

STATE OF CALIFORNIA SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Watershed Improvement Grant Program

SNC ID Number: 1070

Applicant: Sierra County Land Trust

Project Title: Sierra Butte//Lakes Basin Properties Fuel Reduction

Project Category: One

SNC Subregion: North Central

County(ies): Sierra

Funding Amount Requested: \$167,200

Funding Amount Recommended: \$167,200

Total Project Cost: \$186,194

Final Score: 80.75

PROJECT SCOPE / DESCRIPTION

The Sierra County Land Trust's (SCLT) Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Properties Fuel Reduction project in Sierra County is located at 7,000 ft elevation on a ridge overlooking the Sierra Buttes and the Lakes Basin Recreation Area. The project area sits above the unincorporated town of Sierra City and is surrounded largely by U.S. Forest Service lands. This Category 1 project implements a 69-acre fuel break in the Ladies Canyon, Pauley Creek, and Packer Creek watersheds, all of which contribute water to the North Fork of the Yuba River.

A long-term Forest Management Plan, recently completed by the SCLT and funded by the SNC, addresses SCLT properties in the Sierra Buttes Lakes Basin area (1,525 acres). Conditions in the project area consist of overgrown and undesired tree species and chaparral. Forest professionals have concluded that working near roadsides is the best initial approach to reduce the chance of roadside wildfire starts that could then move into high-value water and forest resources. This project will implement a 10,000 ft long, 300ft wide roadside thinning effort using hand-cutting and mastication procedures in strategic locations designed to slow or stop fire in the Packer Saddle area. This location is heavily used by recreationists and mountain bikers.

Forest management projects on SCLT lands have a watershed relationship with the North Yuba Forest Health and Resiliency Project, coordinated by the U.S. Forest Service, SNC, and Sierra County. Neighboring Tahoe and Plumas National Forests have recently completed comprehensive NEPA planning documents to address large areas of their adjacent watershed holdings in the Lakes Basin area and are currently receiving

funding to implement landscape scale restoration projects during the next few years. The SNC has funded several conservation easements and acquisitions through the SCLT in the Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin area.

The Sierra County Land Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of the Sierra Buttes and Lakes Basin Recreation area watershed landscapes. The SCLT has been granted over 1 million SNC dollars for 5 previous projects in the Sierra Buttes area.

This project supports the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Watershed Improvement Program by reducing the risk of high intensity fire surrounding the headwaters of the north fork of the Yuba River-Packer Saddle and Lakes Basin area as well as surrounding public and private forest lands and nearby small communities. Benefits include protected and enhanced watershed health and developed water resources for downstream users, increased carbon storage capacity due to support for old growth trees across the landscape, protection against soil loss and sedimentation entering into a water delivery system, preservation and enhancement of sensitive riparian habitats, and increased overall forest resiliency. The project satisfies state goals for improving watershed conditions intended to cumulatively reduce the impacts of climate change.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

PROJECT TASKS / DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Complete fuels reduction work	Spring 2019 – January 2021
Outreach to Stakeholders	Spring 2019 – January 2022
SNC Progress Reports	Every 6 months
SNC Final Report	January 1, 2022
Estimated Project Completion Date	January 1, 2022

PROJECT COSTS

BUDGET CATEGORIES	SNC FUNDING
Project Costs:	
Project Management	\$4,100
Implementation: Fuel Reduction over 69 acres	\$160,500
Reporting, Performance Measures	\$2,600
Administrative:	
Administrative Costs	\$0
TOTAL:	\$167,200

