

897
Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project
Tuolumne County
Upper Stanislaus Watershed



897
Project Area

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THE LYONS-SOUTH FORK WATERSHED FOREST RESILIENCY PROJECT

TUOLUMNE MAIN CANAL

— CANAL (EARTHEN DITCH)

— FLUME (ELEVATED WOODEN FLUME)

ACTIVITY

▭ PROJECT BOUNDARY

▨ FOREST SERVICE SNC GRANT APPLICATION AREA

▨ STEVEN'S FUND AND/OR TIMBER HARVEST

▨ TIMBER HARVEST

▨ SMALL PRIVATE

▨ PG&E FOREST HEALTH TREATMENTS

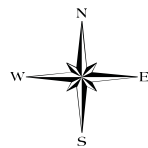
OWNERSHIP

■ SIERRA PACIFIC INDUSTRIES

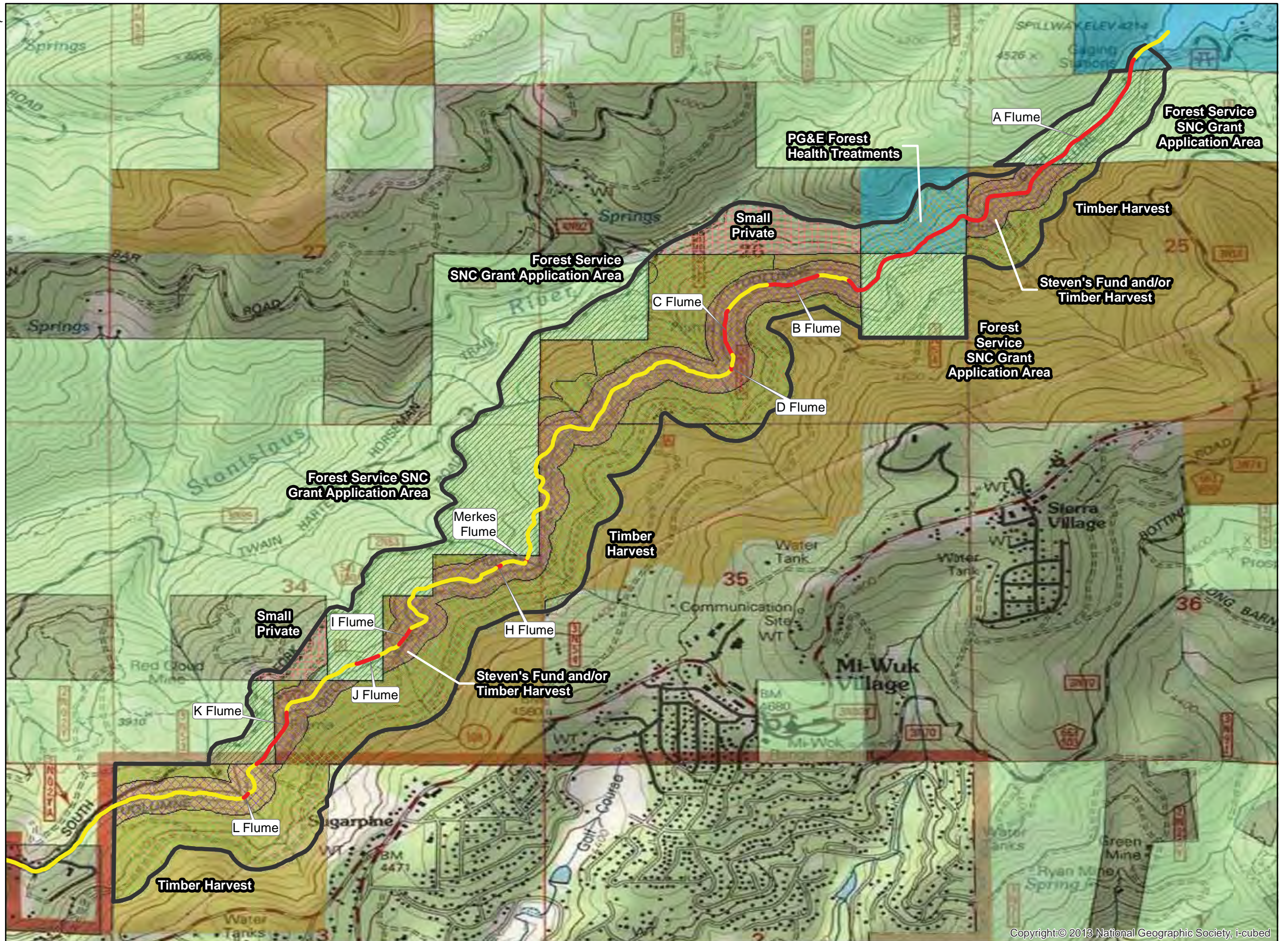
■ PG&E

■ NATIONAL FOREST LANDS

■ OTHER LANDS



0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Mile



STATE OF CALIFORNIA SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY

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

SNC ID Number: 897

Applicant: Tuolumne Utilities District

Project Title: Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest
Resiliency Project

SNC Subregion: South Central

County: Tuolumne

Funding Amount Requested: \$496,000.00

Funding Amount Recommended: \$496,000.00

Total Project Cost: \$1,121,350.00

Final Score: 92

PROJECT SCOPE / DESCRIPTION

The Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project (LSFWFRP) is a Category 1 forest thinning and fuel reduction project that encompasses 733 acres of forestland across multiple landowners within the South Fork of the Stanislaus River watershed. Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) will use grant funds from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) to administer thinning and fuel reduction treatments on 200 acres of the project area within the Stanislaus National Forest in Tuolumne County. This project is designed to enhance forest health and resiliency within the South Fork of the Stanislaus River as well as protect local mountain communities and critical water infrastructure.

