

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Planning and Research
PO Box 3044
1400 Tenth Street, Room 2
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Inland Deserts Region
Bishop Field Office
787 N. Main Street, Suite 220
Bishop, CA 93514

Project Title: Slink Fire Forest Restoration Project

Project Location: The project will be located on the Slinkard/ Little Antelope Wildlife Area (Wildlife Area) in northern Mono County, State of California. The Project is located in Sections 3, 4, 9, 10, 15, 16, and 22 of Township 8 North, Range 22 East, MDBM, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Coleville, Quadrangle map.

Project Description: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (“CDFW”) proposes to conduct post-fire forest restoration activities within the area impacted by the 2020 Slink Fire at the Slinkard/ Little Antelope Wildlife Area (“Wildlife Area”). Over 3,700 acres of wildlife habitat was burned in this wildfire on the Wildlife Area, including over 1,800 acres of critical mule deer winter range.

A Forest Management Plan was drafted by a Registered Professional Forester to inform the project activities. The proposed treatments are intended to address the need for restoration of wildlife habitat and improve the resiliency of the landscape to future wildfires. Project activities include thinning and reforestation of burned Jeffery pine-white fir and pinyon-juniper woodlands, aspen stand enhancement, and restoration of montane meadow and riparian habitats. Project activities include felling dead standing conifers followed by treatments to reduce the fuel load remaining on site with retention of snags for wildlife. Trees will be felled across slope and bucked to create full soil contact to act as an erosion control measure as well as a wildlife enhancement element. Excess biomass may be piled and burned, lopped and scattered or chipped and left on-site. Pile burning will comply with all air quality regulations and chipping shall be limited to a depth of 4 inches and not be continuous. Reforestation species will be predominantly Jeffery pine in burned Jeffery pine-white fir forests and pinyon pine in burned pinyon-juniper woodlands. The total project area includes 602 acres of the Wildlife Area.

Work will be completed by hand crews and low-impact equipment with ground pressures less than 10 psi such as compact track loaders, chippers, masticators, or similar equipment for processing cut material. Site preparation may include the use of herbicides to promote seedling establishment and control invasive weeds.

Bird clearance surveys will be conducted within 3 weeks prior to initiating any project activities. Biological and vegetation surveys of the project area will also be conducted within 3 weeks of any work conducted to evaluate the current site conditions and to assess presence/absence of special status plant or animal species. If special status plants, wildlife nursery sites, or active nests are found they will be sufficiently buffered, or the treatment will be deferred or modified.

Pre-project surveys and project activities will commence in summer 2023, as access permits. Operations will continue, based on crew availability, until completed. These treatments may be repeated as needed to promote establishment of conifer seedlings and control invasive weeds.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Person or Agency Carrying out Project: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Exempt Status:

- Ministerial:
- Declared Emergency:
- Emergency Project:
- Categorical Exemption: 14 CCR, Section 15304,15307, and 15308

Reasons why Project is exempt:

The project is *Class 4, §15304* (Minor Alterations to Land) Exempt; the Project will result in minor alterations to land and vegetation on an officially designated wildlife area that will result in improvement of habitat for fish and wildlife resources.

The project is *Class 7, §15307* (Actions by regulatory agencies for Protection of natural resources) Exempt; the Project includes actions taken by CDFW for the protection of natural resources on a designated wildlife area to restore the areas impacted by the 2020 Slink fire.

The project is *Class 8, §15308* (Actions by regulatory agencies for protection of the environment) Exempt; the Project includes actions taken by CDFW for the protection of the environment on a designated wildlife area to improve wildlife habitat and reduce the potential for future high severity wildfire impacts.

Review by CDFW staff and contracted environmental specialists 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 resource, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation/traffic, or utilities and service systems. Documentation of the environmental review completed by the CDFW is kept on file at the Bishop Field office.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Aaron Johnson, CDFW, (760) 872-1171

DocuSigned by:
Chris Hayes
 Signature: _____ Date: 6/20/2023
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Chris Hayes, Environmental Program Manager

Signed by Lead Agency

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____