PROJECT LETTERS OF SUPPORT / OPPOSITION

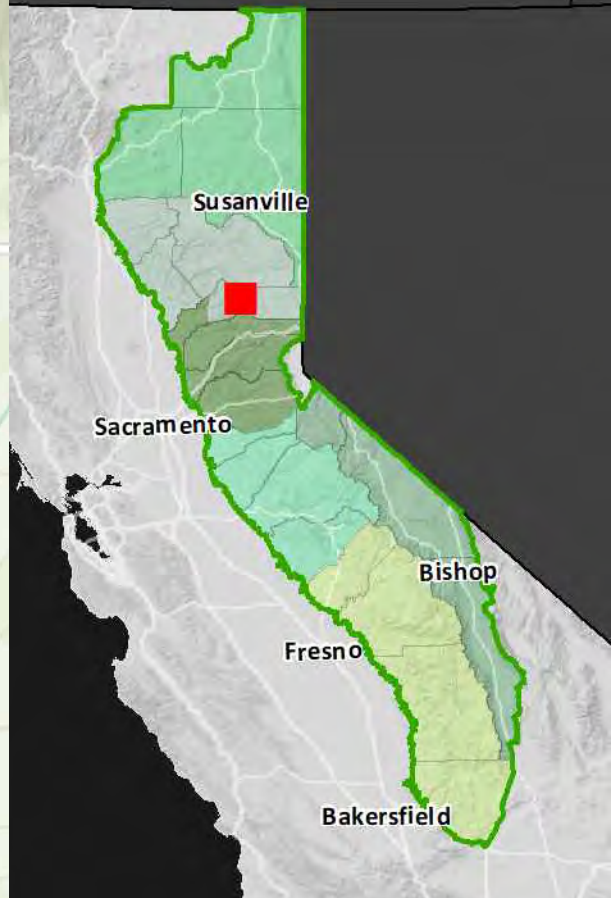
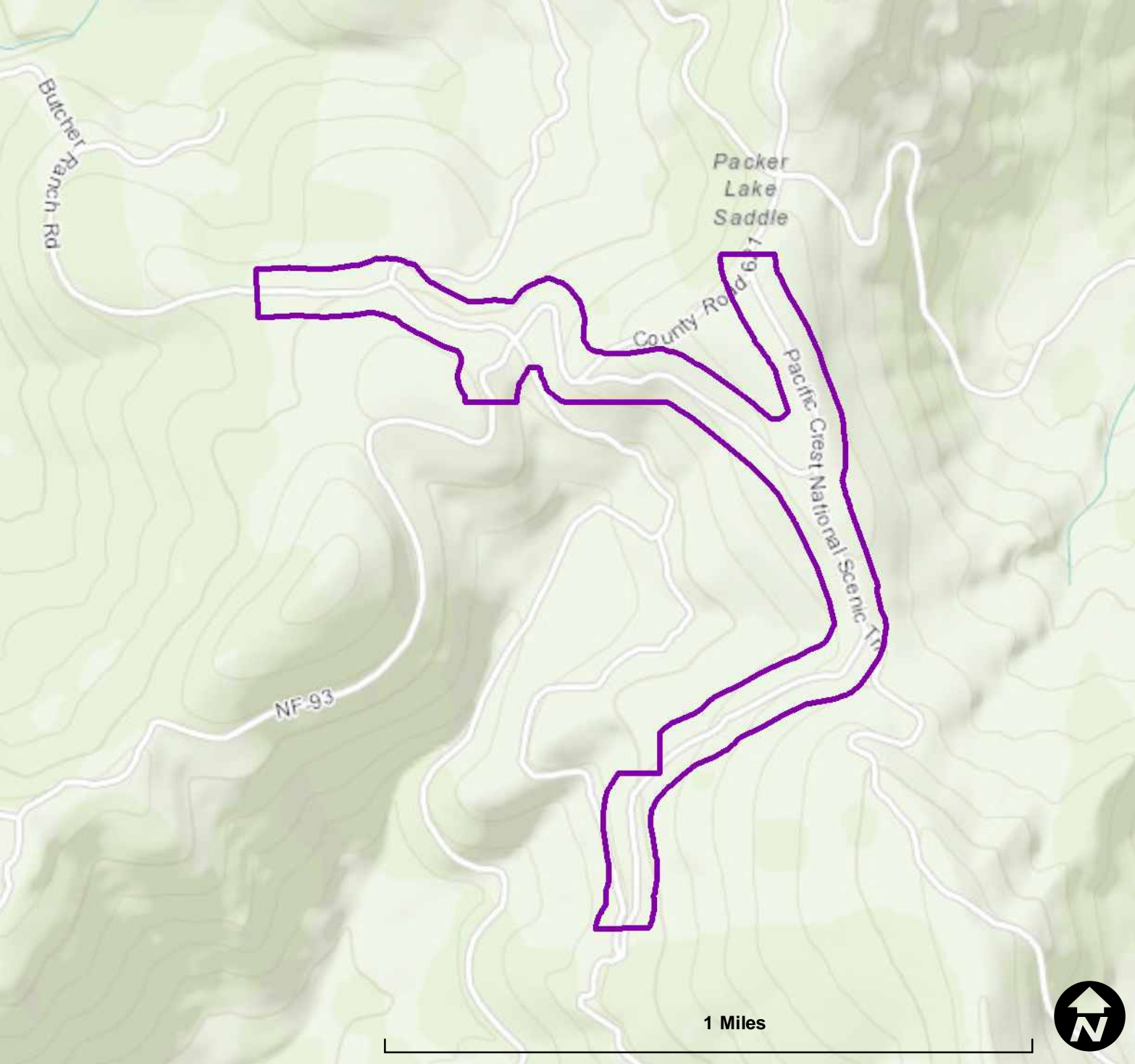
SUPPORT:









