



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

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

PROJECT TITLE	Howard Forest Helitack Expansion		
PROJECT LOCATION	T19N; R14W; Sec 6 T19N; R15W; Secs 1, 2 T20N; R15W; Secs 15, 16, 20-22, 27, 28, 34, 35; MDB&M	COUNTY	Mendocino
LEAD AGENCY	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
CONTACT	Julie Rhoads VMP Forester I	PHONE	707-671-3357
ADDRESS	802 North Main Street Fort Bragg, CA 95437		

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project area is located on 74 acres at Howard Forest Station and Training Center located at the top of Ridgewood Grade, off Highway 101, approximately three miles south of the town of Willits. The Station and Training Center is situated in and adjacent to a Douglas-fir/mixed hardwood forest interspersed with ponderosa pine, true oaks, grassy openings, and shrubs. The area contains multiple buildings for unit staff in a mostly wildland interface and serves as a training center for fire fighters. Annual vegetation management activities are necessary to maintain the grounds in a manner that reduces vegetative fuels around buildings to lower fire risk and remove trees or portions of trees that pose a fire and/or safety risk to structures, property, and human life. Fuels reduction activities also serve as training opportunities for unit fire fighters such as chainsaw operations, putting live fire on the ground, constructing fire line, and simulating mop-up operations. Fuel reduction activities involve the use of hand crews, chainsaws (tree falling, bucking, and brushing), pole saws, chippers, heavy equipment with masticator attachments, and pile and broadcast burning. Live trees (10 inches in diameter or less) may be removed when appropriate to improve spacing or forest health. Larger trees will be pruned to provide for a vertical clearance of up to 14 feet. Dead and dying trees greater than 10 inches may be removed. This project includes long term fuel reduction and hazard tree removal as needed. In addition to the fuel reduction activities, the State is exploring locations on this property that could accommodate a larger hangar for the new "CAL FIRE HAWK" helicopter. Part of that investigation includes a 'fault rupture hazard evaluation' due to the proximity of the active Maacama Fault. Contracted geologists will be conducting multiple non-invasive geophysical studies as well as digging two exploratory trenches to discover any secondary fault traces. Each trench will be 250' long, 10-15' deep, and 6-8' wide. This will be done with an excavator and will require a 25' wide path including tree removal for maneuverability and soil stockpiling. Soil will be backfilled and compacted in the trenches upon completion. Logs will be bucked and left on site

EXEMPTION STATUS

- Categorical Exemption Type/Section: Class 4/15304 Minor Alterations to Land
- Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- 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 a CEQA Article 19 Class 4 Categorical exemption "Minor Alterations to Land" (Section 15304, Public Resources Code) as the proposed fuel management activities entail understory brush removal, 10 "DBH or less tree removal, thinning, pruning, chipping, from an existing roadway, and dead/tree removal to improve access for fire engines and reduce volume of flammable vegetation. The fault study will be a singular excavation and the surface will be restored. As such, CAL FIRE 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. No exceptions apply (Section 15300.2) which would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. Documentation of the environmental review completed by the Department is kept on file at CAL FIRE Mendocino Unit, 802 N. Main Street. Attn. VMP Coordinator.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING

DocuSigned by:

7/6/2024

George Morris III, Northern Region Chief Date
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection