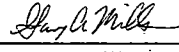


Reasons why project is exempt: The project is Categorically Exempt under Section 15304. Minor Alterations to Land (d) Minor alterations in land, water, and vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas or fish production facilities which result in improvement of habitat for fish and wildlife resources or greater fish production. As such, the use of Section 15304 (d) is applicable and appropriate for this project.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: County of Tulare


Project Planner/Representative: Jennifer Cervantes

Telephone: 559-624-7169

Signature: 
Gary A. Mills

Date: 10/1/2024

Title: Chief Environmental Planner

Signature: 
Reed Schenke, P.E.

Date: 10/1/24

Title: Environmental Assessment Officer
RMA Director

Signed by Lead Agency

Date submitted to OPR: _____

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

Fee Exempt per Government Code Section 6103

To: Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

Tulare County Clerk
Room 105, Courthouse
221 South Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93291

Lead Agency: Tulare County c/o Resource Management Agency
5961 South Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93277 (559) 624-7000

Attn: gmills@tularecounty.ca.gov and jwillis@tularecounty.ca.gov

Applicant(s): Tulare County Public Works
5961 South Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93277 (559) 624-7000

Project Title: Mountain Road 109 (M109) over White River Bridge Revegetation Project

Project Location - Specific: Pixley National Wildlife Refuge in Tulare County, CA

Project Location- Section, Township, Range: Section 22, Township 23S, Range 24E, MDBM

Project Location - City: northwest of Earlimart, CA **Project Location - County:** Tulare

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: As mitigation for impacts to California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) riparian habitat as a result of the M109 over White River Bridge Replacement Project, Tulare County will compensate for permanent loss of 57 trees by planting locally native species at an off-site restoration site. These trees have already been removed and this Project is mitigation as identified in the *Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration Mountain Road 109 White River Bridge Replacement Project* (NOD filed August 30, 2022; SCH# 2021050226).

Off-site restoration efforts will occur within the Pixley National Wildlife Refuge (Pixley NWR), located in the same watershed as the Project (Upper Deer-Upper White) approximately 31 miles west-northwest from the Project site. The refuge sits within the historic flood plain of Deer Creek that currently runs along the southern edge of the refuge. Management activities are focused on management of habitat for several state- and federally listed species including Tipton kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys nitratoideus nitratoideus*), blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia sila*), San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis*) and Buena Vista Lake ornate shrew (*Sorex ornatus relictus*), wetland and waterfowl habitat management, and riparian restoration. Existing riparian habitat occurs in less than one percent of the refuge, covering approximately 15 acres in a narrow remnant band. The proposed mitigation would establish 234 riparian tree plantings along an approximately 1.2-mile drainage (Center Ditch) centrally located in the refuge's wetland parcels, helping to gain a foothold to **a significant increase in the riparian habitat in the refuge with associated habitat values.**

Trees to be planted along Center Ditch include Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), Goodding's willow (*Salix gooddingii*), narrowleaf willow (*Salix exigua*) and red willow (*Salix laevigata*). Cuttings taken for the restoration site will be collected in Pixley NWR from healthy, disease-free mature plants and shall be taken from a variety of individuals to preserve genetic diversity. Cuttings will be collected during late fall to early winter when the applicable species are dormant, and then either planted immediately into soil or will be pre-rooted by holding the cuttings in water for several weeks until root development is observed. Planting and preparation of the trees will be done by hand with no egress into restoration area with vehicles or equipment.

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));
- Common Sense Rule: CEQA guidelines 15061(b)(3)
- Categorical Exemption: **15304 Minor Alterations to Land (d)**
- Statutory Exemptions:

FILED TULARE COUNTY
OCT 2 2024
ASSESSOR / CLERK-RECORDER BY:
DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING AT TULARE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE