

Grants Program CEQA Exemption Review
USFS Tahoe National Forest, Big Chief Restoration, G17-02-20-R01

Summary: This is phase 2 of a restoration project that was submitted in 2018. Phase 1 consisted of preparing environmental documents for the project to support a NEPA analysis. The supplemental NEPA information was used in this exemption review and clearly identifies that the restoration work can be considered exempt from further CEQA review.

Applicable Exemptions	
Applicable Exemption Categories	Description of Proposed Activity(ies)
<u>15304</u> Minor Alterations to Land	The Tahoe NF proposes to conduct the Big Chief Restoration Project, which comprises eradicating and blocking approximately 30 miles (~7 acres) of user-created unauthorized OHV trails that were not included as system trails under the Tahoe National Forest Motor Vehicle Travel Management Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (Sept. 2010). The trails would be decompacted using a combination of mini-excavator and hand work to stimulate natural revegetation. Large boulders, locally available logs and brush, and 8x8 posts (if needed) would be placed to block future OHV access. Weed-free straw and/or natural woody debris would be scattered on disturbed ground to reduce erosion potential. Signs would be installed to educate OHV users of closed status of unauthorized routes and/or direct users to legal OHV opportunities. The restoration is associated with, but independent of, development of the Big Chief Trail, and restoration funds would not be used for trail development.
Wetlands, sensitive habitats, T&E, special-status species	USFS completed biological surveys for special-status plants and terrestrial and aquatic animals within the project area. Surveys determined no special-status plants are present. The project includes standard measures to ensure any seed or plant mixes, if used, would not include invasive nor persistent non-native species. Although special-status wildlife species, e.g., California spotted owl, northern goshawk, and pine marten, could be present in the project area, the project incorporates standard measures, including buffers and LOPs, to ensure significant adverse effects would be avoided. Designated critical habitat does not occur in the project area. A complete list of BMPs is included in the Terrestrial Wildlife evaluation attached to the Decision Memo. No sensitive habitats, such as wetlands, would be adversely affected.
Cumulative effects	The restoration work would occur in the same vicinity and timeframe as the Big Chief trail project, but the project would restore user-created trails and not contribute to any adverse effects of trail construction or operation.
Steep slopes, erodible soils	The project incorporates soils and hydrological monitoring during any ground disturbing activities. Weed-free straw baffles and bales will be utilized to reduce soil erosion of freshly disturbed soil. Restoration should ultimately reduce erosion.

Applicable Exemptions	
Applicable Exemption Categories	Description of Proposed Activity(ies)
State scenic highway	The project is not within the viewshed of any designated state scenic highways.
Hazardous materials	The project area is not located on a site included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the California Government Code (hazardous materials).
Historic or cultural resources	USFS completed cultural resources inventories of the project area (2017 and 2021) and determined that although historic properties are in the project area, adverse effects to all properties could be avoided via standard protection measures (Big Chief Restoration, Tahoe National Forest Cultural Resource Report R2019051700061; Feb. 1, 2021). These measures are consistent with the 2018 Regional Programmatic Agreement with SHPO.
Indirect impacts	There would be no adverse indirect impacts of implementing the restoration project. Areas to be restored are already closed to motorized recreation. Successful restoration should discourage further incursions into closed areas. Signage should direct recreationist to nearby designated OHV routes.



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division
1725 23rd Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, California 95816

Armando Quintero, Director

Notice of Exemption

Table with 2 columns: To: Office of Planning and Research, P.O. Box 3044, Room 113, Sacramento, CA 95812-3044; From: California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR), Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division, 1725 23rd Street, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95816-7100

Project Title: Tahoe National Forest, Big Chief Restoration

Project Applicant: USFS Tahoe National Forest

Project Location – Specific: Tahoe National Forest, Truckee Ranger District

Project Location – City: Sawtooth Ridge, Big Chief area; Project Location – County: Placer

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: The project comprises restoring approximately 30 miles (~7 acres) of user-created unauthorized OHV trails. Trails will be decompacted using a combination of mini-excavator and hand work to stimulate natural revegetation. Large boulders, locally available logs and brush, and 8x8 posts (if needed) will be placed to block future OHV access. Weed-free straw and/or natural woody debris will be scattered to reduce erosion potential. Signs will educate OHV users of closures and/or direct users to legal OHV opportunities.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: CDPR, OHMVR Division

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: USFS Tahoe National Forest

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 (CE). 15304 Minor alterations to land
Statutory Exemptions. State code number.
Activity not subject to CEQA review. Section 15378, Not a CEQA project

Reasons why project is exempt: The project is exempt because it falls within the CE class listed above. Project activities described above do not have the potential for causing a significant adverse effect on the environment. A CEQA Exemption Review Form for the project is on file at the OHMVR Division office listed above.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Jon O'Brien, Environmental Program Mgr.

Signature: Jon O'Brien

Area Code/Telephone/Extension:

(916) 204-0871

3/17/2021

Date:

[X] Signed by Lead Agency

Date received for filing at OPR:

[] Signed by Applicant