



State of California  
The Natural Resources Agency  
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

## NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>	Landscape Scale Management to Combat Goldspotted Oak Borer in Southern California and Forest Health Project & Pesticide Spray Program to Protect Oaks from Goldspotted Oak Borer (Riverside County Forest Health Program)		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	T3S, R1E, Sec. 25, 35, 36 SBBM T3S, R2E, Sec. 19-20, 28-33 SBBM T4S, R1E, Sec. 1-3, 10, 15-16, 21-22 SBBM T4S, R2E, Sec. 6-8, 16-17, 20-21, 16-17 SBBM T4S, R3E, Sec. 31-32 SBBM T5S, R2E, Sec. 1-2, 10-14, 23-26, 35-36 SBBM T5S, R3E, Sec. 5-8, 17-19, 29-35 SBBM T6S, R3E, Sec. 4-5, 8-10, 15, 22-26, 35-36 SBBM T6S, R4E, Sec. 30-32 SBBM T7S, R3E, Sec. 1 SBBM T7S, R4E, Sec. 5-9, 16-17 SBBM	<b>COUNTY</b>	Riverside
<b>LEAD AGENCY</b>	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
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Mountain Communities Fire Safe Council proposes to protect oaks (*Quercus* spp.) from an invasive forest pest, the Goldspotted Oak Borer (*Agrilus auroguttatus*), by implementing a pesticide spray and tree removal program in the mountain communities in Riverside County, California. Funding support for the proposed program (project) is under the Forest Health Program from the California Climate Investment Program (CCI); a grant program administered by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE).

The project will occur in the San Jacinto Mountains Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) of Riverside County, consisting of over 8000 homes and 6000 unimproved parcels. It is located in a densely overgrown forest where years of drought, bark beetle and Golden Spotted Oak Borer (GSOB) infestation, and seasonal dry winds known as Santa Anas have severely increased the potential of a catastrophic wildfire. In addition, successive years of drought have caused critically low fuel moistures lasting throughout much of the year and have also increased the number of dead fuel within the area. These 8000 homes and 6000 parcels lie predominately within the SRA. The project is located in and surrounding the mountain communities of Idyllwild, Pine Cove, Poppet Flats, Pinyon Pines, and Mountain Center. The project area is a mixed conifer setting, above 3,000 feet ASL, with various aspects and slopes. The project intends to protect oaks on private and non-federal government parcels. Most of the private properties are developed for residential use and are small parcels, less than 0.5 acres in size. The non-federal properties are limited to local water district properties and Riverside County properties.

The overall goals of the project are to 1) improve the health and resilience of oaks to increase their ability to withstand GSOB infestation, 2) reforest or restore native oak stands that are GSOB-infested, 3) reduce local GSOB populations by removing heavily infested trees and protecting mature oaks using pesticides, and 4) implement a robust monitoring program to determine if management is successful and measure infestation severity over time. The two primary management activities conducted with this project to achieve these goals are 1) the removal of heavily infested trees and 2) the application of pesticide treatments on infested oak stands, which will be implemented each year typically between April and August. Monitoring will occur year-round to identify newly infested trees in need of treatment or removal. Data will be collected on each tree and will help forest health scientists track the area of infestation and the spread.

The invasive GSOB infests and ultimately kills medium to large diameter red oak species. These species include California



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black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*), coast live oak (*Q. agrifolia*), and canyon live oak (*Q. chrysolepis*). GSOB is an established invasive insect and will persist in our oak ecosystems as long as there are suitable host trees. After several years of infestation, these beetles kill or weaken our mature, acorn-producing oak trees. The program will address public concerns about oak health and mortality. Increased oak mortality decreases biodiversity, changes forest structure, decreases wildlife forage and mast production, decreases carbon storage, increases fuel loading, and adds to the threat of wildfire. Besides these impacts, removal and disposal costs can exceed the budget capacity of landowners and non-federal governmental agencies to remove infested trees promptly to eliminate and slow the spread of GSOB. Forest pest specialists have indicated there are no viable alternatives, such as biocontrol parasites or predators, to control GSOB. Forest health experts suggest that to protect high-valued oaks from GSOB attacks and infestation is to apply a pesticide (barrier spray). The Integrated Pest Management for Land Managers and Landscape Professional (University of California, Agricultural and Natural Resources, Pest Note 74163) indicates two types of pesticides are effective in killing GSOB adults through direct contact: carbaryl and bifenthrin. When adults emerge from the bark in late spring, a pesticide that directly contacts the pest provides the best opportunity to kill the adult beetles. Bifenthrin and carbaryl have effectiveness of between 3-6 months. If applied in late spring the chemical has a good chance of being effective in killing newly laid eggs in the summer to early fall.