The forestlands within the project site are overstocked and have been designated as a high priority for fuels reduction by the local Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The overall goal is to reduce ladder fuels and reduce canopy cover to approximately 50 percent, as well as remove dead/dying trees. These treatments will reduce fire hazards and allow for this forest to better withstand ongoing drought and bark beetle attacks, and protect critical ditch and flume infrastructure that serves the region.

The majority of the neighboring lands within the project boundary belong to Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). Both are dedicated to reducing fuel loading, improving forest health, and protecting nearby infrastructure to create one cohesive forest treatment within the South Fork of the Stanislaus River Watershed. PG&E is currently performing similar treatments to reduce fuel loading and increase forest health on their parcels within the project boundary under their Vegetation

Management Plan. SPI will be completing work on their properties with a combination of timber harvest plans, emergency exemption, and funds from a USFS Stevens Grant. All of these treatments fit into the larger mosaic of forest treatments already conducted by the USFS and SPI that aid in protecting the larger watershed.

Tuolumne Utilities District’s mission is to provide their community with reliable, high-quality water, wastewater, and other utility services. They are a member of the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association and have successfully managed the SNC-funded Tuolumne Ditch System Sustainability Project in the past.

Many partners were involved in the planning of the LSFWFRP, including SPI, PG&E, and the Highway 108 FireSafe Council. All of these organizations have contributed resources, both monetarily and in-kind, to ensure the success of the project. Both SPI and PG&E have already begun treatments on their lands, and the FireSafe Council is pursuing additional funding options to create a cohesive and resilient forest stand structure across all 733 acres within the project.

