

Notice of Exemption (Revised)

TO:

☒ **Office of Planning and Research**
1400 Tenth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

☒ **Humboldt County Clerk**
825 5th Street, Fifth Floor
Eureka, CA 95501

FROM:

Orick Community Services District
101 Swan Road
Orick, CA 95555

State Clearinghouse Number: 2020120306

Project Title: Orick Community Services District (OCSD) Water System Improvements

Project Location:

The project site is located in the unincorporated community of Orick in Humboldt County. Work would occur at four separate locations in Sections 4 and 5, Township 10 North, Range 1 East, and Sections 33 and 34, Township 11 North, Range 1 East, of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Orick 7.5-minute quadrangle (Figure 1).

City: Orick (unincorporated)

County: Humboldt

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project:

The project includes improvements to the OCSD water system that are required in order to replace aging infrastructure and equipment, maintain adequate fire flows, and ensure the health and safety of the community and the environment. The project will benefit residents and businesses within the OCSD's service area.

Improvements include replacing a leaking 100,000-gallon redwood water tank with a ~100,000-gallon welded steel tank. The tank is located on OCSD-owned property ~150 feet south of Old State Highway ~2,000 feet west of its northern intersection with State Route 101. The existing tank would be demolished and removed from the site, and the new tank would be installed in the same footprint as the existing tank. The entire tank pad would be over-excavated approximately three feet below the existing grade. Electrical equipment, supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA), and a six-inch overflow pipe would be installed. In addition, three valves adjacent to the tank would be replaced. A PG&E power pole upslope of the tank would be replaced with a taller pole (50 feet in height) to provide adequate clearance for the power lines, and a 40-foot-tall communications tower would be constructed at the water tank.

At the District office on Swan Road, electrical equipment and a 20-foot-tall communications tower would be constructed to support the SCADA system. A 90 KW, diesel-fired emergency generator equipped with a manual transfer switch would be acquired, and would be housed in a new cargo container outside the District office.

Four distribution valves are inoperable and would be replaced. Two of the valves are located at 120779 Highway 101 next to Hagoods Hardware Store, and the other two are located at 121390 Highway 101 next to the Orick Presbyterian Church. A Caltrans Encroachment permit would be required to replace the valves.

The revised project includes the following modifications on the water tank site: a different alignment for the overhead powerline and installation of one additional 45-foot-tall PG&E power pole for the service drop to the tank; 18 spruce trees ranging in size from 5 inches to 22 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH), one 5-inch DBH alder, one 7-inch DBH alder, one 12-inch DBH alder, and one 13-inch DBH hemlock would be removed to provide PG&E required fire clearance from the overhead electrical facilities.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Orick Community Services District

Name of Agency Carrying out the Project: Orick Community Services District

Local Agency Contact Person: Trevor Avram, Operator/Water Operations Manager

Exempt Status: Categorical Exemption:

California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3 (CEQA Guidelines):
Class 1, §15301 (Existing Facilities)

Class 2, §15302 (Replacement or Reconstruction)
Class 3, §15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures)
Class 4, §15304 (Minor Alterations to Land)

Reason Why Project Is Exempt:

Class 1 authorizes the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. Class 2 authorizes replacement or reconstruction of existing utility systems and/or facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure being replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced. Class 3 authorizes construction of limited numbers of new, small facilities or structures and installation of small new equipment and facilities in small structures. Class 4 authorizes minor alterations to the condition of the land (e.g., clearing, grading, trenching, and backfilling); §15304(i) specifically covers fire fuel management activities around structures to reduce the volume of flammable vegetation, provided that the activities will not impact endangered, rare, or threatened plant or animal species or result in significant erosion and sedimentation of surface waters.

The project is consistent with the categorical exemptions noted above because work would not expand the District's water service capacity; only minor earth disturbance would be required to accommodate the proposed improvements; the ground surface would be restored following construction; no special-status species, wetlands, or other surface waters would be affected; and new construction would be limited to small structures. It should be noted that the California Department of Public Health recognizes water tanks up to 100,000 gallons in size as small structures.

As documented in **Attachment A**, the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances; would not result in damage to scenic resources within a Scenic Highway; is not located on a hazardous waste site pursuant to §65962.5 of the Government Code; would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource; and would not result in cumulatively significant impacts.

