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: *Trinity County Resource Conservation District 2020 Weaverville – Weaver Bally Loop Fuel Reduction Project*
Project Number: *Grant Agreement: 5GG17205 Weaverville portion of Trinity County Hazardous Fuels Reduction*

Program Type: *Vegetation Management Program*
County: *Trinity*

Acres: *195 Acres*

Legal Location: *T33N, R10W, Sections 1, 2, 11, and 12, MDBM*

Name of USGS 7.5' Quad Map(s): *-Weaverville*

☒ Project Vicinity Maps Attached
☒ Project Location Maps Attached
☐ Photos Attached

Other Public Agency Review/Permit Required:

Would the project result in:	YES	NO
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:	☐	☒

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):

The Trinity County Resource Conservation District 2020 Weaverville Fuel Reduction Agreement #5GG17205) is funded by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and the grant has 3 project areas of which only the Weaverville project area is subject to this environmental review document.

Fuels reduction treatments on private property can only happen with landowner permission. Therefore, the project area as mapped and proposed are larger than the actual areas expected to receive treatment, as not all landowners are likely to provide permission. Additionally no treatments are proposed on any publically owned property's (Federal or State owned lands), treatments may occur on municipal services properties such as properties designated for road right of way, school districts and/or water districts.

Project Site Description

The Trinity County Resource Conservation District 2020 Weaverville Fuel Reduction Project is proposed on privately owned parcels within portions of the community of Weaverville, in Trinity County, California. No treatments are proposed on publicly owned property in this project. The project area consists of an isolated subdivision, in the vicinity of Weaver Bally Loop road, of approximately 109 privately owned parcels that is surrounded by public lands and industrial timber lands. The parcels are located primarily on a southern aspect midslope at about 2,200' in elevation on the northern side of the weaver basin, approximately 1/2 mile from the greater community of Weaverville. The topography of the project area is somewhat gentle compared to the surrounding steeper hill slopes with slopes ranging from flat to +-45% in the project area with some steeper pitches. The private parcels range from ½ acre to 2 acres in size and most all are developed with single family dwellings and outbuildings. The primary vegetation type present is oak woodland with chaparral. The vegetation type best describe as oak woodland is primarily vegetated with White and Black oaks with mixed grass understory. Many brush species are present including with various Ceanothus, Manzanita and Yerba Santa being the most prevalent. The developed areas generally have a spare understory around the dwellings and structures but the undeveloped areas are in more of an unmaintained wildland condition.

Treatment Description

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 material that is not feasible to be chipped may be treated with a lop and scatter treatment to CAL FIRE standards, the lop and scatter treatment will not be utilized within 100 feet of structures, roads, or other critical infrastructure. Tree boles that are too large to be chipped will be left on site for community firewood use or wildlife habitat. Burning will <u>not</u> 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 designated for removal by an RPF or supervised designee. 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.

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 within the Weaver Bally Loop subdivision. 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 or supervised designee. Prior to ground operations, nesting bird surveys will be conducted within the project footprint in accordance with CDFW protocols; if active nests are discovered, a 100ft buffer will be

established and no ground operations or vegetation modification 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 at a work site. 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 CNDDB 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*
Junction City	*Weaverville*	*Lewiston*
Hayfork Summit	*Hoosimbim Mtn*	*Bully Choop Mtn*

Species	Status	Potential Impact	Analysis
Boechera serpenticola serpentine rockcress	*CA. rare plant, 1B.2*	*Take*	*This plant grows on Serpentinite ridges and talus in Lower montane coniferous forest and Upper montane coniferous forest between 2,300 feet and 6,300' in elevation.* *Suitable habitat for this plant does not exist within the project areas. Species will not be affected*
Bombus occidentalis western bumble bee	*US-None* *CA-Candidate Endangered*	*Take*	*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 hibernation sites for over-wintering queens. *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.*
Botrypus virginianus rattlesnake fern	*CA. rare plant, 2B.2*	*Take*	*Rattlesnake fern is a species of perennial fern in the adders-tongue family. It is called the rattlesnake fern in some parts of North America, due to its habit of growing in places where rattlesnakes are also found. Rattlesnake fern prefers to grow in rich, moist woods in dense shade and will not tolerate direct sunlight. Habitats include bogs & fens, meadows & seeps in riparian forests, upper montane coniferous forest, lower montane coniferous forest, and wetlands. This species prefers to grow in well-rotted logs, peaty soil and humus at elevations between 2100'and 6600' in elevation.* *Project location is approximately 2,200' in elevation and no soil disturbance is expected. Species was not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Brodiaea rosea Indian Valley brodiaea	*CA. Endangered CA. rare plant, 3.1*	*Take*	*This species grows in vernally moist gravelly serpentine clay in foothill pine forest or oak woodland*