This project aligns with the goals of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program by focusing on applying forest restoration practices strategically to help protect the larger watershed, nearby communities, and critical water infrastructure. The Tuolumne Main Canal system provides drinking water to 90 percent of the residents within Tuolumne County and also provides water to the nearby CAL FIRE air attack base which provides fire protection to the region. This project protects the Stanislaus River watershed which drains into New Melones Reservoir, providing drinking and irrigation water to many foothill and Central Valley communities and farms. This project aligns with the goals of Proposition 1 by aiding in the prevention of natural disasters that would negatively affect California Water Resources.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

PROJECT TASKS / DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Six-month Progress Report	June, Dec. 2017 June, Dec. 2018 June, Dec. 2019
Hand Thinning of	June – Dec. 2017 June – Dec. 2018 June – Dec. 2019
Mechanical/Mastication	Oct. 2017 – Apr. 2018 Oct. 2018 – Apr. 2019 Oct. – Nov. 2019
Public Outreach/ Tours	March 2017 March – June 2018 March 2019
Estimated Project Completion Date	Jan 1, 2020

PROJECT COSTS

BUDGET CATEGORIES	SNC FUNDING
Project Costs:	
Hand Thinning	\$255,000.00
Mechanical Thinning/Mastication	\$172,500.00
Project Management	\$26,000.00
Reporting/Invoicing/Monitoring	\$15,000.00
Administrative:	
Administrative Costs	\$27,500.00
TOTAL:	\$496,000.00

PROJECT LETTERS OF SUPPORT / OPPOSITION

SUPPORT:

- Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions
- Tuolumne County Economic Development Authority
- Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, Fifth Assembly District
- Tuolumne County Farm Bureau
- Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center
- Twain Harte Community Services District
- Senator Tom Berryhill, Eighth Senate District
- Sonora Chamber of Commerce
- City of Sonora
- Stanislaus National Forest
- Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce
- Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors
- Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau
- Mi-Wuk Sugar Pine Fire Protection District
- Tuolumne-Stanislaus Integrated Regional Water Management Authority
- Twain Harte Homeowners
- Pacific Gas and Electric Company
- CAL FIRE

OPPOSITION:

- None

PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

There are four Performance Measures common to all grants. In addition, grantees are required to identify one to three project-specific Performance Measures in their application. Please note, Performance Measures listed here represent those proposed by applicants and may be modified before the grant agreement is executed.

- Acres of Land Improved or Restored
- Number of Significant Sites Protected

Notice of Exemption

Form D

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

From: (Public Agency) Sierra Nevada Conservancy
11521 Blocker Drive, Suite 205
Auburn, CA 95603

(Address)

County Clerk
County of Tuolumne
2 South Green Street
Sonora, CA 95370-4618

Project Title: Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project

Project Location - Specific:

The project is located in Tuolumne County; centered at approximately 38.074729, -120.193986

Project Location – City: Mi-Wuk Village Project Location – County: Tuolumne

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy would provide approximately \$496,000 funding to the Tuolumne Utility District to remove dead and dying conifers and ladder fuels in order to reduce wildfire risk on 202 acres of U.S. Forest Service lands in the Stanislaus National Forest, and protect water quality and the water supply for 90 percent of Tuolumne County residents. (see attached)

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Tuolumne Utility District

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

Reasons why project is exempt:

The project would result in minor alterations to the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation associated with forest management and restoration activities on 202 acres, including removal of dying and dead trees and ladder fuels through a combination of hand thinning, mechanical thinning, mastication of slash, and pile-and-burn that would improve forest health and fire resistance and protect water quality. The project includes USFS management requirements and protection measures that would avoid significant impacts on the environment.

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

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Title: _____

- Signed by Lead Agency Date received for filing at OPR: _____
- Signed by Applicant

Revised 2005

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION
CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15304

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 84 Grant Application Number 897
Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project

Description of Activities

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy would provide \$496,000 in funding to the Tuolumne Utility District for site improvement/restoration activities on 202 acres of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land. The proposed project would remove surface and ladder fuels and reduce upper crown cover to approximately 50 percent. Forest stand densities would be reduced, where necessary, to increase the resiliency of residual trees to disturbance and promote healthy forests during drought conditions by reducing competition for water, nutrients, and light. USFS management requirements and protection measures would be followed to protect the remaining forest, riparian areas, nearby communities, and critical infrastructure. Treatments would include a combination of mastication and hand thinning/brushing. All slopes greater than 35 percent would be treated by hand to remove trees less than 12 inches diameter at breast height (dbh). Slash would either be piled-and-burned or lopped and scattered. Mechanical thinning, chipping/mastication, or pile-and-burn would take place on slopes less than 35 percent. Timber harvesting may be done to reach desired canopy cover and/or combat ongoing bark beetle infestation.