- Sierra County Fire District
- Tahoe National Forest, Yuba River Ranger District
- California Heritage: Indigenous Research Project (Nevada City Rancheria)
- Sierra Buttes Trail Stewardship
- Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
- Sierra County Fire Safe and Watershed Council

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



-  Project Location
-  Project Boundary
-  North Subregion
-  North Central Subregion
-  Central Subregion
-  East Subregion
-  South Central Subregion
-  South Subregion



-  Project Location
-  Project Boundary
-  North Subregion
-  North Central Subregion
-  Central Subregion
-  East Subregion
-  South Central Subregion
-  South Subregion

CEQA Documentation

SNC #: 1070

Project Title: Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Properties Fuel Reduction

Applicant: Sierra County Land Trust

CEQA:

The project is Categorical Exempt under Class 4 Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land.

- **Notice of Exemption:** See Below

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 Sierra
100 Courthouse Square
Downieville, CA 95936

Project Title: Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Properties Fuel Reduction Project (SNC #1070)

Project Location - Specific:

The project is located in Sierra County, generally surrounded by the Tahoe National Forest, and centered at approximately 39°36'51.31"N and 120°39'59.85"W.

Project Location – City: North of Sierra City Project Location – County: Sierra

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy would provide \$167,200 in funding to the Sierra County Land Trust for creation of a 300-foot wide shaded fuel break on 69 acres centered along Butcher Ranch Road. The proposed fuel break lies in with upper elevation meadows of Butcher Ranch, Robinson Cow Camp, and an un-named meadow near Holmes Cabin to effectively form a 3-mile fuel break adjacent to forested areas and the water, recreation, and habitat rich Sierra Buttes/Gold Lakes Basin to the east. The project will reduce wildfire risk in the immediate Packer Saddle and Lakes Basin area, surrounding public and private forest lands, and nearby small communities. The project site and surrounding area is used heavily by recreationists.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Sierra County Land Trust

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 forestry activities on 69 acres, including thinning of vegetation and trees in an area with a high percentage of brush species and shade-tolerant tree species. Hand crews will complete work on steep slopes and in aesthetically sensitive areas while masticators will be used elsewhere. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) reviewed the project and determined that it is exempt from the requirements for preparation of a Timber Harvest Plan pursuant to 14 CCR § 1038(j). The project incorporates all environmentally-protective features required by CAL FIRE.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Shannon Ciotti 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 Grant Application Number 1070
Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Properties Fuel Reduction Project

Description of Activities

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy would provide \$167,200 in funding to the Sierra County Land Trust to create a 300-foot wide (69-acre) shaded fuel break centered along Butcher Ranch Road, northwest of Sierra City. The approach for this project is to use light on the land methods largely by hand crews with work areas designed for an aesthetically pleasing, natural outcome. Project activities will include treatments that target reducing surface fuel accumulations of dead, dying, and diseased trees and thinning thickets of ladder and crown fuels associated with high tree densities to lower the threat of large-scale, high-intensity fire behavior.

