

Environmental Review Report for an Exempt Project

Note: This report form is intended for use to document a limited environmental impact analysis supporting the filing of a notice of exemption document for a proposed project. Although the project appears to fit within the descriptions for allowable categorical exemptions, this report presents the project proponent's review for possible exceptions that would preclude finding the project to be categorically exempt as discussed in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2. This report will be filed with the CEQA administrative record for this project to document the environmental impact analysis conducted by the project proponent.

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Project Name:	Weaver Basin Programmatic Fuels Reduction
Project Number:	N/A
Program Type:	Fuels Reduction
County:	Trinity
Acres:	Up to 400/year
Legal Location:	Sections 35,35 and 36 T34N, R10W; Sections 7,17,19,28,29,30,31,32,33 and 34 T34N R9W; Sections 1,2,3,10,11,12,13,23,24,25 and 36, T33N R10W; Sections 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,15,16,17,18,19,21,29,30 and 31, T33N R9W, Mt. Diablo Meridian.
Name of USGS 7.5' Quad Map(s):	Weaverville, Rush Creek Lakes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Vicinity Map Attached <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Location Map Attached <input type="checkbox"/> Photos Attached	

Other Public Agency Review or Permit Required:		
Would the project result in:	YES	NO
Alterations to a watercourse (DFW - Lake and Stream Alteration Agreement)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Conversion of timberland (CAL FIRE - Conversion Permit or Exemption)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Demolition (Local Air District - Demolition Permit)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Soil disturbance over 1 acre (RWQCB - SWPPP)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Fill of possible wetlands (404 Permit - USACE)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Discuss any above-listed topic item checked Yes and consultation with agencies:		

Project Description and Environmental Setting (describe the project activities, project site and its surroundings, its location, and the environmental setting):
<p>The Trinity County Resource Conservation District (District) is planning the implementation of fuels reduction in strategic areas within the Weaver Creek Watershed, whose largest population is Weaverville, CA. (Figure 1). Fire suppression over the last 100 years has greatly reduced fire frequency, resulting in vegetative and structural changes throughout the surrounding areas. These changes have generally increased wildfire risk and the threat it poses to life and property. Over the last 20 years several large fires have burned near and within this watershed. These fires include; the 2001 Oregon Fire, 2006 Junction Fire, and the 2014 Oregon Fire. All of which threatened the community of Weaverville and prompted emergency evacuations.</p> <p>The goal of this document is to justify a programmatic Notice of Exemption for the Weaver Creek Watershed. This document will help facilitate work in the Weaver Basin by the Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) as well with our partners. It will continue the deliberate investments in community wildfire protection, watershed restoration and wildlife habitat enhancement.</p> <p>The Weaver Creek watershed is over 30,000 acres with a mix of private lands, commercial timberland, and Municipal services as well as state and public lands (Shasta-Trinity National Forest, Bureau of Land Management). This document will not cover work done on public lands. The primary treatment proposed is hand cutting and chipping (where feasible) throughout this area where there are needs. Work will primarily take place around homes and in residential areas creating defensible space and improving ingress egress routes. The goals are to increase the fire safety around homes and in communities where extreme fire behavior effects would be mitigated and where suppressions activities could occur effectively. Our goal is also to improve ingress/egress for first responders and potential evacuees. Elevations range from approximately 1800' – 3800', Topography varies with large flat expanses in the vicinity of Weaverville's center to much steeper terrain in the surrounding mountains. The vegetation communities and fuel types found throughout the project area are fairly diverse and patchy in consistency..</p>

The entire ecosystem found throughout the area is fire adapted and has developed with fire since the last ice age. The area is characterized primarily as mixed conifer, with components of oak woodland, chaparral and grasslands. Grassland areas consists mainly of native and non-native grasses and forbs, including Yellow star thistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*) and Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*). The mixed conifer consist primarily of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) with and Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) with lesser components of Sugar pine (*Pinus lambertiana*), Grey Pine (*Pinus sabiniana*) California black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*), Canyon live oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*), Pacific madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), and Incense cedar (*Calocedrus decurrens*). The canopy is closed throughout most of the treatment area with some brush existing in openings consisting of but not limited to: Wedgeleaf ceanothus (buckbrush) (*Ceanothus cuneatus*), Greenleaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos patula*), and Whiteleaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos viscida*). Conifers have encroached into many of the oak woodland and grassland areas, resulting in the loss of these important habitat types. Chaparral ecosystem type and/or associated species also occurs throughout some of the project area.

