

FILED

November 14, 2024
 JENAVIVE HERRINGTON
 COUNTY CLERK
 LAKE COUNTY



COUNTY OF LAKE
 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
 Planning Division
 Courthouse - 255 N. Forbes Street
 Lakeport, California 95453
 Telephone 707/263-2221 FAX 707/263-2225

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

By *Anna Helms*
 Deputy clerk

TO: County Clerk Office of Planning & Research
 County of Lake 1400 Tenth Street
 Lakeport, CA 95453 Sacramento, CA 95814-3044

FROM: Lake County Community Development Dept.
 255 North Forbes Street
 Lakeport, CA 95453

PROJECT TITLE: Woody Biomass Carbonizer Pilot Project (Categorical Exemption
 CE 24-29)

PROJECT LOCATION: 20126 Hwy 175, Middletown, CA 95461 (013-011-54)

COUNTY: Lake

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT: Woody Biomass Carbonizer Pilot Project

PROPOSAL: The project site is located at 20126 Hwy 175, Middletown, Lake County, CA. 95426. Project activities would occur in a 7.5-acre area within a 167-acre parcel.

The Hometown Wildfire Safety Collaborative is a partnership between Clear Lake Environmental Research Center (CLERC), Northshore Fire Protection District and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). We are working together to address wildfire risks and biomass management logistics in Lake County. This is a pilot project funded by PG&E & CLERC to help improve wildfire safety in Lake County.

The project seeks permission to establish a portable and temporary biochar production facility on a 7.5-acre site located at 20126 Highway 175 in Middletown California.

The site is associated with the Middletown Wastewater Treatment Plant and is located at the western edge of the property operated by Lake County Sanitation District (LACOSAN) under the management of Lake County Special Districts. The proposed project site has previously been disturbed and has been rocked on numerous occasions. The area has a long history of use and serving as a staging area for various community benefit projects, such as:

- The parcel was used as an effluent spray field associated with the Middletown Wastewater Treatment Plant since the late 1980's.
- The parcel was utilized as an _effluent spray field until the County approved the Geysers Effluent Pipeline that now pumps all effluent from Lake County Treatment Plants up to the Geysers where the gray water is injected into the steam wells for the Geothermal Energy Plants.

- The project area was used as a staging area for dead and burned trees after the Valley Fire in 2015.
- The project area was used as a staging area for construction materials and equipment during implementation of the 2017 Anderson Springs Sewer Project.
- Currently, CalFire and the South Lake County Fire Protection District have an Air Curtain Incinerator (ACI) staged at the site to burn accumulated woody material from the community in order to reduce wildfire risks.

The proposed project includes the use of a Tigercat 6040 Carbonizer to convert woody material into biochar. Key elements of the proposed operation include:

Equipment

- One Tigercat 6040 Carbonizer for biochar production
- Existing air curtain burner to remain on-site (already permitted)
- Loader with wood sheer

Materials Handling

- Designated staging areas for delivery and storage of un-merchantable wood sourced from Lake County wildfires, tree mortality emergency, and wildfire mitigation projects
- Delivery' Will be by PG&E contractors and locally contracted haulers. There will be no public drop off permitted
- Only clean forest wood and slash, including charred wood, will be accepted

On-site Facilities

- Housing trailers for security and 24-hour operation facilitation
- Office trailer
- Porta potty
- Temporary water tanks
- Fire Truck and Emergency fire suppression equipment
- Weather monitoring station (Tempest) for compliance with Fire District operational prescriptions

Site Layout

- A 100-foot minimum setback from the Putah Creek riparian corridor to the log deck and related operations.
- Distance between Putah Creek riparian corridor and the carbonizer is greater than 250-feet.
- Minimum 50-foot setback between carbonizer and log decks
- Separation of residential and industrial uses

Operational Practices

- 24-hour operation of the carbonizer; Monday through Friday;
- Deliveries to and from the site will occur during normal business hours
- Biochar distribution from the site during normal business hours (no more than 1 truckload per day)
- Approximately 200-250 tons of woody material processed each day

NAME OF PUBLIC AGENCY APPROVING PROJECT: Lake County Community Development Department

NAME OF PERSON OR AGENCY CARRYING OUT PROJECT: Clear Lake Environmental Research Center (CLERC)

EXEMPT STATUS (Check One):

- Ministerial [Section 21080(b); 15268];
- Declared Emergency [Section 21080(b)(3); 15269(a)];
- Emergency Project [Section 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c)];
- Statutory Exemption: State code number _____;
- Categorical Exemption (15303 of the State CEQA Guidelines); and
- General Rule [Section 15061(b)(3)]

REASONS WHY PROJECT IS EXEMPT:

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) released the Lake County State Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones Map dated September 29, 2023, which become effective April 1, 2024 (Attachment 1). As shown on the map, the majority of Lake County has been classified as having Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. In addition, according to the Lake County Community Wildfire Protection Plan that was completed in September 2023, since 2015, Lake County has lost more than 1,800 homes to wildfire. Some estimates indicate more than 60 percent of Lake County has burned in the decade from 2011 to 2021.

Pursuant to the Lake County Code Chapter 13, Article II, Section 13-10, subsection 10.1:

Prohibited Conduct. It is unlawful for any person owning, occupying, renting, managing, or controlling any real property in the County to cause or permit any weeds, dead trees, or brush to accumulate on said property or to place, cause or permit any rubbish or other refuse to be, accumulate, or remain on any real property in the County, on trailers, in vehicles, or on portions of streets adjoining such real property to the center line of such streets. The accumulation of such garbage is declared to be a public nuisance pursuant to Lake County Code Chapter 13, Section 13-3.1 (e) 7.

The County has concluded that the project is categorically exempt under the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15304. Minor Alterations to Land, Class 4, and Section 15307. Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of natural Resources, Class 7. It has been concluded that no known impacts covered in the exceptions listed in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15300.2 would occur from the proposed project based on the following: a) operations would not occur within 100 feet of the Putah Creek. A query of the California Natural Diversity Database was completed, and an evaluation of environmental impacts concluded that there are no known occurrences of special status species within the footprint of the project area where operations will occur. Diesel fuel will be present on the site but it would follow all local, State, and federal safety standards and containment requirements. In addition, this is an existing public facility that has been rocked and chronically disturbed for decades; b) There are currently 19 projects being proposed in the unincorporated Middletown. However, the proposed project would be temporary with a 12-month operation period; c) There are no known unusual circumstances that might result in significant effects on the environment; d) There are no officially designated state scenic highways according

to the Caltrans List of Officially Designated County Scenic Highways; e) There are no recorded hazardous waste sites according to the State's EnviroStor database; and f) The project site is not on the California Historical Resources list and there are no other known historical resources present. As mentioned previously, the site has historically been disturbed. The Lake County Community Development Department has determined that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment and is, therefore, exempt from the provisions of CEQA.

CONTACT PERSON: Laura Hall, TELEPHONE NUMBER: 707-263-2221

Signature: 

Date: November 14, 2024

Title: Senior Planner