Signature:



Trevor Avram

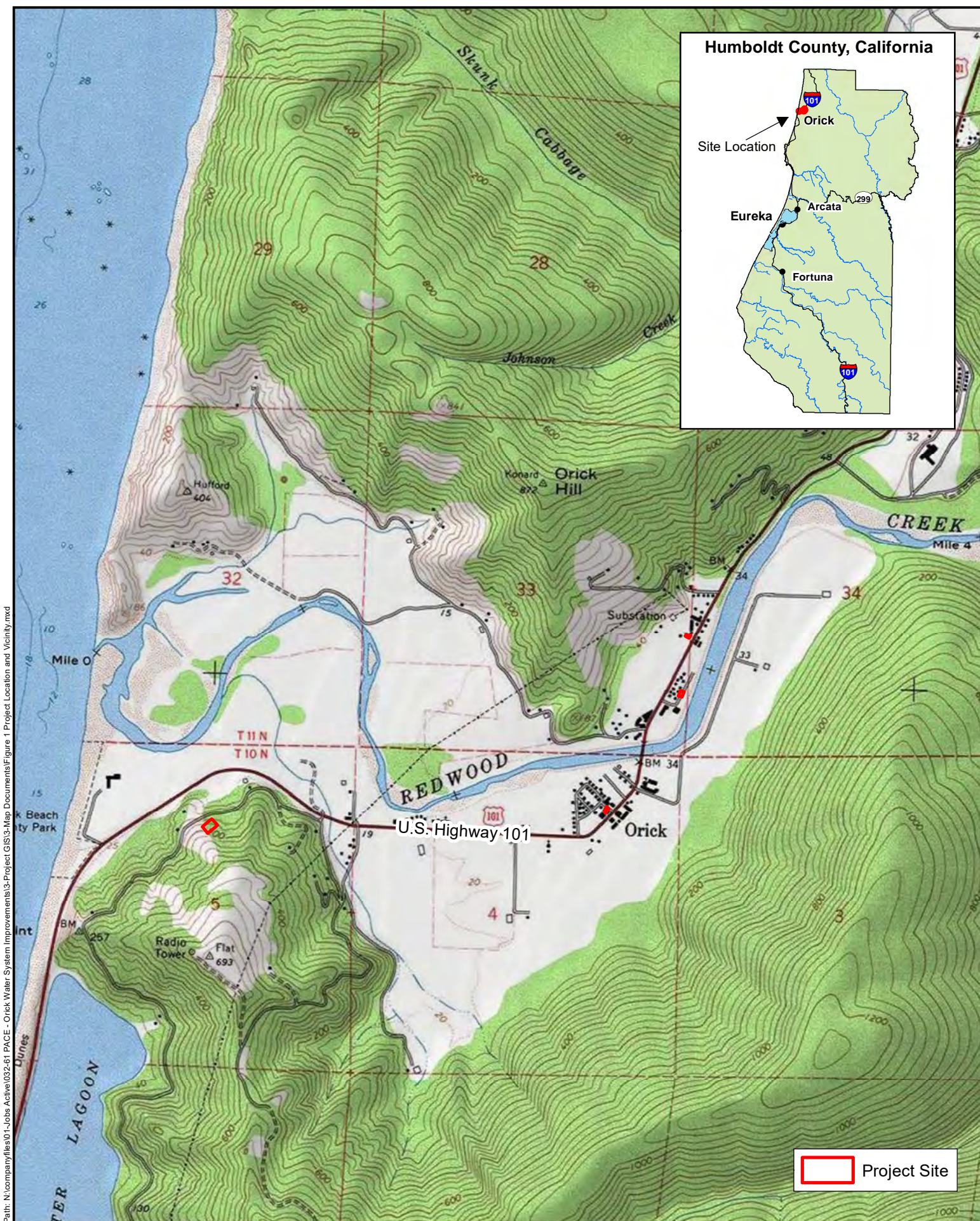
Operator/Water Operations Manager

Date:

5/15/25

Attachments:

- Figure 1: Project Location and Vicinity Map
- Figure 2: Site Plan
- Appendix A: Representative Photographs