			which are not present in the project area. Species will not be affected.
Campylopodiella stenocarpa flagella-like atractylocarpus	*CA. rare plant, 2B.2*	*Take*	*Species grows on rotten logs, stumps, soil and bases of trees.* *No ground disturbance is expected and all rotten logs, stumps, and bases of trees will be maintained. Species will not be affected.*
Carex hystericina porcupine sedge	*CA. rare plant, 2B.3*	*Take*	*This species grows in Marshes swamps and streambanks which are not present in the project area or are within the no cut riparian buffer areas. Species will not be affected.*
Chaenactis suffrutescens Shasta chaenactis	*CA. rare plant, 1B.3*	*Take*	*This species grows in Sandy or Serpentine soils in lower montane coniferous forest and upper montane coniferous forest between 2,200' and 6,700' in elevation. Project location is approximately 2,300' in elevation and no soil disturbance is expected. Species was not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Epilobium oreganum, Oregon fireweed	*CA. rare plant 1B.2*	*Take*	*Species grows only in boggy areas on serpentine soils.* *This species grows in boggy areas which are not present in the project area or are within the no cut riparian buffer areas. Species will not be affected.*
Epilobium siskiyouense Siskiyou fireweed	*CA. rare plant 1B.3*	*Take*	*Species grows in rocky, serpentinite. alpine boulder and rock fields at elevations above 5100'. Project location is approximately 2,300'. Species will not be affected.*
Eriogonum ursinum var. erubescens blushing wild buckwheat	*CA. rare plant 1B.3*	*Take*	*Species only occurs in rocky, scree, talus areas within Chaparral (montane) and Lower montane coniferous forest. No rocky talus areas were identified within the project area and species was not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Haliaeetus leucocephalus bald eagle	*US-Delisted CA-Endangered*	*Take*	*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. The project areas are not located near or adjacent to any free flowing rivers with abundant fish. 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.
Harmonia doris-nilesiae Niles' harmonia	*CA. rare plant, 1B.1*	*Take*	*This plan prefers to grow in rocky open serpentine barrens in chaparral, cismontane woodland, and lower montane coniferous forest at elevations between 1,900' and 5,000 feet in elevation.* *Habitat for this species was not identified within the project area. This species was not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Juncus dudleyi, Dudley's rush	*CA. rare plant 2B.3*	*Take*	*Species requires wetland habitat. Project activities will not occur within wetland or riparian areas. Species will not be affected.*
Juncus regelii Regel's rush	*CA. rare plant 2B.3*	*Take*	*Species only occurs in mesic meadows and seeps in upper montane coniferous forest Meadows and seeps. No habitat for this species was identified within the project area and species was not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Lewisia cotyledon var. heckneri Heckner's lewisia	*CA. rare plant 1B.2*	*Take*	*Heckner's lewisia is a perennial herb that is native to California, and prefers to grow in rocky places in north coast coniferous forest at elevations between 650' and 6,300' above sea level.* *Project location is approximately 2,300' in elevation and no soil disturbance is expected. Species was not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus pop. 36 summer-run steelhead trout	*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.*

