

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County of Mono
From: California Department of Transportation
500 South Main St
Bishop, CA 93514

Project Title: Decision Memo, Hwy 395 Mammoth-Wilson Butte Median Safety Thinning Project

Project Applicant: California Department of Transportation

Project Location - Specific: Project is located on Hwy 395, from PM 27.22-37.5

Project Location - City: Mammoth Project Location - County: MONO

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:

Provide fuel reduction and vegetation removal along the state highway system using a combination of mechanical and hand thinning methods.

Purpose and Need

- Protect life, property, infrastructure, and natural resources.
- Reduce the potential for fire spread from vehicle induced ignitions along the State Highway System.
- Improve forest health and reduce the likelihood of a high-severity fire through mechanical thinning of conifers to a more natural density.
- Create more resilient and healthier forests by reducing competition and increasing water availability.
- Provide defensible space along the State Highway System to protect the effectiveness of the traveled way during normal operations and ingress/egress evacuation and emergency response during a wildfire event.
- Post treatment site conditions shall result in a decrease in surface fire intensity (flame length) and rate of spread.
- Reduce and rearrange vegetation while creating breaks in fuel continuity.
- Improve the natural forest structure with a healthy tree density, a mix of tree species, heights, and age distribution, and natural gaps in the canopy while reducing competition and promoting a healthy multi-aged forest.
- Reduce overcrowding and relieve tree stress.

Description of work

Provide fuel reduction and vegetation removal along the state highway system using a combination of mechanical and hand thinning methods to meet the following specifications:

- **Cut Live Trees:** All live conifer trees less than or equal to 24.0 inches DBH are evaluated for cut or leave status.
- **Cut Hazard Trees:** Snags posing hazards to Forest Service System roads, Highway 395 and contained within the unit boundaries as shown on the contract area map shall be cut regardless of size. Any Snag posing a hazard to the Contractor's operations or personnel may be cut. Snag stump height is less than 8.0 inches, when measured from the uphill side. Snags will be limbed and the boles will be left on the ground. All limbs will be disposed of as described in the "Biomass Disposal" section below.
- **Leave Tree Spacing:** Live conifer trees shall be thinned to an average residual spacing of 25 feet (70 trees per acres (TPA)) across the unit. Spacing should not be uniform and should vary across the entire unit from 15 – 35 feet to create a "natural" aesthetic.
- **Leave tree Selection Criteria:** leave trees should be vigorously growing with dark green crowns which are not fading or chlorotic with live crown ratios greater than 40%. Leave trees should be free of signs of pests or pathogens such as mistletoe or bark beetle. All conifers less than or equal to 24" DBH which have been successfully attacked by bark beetle shall be cut. Trees which have been successful attacked have pitch tubes which are pink/orange in color where the beetle entered the tree. If trees meeting these criteria cannot be identified the healthiest trees shall be retained.
- **DO NOT CUT** any five needle pines and Sierra juniper (whitebark, western white, or limber pine). Preferentially retain species in the following order:
 - Jeffrey pine
 - White fir
 - Lodgepole pine
- **Stump Heights:** Stumps shall not exceed, on the side adjacent to the highest ground, the maximum height of 8 inches except that occasional stumps of greater heights are acceptable when Contractor determines that they are necessary for safe and efficient conduct of logging. Unless otherwise agreed, Contractor shall re-cut high stumps so they will not exceed 8 inches in height and shall dispose of severed portions in the same manner as other activity generated slash. All cut stumps shall have no residual live limbs left attached to the stump.
- **Felling and Bucking:** Felling shall be done to minimize breakage of designated cut trees and damage to residual timber. Trees that are excessively damaged, the cambium is exposed on 1/3 of the bole or more, shall be cut. Bucking shall be done to permit removal of all minimum pieces set forth in in the utilization specifications. Contractor may buck out cull material when necessary to produce pieces meeting utilization specifications. Such bucked out material shall contain a minimum amount

of sound wood. If necessary to assess extent of defect, Contractor shall make sample saw cuts or wedges.