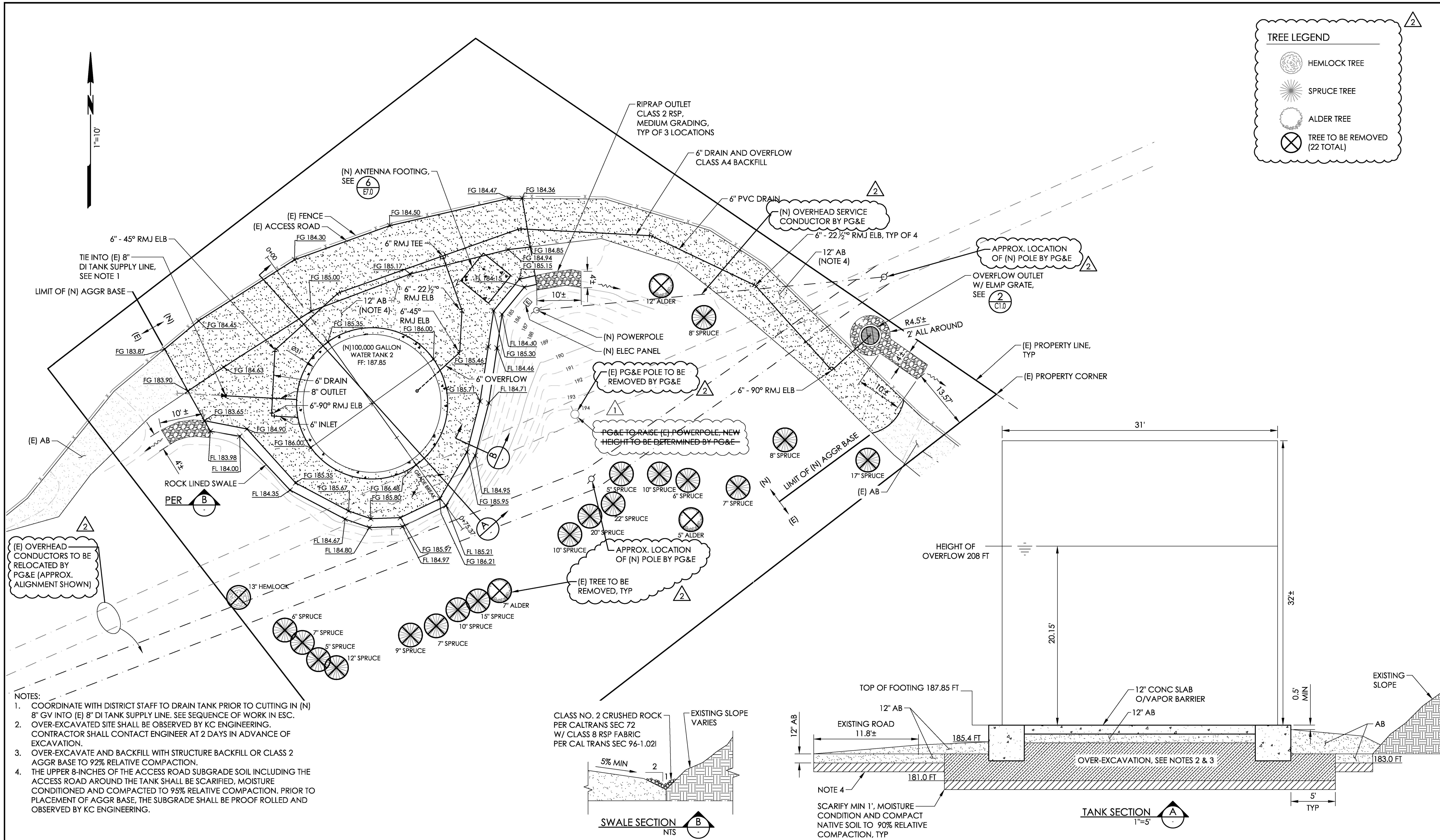


Path: N:\companyfiles\01-Jobs Active\032-61 PACE - Orick Water System Improvements\03-Map Documents\Figure 1 Project Location and Vicinity.mxd



