

Project Description and Environmental Setting (Describe the project activities, project site and its surroundings, its location, and the environmental setting):

Proposed Project Location

Existing Condition/Need for Proposed Project

Biodiversity conservation cannot be achieved through land preservation alone. Stewardship of California's working landscapes, which comprise 40% of California, for wildlife, fish, pollinator, and other biodiversity benefits is critical to stabilizing wildlife populations and preventing extinction. This project will improve wildlife habitat and contribute to the landscape goal of biodiversity conservation.

Proposed Action

Point Blue Conservation Science (PBCS) received a block grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) for a collaborative project that will enable PBCS staff from across California to work with private landowners with the overall goal to co-create, manage, and implement projects that will maximize benefits of working landscapes to wildlife, fish, and pollinators.

Total project area:

Area of potential effect (area of soil disturbance):

Proposed project activities include:

Environmental Impact Analysis

Provide detail only if saying yes.

Aesthetics

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The existing visual character of project sites and surroundings is expected to improve environmental conditions that favor native flora and fauna, creating better opportunities to view native plants and wildlife. PBCS has determined that the project will not cause adverse impacts to aesthetic values.

Agriculture and Forest Resources

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

- Yes No Would any trees be felled? If yes, discuss protection of nesting birds and compliance with Forestry Practice Rules.
- Yes No Would the project convert any prime or unique farmland?
- Yes No Would the project result in the conversion of forest land or timberland to non-forest use?

This project will not convert any agriculture, rangeland, or forest resources or cause significant potential impacts to these resources. PBCS has determined that the project will not cause adverse impacts to agriculture, rangeland, or forest resources.

Air Quality

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

PBCS has determined that, overall, the effect of the project on air quality will be less than significant.

Biological Resources

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

- Yes No Will the project potentially affect biological resources?
- Yes No Was a current CNDDDB review completed? Results discussed below.
- Yes No Was a biological survey of the project area completed? Results discussed below.

An assessment of threatened, endangered, rare, and special-status wildlife species, plant species, and natural communities occurring or potentially occurring in the project area was conducted. This assessment included a records search for threatened, endangered, rare, and special status species and communities using the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB & Spotted Owl Observation Database - BIOS; CDFW 2023), These record searches covered a 3-mile buffer around the proposed project location.

The overall goal of the project is habitat enhancement and restoration in support of native pollinator and wildlife species. PBCS has determined that the project, as designed, will provide a net benefit for native pollinators, wildlife, plant species and natural communities and that there will be no significant adverse impacts of the project on these biological resources.

Cultural Resources

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Yes No Was a current archaeological records check completed?

A current archaeological records check will not be performed prior to preparation of a CEQA Notice of Exemption. However, site-specific archaeological records check will be completed prior to implementation of any treatments with the potential for ground disturbance or other potential impacts to archaeological, historic, or cultural resources.

Yes No Was a Staff or Contract Archaeologist consulted??

Based on results of site-specific archaeological records check, a contract Archaeologist will be consulted to ensure cultural resources and historic properties are appropriately considered in planning.

Yes No Was an archaeological survey of the project area completed?

Based on results of site-specific archaeological records check, and in consultation with contract Archaeologist, a survey of the specific project sites prior to any ground-disturbing activities will be completed.

Yes No Will the project affect any historic buildings or archaeological site?

If a cultural resource site is discovered within a project area during operations, the following applies: 1. Project activities within 100 feet of the newly discovered cultural resource should be immediately halted until the a contract Archaeologist can be contacted and ensure avoidance of the site. Project activities may continue outside this 100-foot perimeter during the identification and avoidance process. 2. If the newly discovered site has been negatively impacted by project operations, a contract Archaeologist will be notified to assist in development of protection

measures and any necessary remediation. 3. The contract Archaeologist will ensure the newly discovered site is recorded and its discovery and protection measures are documented in the project files. 4. If the newly discovered site is a Native American Archaeological or tribal cultural resource (defined in the Forest Practice Rules and CEQA), the contract Archaeologist will notify the appropriate Native American tribal group and the NAHC, if appropriate.

PBCS has determined that there will be no significant adverse impacts of the project on historic, archaeological, or cultural resources.

Geology and Soils

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Project implementation will avoid any unstable land features that are identified in the project area. Proposed treatments will not significantly impair soil quality. Field vehicles and equipment will not be used on soils when the moisture content is at/above field capacity, and will not be allowed within 50 feet of watercourses. This will enable existing buffer strips of vegetation to protect watercourses from soil erosion. PBCS has determined that there will be no significant adverse impacts of the project on geology or soils.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below

Yes No Would the project generate significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions?

The project will generate a small amount of GHG emissions from the use of gas-powered equipment, which could include field vehicles, gas-powered hand tools, and larger speciality equipment. Local air quality regulations will be followed to minimize emissions. PBCS has determined that this project, as proposed, will have no significant adverse impact on the annual release of GHGs.

Yes No Would these GHG emissions result in a significant impact on the environment?

No. See above.

Yes No Would the project conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?