The pesticide spray program plans to treat up to 7,000 oaks with bifenthrin or carbaryl. While the proposed project area covers over approximately 4,000 acres, oaks are randomly scattered and intermixed within the mixed conifer-residential setting. The treated area is estimated at 316 acres, based on the assumption one mature oak canopy occupies a 25-foot radius or 1,963 square feet. Only designated oaks are eligible for the pesticide spray program. A barrier pesticide is sprayed on the main bole and large branches of the designated oak by licensed pest control professionals using commercial grade pressurized hose systems or backpack sprayers. The pesticide application period ranges from April – to August, with the potential to apply the pesticide annually. The project encourages vehicles and equipment operations to paved roads, driveways, natural surfaced roads, and disturbed development sites. Off-road access will only be allowed when absolutely necessary and will avoid all sensitive resources. The pesticide spray program complies with the Department of Pesticide Regulation. All pesticide recommendations, permits, and monthly use reports will be filed with the Riverside County Agricultural Commissioner's Office. A pest control recommendation, written by a Pest Control Adviser, provides the pesticide instruction and guidance for a Qualified Applicator Certificate (QAC) or Qualified Applicator License (QAL) to apply pesticides under this program. Alternatives and avoidance measures have been incorporated into the project description to ensure no significant impacts. Therefore, the pesticide spray program is necessary to address public health and safety concerns with oak mortality, and the program complies with all environmental laws and regulations.

The goal for the whole tree removal phase of this project is to remove approximately 500 dead and dying trees with various diameters located on private and non-federal government agency properties in and around the mountain communities of Idyllwild, CA. The area has experienced extremely high tree mortality due to the recent severe drought conditions and the gold spotted oak borer (GSOB). The California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection has declared the aforementioned area as a Zone of Infestation (ZOI) for GSOB. Trees are an important component of forested ecosystems in California and the removal of already heavily infested, dead, and dying trees will eliminate pests and slow the rate of spread, enhancing the survival rate of existing tree populations and creating a more fire-safe condition. No commercial operations are planned. Trees are located on private parcels and the County of Riverside parks properties in the mountain communities with elevations between 3000 and 6000 feet on various aspects and slopes. Removal operations will consist of felling, limbing, debarking, and bucking. All material will be disposed of in strict accordance with the Sanitary Biomass Utilization Plan written by RPF Tim Morin and supervised designee Paul Ohlman specifically for this project.

### EXEMPTION STATUS

- Categorical Exemption Type/Section: Class 4 §15304 Minor Alterations to Land
- Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)
- Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

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### REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT

Field review by RPF supervised designee Paul Ohlman confirmed that no exceptions apply which would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. The RPF and supervised designee 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, and utility and service systems.

Class 4 - Minor Alterations to Land: The project is categorically exempt from CEQA under the "Class 4" ( 14 CCR 15304) exemption per the CEQA Guidelines because the project involves the minor alteration of the condition of land and/or vegetation and does not require the removal of healthy, mature scenic trees.

A field review by Paul Ohlman, an RPF supervised designee, confirmed that no exceptions apply, precluding the use of a "Notice of Exemption" for this project. However, if the scope of this project changes or at any time does not fall under Class 4 Categorical Exemption, a new CEQA analysis and determination will be conducted.

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### DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING

DocuSigned by:  
*John Melvin*

1/23/2023

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John Melvin, Assistant Deputy Director  
Resource Management  
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Date