The proposed fuel reduction treatments involve the removal of ladder fuels and selectively thinning subdominant trees and brush to break the continuity of the fuels (vertical and horizontal continuity) to reduce rate of fire spread, duration, intensity, or crown fire. Additionally dead or dying trees that pose a threat to public health and safety will be removed as conditions warrant. The fuel reduction treatments will be accomplished with hand crews utilizing chainsaws and a tow-behind chipper that will be operated on existing roads. No heavy equipment operations are proposed and no soil disturbance is expected. All cut material will be chipped on site where feasible. Cut materials that are not feasible to be chipped will be loped and scattered to CAL FIRE standards or may be stacked or piled for use by landowner or to create wildlife habitat. Tree boles that are too large to be chipped will be left on site for community firewood use or wildlife habitat. Burning will not be conducted as part of these projects. In the treatment areas all brush and smaller trees will be removed. Intermediate sized trees (up to 10" DBH) will be thinned to a spacing of 12-20 feet with the goal of retaining the healthiest trees with the largest crowns. Any larger trees proposed for removal (live or dead over 10" DBH) will be marked by designated staff. Limbs and branches will be removed from retained trees up to 8 feet from the ground. When hardwood sprouting has occurred they will be thinned to leave 2-3 dominant stems.

Environmental Impact Analysis

Aesthetics

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Impacts to visual resources would be particularly small in comparison to impacts that are associated with wildland fire and accompanying suppression impacts. The project is visible mainly to the nearby residential areas where treatments occur. Some treatments may be visible to the travelling public due to the location, topography, and the type of treatment, which entails hazardous fuel reduction and chipping. Overall, the aesthetic appeal of the areas should be improved through fuel reduction treatments and will result in negligible impacts to scenic quality and visual resources.

Landowner privacy will be considered and maintained as directed by each participating landowner through pretreatment consultations. The project will have no significant impact on scenic vistas, scenic resources, or the existing visual character and quality of the areas. The project will not create a new source of light that would adversely affect daytime or nighttime views.

Agriculture and Forest Resources

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 Yes No Would any trees be felled? If yes, discuss protection of nesting birds, if necessary.
 Yes No Would the project convert any prime or unique farmland?
 Yes No Would the project result in the conversion of forest land or timberland to non-forest use?
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Thinning will only occur in the understory. Trees over 10 inches in DBH will not be removed unless they pose a threat to operations. Most of the trees that require thinning are between 0 and 6 inches DBH. Thinning shall not be conducted in the overstory stands.

Before any tree is felled it will be assessed for the presence of any nests. If any active nest is observed the tree will not be felled.

No healthy, mature, scenic trees will be removed by this project pursuant to section 15304 of CEQA. No impacts to agriculture and forest reserves is expected.

Air Quality

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- Yes No The local Air Quality Management District guidelines for dust abatement and other air quality concerns were reviewed for this project.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Project implementation may produce small amounts of particulates as a consequence of chipping cut vegetation. The processed material will be broadcast away from roads and structures. Dust abatement is not a concern since all vehicles and equipment will be operating from existing roads and stationary during operating periods. No burning is proposed, hence no smoke impacts will occur. The project will not result in any significant impact to air quality.

Biological Resources

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- Yes No Will the project potentially effect biological resources?
- Yes No Was a current California Natural Diversity Database review completed? Results discussed below:
- Yes No Was a biological survey of the project area completed? Results discussed below:
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Queries of the California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDDB) were conducted in April of 2021. The Weaverville and Rush Creek Lakes quads as well as the surrounding 10 quads were queried to determine the potential occurrence of rare, threatened or endangered species and species of special concern.

The 12 quad search centered on the project area generated an occurrence report of plant and animal species. Several species were listed as "Threatened" or "Endangered". These species include; Northern Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), the foothill yellow-legged frog (*Rana Boylii*), Franklin's bumble bee (*Bombus franklini*), western bumble bee (*Bombus occidentalis*), summer-run steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykill irideus*), chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and the Cascades frog (*Cascades frog*).

