

PROPOSED MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

PROJECT: CASTLE CRAGS STATE PARK ROOT CREEK DRAINAGE FOREST FUELS MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

LEAD AGENCY: CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

Under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the lead agency is the public agency with primary responsibility over approval of a project. California State Parks (CSP) is the CEQA lead agency because it is responsible for implementation and operation of the Castle Crags State Park Root Creek Drainage Forest Fuels Management and Public Safety Improvement Project (project).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

CSP proposes to implement the project within the 435-acre Root Creek Drainage in Castle Crags State Park (CCSP). CCSP is located at the north end of the Sacramento Valley off Interstate 5 in Shasta County. Root Creek Drainage, the project area, encompasses the northern slope of Kettlebelly Ridge, Vista Point Road parking and viewing location, a portion of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), and land next to and just west of I-5, which is all entirely contained within Shasta County. Refer to Figures 2-1 through 2-3 in the attached initial study (IS) for the regional location of CCSP as well as the specific project area.

The project objectives are to improve forest health, reduce wildfire risk, effectively sequester carbon, reduce noxious weed infestations, and provide a secondary emergency access/evacuation road exiting Vista Point. The project consists of three main activities:

- ▲ **Implementation of the Forest Management Plan and Fuels Reduction:** Forest fuels in the Root Creek Drainage would be strategically reduced via hand and mechanical thinning, followed by biomass disposition and prescribed burns, per guidance in the Forest Management Plan. The application of understory thinning followed by prescribed burning would be the most common technique for forest management within Root Creek Drainage. The majority of the forest fuels reduction activities would occur from October through March.
- ▲ **Ongoing Vegetation Management.** Ongoing vegetation management would occur, including targeted herbicide use to control noxious weeds including, but not limited to: French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), sweet pea (*Lathyrus latifolius*), bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), wooly mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*). Herbicides including Milestone, Milestone VM plus, Garlon-4 Ultra, Element-4 and RoundUp Pro Concentrate would be applied via foliar spray at concentrations specified on the chemical's label during fall and/or spring season depending upon species. Infested areas could be treated up to three times a year.
- ▲ **Reestablish Secondary Emergency Access Road to Vista Point.** A secondary emergency access road between the park entrance and Vista Point would be reestablished along an existing, abandoned road bed to: (1) provide a secondary emergency access road for visitors at Vista Point, (2) provide secondary access to the watershed and Vista Point for fire crews in case of wildfire, (3) provide access for equipment and crews to perform forest fuels reduction activities, and (4) replace an existing failed culvert in Root Creek and restore the current creek crossing so that culvert capacity would be adequate, diversion of high flows outside the creek channel would cease, and water quality would be improved.

Project activities are anticipated to begin in late 2019. Reestablishment of the secondary emergency access road would occur over several months, while forest fuels reduction activities and vegetation management would occur on an ongoing basis.

FINDINGS

An IS has been prepared to assess the project's potential effects on the environment and the significance of those effects. Based on the IS, it has been determined that the project would not have any significant effects on the environment once mitigation measures are implemented. The conclusion is supported by the following findings:

1. The project would have no impact related to land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, transportation and traffic, and tribal cultural resources.
2. The project would have a less-than-significant impact on aesthetics, agriculture and forestry resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise, recreation, and utilities and service systems.
3. Mitigation is required to reduce potentially significant impacts related to air quality, biological resources, and cultural resources to less-than-significant levels.

Air Quality

Mitigation Measure AQ-1: Phase Project Activities

Project activities would be phased so that grading of the emergency access road would not occur concurrently with mechanical thinning activities involving the use of a shredder, skidder, or feller/buncher.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would reduce project-generated nitrogen oxides (NO_x) emissions below the Shasta County Air Quality Management District's threshold of 25 pounds per day. Thus, project-generated emissions of criteria air pollutant (CAPs) and precursors would not violate or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation. This impact would be **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Biological Resources

Mitigation Measure BIO-1: Pre-Construction Surveys

Pre-construction surveys will be conducted before ground-disturbing project activities. If pre-construction surveys for reestablishment of the emergency access road, or replacement of the upper Root Creek crossing find special-status plants, and it is not feasible to avoid removal of these plants, CSP shall consult with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, as appropriate depending on species status, to determine the appropriate mitigation measures for direct impacts that could occur because of project construction. CSP will implement standard best management practices and the agreed-upon mitigation measures to achieve no net loss of occupied habitat or individuals. Mitigation measures may include, but are not limited to, preserving and enhancing existing populations through seed collection or transplantation, and/or restoring or creating suitable habitat in sufficient quantities to achieve no net loss of occupied habitat and/or individuals. CSP shall also develop a mitigation and monitoring plan.

If relocation efforts are part of the mitigation plan, the plan shall include details on the methods used, including collection, storage, propagation, receptor site preparation, installation, long-term protection and management, monitoring and reporting requirements, success criteria, and remedial action responsibilities should the initial effort fail to meet long-term monitoring requirements. Success criteria shall include:

- ▲ Preserved populations will be self-producing. Populations will be considered self-producing when:
 - plants reestablish annually for a minimum of five years with no human intervention such as supplemental seeding; and
 - reestablished and preserved habitats contain an occupied area and flower density comparable to existing occupied habitat areas in similar habitat types near the project.

The implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-1 would achieve no net loss of special-status plants and occupied habitat. Therefore, impacts from removal of special-status plants due to reestablishment of the emergency access road, replacement of the upper Root Creek crossing, or herbicide application would be reduced to less-than-significant levels. This impact would be **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Cultural Resources

Mitigation Measure CU-1: Pre-Construction Surveys

A qualified Cultural Resources Specialist will conduct pre-construction surveys before any prescribed burns in areas where cultural resources are likely to be found (e.g., flat areas, near stream-beds). If any archaeological resources are found, a Cultural Resource Specialist will flag and/or fence all cultural resources with a buffer of 50 feet for avoidance during on-site project activities. The Cultural Resource Specialist will remove the fencing after project completion.

Implementation of Mitigation Measure CU-1 would reduce impacts to undiscovered archaeological resources in areas that were not previously surveyed and ensures that CSP Standard Project Requirements intended to protect cultural resources, such as flagging or fencing off sites, will be implemented. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant with mitigation incorporated**.

Pursuant to Section 21082.1 of CEQA, CSP has independently reviewed and analyzed the IS and Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the project and finds that the IS and MND reflects the independent judgment of CSP. CSP further finds that the mitigation measures included in the IS shall be implemented as stated in the MND.

I hereby approve this project:

Matt Teague, Acting District Superintendent
California State Parks
(to be signed upon approval of the project after the public review period is complete)