Oncorhynchus tshawytscha 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.*
Pekania pennanti, Pacific fisher	*US- None 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 biologist will be consulted.*
Penstemon filiformis, thread-leaved beardtongue	*CA. rare plant 1B.3*	*Take*	*This species grows in Rocky, often serpentinite soils and is found in association with Cismontane woodland and Lower montane coniferous forest. No ground disturbance is anticipated from fuel reduction treatments. Species not identified during project site inspections. Species will not be affected.*
Penstemon tracyi Tracy's beardtongue	*CA rare plant 1B.3*	*Take*	*Species grows in exposed rocky outcrops and barren talus in the high mountains. Habitat for this species is not present within the project area. Species will not be affected.*
Rana boylii, foothill yellow-legged frog	*US- None CA-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.*
Sedum obtusatum ssp. paradisum, Canyon Creek stonecrop	*CA. rare plant 1B.3*	*Take*	*Species prefers granite outcrops at elevations above 3250'. Project location is approximately 2,300' in elevation and no granite outcrops were identified within the project area. Species will not be affected.*
Silene salmonacea, Klamath Mountain catchfly	*CA rare plant 1B.2*	*Take*	*Species prefers openings, usually serpentinite in lower montane coniferous forest.* *Fuel reduction treatments are not proposed in forest openings and no serpentinite soils were identified within the project area. Species will not be affected.*
Strix occidentalis caurina, Northern Spotted Owl	*US-Threatened CA-Threatened*	*Take*	*The CNDDB Spotted Owl Database indicates there is one NSO activity center within 1.3 miles of the project area (TRI0370 is located approximately 0.87 mile southwest of the project area. 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 access 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 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. Highly erosive soils or unstable slopes were not 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 unleaded gasoline, 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 and at least 100ft from waterways. 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 active watercourses or bodies of water will be afforded a minimum 50' no cut 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 day on week days 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.

