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Notice of Exemption

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

From: RCD of Tehama County
#2 Sutter Street
Red Bluff, CA. 96080

□ County Clerk
County of Red Bluff
633 Washington Street, Room 111
Red Bluff, CA. 96080

Project Title: Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project

Project Applicant: Resource Conservation District of Tehama County

Project Location – Specific: The project area is located on United States Forest Service and Crane Mills lands, within that portion of the South Coast Range within Western Tehama County.

Tatham Shaded Fuel Break (United State Forest Service Property)

T24N R8W SEC: 2, 3, 10, 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 36
T24N R7W SEC: 20, 29, 30

Tatham Plantations (United State Forest Service Property)

T24N R8W SEC: 2, 3, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 36
T23N R8W SEC: 1
T24N R7W SEC: 30, 31
T23N R7W SEC: 6

Patton Mills Fuel Break Project (United State Forest Service Property)

T24N R7W SEC: 31, 32
T23N R7W SEC: 6
T24N R7W SEC: 20

Whiskey Fuel Treatment Project (United State Forest Service Property)

Whiskey Shaded Fuel Break

T23N R7W SEC: 29, 30, 31

Whiskey Roadside (United State Forest Service Property)

T23N R7W SEC: 29, 30
T23N R8W SEC: 24, 25

M/9 Log Springs Fuel Reduction Project (United State Forest Service Property)

T23N R8W SEC: 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35

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4 Beetles South Fuel Treatment Project (United State Forest Service Property)

T23N R8W SEC: 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35

South Ridge Project

T24N R9W SEC 25 and 36

T24N R8W SEC 30

Oak Ridge Habitat Improvement Project (United State Forest Service Property)

T23N R9W SEC 23, 24, 25, and 26

Project Location – City: Paskenta

Project Location – County: Tehama

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:

The **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** consists of multiple components. The Resource Conservation District of Tehama County (RCDTC), Mendocino National Forest, and Crane Mills have designed a large landscape carbon sequestration, forest restoration and fuel reduction project that will help California meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, reestablish natural fire regimes and stabilize ecological functions. The **Mendocino Forest Health Improvement Project** proposes to improve fire resiliency and restore healthy fire processes through various forest management treatments. As a result of improved forest health and fire protection, increased rates of growth and subsequent rates of greenhouse gas sequestration will be achieved. This project will employ land management strategies to lessen the growing trend of high severity fires impacting Mendocino National Forest lands, private timberlands and outlying communities. The anticipated positive impacts as a result of these treatment strategies will improve multiple ecological components of National Forest and State Responsibility Lands including carbon sequestration, ecosystem processes, along with aquatic and wildlife habitat. These proposed efforts will also improve conditions within outlying communities including public safety, sustainability, productivity. The goals of this project will be accomplished through an array of vegetation treatments including:

- Thinning and removal of diseased overstory trees. These trees may be utilized for wood products (lumber or biomass) or piled and burned
- Thinning of small understory trees through mastication, piling and burning or chipping and shipment of material to a local biomass cogeneration plant
- Thinning of young (less than 100 years old) conifer stands and plantations.
- Mastication or broadcast burning depending on vegetation
- Disposal of material unsuitable for commercial utilization through mastication, chipping and burning
- Reforestation through planting of appropriate tree species.

- Retention of suitable snag trees within all treatment units
- Improved green tree and oak retention which will restore balance between attainable forest management practices and development of desired late-seral stand attributes.

Project Components

The **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** consists of multiple components in the form of implementation units which apply a comprehensive and cohesive treatments across the larger landscape which, when combined, meet US Forest Service management and CAL FIRE goals as well as RCD of Tehama County watershed protection/improvement objectives.

Tatham Ridge Fuels Reduction Project (United State Forest Service Property): The Tatham Ridge project component is designed to meet multiple objectives. The main goal of this project work however is to restore an appropriate species balance that results in the development of desired late-seral stands and species diversity. As a forest health improvement, fuels reduction, and fuel break project, Tatham Ridge focuses on protecting the Buttermilk Late Successional Reserve from fire risk. In addition, the proposed actions will treat stands to protect them from forest health hazards (e.g., insects and disease), and to reduce competition and fuel loading within conifer plantations which will maintain current standing carbon and increase future carbon sequestration within the project area. The secondary beneficial effects of this project component are the protection of hydrologic values, provision of wildlife habitat, timber products, and visual interest. To improve the health of approximately 1,441 acres, this project will employ thinning by mastication and/or hand thinning (chainsaw felling or hand lopping), piling, and burning.

