] The exclusion zone for perennial/intermittent streams starts at: A. The edge of the active channel where slopes rise uniformly from the stream, or at the outer edge of the following features, whichever is the furthest from the stream. B. The first slope-break adjacent to the stream (e.g., stream bank, inner gorge). C. Flat or nearly flat ground adjacent to the channel (e.g., floodplain or terrace). D. Obligate riparian shrub and/or tree communities associated with any of the above. The exclusion zone for SAFs begins at: A. The outer edge of obligate trees, shrubs or herbaceous plants in wet meadows, bogs, fens and springs, or the high-water line of lakes and vernal pools. B. The top of the first slope-break immediately adjacent to the special aquatic feature if further than the obligate vegetation or high-water line.
[5] The exclusion zone for ephemeral streams begins at the edge of the channel where slopes rise uniformly or at the edge of the stream bank, whichever is furthest from the stream.

Cultural Resources

1. The following Standard Protection Measures from Appendices E and H of the 2013 Forest Service Region 5 Programmatic Agreement will be implemented for all cultural sites documented in the project site (resources of interest):

   Flag and Avoid:

   a. Property location conveyed to contractors and employees responsible for implementation; flag for avoidance/protection (Regional PA Standard Protection Measure E.1).

b. All cultural properties within the Area of Potential Effects (APEs) shall be clearly delineated prior to implementing any associated activities that have the potential to affect historic properties. (1) Cultural property boundaries shall be delineated with coded flagging and/or other effective marking (Regional PA Standard Protection Measure E.1.3).

c. Monitoring by Heritage Program Specialist required when work is required within cultural sites (Regional PA Standard Protection Measure E.1.5).

d. Vegetation to be burned shall not be piled within the site boundary unless locations have been specifically approved by qualified Heritage Program staff (Regional PA Standard Protection Measure E.2.2(b)(1)(H)).

e. Trees may be directionally felled away from flagged cultural properties.

2. In accordance with Appendix H.3.1(b) of the Regional PA, inventory efforts in areas of the project site of impenetrable brush or obscured visibility were deferred until after project implementation. As required by and in accordance with the Regional PA, after implementation and within one year of completion of the project activities, the STF will survey areas, determined to be warranted based on the area's historic property sensitivity, that have been cleared of the brush or that have improved visibility. The timing of the surveys will be based on the progress of the implementation in contingent locations so that new surveys can be grouped together as much as possible. The Field Operator will inform the STF Heritage Program Manager (HPM)/Delegated Heritage Program Staff (DHPS) of various stages of the project so that subsequent field work can proceed in a timely fashion.

3. Prior to project implementation in areas that were not included in the 2019 cultural resource surveys for the project (e.g., private properties that did not grant permission to enter in 2019), protocol-level cultural resource surveys will be conducted by a qualified archaeologist. Standard Protection Measures will apply for any resources that are located.

4. Should any previously unrecorded cultural resources be encountered during project implementation, all work will immediately cease in that area and the STF HPM will be notified immediately. Work may resume after approval by the STF HPM providing any Standard Protection Measures are implemented. Should any cultural resources become damaged in unanticipated ways by project activities, the steps described in the Regional PA for inadvertent discoveries will be followed.

Noise

1. Except where the Field Operator has determined that no disturbance will result to the occupants of dwellings, the use of power equipment and machinery within 300 feet of an occupied structure will be restricted to between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., and will be prohibited on Saturdays, Sundays, and

nationally designated legal holidays. This requirement may be waived by the effected property owner(s).

Timber Harvest on BLM Lands

If a BLM Forester determines that a timber harvest is warranted on BLM-managed lands, the following design criteria will apply:

1. Skid Trails

    a. A designated trail network will be used for ground-based harvesting equipment. The network will incorporate existing skid trails over creating new trails and will consider proper spacing, skid trail direction and location relative to terrain and stream channel features. Old skid trails will not be opened or driven on without the approval of the Field Operator.

    b. Skid trails will be designated in locations that channel water from the trail surface away from waterbodies, floodplains, and wetlands, or unstable areas adjacent to them.

    c. Erosion control measures will be applied at skid trails and other disturbed areas with potential for erosion and subsequent sediment and silt delivery to waterbodies, floodplains, or wetlands. These practices may include mulching, water barring, tillage, and woody debris placement.

    d. Main skid trails will be blocked where they intersect roads and landings with an approved barricade and/or scattered slash to preclude off-highway vehicle use (OHV) use.

    e. Designated skid roads will be used to limit soil compaction to less than 12 percent of the project area.

    f. Skid trails will be located to minimize disturbance to coarse woody debris. Where skid trails encounter large coarse woody debris, either the log will be moved out of the way, or a section will be bucked out for equipment access. All sections will remain on site and as undisturbed as possible.

    g. Low psi, wide-track vehicles or one-pass operations (one round trip, in and out) will be required for all mechanical harvester (includes felling and bunching) operations. For multiple passes, equipment must walk on at least 12 inches of slash for equipment greater than 6 pounds per square inch or at least 8 inches of slash for equipment less than 6 pounds per square inch. Mechanized equipment must be capable of reaching 20 feet.

    h. Specific locations of logging operations must be approved by the STF HPM and BLM Archaeologist prior to skidding of material.

2. Landings and Hauling

    a. Existing landings and turnouts along fuel breaks and roads will be used to minimize impacts wherever possible, or at locations pre-approved by the STF HPM and BLM Archaeologist.

    b. During hauling operations, water will be applied when necessary to reduce dust and buildup of fine sediment that can enter into waterways. No surface water will be drafted for dust control

3. Restore Existing Roads

    a. Following completion of treatments, existing public and private gravel roads used for project activities would be restored to pre-project conditions. Contractors will be required to document existing conditions of gravel roads planned for project use prior to project initiation and will document restoration of these conditions following project completion.

4. Waterbars

    a. Spacing and construction of waterbars on skid trails and any other location deemed necessary by BLM will be based on gradient and erosion class in compliance with standard BLM guidelines.

    b. The following techniques will be used to construct waterbars:

        i. Open the downslope end of the waterbar to allow free passage of water.
        ii. Construct the waterbar so that it will not deposit water where it will cause erosion.
        iii. Compact the waterbar to prevent water from breaching the berm.
        iv. Skew waterbars no more than 30 degrees from perpendicular to the centerline of the trail or road.

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

3.1 Aesthetics

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

A number of the fuel breaks are located along existing public roads, and on private lands containing residences and other uses, as well as federal lands used for recreation. The project consists of thinning existing understory and removing dead trees. Although there would be a change in the visual environment, it would be

negligible and would not affect the overall characteristics of the area or scenic resources.

The Tuolumne River is a designated Wild and Scenic River as part of the National Wild and Scenic River System (Public Law 90-542;16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.), and the STF is the managing agency for the segment through the project area (National Wild and Scenic Rivers System 2020). The Paper Cabin and Rim Truck East Fuel Breaks are located on ridgelines over the river, with the Paper Cabin Fuel Break approximately 700 feet from the river at its closest point. Treatment activities may be visible from a small portion of the Wild and Scenic Tuolumne River, but proposed activities would create very minor disturbance to vegetation and soils and nothing that would be visible beyond the implementation phase. The project also includes best management practices and management requirements that will protect riparian areas that are tributaries to the river, eliminating potential impacts from treatment activities on water quality. The project would have no adverse impact on the Wild and Scenic Rivers value.

Overall, the project would potentially benefit the Tuolumne River and its Wild and Scenic values by reducing the risk of a high-severity fire moving into the canyon from communities. In addition to other adverse effects, a high severity fire would result in adverse aesthetic affects in the area and this project is designed to protect the river and its special values. No mitigation is required for work performed within one mile of the river. Maria Benech, Rim Restoration Coordinator, STF, provided concurrence with the findings in an e-mail dated January 30, 2020 (refer to Appendix A for the e-mail). Impacts associated with aesthetics would be less than significant.

3.2 Agriculture and Forest Resources

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ Yes ☐ No Would any trees be felled? If yes, discuss protection of nesting birds and compliance with Forest Plan Requirements.
☐ Yes ☒ No Would the project convert any prime or unique farmland?
☐ Yes ☒ No Would the project result in the conversion of forest land or timberland to non-forest use?
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The treatments for the proposed project have been developed by Cal Fire and the STF, in accordance with the management direction contained in the Stanislaus National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (STF LRMP; 1991), as amended. Trees removed for the project would be 12 inches DBH or less and dead trees. The treatment areas would remain forested following project implementation and no loss or conversion of forest land would occur. The project includes management requirements and design criteria for the protection of nesting birds, which include conducting surveys for work occurring during the nesting season and avoidance of trees containing occupied nests of any species.

Impacts associated with agriculture and forest resources would be less than significant.

3.3 Air Quality

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ Yes ☐ No The local Air Quality Management District guidelines for dust abatement and other air quality concerns were reviewed for this project.
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project area is in the Tuolumne County portion of the Mountain Counties Air Basin (MCAB). The MCAB lies along the northern part of the Sierra Nevada range and encompasses El Dorado (western portion), Plumas, Sierra, Nevada, Placer (middle portion), Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa counties. Air Quality in Tuolumne County is under the regulatory jurisdiction of the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District (TCAPCD). Tuolumne County is a non-attainment area for the State and Federal ozone Air Quality Standards (California Air Resources Board [CARB] 2019; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [USEPA] 2019). Currently, there are no required local attainment plans in Tuolumne County.

The proposed action would produce limited emissions from: (1) off-road motorized equipment used for the project treatments; (2) and from vehicles used to transport personnel to and from the project area; and (3) smoke from pile burning and particulate matter from mechanical treatments. Sensitive receptors include people in proximity to areas being treated, such as residents of the private properties being treated and recreationists and workers using public lands.

Emissions from off-road equipment and worker transport would be limited in duration and the associated emissions would cease once the work is complete. Potential effects to air quality from pile burning could range from a minimal reduction in visibility to potential pneumonic irritation, as well as the smell of smoke affecting people in proximity to the project area when such treatments are underway. However, the duration of these effects is expected to be short with the greatest impact occurring during the actual ignition or active burning phase and lasting from one to a few days depending on the size or number of piles to be ignited. Effects to air quality from mechanical treatments and wood cutting would be dominated by airborne particulate matter generated during the operation of mechanical equipment and transport vehicles and could temporarily reduce visibility in the immediate project area; however, these impacts would quickly dissipate upon the completion of operations.

Potential air quality impacts would be monitored and controlled through existing regulatory processes. A site-specific burn plan would be developed in accordance with all federal and State regulations, and a burn/smoke permit from the TCAPCD will be obtained. The TCAPCD Rule 302 (Burning Permits), Rule 303 (Burn or No-Burn Day), and Rule 307 (Wildland Vegetation Management Burning) would apply, as would California Code of Regulations Title 17 Subchapter 2 (Smoke Management Guidelines for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning). Mandatory compliance with rules and regulations would ensure project related emissions fall below TCAPCD thresholds (B. Sandman, TCAPCD Deputy Air Pollution Control Officer, personal communication

via phone on January 21, 2020). Mechanical treatments causing temporary short-term impacts from dust and exhaust emissions would be very short-lived. Cooperation with the TCAPCD, and the temporary nature of the work would avoid long term air quality impacts. Additional emissions associated with timber harvest and removal of biomass from BLM and STF lands would also be temporary and minimal, and have been evaluated pursuant to NEPA with a de minimis finding. Additional evaluation pursuant to CEQA is not required pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1) amended by Senate Bill 901 (see Section 5.0).

The long-term beneficial effects from burn piles and mechanical treatments would reduce the magnitude of smoke and other negative effects caused from potential large wildfires should these treatments not occur. Impacts associated with air quality would be less than significant.

3.4 Biological Resources

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ Yes ☐ No Will the project potentially effect biological resources?
☒ Yes ☐ No Was a current California National Diversity Database review completed? Results discussed below:
☒ Yes ☐ No Was a biological survey of the project area completed? Results discussed below:
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

A Biological Technical Report (BTR) was prepared for the project to evaluate potential effects on biological resources in the project site (HELIX 2020; Appendix B). The evaluation included a review of databases for regionally occurring species with the potential to be affected by the project, and surveys.

Biological surveys conducted at the project site by HELIX biologists included a biological reconnaissance survey (habitat mapping, botanical and wildlife inventories), focused surveys for special-status plant species, and focused surveys for northern goshawk, great gray owl, and California spotted owl. The surveys were conducted in May, June, and July 2019. Refer to the BTR for specific dates for each survey conducted.

The databases reviewed are listed below:

- The Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office list of threatened and endangered species and Bird Species of Conservation Concern that may occur in the project site and/or may be affected by the project

- The CNPS list of special-status plants documented in the “Tuolumne, CA”, “Standard, CA”, “Columbia, SE, CA”, “Twain Harte, CA”, “Hull Creek, CA”, “Duckwall Mountain, CA”, “Jawbone Ridge, CA”, “Groveland, CA”, and “Moccasin, CA” 7.5-minute quads

- The list of special-status species documented in California Natural Diversity Database the “Tuolumne, CA”, “Standard, CA”, “Columbia, SE, CA”, “Twain Harte, CA”, “Hull Creek, CA”, “Duckwall Mountain, CA”, “Jawbone Ridge, CA”, “Groveland, CA”, and “Moccasin, CA” 7.5-minute quads
- The special-status animals list for the BLM Mother Lode Field Office (BLM 2014) and the statewide BLM list of special-status plants
- The USFS Region 5 Sensitive Species List for the STF (USFS 2014)
- USFWS List of Bird Species of Conservation Concern
- Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) species occurrence records on the STF for mammals and birds (R. Kalinowksi, STF Wildlife Biologist, personal communication via e-mail September 27, 2019)

Each sensitive species included in the lists were reviewed for their potential to occur in the project area or otherwise be affected by the proposed project. Based on the ranges and habitat affinities for each species, a total of 18 regionally-occurring special-status wildlife species have the potential to occur in the project site and are evaluated in detail in the BTR. Refer to Table 7 of the BTR for a summary of the status and occurrence in the project site. No species listed as threatened or endangered under the State of federal Endangered Species Acts will be affected by the project.

Special Status Wildlife

California-sensitive species that were evaluated in detail in the BTR include those identified as having the potential to occur in the overall project site based on the presences of suitable habitat and/or known occurrences include: San Joaquin roach (*Lavinia symmetricus* ssp. 1), FYLF (*Rana boylii*), western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*), California mountain kingsnake (*Lampropeltis zonata*), Cooper’s hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*), northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), olive-sided flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), great gray owl (*Strix nebulosi*), California spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*), pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), ringtail (*Bassariscus astutus*), small-footed myotis (*Myotis ciliolabrum*), long-eared myotis (*Myotis evotis*), fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*), Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*). California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) was evaluated because it is federally listed as threatened and because of reported occurrences in the region, but the project site is outside of the known range and the species is presumed absent from the site. California red-legged frog would not be affected by the project.

FYLF are listed as endangered under the California Endangered Species Act. No take of individuals is anticipated as a result of the proposed project as this species is not known to occur in the project site, the entire project site is more than 165 feet (30 meters) from known occupied habitat, the only potentially suitable habitat is in and within 165 feet of Big Creek, operating requirements and design criteria would further reduce the likelihood of impacts to this species, and the project would have a negligible

impact on habitat overall and could have a beneficial effect on the overall quality of the habitat in the project site by increasing habitat resiliency. The project would also result in less than significant impacts on San Joaquin roach and western pond turtle because operating requirements and design criteria would avoid direct impacts to suitable aquatic habitat and would limit activities within 165 feet of Big Creek and 150 feet of Hell's Hollow Creek which have suitable habitat for both species. Although bald eagle are known in the region, there is no suitable nesting or foraging habitat in the project site and the species would not be impacted by the project.

Other sensitive species with the potential to occur include one species of snake (California mountain kingsnake) seven species of bird (Cooper's hawk, northern goshawk, golden eagle, olive-sided flycatcher, peregrine falcon, great gray owl, ringtail, and five species of bats with marginally suitable roosting habitat in the project site (small-footed myotis, long-eared myotis, fringed myotis, Yuma myotis). In general, the bats are not expected to occur due to the lack of suitable roosting habitat. Impacts to these species would be less than significant.

Overall, mortality from direct contact with equipment is anticipated to be low because it is assumed that most species can find refuge microsites (e.g., inside burrows or under surface objects) or move away from approaching equipment. Adult birds foraging or moving through the work area would be mobile enough to avoid direct contact with equipment. If California king snake are observed, then they would be allowed to leave or would be relocated by a biologist. Ringtail are highly mobile and would be expected to move away from disturbance and avoid contact.

There are records of northern goshawk, great gray owl, and California spotted owl in the project area. Surveys would be conducted in suitable habitat prior to commencing work in an area during the nesting season. If they or any other native birds are observed nesting in the work area, an appropriate buffer would be established around the nest and the area avoided for the duration the nest is active. Impacts to raptors and other nesting birds would be less than significant.

Fire-dependent species preferring open habitats and species that are associated with early successional vegetation or species that consume seeds and fruit appear to benefit from mechanical fuel reduction activities. Increasing understory light for shrub patch development can increase habitat for some small mammals and birds. In contrast, species that prefer closed canopy forests or dense understory, and species closely associated with those habitat elements may be temporarily displaced for foraging habitat. . Some habitat loss may persist for only a few months or a few years, such as the loss of shrubby understory vegetation which can recover quickly. However, the fuel breaks represent a relatively narrow corridor within a greater expanse of habitat. The unmanaged lands on either side of the treated areas would maintain important wildlife habitat features such as large snags, large woody debris, woodrat nests, and live trees with cavities and/or flying squirrel nests which will significantly reduce potential negative impacts on wildlife species, including northern goshawk and California spotted owl. The thinning of brush and small diameter trees can also create conditions in which remaining trees grow bigger, faster. In addition, once regrowth sprouts, the new

vegetation is highly palatable and nutritious. Populations of small mammals, as well as animals such as deer and quail, build up rapidly after the start of new growth.

The project would not affect any threatened or endangered species of wildlife. No significant negative impacts to wildlife would occur as a result of the project. Impacts would be less than significant.

Rare Plants

The entire project site includes potentially suitable habitat for five California rare plant species: Mariposa clarkia (*Clarkia australis* ssp. *biloba*), yellow-lipped pansy monkeyflower (*Diplacus pulchellus*), slender-stemmed monkeyflower (*Erythranthe filicaulis*), shaggy lupine (*Lupinus spectabilis*). Although potentially suitable habitat is present, these species were not observed during botanical surveys. All records are over ten years old and were revisited during the surveys with negative results. Any known or observed observations of rare plants would be flagged and avoided during implementation of treatments. The minimal ground disturbance and understory clearing associated with the proposed project could improve habitat conditions for these species. Impacts to sensitive plants would be less than significant.

Invasive Plants

Equipment and other vehicles used during project implementation may transfer and spread non-native invasive weeds. Weeds are prevalent in the project area, but mostly frequently found along existing roads and trails. Standard contract provisions for equipment cleaning would be applied and flagged weed infestations would be avoided by project activities or treated prior to implementing treatments in an area.

3.5 Cultural Resources

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ Yes ☐ No Was a current archaeological records check completed? Results discussed below:
☒ Yes ☐ No Was a Contract Archaeologist consulted? Results discussed below:
☒ Yes ☐ No Was an archaeological survey of the project area completed? Results discussed below:
☐ Yes ☒ No Will the project effect any historic buildings or archaeological site?

An evaluation of cultural resources was prepared by Clarus Backes, Registered Professional Archaeologist, of HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. (Backes 2020). The scope of work included a records search at the Central California Information Center at California State University, Stanislaus to identify previous survey coverage and documented resources within the project site, Native American coordination, pedestrian surveys, and preparation of a report.

The Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) was contacted by written request for a Sacred Lands File Search. A NAHC Contacts List dated June 27, 2019 was

received. Inquiry letters prepared by Mr. Backes, dated July 9, 2019, were sent to the individuals included on the list. The inquiry letters included a description of the project, its location, and a map of the project area. No responses were received in regard to the request for information.

The records search identified 42 previously recorded sites considered to be resources of interest. Intensive field inventories in areas of the project site not previously surveyed or where the previous surveys were inadequate were conducted HELIX archaeologists between July 2, 2019 and December 12, 2019. A total of 762.3 acres of the APE had been adequately surveyed, 558.9 acres were covered during the intensive survey conducted in 2019, and 631.7 acres were unable to be surveyed due to steep slopes, impenetrable vegetation, or poor visibility, or because landowners had not granted access to the survey crews. Thirteen new heritage resource sites were located and documented and are considered potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; as such they are resources of interest that will be protected through the application of Standard Protection Measures. Specific site information and protection measures developed during the study are available on a need-to-know basis and are kept in a project-associated confidential file.

Standard Protection Measures would be implemented for each site. The measures include flagging sites for avoidance and protection, monitoring by heritage program specialist, directional felling of trees away from cultural features during prescribed burns, and staging burn piles outside of archaeological site boundaries.

Areas of the site where inventories were deferred due to impenetrable vegetation or obscured visibility would be surveyed within one year of completion of the project activities, based on the historic property sensitivity of the area. If previously undiscovered historical resources are encountered during project activities, the resources would be avoided through coordination with the STF HPM, and Standard Protection Measures would apply.

As a federally funded undertaking that would take place on lands administered by the STF and the BLM, the project requires compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106). Because the majority of Federal lands within the fuel breaks are administered by the STF, the BLM and HCD have designated the STF as the lead Federal agency for the entire undertaking. Through consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer, the STF determined that *Amendment #1: Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Processes for Compliance With Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act For Management of Historic Properties By the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5)* was the appropriate agreement for the STF to use in order to satisfy the requirements of Section 106 for all lands involved in the undertaking. As lead agency, the STF provided site location data and determined the appropriate survey and reporting requirements for the project's cultural resources assessment. Refer to Section 3.18 for a discussion of Tribal Cultural Resources and consultation.

The STF HPM issued a letter dated February 12, 2020, with a recommendation of no effect on the resources, as well as noting that as lead agency for Section 106 compliance, the project is certified as having met all stipulations of the Regional PA and therefore has complied with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (refer to Appendix C for the letter). Impacts on cultural resources would be less than significant.

3.6 Energy

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

While project activities would result in the temporary consumption of energy resources in the form of vehicle and equipment fuels (gasoline and diesel fuel), such consumption would be incidental and temporary. Equipment and machinery used would comply with all State energy efficiency standards. The project would not have the potential to have a significant impact on energy consumption or conflict with a State or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency.

3.7 Geology and Soils

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Project implementation would result in minimal ground disturbance. However, certain methods of vegetation removal through use of mechanical equipment and pile burning could result in limited soil erosion. The project would comply with all measures set forth in the STF LRMP to minimize the potential for soil erosion. In addition, all vegetation would be cut above ground level, which would keep the root systems intact and would anchor the soils and prevent erosion. In addition, litter and duff would remain in place which would reduce the potential for soil erosion. Masticated brush would be dispersed throughout the project area, which would further prevent erosion. Operation of equipment, such as masticators and tractors, has the potential to result in some ground disturbance, but equipment would only be used on slopes less than 40 percent. Methods would be chosen and used solely or jointly based on changing topography and site-specific conditions. Standard operating requirements outline mechanical equipment operation restrictions within 300 feet of a stream. The effects of the project associated with geology and soils would be less than significant.

3.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ Yes ☒ No Would the project generate significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions?
☐ Yes ☒ No Would these GHG emissions result in a significant impact on the environment? Discuss below:
☐ Yes ☒ No Would the project conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases? Discuss below:

The project objective is to provide long term benefit by supporting a fire resilient landscape and creating a defensible space that can be used to minimize the spread of fires. Implementation of the project would contribute to a reduction in wildfire risk and severity in the County.

As described in Section 3.3, the proposed project would produce short-term limited emissions from internal-combustible engines utilized to masticate woody fuels and to transport personnel to and from the project area. The proposed action would produce smoke from pile burning and particulate matter from mechanical treatments. The duration of these GHG emitting activities is expected to be short with the greatest impact occurring during the actual ignition or active burning phase, lasting from one to a few days depending on the size or number of piles to be ignited. GHG emissions from mechanical treatments and wood cutting would be dominated by airborne particulate matter generated during the operation of mechanical equipment and transport vehicles, however these impacts would be minimal and temporary. Additional emissions associated with timber harvest and removal of biomass from BLM and STF lands would also be temporary and minimal, and have been evaluated pursuant to NEPA with a de minimis finding. Additional evaluation pursuant to CEQA is not required pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1) amended by Senate Bill 901 (see Section 5.0).

The TCAPCD rules 302 (Burning Permits), Rule 303 (Burn or No-Burn Day), and Rule 307 (Wildland Vegetation Management Burning) would apply to the proposed project and the proposed project would conform to the applicable TCAPCD regulations. Currently, there are no required local attainment plans in Tuolumne County.

Short-term equipment and vehicle usage, and pile burning in the project area would not generate emissions that would have a significant impact on the environment, and implementation of the proposed project would contribute GHGs that are far less than what wildland fires generate. In addition, the project would remove hazardous fuels from within the fuel breaks which would reduce the risk of large wildland fires that release greenhouse gases. The reduction in risk of wildfire GHG reductions that would exceed any GHG emission of the project. Therefore, while some emissions would be generated, the impacts would be less than significant.

3.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project would not create a hazard to the public through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials. All hazardous materials used for equipment or pile burning would be disposed of in accordance with applicable federal, State and local requirements. The project would not require soil excavation or structures associated with hazardous materials sites. The project would not include road closures or generate substantial traffic that would create a hazard. Temporary lane closures could occur along rural roads; however, the implementation would not interfere with any adopted emergency response or evacuation plan. For any work within County or Caltrans rights-of-way, encroachment permits would be required, and traffic control plans would be prepared, as appropriate.

3.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ Yes ☒ No Will the project potentially affect any watercourse or body of water?
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The proposed fuel breaks are generally situated along ridges in the San Joaquin River watershed (Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 6: 180400) and all streams and waterways in the region ultimately drain to the San Joaquin River. Most of the proposed fuel breaks are in the Tuolumne River subwatershed, with small portions at the north in the Stanislaus River watershed and in the south in the Merced River watershed. The fuel breaks would be accessed by existing roads, and the project has been designed to protect and maintain water quality and prevent adverse effects to beneficial uses both on-site and downstream.

As previously mentioned, certain methods of vegetation removal including thinning and pile burning could result in limited soil erosion which could lead to an increase in sedimentation in waterways. Those potential effects would be minimal due to the limited aquatic resources in the area and minimal ground disturbance associated with the proposed activities. The project would comply with all measures set forth in the STF LRMP to minimize soil erosion would avoid the potential for soil erosion. In addition, all vegetation would be cut above ground level, which would keep the root systems intact and would anchor the soils and prevent erosion. In addition, litter and duff would remain in place which would reduce the potential for soil erosion. Masticated brush would be dispersed throughout the project area, which would further prevent erosion. Operation of equipment, such as masticators and tractors, has the potential to result in some ground disturbance, but equipment would only be used on slopes less than 40 percent. Methods would be chosen and used solely or jointly based on changing topography and site-specific conditions. Operating requirements for the project outline mechanical

equipment operation restrictions within 300 feet of a stream, including prohibiting staging, fueling, maintenance or cleaning of vehicles equipment, or tools within the buffer. Existing crossings would be used, and equipment would not be operated in water. Soil erosion and sedimentation and other effects on water quality as a result of the project would be negligible.