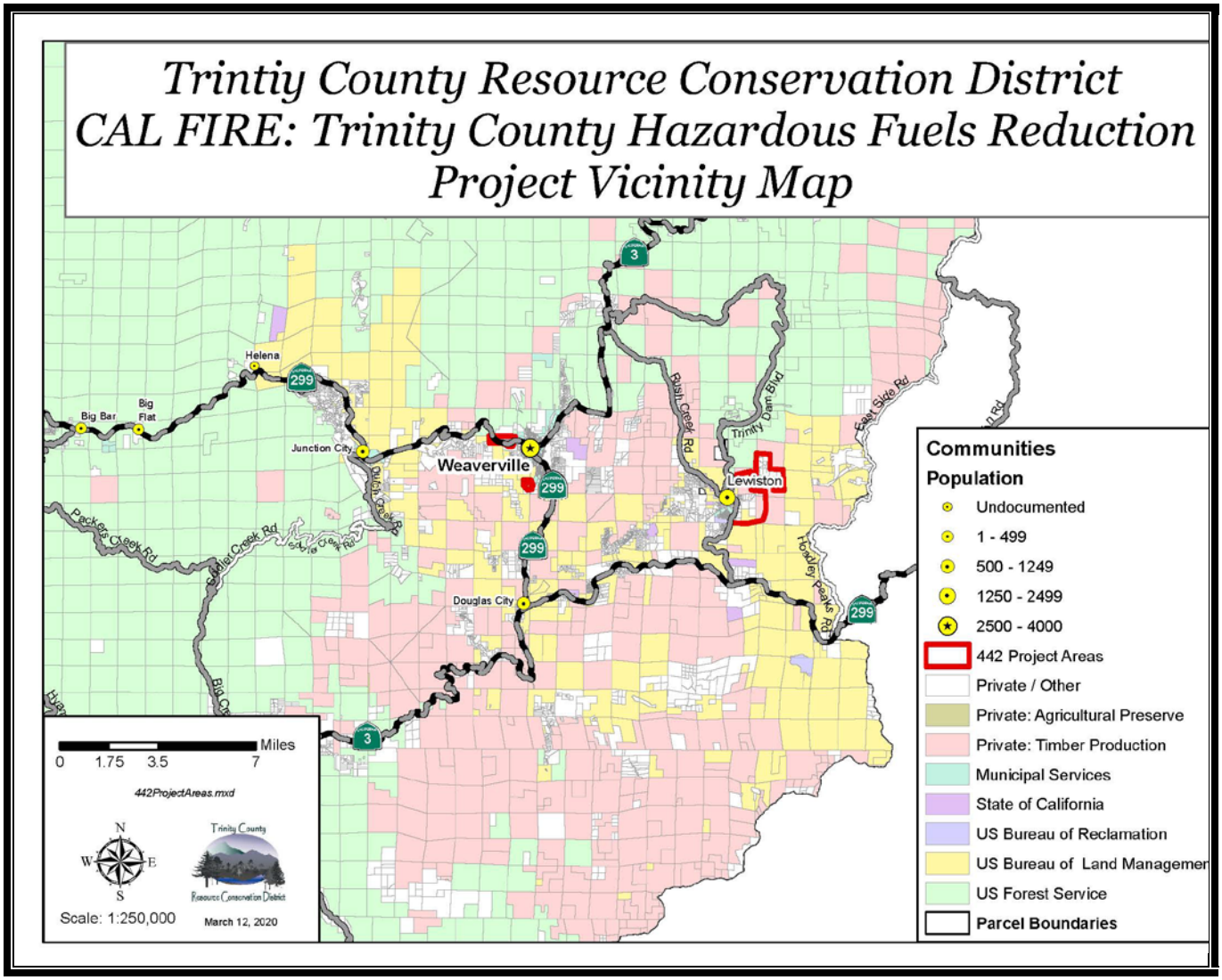

Figure 1. Weaverville Project Vicinity Map.

