



COLUSA COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

July 10th, 2020

Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Notice of Exemption for the Upper Little Stony Post Ranch Fire Restoration Project

To Whom It May Concern:

The following Notice of Exemption is for the Upper Little Stony Post Ranch Fire Restoration Project, a watershed scale post-fire restoration project on privately owned land within Mendocino National Forest boundary over the next 4 years (April 1st, 2020- March 31st, 2024). The project is in the northwest portion of Colusa County near the communities of Stonyford, Century Ranch and Lodoga.

The project is funded through California's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Forest Health Grant and managed by the Colusa County Resource Conservation District. I am the point of contact regarding any follow-up after the review of the CEQA document. Please find the Notice of Exemption and project map enclosed.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Harper
Executive Director/ Project Manager

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Notice of Exemption

2020070362

To: X Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: Colusa County RCD
100 Sunrise Blvd, Suite B
Colusa, CA 95932

☐ County Clerk
County of Colusa
546 Jay St, suite 200
Colusa, CA. 95932

Project Title: Upper Little Stony Post Ranch Fire Restoration Project

Project Applicant: Colusa County Resource Conservation District

Project Location – Specific: The project area is located within the United States Forest Service on private inholders lands, within that portion of the South Coast Range within northwestern Colusa County.

ULSIA Properties, Colusa County

T16N R7W Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 21 MDBM

Project Location – City: Stonyford

Project Location – County: Colusa

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Colusa County Resource Conservation District (CCRC), Upper Little Stony Inholders' Association (ULSIA) along with Mendocino National Forest (MNF), have coordinated the development of Upper Little Stony Post Ranch Fire Restoration Project as a landscape scale forest restoration/carbon sequestration/fuel reduction project that will help California meet its Greenhouse Gas (GHG) goals, reestablish natural fire regimes and stabilize ecological functions. In 2018 the Ranch Fire destroyed much of the Mendocino National Forest within Colusa County. The area for restoration was severely damaged. This project is to implement forest restoration practices on a watershed level. It is imperative to implement restoration as soon as possible to lessen the damage to remaining trees, wildlife and water on the private inholdings, which will complement the public land restoration. Activities on public and private lands within the Mendocino National Forest are being coordinated to achieve watershed health and habitat restoration. The project is on 1,680 privately owned acres within MNF and will be completed over the next 4 years. The post fire restoration involves reforestation along with biomass removal, pest control and fuels management. The goals of this project will be accomplished through an array of vegetation treatments including:

- Reforestation treatments will have site preparation for replanting on 780 acres by removing dead and damaged biomass through mastication, hand piling, and machine piling. The replanting tree spacing will be 150 trees per acre on a total of 557 acres; natural regeneration will occur the remaining acres.
- Pest control treatment on 750 acres with will include thinning, release, pruning and limited herbicide application to maintain a healthy tree stand of uneven aged trees and meadow restoration.

- Prescribed Burn treatments on 525 acres will be burning biomass slash piles created within the project area during site prep activities.
- Biomass utilization on 880 acres that began with timber salvage on the private lands within the MNF will continue with the removal of dead or dying smaller conifer as well as hardwood for firewood.

This project is designed to develop fire resiliency and restore healthy fire processes through various forest management treatments. Increased GHG rates and growth will be achieved as a result of improved forest health. The anticipated positive impacts of proposed treatment strategies will restore the original forest as well as ecological components of lands within Mendocino National Forest Federal Responsibility Area and State Responsibility Area. Project work will be completed utilizing the above noted vegetation treatments.

Project Components

The proposed project areas are located within Mendocino National Forest where the Ranch Fire, a large-scale, stand-replacing wildfire occurred. Most remaining trees are having post fire pest tree mortality. The majority of the project sites are within severe burn as mapped by the USFS post fire analysis. Restoring the ecosystem health within the various private property project sites will re-establish forestlands that were significantly impacted by fire, and post fire pests. This project will prevent conversion of forests to shrub and non-native invasives and increase carbon storage capacity. Project sites are located on roughly 1,680 acres of private inholdings within the Mendocino National Forest in the 25,850-acre Stony Creek watershed with activities focused in two upper sub watersheds. The majority of **Upper Little Stony Post Ranch Fire Restoration** project area is located within the severely burned sub watersheds of Trout Creek, and Upper Little Stony Creek (12,580 acres). Pre-fire vegetation throughout the project area consists of mixed conifer forest stands along with a few grassy glades. The understory was a mix of conifer, oak and brush species. Various solid stands of brush along with knobcone forest were found at lower elevation on the edge of the project areas. All vegetation was burned, some areas so severely that the original vegetation seed sources were lost.

Without any treatment, the post fire pioneering brush species will continue to establish and significantly increased risk of fire ignition, fire spread, and continuing negative impacts to diverse and balanced vegetation, water quality and other habitat and landscape components.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Colusa County Resource Conservation District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Colusa County Resource Conservation 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));

☒ X Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: 15304. Minor Alterations of Lands

X Statutory Exemption. State code number: 4799.05(d)(1)

Reasons why project is exempt:

The Colusa Count Resource Conservation District is providing project funding obtained through the **California Climate Investments Fire Prevention Grant Program** in order to conduct restoration activities on private lands within the Mendocino National Forest. The CCRCD is also providing project management and other personnel necessary to implement project work. CCRCD has considered the sensitivity of its location, possible cumulative impacts as well as any potential impact due to avoidable circumstances, and found that Categorical Exemption 15304, minor alterations to the land.

This environmental review used the **Upper Little Stony Post Ranch Fire Restoration** scope of work noted above and meet the conditions of California Code 4799.05(d)(1) in that those portions of the project area located within Mendocino National Forest lands in Trout Creek and parts of Little Stony watersheds. These properties have been analyzed under US Forest Service environment analysis processes as described in a NEPA Environmental Assessment document and USFS Decision Memo prepared for similar project. The full NEPA with special biological and cultural studies covered most of the properties for a prescribed burn and fuels treatment. On the private lands, on the same areas, a CCRCD funded fuels treatment project was implemented using Categorical Exemption sec 15304.

THPs, PEIR and exemptions have been completed on all private lands in both watersheds to meet similar environmental compliance for project practices. Within the last 10 years, through a CFIP PEIR, similar practices were used on most properties and on the three properties that were not salvaged. Initial post fire restoration included salvage biomass removal under the consists of **CAL FIRE** approved timber harvest exemptions completed under **California Forest Practices Act** regulations on lands owned by 13 of the 16 owners involved in this project (Exemptions #1-18EM-00094; 00095, 00107, 00114, 00115, 00118, 00129, 00140, 00148, 00157 and #1-19EM 00015, 00016, 00057). The mapped THP exemption areas will have above practices applied. CCRCD RPF with CAL FIRE cultural resources tech training has surveyed and planned all properties (including non-salvaged properties) to address CEQA concerns and to meet the Categorical Exception 15304 guidelines. To assure full compliance, practices to be used are to follow the CAL FIRE CA Forest Improvement Program (CFIP) practices (Article 8, Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Sections 1545-1545.9) and CCRCD will use the CFIP PEIR CEQA checklist combined with the NEPA studies and findings to minimize /avoid any potential impacts.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Elizabeth Harper

Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (530) 458-5131 Ext.117

If filed by applicant:

- 1) Attached certified document of exemption finding.
- 2) Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? **x Yes**

Signature: _____

Date: 7/10/2020

Title: Project Manager

☒ Signed by Lead Agency

Date received for filing at OPR:

☐ Signed by Applicant

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