The South Fork Stanislaus River passes through the project site and flows into the New Melones Reservoir, then into the San Joaquin Valley, and ultimately the Sacramento Delta. Restoration in this watershed would contribute to greater water security and protection of water quality for downstream users. The project encompasses a local historic feature, the Tuolumne Main Canal (TMC), which remains the primary drinking water conveyance system to 90 percent of Tuolumne County residents. By increasing forest health and providing critical watershed protection, the project would help to protect the TMC and secure its survival and the local water supply should a wildfire occur in this area.

The project also ties into similar projects to remove dead and dying conifers and ladder fuels on adjacent lands within a 733-acre area owned by Sierra Pacific Industries, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, and USFS. The project would also enhance carbon storage and rate of sequestration as this area would be less prone to catastrophic wildfire and improve function of forestland.

Reasons Why the Project is Exempt

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

CEQA Guidelines Section 15304: Minor Alterations to Land

The Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4, which consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes. The minor land alterations proposed by the project involve the removal of dead and dying trees and ladder fuels using hand and mechanical thinning, mastication of slash, and pile-and-burn. This forestry work would not result in significant adverse impacts.

No Exceptions to a Categorical Exemption

Categorical exemptions represent activities that generally do not result in significant environmental impacts. However, there are six exceptions to categorical exemptions, defined in the CEQA Guidelines

Section 15300.2. Generally, a categorical exemption does not apply if a project would occur in certain specified sensitive environments, would affect scenic resources within an official state scenic highway, or would be located on a designated hazardous waste site. In addition, a categorical exemption would not apply if the project causes substantial adverse changes in the significance of a historical resource or would be considered significant within the cumulative context. Table 1 identifies the exceptions from CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 and includes a brief rationale as to why each exception does not apply to the Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project.

Table 1	
Categorical Exemption Exceptions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2)	
Exception	Applicability
<p>(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may impact an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.</p>	<p>The goals of this 202-acre forestry project are to restore health to the forested area between Lyons Reservoir and the communities of Twain Harte and Mi-Wuk Village, preventing catastrophic wildfires, protecting drinking water supplies, and improving downstream aquatic resources.</p> <p>The project work consists of minor land alterations involving the removal of dead and dying trees and ladder fuels. The project would not occur on areas known to contain hazardous substances. The project activities could occur in locations that contain cultural or biological resources; however, the project activities would implement standard management requirements and protection methods such that there would not be an adverse effect on cultural and biological resources, as indicated in the Decision Memo and categorical exclusion adopted by the USFS for this project.</p>
<p>(b) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.</p>	<p>The forest management activities would not adversely affect environmental resources, and would therefore not contribute to any cumulative environmental impact in relation to other restoration projects in the region. In fact, the project would result in beneficial effects to the project area forest, creeks, watersheds, associated lands, and adjacent forested areas by providing wildfire risk reduction, and natural resource management and protection. Consequently, the proposed project, in combination with other nearby forest management treatments, would not result in significant cumulative impacts.</p>
<p>(c) Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.</p>	<p>The site improvement/restoration project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Specific environmental topics are addressed below:</p> <p>Aesthetics. See Recreation and Scenic</p>

