



Trinity County Resource Conservation District Environmental Review Report for an Exempt Project

Note: This report form is intended for use by Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) staff to document a limited environmental impact analysis supporting the filing of a Notice of Exemption (NOE) document for a proposed TCRCD project. Although the project appears to fit within the descriptions for allowable Categorical Exemptions, this report presents TCRCD's review for possible "Exceptions" that would preclude finding the project to be categorically exempt as discussed in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2. This report will be filed with the CEQA administrative record for this project to document the environmental impact analysis conducted by the District.

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Project Name: Douglas City portion of SWRCB Trinity River Watershed Roadside Fuel Reduction Project
Project Number: Grant Agreements: D1713103 (SWRCB)
Program Type: Vegetation Management Program
CAL FIRE Unit: Shasta-Trinity
County: Trinity
Acres: 50 Acres- D1713103 (SWRCB)
Legal Location: T33N, R9W, Sections 5,6,27,28,32,33,34,31,32,36
T32N, R10W, Sections 1,2,3,12,,34,35
Name of USGS 7.5' Quad Map(s): Weaverville and Lewiston
☒ Project Vicinity Maps Attached ☒ Project Location Maps Attached ☐ Photos Attached

Other Public Agency Review/Permit Required:

Would the project result in:

- Alterations to a watercourse (DFW - 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:

YES

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NO

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

Project Description and Environmental Setting (Describe the project activities, project site and its surroundings, its location, and the environmental setting):

Fuels reduction treatment on private property can only happen with landowner permission. Therefore, the project areas as mapped are larger than the actual areas expected to receive treatment, as not all landowners are likely to provide permission.

The SWRCB Trinity River Watershed Roadside Fuel Reduction Project will be implemented adjacent to Co.219 Rd (Union Hill Rd), Co. 218 (Steel Bridge Rd), Co. 176 Rd, Co.221 (Steiner Flat Rd), and various other private roads. The Roadside Fuel Reduction Project will occur on both privately owned and public parcels. The intent of this project is to create a roadside fuel break along primary access routes to minimize the chances of fire starts, reduce the size and severity of fires started along the roadsides and provide for safer escape routes for residents in the event of catastrophic fire. Fuel treatments will occur from 50' up to 150' from the road edges on participating properties. We anticipate approximately 50 acres will be treated in the Douglas City portion of this project.

The proposed fuel reduction treatments involves the removal of ladder fuels and selectively thinning subdominant trees and brush to break the continuity of the fuels (vertical and horizontal continuity) to reduce rate of fire spread, duration, intensity, or crown fire. Additionally dead or dying tress that pose a threat to public health and safety will be removed as conditions warrant. The fuel reduction treatments will be accomplished with hand crews utilizing chainsaws and a tow-behind chipper that will be operated on existing roads. No heavy equipment operations are proposed and no soil disturbance is expected. All

cut material will be chipped on site where feasible. Cut materials that are not feasible to be chipped (located over 100' from existing roads) will be loped and scattered to CAL FIRE standards, the lop and scatter treatment will not be utilized within 100 feet of structures, roads, or other infrastructure. Tree boles that are too large to be chipped will be left on site for community firewood use or wildlife habitat. Burning will not be conducted as part of these projects. In the treatment areas all brush and smaller trees will be removed. Intermediate sized trees (up to 8" DBH) will be thinned to a spacing of 12-20 feet with the goal of retaining the healthiest trees with the largest crowns. Any larger trees proposed for removal (live or dead over 8" DBH) will be marked by an RPF. Limbs and branches will be removed from retained trees up to 8 feet from the ground. All hardwoods will be retained as long as they maintain a 20% or greater live crown ratio after the lower limbs are removed.

The Douglas city community and project area is primarily located in the valley bottom adjacent to the Trinity River with some of the properties extending upslope onto the adjacent hill sides from ~1600'-2200' elevation. Much of the project area was significantly impacted by historic era gold mining operations and large areas of tailing piles and barren bedrock were left behind. The mined areas have revegetated over time but the vegetation present on the mined areas appears much different than the unmined areas where the native topsoil remains. The environmental setting is characterized by mixed conifer and oak woodland. The mixed conifer is more prevalent on the north facing slopes and unmined areas while the oak woodland is more prevalent on the south facing slopes and previously mined areas. The dominant conifer species observed are Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Grey Pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) with lesser amounts of Sugar Pine (*Pinus lambertiana*), and Incense Cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*). Hardwood species present include live oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), White Oak (*Quercus alba*), black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), big leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) and cottonwood (*Populus spp.*). Brush and shrub species observed include various species of Ceanothus, manzanita (*Arctostaphylos spp.*), redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus spp.*), willow (*Salix spp.*) and poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*). Many non-native and invasive species were noted during surveys, including Himalaya berry (*Rubus armeniacus*), invasive rose (*Rosa spp.*), scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), black locust (*Centaurea solstitialis*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), and various other non-native grasses and forbes.