Figure 1
Project Location and Vicinity Map

All depictions are approximate. Not a survey product. 11.25.20



<p>BAR IS ONE INCH ON ORIGINAL DRAWING</p> <p>0" 1"</p> <p>IF NOT ONE INCH ON THIS SHEET, ADJUST SCALES ACCORDINGLY.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">REVISIONS</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>NO</th> <th>DATE</th> <th>DESCRIPTION</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>3/14/24</td> <td>ADDENDUM #1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>4/21/25</td> <td>ADDED TREE REMOVALS PER PG&E REQUIREMENTS & REVISED PG&E LAYOUT</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	NO	DATE	DESCRIPTION	1	3/14/24	ADDENDUM #1	2	4/21/25	ADDED TREE REMOVALS PER PG&E REQUIREMENTS & REVISED PG&E LAYOUT	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>PACE ENGINEERING</p> </div> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td>DES - TWW</td> <td>CKD - TWW</td> <td>JOB NO.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DRN - BWS</td> <td>DATE 3/14/2024</td> <td>3027.02</td> </tr> </table>	DES - TWW	CKD - TWW	JOB NO.	DRN - BWS	DATE 3/14/2024	3027.02	<p>SIGNED</p> <p style="text-align: right;">4/22/25</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>	<p>ORICK COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT</p> <p>WATER SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT TANK 2 REPLACEMENT</p> <p>Figure 2</p> <p>REVISED SITE PLAN</p>	<p>SHEET</p> <p style="font-size: 2em;">C2.1</p> <p>PG 6 OF 29</p>
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Plot Date: April 22, 2025 - 6:05 pm Log Name: rturner
 File Name: Willard Projects\3027.02 Orick CSD\DWG\Site Plan T2dwg Layout C2.1 (ADD#1)

ATTACHMENT A

Documentation for Categorical Exemption

Orick CSD Water System Improvements

As described in the Notice of Exemption (NOE), the proposed project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to §15301 (Class 1-Existing Facilities), §15302 (Class 2-Replacement or Reconstruction), §15303 (Class 3-New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures), and §15304 (Class 4-Minor Alterations to Land) of the CEQA Guidelines. CEQA Guidelines §15300.2 identifies exceptions that override a lead agency's ability to use a categorical exemption. These exceptions are listed below, followed by documentation of why each exception does not apply to the proposed project.

- 1. Location.** *Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located -- a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may 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.*

The proposed project is supported in part by Class 3 and 4 exemptions. As documented below, no evidence has been found to suggest that the project location is particularly sensitive. Likewise, the project is not expected to affect an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern. Therefore, Class 3 and 4 exemptions are applicable to the proposed project.

- 2. Cumulative Impact.** *All exemptions are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time, is significant.*

The project involves replacement and improvements to existing components of the Orick Community Services District's (OCSD) water system that are required in order to ensure the health and safety of the community and the environment. There are no other closely related past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects in the project area that would cause related impacts. Impacts from the proposed project would be temporary and cease at completion of the project. Therefore, the proposed project's impacts would not be cumulatively considerable.

- 3. 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.*

An "unusual circumstance" exists if the project's circumstances differ from the general circumstances of projects covered by the applicable exemption, and, if so, whether there is a reasonable possibility of a significant effect on the environment *due to* the unusual circumstances. As documented below, there are no unusual circumstances that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Aesthetics:

The proposed water tank would be replaced in the same location and have approximately the same capacity as the existing tank. Although several trees would be removed to satisfy fire clearance requirements for the powerlines, due to the number of trees that would remain, no adverse impact from tree removal would occur.

Other above-ground structures are limited to communication towers at the water tank site and at the District office, a power pole extension at the tank site, and a storage facility at the District office. The 40-foot tower at the tank site would be a narrow, lattice structure only ten feet taller than the tank and would be lower in height than surrounding trees. The 20-foot tower at the District office would also be a narrow, lattice structure, and would be shorter than the surrounding power poles.

The two new power poles at the tank would be 45 feet and 50 feet in height, but would not be readily visible given their neutral color and forested backdrop. The emergency generator storage container at the District

office would be visible only to viewers on Swan Road, a short, dead-end street with minimal traffic. Valve replacement work would occur at highly visible locations along Highway 101, but the visual impacts due to construction would be very short-term and no permanent impacts would occur. The proposed project would not involve any unusual circumstances that might result in a significant visual impact.

Agriculture and Forestry Resources:

According to the California Department of Conservation [DOC], the project site is not designated as prime, unique, or important farmland and is not under a Williamson Act contract (DOC, 2025; 2020).

Although several trees would be removed from the water tank site, the tree removal is necessary to reduce the risk of fire hazards and the potential for trees to fall into powerlines. As such, the project qualifies for an exemption from timberland conversion permits and timber harvest plan requirements (California Code of Regulations Title 14, §1104.1, Conversion Exemptions) (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 2025). There are no unusual circumstances associated with agriculture or forestry resources that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Air Quality/Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions:

The proposed project would result in the temporary generation of ROG, NO_x, PM₁₀, and other regulated pollutants during construction. ROG and NO_x emissions are associated with employee vehicle trips, delivery of materials, and construction equipment exhaust. PM₁₀ would be generated during site preparation, excavation, road paving, and from exhaust associated with construction equipment. Emissions would be generated during use of the temporary diesel-fired generator; however, the generator would be operated only in the event of an emergency and during periodic testing. There are no unusual circumstances associated with air quality or GHG emissions that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Biological Resources:

Special-Status Species

Biological review of the proposed project included review of California Natural Diversity Data Base (CNDDB) records for special-status plants, animals, and natural communities; review of the California Native Plant Society's (CNPS) Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants; review of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) records for federally listed, proposed, and candidate plant and wildlife species under jurisdiction of the USFWS as well as the USFWS list of migratory birds of conservation concern; and review of National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) records for anadromous fish species under the jurisdiction of the NMFS.

Botanical and wildlife field evaluations were completed by an ENPLAN biologist on June 19, 2020. Some of the special-status species potentially occurring in the project area would not have been evident at the time the fieldwork was conducted. However, determination of their potential presence could readily be made based on observed habitat characteristics. Two plant species identified as California Rare Plant Rank (CRPR) 4 (Plants of Limited Distribution - A Watch List) were observed at the water tank site: trailing black currant and golden saxifrage. Rank 4 plants are not considered special-status species; although avoidance is recommended where feasible, mitigation is not required. With respect to wildlife, northern red-legged frogs (a California Species of Special Concern) have previously been reported in the general vicinity of the water tank. A single frog, probably a northern red-legged frog, was briefly sighted during the field survey, but its identification could not be confirmed. Northern red-legged frogs are not uncommon in the area: CNDDB records show 31 sighting locations within a five-mile radius of the project area. CDFW staff was contacted to discuss the implications of the potential presence of northern red-legged frogs in the vicinity of the tank (van Hattem, pers. comm.) Although frogs should be avoided if observed during construction, the proposed work would not affect breeding habitat for the frog; therefore, no significant impacts would occur. No unusual biological circumstances are present that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project. Photographs of the project area are included in **Appendix A**.

Sensitive Natural Communities

Field review identified one perennial stream crossing under the driveway leading to the water tank site. Although the stream and its adjoining riparian habitat are considered sensitive, no work affecting the stream

or riparian habitat is proposed.

Nesting Migratory Birds

The USFWS identified the following Birds of Conservation Concern as potentially being affected by the proposed project: Allen's hummingbird, bald eagle, black oystercatcher, black turnstone, Clark's grebe, great blue heron, marbled godwit, olive-sided flycatcher, red-throated loon, rufous hummingbird, semipalmated sandpiper, and whimbrel (USFWS, 2020). A few of these species could potentially nest in the vicinity of the water tank, as could individuals of other more common species. The potential for adversely affecting nesting birds will be minimized by conducting construction activities outside of the nesting season (between September 1 and January 31), or conducting pre-construction nesting surveys in accordance with existing standard construction measures if work is conducted during the nesting season.

There are no unusual circumstances associated with nesting migratory birds that would preclude a categorical exemption for the proposed project.

Energy:

The proposed project does not include any components that would result in environmental impacts due to the wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources. There are no unique circumstances related to energy use during construction or operation of the proposed project that would result in more significant impacts than other similar projects.

Geology and Soils:

According to the Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map, there are no Alquist-Priolo Special Study Zones in the project area. The nearest Alquist-Priolo Special Study Zones occur approximately 16 miles south of the community of Orick near Trinidad (DOC, n.d.a.).

