



**CEQA EXEMPTION / NEPA CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION
DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 06/2022)**

Project Information

Project Name (if applicable): Statewide Fuels Reduction Contract #2

DIST-CO-RTE: 08-RIV/SBd – VAR/VAR **PM/PM:** VAR/VAR

EA: 08-SWFR2/PN 0000000044 **Federal-Aid Project Number:** N/A

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to manage and reduce the amount of fire hazards that exist along state routes and highways that pose a threat to structures, the environment, and the traveling public in conjunction with keeping the road open. This work will be conducted in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. All work will be conducted within State Right of Way.

Caltrans CEQA Determination (Check one)

- Not Applicable** – Caltrans is not the CEQA Lead Agency
- Not Applicable** – Caltrans has prepared an IS or EIR under CEQA

Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, the project is:

- Exempt by Statute.** (PRC 21080[b]; 14 CCR 15260 et seq.)
- Categorically Exempt. Class 4(i).** (PRC 21084; 14 CCR 15300 et seq.)
 - No exceptions apply that would bar the use of a categorical exemption (PRC 21084 and 14 CCR 15300.2). See the [SER Chapter 34](#) for exceptions.
- Covered by the Common Sense Exemption.** This project does not fall within an exempt class, but it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment (14 CCR 15061[b][3].)

Senior Environmental Scientist or Environmental Branch Chief

Cesar Garcia	<i>Cesar Garcia</i>	7/2/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date

Project Manager/VMP Lead

David Gilbert	<i>David Gilbert</i>	7-02-2024
Print Name	Signature	Date



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Caltrans NEPA Determination (Check one)

[X] Not Applicable

Caltrans has determined that this project has no significant impacts on the environment as defined by NEPA, and that there are no unusual circumstances as described in 23 CFR 771.117(b). See SER Chapter 30 for unusual circumstances. As such, the project is categorically excluded from the requirements to prepare an EA or EIS under NEPA and is included under the following:

[] 23 USC 326: Caltrans has been assigned, and hereby certifies that it has carried out the responsibility to make this determination pursuant to 23 USC 326 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated April 18, 2022, executed between FHWA and Caltrans. Caltrans has determined that the project is a Categorical Exclusion under:

- [] 23 CFR 771.117(c): activity (c)(Enter activity number)
[] 23 CFR 771.117(d): activity (d)(Enter activity number)
[] Activity Enter activity number listed in Appendix A of the MOU between FHWA and Caltrans

[] 23 USC 327: Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, Caltrans has determined that the project is a Categorical Exclusion under 23 USC 327. The environmental review, consultation, and any other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Caltrans pursuant to 23 USC 327 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated May 27, 2022, and executed by FHWA and Caltrans.

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

N/A

Print Name

Signature

Date

Project Manager/ DLA Engineer

N/A

Print Name

Signature

Date

Date of Categorical Exclusion Checklist completion (if applicable): N/A

Date of Environmental Commitment Record or equivalent: July 1, 2024

Briefly list environmental commitments on continuation sheet if needed (i.e., not necessary if included on an attached ECR). Reference additional information, as appropriate (e.g., additional studies and design conditions).



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Continuation sheet:

Continued from page 1.

The purpose of this project is to manage and reduce the amount of fire hazards that exist along state routes and highways that pose a threat to structures, the environment, and the traveling public in conjunction with keeping the road open. This work will be conducted in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. All work will be conducted within State Right of Way.

The San Bernardino County limits for this Service Contract are as follows: Route 02 between PM 5.2 - 6.4 EB and WB; Interstate 10 between PM 11.13 - 39.16 EB and WB; Route 18 between PM 8.23 - 11.24 NB and SB; Route 71 between PM 5.2 - 8.4 NB and SB; Route 142 between PM 0.8 - 3.2 EB and WB; Route 210 between PM 0.0 - 22.0 EB and WB; Route 215 between 0.0 and 18.7 NB and SB; Route 259 between 0.0 and 1.5 NB and SB; and Route 330 at five parcels (APN - 0296-361-25-0000; 0296-361-26-0000; 0296-361-27-0000; 0296-361-28-0000; 0296-361-29-0000).

The Riverside County limits for this Service Contract are as follows: Interstate 10 between PM 38.7 - 42.0 EB; Interstate 15 between PM 4.25 to 52.8 NB and SB; Route 79 between PM 0.0 - 15.5 and PM 34.1 to 39.15 NB and SB; Route 91 between 0.0-3.0 and PM 7.0 – 11.5 EB and WB; Route 111 between PM 10.7 – 16.0 and PM 60.03 – 62.04 EB and WB; Route 215 between PM 8.43 – 45.33; Route 371 between PM 56.5-63.5 and PM 68.0-75.0 NB and SB.

