

Fresno County Culvert Improvements

On Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269
at various post miles in Fresno County

06-FRE-5, 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, 269 - Post Miles Various

Project ID Number 0620000076

Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration and Draft Section 4 (f) De Minimis Evaluation



Prepared by the
State of California Department of Transportation

December 2024



General Information About This Document

What's in this document:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has prepared this Initial Study, which examines the potential environmental impacts of alternatives being considered for the proposed project in Fresno County, California. The document explains why the project is being proposed, the alternatives being considered for the project, the existing environment that could be affected by the project, potential impacts of each of the alternatives, and proposed avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures.

What you should do:

- Please read the document. Additional copies of the document and the related technical studies are available for review at the Caltrans District Office at 1352 West Olive Avenue, Fresno, California 93728 weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and at the Fresno County Public Library at 2420 Mariposa Street, Fresno, California 93721 Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with Sunday hours from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. This document may be downloaded at the following website: <https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-6/district-6-projects>.
- Tell us what you think. If you have any comments regarding the proposed project, send your written comments to Caltrans by the deadline. Submit comments via U.S. mail to: Judith Lopez, District 6 Environmental Division, California Department of Transportation, 2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100, Fresno, California 93721. Submit comments via email to: judith.lopez@dot.ca.gov.
- Submit comments by the deadline: February 7, 2025

What happens next:

After comments are received from the public and the reviewing agencies, Caltrans may 1) give environmental approval to the proposed project, 2) do additional environmental studies, or 3) abandon the project. If the project is given environmental approval and funding is appropriated, Caltrans could design and construct all or part of the project.

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Rehabilitate or replace existing blocked and defective drainage across
multiple state routes and Interstate 5 at various post miles in Fresno County

**INITIAL STUDY
with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration
and Draft Section 4(f) De Minimis Evaluation**

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Transportation
Responsible Agency: California Transportation Commission



Jennifer Lugo
Environmental Office Chief, District 6
California Department of Transportation
CEQA Lead Agency

12/12/2024

Date

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DRAFT

Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: pending

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 06-FRE-Routes Various-Post Miles Various

EA/Project Number: EA 06-1A730 and Project ID Number 0620000076

Project Description

The proposed project would repair or replace 86 culverts at various locations in Fresno County across an Interstate and multiple highways: Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by Caltrans District 6. On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action with the incorporation of the identified mitigation measures will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

The project will have no effect on agricultural and forest resources, air quality, energy, geology and soils, paleontological resources, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, and tribal cultural resources.

The project will have a less than significant effects to cultural resources, greenhouse gases, utilities and service systems, transportation, and wildfires.

With the following mitigation measures incorporated, the project will have less than significant effects to aesthetics and biological resources:

- Removal of tree anemone and impacts to Crotch's bumble bee habitat will be mitigated at an offsite location to enhance and/or restore of habitat.
- Compensation for loss of habitat for the California tiger salamander will occur through the purchase of credits from a mitigation bank.
- Replacement planting at a minimum of 3-to-1 ratio for about 33 riparian trees will be conducted at an offsite location.
- Replacement replanting at a minimum of 10-to-1 ratio for removal of one oak tree on a scenic highway.

Jennifer Lugo
Environmental Office Chief, District 6
California Department of Transportation

Date

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Chapter 1 Proposed Project

1.1 Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to restore the existing drainage systems to a state of good condition within Fresno County, along Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 where culverts need replacement or repair. See Figure 1-1 for the project vicinity map.

This rehabilitation project was initiated by District 6 Maintenance in 2020. Caltrans identified 105 culvert locations for improvements that vary in size, shape, and material make-up. Nineteen culverts were removed on State Route 180 and are currently under construction through the emergency program, leaving 86 culverts for rehabilitation, as discussed in this environmental document.

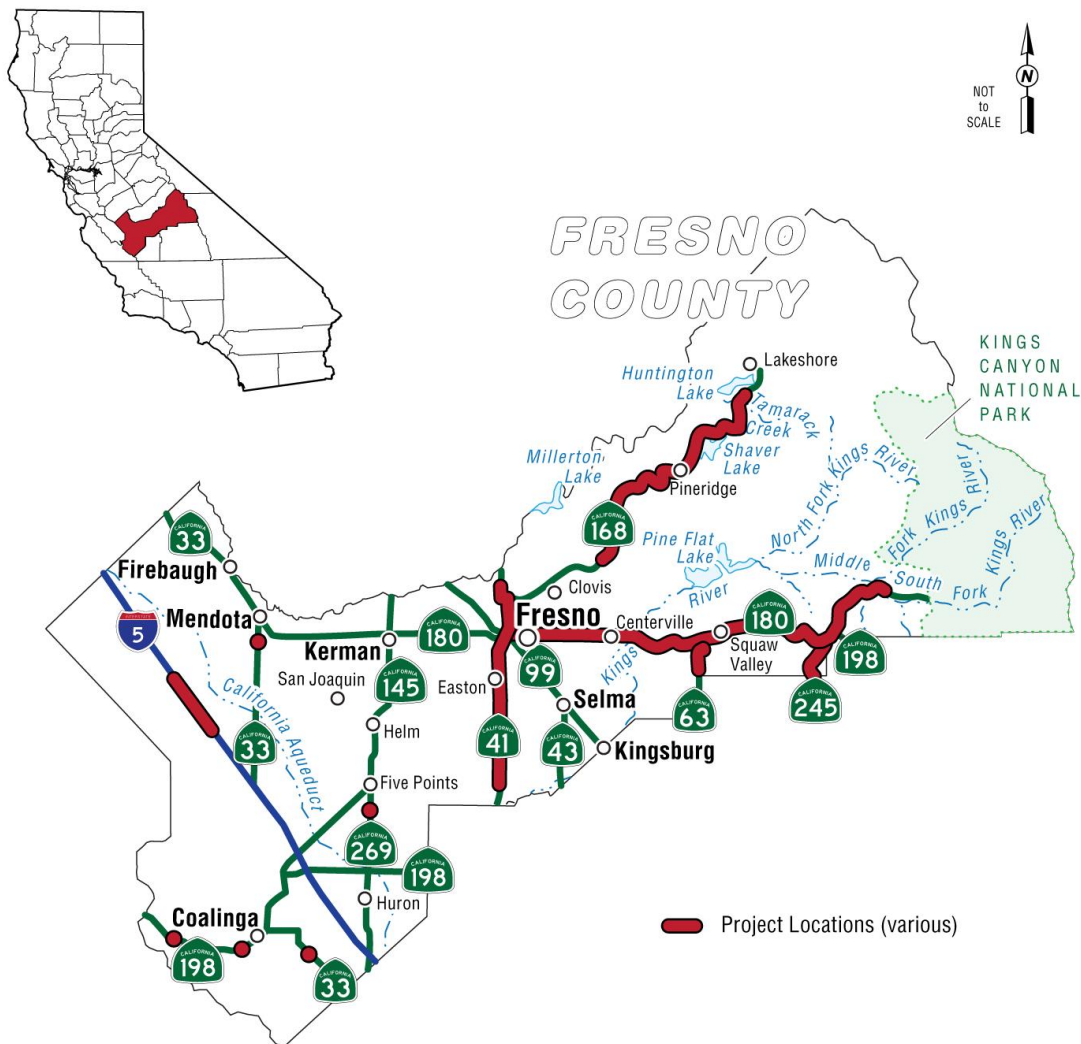
Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 are spread across Caltrans District 6:

- Interstate 5 through Fresno County is a rural four-lane divided freeway.
- State Route 33 is a rural two-lane undivided highway along the San Joaquin Valley's west side.
- State Route 41 in Fresno County alternates as a two-lane expressway, four-lane expressway, and four-lane freeway.
- State Route 63 in Fresno County is a two-lane highway with interchange connections at State Route 198 to the south and State Route 180 to the north.
- State Route 168 is mostly a two-lane undivided conventional highway.
- State Route 180 is mostly a two-lane undivided conventional highway between post miles 71.6 and 137.9, and a six-lane freeway from post miles R54.6 to 64.4.
- State Route 198 in Fresno County is a two-lane highway.
- State Route 245 is a two-lane undivided highway along the San Joaquin Valley's east side.
- State Route 269 is a two-lane conventional highway from post miles 9.6 to 24.8 in Fresno County.

Most of the proposed culvert improvement locations are in segments of highway that cross through mountainous terrain; the remaining locations are on a segment of highway that passes through somewhat level terrain surrounded by agricultural fields and orchards.

This project is included in the 2022 State Highway Operation and Protection Program Drainage System Restoration Program for delivery in the 2025/2026 fiscal year. It is also included in the Fresno Council of Governments 2022 cost-constrained Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map



1.2 Purpose and Need

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the project is to repair and replace existing culverts, extend the life of the culverts, and maintain the operational integrity of the drainage systems.

1.2.2 Need

The existing drainage culvert systems within the project limits have been identified as deficient and damaged, perforated or clogged with debris or sediments. The dysfunction of the culverts would increase flooding and result in erosion and failure of the embankment slopes and support of the highway pavements.

1.3 Project Description

The project would repair or replace 86 culverts at various locations in Fresno County along Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269.

1.4 Project Alternatives

Two alternatives are proposed for this project:

- Build Alternative
- No-Build Alternative

1.4.1 Build Alternative

The Build Alternative would replace or repair 86 existing culverts in Fresno County on Interstate 5 and State Route 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 at various locations. Thirteen culverts would be replaced, and 73 would be repaired with culvert barrel lining. Table 1.1 lists the original 105 culvert locations and mentions the nineteen culverts that were removed on State Route 180 for emergency work. The project would require five temporary construction easements and fourteen permanent drainage easements at thirteen culvert replacement locations. Trees would be removed and nightwork may be required.

Shoulder closures are anticipated for the proposed culvert replacement work. Temporary barrier systems or other approved systems, such as contractor-proposed lane closures, may be used during daytime construction. Culvert

replacement may require trenching methods in which temporary closure of one lane on a two-lane highway would require a flagman to direct the passage of two-way traffic through the single lane.