Treatment will consist of removing or pruning trees, shrubs, and brush on the project site. All work is to be completed by use of hand crews on steep slopes or in aesthetically sensitive areas. Masticators would be used in less sensitive areas, supported by chippers. Chipped material will be left on site to provide ground cover and erosion control. The treatments will remove:

- understory fuels over 1 foot tall, with some exceptions for individual plants or groups of plants up to 10 feet in canopy diameter;
- trees up to 10-inch diameter at breast height (dbh) to create horizontal distances between residual trees from 20 to 30 feet between trunks and 15 to 25 feet between tree crown drip lines, with exceptions for larger, defective trees; and
- as much brush as possible, leaving some for aesthetic reasons.

A registered professional forester will develop detailed criteria for the fuel reduction methods, locations of each method, and delineation of special treatment areas. Fuels reduction work will be completed by a professional crew.

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 Sierra Buttes/Lakes Basin Properties Fuel Reduction 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 forestry activities on 69 acres, including thinning of vegetation and trees in an area with a high percentage of brush species and shade-tolerant tree species. Hand crews will complete work on steep slopes and in aesthetically sensitive areas while masticators will be used elsewhere. This forestry work will not result in significant adverse impacts.

No Exceptions to a Categorical Exemption

Categorical exemptions represent activities that generally do not result in significant environmental impacts. However, there are six exceptions to categorical exemptions, defined in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2. Generally, a categorical exemption does not apply if a project would occur in certain specified sensitive environments, would affect scenic resources within an official state scenic

highway, or would be located on a designated hazardous waste site. In addition, a categorical exemption would not apply if the project causes substantial adverse changes in the significance of a historical resource or would be considered significant within the cumulative context. Table 1 identifies the exceptions from CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 and includes a brief rationale as to why each exception does not apply to the Eastern Madera Wildfire Reforestation 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 goal of this 69-acre forestry project is to reduce wildfire risk and create a 300-foot wide shaded fuel break along roads that are heavily used by recreational visitors in a highly scenic area. This project ties into other nearby landscape features to effectively create a 3-mile fuel break.</p> <p>The project work consists of minor land alterations involving forest thinning activities on 69 acres, including thinning of vegetation and trees in an area with a high percentage of brush species and shade-tolerant tree species. Hand crews will complete work on steep slopes and in aesthetically sensitive areas while masticators will be used elsewhere. The project work will not occur on areas know to contain hazardous substances, nor will project activities occur in locations that contain known significant cultural or biological resources.</p>
<p>(b) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.</p>	<p>The forest management activities will not adversely affect environmental resources and will therefore not contribute to a cumulative environmental impact in relation to other forest management projects in the region. In fact, the project will result in beneficial effects to the project area and adjacent forested areas by reducing the potential for high severity wildfire and restoring conifer forest habitat. Consequently, the proposed project, in combination with other nearby forest management treatments or other reasonably foreseeable projects, will 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 fuel management project will not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Specific environmental topics are addressed below:</p> <p>Aesthetics. See Recreation and Scenic Resources.</p> <p>Agriculture/ Forestry. The project area does not contain any agricultural or grazing resources. The project will not convert forest lands to a non-forest land use.</p> <p>Air Quality/GHGs. The project activities will result in nominal fugitive dust, particulate, and mobile source emissions. Mobile source emissions will be limited to those associated with vehicle trips to/from the project area, and the use of forestry equipment (e.g., masticators). Activities that emit fugitive dust and particulate (i.e., use of masticators or chainsaws) will be conducted in accordance with requirements of the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management</p>

District, which will minimize environmental effects.

Sensitive receptors will not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations. The project will not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the region's applicable air quality plan and will not violate any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation.

Biological Resources. The project area was evaluated for sensitive biological resources through a nine-quadrangle review of the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), the California Native Plant Society Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants of California (CNPS), and by review of the Forest Management Plan and the Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan for the project area.

Based on the database searches, the Forest Management Plan, and the Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan, no threatened, endangered, or other special-status animal species are known to occur within the project area; however suitable habitat exists in the project area for several special-status wildlife species. Project activities will occur in upland areas within 300 feet of existing roads and will include limited operating periods, pre-project surveys, nest buffers, and other Best Management Practices. As a result, the project will not significantly affect any special-status wildlife species.