Environmental Impact Analysis

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:

The project results will be visible from Co.219 Rd (Union Hill Rd), Co. 218 (Steel Bridge Rd), Co. 176 Rd, Co.221 (Steiner Flat Rd), and various other private roads in the vicinity of Douglas City. Landowner privacy will be considered and maintained as directed by each participating landowner through pretreatment consultations. The project will have no significant impact on scenic vistas, scenic resources, or the existing visual character and quality of the areas. The project will not create a new source of light that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views.

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 FPRs.
☐ 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:

This project is non-commercial and therefore FPRs do not apply. No trees over 8" DBH will be felled without being marked by an RPF. If active nests are discovered prior to operations, a 100ft buffer will be established and no ground operations will occur within the buffer. If a nest is discovered during ground operations, work will be temporarily suspended in the vicinity of the nest and the Project Coordinator will be notified. If an active raptor nest or other sensitive species nest is discovered, a 500ft buffer will be established and the Project Coordinator will be notified.

The project will not convert any prime or unique farmland. The project will not result in the conversion of forest land or timberland to non-forest use.

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:

Project implementation may produce small amounts of particulates as a consequence of chipping cut vegetation. However, operations will be limited to one or two vehicles and one chipper. The processed material will be broadcast away from roads and structures. Dust abatement is not a concern since all vehicles and equipment will be operating from existing roads and stationary during operating periods. No burning is proposed, hence no smoke impacts will occur. The project will not result in any significant impact to air quality.

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 CNDDDB 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:

Dedrick	Rush Creek Lakes	Trinity Dam	Papoose Creek
Junction City	Weaverville	Lewiston	French Gulch
Hayfork Summit	Hoosimbim Mountain	Bully Choop Mountain	Shasta Bally

No plant species rank 1A,1B,2A or 2B were found within the twelve quad search for Federal endangered, threatened, proposed or for state listed endangered, threatened or Rare.

Species	Status	Potential Impact	Analysis
<i>Bombus occidentalis</i> western bumble bee	US-None CA-Candidate Endangered	Take	<i>The western bumble bee was once very common in the western United States and western Canada. These bees can still be found in the northern and eastern parts of their historic range, but the once common populations from southern British Columbia to central California have nearly disappeared. As generalist foragers, they do not depend on any one flower type. The major threats to bumble bees include: spread of pests and diseases by the commercial bumble bee industry, other pests and diseases, habitat destruction or alteration, pesticides, invasive species, natural pest or predator population cycles, and climate change. Bumble bees are threatened by many kinds of habitat alterations which may destroy, alter, fragment, degrade or reduce their food supply (flowers that produce the nectar and pollen they require), nest sites (e.g. abandoned rodent burrows and bird nests), and</i>

			<p>hibernation sites for over-wintering queens.</p> <p>The proposed fuel reduction treatments will allow more light onto the forest floor which will increase the amount of flowering herbs and forbs available for bumble bee's. If a bumble bee nest or hibernation site is discovered during operations all operations within 100' of the nest/hibernation site will stop and CDFW will be consulted. Species will not be affected.</p>
<i>Gulo gulo</i> California wolverine	US- Proposed CA-Threatened	Take	<p>Found in the north coast mountains and the Sierra Nevada. Found in a wide variety of high elevation habitats. Habitat does not exist within project area. Species will not be affected</p>
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> bald eagle	US-Delisted CA-Endangered	Take	<p>Species requires large bodies of water, or free flowing rivers with abundant fish, and adjacent snags or other perches. Species perches high in large, stoutly limbed trees, on snags or broken-topped trees, or on rocks near water. Species nests in large, old-growth, or dominant live tree with open branch work, especially ponderosa pine. No trees (live or dead) over 8" in diameter will be removed unless assessed for potential species use and marked for removal by an RPF or supervised designee. No raptor nests were identified within the project area during project area inspections. Species will not be affected.</p>
<i>Hydromantes shastae</i> Shasta Salamander	CA-Candidate Endangered	Take	<p>Species lives within cool, wet ravines valley's and caves predominantly with limestone geology. No suitable habitat exist within the project area. Species will not be affected.</p>
<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i> <i>irideus</i> pop. 36 summer-run steelhead trout	US- None CA- Candidate Endangered	Take	<p>Species requires cold water stream flows for survival. The no cut riparian stream buffer will maintain all shade trees adjacent to active watercourses within the project area. Species will not be affected.</p>

<i>Oncorhynchus tshawytscha</i> pop. 30 chinook salmon - upper Klamath and Trinity Rivers ESU	US- None CA. Candidate Endangered	Take	Species requires cold water stream flows for survival. The no cut riparian stream buffer will maintain all shade trees adjacent to active watercourses within the project area. Species will not be affected.
<i>Pekania pennanti</i> , Pacific fisher	CA. threatened	Take	No cutting of large potential den trees are proposed for this project. Species will not be affected. If species is observed operations will cease within 1000' and CDFW or CAL FIRE biologist will be consulted.
<i>Rana boylei</i> , foothill yellow-legged frog	US- None CA-Threatened	Take	<i>This species is found in flowing streams and rivers with either rocky substrate or sunny banks.</i> <i>Project activities will not occur within wetland or riparian areas. Species will not be affected.</i>
<i>Rana boylei</i> , yellow-legged frog	CA. candidate threatened	Take	This species is found in flowing streams and rivers with either rocky substrate or sunny banks . Project activities will not occur within wetland or riparian areas. Species will not be affected.
<i>Strix occidentalis caurina</i> , Northern Spotted Owl	US-Threatened CA-Threatened	Take	No habitat modification will result from the proposed fuel reduction treatments. To avoid noise disturbance during the nesting season, no operations will be conducted within areas of suitable habitat that are greater than 1,000 feet from a residence or county road between February 1 and August 1 annually. Species will not be affected.

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 CAL FIRE Staff or 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?
☐ This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

No burning or ground disturbing activities are proposed with this project. Therefore, no archaeological record check or cultural survey is required. The project will have no significant impact on cultural resources.

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:

A negligible amount of soil disturbance will result from hand crews dragging brush. No highly erosive soils or unstable slopes were observed in the project area. The project will have no significant impact on Geology and Soils.

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:

A small amount of GHG emissions will result from vehicle traffic going to and from the project site, as well as the operation of a diesel chipper and gas chainsaws. However, the amount of GHGs released would be negligible in comparison to those released by a catastrophic wildfire. This project mitigates the risk of catastrophic wildfire and any associated GHG emissions. In addition, selective thinning of codominant and subdominant trees will release the remaining conifers and hardwoods, resulting in an increased rate of carbon sequestration over a longer temporal scale. Implementation of this project will likely result in a net reduction of GHG emissions and will not conflict with CA AB32.

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:

This project will require the use of two cycle fuel and diesel fuel to operate equipment. A hazardous materials endorsement will not be required. Equipment will be refueled only on existing roads road and at least 100ft from water ways. Each vehicle at the project site will be equipped with an appropriate spill-kit.

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:

All watercourses or bodies of water will be afforded a minimum 50' buffer. The project will have no significant impact on Hydrology or Water Quality.

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:

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:

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:

Vegetation treatment will require the use of chainsaws and a chipper, which will generate noise that may be audible to landowners within and near the project areas. However, work will occur during the business week and residents have been informed of the nature of work and the associated noise. In addition, the project areas are surrounded by private properties, where chainsaws and other internal combustion engines are regularly operating. This project will not significantly increase adverse noise levels.

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:

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:

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:

Transportation/Traffic

- ☒ 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:

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:

Several power and utility lines run through the project footprint. No trees will be felled that could threaten the power and utility lines. The project will have no significant impact on utilities and service systems.

Changes Made to Avoid Environmental Impacts:

None.

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?

☐☒**Justification for Use of a Categorical Exemption (discuss why the project is exempt, cite exemption number(s), and describe how the project fits the class):**

This project fits the description for a Class 4, §15304 – Minor Alterations to Land Categorical Exemption to CEQA. Field review by Trinity County Resource Conservation District staff confirmed that no exceptions apply which would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. The project consists of minor treatments to land and vegetation in the form of brush removal hand crews and chipping. The activities do not result in the taking of endangered, rare, or threatened plant or animal species, or sedimentation to surface waters. Trinity County Resource Conservation District staff has concluded that no significant environmental impact would occur to aesthetics, agriculture and forestland/timberland, air quality, biological

resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation/traffic, or to utilities and service systems

Conclusion:

☒ After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the description for the various classes of Categorical Exemptions to CEQA, TCRCD 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, TCRCD 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.

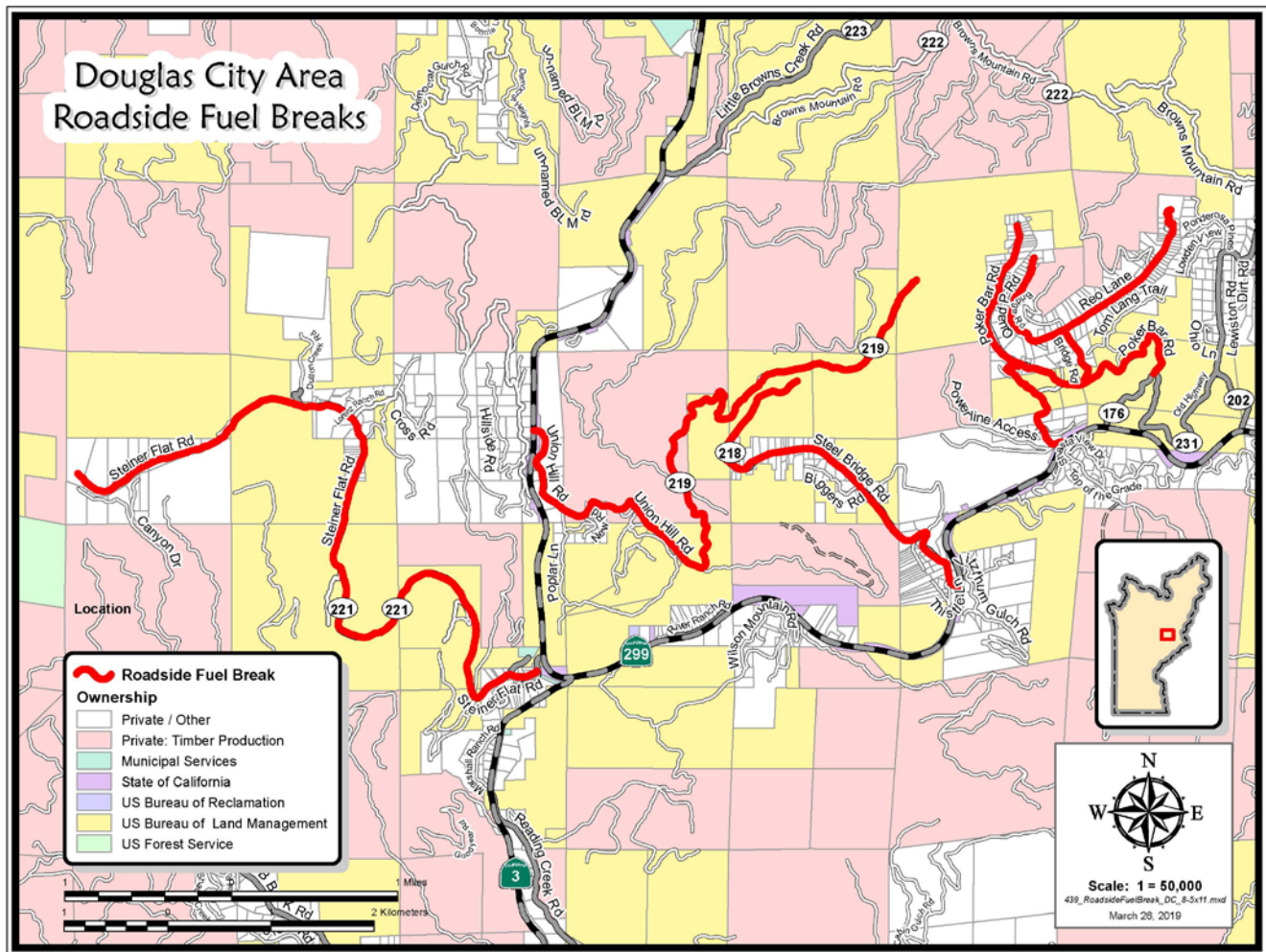


Figure 1. Douglas City SWRCB Roadside Fuelbreak Project Map.