Patton Mill Fuel Break Project (United State Forest Service Property): This component of the overall **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** was designed by the RCD of Tehama County as a shaded fuel break and is intended to break up the continuity of forest fuels by creating connectivity with fuel breaks on private land north of the project area. This project aims to reduce the potential for large fires (and their resulting contributions of greenhouse gases) to spread into public and privately owned forest lands or onto downslope privately owned foothill rangelands and adjacent communities. Implementation of this project also increases the likelihood of long-term carbon storage in protected residual trees. Thinning prescriptions direct the retention of the largest, healthiest site-appropriate trees, which lead to a higher probability of long-term survival and carbon sequestration.

Implementation of the Patton Mill project component is already in progress; however, grant funds will help to address the treatment of sub merchantable vegetation needed to effectively impact forest health and fire behavior. The project area includes the creation of an up to 400 foot wide roadside buffer (typically 200 feet on either side of the road), totaling 48 acres. Thinning and pile burning will create space between crowns and retain the largest, healthiest trees, which would contribute to future tree survival in the event of a fire passing through the area.

Whiskey Fuel Treatment Project (United State Forest Service Property): The primary purpose of the Whiskey project is to improve the growth rate and health of plantations and natural stands adjacent to major roads on approximately 214 acres of land through tree density reduction treatments (thinning, piling and burning). Secondary benefits are carbon stabilization, pest management, fuel reduction, and improvements to forest transportation routes. Thinning within these stands are anticipated to increase diameter growth and bark thickness in residual trees. These treatments will also contribute to safer ingress and egress during wildfire events as the treatment area follows along the M4 road and County Road 55. In addition, this project connects to Crane Mills ridgeline fuel breaks to the west.

Most of the treatment areas are within plantations and younger stands (less than 40 years old). Thinning will result in variable spacing of residual trees. This project is also designed to help protect the Buttermilk Late Successional Reserve and other fish and wildlife habitat by reducing hazardous fuel levels within and adjacent to its boundaries. It is desirable to maintain the proposed treatment areas as a shaded fuel break, thinning as necessary in the future in order to maintain vigor and adequate canopy cover. Once created, treatment areas will help to decrease the chance of loss from wildfire and as a result, will allow for long-term carbon storage and sequestration within the remaining trees. This project is already in progress, CCI funds would enable project work to be completed in a more effective and timely manner.

M9/Log Springs Fuel Reduction Project (United State Forest Service Property): The proposed project is anticipated to improve forest health by removing beetle killed and infested trees, reduce inter-tree competition and increase individual tree growth rates. These actions will reduce the potential for subsequent bark beetle related tree mortality and spread within the residual stand, as well as protecting adjacent stands, including the Buttermilk Late Successional Reserve. Fire suppression and forest management activities have resulted in this portion of the overall project area being dominated by woody vegetation, canopy disturbance, an increase in surface fuels and understory density as well as inter-tree composition. The resulting conditions reduce the potential of high carbon emissions and loss from wildfire or insect and disease.

The **M9/Log Springs Fuel Reduction Project** includes timber stand improvement techniques that strategically thin 236 acres of ponderosa pine and black oak dominated stands. Trees selected for retention will be the healthiest and most vigorous in the stand, promoting long-term carbon storage and sequestration in the project area.

4 Beetles South Fuel Treatment Project (United State Forest Service Property): The treatments to be completed in this project component were identified in a collaborative landscape analysis, the outcome of which determined that there is a significant need for and opportunities to reestablish natural fire regimes and improve ecological functions on 1,327 acres of Mendocino National forest lands. This project seeks to address tree mortality due to insects and disease which are a primary cause of tree mortality. Values that are at risk of loss under current unhealthy conditions include carbon storage through elevated levels of mortality, loss of standing live carbon in the event of a wildfire in areas of high surface fuel loading and visual characteristics.

The project work will improve forest health by accomplishing the following objectives:

- Increase health and vigor of forest stands (e.g., reduce density and tree mortality);
- Increase structural and tree species diversity (e.g., recruit a new age class of trees);
- Increase incremental growth of trees;
- Improve genetics of stands; and
- Maintain and improve growing conditions for black oak.