Based on the database searches, the Forest Management Plan, and the Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan, no threatened, endangered, or other special-status plant species are known to occur within the project area. However, the project includes potentially suitable habitat for several special-status plant species. One special-status plant species was found in the nine-quadrangle CNPS search that was not included in the Forest Management Plan, or the Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan. Plumas Ivesia (*Ivesia sericoleuca*), a ranked 1.B.2 plant. This species is not anticipated to occur in the project area because there is no suitable habitat present.

The project will not adversely affect special-status plant species because surveys for special-status plants will occur during the appropriate blooming period, and special-status plants will be flagged, and avoided during project activities.

Cultural Resources. See (f).

Geology/Soils. The forest restoration activities will not expose people or structures to loss, injury, or death due to seismic activity or unstable soils. No waterways are located in the project site; thus, the work planned as part of the project will not occur in wetlands or stream courses.

	<p>Resulting material from mastication and/or chipping will be left on-site to provide ground cover and erosion control.</p> <p>Hazards/Hazardous Materials. See section (e), below.</p> <p>Hydrology/Water Quality. See Geology/Soils.</p> <p>Noise. Forest restoration activities will generate temporary noise. Receptors in the area include recreational visitors, such as hikers and mountain bikers, and a few residences and lodges. The Fuel Reduction Project is expected to be completed in one season (Fall 2019). If needed, project activities will extend to a second season. However, given that project activities will be limited to daytime (the least sensitive hours of the day), and the limited extent to which these activities could expose sensitive receptors to increased noise levels in one or two seasons, the project will not cause significant noise effects.</p> <p>Recreation and Scenic Resources. No specific recreational facilities or improvements are proposed as part of the forest restoration activities. The project area is located along roadways that are accessed by recreational visitors. The project area receives heavy use by hikers to the Lookout Trail, Pacific Crest Trail hikers, Off-Highway vehicle users, and mountain bikers. It is possible that during project implementation, recreation access in this area could be temporarily limited. However, by creating a shaded fuel break in this area, the project would reduce the potential for negative impacts on recreation and scenic resources that could occur from a catastrophic wildfire. Because this area has a high number of visitors, there is an increased risk of human ignition of a fire. The project treatments are also designed to be completed by hand crews in aesthetically sensitive areas in order to achieve an aesthetically pleasing naturalized outcome. The reforestation project will result in long-term beneficial effects to recreational and scenic resources.</p> <p>Transportation. There will be limited additional trips on local roadways during project implementation. No vehicular transportation over sensitive habitat will occur, and no new roads will be constructed. The vehicles will not block traffic and no traffic delays will occur due to project activities.</p> <p>Other CEQA Issues. The project will 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,</p>	<p>The project area is not visible from a scenic highway, and will 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>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>(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 will be affected by the project.</p> <p>An archaeological survey and records search were conducted for the project site to support the Notice of Timber Operations That Are Exempt from Timber Harvesting Plan Requirements prepared for this project issued by CAL FIRE pursuant to 14 CCR 1038(j). The records search identified four historic sites in or adjacent to the project site. The survey of the site did not identify any evidence of prehistoric use or activities. Sections of a historic water ditch were found within the project boundary. Water conveyance features within Mother Lode country, including the setting for this project, are common. This resource was not determined to be significant. Additionally, the sections of the ditch found on the project site will be flagged and shown to the contractor prior to project operations. The ditch will be protected by avoidance and the use of hand crews to treat the slash and brush.</p> <p>The project forester sent notices to the Native American Heritage Commission, Greenville Rancheria of Maidu Indians, the Maidu Cultural and Development Group, and the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California. These tribal groups did not identify potential significant impacts to Tribal Cultural Resources or historic resources.</p> <p>The project includes protection measures that require work is stopped within 100 feet of a previously undiscovered resources that is encountered. Work in this area would not resume until the project plans are revised to include information regarding this new resource and applicable protection measures are developed.</p> <p>The project will not result in an adverse change in the significance of any archaeological or historical resource and will not disturb or destroy any human remains or paleontological resources.</p>