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

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Notice of Exemption

PROJECT TITLE: 2023-2024 Northstar Community Evacuation/Forest Fuels Reduction Project

PROJECT NUMBER: 620-69-4326(2023-24)

PROJECT LOCATION: Project work within the boundary of the Community of Northstar View which lies within Sections 29, 31 32, T17N, R17E, MDB&M

COUNTY: Placer

ACRES: 82.1-acres

LEAD AGENCY: Northstar Fire Department

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 schedule for this project is July 2023 and expiring on June 30, 2024. The projects funding mechanism is from a 2021 Measure U voter property tax initiative and hard match costs. The project has a focus on various methods of forest fuels reduction designed to enhance identified evacuation routes, protect structures and infrastructure. This is a priority from the updated 2022 Northstar Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Below are key components to the project:

1. To perform forest fuels reduction along major evacuation routes, structure and infrastructure protection to the Community of Northstar. The project areas exist on privately owned; open common space forested lands next to evacuation routes, residential/commercial structures and infrastructure. The project areas are part of Priorities Number One, Three and Six in the Updated 2022 Northstar Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
2. To remove dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees that identify as a fire hazard and or are detrimental to forest health (Priority Three).
3. The funding for forest fuels reduction for evacuation routes and forest fuels buffer work exists exclusively within the Northstar Community Services District Boundary. The project will cover 82.1-acres of land.
4. This project exists within a State Regulatory Area (SRA), CAL FIRE named Very High Fire Severity Zone. The project areas hold over-stocked conifer tree stands, declining conifer trees, vegetation health that is a result of multiple years of drought and correcting one hundred plus years of historical timber harvesting practices which altered the forests of the Martis Creek Watershed. Currently, forest fuels reduction work within the project areas requires a combination of first entry, multiple year work and periodic maintenance treatment. The goal is to reduce forest fuels within areas that are readily able to burn hot and travel at an accelerated rate across the topography and affect a safe community wide evacuation and supply structure and infrastructure protection. A secondary issue is 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 will consist of the following:

1. 82.1-acres of forest fuels reduction the Northstar Community Services District Boundary focusing within the lower to mid-level and the upper areas of the district, consisting of Northstar Drive, Ridgeline Road, Beaver Pond, Big Springs Drive, Martis Landing, Deer Path, Basque, Wolf Tree, Conifer, Wagon Wheel, and Highlands View Road. For this

project, forest fuels reduction treatment will be by hand crew, mastication, and chipping. A contingency of pile burning exists within steep rocky areas. The treatment/disposal of biomass will be by chipping (broadcasting/haul off-site), skid steer-based mastication and the contingency of pile burning. Hand crew treatment methods involve a seven to ten (7-11) person hand crew equipped with one to two (1-3) chainsaws, (1-3) pole saws and various hand tools such as a rake(s) and shovel(s). Hand crew work will focus on reducing the density of 1" to 14" Diameter Breast Height (DBH) conifer trees that are considered suppressed and intermediate class trees. Dead, diseased, dying and pest infected conifer trees may have a larger diameter up to "24" DBH. Residual conifer trees will be limbed from a range of 4' to 15' from the highest point of the ground up. Flammable brush thinning will create mosaics. Mosaic thinning will create various age classes and spacing based on slope and topography. Ground fuel reduction goals will range from 1,000 to 3,000 tons per acre. Chipping will be with a rubber tracked chipper that can run via remote control through the forest up to 30% slopes. The track chipper does not require a road/skid trail system to run through the forest and has the capability of chipping trees up to 15" Diameter Breast Height, (D.B.H). A computer system allows the feeding of the chipper to be efficiently without clogging the "chute" which is the mechanism to broadcast woodchips. Track chipper operation requires a 3 to 5-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 "feed" the chipper when in operation. The operator guides the chipper to biomass piles. Hauling of the material off-site and broadcasting will be the method of biomass disposal. Where broadcasting, woodchips will be a depth range of 2"-3". Raking will be in areas of heavy depth concentrations or woodchip accumulations, especially near tree wells. The chipping crew will follow behind the chipper and rake out any deep chipper track ruts to ensure water disturbance will not occur. For the pile burning part of the project, the same contracted hand crew will create burn piles 8' x 8' in size. The contingency of burn pile placement will be in open areas, which are well-spaced from one another. The contingency estimates are 300 burn piles in areas where chipping or mastication are not a viable option. All pile burning operations and the permitting process will be through the Placer County Air Pollution Control District (PCACD).