Table 1.1 Culvert Locations and Proposed Work

Location	Route	Post Mile	Proposed Work
1	5	51.43	Culvert Barrel Lining
2	5	52.88	Repair/Culvert Barrel Lining
3	5	54.27	Repair/Culvert Barrel Lining
4	5	54.46	Culvert Barrel Lining
5	5	59.05	Culvert Barrel Lining
6	5	59.29	Culvert Barrel Lining
7	33	2.75	Culvert Barrel Lining
8	33	60.25	Culvert Barrel Lining
9	41	R1.70	Culvert Barrel Lining
10	41	R4.75	Culvert Barrel Lining
11	41	R7.77	Culvert Barrel Lining
12	41	R33.11	Culvert Barrel Lining
13	41	R33.11	Culvert Barrel Lining
14	41	R33.11	Culvert Barrel Lining
15	63	2.5	Culvert Barrel Lining
16	63	6.32	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
17	63	6.43	Culvert Barrel Lining
18	63	7.12	Culvert Barrel Lining
19	168	20.95	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
20	168	21.26	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
21	168	21.79	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
22	168	L30.50	Culvert Barrel Lining
23	168	L32.02	Culvert Barrel Lining
24	168	L32.09	Culvert Barrel Lining
25	168	40.7	Culvert Barrel Lining
26	168	45.87	Culvert Barrel Lining
27	168	47.51	Culvert Barrel Lining
28	168	48.63	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
29	168	52.48	Culvert Barrel Lining
30	168	59.24	Culvert Barrel Lining
31	168	60.19	Culvert Barrel Lining
32	168	60.22	Culvert Barrel Lining
33	168	60.64	Culvert Barrel Lining
34	168	62.25	Culvert Barrel Lining
35	180	R56.58	Culvert Barrel Lining

Location	Route	Post Mile	Proposed Work
36	180	R56.85	Culvert Barrel Lining
37	180	R58.55	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
38	180	R59.40	Culvert Barrel Lining
39	180	93.25	Culvert Barrel Lining
40	180	95.80	Culvert Barrel Lining
41	180	98.77	Culvert Barrel Lining
42	180	101.26	Culvert Barrel Lining
43	180	101.36	Culvert Barrel Lining
44	180	104.24	Culvert Barrel Lining
45	180	104.53	Culvert Barrel Lining
46	180	104.96	Culvert Barrel Lining
47	180	105.69	Culvert Barrel Lining
48	180	106.25	Culvert Barrel Lining
49	180	107.52	Culvert Barrel Lining
50	180	107.70	Culvert Barrel Lining
51	180	107.76	Culvert Barrel Lining
52	180	107.84	Culvert Barrel Lining
53	180	108.39	Culvert Barrel Lining
54	180	108.45	Culvert Barrel Lining
55	180	108.61	Culvert Barrel Lining
56	180	114.17	Culvert Barrel Lining
57	180	114.32	Culvert Barrel Lining
58	180	114.37	Culvert Barrel Lining
59	180	114.58	Culvert Barrel Lining
60	180	114.84	Culvert Barrel Lining
61	180	115.03	Culvert Barrel Lining
62	180	115.40	Culvert Barrel Lining
63	180	117.07	Culvert Barrel Lining
64	180	118.42	Removed from project due to emergency repair
65	180	119.04	Culvert Barrel Lining
66	180	119.88	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
67	180	119.94	Culvert Barrel Lining
68	180	121.21	Culvert Barrel Lining
69	180	122.32	Culvert Barrel Lining
70	180	122.95	Culvert Barrel Lining
71	180	123.11	Culvert Barrel Lining
72	180	123.25	Culvert Barrel Lining
73	180	123.29	Removed from project due to emergency repair
74	180	123.44	Culvert Barrel Lining
75	180	123.49	Culvert Barrel Lining

Location	Route	Post Mile	Proposed Work
76	180	124.96	Culvert Barrel Lining
77	180	125.40	Culvert Barrel Lining
78	180	129.92	Removed from project due to emergency repair
79	180	129.97	Removed from project due to emergency repair
80	180	130.18	Removed from project due to emergency repair
81	180	130.53	Removed from project due to emergency repair
82	180	130.74	Removed from project due to emergency repair
83	180	131.00	Removed from project due to emergency repair
84	180	132.09	Removed from project due to emergency repair
85	180	133.49	Removed from project due to emergency repair
86	180	133.72	Removed from project due to emergency repair
87	180	133.77	Removed from project due to emergency repair
88	180	135.02	Removed from project due to emergency repair
89	180	135.67	Removed from project due to emergency repair
90	180	136.1	Removed from project due to emergency repair
91	180	136.74	Removed from project due to emergency repair
92	180	136.97	Removed from project due to emergency repair
93	180	137.56	Removed from project due to emergency repair
94	180	137.80	Removed from project due to emergency repair
95	198	0.88	Culvert Barrel Lining
96	198	20.21	Culvert Barrel Lining
97	198	20.87	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
98	245	0.32	Culvert Barrel Lining
99	245	1.49	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
100	245	2.09	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
101	245	3.2	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
102	245	5.2	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
103	245	7.14	Replace with 24-inch Reinforced Concrete Pipe
104	245	7.75	Culvert Barrel Lining
105	269	19.39	Culvert Barrel Lining

Source: Draft Project Report, 2024

This project contains a number of standardized project measures that are used on most, if not all, Caltrans projects and were not developed in response to any specific environmental impact resulting from the proposed project. These measures are listed later in this chapter under “Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives.”

1.4.2 No-Build (No-Action) Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project, which is to maintain the operational integrity and extend the life of the

drainage systems. The No-Build Alternative would not rehabilitate, repair, replace, or clean the drainage systems. The alternative would leave the drainage systems as they are, further deteriorating the systems with heavy rust and clogging the culvert pipes with more sediment and debris.

1.5 Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives

- Standard Special Provision 7-1.02K(6)(j)(iii) Hazardous Waste — Includes specification for handling, removing, and disposing of unregulated earth material containing lead. Management of this material exposes workers to health hazards that must be addressed in the lead compliance plan prior to the start of construction.
- Standard Special Provisions 14-11.08 Regulated Material Containing Aerially Deposited Lead—Includes specification for management of regulated material containing aerially deposited lead. Management of the material includes excavating, loading and unloading containers or trucks, transporting, and disposal.
- Standard Provision 14-7.03 Discovery of Unanticipated Paleontological Resources—If paleontological resources are discovered at the job site, do not disturb the resources and immediately stop all work within a 60-foot radius of the discovery, secure the area, and notify the resident engineer. Do not move paleontological resources or take them from the job site.
- Standard Specification Section 13-1 Water Pollution Control - If the project disturbs less than 1 acre of soil, a Water Pollution Control Plan is required for the contractor to address all potential water quality impacts that may occur when performing construction activities. If the project disturbs one acre or more of soil, then the following requirements would be required such as a Notification of Intent is to be submitted to the appropriate Regional Water Quality Control Board at least 30 days before the start of construction.
 - A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan is to be prepared and implemented during construction to the satisfaction of the Resident Engineer.
 - A Notice of Termination shall be submitted to the Regional Board upon completion of construction and site stabilization. A project will be considered complete when the criteria for final stabilization in the Construction General Permit are met.
- 14-0.02 Air Pollution Control: Comply with air pollution control rules, regulations, ordinances, and statutes that apply to work performed under the construction contract.

- 14-2.03A: If human remains are encountered during construction on state or private lands, California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 requires that construction or excavation be stopped near the discovery and the county coroner be notified. The coroner will determine if the remains are Native American (Public Resources Code Section 5097). If the remains are determined to be Native American, the coroner will notify the Native American Heritage Commission. The Native American Heritage Commission then must select and notify the person designated as the Most Likely Descendant. The Caltrans District Native American Coordinator will contact the designated Most Likely Descendant to ensure that lines of communication are quickly established. The Most Likely Descendant will provide Caltrans or the private landowner with information on how they want the human remains to be treated. It is Caltrans' policy to implement the wishes of the Most Likely Descendant if it is feasible to do so. If the location where human remains are found is a temporary easement on private land, the Most Likely Descendant will provide the landowner with a statement of how they want the human remains to be treated. The landowner will decide if he or she wants to comply with the wishes of the Most Likely Descendant and California Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act regulations. If human remains are found on federal lands, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 protocol will be followed. All construction or archaeological activity will be terminated in the location if human remains are found on federal lands. The responsible federal agency will be contacted. Cultural staff of that agency will also be notified of the inadvertent discovery of human remains. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act consultation will be conducted by the appropriate staff at the federal agency with jurisdiction.
- 14-11.04 Dust Control: Excavation, transportation, and handling of material containing hazardous waste or contamination must result in no visible dust migration. When clearing, grubbing, and performing earthwork operations in areas containing hazardous waste or contamination, provide a water truck or tank on the job site.
- 14-8.02 Noise Control: Pertains to controlling and monitoring noise resulting from work activities. Noise levels are not to exceed 86 decibels at 50 feet from the job site from 9:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

1.6 Discussion of the NEPA Categorical Exclusion

This document contains information regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other state laws and regulations. Separate environmental documentation, supporting a Categorical Exclusion determination, has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). When needed for clarity, or as required by

CEQA, this document may contain references to federal laws and/or regulations (CEQA, for example, requires consideration of adverse effects on species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—that is, species protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act).

1.7 Permits and Approvals Needed

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications are required for project construction:

Agency	Permit/Approval	Status
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement	The 1600 Permit would be obtained before construction starts.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	2081 Incidental Take Permit	Incidental Take Permit for Crotch’s bumble bee, tree anemone and California tiger salamander would be obtained prior to the start of construction.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Biological Opinion	The biological opinion will be obtained during the Plans, Specification, and Estimates phase of the project.
Regional Water Quality Control Board	Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification	The 401 certification (permit) would be obtained before construction starts.
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide Verification	The 404 Permit would be obtained before construction starts.
California State Office of Historic Preservation	Concurrence with the Finding of No Adverse Effect	Concurrence was obtained on November 13, 2024.

Chapter 2 CEQA Evaluation

2.1 CEQA Environmental Checklist

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A “No Impact” answer reflects this determination. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

“No Impact” determinations in each section are based on the scope, description, and location of the proposed project as well as the appropriate technical report (bound separately in Volume 2), and no further discussion is included in this document.

2.1.1 Aesthetics

Considering the information in the Visual Impact Assessment Memorandum with Scenic Resource Evaluation dated October 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	No Impact
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	No Impact
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	No Impact

(b) Affected Environment

The project intersects a variety of landforms in Fresno County. The landscape to the East and North areas of Fresno County consists of rocky mountains to grassy mountains with a deciduous forest. West of Fresno County, there are mainly flat terrain with rolling hills.

The project has two State Routes that are listed as a State Scenic Highway; State Route 180 is a designated State Scenic Highway from post mile 78.6 to post mile 137.9 and State Route 168 is designated State Scenic Highway from post mile 4.0 to post mile 49.7. Additional scenic areas include the Sierra National Forest, Shaver Lake, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

A Scenic Resource Evaluation was performed as part of the Visual Impact Assessment prepared in October 2024 to ensure that scenic resources are not impacted by the project. Scenic resources that occur at the culvert repair locations include rock outcroppings, heritage size oak trees, forest trees, vistas, and views.

Environmental Consequences

One scenic resource on State Route 168 at post mile 21.26 identified as a blue oak tree, approximately 20 inches at breast height, will be removed for the culvert replacement. The tree possesses a memorable form and is large enough size to be considered “heritage.” The resource change will be a moderate impact.

Temporary Construction-Related Impacts

Temporary visual impacts may occur during project construction. Equipment and materials will need to be stored during construction. There may be a temporary increase in light and glare if night work is required. These visual

impacts are expected to be temporary and have less than substantial impacts.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following measure to avoid or minimize visual impacts will be incorporated into the project:

- Minimize tree removal—Remove only those trees and shrubs required for the culvert replacement. Avoid removing trees and shrubs for temporary uses, such as construction staging areas or temporary stormwater conveyance systems.

With the following mitigation measures incorporated, the project will have less than significant effects to aesthetics resources:

- Replacement planting for vegetation removed or damaged by the project—The project will remove one existing oak tree. Per Caltrans standards, trees removed for highway improvements must be replaced at a minimum 1-to-1 ratio. It is expected that replacement planting will deliver a 10-to-1 ratio of 10 new trees. To achieve this replanting ratio, additional trees will be planted within the suitable existing right-of-way. If necessary, additional planting can take place within Caltrans' right-of-way outside of the project limits or through partnerships with other organizations. The trees will be drought-tolerant California natives that use low amounts of water and attract pollinator species.

2.1.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Considering that most work will be performed only inside Caltrans right-of-way, and the project areas are predominantly in mountainous and rural areas with no designated agricultural lands the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forestry Resources
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	No Impact
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	No Impact
c) Conflict with existing zoning, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))?	No Impact
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact

2.1.3 Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Considering the information in the Air Quality Memo dated September 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	No Impact
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	No Impact
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	No Impact

2.1.4 Biological Resources

Considering the information in the Natural Environment Study dated October 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries?	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	Less Than Significant Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	No Impact
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	No Impact
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	No Impact

(a)(b) Affected Environment

The Biological Study Area is the area to be directly affected by the project plus the nearby areas to be indirectly affected by the project. The study area encompassed 100-feet around each culvert location.

A list of federally endangered species and critical habitats that may be affected by the project was requested on January 29, 2024. In-office research (checking the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Information for Planning and Consultation website, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s California Natural Diversity Database, and the California Native Plant Society’s Inventory of Rare Plants) and field surveys were conducted by Caltrans biologists for the project.

Drainage, botanical, habitat, and general wildlife surveys were performed during the months of January to February 2022, April 2023, and August to October 2023.

Special-Status Plant Species

Thirteen special-status species identified in species queries were found to have historical records of occurrences or potentially suitable habitat within the biological study area. No special-status plants were seen during surveys. Given the age and disturbance of historical observations in the project vicinity, 12 special-status species—California satintail, Congdon’s Lewisia, King River buckwheat, Madera leptosiphon, marble rockmat, orange lupine, short-leaved hulsea, slender-stalked monkey, Tompkin’s sedge, Tracy’s eriastrum, Tulare cryptantha, and winter’s sunflower—are not expected to occur within the biological study area or have a very low potential to occur within the action area. The remaining species—tree anemone—is discussed below.

Tree Anemone

The tree anemone (a shrub) is considered state threatened and has a 1B.2 California Rare Plant Rank, which indicates that it is a rare, threatened, or endangered species in California and elsewhere. The species is limited to Fresno County and Madera County and typically occurs in chaparral foothill woodlands and cismontane woodlands on granitic soil between 1,115 and 4,395 feet in elevation.

Ten shrubs were seen along State Route 168 between post mile 32 and post mile 33 at two proposed culvert locations.

Special-Status Animal Species

Twenty-four species of special concern identified in species queries were found to have historic records of occurrence or potentially suitable habitat observations within the biological study area. No special-status species were seen. Given the age and distance of historic observations, as well as limited suitable habitats in the project vicinity, the following species are not expected or have a very low potential to occur within the biological study area: western bumblebee, monarch butterfly, California glossy snake, San Joaquin coachwhip, California spotted owl, northern goshawk, northern harrier, short-eared owl, American badger, California wolverine, pallid bat, Sierra marten, spotted owl, Tulare grasshopper mouse, western mastiff bat, and western red bat. The remaining species—Crotch's bumble bee, western spadefoot toad, California tiger salamander, Yosemite toad, Swainson's hawk, fisher, San Joaquin kit fox, and Sierra Nevada red fox—are discussed below.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

Crotch's bumble bee is a California state candidate endangered species. The species can be found in grasslands and shrublands from southern to central California.

The culvert locations on State Routes 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 are within the range of this species and offer suitable habitat. No Crotch's bumble bees were found during surveys but, on the Fresno 168 Culvert Rehabilitation project, there was a sighting of Crotch's bumble bee near culvert locations proposed for this project. Based on these results, there is a potential for Crotch's bumble bee to be present within the biological study area.

Western Spadefoot Toad

The western spadefoot toad is listed as a California species of concern and is federally proposed as threatened habitat is present on State Route 168 and State Route 63 within the biological study area.

California Tiger Salamander

The California tiger salamander is listed as federally threatened and state threatened. This salamander is also on the California Department of Fish and

Wildlife's watch list. The species' range spans from the Coast Ranges through the Central Valley floor to the Sierra Nevada foothills.

No California tiger salamanders were seen during surveys, but surveys were conducted during the summer dormancy period, making the possibility of observation low. Burrows suitable for the species were seen on State Route 168 and State Route 63.

Due to highway maintenance of the Caltrans right-of-way, it is unlikely for any California tiger salamanders to spend summers in burrows in the right-of-way in or near the biological study area.

Yosemite Toad

The Yosemite toad is a federally threatened species and California Department of Fish and Wildlife species of special concern. The species' range spans from the upper montane into the subalpine zone below the timberline.

Suitable upland habitat in upper montane forest is present within the project footprint, and there are six culverts that overlap the Yosemite toad habitat on State Route 168.

Swainson's Hawk

The Swainson's hawk is listed as threatened by the State of California. Most of the California population of Swainson's hawk is found in the Central Valley.

No Swainson's hawks or nests were seen during surveys. A search of the California Natural Diversity Database found seven records of Swainson's hawk in the last 20 years within 5 miles of the biological study area. Potential nesting or foraging habitat is present within or near the biological study area at 27 culvert locations on Interstate 5 and State Route 41. The other state routes affected by the project contain mature trees that may provide potential nesting habitat for this species.

Fisher, Southern Sierra

The Pacific fisher is listed as a federally endangered and state threatened species. It is a California Department of Fish and Wildlife species of special concern. Fishers prefer large patches of mixed conifer forests with high canopy cover and large trees, snags, rock piles, and downed logs for denning, resting, and hunting on the forest floor.

No fishers were seen during surveys. A search of the California Natural Diversity Database found two records of fishers within 5 miles of the project within the last 20 years. Potential habitat in higher-elevation mixed conifer is present on State Route 168 and State Route 180.

San Joaquin Kit Fox

The San Joaquin kit fox is a federally listed and state listed endangered species. Critical habitat for the San Joaquin kit fox has not been designated, but a recovery plan was prepared in 1998 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Historically, this species of fox prefers alkali scrub/shrub and arid grassland habitats but has been seen in residential populations in the Bakersfield area.

No San Joaquin kit foxes were seen during surveys. No suitable potential habitat was found. A search of the California Natural Diversity Database found one record of a San Joaquin kit fox in the last 20 years within 5 miles of two culverts on State Route 198.

Sierra Nevada Red Fox

The Sierra Nevada red fox is listed as a federally and state threatened species. This fox is found in subalpine, alpine, and montane near a meadow, dwarf-shrub, woodland grassland, wetland, chaparral, and riparian habitats at 3,900 and 11,900 feet elevations in the Sierra Nevada.

No Sierra Nevada red foxes were seen during surveys. A search of the California Natural Diversity Database found no record of a Sierra Nevada red fox in the last 20 years within 5 miles of the action area. Potential foraging habitat in montane woodlands is present at 28 of the high elevation locations on State Route 168 and State Route 180, but these locations are very small and disturbed by traffic.

Natural Community Riparian Trees

Riparian trees were recorded during aquatic resource delineations. A total of 41 trees were found within 50 feet of the culverts and within riparian areas. Of those 41 trees, 33 trees are within the project footprint of 20 feet of the culverts. The trees are located at four culverts on State Route 168: post mile 7.14, post mile 7.75, and post mile 122.95.

Environmental Consequences

Special-Status Plant Species

As mentioned in the affected environment section, the 12 special- status species were not seen during surveys and are not expected to occur within the biological study area.

Tree Anemone

Based on botanical surveys, it is estimated shrubs will need to be removed to allow access to the culvert inlets and outlets. An Incidental Take Permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife would be obtained, and mitigation replanting would be required.

