

## NOTICE OF EXEMPTION



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

<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b>	Foothill Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	T2N, R15E portions of Sections 15, 16, 21 and & 22, MDBM.	<b>COUNTY</b>	Tuolumne
<b>LEAD AGENCY</b>	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
<b>CONTACT</b>	Gary Whitson, Unit Forester CAL FIRE Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit	<b>PHONE</b>	(209) 754-3831
<b>ADDRESS</b>	785 Mountain Ranch Rd., San Andreas, CA 95249		

**Project Description:** This project will consist of reducing brush, live trees less than 12-inches diameter at breast height, and surface fuels to create a shaded fuel break condition around the Foothill Horizons School near the community of Sonora. Operations will consist primarily of mastication and hand crews cutting, piling and burning or chipping. Approximately 10 to 20 of the piles will be specifically ignited and extinguished to create biochar. Additionally, some material will be burned in a kiln to create approximately 4 yards of biochar material. The biochar will be spread on-site or used for various composting or planting experiments. The intent of the fuel reduction project is to eliminate the vertical and horizontal continuity of understory fuels, surface fuels, and crown fuels to improve ingress and egress, minimize fire behavior in the event of a fire, and to improve forest health. The project area is approximately 144 acres in size. The project area ranges in elevation from approximately 2,440 to 2,682 feet above sea level. Vegetation at the site would best be described as oak woodland. Surface and ladder fuels will be reduced or modified by mastication, chipping, or by hand cutting, piling and burning. Mastication may be conducted by a variety of track laying type tractors. Hand work for chipping, as well as piling and burning will be conducted by hand crews using chainsaws and other hand tools. Target residual tree spacing will be 25 to 30-feet between stems. Residual trees will be pruned to a height of approximately 8 to 10-feet above ground level. Dead trees of any size may be felled and chipped, piled and burned, or masticated. Masticated or chipped material will be left on site. Rubber tracked skid steer tractors or small, rubber tracked excavators may be used to construct piles or transport material to the kiln for burning. The project area may be maintained using goats to browse vegetation sprouting in the project area. The reduction in vegetation will create an open and parklike shaded fuel break condition that will minimize fire behavior and create a stand structure that is resistant to stand replacing fires.

**EXEMPTION STATUS**

- Categorical Exemption Type and 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**

This project fits under portions of 15304- Minor Alterations to Land. The project will consist of removing surface and ladder fuels to create a shaded fuel break condition. The project is located in an urban interface area. The project will create an open and park like condition. The project will not involve the removal of mature or scenic trees. Stand health will be improved by removing dead, dying, and suppressed trees and brush, and increasing growing space for mature, healthy dominant and co-dominant trees. Sensitive species will not be impacted by the proposed project. The project was designed to avoid adverse impacts to watercourses. Mastication and chipping will leave a layer of organic material that will provide for excellent erosion control. The project was carefully designed to avoid adverse impacts to archaeological resources. The project was designed to reduce hazardous fuel loading in a strategic location that will make the community more resilient regarding wildfires.

Review by CAL FIRE staff confirmed that no exceptions apply that would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. The Department 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, populations and housing, public services, recreation, transportation/ traffic, utilities and service systems, or to wildfire. Documentation of the environmental review completed by the Department is kept on file at the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit Headquarters in San Andreas.

**DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING**

DocuSigned by:  
**David Fulcher** 12/4/2024  
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 David Fulcher, Southern Region Chief Date  
 California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection