

## NOTICE OF EXEMPTION



State of California  
 The Natural Resources Agency  
 California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

<b>PROJECT TITLE:</b>	Tuolumne Utilities District Critical Facilities Fuel Reduction Project Phase 3		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	T2N, R14E, Sections 11, 12, 14 & 24; T2N, R15E, Sections 9, 25, 31; T2N, R16E, Section 7, Mount Diablo Base Meridian	<b>COUNTY</b>	Tuolumne
<b>LEAD AGENCY</b>	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
<b>CONTACT</b>	Roger Petersen, Unit Forester CAL FIRE Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit	<b>PHONE</b>	(209) 754-3831
<b>ADDRESS</b>	785 Mountain Ranch Rd., San Andreas, CA 95249		

**Project Description:** The proposed project will reduce hazardous fuel loading around seven critical water treatment and water storage facilities operated by the Tuolumne Utilities District in Tuolumne County. The seven sites consist of the Sonora Water Treatment Plant, Columbia Water Treatment Plant, Kennebec Tank, Pedro Y Tank, Big Hill Water Treatment Plant, Comstock Tank and Sonora Vista Tank. The objective of the project is to provide protection to vulnerable district infrastructure by reducing the amount of flammable vegetation from an approximate 200 to 300-foot radius around the various facilities. The facilities are all located in urban interface settings and are adjacent to residences. Vegetation at each site varies. The various sites range from approximately 2,100-feet to 3,700-feet in elevation. The lower elevation sites are dominated by interior live oak and California gray pine with an understory of chamise, manzanita, toyon, poison oak, buckeye and ceanothus. The Big Hill Water Treatment Plant and Comstock Tank are Sierra mixed conifer with an understory of conifer, manzanita and live oak. Surface and ladder fuels will be reduced or modified by mastication, chipping, or piling and burning. Mastication may be conducted by a variety of track laying type tractors. Hand work for chipping will be conducted by hand crews using chainsaws and other hand tools. Trees up to 14-inches diameter at breast height (dbh) may be felled to thin the canopy. The remaining stand will consist of healthy trees spaced approximately 25 to 30 feet apart. Dead trees of any size may be felled, masticated, chipped or piled and burned. All brush and pine regeneration growing on fill slopes and cut banks adjacent to critical facilities may be removed. Residual trees may be pruned to a height of 10-feet above the ground to eliminate ladder fuels. The intent of the project is to minimize potential fire behavior around these facilities. The project area is approximately 30 acres in size.

**EXEMPTION STATUS**

- Categorical Exemption Type and Section: Class 4, §15304 Minor Alterations to Land
- Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)
- Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

**REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT**

The project will consist of removing surface and ladder fuels from around critical water treatment and water storage facilities in Tuolumne County. The project is located in urban interface areas. The project will create a shaded fuel break condition around each site. The project will not involve the removal of mature or scenic trees. Stand health will be improved by removing dead, dying, and suppressed trees and brush, and increasing growing space for mature, healthy trees. Sensitive species will not be impacted by the proposed project. The project was designed to avoid adverse impacts to watercourses. Mastication and chipping will leave a layer of organic material that will provide excellent erosion control. The project was designed to avoid adverse impacts to archaeological resources. The project was designed to protect critical water treatment and water storage infrastructure from wildfire and will make communities in Tuolumne County more resilient regarding wildfires.

Review by CAL FIRE staff confirmed that no exceptions apply that would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. The Department has concluded that no significant environmental impact would occur to aesthetics, agriculture and forestland/timberland, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use planning, mineral resources, noise, populations and housing, public services, recreation, transportation/ traffic, utilities and service systems, or to wildfire. Documentation of the environmental review completed by the Department is kept on file at the Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit Headquarters in San Andreas.

**DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING**

DocuSigned by:  
  
 Mike Van Loben Sels, Southern Region Chief      Date: 5/29/2025  
 California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection