NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

State of California
The Natural Resources Agency
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

PROJECT TITLE	San Juan Canyon Phase Rx Burn

PROJECT LOCATION	T13S 04E 13, 14, 24, 25, 35, 36 T13S 05E 18, 19, 20, 30; MDBM	**COUNTY**	San Benito/Monterey

LEAD AGENCY	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

CONTACT **ADDRESS**	Timothy Montgomery CAL FIRE San Benito - Monterey Unit 2221 Garden Road Monterey, CA 93940	**PHONE**	(831) 601-6547

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

San Juan Canyon Road is a major ridgeline connecting rural homes to the town of Hollister and San Juan Bautista. The project area is located within and adjacent to Fremont State Park and Hollister Hills recreation area. It is rated as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, which identifies this area of high risk for large scale wildland fires. The egress and ingress for this area is defined as "one-way-in one-way-out", which is why there has been a huge emphasis on fire prevention in the community. There have been ongoing fuel modification projects within much of the project area for over 8 years that have created a foundation for a viable fuel break in the event of a wildfire. The project area has already been treated using mastication, chipping, thinning, pile burning, and lop and scatter. These treatments will continue over the entire project area (1,124 acres) as maintenance of the fuel break yearly. Additionally, prescribed fire in the form of training burns will be applied to reduce regrowth, dead and downed fuels, as well as ladder fuel potential. New treatments, in preparation for burning, include mowing along the road system and handline. The proposed training burn plots are around 90 acres altogether, ranging from 1-21 acres per plot. The training burns will take place any time of year when weather and fuel conditions allow for anticipated fire behavior and safety. The training burn and maintenance will likely commence in 2023.
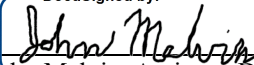
EXEMPTION STATUS

☒ Categorical Exemption   Type and Section: 4 Class   15304, Minor Alterations to Land

☐ Statutory Exemption (state code section):   Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1)

☐ Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)

☐ Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(3); 15269(a))

☐ Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT

The project meets the requirements of Class 4, §15304 Minor Alteration to the Land Categorical Exemption to CEQA. Class 4 includes minor public or private alterations in the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, and scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes. Field review by CAL FIRE staff confirmed that no §15300.2 Exceptions apply, which would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. Several exemptions have provided preparation for San Juan Canyon training burn, including "San Juan Canyon Shaded Fuel Break" (SCH: 2014028329) and "…Phase II" (SCH: 2014128234); "…Chipping" (SCH: 2016068419), and the extensive work from the Governor's 35 Priority Projects in 2019 (Executive Order N-05-1). Treatments for the maintenance and improvement of the existing fuel break include mastication, pile burning, thinning, chipping, lop and scatter, mowing, handline, and broadcast burning. The activities will not result in the taking of endangered, rare, or threatened plant or animal species, or sedimentation to surface waters. CAL FIRE staff has concluded that no significant environmental impact would occur to aesthetics, agriculture and forestland/timberland, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, 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.

Documentation of the environmental review completed by the Department is kept on file at CAL FIRE's San Benito-Monterey Unit Headquarters.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING

John Melvin, Assistant Deputy Director   4/4/2023
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection   Date