3.11 Land Use and Planning

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

There would be no new development and no change in land use associated with project implementation. The proposed activities would be consistent with the prescribed forest practices from the STP LRMP. The project would support the goals and objectives of numerous strategic programs and plans in the area including: The Forest and Watershed Health Program; BLM's Central California District Fire Management Plan for the Mother Lode Field Office (BLM 2018); STP LRMP; Cal Fire's 2018 Strategic Fire Plan.

3.12 Mineral Resources

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resources or locally important mineral resources recovery site.

3.13 Noise

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Several of the treatment areas occur on or near private properties with residences. Sensitive receptors include the residents on private properties and recreational users near active treatment areas. During the treatment activities, there would be temporary noise increases from the use of mechanical mastication and piling equipment, chainsaws, chippers, pole saws, and hand tools. The noise increases would be for a limited duration within a given area that would vary depending on the project area location and the equipment being used. Activities within 300 feet of residences would be limited to the daytime hours (7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. weekdays) when people are less sensitive to noise. Any contractor will be required to comply with all applicable noise and occupational safety standards as defined in the contract specifications, and to protect workers and other persons from the health effects of increased noise levels from the use of equipment.

3.14 Population and Housing

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project would not include the construction of new homes or businesses and would not directly or indirectly induce substantial unplanned population growth, nor would it displace housing or people.

3.15 Public Services

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project would have a beneficial impact on public services as the project would provide a defensible space for firefighters to use to control wildland fires. This project does not result in adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or altered governmental facilities or an increase in demand on public services.

3.16 Recreation

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project would not increase the population in the project area which would increase recreational demand and it does not include recreational facilities.

3.17 Transportation

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Vehicle trips associated with transportation and crews to the treatment area would be short term and would cease once the project is completed. The proposed project may include temporary lane closures on rural roads, but through access would be maintained for the duration of the activities. For work within County and Caltrans rights-of-way, encroachment permits would be obtained from the permitting agency and traffic control plans would be provided, as appropriate. The proposed project would not conflict with any transportation plan, ordinance or policy. The project would not result in inadequate emergency access or create design hazards, the project would not have a significant impact on transportation.

3.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

☐ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☒ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

As mentioned in Section 3.5, STF is the designated lead agency for Section 106. All formal Native American consultation for the project was conducted directly between the STF and local tribes, including the Chicken Ranch Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians and the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians. No formal consultation pursuant to Assembly Bill 52 is required for projects that are categorically exempt from CEQA.

3.19 Utilities and Service Systems

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project does not include new construction which could affect the environment or place new demand on existing utilities and services.

3.20 Wildfire

☒ This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project would not impair an adopted emergency response plan or require the installation or maintenance of additional associated infrastructure that would exacerbate the risk of wildfire or expose people or structures to significant wildfire risk. The proposed activities would be consistent with the prescribed forest practices from the STP LRMP. The project would support the goals and objectives of numerous strategic programs and plans in the area including: The Forest and Watershed Health Program; BLM's Central California District Fire Management Plan for the Mother Lode Field Office (BLM 2018); STP LRMP; Cal Fire's 2018 Strategic Fire Plan.

3.21 Changes Made to Avoid Environmental Impacts:

Standard operating procedures in accordance with the STP LRMP as well as management requirements and design criteria incorporated into the project description would avoid significant environmental impacts.

4.0 MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

	YES	NO
(a) Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	☐	☒
(b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probably future projects)	☐	☒
(c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	☐	☒

5.0 JUSTIFICATION FOR USE OF A CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION

The proposed project has been found to have no significant effect on the environment. Section 21084 of the Public Resources Code identifies circumstances in which the exemption would not apply. Exceptions to Categorical Exemptions (pursuant to PRC Section 21084 and State CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2) are listed below with justification for the project's associated affects:

A project that is located where it 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.

Based on the analysis contained in this document, it has been determined that the project would not be located in an area where it would have an impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern.

A project that would have a cumulative impact.

The proposed action is implemented in accordance with the management direction contained in the STF LRMP, which has the objective to protect environmental resources. The proposed project would have negligible negative impacts on the environment and would not contribute to a cumulatively considerable impact.

The project consists of a series of linear shaded fuel breaks, which would be implemented in conjunction with similar projects in the region. The proposed project is part of the Forest and Watershed Health Program which will include additional efforts to reduce fuels from forests in Tuolumne County on approximately 5,500 acres. In addition, the USFS and BLM have ongoing efforts to implement fuel breaks and fuels reduction projects in the watershed, including the approximately 220-acre Wagner Ridge Fuel Break Watershed Protection Project in northern Mariposa County (which would be continuous with or nearly continuous with the proposed project; BLM 2019). While ongoing and future activities in the area, including non-federal actions, would be implemented in the region, all projects would be implemented in accordance with State and federal regulations. There is not, at present, a better way to reduce dense understory vegetation that would have been reduced by wildfire in the past, before intense fire suppression was practiced. The proposed action is expected to have a beneficial cumulative impact on wildfire suppression in the area, especially with planned long-term maintenance of the treatment area.

A project that may result in damage to scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway designated as a State scenic highway.

No scenic resources will be affected by the project and there are no State designated scenic highways in the project area.

A project that is located on a site that is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.

The Cortese list includes only one site in Tuolumne County, which is not located in the project area (DTSC 2019). The project will not affect a hazardous materials site.

A project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of historical resources.

The project would avoid any historical resources in the treatment area and will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of the historical resource.

Justification for Use of a Categorical Exemption

The project falls under Categorical Exemption Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15304). This exemption applies to projects that are minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. The proposed project consists of removing small trees and understory vegetation, and dead trees, in support of a fire resilient landscape on private and public lands. The alterations to the vegetation would be minor, and would not involve removal of healthy, mature, or scenic trees.

Portions of the project on federal land are exempt from CEQA pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1) amended by Senate Bill 901. Under this exemption, CEQA does not apply to prescribed fire, thinning, or fuel reduction projects undertaken on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under NEPA if the primary role of a state or local agency is providing funding or staffing for those projects. HCD's primary role in the project is to provide funding for the project, and actions on federal land were reviewed in their entirety pursuant to NEPA through an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

6.0 CONCLUSION

☒ After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the description for the various classes of Categorical Exemptions to CEQA, HCD has determined that the project fits within one or more of the exemption classes and no exceptions exist at the project site which would preclude the use of this exemption. The Department considered the possibility of (a) sensitive location, (b) cumulative impact, (c) significant impact due to unusual circumstances, (d) impacts to scenic highways, (e) activities within a hazardous waste site, and (f) significant adverse change to the significance of a historical resource. A Notice of Exemption will be filed at the State Clearinghouse.

☐ After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the description for the various classes of Categorical Exemptions to CEQA, HCD has determined that the project does not fit within the description for the various exemption classes or has found that exceptions exist at the project site which precludes the use of a Categorical Exemption for this project. Additional environmental review will be conducted and the appropriate CEQA document used may be a Negative Declaration or a Mitigated Negative Declaration.