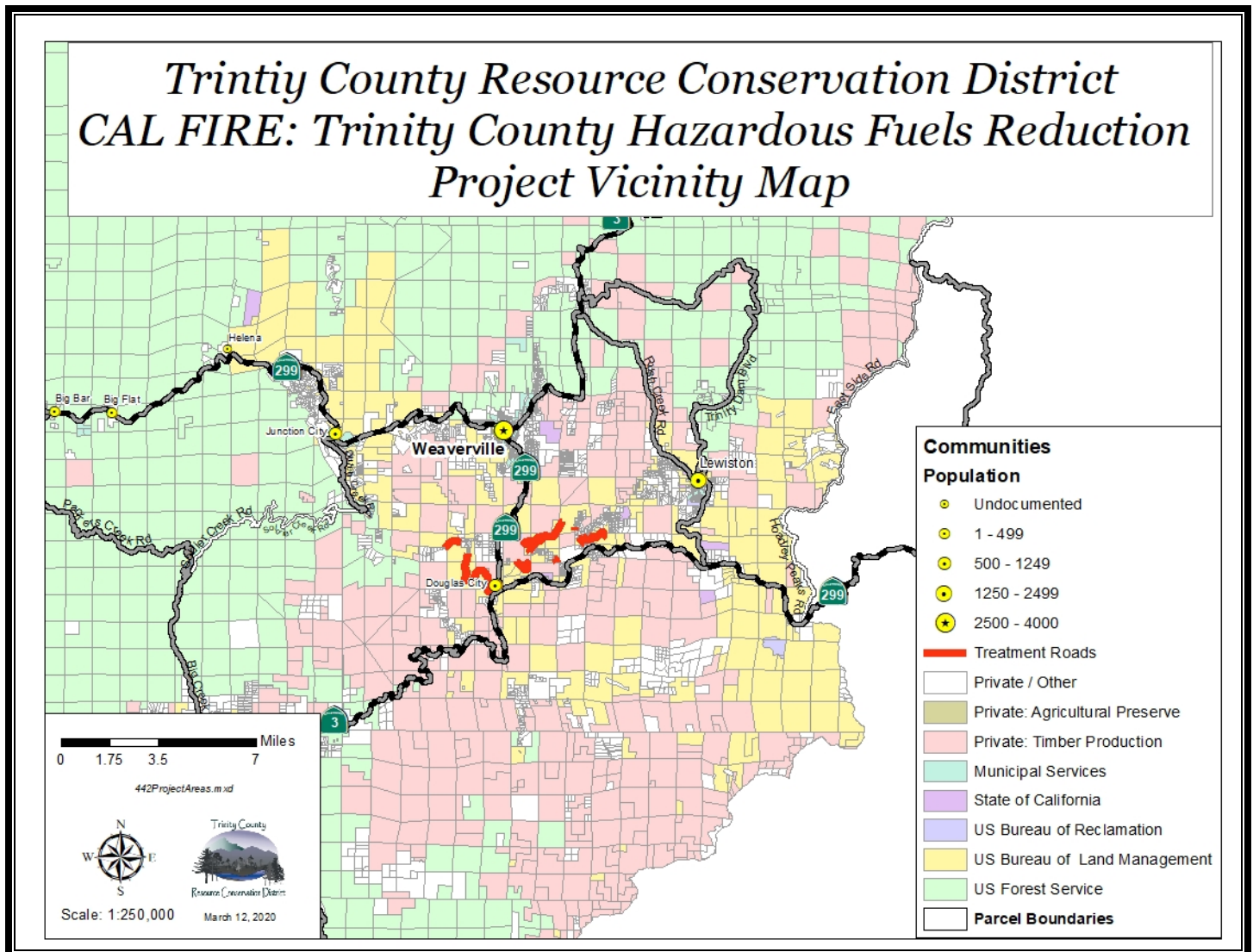


Figure 2. Douglas City SWRCB Roadside Fuelbreak Vicinity Project Map.