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Northstar Fire Department
Northstar Community Services District
910 Northstar Drive, Northstar, CA 96161
P: 530.562.1212 • F: 530.562.0702 • www.northstarcsd.org

Board of Directors

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Notice of Exemption

PROJECT TITLE: NORTHSTAR TRI-COMMUNITY FOREST FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT
(Northstar Portion Project)

PROJECT NUMBER: G21-001

PROJECT LOCATION: The Northstar Community Services District
Boundary, Truckee California within, Sections 31, 32, T17N, R17E,
MDB&M

County: Placer

CAL FIRE UNIT: NEU

LEAD AGENCY: Northstar Fire Department (NFD)

CONTACT: JOE BARRON (NFD FORESTER, RPF #2984)

ADDRESS: 910 Northstar Drive, Truckee, CA 96161

PHONE: 530-562-1212 x2

Project Description: The multi-year project that has the potential to last into the spring of 2023 is funded from a 2020 privately funded Tahoe Mountain Resorts Foundation (TMRF). The Project that has a focus on various methods of forest fuels reduction that is located within and outside the boundary of the community of Northstar. Project focus is as follows:

1. To remove dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees that possessed a fire hazard and are detrimental to forest health.
2. To perform forest fuels reduction within priority areas identified as evacuation routes open space common areas. These areas exist within and in proximity to residential and commercial structures and or adjacent to evacuation routes.
3. To treat approved grant project areas so that they meet compliance as per Northstar Ordinance 35-19, Section Number Five 5.
4. To perform hazardous forest fuels reduction work that focus' on Priority Number One and Three in the recently updated 2021 Northstar Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

The funding from the grant will help subsidize the district costs of fuels reduction and treatment will help meet the priorities of the recently updated 2021 Northstar Fire Department Community Wildfire Protection Plan. This project will address a multitude of forest fuels issues that must be addressed due the Community of Northstar existing within a Very High Fire Severity Zone including the declining tree and vegetation health that has been impacted by continuing drought cycles, warming temperatures, and correcting 100-plus years of historical timber harvesting practices that has altered the forests of the Martis Creek Watershed. Currently, forest fuels that exists within the open space common areas/evacuation routes and residential and commercial properties require a combination of initial and maintenance treatment. The objective is to reduce forest fuels within areas that are readily able to burn hot and travel across the forest topography at an accelerated rate. Additionally, by addressing the removal of dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees will help reduce the acceleration of tree mortality before reaching an epidemic level.

Project Activities: Project work is to be performed by utilizing the four methods described above. This will consist of the following:

1. 32.04-acres of forest fuels reduction within identified evacuation routes, open common space areas which will be treated by means of a hand crew disposing the biomass by means of chipping, mastication or hauling the material off-site. This treatment method will be performed by using a four to seven (4-11) person hand crew equipped with one to two (1-2) chainsaws, (1-2) pole saws and various hand tools such as a rakes and shovels. Hand crews will focus on reducing the density of small diameter, non-merchantable conifer trees that are considered suppressed and intermediate class trees. Residual conifer trees will be limbed from a range of 4' to 15' from the highest point of the ground up. Flammable brush will be thinned by means of creating mosaics or clearing where appropriate. Mosaics will be thinned by creating various age classes and spacing adequately based on slope and topography. Ground fuels will be reduced to a range of 1,000 to 3,000 tons per acre. Chipping will be utilized with the Northstar Fire Department (NFD) Track Chipper #31, (C-31). C-31 is a rubber tracked chipper that can operate via remote control through the forest up to 30% slopes. Chipper -31 does not require a road/skid trail system to operate through the forest and has the capability of chipping trees up to 16" Diameter Breast Height, (D.B.H). A computer system is embedded within the chipper that allows the feeding of the chipper to be efficiently without clogging the "chute" which is the mechanism to broadcast woodchips. (C-31) is operated with a 3 to 4-person crew that consists of an operator who has a remote control in hand for maneuvering the chipper. The operator watches the instrumentation, feeding of the chipper and safety of the crew. Chipper personnel will "feed" the chipper when in operation. The operator will guide the chipper to biomass piles that will be chipped and broadcasted. Woodchip broadcasting will be a depth range of 2"-3". Areas of heavy depth concentrations or woodchip accumulations near tree wells will be raked out by hand. The chipping crew will follow behind the chipper and rake out any deep chipper track ruts to ensure water disturbance will not occur. Method two will be by means of hauling. The hauling of material will require the use of two hydraulic tilt bed dump trucks. The trucks will operate in designated areas and position themselves where the crew can load the biomass into the dump bed. The material such as woodchips will be taken off-site, either to the Truckee landfill or the potential NCSO biomass facility if it is able to be put online during this grant cycle. Mastication will be performed with a small skid steer-based machine with a rotating drumhead. This machine has rubber tracks which is low impact for soil disturbance and soil compaction. This operation will be performed with an operator and one to two spotters who will be assigned to observe for hazards such as rocks, watch for pedestrians and rake out track disturbance.

