

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

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

County Clerk

County of: El Dorado

From: (Public Agency): El Dorado Resource Conservation District

100 Forni Road, Suite A

Placerville, CA 95667

(Address)

Project Title: Post-Caldor Fire Watershed Restoration for Securing Water Supply for the Grizzly Flats Community Project

Project Applicant: El Dorado Resource Conservation District

Project Location - Specific:

Big Canyon Creek and North Canyon Creek watershed, entirely in the USFS.

Project Location - City: _____ Project Location - County: El Dorado

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The project consists of conducting post-fire hazardous fuels reduction, site preparation and reforestation of affected land within the critical watersheds. The proposed action would include the following activities, which are extracted from the proposed action presented in the NEPA EA for the Caldor Fire Restoration Project (see Appendix B of the NEPA EA; USFS 2025a). Implementation of treatments would occur as a series of phases to be determined through coordination with the ENF and based on budget, workforce capacity and availability, and other constraints.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: El Dorado Resource Conservation District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: El Dorado Resource Conservation District

Exempt Status: (check one):

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Section 15304, Class 4 Minor Alterations to Land
- ☒ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1)

Reasons why project is exempt:

Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1), as amended by Assembly Bill 211 (effective September 27, 2022) exempts from the requirements of CEQA prescribed fire, reforestation, habitat restoration, thinning, and fuel reduction projects, and other related activities included in the project description, including the issuance of permits or other approvals for those projects, undertaken in whole or in part, on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the federal National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) if the role of the state or local agency is to provide funding or staffing for those projects, or if the state or local agency is undertaking the projects pursuant to the federal Good Neighbor Authority (Public Law 113-79) or a stewardship agreement with the federal government entered into pursuant to Public Law 113-79. The USFS has completed the NEPA process for the proposed project activities with approval of the EA/FONSI and Decision Notice on March 25, 2025 for the ENF Caldor Fire Restoration Project Phase 1 (USDA Forest Service 2025a, b). RCD is a special district of the State and is responsible for providing funding and/or staffing to implement various elements of the Caldor Fire Restoration Project.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Mark Egbert Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (530) 295-0120

If filed by applicant:

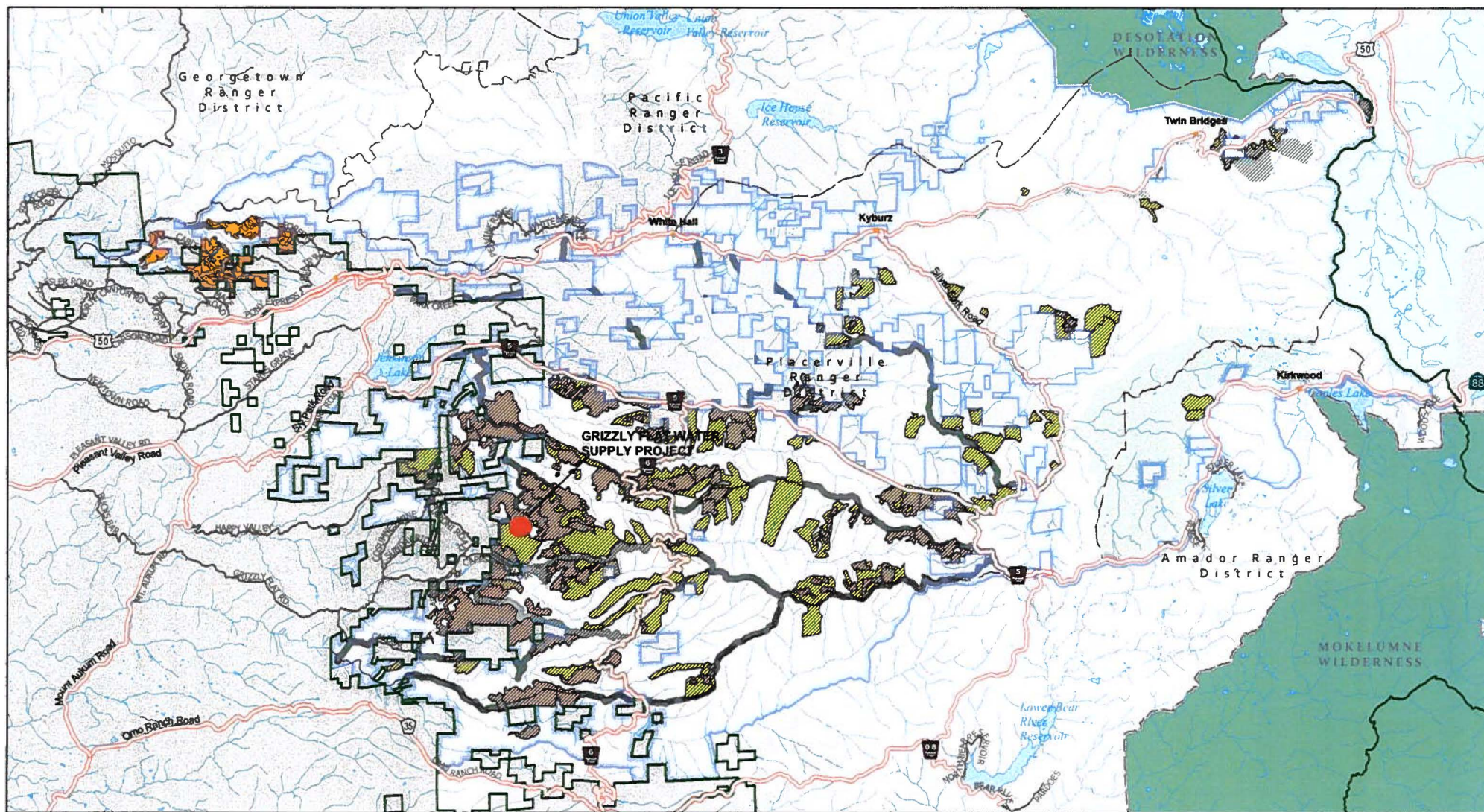
1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature:  Date: 4/21/2025 Title: Vice President

■ Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

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

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____



USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Eldorado National Forest
Placerville, Pacific, and Amador Ranger District

Caldor Fire Restoration Project
Overview Map - Phase I (Fuels Reduction, Thinning,
and Reforestation)

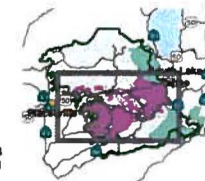
- Caldor Fire Restoration Project Boundary
- Green Tree Thinning Fuels Reduction Unit
- Hazardous Fuels Reduction Unit
- Ground Based
- Skyline
- Additional Planned Unit
- Fuel Break Development
- Fuel Break Maintenance
- Reforestation Area
- Populated Place
- Major Route
- Other Major Roads
- Waterbody

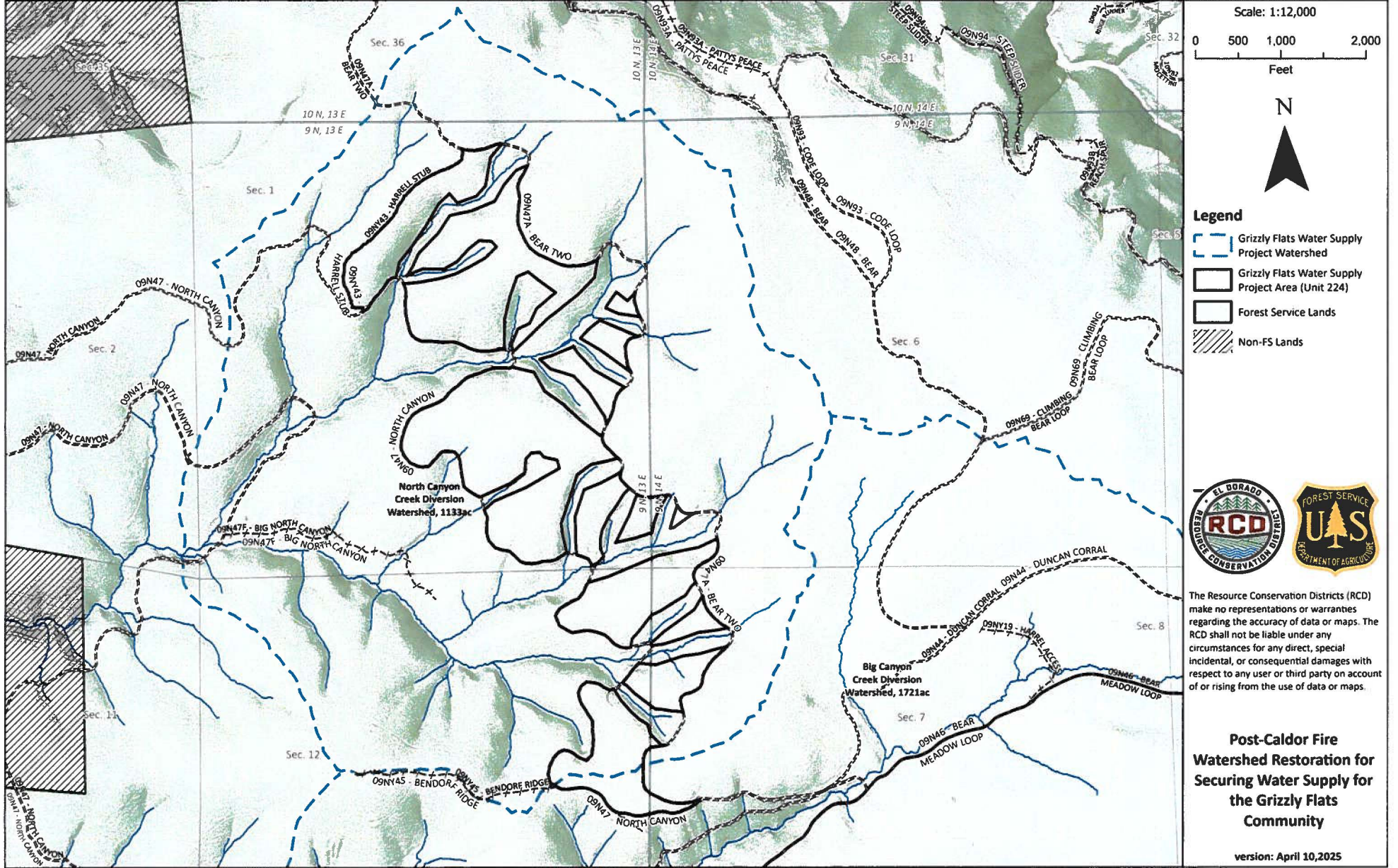
Grizzly Flat Water Supply Project Location in the Region

- Administrative Boundary
- Ranger District Boundary
- Wilderness
- Caples Creek Proposed Wilderness Area
- Eldorado National Forest Land
- Non-Forest Service Land
- Other Forest Service Land

Original data was collected from multiple sources and may not meet the U.S. National Map Accuracy Standards of the Office of Management and Budget. For specific data source data and additional digital information consult the Project Worksheet.

Map data is not guaranteed to be accurate or complete.





1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The Post-Caldor Fire Watershed Restoration for Securing Water Supply for the Grizzly Flats Community Project (project) is in western El Dorado County, California within the Caldor Fire footprint. The project area comprises the Big Canyon Creek watershed (1,700 acres) and North Canyon Creek watershed (1,300 acres), which total 3,000 acres located entirely in the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) Eldorado National Forest (ENF). The project watersheds fall within Sections 1, 2, 11, 12 and 13 of Township (T) 09N, Range (R) 13E; Section 36 of T10N, R13E; and Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, and 18 of T10N, R14E on the Iron Mountain U.S. Geological Survey 7.5 minute quadrangle map, MDM. Refer to the overview map in Attachment A for the project's location in the region.