

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Planning and Research
PO Box 3044, Room 113
1400 Tenth Street
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: Responsible Agency:
California Energy Commission
Fuels and Transportation Division

Sacramento, CA 95814

Project Title: North Coast Plug-In Electric Vehicle Charging Network Phase 2 - amendment, site #6 change

Project Applicant: Redwood Coast Energy Authority

- 1) Orleans Volunteer Fire Department, 38162 CA-96, Orleans, CA 95556
- 2) Azalea Hall, 1620 Rickett Rd, McKinleyville, CA 95519
- 3) Mad River Community Hospital, 3800 Janes Rd, Arcata, CA 95521
- 4) Carlson Park, 5201 Carlson Park Dr, Arcata, CA 95521
- 5) Sequoia Park, Eureka
- 6) Eureka office of the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), 2500 6th Street, Eureka, CA 95503
~~College of the Redwoods, 7351 Tompkins Hill Rd, Eureka, CA 95501~~
- 7) Rohner Park, 9 Park St, Fortuna, CA 95540
- 8) Province Redwood Memorial Hospital, 3300 Renner Dr, Fortuna, CA 95540
- 9) Redwoods Rural Health Center, 101 West Coast Rd #B, Redway, CA
- 10) Jerold Phelps Community Hospital, 733 Cedar St, Gaberville, CA 95542

Project Location - Specific:

Project Location - City:

Orleans, McKinleyville, Arcata, Eureka, Fortuna, Redway, and Gaberville

Project Location - County:

Humboldt

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

Under grant agreement ARV-22-008, the California Energy Commission (CEC) will provide a \$700,000 grant to Redwood Coast Energy Authority (RCEA) to carry out Phase 2 of its rural electric vehicle (EV) charger station program. The CEC earlier helped fund Phase 1 of RCEA's North Coast EV charger program.

The objective of this Agreement is to install a total of 32 Level 2 chargers for electric vehicles at 10 community hub sites in Humboldt County to serve local rural drivers. The chargers will be open to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The project will result in benefits to EV users in the Humboldt County area.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project:

California Energy Commission

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:

Redwood Coast Energy Authority

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));

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- Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: California Code of Regulations, tit.14, §15301 – “Existing Facilities”;
§15303 – “New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures”;
§15304 – “Minor Alterations to Land”.
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- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

Redwood Coast Energy Authority (RCEA) is a joint powers agency formed by several cities, Humboldt County, and a water district. RCEA, or one or more of its local government members it identified, (the Cities of Arcata, Eureka, and Fortuna, and Humboldt County) where the project activities will occur is/are the lead CEQA agency(ies). The CEC’s understanding is that none have yet acted under CEQA. However, the lead agency can issue a Notice of Exemption or regard the project as nondiscretionary (and exempt from CEQA). The CEC is a Responsible Agency under CEQA for this grant.

The CEC has independently reviewed applicable law, gathered additional evidence from RCEA, and reached CEQA findings, as follows.

Assembly Bill 970 (2021), amending AB 1236 (2015), requires all local governments to “administratively approve an application to install electric vehicle charging stations through the issuance of a building permit or similar nondiscretionary permit. . . . The requirements of local law shall be limited to those standards and regulations necessary to ensure that the electric vehicle charging station will not have a specific, adverse impact upon the public health or safety. . . .” If the project might have such an effect, the city or county may require the applicant to apply for a use permit. (Cal. Gov. Code 65850.7(b).) (The amended language became effective January 1, 2023.)

A Responsible Agency cannot ignore “unusual circumstances,” which constitute an exception to certain CEQA exemptions. (14 C.C.R. § 15300.2(c), providing, “Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.”)

The potentially unusual circumstances regarding this grant are: (1) grant’s objective to serve a large, rural area, including outreach, thereby inducing vehicle trips, and (2) siting EV chargers at three hospitals and a fire department, all of which use emergency vehicles. This raises a question of potential EV’s queuing around a hospital or fire department, which might interfere slightly with emergency vehicle ingress and egress during emergencies. This could be a public health and safety issue; therefore, falling within the carve-out in AB 970.

First, RCEA predicts the locations of the EV chargers will not be close to the on-site and adjacent street emergency vehicle access routes to the hospitals and fire department.

Second, RCEA’s estimated charging sessions per day do not constitute many vehicle trips. RCEA used data from its existing EV chargers at various land uses as baseline for making estimates for trip generation at the proposed EV sites. For example, RCEA used data for existing chargers at one hospital to estimate trips for the three proposed EV stations at hospitals. Redwood estimates up to five charging sessions per day at each station, varying by site. The estimated total is about 22 charges per day for the 10 stations combined, in the near term. This includes existing EV owners at those 10 sites, along with any induced, new trips. This estimate supports the conclusion that no queuing of any consequence due to the proposed EV charging stations at the hospital or the fire department sites is likely.

For the above reasons, there is no foreseeable public health and safety impact. The project would not interfere with public services’ response times or result in inadequate emergency access. The project would not “impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan.”

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The project would not “cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly.” (State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G, Initial Study Checklist.)

Cal. Code Regs., Title 14, section 15301 provides that projects which consist of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, and which involve negligible or no expansion of existing or former use, are categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA. This project involves installation of thirty-two electric vehicle Level 2 chargers at ten community hub sites around Humboldt County. The electric vehicle charging stations will be installed on existing pavement and connected to existing electrical infrastructure in locations where customers already park their vehicles. The project involves negligible or no expansion of existing or former use of the sites. Therefore, the project falls within section 15301 and will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Cal. Code Regs., Title 14, Sec. 15303 provides that projects which consist of construction and location of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures; installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures; and the conversion of existing small structures from one use to another where only minor modifications are made in the exterior of the structure, are categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA. This project consists of installation of new small equipment to existing sites. Specifically, a typical charger to be installed is approximately the size of a pay phone. The equipment will be installed on existing pavement. Therefore, the project falls within section 15303 and will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Cal. Code Regs., Title 14, Sec. 15304 provides that projects which consist of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes are categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA. In this project, minor trenching and directional boring may be necessary to lay conduit from the existing or new electrical infrastructure (transformer, switchgear, etc.) to the charging equipment. Trenching/boring will take place on currently paved ground, which would not involve the removal of any trees, and the existing surface will be restored. Therefore, the project falls within section 15304 and will not have a significant effect on the environment.

The project will not impact an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies; does not involve any cumulative impacts of successive projects of the same type in the same place that might be considered significant; does not involve unusual circumstances that might have a significant effect on the environment; will not result in damage to scenic resources within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway; the project site is not included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code section 65962.5; and the project will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. Therefore, none of the exceptions to categorical exemptions listed in CEQA Guidelines section 15300.2 apply to this project, and this project will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Responsible Agency

Contact Person: Kyle Wada

Area

Code/Telephone/Extension: (916) 909-2590

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: *Kyle Wada* Date: 12/2/24 Title: Energy Analyst

Signed by Responsible Agency Signed By Applicant

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Date Received for filing at OPR: _____