7.0 REFERENCES

7.1 Literature Cited

Backes, Clarus. 2020. Cultural Resource Management Report 05-16-4532 for the National Disaster Resilience Competition Fuel Break Project. February 12.

California Air Resources Board (CARB). 2018. Multimedia Release: CARB offers guidance on protecting yourself from exposure to smoke from wildfires. Release No. 18-61. Accessed March 15, 2020 at: https://ww2.arb.ca.gov./news/multimedia-release-carb-offers-guidance-protecting-yourself-exposure-smoke-wildfires. Release date: November 15, 2018.

California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). 2019. EnviroStor: Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List. Accessed on December 4, 2019 at: https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/search.asp?cmd=search&reporttype=CORTESE&site_type=CSITES,OPEN,FUDS,CLOSE&status=ACT,BKLG,COM&reporttitle=HAZARDOUS+WASTE+AND+SUBSTANCES+SITE+LIST.

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc. (HELIX). 2020. Biological Technical Report for the NDRC Fuel Break NEPA and CEQA Environmental Review. March.

National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. 2020. Designated Rivers webpage for Tuolumne River. Accessed on January 30, 2020 at: https://www.rivers.gov/rivers/tuolumne.php.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS). 2014. USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, Sensitive Species by Forest. Updated October 10.

U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 2018. The Mother Lode Field Office Fire Management Plan.

2014. Special-status animals list for the Mother Lode field office. September 23

United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2019. Nonattainment Areas for Criteria Pollutants (Green Book). June. Available at: https://www.epa.gov/green-book.

7.2. Personal Communication Cited

Benech, M. 2020. Rim Restoration Coordinator, U.S. Forest Service Stanislaus National Forest. Personal communication vial e-mail in which Ms. Benech provided concurrence to a no effect finding regarding Wild and Scenic Rivers. E-mail to Patrick Talbott, Grants Management NDRC Representative, State of California Department of Housing and Community Development, dated January 30, 2020.

Sandman, B. 2020. Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District Deputy Air Pollution Control Officer. Personal communication via telephone with V. Ortiz, Senior Air Quality Specialist, HELIX, in which Mr. Sandman provided direction regarding level of air quality analysis required for project – no quantitative analysis is needed. Phone conversation January 21.

8.0 PREPARERS

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.

- David Claycomb, AICP, Principal-In-Charge, HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
- Catherine Silvester, Senior Project Manager, HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
- Daniel Van Essen, Environmental Planner, HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

- Vander Kolk, Elliott; NDRC Forest and Watershed Health Program Coordinator
- Williams, Andrea; Reimbursements Program Coordinator

Department of Housing and Community Development

- Patrick Talbott; Grants Management NDRC Representative

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Appendix A

Wild and Scenic Rivers: U.S. Forest Service E-mail Demonstrating Concurrence with Findings

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From:	Catherine Silvester
To:	Talbott, Patrick@HCD
Cc:	Vander Kolk, Elliott@SNC; Raber, Lindsay@SNC
Subject:	FW: Wild and Scenic River
Date:	Thursday, January 30, 2020 3:04:00 PM
Attachments:	image001.png image002.png image003.png image004.png

Hi Patrick,

This concurrence will be cited in the HCD EA and incorporated into the project record.

Thank you,

Catherine Silvester
Senior Environmental Project Manager

HELIX Environmental Planning, Inc.
11 Natoma Street
Suite 155
Folsom, CA 95630
916.365.8700 **tel**
916.365.8715 **direct**
CatherineS@helixepi.com
helixepi.com | LinkedIn | Facebook | Twitter

From: Benech, Maria -FS <maria.benech@usda.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 30, 2020 2:53 PM
To: Talbott, Patrick@HCD <Patrick.Talbott@hcd.ca.gov>
Cc: Vander Kolk, Elliott@SNC <Elliott.VanderKolk@sierranevada.ca.gov>; Raber, Lindsay@SNC <Lindsay.Raber@sierranevada.ca.gov>
Subject: Wild and Scenic River

Patrick, please see language below regarding the fuel breaks and no impact to wild and scenic rivers.

Treatment activities may be visible from a small portion of the Wild and Scenic Tuolumne River, but proposed activities would create very minor disturbance to vegetation and soils and nothing that would be visible beyond the implementation phase. The project also includes best management practices and management requirements that will protect riparian areas that are tributaries to the river, eliminating potential impacts from treatment activities on water quality.

Overall, the project would potentially benefit the Tuolumne River and its Wild and Scenic values by

reducing the risk of a high-severity fire moving into the canyon from communities. High severity fire has the potential to cause severe erosion and adverse effects to water quality and this project is designed to protect the river and it's special values.

Maria Benech
Rim Fire Restoration Coordinator

Forest Service
Stanislaus National Forest

p: 209-288-6285
c: 209-283-4079
maria.benech@usda.gov

19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370
www.fs.fed.us

Caring for the land and serving people

Appendix B

Biological Resources Technical Report

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Appendix C

Cultural Resources:
U.S. Forest Service Letter of Findings

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United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Stanislaus National Forest | 19777 Greenley Road Sonora, CA 95370

File Code: 2360 **Date:** February 12, 2020

Route To: Planning and Implementation Officers

Subject: National Disaster Resilience Competition Fuel Break Project, Cultural Resource Management Report 05-16-4532

To: Sarah LaPlante and Jim Junette, District Rangers

Based on the following actions, a NO EFFECT RECOMMENDATION is made for the above undertaking in accordance with the provisions set forth in the "Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), California State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Processes for Compliance With Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Management of Historic Properties by the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region" (Regional PA), signed February 2013, as amended 2018.

[x] A review of the Forest's heritage resource files revealed that ALL [ ] or PART [x] of the Area of Potential Effect (APE) of the undertaking has been previously inventoried to current professional standards through the following reports. No further inventory of these areas is required:

Report or CCIC Number	Report Name	Author	Year
051600268	Burnout FSS	C. Buttery, S. Baker	1991
051600280	Garrotte ISS	J. Moriarty	1988
051600285	Kassabaum Property Fence	C. Buttery	1989
051600295	Stanislaus Heli FSS	K. Benedict	1989
051600300	Paper FSS	C. Whitesell	1988
051600311	Sugar 'A' ISS	J. Moriarty	1989
051600312	Ferretti ISS	J. Moriarty	1989
051600333	Hetchy ISS	C. Whitesell	1989
051600348	Mcgee ISS	C. Dreyer	1990
051600350	Wagner ISS	S. Howe	1989
051600432	Spike ISTS	S. Marsh	1992
051600463	Bower Cave Land Exchange	PAR	1990
051600466	Mi-Wok Site Prep/Round Cr	B. Balen	1990
051600486	South Fork ISS	J. Senser	1992
051600545	Groveland Road Oblit	J. Ruhan	1993
051600559	Hamm-Hasloe Timber Sale	S. Marsh	1994
051600568	Shaft Insect Salvage Timber Sale	H. Asquith	1993
051600586	NR Eval Of Bower Cave Land Exchange	PAR	1991
051600655	Mi-Wok Village Firebreak	S. Baker	1992
051601020	Skidmore Deeptill	T. Keefe	1993
051601023	Tuolumne Prec Trail Exten	A. Leigh	1993
051601062	American Camp Fuelbreak Project	J. Sandorf	1994
051601129	Refried F.S.T.S.	D. Phinney	1997
051601186	Excel Hazard Tree Removal	E. Potter	1999
051601198	Son of Scramble	E. Potter	2000