2. Treatments within identified evacuation zones will be treated as follows: 1. Main (Primary) evacuation route treatments on Northstar Drive, Highlands View Road and Big Springs Drive. 2. Secondary treatments will be performed on Ridgeline Road. 3. Treatments will be 300' in total and 150' from each side of the centerline of the road. The treatments will be treated to a level to allow a safe community evacuation while allowing emergency vehicles to enter the community.

3. Treatments in identified evacuation routes may also create a 300' or less forest fuels buffer from residential/commercial structures. 300' Forest fuels reduction buffer zones for roads and structures are guided by Northstar Ordinance 35-19, Section 5 and the California Forest Practice rules as per treatment levels based on CAL FIRE Exemptions.

4. Treatment levels - The removal of green, including dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees that act as a fire and forest health hazard will be identified for removal within the 32.04-acre project boundary. All trees identified for removal will be marked with a blue band at Diameter Breast Height (D.B.H.) at 4.5 feet from the highest point of the ground up. All trees will be directional fallen by chainsaw using a locally 4-11 person contracted hand crew. Approximately ninety-seven percent (98%) of the conifer trees to be removed will be green, dead/diseased/dying trees and the target tree species will be white fir (*Abies concolor*). Two percent (2%) are Jeffrey pine (*Pinus jeffreyi*) species. Trees of focus for removal will be the suppressed and select intermediate class trees that pose a fire/safety hazard to the community. A secondary focus of removing trees that have active bark beetle infestations and or are diseased that is impacting the residual trees. Stressed trees drought and disease that are the primary host trees to the bark beetles within the district and reducing the number of hosts will help slow tree mortality.

Flammable brush components such as green leaf manzanita (*Arctostaphylos patula*), Tobacco brush (*Ceanothus velutinus*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), and mountain sage (*basin big sagebrush*) will be the target brush species for hazardous fuels reduction. Brush components will be as follows: Removed in entire areas where appropriate, treated as mosaics and differing age classes. Treatments of brush removal will be by mastication and hand crews. Mastication will focus on clearance along evacuation routes and selected 300' buffer zones closer in proximity to structures and infrastructure. Mosaics will be established further from roadways, structures, and infrastructure. Additionally, brush components will be removed under the tree canopy and when left in mosaics, spacing will be 2-times the height of the

brush on 0%-20% slopes from one brush component edge to the next and 4-times from 21%-40% slopes. Brush will be retained where erosion potential is, where its beneficial to wildlife habitat and where diversity is required.

Tree limbing will range from 6' to 15' depending on the forest topography, slope, aspect, and forest ground fuel accumulation and arrangement. One out of every seven (7) trees will be left for wildlife habitat and diversity. Additionally, any trees that demonstrate wildlife potential will be retained.

As per the California Forest Practice Rules, snags will be retained in the range of 1-3 per acre and various snag classes. Snags that possess a tree hazard to wildfire and public safety will be removed and each snag will be closely observed before marking.

Downed woody debris (DWD) will follow the requirements of the California Forest Practice Rules, leaving various decay classes where appropriate. Downed woody material well embedded in the ground will not be removed. As will DWD identified for erosion control or soil stability. Soil and wildlife diversity and issues will be evaluated as per the NFD Forester in the project.