Additionally, In April 2021 the official species list for the project area was generated from the US Fish and Wildlife Service website (<https://ecos.fws.gov/ipac>). According to the US Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service's Information for Planning and Consultation tool (IPaC), the following federally threatened or endangered plant and animal species or their habitat were identified to possibly be found within the project area: Northern Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), Conservation fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta conservation*), Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp (*Branchinecta lynchi*), Vernal Pool Tadpole Shrimp (*Lepidurus packardi*) and McDonald's Rock-cress (*Arabis mcdonaldiana*). The 12 quad CNDDDB query does not indicate the presence of any CRPR list 1 or 2 species. No serpentine soils or large rock outcrops are present. Habitat exist within the project area for the foothill yellow-legged frog. This species is found in flowing streams and rivers; project activities will not occur within wetland or riparian areas so species will not be affected. A field survey was performed on January 14, 2021. No individuals of CNDDDB or Forest TESP species were found Whether present or not, many native California plants are perennial herbs that have evolved with fire as a natural disturbance. The proposed treatment, in many ways, mimics a natural fire regime.

For each species above, habitat attributes were identified and analyzed to determine the likelihood of their actual presence within the project area. Consideration was also given to the proposed project activities and the likelihood of any significant adverse impacts to any listed or non-listed species as a result of those activities. The proposed understory thinning will have no effect and will not remove potential nesting structure associated with nesting bird species.

Habitat for the species listed below are not present in areas that will receive treatment. This project will have no significant adverse impacts to these species, and they were not considered further.

Northern Spotted Owl	Yellow-billed cuckoo	Vernal Pool Tadpole Shrimp
Bald Eagle	Conservation fairy shrimp	Vernal Pool Fairy Shrimp
Mcdonald's Rock-cress		

Only one terrestrial wildlife species, the Northern Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) (NSO), is federally listed for this area and occurs near the project area.

The potential effects analyzed regarding this species are:

- Disturbance and direct harm from noise or activity related to project implementation.
- Modification or removal of suitable habitat resulting in effects to NSO.
- Modification or removal of suitable habitat resulting in effects to designated Critical Habitat.

Direct Harm/Disturbance

All work will occur around homes and within established roadway corridors. It is assumed that no NSO are present or adjacent to the treatment area so LOP's are not warranted.

Habitat Modification

No nesting/roosting or foraging habitat was observed within or directly adjacent to any of the treatment areas. Since proposed activities are limited to thinning of small diameter trees and brush, effects to overstory in dispersal habitats are expected to be minimal or non-existent, and project activities are not expected to affect the ability for NSO to disperse throughout the project area.

As a result of these measures, project activities are very unlikely to cause any larger changes in the quantity, availability or distribution of prey species that would alter normal NSO behavior patterns or the likelihood of NSO survival or reproductive success. It is therefore determined that the activities associated with this project will have no effect on NSO or NSO habitat suitability.

Critical Habitat Modification

This project will occur entirely on private lands which excluded from designation as Critical Habitat for this species. Therefore, no NSO Critical Habitat will be affected, and the appropriate determination for effects to Critical Habitat is "no effect."

No significant adverse impacts are expected for to the Northern Spotted Owl as a result of project activities.

No impacts to Biological resources are expected.

Cultural Resources/Tribal Cultural Resources

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- Yes No Was a current archaeological records check completed? Results discussed below:
- Yes No Was a professional archaeologist consulted? Results discussed below:
- Yes No Was an archaeological survey of the project area completed? Results discussed below:
- Yes No Will the project effect any historic, archaeological or tribal cultural resources?
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

No burning or ground disturbing activities are proposed with this project. Therefore, no archaeological record check or cultural survey is required. The project will have no significant impact on cultural resources.

Energy

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This section does not apply to this project as the proposed treatments will not affect energy efficiency in any way. No energy will be produced or altered, the project will not result in any unnecessary energy consumption. No effect to energy is anticipated.

Geology and Soils

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The proposed project should not result in significant adverse impacts to slope stability or soil productivity due to the following conditions and project parameters:

- The treatment areas do not contain any known unstable areas.
- Only hand crews will be used for this project. Additionally, the entire overstory stand, and most of the understory stand will be retained.