051601220	Mt. Provo Fuel Reduction	S. VanBuskirk	2001
051601222	Mi-Wok, Hacienda Fair Oaks	S. VanBuskirk	2001
051601252	South 108 Fuel Reduction, Forest Health, & Road Mgmt	E. Potter	2005
051601316	Ponderosa Way Pit Project	C. Ashe	2013
051601328	Westside Trail Reroute	K. Strain	2012
051601371	Tud Eureka Ditch Rac Project	K. Strain	2017
051601406	Pg&E Emergency Sup For Htr Forestwide	Blue Rock	2019
051603377	Highway 108 Caltrans Hazard Tree Removal Project	B. Norton	2016
051604015	Spike II Addon ISTS	S. Marsh	1993
051604038	PG&E HTR	G. Maniery, PAR	1994
051604062	Rust Resistant Sugar Pine	S. Marsh	1995
051604165	Rim Truck Fuelbreak	S. Marsh	2001
051604237	2004 Creek Fire Suppression	S. Marsh	2004
051604240	Indian Creek (Private) Fuelbreak	J. Ruhan	2004
051604255	Fy05 Groveland Hazard Tree Removal	J. Ruhan	2005
051604257	Three Fires Timber And Hazard Tree	J. Ruhan	2005
051604263	Hells Hollow Roadside Fuelbreak	J. Ruhan	2006
051604274	Long Shanahan Fuels Reduction And Forest Health Project	P. Riefkohl	2007
051604382	Knobcone Ecological Restoration Project	K. Strain	2013
051604386	Hetch Hetchy Reliable Power Project	William Self and Associates	2014
051604393	Rim Fire Suppression	P. Wisniewski	2014
051604420	Rim Fire Section 110 Project	A. Hoskins	2015
051604446	Big Creek Fire Salvage	P. Wisniewski	2016
051604455	Rim Recovery-Reforestation Add-On	Not provided	2016
051604457	Wagner Ridge East Hazard Tree Removal Sale	K. Strain	2016
051604459	Second Garrotte Hazard Tree Sale	P. Wisniewski	2016
051604462	Golden Gate Highway 120 Hazard Tree Removal Project	Far Western	2016
051604468	Hetch Hetchy Hazard Tree Removal West	S. Zaragoza	2016
05160772G	Clavey River Project - 230 Kv	L. Napton	1992
05164448B	Pg&E Curtis 1704a Line Htr Add-On	K. Strain	2016
05164463B	Red Tsunami Hazard Tree Project 2	K. Strain	2016
TO-00433	Cultural Resource Inventory Report, U.S.D.I. - Bureau of Land Management Bakersfield District, Folsom Resource Area: Report No. CA-018-S-TM-86/09, Wagner Ridge Timber Sale	D. Decker	1986
TO-01134	Cultural Resource Recordation (CA-TUO-002466/H), Brack Property, Tuolumne County, California	E. Greathouse, L. Napton	1990
TO-01297	Cultural Resource Assessment of the Tuolumne County Ditch Improvement Project, California	Peak & Associates, Inc.	1987
TO-01310	Archaeological Survey and Extended Archaeological Survey Report for the Proposed East Sonora Bypass On Highway 108 Near Sonora, California 10-TUO-108 P.M. 1.7/6.7 10200-340400	M. Rondeau	1988
TO-01921	A Cultural Resources Survey and Assessment of the Long Gulch Ranch Project, Tuolumne County, California	J. Foster, M. Thornton	1993
TO-02081	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment; A Supplemental Report for a Timber Harvesting Plan; Wagner Ridge THP	R. Krohn	1993

TO-02308	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment, a Supplemental Report of a Timber Harvesting Plan; Project Levin THP	M. Vroman	1993
TO-02356	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment, A Supplemental Report for a Timber Harvesting Plan: Project Klein/Davis Sale	T. Tate	1993
TO-02483	Cultural Resource Survey of the Proposed Tuolumne Park and Recreation District Trail Extension Project, Cultural Resource Management Report 05-16-1023 in Tuolumne County, California	A. Leigh	1994
TO-02681	Sugar Pine Railroad: Archaeological and Global Positioning Survey, Ralph Station to Lyons Dam	S. Davis-King, R. Ozbirn	1995
TO-02719	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment; A Supplemental Report for a Timber Harvesting Plan, Graham THP	M. Vroman	1995
TO-02720	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment; A Supplemental Report for A Timber Harvesting Plan: Brockett THP. 4-95-174/TUO-21	W. Dorrell	1995
TO-02771	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment A Supplemental Report for a Timber Harvesting Plan, Alderman THP, 4-94-211/TUO-34	S. Cannon	1994
TO-02977	Archaeological and Historical Resources Survey and Impact Assessment; A Supplemental Report for a Timber Harvesting Plan; Project Name: Willis THP	W. Dorrell	1996
TO-03031	Confidential Archaeological Addendum for Timber Operations on Non-Federal Lands in California. Project: Hills Hollow Timber Harvesting Plan	Cannon, S.	1997
TO-03284	Confidential Archaeological Addendum for Timber Operations on Non-Federal Lands in California: M&B Ranch/Seastrom THP. 4-98-21/TUO-4	R. Krohn	1997
TO-04070	Department of Transportation Negative Archaeological Survey Report, 10-Tuolumne-10-10-108, P.M. 10-16.90+/-	C. Francis	2000
TO-04627	Letter Report for Archaeological Survey, Bank Emergency Notice Timber Harvest Plan (4-02EM-016/TUO-4)	W. Dorrell	2002
TO-04627	Letter Report for Archaeological Survey, Bank Emergency Notice Timber Harvest Plan (4-02EM-016/TUO-4)	W. Dorrell	2002
TO-04693	Confidential Archaeological Addendum for Timber Operations on Non-Federal Lands in California: Bottini THP, 4-02-25/TUO-2	D. Baker	2001
TO-04720	Confidential Archaeological Addendum for Timber Operations on Non-Federal Lands in California: South Pearl THP #4-02-34/TUO-3	M. Vroman	2002
TO-04731	Cultural Resource Inventory Report: Creek Fire Salvage Timber Sale (Report #CA-018-S-TM-02/04)	D. Decker	2002
TO-04759	CDF Project Review Report for Archaeological and Historical Resources: Mi-Wuk Fuel Break, Rx4-038-TCU	T. Francis	2002
TO-05438	Confidential Archaeological Addendum for Timber Operations on Non-Federal Lands in California: Mi Wuk THP, 4-97-31/TUO-8	M. Vroman	1997

TO-05498	Cultural Resources Inventory of Caltrans District 10 Rural Conventional Highways; Volume l: Summary of Methods and Findings	L. Leach-Palm et al.	2004
TO-05565	Confidential Archaeological Letter for the Dennison/Williams Emergency Fuel Hazard Reduction; 4-04EM-029-TUO	W. Dorrell	2004
TO-05568	An Archaeological Survey Report for the Shiloh NTMP, Tuolumne County, California; N-4-04-4	B. Pollard	2004
TO-05711	Cultural Resource Survey and Evaluation for the Baker Youth Camp, Near Groveland, Tuolumne County, California (APN 66-220-13)	J. Costello, L. Leach-Palm, T. Brejla	2005
TO-05725	Confidential Archaeological Letter for Emergency Notice Dated 02/15/05 - Tuolumne Fire Salvage Operations - Section 16, T1S, R18E: MDM--(D'Eyraud Ranch Emergency)	M. Albrecht	2005
TO-06816	Cultural Resource Inventory Report U. S. Department of Land Management Folsom Field Office Project Name: Arrastraville Fuel Break, Case # CA-018-S-TM-08/11	J. Barnes	2008
TO-06957	An Archaeological Survey Report for the M & B Ranch NTMP Tuolumne/ Mariposa County, California	D. Baker	2008
TO-07198	Archaeological Investigations of the Wagner Ridge Fuel Treatment Project, Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties, California	L. Napton	2010
TO-07343	United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management Mother Lode Field Office Section 106 Compliance for the Wagner Ridge Fuel Break Maintenance Tuolumne and Mariposa Counties (BLM case # CA-018-STM-10/06)	J. Barnes	2010
TO-07521	Tuolumne Utilities District Ditch Sustainability Project Historic Resource Evaluation Report	Foothill Resources, Ltd.	2012
TO-07737	Field Office Report of Cultural Resources Ground Survey Findings, EQIP Program, Project #749104112z0, Forest Stand Improvement	E. Truman	2011
TO-08041	Final Archaeological Survey Report Mountain Tunnel Geotechnical Project, Tuolumne County, California	A. Estes, T. Young, N. Fino	2013
TO-08271	Archaeological Survey Report for the Robert McDow, Tuolumne County, California Farm No. 118 Tract No. 399	A. DeGeorgey	2015
TO-08943	Final Archaeological Resources Survey Report for the Valley Area ROW and Culvert Locations of the Reliable Power Project, Tuolumne and Stanislaus Counties, California; Technical Report 18-566	A. Estes, N. Fino	2018
TO-08955	State Water Resources Control Board Supplemental Historic Properties Identification Report, Groveland Community Services District Downtown Groveland and Big Oak Flat Sewer Collection System Improvement Project, Tuolumne County, California	W. Pierce, K. Marti	2019

[x] A review of the Forest's heritage resource files revealed that ALL [ ] or PART [x] of the APE of the undertaking had not been previously inventoried to current professional standards.

The APE was subsequently inventoried, and documented in the following report: National Disaster Resilience Competition Fuel Break Project, Cultural Resource Management Report 05-16-4532

[x] Heritage resources of interest are located within the APE and are to be protected using the following protection methods:

Standard Protection Measures
Flag and Avoid: E.1: Property location conveyed to contractors and employees responsible for implementation; flag for avoidance/protection. E.1.3: All cultural properties within APEs shall be clearly delineated prior to implementing any associated activities that have the potential to affect cultural properties. (1) cultural property boundaries shall be delineated with coded flagging and/or other effective marking. E.1.5: Monitoring by heritage program specialist required when work is required within cultural sites. E.2.2(b)(1)(H): Vegetation to be burned shall not be piled within the site boundary unless locations have been specifically approved by qualified Heritage Program staff. Trees may be directionally felled away from flagged cultural properties.

ADDITIONAL PROTECTION MEASURES

1. In accordance with Appendix H.3.1(b) of the Region 5 PA, inventory efforts in areas of the project site of impenetrable brush or obscured visibility were deferred until after project implementation. As required by and in accordance with the Region 5 PA, after implementation and within one year of completion of the project activities, the STF will survey areas, determined to be warranted based on the area's historic property sensitivity, that have been cleared of the brush or that have improved visibility. The timing of the surveys will be based on the progress of the implementation in contingent locations so that new surveys can be grouped together as much as possible. The Field Operator will inform the STF HPM/DHPM of various stages of the project so that subsequent field work can proceed in a timely fashion.

2. Prior to project implementation in areas that were not included in the 2019 cultural resource surveys for the project (e.g., private properties that did not grant permission for cultural resource surveys in 2019), protocol-level cultural resource surveys will be conducted by a qualified archaeologist. Standard protection measures will apply for any resources that are located. The following private parcels are located within the APE but were not surveyed:

3. Should any previously unrecorded cultural resources be encountered during project implementation, all work will immediately cease in that area and the STF HPM/DHPM will be notified immediately. Work may resume after approval by the STF HPM/DHPM providing any standard protection measures are implemented. Should any cultural resources become damaged in unanticipated ways by project activities, the steps described in the Region 5 PA for inadvertent discoveries will be followed.

Remarks:

In agreement with the California State Historic Preservation Office, this project used the U.S.F.S. Region 5 Regional PA to comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on all project lands (private, Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service). The project is certified as having met all the stipulations of the Regional PA and therefore has complied with Section 106. Other agencies, for purposes of NEPA or CEQA, may reference this letter for compliance with Section 106.

Prior to implementation, the project manager is required to contact a qualified archaeologist to ensure sites are flagged and if any assessments are needed due to a change in condition. This is required each time the project is implemented regardless of information received in prior years.

KATHY STRAIN
Forest Heritage Resource Program Manager

Notice of Exemption

Form D

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

County Clerk
County of _____

_____

_____

From: (Public Agency) Department of Housing and Community Development
2020 West El Camino Avenue, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95833
(Address)

Project Title: NDRC Fuel Breaks Project

Project Location - Specific:

See Section 1.1 in Attachment A, and Figure 1, Vicinity Map, in Attachment B

Project Location – City: _____ Project Location – County: Tuolumne

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

See Sections 1.2 through 1.4 in Attachment A

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Department of Housing and Community Development

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: The USFS Stanislaus National Forest (STF)

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, Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1)

Reasons why project is exempt:

Class 4 consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Furthermore per Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1), CEQA does not apply to prescribed fire, thinning, or fuel reduction projects undertaken on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the federal NEPA if the primary role of a state or local agency is providing funding or staffing for those projects (see Section 1.5 in Attachment A).

Lead Agency Contact Person: Patrick Talbott Area Code/Telephone/Extension: 916-263-2297

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: 6/10/2020 Title: Federal Programs Branch Chief

☒ Signed by Lead Agency

☐ Signed by Applicant

Date received for filing at OPR: _____

Revised 2005