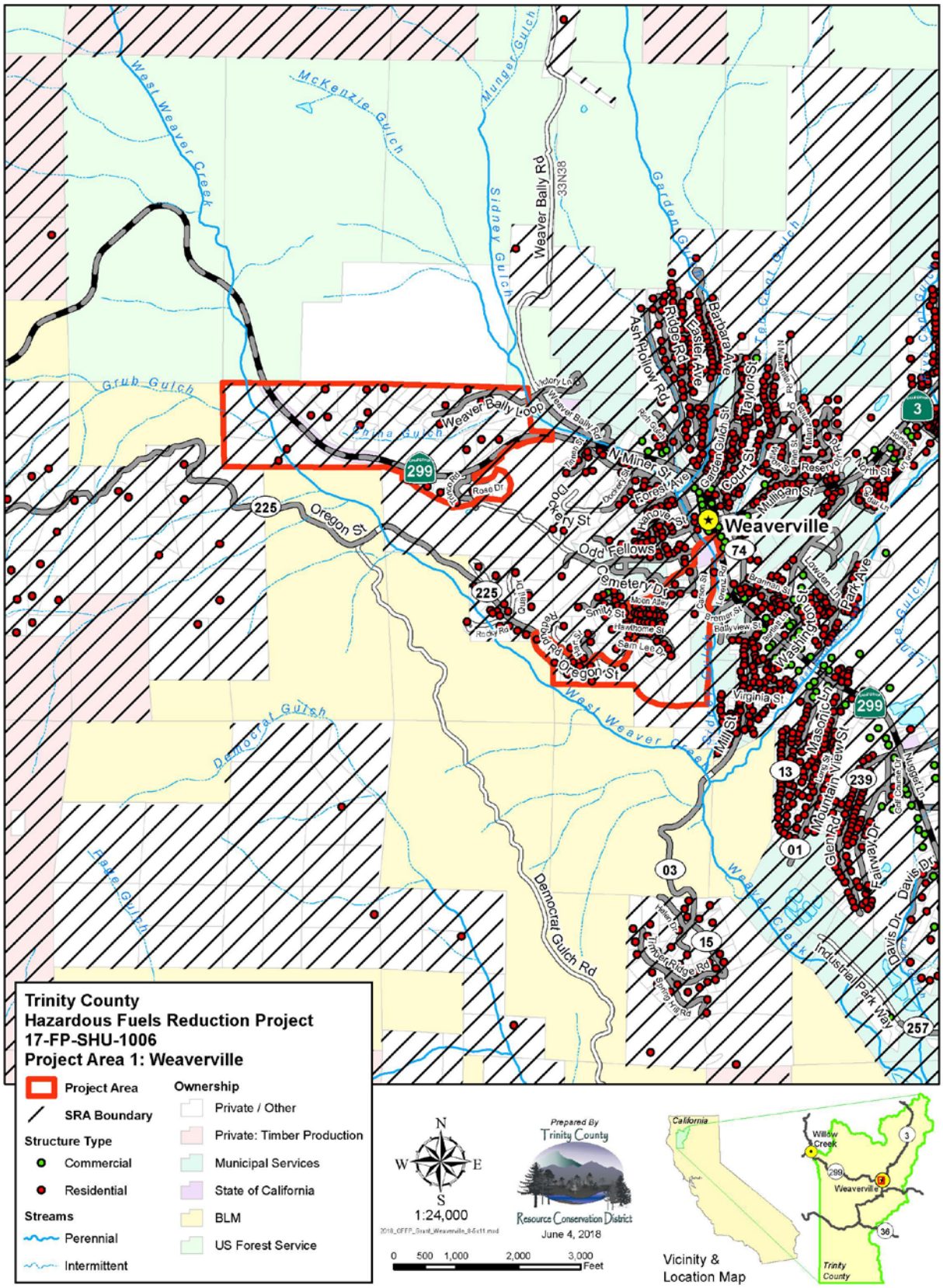

Figure 2. Weaverville Project Area Map

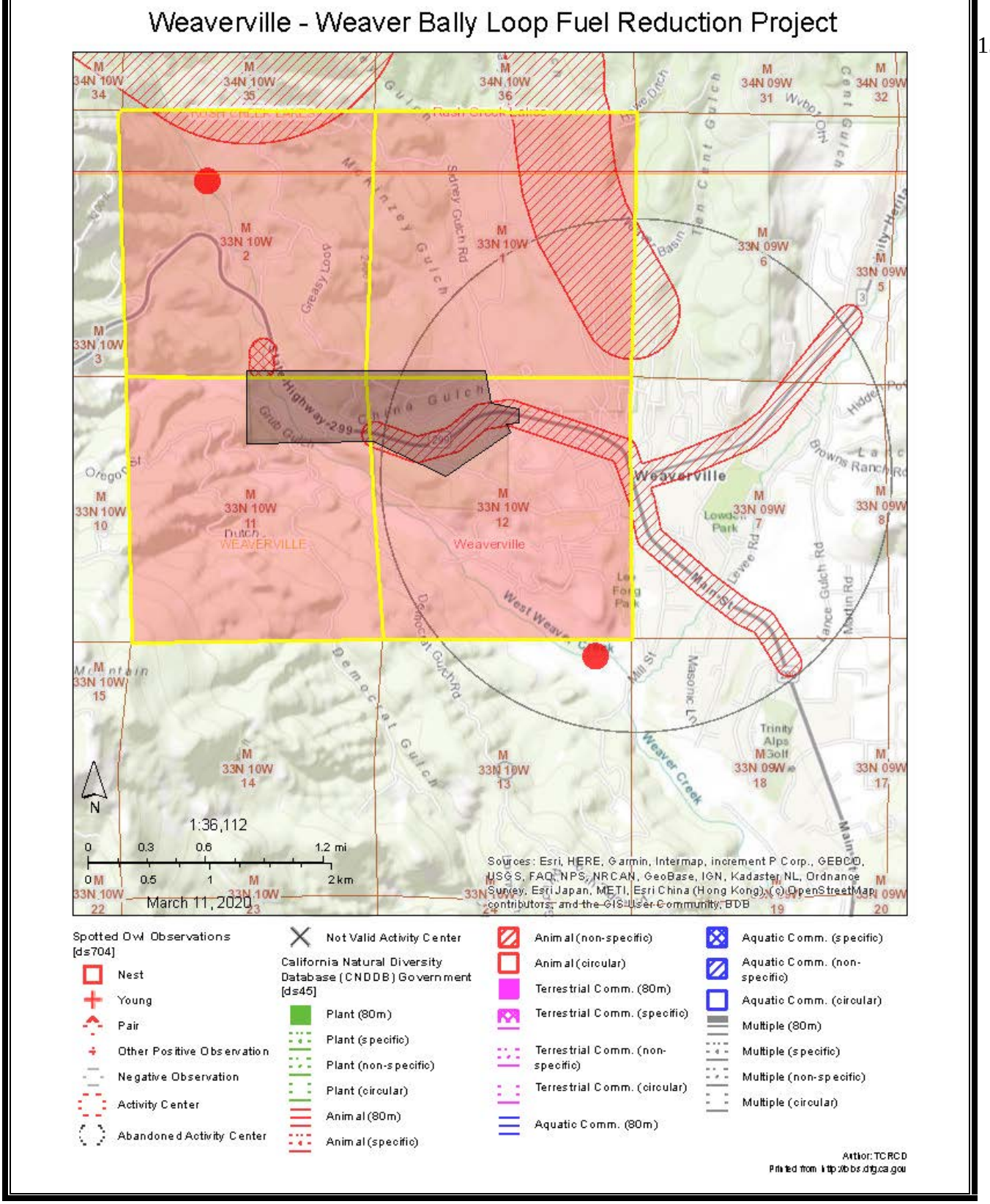

Figure 3. Weaverville CNDDB Species Map