

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Planning and Research
PO Box 3044, 1400 Tenth Street, Rm 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Habitat Conservation Planning Branch
Native Plant Program
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

Project Title: Effects of Insect Biological Control Agents on *Cirsium ciliolatum* (Project)

Project Location: U.S. Department of Agriculture Western Regional Research Center, 800 Buchanan St., Albany, CA 94710 in Alameda County (quarantine laboratory, 37.885993°N, -122.303536°E).

Project Description: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife is issuing a permit to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Western Regional Research Center [Permit No. 2081(a)-20-015-RP] pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081(a) for a project to determine if two insect biological control agents can attack or damage non-target plant species such as a closely related state-listed endangered plant *Cirsium ciliolatum*. The insects being evaluated are two weevils, *Larinus filiformis* whose only known host plant is yellow star-thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and *Larinus latus* whose only known host plant is Scotch thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*). The *Cirsium ciliolatum* plants will be exposed to the insects in two settings, (1) with the known host plant species (yellow star-thistle or Scotch thistle) to confirm if the insects will preferentially target their known host plant species, and (2) in the absence of the known host plant species to determine whether the insects will feed on, lay eggs on, and can develop in the flower heads of *Cirsium ciliolatum* when presented with no alternative. The results will help determine if *Cirsium ciliolatum* is at risk of damage by these insects or if the insects may be safely released as biological control agents of yellow star-thistle and Scotch thistle, two invasive species. Tissue samples will undergo DNA analysis at a USDA facility in Montana. Any vouchered specimens of the cultivated plants will be stored at approved herbaria within California.

California Public Agency Approving Project: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Lincoln Smith, U.S. Department of Agriculture-ARS-WRRC-ISPH

Exempt Status:

- Ministerial;
- Declared Emergency;
- Emergency Project;
- Categorical Exemption. Type and section number: Section 15306, Class 6

Reasons why project is exempt: The Project consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a major disturbance to an environmental resource. The permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for the Project includes measures to ensure that existing populations of *Cirsium ciliolatum* are not negatively impacted.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Raffica La Rosa

Area Code/Telephone/ Extension: (916) 206-4502

Signature:  _____ **Date:** 12/23/2020

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Isabel Baer, Native Plant Program Manager

- Signed by Lead Agency
- Date Received for filing at OPR: _____