Special-Status Animal Species

Crotch's Bumble Bee

The project would temporarily impact up to 3.23 acres of potential foraging and nesting habitat from construction activities on State Routes 168, 180, and 198. Permanent impacts up to 0.02 acre are anticipated. Due to the sensitive nature of this bumble bee's nest, there is a potential to harm the species, so an Incidental Take Permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Service would be obtained.

California Tiger Salamander

The project would permanently impact up to 0.0066 acre to several culvert locations on State Route 168 and State Route 63 due to culvert work. Temporary impacts up to 0.237 acre to upland habitat are anticipated from construction activities.

Caltrans determined that the project may affect, is likely to adversely affect the California tiger salamander.

Western Spadefoot Toad

The project would permanently impact up to 0.0015 acre at one culvert location on State Route 168 due to culvert work. Temporary impacts up to 0.252 acres to upland habitat are anticipated from construction activities.

The species is currently proposed to be listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; if the species is listed before construction begins, Caltrans will re-initiate consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to coordinate avoidance and minimization measures.

Yosemite Toad

The project would temporarily impact up to 0.169 acre of upland habitat. No permanent impacts are anticipated for the Yosemite toad habitat. The impact area at each culvert location is likely to cause a short-term impact to a small portion of habitat. Therefore, Caltrans determined that the project may affect, is not likely to adversely affect the Yosemite toad.

Caltrans will obtain a letter of concurrence from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for the Yosemite toad.

Swainson's Hawk

The project would temporarily impact 1.190 acres of potential foraging habitat from culvert work. Given the small project footprint and low duration of impact at each culvert location, no impacts to the Swainson's hawk are anticipated.

Fisher, Southern Sierra Nevada Ecologically Significant Unit

The project would temporarily impact up to 1.27 acres of non-critical potential habitat from culvert work. Permanent impacts up to 0.010 acre at State Route

245 and State Route 168 would result from the addition of rock slope protection, flared end sections and the headwall on culverts. Given the small area of impact at each culvert to the species, Caltrans determined that the project may affect, is not likely to adversely affect the fisher.

Informal Section 7 consultation will be conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the fisher. Mitigation, if required, will be determined in coordination with the resource agencies during the consultation process. A Letter of Concurrence is expected to be issued before project construction starts.

San Joaquin Kit Fox

Given the small project footprint and low duration of impacts at each culvert and low-quality habitat within the project footprint, no impacts to this species are anticipated. Caltrans determined that the project may affect, is not likely to adversely affect the San Joaquin kit fox.

Sierra Nevada Red Fox

The project would temporarily impact up to 1.326 acres of potential habitat from culvert work and tree removal. However, this potential habitat is unlikely to be occupied. The project is unlikely to have any significant impacts on this species or its habitat due to the size and short duration of work. Caltrans determined that the project may affect, is not likely to adversely affect the Sierra Nevada red fox.

Natural Community - Riparian Trees

The project would remove about 33 riparian trees from within the bed or bank of each culvert location.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Special-Status Plant Species

Potential avoidance and minimization measures for the protection of potential habitat used by special-status plant species include the following:

- Before construction starts, detailed botanical surveys will be conducted during the peak flowering season to identify any presence of rare plant species within the Project Impact Area. These surveys will adhere to the rigorous protocols established in the 2018 guidelines by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, aimed at Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special-Status Native Plant Populations and Natural Communities.
- To minimize direct impacts from construction activities, protective buffer zones will be established around areas identified as actual habitat for special-status plant species. These zones will be clearly demarcated (distinguished) with signage and fencing to prevent unauthorized access and disturbance.

Tree Anemone

The following minimization and mitigation measures are proposed for the tree anemone.

- Pre-construction surveys will be conducted for this species during the appropriate blooming period the season prior to construction following the *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities*. If plants are found, flagging will be installed to avoid the plants, if feasible.
- Caltrans will apply for a Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Compensation mitigation will be obtained through an offsite location either through planting improvements or restoration.

Special-Status Animal Species

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for the western bumblebee, California glossy snake, San Joaquin coachwhip, California spotted owl, pallid bat, Sierra marten, spotted bat, Tulare grasshopper, western mastiff, western red bat, monarch butterfly, and California wolverine:

- Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be provided to construction workers before the start of construction.
- Preconstruction surveys will be conducted 30 days prior to the start of construction.
- Construction equipment and staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a qualified biologist prior to use and be located within pre-disturbed areas.
- During nightwork, work lights will be directed away from habitat and shields will be used.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

An Incidental Take Permit will be obtained for Crotch's bumble bee. The following mitigation measure is proposed for impacts to Crotch's bumble bee:

- Compensation for loss of habitat will be obtained at an offsite location through enhancement and/or restoration of habitat per coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

California Tiger Salamander

Potential minimization and mitigation measures for the California tiger salamander include the following:

- Caltrans will install ERTEC temporary fencing (a high-visibility, nonpermeable exclusionary fencing) at the six locations with suitable upland habitat.
- No construction activities will be conducted in upland areas where migrating California tiger salamanders may occur if: (1) it is raining, (2) there is a greater than 70 percent chance of rain based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecast on any given workday, or (3) a rain event greater than 0.25 inch has occurred within the past 48 hours. Before resuming work following a rain event, a qualified biologist will conduct a new preconstruction visual survey of the work area to confirm that no California tiger salamanders are present.
- All small rodent burrows will be avoided by 50 feet at the six locations within suitable upland habitat for the California tiger salamander. If avoidance is not possible, Caltrans will obtain confirmation from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to excavate burrows.

An Incidental Take Permit will be obtained for the California tiger salamander. The following mitigation measure is proposed for impacts to the California tiger salamander:

- Compensation for loss of habitat will be obtained through the purchase of credits from a mitigation bank per coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Compensatory mitigation for temporary impacts of 0.341 acre and permanent impacts of 0.0015 acre are anticipated to be mitigated through the purchase of mitigation bank credits from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife and California Department of Fish and Wildlife-approved mitigation bank.

Western Spadefoot Toad and Yosemite Toad

Potential minimization measures for the western spadefoot toad and Yosemite toad include the following:

- Caltrans will install ERTEC temporary fencing (a high-visibility, nonpermeable exclusionary fencing) at the six locations with suitable upland habitat.
- No construction activities will be conducted in upland areas where migrating western spadefoot toad and Yosemite toad may occur if: (1) it is raining, (2) there is a greater than 70 percent chance of rain based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecast on any given workday, or (3) a rain event greater than 0.25 inch has occurred within the past 48 hours. Before resuming work following a rain event, a qualified biologist will conduct a new

preconstruction visual survey of the work area to confirm that no western spadefoot toad and Yosemite toad are present.

Swainson's Hawk

Potential avoidance and minimization measures for the Swainson's hawk include the following:

- Protocol nesting surveys in accordance with the *Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's Hawk in California's Central Valley* will be completed the season before construction to determine if any Swainson's hawks are nesting in the action area.
- If nesting pairs are identified within 500 feet of the project footprint, additional avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented to avoid direct impacts, such as Environmentally Sensitive Area fencing enclosing the nest tree, a 500-foot buffer surrounding the nest, and a biological monitor present during activities that occur within this buffer. In addition, a special provision for migratory birds and nesting raptors (including the Swainson's hawk) will be included in the construction contract to ensure that no potential nesting migratory birds are affected during construction.

Fisher, Southern Sierra Nevada Ecologically Significant Unit

Informal Section 7 consultation will be conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the fisher. A Letter of Concurrence is expected to be issued before project construction starts.

Potential avoidance and minimization measures for the fisher include the following:

- Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be provided to construction workers before the start of construction.
- Preconstruction surveys will be conducted 30 days prior to the start of construction.
- During nightwork, work lights will be directed away from habitat and shields will be used.

San Joaquin Kit Fox

Potential avoidance and minimization measures for the San Joaquin kit fox include the following:

- Preconstruction and pre-activity surveys will be conducted no less than 14 days and no more than 30 days before the beginning of ground disturbance and/or construction activities or any project activity likely to impact the San Joaquin kit fox.

- Project-related vehicles should observe a speed limit of 20 miles per hour in all project areas, except on county roads and state and federal highways; this is particularly important at night when San Joaquin kit foxes are most active. To the extent possible, nighttime construction should be minimized. Off-road traffic outside of designated project areas should be prohibited.
- All construction pipes, culverts, or similar structures with a diameter of 4 inches or greater that are stored at a construction site for one or more overnight periods should be thoroughly inspected for San Joaquin kit foxes before the pipe is used or moved in any way.
- Food trash and other garbage that may attract wildlife to the work area will be disposed of in closed containers and removed at the end of each workday. Feeding any wildlife will be prohibited.
- Firearms (except those carried by qualified and permitted public safety agents) and pets will not be permitted on the worksite.
- The use of rodenticides and herbicides in project areas should be restricted.
- No pets, such as dogs or cats, should be permitted on the project site to prevent harassment, mortality of kit foxes, or destruction of dens.
- A representative shall be appointed by the project proponent who will be the contact source for any employee or contractor who might inadvertently kill or injure a kit fox or who finds a dead, injured or entrapped kit fox. The representative will be identified during the employee education program and their name and telephone number shall be provided to the Service.
- Worker Environmental Awareness Training for the San Joaquin kit fox will be provided to construction workers before the start of construction.
- To prevent the inadvertent entrapment of San Joaquin kit foxes or other animals during the construction phase of a project, all excavated, steep-walled holes or trenches more than 2 feet deep should be covered at the close of each working day by plywood or similar materials or provided with one or more escape ramps constructed of earth fill or wooden planks. Before such holes or trenches are filled, they should be thoroughly inspected for trapped animals.
- Any contractor, employee, or military or agency personnel who are responsible for inadvertently killing or injuring a San Joaquin kit fox shall immediately report the incident to their representative. This representative shall contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife immediately in the case of a dead, injured or entrapped kit fox.
- Informal Section 7 consultation will be conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the San Joaquin kit fox. Mitigation, if required, will be

determined in coordination with the resource agencies during the consultation process. A Letter of Concurrence is expected to be issued before project construction starts.