As per the *2021-22 Detailed Fuel Reduction District Guidance for early-action Fuels Reduction Service Contracts* document, along with the *District 8 Contract 2 Fuel Reduction Management Plan (FY23/24 & 24/25)* signature approved August 18, 2023, the project proposes to manage and reduce the amount of fire hazards that exist along state routes and highways that pose a threat to structures, the environment, and the traveling public in conjunction with keeping the road open. Brush and vegetation removal is limited to 10 feet from the edge of pavement. The selected areas were identified due to the fire danger present along these routes, and the lack of available maintenance recourses resulting in a challenge to keep up with the required mitigation efforts.

This project does not have an assigned project Expenditure Authorization. For tracking purposes in STEVE the project has been designated as **08-SWFR2**. The work is being captured under Department Head Quarters Overhead EFIS# 0000000044, Phase N, reporting code WILDFIREFL, Sub Object 036. This project is funded by STATE only dollars. The following technical documentation was prepared in conjunction with determining and addressing applicable California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documentation and compliance requirements:

AIR QUALITY

Per memorandum from Environmental Engineering dated **June 13, 2024**:

This project is listed in Table 1, Carbon Monoxide (CO) Protocol. It is exempt from all air emissions analyses. Therefore, no air quality study is needed.

NOISE QUALITY

Per memorandum from Environmental Engineering dated **June 17, 2024**:

This project falls under Type III project categories of 23CFR772.7 in the Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol dated April 2020. Per the Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol, "Type III projects do not require a noise analysis.", therefore, a noise study is not needed for this project.



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HAZARDOUS WASTE

Per the INITIAL SITE ASSESSMENT (ISA) CHECKLIST dated **June 17, 2024**:

The Initial Site Assessment (ISA) Checklist completed for this proposed project has determined, “There is a low risk of potential hazardous waste involvement” and “no soil disturbance is involved” based on work description.

PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Per Email dated **June 3, 2024**:

“Due to the nature of project description, no paleontological studies will be required for revised ESR#2 review request for the above referenced project.”

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Per the HISTORICAL RESOURCES COMPLIANCE REPORT (HRCR) dated **June 27, 2024**:

“Ashley Bowman, who meets the Professionally Qualified Staff (PQS) Standards in Section 106 PA Attachment 1 and as applicable PRC 5024 MOU Attachment 1 as a(n) Co-Principal Investigator, has determined that the only/only other properties present within the APE meet the criteria for Section 106 PA Attachment 4 (Properties Exempt from Evaluation) and as applicable PRC 5024 MOU Stipulation VIII.C.1 and Attachment 4.”

“Caltrans, pursuant to Section 106 PA Stipulation IX.A and as applicable PRC 5024 MOU Stipulation IX.A.2, has determined a Finding of No Historic Properties Affected is appropriate for this undertaking...”

Measures to be included in the Environmental Commitments Record (ECR):

- **CUL-1:** If buried cultural resources are encountered during Project Activities, it is Caltrans policy that work stop within 60 feet of the area until a qualified archaeologist can evaluate the nature and significance of the find.
- **CUL-2:** In the event that human remains are found the county coroner shall be notified and ALL construction activities within 60 feet of the discovery shall stop. Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5097.98, if the remains are thought to be Native American, the coroner will notify the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) who will then notify the Most Likely Descendent (MLD). The person who discovered the remains will contact the District 8 Division of Environmental Planning; Ashley Bowman, Caltrans PQS: (909) 472-7730 and Gary Jones, DNAC: (909) 261-8157. Further provisions of PRC 5097.98 are to be followed as applicable.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Per the NATURAL ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY-NO EFFECT MEMO dated **May 15, 2024**:

As stated in the No Effect Memo under **Effect Findings**, “Biological issues were identified. See issues and avoidance measures below; no permits required.” The project proposes to reduce the ignition sources along various routes by removing vegetation following unique prescriptions by route from edge of pavement to limits of the State Right of Way. Through the implementation of the Avoidance and Minimization measures, Caltrans determines that the project will have no effect on species listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act, in accordance with Section 10 of the Act and no take on state listed species. This project is located outside of NOAA



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Fisheries jurisdiction; therefore, a NOAA Fisheries species list is not required, and no effects of NOAA Fisheries species is anticipated.

Measures to be included in the Environmental Commitments Record (ECR):

Bio-General-1	Equipment Staging, Storing & Borrow Sites: All staging, storing, and borrow sites require the approval of the Caltrans biologist.
Bio-General-4a	Preconstruction Surveys: Preconstruction surveys must be conducted by a qualified biologist at least 3 days prior to project activities. If a species of special concern is located, the Resident Engineer and Caltrans biologist must be contacted and additional measures and/or agency coordination may be required.
Bio-General-4b	Preconstruction Surveys: Preconstruction arroyo toad surveys must be conducted by a qualified biologist 3-days prior to project activities within Location 12: RIV Route 79 0.0-15.0. If an arroyo toad is located, the Resident Engineer and Caltrans biologist must be contacted and additional measures and/or agency coordination may be required.
Bio-General-4c	Preconstruction Surveys: Preconstruction WR-MSHCP narrow endemic plants (NEP) surveys must be conducted by a qualified biologist 3-days prior to project activities within Locations 11 and 12. If a NEP is located, the Resident Engineer and Caltrans biologist must be contacted and additional measures and/or agency coordination may be required.
Bio-General-4d	Preconstruction Surveys: Preconstruction CVMSHCP conserved species (Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard, Coachella Valley milkvetch) surveys must be conducted by a qualified biologist 3-days prior to project activities within Locations 17. If a species is located, the Resident Engineer and Caltrans biologist must be contacted and additional measures and/or agency coordination may be required.
Bio-General-5a	Work Avoidance: To address impacts to Joshua Trees avoid any removal, trimming or any other activity impacting Joshua Trees within Location 1: SBD Route 02 between PM 0.0 - 6.4.
Bio-General-5b	Work Avoidance: To address impacts to watercourses or riparian vegetation, avoid all work within riparian zones.
Bio-General-5c	Work Avoidance: To address potential impacts to special status ground-dwelling insects, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals no mowing activities should occur at Locations 12,17, and 19.
Bio-General-6	Species Avoidance: If during project activities a species of special concern is discovered within the project site, all construction activities must stop within an appropriate buffer determined by the qualified biologist and the Caltrans biologist and Resident Engineer must be notified.
Bio-General-7	Worker Environmental Awareness Program (WEAP): A contractor supplied biologist must present a biological resource information program/WEAP for special status species prior to project activities to all personnel that will be present within the project limits for longer than 30 minutes at any given time.
Bio-General-8	Biological Monitor. The qualified biologist must monitor project activities weekly (or more frequent if needed) to ensure that measures are being implemented and documented.



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Bio-Avian-1	Preconstruction Nesting Bird Survey: If project activities cannot avoid the nesting season, generally regarded as Feb 1 – Sept 30, then preconstruction nesting bird surveys must be conducted 3 days prior to construction by a qualified biologist to locate and avoid nesting birds. If an active avian nest is located, a no construction buffer may be established and monitored by the qualified biologist.
Bio-Plant-1	Rare Plant Surveys, Flagging and Fencing: Within the spring and summer flower blooming season prior to construction, a preconstruction survey must be conducted by a qualified contractor supplied biologist for quino checkerspot butterfly within Location 13: RIV Route 79 between PM 0.0 - 15.5 and Location 23: RIV Route 371 between 56.5-63.5 and 68.0-75.0. Any potential host plants must be flagged for visual identification to construction personnel for work avoidance.
Bio-Anthropod-1	Brush Removal to Promote Suitable for Monarch Butterfly Habitat: To most practical extent possible, removal of dense brush using forestry mowing, chainsaws, or other mechanical methods will be done to promote more open grassland habitat types. Maintenance of brush management involves monitoring for regrowth or reoccurrence of brush (Monarch Butterfly CCAA).

STORM WATER

Per Memorandum dated **June 10, 2024:**

The permit which regulates stormwater and non-stormwater discharges from Caltrans properties and facilities, and discharges associated with operations and maintenance of the statewide highway system is Order No. 2022-0033-DWQ, NPDES No. CAS000003, NPDES Statewide Storm Water Permit for State of California, Department of Transportation.

NPDES requirements for the work identified in the Reduction Plan (within State right of way) shall comply with the latest edition of the Caltrans Maintenance Manual and the latest edition of the Caltrans Statewide Stormwater Management Plan. The nature of the proposed work, “Existing drainage flow patterns will not be altered, and No new impervious surfaces will be added.” Also identified as NOT required for this project are the following: Encroachment Permit, A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) or Water Pollution Control Program (WPCP) and Notification to the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board.



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VISUAL RESOURCES

Per VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT(VIA) LEVEL QUESTIONNAIRE dated **June 19, 2024**:

A questionnaire to determine the VIA level was completed and resulted in a score of **18**, which is in the lowest range level of impacts in the questionnaire. This score corresponds to the following statement, "No visual resource related regulatory requirements. No or negligible visual changes to the environment are proposed. None or minimal public concern has been identified. This Questionnaire with rationale for selected responses to questions in the available spaces after each question along with a statement of no visual resource impact is appropriate and provides a sufficient rationale why a technical study is not required."

PERMITS

Per the NATURAL ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY-NO EFFECT MEMO dated **May 15, 2024**:

No Permits are required for this project.

In conjunction with the results of the above technical documentation, the Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures included in the initial and revised Environmental Commitment Record (ECR) prepared for this project, will be implemented during the construction of this project. If it is determined that revisions to the ECR are required during performance of project, the ECR will be updated accordingly.

Changes to the project description, scope of work, limits, construction strategy and/or staging and storage requirements, will require that the District's Division of Environmental Planning be notified in a timely manner, to determine if an Environmental Re-Evaluation (and/or updates to the Technical Studies performed) is required.