	<p>Resources.</p> <p>Agriculture/Forestry. The project area does not contain any agricultural or grazing resources. The project operations would be short-term, temporary and would not affect the land’s ability to support grazing. The project would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on 202 acres by removing dead and dying trees and ladder fuels, thereby helping to protect these forest resources from catastrophic wildfire. The project would have no permanent impact on agricultural resources, including grazing activities.</p> <p>Air Quality/GHGs. The project activities would result in nominal fugitive dust, particulate, and mobile source emissions. Mobile source emissions would be limited to those associated with vehicle trips to/from the project area. All burning would be conducted in compliance with a permit issued by the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District. Nearby sensitive receptors would not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations. The project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the region’s applicable air quality plan and would not violate any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation.</p> <p>Biological Resources. The project would not have a significant effect on special-status species.</p> <p>In a Decision Memo for the project, the USFS concluded that there are no Federally listed threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing, or proposed critical habitat that would be adversely affected by this project. The project would not result in detrimental effects to USFS sensitive plant or animal (terrestrial or aquatic) species. No special status species were observed in the project area during field reconnaissance. Project activities would implement management requirements to avoid and minimize effects on sensitive plant or animal species in the project area. The project would also not cause adverse effects to management indicator species habitats. The USFS determined that the project qualified for a categorical exclusion from the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).</p>
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The project area was also evaluated for sensitive biological resources through a subsequent review of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database. No additional special-status species were identified beyond those included in the Decision Memo.

The project activities could slightly increase the risk of noxious weed introduction by creating conditions that favor noxious weed establishment; however, implementation of USFS management requirements would result in a low risk of introduction and spread.

Cultural Resources. See (f).

Geology/Soils. The forestry activities would not expose people or structures to loss, injury, or death due to seismic activity or unstable soils. Heavy equipment would be confined to operating on slopes that do not exceed 35 percent. The project would also implement standards to minimize erosion and other soil impacts as required by the USFS. The work planned as part of the project would not occur in wetlands or stream courses. Operations within Class I and II Watercourse and Lake Protection Zones (WLPZ) and Class III Equipment Limitation Zones (ELZ) would conform to the Stanislaus National Forest Best Management Practices (BMPs). Moreover, removal of dead and dying trees and ladder fuels would reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire that would otherwise threaten water quality and aquatic habitat.

Hazards/Hazardous Materials. See (e).

Hydrology/Water Quality. See Geology/Soils.

Noise. Forestry activities would generate temporary noise. However, given that project activities would be limited to daytime (the least sensitive hours of the day), and the limited extent to which these activities could expose sensitive receptors to increased noise levels, the project would not cause significant noise effects.

Recreation and Scenic Resources. No specific recreational developments or improvements are proposed as part of the forest management activities. An unsurfaced railroad grade runs

	<p>through the project area and is used by the public for hiking. Operations signs would be placed along the grade to alert the public during project activities. The project would have some temporary negative effects on visual quality during implementation of project activities. The project would have long-term benefits to recreational and scenic resources by creating open park-like conditions and as a result of fuels reduction and therefore a reduced risk of catastrophic wildfire.</p> <p>Transportation. There would be limited additional trips on local roadways during project implementation. No vehicular transportation over sensitive habitat would occur. The vehicles would not block traffic and no traffic delays would occur due to project activities.</p> <p>Other CEQA Issues. The project would have no effect on land use, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, or utilities and service systems.</p>
<p>(d) Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.</p>	<p>State Route 108, approximately 0.5 miles from the project area, is eligible for designation as a state scenic highway. However, project activities would be screened from views on SR 108, and would not damage scenic resources visible from this highway. The project area is not visible from a designated scenic highway, and would not result in the removal of, or damage to, any trees, rock outcroppings, historic buildings or other resources within the viewshed of a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.</p>
<p>(e) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.</p>	<p>The project is not located on a site which is included on a hazardous waste site contained on a list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.</p>
<p>(f) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.</p>	<p>No prehistoric or historic resources would be affected by the project.</p> <p>To support the development of the project, the USFS prepared a Cultural Resource Management Report (CRMR). Cultural resources of interest are located within the project area would be protected using a variety of protection measures identified in the CRMR and in the management requirements included in the Decision Memo prepared by the USFS. Compliance with these management requirements and protection methods, including</p>

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