Trees to be removed will either be chipped and broadcasted, hauled away, or used as a split-wood/fuelwood product. Each project site will be evaluated by the Forester as to the proper disposal method. Areas where duff layers are accumulated will not receive broadcasting of woodchips. Hauling of the material off-site will be the preferred choice of biomass and fuel wood for this project when appropriate.

Project Goals and Accomplishments: This project meets priority numbers one, and three which are identified in the 2021 updated Community Wildfire Protection Plan, (CWPP). A copy of the Northstar CWPP can be found from the Northstar Community Services District (NCS) website at the following: <https://www.northstarcsd.org/departments/fire/forestry>. The goals of the project are as follows: 1. To mitigate forest fuels that have accumulated at an accelerated rate and require maintenance and or initial treatment. 2. Maintain 300' fuels buffer zones(s) from residential/commercial properties as well as protecting road systems for emergency vehicle access and evacuation. 3. Reduce the threat of wildfire and maintain forest health by addressing the removal of dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees to mitigate the spread of tree mortality and can mitigate mortality and a manageable rate. 4. This comprehensive project will help stretch District Forest Fuels Reduction dollars, thus allowing completed projects to be placed on a maintenance schedule and future treatments can be performed at a feasible cost per acre.

Permitting Method(s): The project will implement the following as permits to perform the project.

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- The following Categorical Exemptions and CAL FIRE Exemptions will be applied to the project.
- *14CCR§15304 Minor Alteration to Land. The project's main emphasis is to reduce the abundance of fuels along identified evacuation routes, near or adjacent to residential/commercial properties and infrastructure and to mitigate the effects of a wildfire occurring within or outside the Northstar Community Services District Boundary which is designated as a Very High Fire Severity Area.*
- *14CCR§15307, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources - The Northstar Fire Department an entity of the Northstar Community Services District within Placer County and is working under Northstar Ordinance 35-19, Section 5, which relates to fuel treatments within regarding "Wildland Fire Prevention and Defensible Space Requirements". This project will help prevent a wildfire from occurring and to protect the cultural resources that exist within the Northstar Community Services District and as a part of the Martis Valley Complex.*
- *CAL FIRE 1038 Exemption(s) – 1038 Exemptions 2-21EX-00826-PLA will be in place by multiple landowners within the Northstar Community Services District boundary. These Exemptions will allow the removal of dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees and within 300' of structures and evacuation routes.*

This project has had an environmental review conducted by the Northstar Fire Department to conform to applicable environmental laws, regulations, and policies under (CEQA). The Environmental Review documents will be available upon request and stored at 910 Northstar Drive, Truckee, CA 96161. This project is a multi-year project and will reflect the life of the project which will officially expire on December 31, 2024.

Justifications for Use of a Categorical Exemption (discuss why the project is exempt, cite exemption number(s), and describe how the project fits the class):

EXEMPTION STATUS: Categorical Exemption(s)

14 CCR§15304, Minor Alterations to Land

14CCR§15307, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for the Protection of Natural Resources

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CAL FIRE 1038 Exemption(s) – 1038 Exemptions 2-21EX-00826-PLA will be in place by multiple landowners within the Northstar Community Services District boundary. These Exemptions will allow the removal of dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees and within 300' of structures and evacuation routes.

FIELD AND OFFICE REVIEW BY THE NORTHSTAR FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFF CONFIRMED THAT NO EXCEPTIONS APPLY WHICH WOULD PRECLUDE THE USE OF A NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FOR THIS PROJECT. THE DEPARTMENT HAS CONCLUDED THAT 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, OR TO UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS. DOCUMENTATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW COMPLETED BY THE DEPARTMENT IS KEPT ON FILE AT NORTHSTAR FIRE DEPARTMENT, STATION #31 IN TRUCKEE, CA.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING _____

**Joe Barron (Forester, RPF# 2984)
NORTHSTAR FIRE DEPARTMENT**

DATE 08-09-2021