

PROJECT TITLE	Mt Elizabeth Shaded Fuel Break		
PROJECT LOCATION	T2N, R16E, Portion of Sections 4,5, and 6 MDBM	COUNTY	Tuolumne
LEAD AGENCY	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
CONTACT	Roger Petersen		
ADDRESS	18464 Striker Court Sonora, CA 95370	PHONE	(209) 533-2265 x 109

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project area is located in northwestern Tuolumne County along South Fork Road, Mt Elizabeth Road, Center Camp Road, and Forest Road 2N26. The project is approximately 9 miles northeast of the city of Sonora and 1.25 miles north of the Twain Harte. Project area is defined as 150 feet either side of the roads or designated centerline. The project has two segments, east and west, separated by public lands. The eastern terminus is the Forest Service boundary on Center Camp Road. From here the project follows Center Camp Road south to the intersection of South Fork Road, and then follows South Fork Road to the intersection of Hepler Drive at Carboni Castle. From this point the project follows the PG&E Ditch across the meadow and then follows the section line north to Hepler Road. The project follows Hepler road west to the intersection of Mt. Elizabeth Road. The project forks at this point with the north fork following Mt Elizabeth Road 1.25 miles ending at the USFS property line. The south fork follows Mt. Elizabeth road south to the Intersection of 2N26 and then follows 2N26 ¼ mile to the USFS property line. The western segment of the project starts at the eastern border of the Cedar Ridge subdivision and follows Mt. Elizabeth Drive and 2N26 east 1.2 miles to the USFS property line. Along the South Fork Road and 2N26 sections, the PG&E Ditch follows downhill from the road. In these portions the fuelbreak will extend 150 feet downhill or to the ditch whichever is closer. If the ditch is closer than 150 feet from the road the fuelbreak will be extended up hill to maintain the 300 foot overall width. The portion along 2N26 has been treated in the recent past and this operation will treat re-growth. This road is very important for emergency egress from Cedar Ridge. The project area ranges from approximately 3,800 feet to 4,500 feet in elevation above sea level. The project is along the ridge dividing the Stanislaus River Canyon to the north and the more populated areas of Tuolumne County to the South. The majority of the project follows the PG&E Ditch. This ditch is the main transportation conduit providing water to Sonora and the surrounding area. The ditch is a mix of earth, gunite-lined, and flumes. Protection from wildfire is paramount to the public safety of Tuolumne County. The potential for a fire coming south out of the Stanislaus River Canyon is extreme. South Fork and Mt Elizabeth roads are major access roads for residents and EMS. If a fire did rapidly move south out of the canyon, residents could be trapped with no avenue for escape.

Vegetation type is in the conifer transitional belt and consists of Ponderosa Pine and Chaparral vegetation types. Major tree species include native oaks and conifers, Black Oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), Canyon and Interior Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis and wislizenii*), Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Sugar Pine (*Pinus lambertiana*), and Incense Cedar (*Libocedrus decurrens*). Brush species include manzanita, toyon, ceanothus, poison oak, and bear clover. The area is overstocked with vegetation and crown closure nears 100% except for areas where clearing has occurred for residential building or across the meadow at Twain Harte Valley Golf Course. The conifer component has experienced a large amount of mortality from bark beetles as years of drought have weakened the trees increasing susceptibility to insect attack. Mortality has lessened the last 2 years but the component of dead wood standing and on the ground is excessive. PG&E has completed fuel reduction work on their property along South Fork Road that will augment this project's goals. Understory brush is thick through most of the project. The Oak Fire in June of 2015 burned 100 acres approximately 2.5 miles west of this project. The project consists of shaded fuel break construction. Construction will consist of pre-commercial thinning trees to reduce crown densities to a level that will not carry a crown fire. Trees will be selected to create an open canopy with a goal of 40% crown cover, and improve forest health and vigor. Trees with cavities will be left to maintain wildlife structure. Understory treatments will consist of removal of ground and ladder fuels. Vegetation will be left in open areas so that the distance between shrubs or trees is at least twice the height of the plants. Residual trees will be pruned to 10 feet or ½ the live crown whichever is less. The project area is approximately 128 acres in size with a length of 3.53 miles. Vegetation removal will consist of hand cutting and piling for burning during a safe burn window, mechanical mastication with light and/or heavy equipment, hand cutting and chipping, and/or harvesting using mechanical harvesters or traditional logging techniques. Area designated for mastication is 93 acres. The eastern portion of the project along South Fork and Center Camp roads is planned to be treated mainly by hand crews. Depending on masticating equipment on the project portions of this section may be masticated. Heavy equipment will be confined to slopes that do not exceed 40%. Trees up to 12 inches DBH may be removed if they are dead or anticipated to die within 1 year by a Registered Professional Forester. Any tree posing a threat to life and safety shall be removed. Grass, forbs and other low-lying ground

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vegetation will not be targeted for removal. The primary goal is to disrupt the horizontal and vertical continuity of fuels in order to provide a safe and feasible means of defense against the high probability of vegetation fire within the wildland urban interface.

EXEMPTION STATUS

- Categorical Exemption Type/Section: Class 15304- Minor Alterations to Land
- Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)
- Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT

This project fits under portions of 15304- Minor Alterations to Land.

The Class of Exemption to be used is 14 CCR 15304- Minor Alterations to Land. The project consists of constructing fuel breaks. A query of the CNDDDB did not reveal the presence of any sensitive species. Protection measures for watercourses are consistent with The California Forest Practice Rules. Protection measures for archaeological sites are consistent with Best Management Practices implemented in the area and project impacts are not expected. All burning will be done in accordance with a permit for the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control District.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

JAN 14 2019

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE



Helge Eng., Deputy Director
California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection

1/11/19

Date

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

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