

Notice of Exemption

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

From: University of California, Santa Cruz
Physical Planning, Development & Operations
1155 High Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

Project Title: Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve Emergency Bank Stabilization Project

Project Applicant: University of California Santa Cruz

Project Location: The Project is located along an approximate one-mile segment of Big Creek Canyon Road, which extends east from State Route (Highway 1), within the Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve (Reserve) in the Big Sur area of Monterey County. The approximately 3,850-acre Reserve, which is owned and managed by the University of California, is located approximately 45 miles south of the city of Monterey; see Figure 1.

Project Location - City: Unincorporated Big Sur area **Project Location - County:** Monterey

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project: The proposed project consists of bank repairs at eight locations along Big Creek Canyon Road, which extends east from Highway 1, as well as improvements at the Reserve entry. Generally, the repairs consist of placement of base rock along segments of the road and installation of rock slope protection (RSP) along segments of Big Creek and Devil's Creek that are adjacent to the road to provide stabilization for the roadway that was damaged due to storms that occurred in 2023. The work areas total approximately 0.29 acres in nine locations.

A total of 83 cubic yards of aggregate base rock is proposed to be placed on the western edge of the road surface to provide a level and smooth driving surface and to maintain the 10-foot road width in four locations with minor widening of the road in some locations. The roadbed would be raised approximately 1.5 feet at one site for a distance of approximately 80 linear feet. Removal of rock boulders and debris at the edge of the existing road also is proposed in some locations to provide a minimum road width of 10 feet. Placement of rock will be individually controlled (placed one by one with an excavator, rather than dumping multiple rocks). The rocks would be placed to conform to natural grades and exposed bedrock where present.

Best management practices (BMPs) will be implemented during the approximate 6-to-8-week construction period to avoid and minimize potential adverse effects on water quality and biological resources. The RSP work areas would be isolated from Big Creek and Devil's Creek with installation of an impermeable turbidity curtain along the creek side perimeter of the work area that would not impede creek flows and would prevent sediments and materials from inadvertently entering the creek channel. Silt fences would be installed to protect undisturbed areas adjacent to the work sites, and erosion control measures would be implemented as set forth in the plans.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: University of California, Santa Cruz

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: University of California, Santa Cruz

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: _____
- Statutory Exemption. State code number: _____

Reasons Why Project is Exempt: CEQA provides “statutory exemptions” that are applicable to certain projects and activities, as granted by the Legislature. CEQA Statute Section 21080(b)(3) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(a) allows exemption from CEQA for emergency projects under certain conditions. Specifically, these sections include projects carried out by a public agency to maintain, repair, restore, demolish or replace property or facilities damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster in a disaster-stricken area in which a state of emergency has been proclaimed.

The University’s Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve Emergency Bank Stabilization Project seeks to replace road material along Big Creek Canyon Road that was removed during the 2022/2023 winter storms and to improve on the original construction of the road to resist future high flow events. The 2022-23 winter was a heavy rainfall year, and January 2023 brought a significant high flow event. Big Creek reached a level not seen in the 40 years of UC-management of the Reserve. The storms caused undermining of the banks of Big Creek and damage to the adjacent Big Creek Canyon Road at eight locations, and currently, the road no longer provides safe vehicle access to the Reserve. Foundational and surface material was removed at eight sites along the road, five of which have completely impeded the passage of vehicles. At this time, access to critical facilities and infrastructure and for direct emergency response is blocked. As a result of these storms, Monterey County, as well as other counties in California, were declared disaster areas by the federal and state governments pursuant to the California Governor’s proclamation on March 8, 2023 (DR-4683-CA) and a Presidential declaration of a major disaster for the State of California (FEMA-4699-DR) on April 3, 2023.

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(a), this project provides for the repair and reconstruction of the Big Creek Canyon Road, which was damaged as a result of a disaster in a disaster-stricken area in which a state of emergency had been proclaimed by the Governor. Thus, the project results in replacement of public facilities that were damaged as a result of the declared state of emergency. Additionally, Big Creek Road is in danger of further erosion and storm damage. Under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(b), this project provides for emergency repairs to publicly- owned facilities necessary to maintain service essential to the public health, safety or welfare. Since January 2023, access to the Reserve has been closed to all vehicle traffic for public safety. Action is needed to reopen this road to all modes of transportation, including emergency vehicles, to provide for facilities necessary to maintain service essential to the public health, safety or welfare of the community.

Therefore, the University of California, Santa Cruz is able to document that the project qualifies for the Statutory Exemption found at CEQA Statute Section 21080(b)(3) and CEQA Guidelines 15269(a) and (b), which allows emergency projects under certain conditions.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Erika Carpenter

Area Code/Telephone/Extension: 831-212-0187

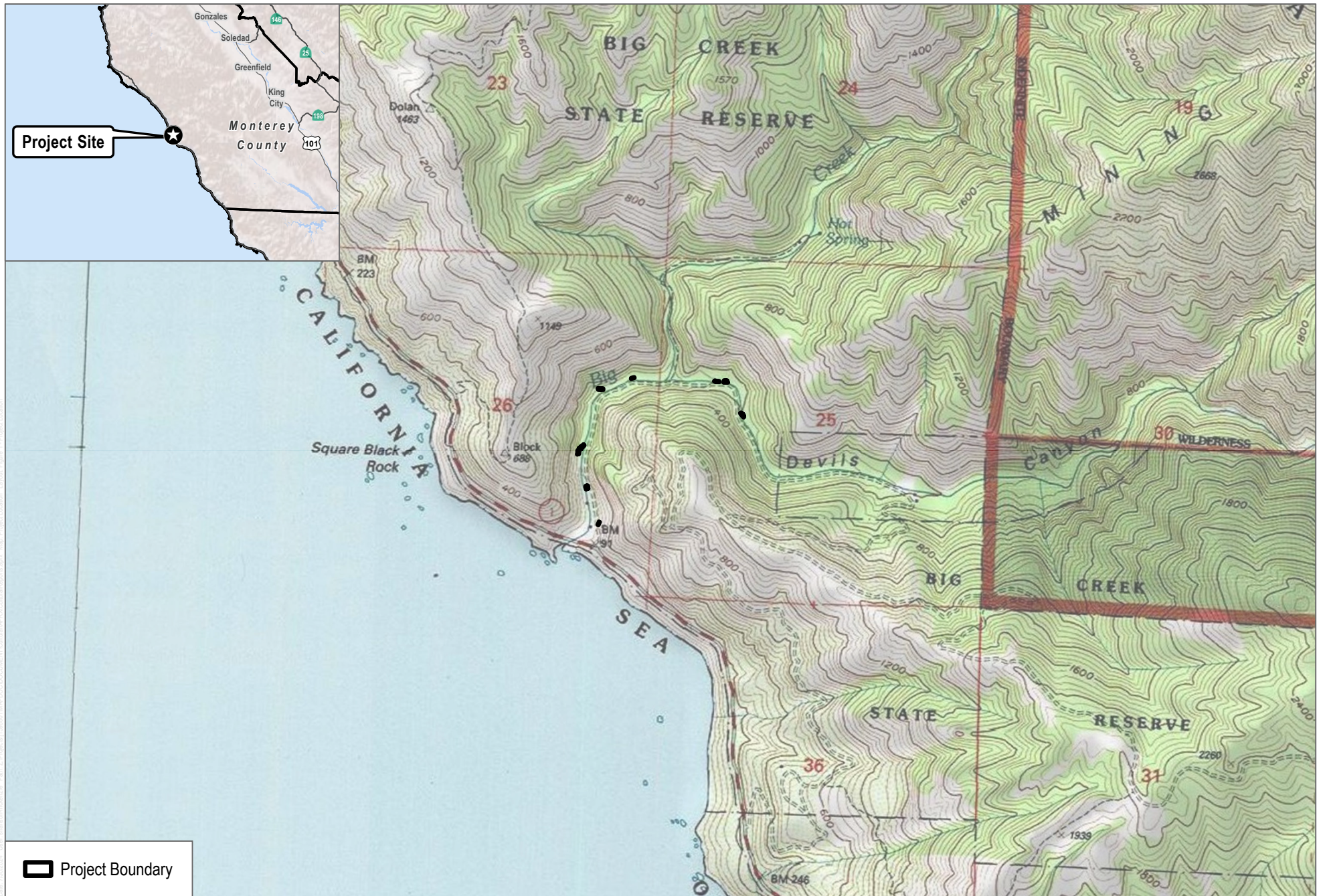
DocuSigned by:
 Signature: Erika Carpenter Date: 8/2/2024 Title: Senior Environmental Planner
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If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____



SOURCE: USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle Series



0 500 1,000 Feet

FIGURE 1

Regional Project Location

Landels-Hill Big Creek Reserve Emergency Bank Stabilization Project