

**2020/2021 Grants Program Application CEQA Exemption Review
Mojave Desert Land Trust, Restoration, G21-04-21-R01**

Summary: The OHMVR Division has reviewed the grant program project and determined that all activities are exempt from further CEQA review.

Applicable Exemptions	
Applicable Exemption Categories	Description of Proposed Activity(ies)
<p><u>15301</u> Existing Facilities</p>	<p>Mojave Desert Land Trust manages Palisades Ranch for endangered and other special-status species with a goal of restoring and preserving the site’s rare desert riparian habitat. Because of these sensitive resources, the property is not open for OHV recreational use and is actively managed to prevent and restore OHV trespass. The proposed activities include fortifying the western boundary line of the Palisades Ranch property, restoring sensitive habitat damaged by several years of illegal OHV use, and providing education and outreach to surrounding communities and the general public. The proposed activities would be accomplished by the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Restoration: Restore approximately 5.25 acres of upland desert habitat by decompacting packed soils, collecting and dispersing native seeds, and vertical mulching. • Monitoring/Patrol: Monitoring the fence line at monthly intervals for three years; monitoring restoration success a minimum of twice per year over a three-year period. • Signage: Installing informative signs along the fence line and property boundary and educating visitors about habitat sensitive, closure areas, and private land ownership. • Fencing/Barriers: Installing 1.34 linear miles of post-and-cable fencing and 2.21 linear miles of t-post and wire fencing along portions of the Palisades Ranch boundary; installing four gates for management access. • Public Outreach/Visitor Services: Developing, coordinating, and conducting three education and outreach events (1 per year) highlighting best practices, rules and regulations, and considerations for OHV activity in desert tortoise and Mojave ground squirrel habitat; producing media content supporting the education and outreach events. <p>No expansion of existing maintenance activities or facility operations is proposed.</p>

Potential Exceptions to the Exemptions	
Wetlands, sensitive habitats, T&E, special-status species	<p>The sensitive desert upland shrub habitat would be restored with no adverse impacts to wetlands or navigable waters. All necessary precautions would be taken to avoid impacts to threatened and endangered species that may occur at the project site. No adverse impacts are anticipated with implementation of standard avoidance protocols. Fence lines and restoration routes would be surveyed for sensitive species prior to beginning work, and area sweeps would occur prior to commencing daily work. Botanical surveys focusing on special-status plant species were conducted seasonally at the Project Site from May 2020 to March 2021. One species of conservation concern, Mojave fishhook cactus, was identified on the property; locations of individuals were recorded, and the species would be avoided. All work would be supervised by the on-staff biologist. Prior to commencing work, the applicant would conduct an additional review of the California Natural Diversity Database to ensure they have the most recent occurrences of special-status species potentially found on the project site.</p> <p>The proposed fence would be installed during the winter months when desert tortoise and Mohave ground squirrel activity is minimal. The fence would be constructed using smooth steel cable and wire, which are friendly to wildlife and do not inhibit wildlife movement.</p> <p>While the project area overlaps Critical Habitat for desert tortoise (<i>Gopherus agassizii</i>; State Threatened; Federal Threatened) and southwestern willow flycatcher (<i>Empidonax traillii brewsteri</i>; State Endangered, Federal Endangered), the project comprises low disturbance restoration efforts aimed at recovering areas of illegal trails and dissuading future illegal use of the project area. Overall, the proposed project would improve critical habitat for the desert tortoise and southwestern willow flycatcher.</p>
Cumulative effects	<p>Proposed project activities combined with other fencing/barrier and habitat restoration activities completed in the same place over several years would not adversely affect impact the area's resource values. This project would have a net-positive impact in terms of biological, hydrological, soil, and scenic resources. Therefore, there would be no negative cumulative impact.</p>
Steep slopes, erodible soils	<p>There would be no adverse impacts to soils, such as excessive erosion, loss of topsoil, or geologic or seismic disturbances. By eliminating cross-country OHV activity, removing illegal OHV routes, reversing much of the existing erosion conditions, and restoring native vegetation, the project would result in a net benefit to soil retention within the project area.</p>

Potential Exceptions to the Exemptions	
State scenic highway	The project would not occur within the viewshed of a state scenic highway. There would be no adverse impacts to scenic resources. The project would ultimately improve scenic resources by removing visual scars on the land and promoting new vegetation growth.
Hazardous materials	There are no hazardous material site listings in the project area pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the California Government Code.
Historic or cultural resources	There are no signs of cultural sites or artifacts, and no record of findings in the Project Area. The applicant has incorporated standard practices into the project addressing inadvertent discovery of resources. If any such resource or artifact is observed during the course of restoration activities, then work at the location would cease until further study, guidance and recommendations for work activities to continue can occur. Therefore, no substantial adverse impacts are anticipated.
Indirect impacts	There are no foreseeable indirect significant impacts resulting from this project. The entire project area is already closed to OHV recreation, and numerous legal OHV opportunities exist within the project vicinity.



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division
715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Armando Quintero, Director

Notice of Exemption

Table with 2 columns: To (Office of Planning and Research) and From (California Department of Parks and Recreation)

Project Title: Mojave Desert Land Trust, Restoration

Project Applicant: Mojave Desert Land Trust

Project Location – Specific: Palisades Ranch

Project Location – City: near Helendale

Project Location – County: San Bernardino

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: Project activities include fencing the western boundary line of the Palisades Ranch property, installing signage along the fencing and property boundary, restoring sensitive habitat damaged by illegal OHV use, monitoring the fence line and restoration success, and providing education and outreach to surrounding communities and the general public.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: CDPR, OHMVR Division

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Mojave Desert Land Trust

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). Section 15301 Existing Facilities
Statutory Exemptions. State code number.
Activity not subject to CEQA review.

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. No exceptions to the exemption apply to this project.

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

Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (916) 204-0871

Signature: Jon O'Brien

Date: 1/28/2022

[X] Signed by Lead Agency

Date received for filing at OPR:

[] Signed by Applicant