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Caldor Fire of 2021 burned approximately 221,835 acres, including the North Canyon Creek and Big Canyon Creek watersheds which are the sole source of water supplying the community of Grizzly Flats. These watersheds are located entirely within the ENF and are also in the headwaters that eventually feed into the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Central Valley Project American River Unit, including the Folsom Dam and Reservoir.

The project consists of conducting post-fire hazardous fuels reduction, site preparation and reforestation of affected land within the critical watersheds. The project falls within the footprint of the ENF Caldor Fire Restoration Project in which hazardous fuels reduction, watershed restoration and reforestation treatments have been identified (see overview map in Attachment A). The ENF has identified Unit 224 from the Caldor Fire Restoration Project Phase 1 for implementation under the project, which consists of approximately 227 acres of USFS System lands approximately 1.5 mile northeast of the community of Grizzly Flats, primarily within the Big Canyon Creek watershed. Unit 224 falls within Section 1 of Township 09N, Range 13E on the Iron Mountain U.S. Geological Survey 7.5 minute quadrangle map, MDM (refer to the project area map in Attachment A). Additional areas within the project site may be treated under the proposed project up to 280 acres total. Additional Caldor Fire Restoration Project Phase 1 treatments in the watershed are being undertaken by others and/or will be handled under separate authorization by the ENF.

The proposed project is a collaborative effort being implemented by the El Dorado County Water Agency (EDCWA) in partnership with the El Dorado Resource Conservation District (RCD) in coordination with ENF, and is funded through both non-federal contributions and WaterSMART funds administered by the BOR. Objectives of the project include: 1) treating up to 280 acres of the watersheds feeding into the Grizzly Flats community affected by the Caldor Fire to reduce the potential for wildfire in the future by removing accumulated debris and dead trees; 2) conducting site preparation and planting to re-establish forest cover on up to 280 acres; 3) increasing carbon sequestration and achieve greenhouse gas emission reduction through the reforestation of the burned area; and 4) identifying measures that may be required to protect watershed values and water quality in watersheds that are important sources of domestic water supply. The project would meet these objectives by treating areas of the watersheds identified by ENF as priority under the Caldor Fire Restoration Project and which would align

with other Caldor Fire Restoration Project work being implemented in those watersheds by the ENF to achieve watershed resilience. Activities authorized under the WaterSMART program for the project that align with the activities of the Caldor Fire Restoration Project include: 1) hazard tree removal; 2) hazardous fuels reduction; 3) reforestation – site preparation; 4) reforestation – conifer release; 5) herbicide application; 6) sawlog or wood biomass removal; 7) temporary road construction; and 8) road decommissioning (temporary roads).

These treatments would meet the project objectives by removing hazard trees and fuels that could serve as the pretext for another mega catastrophic fire within the South Fork of the American River watershed and would provide a more immediate benefit of removing debris potentially affecting water quality and downstream water supply system functions. Reforestation activities under the project would improve forest and watershed health and recovery, including increasing water infiltration rates, reducing debris flows and rates of soil loss, and resilience to future wildfire. Implementation of proper BMPs, including decommissioning of temporary roads constructed for project activities, and restoration of roads impacted by project activities would further restore and improve watershed health. It should be noted that while the ENF Caldor Fire Restoration Project includes watershed restoration activities, those activities are specifically related to restoration of roads, stream improvements and other activities related to soil erosion, hydrologic functions and aquatic wildlife habitat and while they are part of overall watershed health and functions, they are not part of the proposed project.

The proposed project requires analysis pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) because it is located on federal land (USFS System lands), and because implementation is financed with federal funds (BOR). Review pursuant to the California Department of Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is required because the RCD is taking discretionary action to facilitate and implement the project activities (EDCWA is responsible for administration of the WaterSMART funds and is not a CEQA Lead Agency). The USFS has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) with a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and filed a Decision Notice on March 25, 2025 for the Caldor Fire Restoration Project – Phase 1 (USFS 2025a,b). Phase 1 of the project addresses various post-Caldor Fire restoration activities including hazardous fuels removal and reforestation in the project watersheds. BOR will prepare a separate NEPA document for release of federal funds.

1.3 PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would include the following activities, which are extracted from the proposed action presented in the NEPA EA for the Caldor Fire Restoration Project (see Appendix B of the NEPA EA; USFS 2025a). Implementation of treatments would occur as a series of phases to be determined through coordination with the ENF and based on budget, workforce capacity and availability, and other constraints.

Reduce Wildfire Risk: The RCD would implement hazardous fuels reduction and hazard tree removal activities in accordance with the activities outlined in Appendix B of the NEPA EA (USFS 2025a) and would be accomplished using a combination of hand and machine felling as described in the EA (Hazard Tree Abatement, Hazardous Fuels Reduction in USFS 2025a). Machine operations would be limited to slopes less than 45% and slopes less than 35% for sawlog or woody biomass removal. (Sawlog or Woody Biomass Removal in USFS 2025a). Blasting (explosives), aerial operations, and prescribed burning would not be used.

After felling, material may be piled for future burning, broadcast chipped or lopped and scattered and left in place for slope stabilization. Slash may be spread on the surface as needed to protect soils or piled for future burning by the USFS.

Site Preparation: In areas identified for reforestation, the RCD would implement hazardous fuels reduction and hazard tree removal activities as described above under Reduce Wildfire Risk and as described in the EA (Reforestation – Site Preparation in USFS 2025a). As required, RCD may apply herbicide to achieve desired conditions for control of non-native or competing native vegetation.