Sierra Nevada Red Fox

Potential minimization measures for the Sierra Nevada red fox include the following:

- All construction pipes, culverts, or similar structures with a diameter of 4 inches or greater that are stored at a construction site for one or more overnight periods should be thoroughly inspected for Sierra Nevada red foxes before the pipe is used or moved in any way.
- Food trash and other garbage that may attract wildlife to the work area will be disposed of in closed containers and removed at the end of each workday. Feeding any wildlife will be prohibited.
- The use of rodenticides and herbicides in project areas should be restricted.
- Surveys will be conducted within of the project footprint and within 250 feet of the proposed culvert locations.
- Informal Section 7 consultation will be conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Sierra Nevada red fox. A Letter of Concurrence is expected to be issued before project construction starts.

Natural Community–Riparian Trees

Potential minimization and avoidance measures for the riparian trees include the following:

- Trees will be avoided to the extent practicable.
- Where feasible, trees that can be avoided will have fencing installed around the trees.

Compensatory mitigation for riparian trees will be obtained through replacement planting at a minimum of 3-to-1 ratio at an offsite location. Caltrans will submit a replanting plan to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for approval. The replacement planting requires five years of monitoring post initial planting and to achieve a success criterion to complete the mitigation.

c) Affected Environment

Wetlands and Other Waters

Aquatic delineation surveys were conducted in October 2023. The study area consists of 50 feet around the culvert inlets and outlets. Five types of aquatic resources were identified: perennial drainage, intermittent drainage, ephemeral drainage, freshwater emergent wetland, and riparian. Perennial drainages were

identified along State Routes 180 and 245. Intermittent drainages were identified on State Routes 33, 63, 168, 180, and 245. Ephemeral drainages were identified on State Routes 168, 180, and 245. Twenty-four aquatic resources were found to be jurisdictional by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Of those 24, four of the aquatic resources are considered Waters of the U.S.

Environmental Consequences

Wetlands and Other Waters

The project would temporarily impact up to 0.0262 acre of Waters of the U.S. and about 0.0687 acre of Waters of the State. There would be about 0.165 acre of temporary impacts to riparian resources. Permanent impacts up to 0.008 acre of Waters of the State would occur at two culvert locations on State Route 168.

The project would require a 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement, a 404 Clean Water Act permit, and a 401 or Waste Discharge Requirement permit for waters of the U.S.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Wetlands and Other Waters

The project would require a 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement, a 404 Clean Water Act permit, and a 401 or Waste Discharge Requirement permit for waters of the U.S.

The following avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented to have a less than significant impact to aquatic resources:

- The project will comply with the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan developed for the project. The Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan shall address all state and federal water control requirements and regulations. The Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan shall also address all construction-related activities, equipment, and materials that could impact water quality. It shall include Best Management Practices to control pollutants, sediment from erosion, stormwater runoff, and other construction-related impacts.
- The stockpiling of materials, equipment (including portable equipment), vehicles, and supplies (including chemicals) will be restricted to designated construction staging areas.
- An Emergency Spill Prevention Plan and a Water Pollution Control Program will be prepared and include measures to minimize the risk of fluids or other materials (oils, transmission and hydraulic fluids, cement, and fuel) from entering waterways or sensitive upland habitats. The plans will be kept at the project site throughout construction.

- Temporary silt fencing or straw waddles will be installed within the project footprint to protect aquatic resources adjacent to the project footprint from construction activities based on site conditions, where feasible.

2.1.5 Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Archaeological Survey Report and Historic Property Survey Report dated November 2024 and the Finding of No Adverse Effect dated November 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	No Impact
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	No Impact

Affected Environment

A records search was conducted using the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center, a background literature search, a topographic and historical map review, and a Caltrans cultural resources database check. The records search was negative for archaeological resources within or adjacent to the project area. One state-owned built environment resource—General Grant Grove – Cedar Grove Section (Kings River Canyon Highway also identified as State Route 180)—is within the area of potential effect from post mile 112.1 to post mile 137.9.

General Grant Grove – Cedar Grove Section (Kings River Canyon Highway) is a linear built environment resource with several contributing components, including original stone masonry structures such as parapet retaining walls, water fountains, culvert headwalls, and the South Fork Kings River Bridge.

The resource is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources at the state level of significance under Criterion A/1 for its associations with tourism in the upper Kings River region and the establishment of the Kings Canyon National Park and its association with the state’s convict labor program in California.

Environmental Consequences

One culvert would be replaced along with the masonry headwall that is considered to be a contributing resource to the General Grant Grove – Cedar Grove section. However, the removal of one contributing headwall out of 100 or more contributing headwalls has a minor impact to the integrity of the historic property as a whole and does not diminish the integrity of State Highway 180 – Kings River Canyon Highway in a manner or extent that would impair the historic property’s ability to convey its historical significance.

Caltrans proposes that a Finding of No Adverse Effect is appropriate for this undertaking. Caltrans obtained concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Officer on this finding, in accordance with Programmatic Agreement Stipulation X.B.2 on November 13, 2024. The concurrence letter from the State Historic Preservation Officer can be found in Appendix C of this document.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

To ensure that project activities do not change and result in an adverse effect, Caltrans will ensure that a Caltrans Principal Architectural Historian reviews the construction plans as they are developed. Should any significant changes be made to the construction plans or during construction activities that have the potential to impact the Kings River Canyon Highway or any contributing features in an adverse manner, the State Historic Preservation Officer will be notified immediately and additional documentation, as appropriate, will be completed.

2.1.6 Energy

Construction activities would cause a temporary increase in energy consumption, but the increase would not be significant. The project would rehabilitate existing drainage systems. The project would not increase capacity on the interstate or state routes in Fresno County. Considering these reasons and guidance from the Caltrans Standard Environmental Reference Chapter 13-Energy and the Energy Memorandum dated September 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation?	No Impact
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	No Impact

2.1.7 Geology and Soils

Considering the information in the California Department of Conservation Map Data Viewer webpage accessed September 2024 and the Paleontological Identification Report dated March 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42. 	No Impact
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	No Impact
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	No Impact
iv) Landslides?	No Impact
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	No Impact
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in onsite or offsite landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?	No Impact
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?	No Impact
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?	No Impact
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	No Impact

2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Considering the information in the Caltrans Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Memorandum dated September 2024, following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	Less Than Significant Impact

Affected Environment

The project lies on Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 spread across Caltrans District 6 in Fresno County. Segments of the highways cross through mountainous terrain, while other locations are on level terrain surrounded by agricultural fields and orchards.

The Fresno Council of Governments guides transportation and housing development in the project area. Chapter 3 of the Sustainable Communities Strategy discusses the emission reduction strategy for the region. The Sustainable Communities Strategy strives to reduce air emissions from passenger vehicles and light-duty truck travel by better coordinating expenditures with forecasted development patterns and helping to meet greenhouse gas targets for the region.

Environmental Consequences

Greenhouse gas emissions impacts on non-capacity-increasing projects like the Fresno County Culvert Improvements project are considered less than significant under CEQA because there will be no increase in operational emissions. However, construction equipment, traffic delay, material processing, and delivery may generate short-term greenhouse gas emissions during construction. Carbon dioxide emissions generated from construction equipment were estimated using the Caltrans Construction Emissions Tool v1.1. The estimated emissions are 362 tons of carbon dioxide per 276 working days.

While some construction greenhouse gas emissions will be unavoidable, implementing standard conditions or Best Management Practices designated to reduce or eliminate emissions as part of the project will reduce impacts to less than significant.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following project-level measures would be implemented to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to construction activities:

- To the extent feasible, limit idling to 5 minutes for delivery and dump trucks and other diesel-powered equipment (with some exceptions).
- To the extent feasible, reduce the need for transport of earthen materials by balancing cut and fill quantities.
- To the extent feasible, supplement existing construction environmental training with information on methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to construction.
- To the extent feasible, reduce construction waste by reusing or recycling construction and demolition waste.
- To the extent feasible, schedule truck trips outside of peak morning and evening commute hours.
- To the extent feasible, design and install long-life pavement structures to minimize life-cycle costs.
- To the extent feasible, encourage improved fuel efficiency from construction equipment by maintaining equipment in proper working condition, using the right size equipment for the job, and using equipment with new technologies.

2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Considering the information in the Initial Site Assessment and Preliminary Site Investigation for Aerially Deposited Lead dated March 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	No Impact
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	No Impact
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	No Impact
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	No Impact
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	No Impact

2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

Considering the information in the Water Compliance Memorandum dated March 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface water or groundwater quality?	No Impact
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would: (i) result in substantial erosion or siltation onsite or offsite;	No Impact
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding onsite or offsite;	No Impact
(iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	No Impact
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?	No Impact
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	No Impact
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	No Impact

2.1.11 Land Use and Planning

The project would not physically divide an established community and would not conflict with the Fresno County General Plan or any other policy or regulations meant to avoid or mitigate an environmental effect. Considering these factors, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning
a) Physically divide an established community?	No Impact
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	No Impact

2.1.12 Mineral Resources

Considering the information in the California Department of Conservation Online Mineral Land Classification Interactive Map accessed September 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?	No Impact
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?	No Impact

2.1.13 Noise

Considering the information in the Noise Compliance Study dated March 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project result in:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise
a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	No Impact
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	No Impact
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	No Impact

2.1.14 Population and Housing

The project would repair or replace 86 culverts in various locations across multiple interstate and state routes in Fresno County. The project would

require 5 temporary construction easements and 14 permanent drainage easements at 13 culvert replacement locations, but no residents or businesses would be relocated or displaced. Considering the information in the 2024 Draft Project Report, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	No Impact
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	No Impact

2.1.15 Public Services

The project would repair or replace culverts at existing locations and would not trigger the need for new or modified public services. Considering the information in the Transportation Management Plan dated April 2024 the following significance determinations have been made:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services
a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services: Fire protection?	No Impact
Police protection?	No Impact
Schools?	No Impact

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services
Parks?	No Impact
Other public facilities?	No Impact

2.1.16 Recreation

The project would repair or replace existing culvert locations along various interstate and state routes in Fresno County. The Sequoia National Forest, Sierra National Forest, and Kings Canyon National Park occur near the project area. But, the project would not alter roadway capacity or traffic patterns in a way that might increase the use of the existing recreational facilities nor require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities. State Routes 180 and 245 would remain open during construction, and all existing recreational facilities would be accessible during and after construction. Considering this information, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation
a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?	No Impact
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	No Impact

2.1.17 Transportation

This project is listed in the 2023 Fresno Council of Governments Federal Transportation Improvement Program as a pavement resurfacing and/or rehabilitation project.

The project is considered a culvert rehabilitation project that consists of drainage improvements. The project type would not lead to a measurable and substantial increase in vehicle capacity travel. Considering this information from the Draft Project Report dated 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation
a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	No Impact
b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	No Impact
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	No Impact
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	Less Than Significant Impact

(d) Affected Environment

Emergency Services

A Transportation Management Plan was prepared in April 2024 to prevent and mitigate construction impacts. Eleven of the 13 culverts proposed for removal would require temporary closure of one lane on a two-lane highway. Emergency services could be affected during construction due to temporarily increased response times for emergency medical and fire services. The Fresno County Sheriff’s Department and the California Highway Patrol provide public safety services to the project area where culvert replacements will take place.

Four fire stations are within the culvert replacement locations: Cal Fire Shaver Lake Station about 2.7 miles from culvert location at post mile 48.63 on State Route 168; Fresno County Fire Station 75 about 7 miles from culvert replacement locations at post miles 20.95, 21.26, and 21.79 on State Route 168; Cal Fire Badger Fire Station about 2.5 miles from post mile locations: 1.49, 2.09, 3.2, 5.2, and 7.14 on State Route 245; and Cal Fire Squaw Valley Station about 4 miles from post mile 6.32 on State Route 63.

Environmental Consequences

Day and night work with lane closure using reversing one-way traffic control will be required throughout the duration of construction. A flagger on either side of the construction work zone will control the flow of traffic intermittently with one direction closed and the other direction open to traffic. A detailed traffic management plan would be developed during the design phase (known as the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates phase) of the project to minimize delays and maximize safety for the traveling public and emergency service providers during construction.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No mitigation is anticipated.

2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Archaeological Survey Report dated October 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code Section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(k), or	No Impact
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivisions (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	No Impact

2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems

Considering the information in the 2024 Draft Project Report, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	Less Than Significant Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	No Impact
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project’s projected demand in addition to the provider’s existing commitments?	No Impact
d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	No Impact
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The project roadway alignment and culvert spot locations are adjacent to multiple utilities (buried and exposed), which include but are not limited to existing telephone lines, fiber optic lines, petroleum lines, natural gas lines and electrical lines.

Environmental Consequences

One culvert replacement on State Route 63 has the potential to impact a Frontier communication cable conduit along the south side of the roadway. Once the precise location has been determined, a decision can be made whether design avoidance measures can be used. This will be addressed in the design phase of the project.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

During the design phase of the project, a more detailed study would be conducted to determine any necessary relocation of utilities. Caltrans would meet with the affected utility providers to coordinate the details of relocations and easements to avoid or minimize any interruption in service.

2.1.20 Wildfire

Considering the information in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s Fire Hazard Severity Zone Mapping accessed September 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	Less Than Significant Impact
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	Less Than Significant Impact
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	No Impact

Affected Environment

Wildfires can directly burn facilities and indirectly cause damage when rain falls on denuded slopes that landslide after a fire. Effects will vary by location and may, in the most extreme cases, require that a facility be relocated or redesigned. Accordingly, Caltrans must consider these types of climate stressors in how highways are planned, designed, built, operated, and maintained. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection’s Fire Hazard Severity Zone mapping tool shows that the project limits run through moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones. The Caltrans District 6 Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment mapping of roadways exposed to wildfire risk shows that State Routes 168, 180, and 245 in the project area run through areas that have a medium, high, and very high wildfire vulnerability projected from 2025 to 2085.

Environmental Consequences

The project would not introduce any new structures or operations that would worsen the risk of wildfire. The potential for fire varies with the type of roadside vegetation and configuration of the pavement edge. For example, grasses on a cut slope with a dike at the base are less likely to be ignited by a cigarette or spark than grasses on a flat traversable roadside. Similarly,

perennial or low-growing annual grasses present fewer fire risks than tall annual grasses. The consequences of a fire spreading to a nearby forest may be more serious than a fire spreading in a desert, chaparral, or grassland.

Fire-resistant culvert materials will be selected to ensure that drainage facilities are as fire-resistant as possible. The project will not impair emergency response vehicles or emergency evacuation plans. Operationally, the project is not expected to increase the risk of wildfires or worsen the impacts of wildfire.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following Caltrans Best Management Practices will be implemented during construction activities:

- The contractor will obtain the emergency phone numbers of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection unit headquarters, the U.S. Forest Service ranger district office, and the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management field offices. These phone numbers will be submitted to the resident engineer before the start of job site activities. The agencies' names and emergency phone numbers must be posted at a prominent place at the job site.
- Locate flammable materials at least 50 feet away from equipment service, parking, and gas or oil storage areas. Each small mobile or stationary engine site must be cleared of flammable material for a radius of at least 15 feet from the engine.
- Before clearing and grubbing, clear a firebreak at the outer limits of the areas to be cleared and grubbed. Where clearing and grubbing limits allow, use a minimum firebreak width of 20 feet. Each area to be cleared and grubbed must be cleared and kept clear of flammable material, such as dry grass, weeds, brush, downed trees, oily rags and waste, paper, cartons, and plastic waste.
- Establish setbacks and/or buffers from areas identified as vulnerable to climate change stressors, such as wildfire. Stabilize slopes to lower chances of landslides on slopes at risk from more frequent or intense wildfire and precipitation.
- Furnish a pickup truck and drier that will be available for fire control during working hours. The truck must be equipped with the following:
 - Ten shovels, 10 axes, and two 5-gallon water-filled backpack fire pumps.
 - A 100-gallon tank of water with a gasoline-powered pump and 100 feet of a 0.75-inch hose on a reel.

- Furnish the following fire tools:
 - One shovel and one fully charged fire extinguisher (Underwriters Laboratories rated at 4B:C) or more on each truck, personnel vehicle, tractor, grader, or other heavy equipment.
 - One shovel and one 5-gallon water-filled backpack fire pump for each welder.
 - One shovel or one chemical-pressurized fire extinguisher, fully charged, for each gasoline-powered tool, including chain saws, soil augers, and rock drills. The fire tools must always be within 25 feet from the point of operation of the power tool. Each fire extinguisher must be of the type and size required by Public Resources Code Section 4431 and 14 California Code of Regulations Section 1234.
- In addition to being available at the worksite, the truck and operator must patrol the construction area from noon until at least 30 minutes after job site activities have ended. If the fire danger rating is “very high” or “extreme” or if a “fire weather watch” or “red flag warning” is issued, the truck and operator must patrol the construction area while work is being done and for at least 30 minutes after job activities have ended.
- The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management have established the following adjective class ratings for five levels of fire danger for use in public information releases and fire protection signing: “low,” “moderate,” “high,” “very high,” and “extreme.” Obtain the fire danger rating daily for the project area from the nearest California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection unit headquarters, U.S. Forest Service ranger district office, or Bureau of Land Management field office. Monitor the National Weather Service’s daily forecasts for “fire weather watches” and “red flag warnings” covering the project’s locations.
- Arrangements have been made with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management to notify Caltrans when the fire danger rating is “very high” or “extreme.” This information will be given to the resident engineer, who will notify the contractor for dissemination and action in the area affected. If a discrepancy between this notice and the fire danger rating obtained from the nearest office of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection or the U.S. Forest Service exists, the contractor must conduct operations according to the higher of the two fire danger ratings.
- If the fire danger rating is “extreme” or a “red flag warning” is issued, take the precautions specified for a “very high” fire danger rating or a “fire weather watch” issuance, except:

- Smoking is allowed only in automobiles and cabs of trucks equipped with an ashtray.
- Work that could start a fire requires that properly equipped fire guards be assigned to such operation for the duration of the work.
- The resident engineer may suspend work completely or in part due to hazardous fire conditions. The days during this suspension will be nonworking days. If field and weather conditions become such that the work is suspended, Section 7-1.02M(2) will not be enforced for the period of the suspension.

2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	Less Than Significant Impact With Mitigation Incorporated
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)	No Impact
c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	No Impact

(a) Affected Environment

Build Alternative

Special-status animal and plant species were identified to be historically present within the 7.5-minute U.S. Geological Survey quadrangles queried on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Information for Planning and Consultation and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s California Natural Diversity Database. During aquatic resource delineations surveys, riparian trees were recorded near four culvert locations. The project has the potential to affect the habitat quality of two special-status animal species—Crotch’s bumble bee and California tiger salamander—and one special-status plant species—tree anemone—and riparian trees.

Crotch’s Bumble Bee

Crotch’s bumble bee is a California State candidate endangered species. The culvert locations on State Routes 180, 168, 198, 245, and 269 are within the range of this species and offer suitable habitat. No Crotch’s bumble bees were found during surveys, but there is a potential for Crotch’s bumble bees to be present within the biological study area.

California Tiger Salamander

The California tiger salamander is listed as federally threatened and state threatened, and it is on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife watch list. No California tiger salamanders were seen during surveys, but burrows suitable for the species were seen on State Routes 168 and 63.

Tree Anemone

The tree anemone is considered state threatened and has a California Rare Plant Rank of 1B.2, which indicates that it is a rare, threatened, or endangered species in California and elsewhere.

Natural Community - Riparian Trees

About 33 trees are within the project footprint of 20 feet of four culverts on State Route 168: post mile 7.14, post mile 7.75, and post mile 122.95.

Environmental Consequences

Build Alternative

Crotch’s Bumble Bee

The project would temporarily impact up to 3.23 acres of potential foraging and nesting habitat from construction activities on State Routes 168, 180, and 198. Permanent impacts up to 0.02 acre are anticipated. Due to the sensitive nature of this bumble bee’s nest, the project has the potential to harm the species.

California Tiger Salamander

The project would permanently impact up to 0.0066 acre of several culvert locations on State Routes 168 and 63 due to culvert work. Temporary impacts

up to 0.237 acre of upland habitat are anticipated from construction activities. Caltrans determined that the project may affect, is likely to adversely affect the California tiger salamander.

Tree Anemone

The tree anemone was seen near the inlets and outlets at one culvert location. There is potential that some anemone shrubs may be impacted by the proposed construction activities. It is anticipated that shrubs will need to be removed during construction.

Natural Community Riparian Trees

The project would remove about 33 riparian trees from within the bed or bank of each culvert location.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Crotch's Bumble Bee

Potential minimization and mitigation measures for Crotch's bumble bee include the following:

- Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be provided to construction workers before the start of construction.
- Preconstruction surveys will be conducted 30 days prior to the start of construction.
- Construction equipment and staging areas will be surveyed and cleared by a qualified biologist prior to use and be located within pre-disturbed areas.

An Incidental Take Permit will be obtained for Crotch's bumble bee. The following mitigation measure is proposed for impacts to Crotch's bumble bee:

- Compensation for loss of habitat will be obtained through the purchase of credits from a mitigation bank, preservation of habitat, or enhancement or restoration of habitat per coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

California Tiger Salamander

Potential minimization and mitigation measures for the California tiger salamander include the following:

- Caltrans will install ERTEC temporary fencing (a high-visibility, nonpermeable exclusionary fencing) at the six locations with suitable upland habitat.
- No construction activities will be conducted in upland areas where migrating California tiger salamanders may occur if: (1) it is raining, (2) there is a greater than 70 percent chance of rain based on the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service forecast on any given workday, or (3) a rain event greater than 0.25 inch has occurred within the past 48 hours. Before resuming work following a rain event, a qualified biologist will conduct a new preconstruction visual survey of the work area to confirm that no California tiger salamanders are present.

- All small rodent burrows will be avoided by 50 feet at the six locations within suitable upland habitat for the California tiger salamander. If avoidance is not possible, Caltrans will receive confirmation from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service to excavate burrows.

An Incidental Take Permit will be obtained for the California tiger salamander. The following mitigation measure is proposed for impacts to California tiger salamander habitat:

- Compensation for loss of habitat will be obtained through the purchase of credits from a mitigation bank per coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Compensatory mitigation for temporary impacts of 0.341 acre and permanent impacts of 0.0015 acre are anticipated to be mitigated through the purchase of mitigation bank credits from a U.S. Fish and Wildlife and California Department of Fish and Wildlife-approved mitigation bank.

Tree Anemone

Potential minimization and mitigation measures for the tree anemone include the following:

- Pre-construction surveys will be conducted for this species during the appropriate blooming period the season prior to construction following the *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities*. If plants are found, flagging will be installed to avoid the plants, if feasible.

An Incidental Take Permit will be obtained for the tree anemone. Compensation mitigation will be obtained through an offsite location either through planting improvements or restoration.

Natural Community—Riparian Trees

Potential minimization and avoidance measures for riparian trees include the following:

- Trees will be avoided to the extent practicable.
- Where feasible, trees that can be avoided will have fencing installed around the trees.

Compensatory mitigation for riparian trees will be obtained through replacement planting at a minimum of 3-to-1 ratio at an offsite location. Caltrans will submit a replanting plan to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for approval. The replacement planting requires five years of monitoring post initial planting and to achieve a success criterion to complete the mitigation.

With the implementation of the mitigation measures for Crotch's bumble bee, California tiger salamander, tree anemone, and riparian trees, the habitat impacts will be less than significant.

Chapter 3 Coordination

Early and continuing coordination with the general public and public agencies is an essential part of the environmental process. It helps planners determine the necessary scope of environmental documentation and the level of analysis required to identify potential impacts, avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures, as well as related environmental requirements. Agency consultation and public participation for this project have been accomplished through several formal and informal methods, including project development team meetings and interagency coordination meetings.

This chapter summarizes the results of Caltrans' efforts to identify, address, and resolve project-related issues through early and continuing coordination.

3.1 Coordination with Native American Groups

3.1.1 Native American Heritage Commission

- **November 6, 2023:** Native American consultation was initiated through letters to tribal representatives.
- **December 1, 2023:** The California Native American Heritage Commission responded with a letter that stated no known cultural resources lie in the project area. The California Native American Heritage Commission provided the names of tribal representatives who have ties to the geographic area of the proposed project.

3.1.2 Tribal Coordination

- **October 20, 2023:** Caltrans sent project notification letters to 19 tribal representatives. The correspondence included an invitation to consult under Public Resources Code Section 21080.3.1 and Chapter 532, Statute 2014. No responses were received.
- **November 22, 2023:** Caltrans sent a second project notification letter to 19 tribal representatives that included updates on the temporary construction easements and a decrease in culvert locations. No responses were received.

3.1.3 Coordination with Agencies

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- **January 29, 2024:** A species list was obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Consultation website.

- **March 22, 2024:** An updated species list was obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Consultation website.
- **April 25, 2024:** The Caltrans Biologist held a meeting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service liaison to discuss the potential effect determinations for critical habitat, the potential conferencing on proposed species, and the project overall.

National Park Service

- **September 27, 2023:** Caltrans sent a letter to the Branch Chief in the Cultural Resources unit for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. No response was received.

U.S. Forest Service

- **September 27, 2024:** The Branch Chief for Caltrans' cultural resources unit sent the draft Archaeological Survey Report, draft Historic Property Report and draft Finding of No Adverse Effect to the U.S. Forest Service (Sequoia National Forest) archaeologist to review.
- **September 30, 2024:** Caltrans emailed a representative with the U.S. Forest Service to discuss three culvert locations in the Sequoia National Forest that would require a temporary construction easement and/or drainage easement. This will constitute a Section 4(f) De Minimis finding.
- **October 4, 2024:** The archaeologist with the U.S. Forest Service concurred on Caltrans' cultural studies.
- **October 30, 2023:** Information on Yosemite toad habitat and occupied meadow was shared with Caltrans by the U.S. Forest Service. This information focused on areas adjacent to State Route 168. A road mortality (death of a Yosemite toad) on State Route 168 was confirmed.
- **November 8, 2024:** The Caltrans biologist met with the U.S. Forest Service Botanist and discussed mitigation options for species and provided additional material to include in Environmental awareness trainings.

3.1.4 Coordination with Local Government

- **September 27, 2023:** Consultation was initiated through letters to Mr. Sean Brewer, Assistant City Manager, City of Coalinga Community Development Department; Ms. Jennifer Clark, Director, City of Fresno Department of Planning and Development; and Mr. Steven E. White, Director of the Fresno County Department of Public Works and Planning.

- **October 2, 2023:** Ms. Clark of the City of Fresno responded that she found no pertinent resources in her search of city files and had no further comments on the project.

3.1.5 Coordination with Historical Society/Historic Preservation Groups

- **September 27, 2023:** Caltrans sent letters to local historical societies and historic preservation groups to: Mr. Keith Swinger, Chairperson, Central Sierra Historical Society; the City of Fresno Historic Preservation Commission; and Ms. Elizabeth Laval, President, Fresno County Historical Society. No response has been received from the local societies and preservation group.
- **November 13, 2024:** State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with Caltrans' Finding of No Adverse Effect for a historic property (refer to Appendix C).

Appendix A Title VI Policy Statement

CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

California Department of Transportation

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September 2023

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

The California Department of Transportation, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensures "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Caltrans will make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its services, programs and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, or national origin. In addition, Caltrans will facilitate meaningful participation in the transportation planning process in a non-discriminatory manner.

Related federal statutes, remedies, and state law further those protections to include sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and age.

For information or guidance on how to file a complaint, or obtain more information regarding Title VI, please contact the Title VI Branch Manager at (916) 639-6392 or visit the following web page: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/title-vi>.

To obtain this information in an alternate format such as Braille or in a language other than English, please contact the California Department of Transportation, Office of Civil Rights, at PO Box 942874, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 94274-0001; (916) 879-6768 (TTY 711); or at Title.VI@dot.ca.gov.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Tavares'.

TONY TAVARES
Director

"Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment"

Appendix B Draft Section 4(f) De Minimis Evaluation

Introduction

This section of the document discusses de minimis impact determinations under Section 4(f). Section 6009(a) of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users amended Section 4(f) legislation at 23 United States Code 138 and 49 United States Code 303 to simplify the processing and approval of projects that have only de minimis impacts on lands protected by Section 4(f). This amendment provides that once the U.S. Department of Transportation determines that a transportation use of Section 4(f) property, after consideration of any impact avoidance, minimization, and mitigation or enhancement measures, results in a de minimis impact on that property, an analysis of avoidance alternatives is not required and the Section 4(f) evaluation process is complete. The Federal Highway Administration's final rule on Section 4(f) de minimis findings is codified in 23 Code of Federal Regulations 774.3 and Code of Federal Regulations 774.17.

Responsibility for compliance with Section 4(f) has been assigned to the Department (Caltrans) pursuant to 23 United States Code 326 and 327, including de minimis impact determinations, as well as coordination with those agencies that have jurisdiction over a Section 4(f) resource that may be affected by a project action.

A 'use' of a Section 4(f) property...

23 Code of Federal Regulation 774.17 defines "use" in three ways:

1. When land from a Section 4(f) resource is permanently incorporated into a transportation facility or project (actual use);
2. When there is a temporary occupancy of Section 4(f) resource that does not meet the five criteria of temporary use; and,
3. When there is constructive use of the Section 4(f) resource.

There are two potential properties within the project area:

- a. The General Grant Grove Section, a historic highway
- b. The Giant Sequoia National Monument, a recreational area

There is one historic property and a national monument within the project study area and there is a use for both properties.

Historic Property General Grant Grove Section

Caltrans' architectural historian formally evaluated one historic-era property that was within the architectural Area of Potential Effects: the General Grant Grove Section (Kings River-Canyon Highway) identified as State Route 180 located from post mile 112.1 to post mile 137.9. Contributing components include original stone masonry structures such as parapet retaining walls, water fountains, culvert headwalls, and the South Fork Kings River Bridge.

The Kings River Canyon Highway segment of State Route 180 was assumed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources at the State level under Criterion A/1 for its associations with tourism in the upper Kings River region and the establishment of the Kings Canyon National Park and for its association with the State's convict labor program in California. The property boundary of the historic resource on State Route 180 is post mile 112.1 on the west end and post mile 137.9 on the east end and is limited to the roadway plus the inclusion of the original stone masonry structures and the South Fork Kings River Bridge.

The Build Alternative would repair and replace 86 culverts on Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269. The project area of direct impact includes 21 culvert locations. Of the 21 culverts within the area of direct impact, eight of the culvert locations have been determined ineligible or noncontributing resources to the historic property. The remaining 13 culverts have been determined to be contributing resources. Of the 13 contributing culverts within the area of direct impact, only one culvert location at post mile 119.88 has been found to need replacement to meet current standards.

Proposed Use

The culvert location at post mile 119.88 on State Route 180 includes one masonry headwall at the inlet and no end treatment for the outlet. The headwall appears to remain in good condition and retains sufficient integrity to remain a contributing resource. The planned project activities for the culvert at this location include replacing the 1.5-foot corrugated steel pipe with a 2-foot-diameter reinforced concrete pipe. This will result in an increase of 6 inches in diameter, requiring a new headwall to be constructed. The new headwall would be a structural concrete pipe headwall.

The removal of one contributing headwall does not impact the historic property's integrity of location, setting, feeling, or association, and has only a negligible impact on the integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The headwall and culvert are located within a recessed section of the highway and not visible to the traveling public. As a result, new visual elements would have a negligible impact to the historic property as a whole. Because the Kings River Canyon Highway contains 147 contributing resources (111 of which are

masonry culvert headwalls) and spans more than 26 miles long, the replacement of a culvert at a single location would not noticeably impair the historic district's ability to convey its character and historical significance. The project is not expected to adversely affect the General Grant Grove Section under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Based on the “no adverse effect” determination under Section 106, Caltrans has determined that a de minimis finding under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users Section 6009 Section 4(f) provisions would apply to the use of the historic property in the Fresno County Culvert Improvements project. This finding is supported by the following:

- The proposed replacement of one contributing headwall out of a total of more than 100 contributing headwalls constitutes a negligible impact to the integrity of the historic property as a whole and does not diminish the integrity of State Highway 180 – Kings River Canyon Highway in a manner or extent that would impair the historic property's ability to convey its historical significance.
- A Finding of No Adverse Effect was received from the State Historic Preservation Officer on November 13, 2024 (refer to attachment C).

Measures to Minimize Harm

To ensure that project activities do not change and result in an adverse effect, Caltrans will ensure that a Caltrans Principal Architectural Historian reviews the construction plans as they are developed. Should any significant changes be made to the construction plans or during construction activities that have the potential to impact the Kings River Canyon Highway or any contributing features in an adverse manner, the State Historic Preservation Officer will be notified immediately and additional documentation, as appropriate, will be completed.

Giant Sequoia National Monument

The Giant Sequoia National Monument was incorporated into the Sequoia National Forest in 2000 to protect groves of giant sequoia. The Giant Sequoia National Monument was recommended for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System through the 2012 Giant Sequoia National Monument Management Plan.

The Giant Sequoia National Monument covers 328,315 acres of land within the Sequoia National Forest and is managed under the U.S Forest Service. The monument encompasses 33 giant sequoia groves, a variety of recreational activities (horseback riding, trails, and fishing), and campgrounds. The monument is divided into two sections: the northern portion, which is east of the City of Fresno, and the southern portion, which is

east of the City of Porterville. Segments of the project are on State Route 245, which intersects the northern portion of the Giant Sequoia National Monument.

Proposed Use

Temporary construction easements and drainage easements would be needed from the property to replace the three culverts at post mile 3.2, post mile 5.2, and post mile 7.14 on State Route 245. The existing culvert material is a corrugated steel pipe with diameters ranging from 8 inches to 84 inches; that would be replaced with a 24-inch reinforced concrete pipe. Closures of the road shoulder are anticipated for the proposed culvert replacement work. Temporary barrier systems or other approved systems, such as contractor-proposed lane closures, may be used during daytime construction. This project is not expected to permanently “use” park facilities as defined by Section 4(f).

Caltrans anticipates that the temporary impacts on the Giant Sequoia National Monument will meet the criteria of “temporary occupancy” described below.

If the following five conditions set forth in 23 Code of Federal Regulations 774.13(d) can be satisfied, Section 4(f) will not apply:

- The duration of occupancy must be temporary, i.e., less than the time needed for the construction of the project, and there should be no change in ownership of the land;
- The scope of the work must be minor, i.e., both the nature and magnitude of the changes to the 4(f) resource must be minimal;
- There are no anticipated permanent adverse physical impacts, nor will there be interference with the activities or purposes of the resource on either a temporary or permanent basis;
- The land being used must be fully restored, i.e., the resource must be returned to a condition that is at least as good as that which existed before the project, and;
- There must be documented agreement among the appropriate federal, state, or local officials having jurisdiction over the resource regarding the above conditions.

Caltrans has determined the work to be minor in scope and would not constitute “use” of the park after taking into account avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures and because there is no net effect or no adverse effect on the Section 4(f) resource.

Caltrans contacted the U.S. Forest Service on September 30, 2024, to initiate coordination between the agency and Caltrans regarding the Section 4(f)

process. A summary of Caltrans' coordination efforts with the U.S. Forest Service follows:

- September 30, 2024: Caltrans emailed a representative with the U.S. Forest Service to discuss the Section 4(f) resource in the Sequoia National Park.
- October 11, 2024: Caltrans sent a follow-up email to the U.S. Forest Service.

Caltrans received no response from the U.S. Forest Service. According to Section 4(f) approvals under Section 774.3(a), a minimum of 45 days for receipt of comments is mandated in the regulation. If comments are not received within 15 days after the comment deadline, a lack of objection may be assumed and then Caltrans may proceed with the work.

Appendix C Finding of No Adverse Effect



State of California • Natural Resources Agency

Gavin Newsom, Governor

**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Armando Quintero, Director

Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95816-7100
Telephone: (916) 445-7000 FAX: (916) 445-7053
calshpo.ohp@parks.ca.gov www.ohp.parks.ca.gov

November 13, 2024

VIA EMAIL

In reply refer to: FHWA-CATRA_2024_1025_001

Mr. Jeff Carr, Acting Section 106 Coordinator
Cultural Studies Office
Division of Environmental Analysis
PO Box 942873, MS-27
Sacramento, CA 94273-0001

Subject: Finding of Adverse Effect for the Proposed Fresno County Culverts Project,
Fresno County, California

Dear Mr. Carr:

Caltrans is initiating consultation regarding the above project in accordance with the 2014 *First Amended Programmatic Agreement Among the Federal Highway Administration, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the California Department of Transportation Regarding Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as it Pertains to the Administration of the Federal-Aid Highway Program in California* (106 PA) as well as under Public Resources Code 5024 and pursuant to the January 2015 *Memorandum of Understanding Between the California Department of Transportation and the California State Historic Preservation Office Regarding Compliance with Public Resources Code Section 5024 and Governor's Executive Order W-26-92, addended 2019 (5024 MOU)*. As part of your documentation, Caltrans submitted a Historic Properties Survey Report, Archaeological Survey Report, Finding of Effect Report for the above project.

Caltrans proposes to improve 86 culverts along State Routes 5, 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 throughout Fresno County. Work for the culvert repairs include barrel lining or replacement of existing drainage pipe, which could be increased to a pipe size of 24" to improve drainage. As proposed, 73 culverts will have barrel lining installed and 13 culvert pipes will be replaced. At locations with pipe replacement, a total 13 trees will be removed at 5 culvert locations.

Caltrans District 6, pursuant to Stipulation VIII.C.4 the 106 PA, received Caltrans Cultural Studies Office's approval to consider the Kings River Canyon Highway eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places for the purposes of this undertaking only because evaluation was not possible due to the size of the resource and the limited

Mr. Carr
November 13, 2024
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potential to effect. The Kings River Canyon Highway is assumed eligible under Criterion A for its associations with tourism in the upper Kings River region and the establishment of the Kings Canyon National Park and for its association with the State's convict labor program in California. The period of significance is 1939, the year this section of highway was completed. The historic property's boundary is located entirely within the right-of-way along Highway 180, extending approximately 26 miles between post mile 112.1 to post mile 137.9. The Kings River Canyon Highway contains 147 contributing resources including 111 masonry culvert headwalls. One masonry headwall is proposed for replacement for the project.

Caltrans applied the criteria of adverse effect and found the project will have no adverse effect on historic properties. The proposed replacement of one contributing headwall out of a total of more than 100 contributing headwalls constitutes a negligible impact to the integrity of the historic property as a whole and does not diminish the integrity of State Highway 180 – Kings River Canyon Highway in a manner or extent that would impair the historic property's ability to convey its historical significance.

Based on my review of the submitted documentation, I have no objections to Caltrans' finding of no adverse effect for this undertaking.

If you have any questions, please contact Natalie Lindquist at natalie.lindquist@parks.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer

Technical Studies Bound Separately (Volume 2)

Air Quality Report – September 2024

Noise Study Report – March 2024

Water Quality Report – March 2024

Natural Environment Study – October 2024

Location Hydraulic Study – March 2024

Historical Property Survey Report – October 2024

Archaeological Survey Report – October 2024

Initial Site Assessment and Preliminary Site Investigation Summary – March 2024

Scenic Resource Evaluation/Visual Assessment – October 2024

Paleontological Identification Report – March 2024

Climate Change Memorandum – September 2024

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study, please send your request to:

Judith Lopez
District 6 Environmental Division
California Department of Transportation
2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100, Fresno, California 93726

Or send your request via email to: judith.lopez@dot.ca.gov
Or call: (559) 240-5068

Please provide the following information in your request:

Project title: Fresno County Culvert Improvements

General location information: On Interstate 5 and State Routes 33, 41, 63, 168, 180, 198, 245, and 269 in Fresno County

District number-county code-route-post mile: 06-FRE-5,33,41,63,168,180,198,245,269-Post Miles: Various

EA/Project ID number: 06-1A730/0620000076