No impacts related to geology and soils is anticipated.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 Yes No Would the project generate significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions?
 Yes No Would these GHG emissions result in a significant impact on the environment? Discuss below:
 Yes No Would the project conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases? Discuss below:

A small amount of GHG emissions will result from vehicle traffic going to and from the project site, as well as the operation of a diesel chipper and gas chainsaws. However, the amount of GHGs released would be negligible in comparison to those released by a catastrophic wildfire. This project mitigates the risk of catastrophic wildfire and any associated GHG emissions. In addition, selective thinning of codominant and subdominant trees will release the remaining conifers and hardwoods, resulting in an increased rate of carbon sequestration over a longer temporal scale. Implementation of this project will likely result in a net reduction of GHG emissions and will not conflict with CA AB32.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Safety hazards could result during the operations phase through the use of, chainsaws, and chippers. All necessary precautions will be implemented to ensure personnel safety. These precautions include proper training and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

This project will require the use of two cycle fuel and diesel fuel to operate equipment. A hazardous materials endorsement will not be required. Equipment will be refueled only on existing roads or at least 100ft from water ways.

Hydrology and Water Quality

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 Yes No Will the project potentially affect any watercourse or body of water?
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

All active watercourses or bodies of water will be afforded a minimum 50' no cut buffer. The project will have no significant impact on Hydrology or Water Quality.

Land Use and Planning

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This section does not apply as the project will not change or conflict with and any land use plan, policy, or regulation. No effect is anticipated.

Mineral Resources

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This section does not apply as there are no known mineral resources found within the treatment area, no effect is anticipated as a result of this project.

Noise

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Vegetation treatment will require the use of chainsaws and a chipper, which will generate noise that may be audible to landowners within and near the project areas. However, work will occur during the business week and residents have been informed of the nature of work and the associated noise. In addition, the project areas are surrounded by private properties, where chainsaws and other internal combustion engines are regularly operating. This project will not significantly increase adverse noise levels.

Population and Housing

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This section does not apply as project components (fuel reduction/prescribed burning) are not related to population and housing, there will be no effect.

Public Services

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This section does not apply as project components will not impact or change any public services, or fire/police protection and their ability to respond and perform. No effect is anticipated.

Recreation

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

No impacts to recreation is anticipated.

Transportation and Traffic

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This project will generate an insignificant amount of road traffic from work crews and project management. This project will not generate road blockages or impede ingress or egress to or from the treatment areas. No impacts to transportation and traffic is anticipated.

Utilities and Service Systems

- This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Several power and utility lines run through the project footprint. No trees will be felled that could threaten the power and utility lines. No effect is anticipated.

Wildfire
 This topic does not apply to this project and was not evaluated further.
 This topic could apply to this project, and results of the assessment are provided below:
 This project will allow multiple treatments to occur within the project footprint. These treatments have the potential to mitigate extreme fire behavior diminishing the effects of catastrophic wildfire.

Changes Made to Avoid Environmental Impacts:
 N/A

Mandatory Findings of Significance:	YES	NO
(a) Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? “Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probably future projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Justification for Use of a Categorical Exemption (discuss why the project is exempt, cite exemption number(s), and describe how the project fits the class): The proposed project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15304. Pursuant to Section 15304, Class 4 consists of minor private alterations of vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees.
 No exceptions apply which would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. The project consists of minor treatments to land and vegetation in the form of hand thinning and chipping via hand crews. The activities do not result in the taking of endangered, rare, or threatened plant or animal species, or sedimentation to surface waters. This project will not convert forestland to non-forest uses, and all treated vegetation will have the ability to grow back. No significant environmental impact would occur to aesthetics, agriculture and forestland/timberland, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation/traffic, utilities and service systems, or to wildfire.

Conclusion:
 After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the description for the various classes of categorical exemptions to CEQA, the project proponent has determined that the project fits within one or more of the exemption classes and no exceptions exist at the project site which would preclude the use of this exemption. The project proponent considered the possibility of (a) sensitive location, (b) cumulative impact, (c) significant impact due to unusual circumstances, (d) impacts to scenic highways, (e) activities within a hazardous waste site, and (f) significant adverse change to the significance of a historical resource. A notice of exemption will be filed.
 After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the description for the various classes of categorical exemptions to CEQA, the project proponent has determined that the project does not fit within the description for the various exemption classes or has found that exceptions exist at the project site that precludes the use of a categorical exemption for this project. Additional environmental review will be conducted and the appropriate CEQA document used may be a negative declaration or a mitigated negative declaration.

Figure 1: Project Vicinity Map

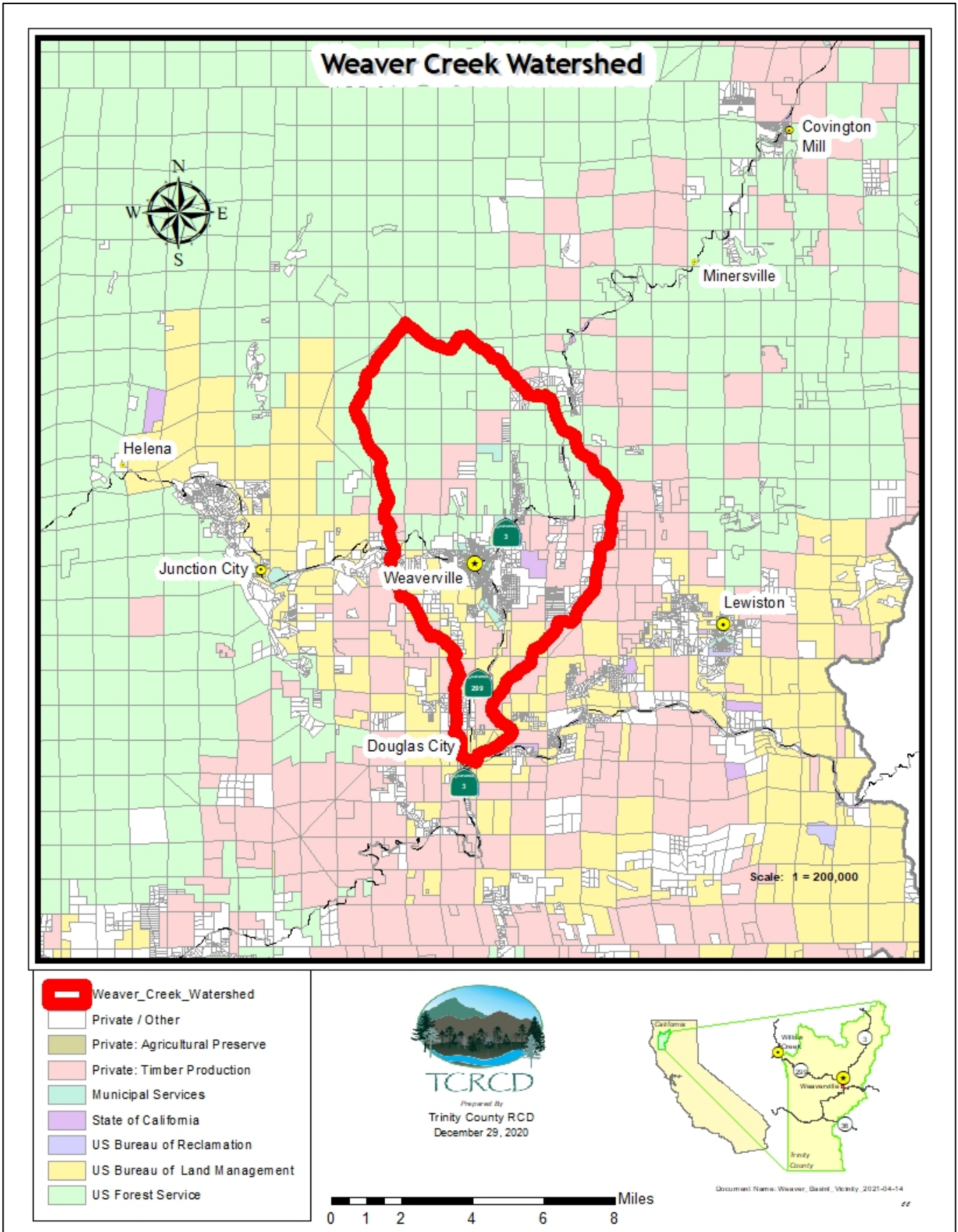


Figure 2: Project Location Map