2. 15 estimated acres of forested land will have a prescription of mastication. The mastication machine will focus on the removal of contiguous brush fields by creating separation and diversity in a mixed age class of brush by setting up a mosaic brush field pattern. Thinning of brush fields will reduce fire's ability to travel across the landscape and carry into the mature tree canopy as a ladder fuel.
3. 60 estimated acres of contiguous flammable brush growth will have treatment by a hand crew. The hand crew will selectively thin 1" to 14" Diameter Breast Height (DBH) conifer trees, thin brush and remove downed fuels where the masticator cannot operate. Additionally, there will be a target of larger dead, diseased, dying and pest infected trees if they are a fire and or safety hazard. Chipper-31 (C-31) will ease biomass removal by laying the material on the forest floor.
4. The contingency of 5 potential acres will receive pile burning. This will be in place for project areas that will be steep, rocky, and inaccessible for the mastication and chipper machines.
5. The result of this project will be enhancing Primary and secondary evacuation routes, supply structure protection and to create an effort to reduce the threat of wildfire, promoting a healthy and diverse Sierra Nevada Mixed Conifer Forest.

Project Goals and Accomplishments: This project meets priority numbers One, Three and Six, found in the updated 2022 updated Community Wildfire Protection Plan, (CWPP). A copy of the Northstar CWPP can be found at <https://www.northstarcsd.org/forestry>. The goals of the project are as follows: 1. Support a 300' fuels buffer zone, protecting primary and secondary evacuation routes for a community wide evacuation. 2. Supply a forest fuels buffer that will be 300' and greater to protect residential, commercial structures and infrastructure. 3. Reduce the threat of wildfire and to support 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. This comprehensive project will help drive a forest fuels reduction project towards a maintenance mode. Once the project is completed, it will allow the project to be placed on a maintenance schedule and future treatments can be performed at a workable cost per acre.

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):

The project meets the Categorical Exemption as described under **14CCR§15304 Minor Alteration to Land**. The project's main emphasis is to reduce the abundance of fuels near or next to a major evacuation route which is a part of the Community of Northstar's road system. Protection of residential/commercial structures and infrastructure. This project is designed to mitigate the effects of a wildfire occurring within or outside the Northstar Community Services District Boundary which is chosen by CAL FIRE as existing within a Very High Fire Severity Area.

EXEMPTION STATUS: Categorical Exemption(s)

14 CCR§15304, Minor Alterations to Land

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

14CCR§ 1038 (b)

14CCR§ 1038 (d) (1)

14CCR§15304, Minor Alteration to Land - *The project's main emphasis is to reduce the abundance of fuels near or next to a major evacuation route and the Community of Northstar's road system. This project is designed to mitigate the effects of a wildfire occurring within or outside the Northstar Community Services District Boundary which is chosen by CAL FIRE as existing within a Very High Fire Severity Area.*

The project meets the Categorical Exemption as described under Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources 14CCR§15307. This project will help prevent wildfires from occurring and to protect the cultural resources that exist within and outside the boundaries of the Northstar Community Services District and as a part of the Martis Valley Complex.

The use of CAL FIRE 1038 (b) and (d) Exemptions to help meet the goals of the project. The Exemption allows for the removal of dead, diseased, dying and pest infected, green trees and biomass which is identified as a wildfire/forest health issue.

FIELD AND OFFICE REVIEW BY THE NORTHSTAR FIRE DEPARTMENT FOREST FUELS MANAGEMENT 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, LOCATED AT 910 NORTHSTAR DRIVE, IN TRUCKEE, CA.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING _____



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

DATE 07-06-2023