No, this project does not conflict with the State of California’s plan to reduce atmospheric carbon or greenhouse gas emissions.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Gasoline and diesel fuel will be used for vehicles, equipment and handheld equipment. Refueling of vehicles and equipment shall occur on existing roads to the extent feasible, and at least 100 feet from watercourses. PBCS has determined that project, if implemented as proposed, will not result in significant adverse impacts regarding hazards and hazardous materials.

Hydrology and Water Quality

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.
- Yes No Will the project potentially affect any watercourse or body of water?
- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Land Use and Planning

- This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This project does not conflict with any land use or planning or change the land use designation for any parcel.

- This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Mineral Resources

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

There are no known or related mineral resources or extraction as part of this project, and the project does not restrict access for any future mineral extraction activities.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Noise

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The project will include the operation of chainsaws, mechanized equipment, and vehicles which will produce noise that may be audible to landowners near the project areas. The additional noise will be limited to the period of project implementation, which will be of short duration. It is PBCS's determination that the projects will not cause significant adverse noise levels.

Population and Housing

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This project has no applicability to population and housing issues in Shasta or Tehama Counties, CA.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Public Services

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

This project is intended to enhance and restore habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and will not affect public services.

Recreation

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

The existing visual character of project sites and surroundings is expected to improve environmental conditions that favor native flora and fauna, creating better opportunities to view native plants and wildlife, and thus improving recreational experiences. PBCS has determined that the project will not cause adverse impacts to recreation.

Transportation/Traffic

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Minimal increases in traffic along adjacent public roads could occur as a result of project staff, equipment operators, and hand crews accessing project areas. This increase in traffic will be minor and insignificant as the regional roads have been designed to accommodate the anticipated level of traffic. As such, the project as proposed will not cause significant changes in current transportation traffic patterns and frequencies.

Utilities and Service Systems

This topic does not apply to a project of this type and was not evaluated further.

This topic could apply to a project of this type, and results of the assessment are provided below:

Project Design Features That Avoid Environmental Impacts:

Adverse environmental impacts have been avoided through careful review of site conditions prior to treatment method determination. Site soils, slope, habitat, and water resources were thoroughly examined during project design and layout. Equipment has been minimized on slopes over 35% and excluded from watercourses to provide for soil and water resource protection, as well as protection of sensitive habitats and organisms. All water features have been afforded protection from equipment operations through the establishment of watercourse protection zones. Sensitive plants and wildlife have been identified during the site-specific scoping process and the project as designed will not adversely affect them. Sensitive cultural resources will be surveyed for prior to implementation and the project has been designed to have no impact on them.

Mandatory Findings of Significance:

YES NO

(a) Does the project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory? YES NO

(b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects) YES NO

(c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly? YES NO

Justification for Use of a Categorical Exemption (discuss why the project is exempt, cite exemption number(s), and describe how the project fits the class): Based on no effects, negative, or cumulative impacts to natural resources, and a greenhouse gas benefit, this project fits within a Categorical Exemption.

This review of the Class 4 exemption (CCR Section §15304) covers minor alterations to land. PBCS has determined that the objectives of enhancement and restoration of wildlife and pollinator habitat, and the implementation activities as designed for this project, will result in minor alterations to land and vegetation, and therefore fit within the CCR Section 15304 exemptions.

This review of the Class 33 exemption (CCR Section §15333) covers small habitat restoration projects. PBCS has determined that the objectives of enhancement and restoration of wildlife and pollinator habitat, and the implementation activities as designed for this project, will result in the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants or wildlife not to exceed five acres in size.

Additional environmental analysis was conducted by PBCS Biologist/Project Specialist regarding proposed project effects on rare, threatened and endangered plants; threatened, endangered and special status wildlife species; and cultural resources. PBCS has reviewed these reports and determined that the project's implementation will result in multiple benefits, including habitat improvement for wildlife and pollinators, fuel reduction, and reduction in noxious invasive species. There will be no significant adverse impacts on endangered, rare, or threatened species or their habitats. There will be no significant adverse impacts to soils, hydrology, or water quality. There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site. The project will avoid all archeological resource sites. The project will not result in cumulatively significant impacts. The project will have no significant adverse effect on the environment.

Conclusion:

After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the descriptions for the various classes of Categorical Exemptions to CEQA, PBCS has determined that the project fits within one or more of the exemption classes. PBCS has also determined that no exceptions exist which would preclude the use of this exemption, such as: (a) sensitive location, (b) cumulative impact, (c) significant effects on the environment, (d) impacts to scenic highways, (e) activities within a hazardous waste site, and (f) significant adverse change to the significance of any historical resource. A Notice of Exemption will be filed with the county Clerk-Recorder and with the State Clearinghouse.

After assessing potential environmental impacts and evaluating the description for the various classes of Categorical Exemptions to CEQA, PBCS has determined that the project does not fit within the description for the various exemption classes or has found that exceptions exist at the project site which precludes the use of a Categorical Exemption for this project. Additional environmental review will be conducted and the appropriate CEQA document used may be a Negative Declaration or a Mitigated Negative Declaration.

Signed: Cathryn Mong

REFERENCES:

CDFW. 2023. Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS). California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Accessed on _____ from: <http://map.dfg.ca.gov/rarefind/view/RareFind.aspx>.

NRCS. 2023. Web Soil Survey. Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Accessed on 2 March 2023: <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>.