There are potentially active faults north, south, and east of Orick (DOC, n.d.b.); however, this is not unique to the project site. As recommended in the Geotechnical Report prepared by KC Engineering (KC Engineering, 2020), structures at the water tank site would be designed in accordance with the California Building Code and other applicable State codes to withstand anticipated ground accelerations.

According to the Geotechnical Report prepared by KC Engineering, subsurface soils at the proposed tank site consist of fine-grained soils overlying bedrock material. The geologic deposits underlying the proposed water tank are mapped by the California Division of Mines and Geology as Mesozoic-aged Franciscan Complex (KC Engineering, 2020). These deposits are found throughout the community of Orick and are not unique to the project site. Additionally, improvements at other locations within the District's service area would occur in previously disturbed areas. There are no unique circumstances related to geology or soils that would result in more significant impacts than other similar projects.

Hydrology and Water Quality:

Construction activities would result in the temporary disturbance of soil and would expose disturbed areas to potential storm events, which could generate accelerated runoff, localized erosion, and sedimentation. However, in accordance with Humboldt County requirements, erosion/sediment controls would be implemented to prevent damage to streams, watercourses, and aquatic habitats. There is nothing unique about the project site or project design that would result in significant impacts to water quality.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Map (Panels 06023C0165F and 0170F effective November 4, 2016), the project site is not located within a designated flood hazard zone (FEMA, n.d.).

Land Use and Planning:

The proposed project would not conflict with the County's General Plan, applicable County Codes, or standard construction measures, and does not include any components that would physically divide an established community.

Mineral Resources:

The California Geological Survey has not designated any Mineral Resource Zones in the project area (DOC, n.d.c.). There are no active mining operations in the study area (DOC, n.d.d.)

Noise:

Construction activities would generate noise and would temporarily increase noise levels in the area. Additionally, use of the emergency generator would generate noise; however, the generator would be used only during emergencies and for periodic testing. There is nothing unique to the project that would result in more significant impacts than other construction projects in the area. The project does not include any components that would result in a permanent increase in noise levels.

Population and Housing:

The purpose of the project is to ensure the health and safety of the community and the environment. Because the project would not increase the capacity of the District's water system, the project would not induce population growth in the area beyond that currently projected in the County's General Plan.

Public Services:

Because the project does not include any components that would increase capacity in the District's water system, the project would not induce population growth in the area beyond that currently projected in the County's General Plan. Therefore, the project would not generate a demand for additional fire protection, police protection, schools, parks, or other public services.

Recreation:

There are no unique recreational facilities or resources in or adjacent to the project site. In addition, because the project would not induce population growth, the project would not indirectly impact recreational facilities or result in the need for additional recreational facilities.

Transportation:

Because the project would not induce population growth, the project would not directly or indirectly result in a permanent increase in traffic. There would be short-term increases in traffic in the area associated with construction; however, this is a temporary impact and would cease upon completion of the improvements.

Utilities and Service Systems:

Other than the powerline extension on the water tank site, the project would not require the relocation of sewer lines, electric facilities, storm drains, natural gas, or other utility infrastructure. Because the project would not induce population growth, no increased demand for utilities would occur.

Wildfire:

Installing overhead powerlines on the water tank site could increase the risk of fire hazards; however, as described above, potentially fire prone and hazardous trees would be removed in accordance with existing requirements to minimize the risk of fire hazards and the potential for trees to fall into powerlines. The project does not include any other features that would increase the long-term risk of wildland fires or expose people or structures to wildland fires. There are no unique circumstances associated with the proposed project that would result in more significant impacts than other projects in the area.

- 4. Scenic Highways.** *A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a State Scenic Highway.*

According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), there are no officially designated State Scenic Highways in the project area (Caltrans, n.d.); therefore, there would be no impact.

5. Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to §65962.5 of the Government Code.

The following databases were reviewed to locate "Cortese List" sites (CalEPA, n.d.).

- List of Hazardous Waste and Substances sites from the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) EnviroStor database.
- State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) GeoTracker Database.
- List of solid waste disposal sites identified by SWRCB with waste constituents above hazardous waste levels outside the waste management unit.
- List of active Cease and Desist Orders and Clean-Up and Abatement Orders from the SWRCB.

The records search revealed that the project is not located on a hazardous waste site. However, an active leaking underground storage tank case is located east of the planned valve replacement near Hargood's Hardware Store, at the now-closed Green Valley Exxon. Review of GeoTracker records shows that the leaking tanks were removed in August 2000. Based on nearby monitoring wells, the depth to groundwater is estimated at 9 to 19 feet below ground surface. Because the valve replacement would be at a much shallower depth (approximately 3 feet), it is not anticipated that groundwater would be encountered. In the unlikely event that contaminated groundwater was encountered during valve replacement, OCSB would be responsible for the proper handling and disposal of the contaminated water, in accordance with State Water Board requirements.

6. Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

A cultural resources evaluation was completed for the project by DZC: Archaeology & Cultural Resource Management to identify the project's potential effects on cultural resources. The evaluation included a records search, Native American consultation, and field evaluation. The records search included review of records at the Northwest Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System (NWIC/CHRIS), Ancestry.com, General Land Office records, California State Archives, and consultation with the Native American Heritage Commission, the Yurok Tribe of the Yurok Reservation, Big Lagoon Rancheria, and the Cher-Ae-Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria. NWIC/CHRIS resources evaluated included the *California Inventory of Historical Resources* (1970), *Caltrans Local and State Historic Bridge Inventory*, and *Handbook of North American Indians* (Vol. 8, 1970).

A records search was conducted by the NWIC/CHRIS on September 17, 2020, and covered a 1/4-mile radius around the project's Area of Potential Effects (APE). The records search revealed that 12 archaeological surveys have been conducted within a 1/4-mile radius of the APE, five of which encompassed portions of the APE. There is one previously recorded archaeological site within a 1/2-mile radius of the APE and none within the project's APE. Archeological fieldwork took place on October 6, 2020, during which the APE was intensively surveyed to identify cultural resources that would be potentially affected by the proposed project. No cultural resources were identified.

On August 24, 2020, the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) conducted a search of their Sacred Lands File and indicated that the search did not reveal any known Native American sacred sites or cultural resources in the project area. The NAHC also provided contact information for several Native American representatives and organizations, who were contacted on September 17, 2020, with a request to provide comments on the proposed project. No responses were received.

The evaluation concluded that no known cultural resources would be impacted by the project. However, there is always some potential for previously unknown cultural resources to be encountered during construction. The following standard construction measures will be included in construction contracts for the project to address the inadvertent discovery of cultural resources and human remains.

- 1) It is best practice to avoid cultural resources whenever possible. In cases of inadvertent (unplanned) discovery of cultural resources or human remains, all work shall stop in that area until a qualified archaeologist can evaluate the nature and significance of the find [CCR 15064.5(f)].
- 2) If human remains are encountered during construction, it is required that work stop immediately in that area and notification be made to the Humboldt County Coroner (CCR 15064.5(e) (1) (A); HSC Sec. 7050.5).
 - a) Contact information for the Chief Deputy Coroner office at the time of this report: Humboldt County Coroner; Ernest Stewart – Chief Deputy Coroner, 3012 I Street, Eureka, CA 95501; Phone: 707-445-7242.
 - b) If the Coroner determines the remains to be Native American, the Coroner shall contact the NAHC within 24 hours and collaboratively determine the Most Likely Descendant (CCR 15064.5(e)(1)(B).

DOCUMENTATION:

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- _____. n.d.c. Mineral Land Classification Map. <https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/minerals/?page=Mineral-Land-Classification>. Accessed May 2025.
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- California Department of Transportation.** n.d. California Road System – Functional Classification. <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=026e830c914c495797c969a3e5668538>. Accessed May 2025.
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- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).** California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB). <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDB/Maps-and-Data>. Accessed November 2020 and May 2025.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).** n.d. National Flood Hazard Map (Panels 06023C0165F and 170F, effective November 4, 2016). <https://hazards.fema.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8b0adb51996444d4879338b5529aa9cd>. Accessed May 2025.
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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).** 2020. IPaC Resource List: Threatened and Endangered Species, and Birds of Conservation Concern. Accessed November 2020 and May 2025.