Reforestation: In areas identified for reforestation, the RCD would plant nursery-grown local seedlings in accordance with the methods and to achieve planting densities outlined in Appendix B of the NEPA EA, Reforestation – Planting (USFS 2025a). The planting stock would be appropriate to the project area (seed zone and species mixes) and will include the Sierra mixed conifer species characteristic of the latitude and area being planted.

Stocking Surveys and Competition Control: The RCD will conduct stocking surveys one year after completion of planting to assess survival and management needs. Following the stocking surveys, conifer release and herbicide application shall be implemented during a single season as appropriate in accordance with the methods outlined in Appendix B of the NEPA EA, Reforestation – Conifer Release, and Herbicide Application (USFS 2025a).

Existing landings, disturbed areas and roadways would be used as available for skid trails, deck landings, and access to minimize new disturbance. As needed, temporary skid trails and landings may be created within the treatment unit but outside of sensitive habitat and riparian conservation areas (RCAs). No new roads would be constructed, but temporary roads access roads may be required to allow trucks to reach existing landings. Temporary stream crossings would only occur if approved by the USFS hydrologist specialist and in accordance with Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs would be implemented at temporary skid trails, landings, and access roads prior to the wet season and all temporary features would be decommissioned following completion of project operations which may include: ripping, water barring, seeding and/or mulching. Temporary access roads would be blocked during the wet season and as needed following decommissioning to avoid erosion and unauthorized use.

Existing USFS System roads maintenance level 1 through 5 may require maintenance prior to and following project activities to support the equipment necessary for the proposed project. RCD may implement minor maintenance as required to conduct project activities, or to restore roads damaged during project activities. All work would occur within the existing disturbed areas of the roadbed and would be consistent with the road management objectives and maintenance criteria contained in the Forest Service Handbook and current Forest Service guidelines.

All project design criteria and BMPs outlined in the NEPA EA (USDA Forest Service 2023a) for the protection of natural and cultural resources will be incorporated into the project design and enforced during implementation. Furthermore, activities would be in accordance with the standards and guidelines described in the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1989), the Sierra Nevada Plan Amendment (USDA 2004), and the National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, Volume 1 (USDA Forest Service 2012).

These standards and guidelines include BMPs that would be adhered to throughout implementation of the project, and which provide for consistency with the Forest Plan and other guidance, and/or they minimize or eliminate potential impacts to water quality, cultural, biological, and other resources in the area.

1.4 REASONS WHY PROJECT IS EXEMPT

Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1), as amended by Assembly Bill 211 (effective September 27, 2022) exempts from the requirements of CEQA prescribed fire, reforestation, habitat restoration, thinning, and fuel reduction projects, and other related activities included in the project description, including the issuance of permits or other approvals for those projects, undertaken in whole or in part, on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the federal National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) if the role of the state or local agency is to provide funding or staffing for those projects, or if the state or local agency is undertaking the projects pursuant to the federal Good Neighbor Authority (Public Law 113-79) or a stewardship agreement with the federal government entered into pursuant to Public Law 113-79.

The USFS has completed the NEPA process for the proposed project activities with approval of the EA/FONSI and Decision Notice on March 25, 2025 for the ENF Caldor Fire Restoration Project Phase 1 (USDA Forest Service 2025a, b). RCD is a special district of the State and is responsible for providing funding and/or staffing to implement various elements of the Caldor Fire Restoration Project

Phase 1, which is being undertaken pursuant to a stewardship agreement with the USFS. RCD filed a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for these activities on April 22, 2025. The current proposed project is a subproject to the Caldor Fire Restoration Project, and for which RCD is responsible for providing funding and staffing to implement the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project is authorized under the existing CEQA NOE and no further noticing or filing pursuant to CEQA is required.

1.5 REFERENCES

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. 2025a. Eldorado National Forest Caldor Fire Restoration Project Environmental Assessment. Region 5, Eldorado National Forest, Placerville, CA. March 2025.

2025b. Eldorado National Forest Caldor Fire Restoration Project Phase 1 Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Notice. Region 5, Eldorado National Forest, Placerville, CA. March 25, 2025.

2012. National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, Volume 1.

2004. Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment. Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

1989. Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan.

Attachment A – Figures

- Overview Map – Grizzly Flat Water Supply Project's Location in the Region (Caldor Fire Restoration Project Phase 1)
- Project Area Map – Unit 224 in Project Watersheds