This project utilizes various thinning treatments to meet the objectives of forest health improvement and fuels reduction. The total project area is 1,327 acres; within those acres the following treatments would be completed as appropriate and some may overlap:

- Thinning and removal of overstory or mid-canopy,
- Proportional thin (thinning throughout diameter range),
- Mechanical thinning, yarding, and hauling of understory material for electrical generation,
- Mastication thinning or hand thinning, piling, and pile burning, and
- Reforestation with a focus on enhancing species diversity.

South Ridge Project: (Crane Mills Property) The South Ridge Project component of the **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** focuses primarily on forest health improvement that

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will result in carbon stabilization and wildfire risk reduction. This component of the overall project entails a 903 acre timber harvest operation and related stand improvement work that was analyzed in a Cal Fire approved Timber Harvest Plan (#2-14-046-TEH) prepared under California Forest Practices Act regulations. Costs associated with the harvest of merchantable timber would be incurred and paid for by Crane Mills who own and manage lands within the South Ridge Project portion of the overall project area. Those costs associated with improving forest health, fire/fuels management and fire ecology conditions within 700 acres of the South Ridge Project area have been incorporated into the **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project budget**.

In completing harvest operations, sanitation-salvage and shelterwood removal step practices will be utilized as appropriate for each stand of trees within harvest areas. Recent mortality among all species within the South Ridge project area is attributed to dwarf mistletoe infestation within Ponderosa pine and Klamath Mixed Conifer understory stands. In general, artificial regeneration will not be required in order to meet stocking standards after harvest as stocking among sub-merchantable sized trees is adequate at approximately 308 trees per acre. An exception would be those areas where the understory is heavily infected with dwarf mistletoe. During harvest operations an assessment of the site will be completed in order to evaluate the extent of mistletoe infestation. Trees that are infected with dwarf mistletoe will be either pruned or removed. If holes within project area stands are a 10th of an acre or larger, these will be planted with a conifer species that are resistant to the current infestations. Where there are gaps in stocking or a need for a particular species, all healthy and vigorous larger tree (24"+ dbh) will be left as seed trees. Conversely, if seed trees that have successfully regenerated the surrounding area inhibit growth of the advanced reproduction, these will be harvested. Post-harvest activities and forest improvement work to be a part of the project budget include mechanical thinning, mastication, yarding, and hauling of non-marketable timber and other vegetative debris suitable for energy generation at a biomass treatment facility.

Oak Ridge Habitat Improvement Project: This project involves hardwood and chaparral management to improve wildlife habitat and reduce fire hazards to the adjacent late successional habitat. The Oak Ridge project primarily focuses on thinning understory small diameter conifer species from hardwood stands to promote stand longevity and reduce ladder fuels. This will be accomplished through burning 362 acres which will stimulate new growth, produce a mosaic of age classes, and reduce continuity of fuels. The Oak Ridge project is an on-going, long-term management objective that ties into the work done on the M9/Log Springs and 4 Beetles South fuel break projects.

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

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Resource Conservation District of Tehama County

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));
- 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:

Per 4799.05(d)(1) of the California Code, CEQA does not apply to prescribed fire, thinning, or fuel reduction projects undertaken on federal lands that reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been

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reviewed under provisions established in the National Environmental Protection Act. This exemption is contingent upon whether the primary role of a state or local agency is to provide funding or staffing for such projects. In connection with **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** efforts, the Resource Conservation District of Tehama County is providing project funding obtained through the **California Climate Investments Fire Prevention Grant Program** in order to conduct fuel reduction activities on federal lands within the Mendocino National Forest. The RCDTC is also providing project management and other personnel necessary to implement project work.

The **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** scope of work described under Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: shown above meet the conditions of **California Code 4799.05(d)(1)** in that those portions of the project area located on Mendocino National Forest lands have been analyzed under US Forest Service environment analysis processes as described in a NEPA Environmental Assessment document and USFS Decision Memo prepared for each project component described above. In addition, that portion of **Tehama Mendocino Fuel Reduction Partnership Project** work to be completed in connection with the South Ridge Project component will be implemented on private timberlands and has been analyzed in a **Timber Harvest Plan (#2-14-046-TEH)** prepared and approved under the regulations of the California Forest Practices Act.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Jon Barrett **Area Code/Telephone/Extension:** 530-727-1280 Ext: 103

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: 6/5/2019

Title: Project Manager

- Signed by Lead Agency
- Signed by Applicant

Date received for filing at OPR:

Governor's Office of Planning & Research
JUN 05 2019
STATE CLEARINGHOUSE