- Skidding/Yarding: All cut material that meets the utilization specification shall be limbed and cut to length prior to being skidded/yarded to landings. Whole tree yarding may occur if proposed landings can be sufficiently sized and is approved by the COR in writing. All skidding/yarding operations shall be ground based unless otherwise agreed to by the COR in writing. No skidding on paved roads will occur unless otherwise approved by the COR in writing.
- Utilization Specifications: Logs on the small end measuring 6 inches or greater in Diameter Inside the Bark (DIB) and have a length of 10 feet or greater. All cut trees greater than 8 inches DBH shall have at least one utilized log. Tops, limbs and trees not meeting the utilization specification shall be disposed of by one of the methods described in the "Biomass Disposal" section. All cut trees will be bucked into standard timber log lengths starting at 10 feet and then in increments of a foot up to a maximum of 42 feet before decking.
- Decking: All material meeting the utilization specification shall be transported and decked at the designated decking locations. Decks will no exceed 5 feet in height and set back at least 10 feet from the adjacent road. Decks will be created by placing logs parallel to one another in a neat and orderly manner so that they are stable. Existing live trees or infrastructure will not be used as support.

Operations:

- Any proposed temporary roads shall be constructed on existing benches at the lowest gradient possible. When they cross streams, they should cross at the highest angle possible, and should not be constructed in swales.
- Main skid trails, trails used 10 or more times, shall preferably be spaced 132 feet apart and join prior to landing so that there is one main entrance to landing.
- Landings will be constructed or reconstructed in previously disturbed areas, adjacent to existing roads, and on slopes less than 5% when available. The cleared or excavated size of landings shall not exceed that needed for efficient skidding and loading operations.
- Equipment used for mechanical cutting, limbing, bucking, or chipping will be restricted to slopes averaging less than 30 percent.
- Ground-based mechanical equipment operations will only be allowed when soil moisture conditions are such that compaction, gullyng, and/or rutting will be minimal and when the soil is dry to 6 inches or soil is frozen so that it supports the weight of equipment with limited exceptions as follows: if operations are needed where soil is not dry to 6 inches, methods such as slash mats or log causeways will be used to minimize soil disturbance. Slash mats must be a minimum of 6 inches deep.

Rehabilitation:

- Any designated improvement (existing roads) which have been disturbed by the Contractor's operations will be returned to as near original condition as practicable.
- All main skid trails shall be backbladed and all other minor skid trails shall be backbladed if there is rutting exceeding 2 inches in depth for more than 25 feet. ○ All main skid trails that exceed 15% slope shall backbladed and have slash and woody debris placed on skid trail to 85% coverage.
- Disguise skid trails and landings subject to ingress from landings, roads or campgrounds by raking and spreading small and/or large woody debris, spreading chips, or placing large rocks.
- Landing locations will be decommissioned after operations are completed in each area. The following methods will be applied to decommissioning operations:
 - Apply wood chip material to landing locations to a maximum depth of 4 inches.
 - Lop and scatter slash over landings locations surfaces to provide at least 50% coverage.
 - Landings with excessive compaction shall be subsoiled/ripped to reduce compaction.
 - Prior to major weather events forecasted by the National Weather Service with a 50% or greater chance of precipitation within 24 hours which could lead to runoff, all skid trails, landings, and temporary roads which are no longer being used shall be decommissioned and rehabbed.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: California Dept of Transportation

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: California Dept of Transportation

Exempt Status (**check one**):

- Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: 15304(i).
- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

With the implementation of avoidance and minimization measures, no known environmental resources will be impacted

Lead Agency Contact Person: Heather Elder

Phone number: 76087448320

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project?

Yes No

Signature: *Heather Elder* Date: 9/14/2024 Title: Senior Environmental Scientist

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.

Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.