

NOTICE OF CEQA EXEMPTION

To: Lassen County Clerk
220 South Lassen Street
Susanville, CA 96130

From: Honey Lake Valley RCD
1516 Main Street
Susanville, CA 96130
530-260-0067

Date: June 26, 2025

Project Title:

McKenzie Meadows Restoration Project Phase 1

Project Location:

The McKenzie Meadows Restoration Project Phase 1 is located approximately 5.5 air miles northeast of the town of Westwood, CA in Township 29 North, Range 9 East, Sections 24, 25, and 26; Township 29 North, Range 10 E, Section 30, M.D.M, WESTWOOD EAST USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle.

Project Description:

The primary goal of the Project is to restore 212 acres of meadow floodplain function by eliminating gullied (incised) channels and re-establishing the channel-floodplain connection. The Project includes a variety of treatment techniques to eliminate channel incision, including partial fill in the two primary gullies (and several fingering tributaries migrating up meadow from the primary gullies), and riffle augmentation with rock and sod riffles in less-incised reaches of channel, plus placement of downed wood in several locations in the smaller Chaparral tributaries. A valley grade structure (VGS) at the bottom of the Project will tie the restored floodplain elevation to the incised gully elevation downstream. On-site fill will be generated primarily from in-gully borrow areas, creating ponds as the groundwater table recovers. Additional fill will be generated from removal of several sections of old railroad grade and several off gully borrow sites.

Filling the incised gullies would require excavation and placement, using heavy equipment, of approximately 64,000 cubic yards of soil in the 64 proposed partial channel fill plugs and the core of the valley grade structure to eliminate the existing gullied channel and raise/restore the base elevation of surface water flow in the meadow. An additional estimated 800 cubic yards of fill would be placed in the upland, eroded segments of channel outside of mapped wetland areas, for a total of approximately 64,800 cubic yards of fill. At several key locations, fills will redirect stream flows into remnant channels or swales on the meadow surface, distributing flow across the floodplain. Additionally, an estimated 1,400 cubic yards of locally sourced rock will be used to construct the valley grade structure and rock riffles. Revegetation of approximately 5 acres of disturbed soils (plug surfaces, railroad grade removal, and temporary access roads) would include transplanting of willows and sedge sod removed from the bottom of the gullies, post-construction seeding with a native wet meadow seed mix (combination of locally collected and purchased from Comstock Seed), planting an estimated 2,000 willow cuttings and 100 cottonwood saplings in the Chaparral tributary area. About 5,000 feet of cross fencing is proposed to protect the newly constructed

NOTICE OF CEQA EXEMPTION

restoration features from grazing livestock and facilitate improved grazing management as the project matures.

Erratic climate behavior such as experienced in recent years can have an impact on project stability, particularly the first couple of years following restoration. Project restoration features will be monitored annually (early spring) for the first five years post-restoration and evaluated for performance and desired conditions. Those evaluations will determine whether adaptive maintenance is required and provide guidance for the necessary actions to be implemented as soon as possible. Livestock grazing is to be deferred for up to 3 years post-restoration to allow vegetation recovery; subsequent livestock grazing will be guided by the Grazing Management Plan developed through the Conservation Easement.

The Project is expected to provide the following benefits:

- **Benefit water supply and quality:** The project will enhance groundwater retention, resulting in greater summer base flows and outflow extended later in the season. Water quality will be enhanced by eliminating bank erosion, while more vigorous meadow vegetation will filter floodplain flows.
- **Improve plant communities and habitat:** It is expected that intermittent channel lengths would increase after construction, relative to the existing condition by reducing existing channel length eliminated through gully fill and reactivating channels and shallow swales on the floodplain. Overall, intermittent channels are projected to increase in length from 13,588 feet to 16,981 feet post-project. Channel acreage is expected to decrease from 9.73 acres to 6.85 acres, because existing channels are oversized due to long-term incision and lateral bank erosion, which has widened the gullies, while the reactivated channels are not incised. This reflects a return to reference conditions. Palustrine acreage would increase from 84.18 acres to 111.10 acres post-project. Borrow areas and unfilled channel segments in the upper reach of Fredonyer Creek would result in 9.28 acres of lacustrine features as the groundwater table recovers. Further details on the Project design and methods of construction can be found in the attachments to this report (e.g., representative cross-sections). The subsurface hydrology to sustain wet meadow plant species will expand, increasing wet meadow acreage from 94 acres to an estimated 127 acres, or an increase of 33 acres.

Revegetation efforts will include seeding with native meadow graminoids and forbs and planting willows and cottonwoods, expanding food sources and cover for meadow birds. A small patch of aspen is expected to expand and thrive once the large incision adjacent to it is filled, creating an additional habitat niche for wildlife species. Increased wet meadow acreage and a greater diversity of forage species will accelerate improvements in avian species diversity, particularly for meadow focal species. Special-status species known to use the meadow include greater sandhill crane and gray wolf. Improvements in habitat quality will increase foraging opportunities for both species.

Exempt Status (Guidelines Section and Class): Statutory Exemption:

NOTICE OF CEQA EXEMPTION

CEQA STATUTORY EXEMPTION FOR RESTORATION PROJECTS (SERP), (Pub. Resources Code, § 21080.56, subd. (e).)

Reasons Why Project is Exempt:

The Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District (HLVRCD) has determined that the Project is exclusively a project to restore and enhance habitat for California native fish and wildlife. The Project intends to restore and enhance mesic meadow habitat by restoring floodplain function at McKenzie Meadows. The Project will eliminate channel incision and reactivate historic flowpaths on the meadow surface, and includes planting native plant species in the riparian corridor, and implementing grazing management changes to enhance habitat quality for meadow species. The restored hydrology and improved floodplain function will promote more vigorous growth of mesic and wet meadow plant species, enhance summer flow conditions, and improve water quality by eliminating eroding banks and filtering flood flows on the meadow floodplain surface. Specifically the Project will result in:

- Eliminating incised channels and restoring floodplain function will raise the groundwater table, resulting in increased coverage of mesic/wet meadow plant communities
- Revegetating disturbed areas with native plant species will facilitate habitat recovery
- Additional fencing will allow for improved grazing management
- Restored hydrology and vegetation will improve water quality by eliminating bank erosion and filtering flood flows on the floodplain
- Create or enhance habitat (foraging, nesting) that will promote avian species abundance and diversity, such as sandhill cranes, yellow warbler and willow flycatcher
- Ponded water and abundant willow will create suitable habitat for beaver to expand into (beaver are present one mile downstream of project area in Goodrich Creek)

The HLVRCD has determined that the Project does both of the following: (1) results in long-term net benefits to climate resiliency, biodiversity, and sensitive species recovery; and (2) includes procedures and ongoing management for the protection of the environment. Restoring the McKenzie Meadows meadow floodplain directly addresses the impact of increased frequency of more rain than snow in precipitation events by reconnecting the incised channels and swales with the meadow floodplain. This allows flows to disperse across the floodplain, and water to be absorbed into meadow soils, providing increased water retention and replenishment of the shallow groundwater aquifer. The increased groundwater retention leads to slowly filtering and releasing water into stream channels later into the summer months, extending the availability of clean surface water in the meadow and downstream to provide resiliency to drought climate impacts on habitats for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species. Meadows with restored hydrologic/floodplain connectivity are naturally able to retain more water in their soils over multi-year droughts and able to withstand catastrophic wildfire, providing valuable refugia during post-fire recovery of surrounding ecosystems.

NOTICE OF CEQA EXEMPTION

The Project will also promote climate resiliency through a two-fold effect on carbon storage: (1) restoring the meadow will prevent continued loss of carbon via oxidation from drying meadow soils; and (2) the restored meadow will act as a net carbon sink as the meadow soils begin to re-sequester carbon through increased aboveground and belowground biomass. Thus, the restoration will mitigate climate impacts by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration.

Long term effects are expected to be mostly beneficial with longer periods of moist conditions in portions of the meadow. The project will result in an increase in Wetland habitat by 33.23 acres, ponded-water habitat will provide cover, and encourage beaver colonization further up into the meadow, other non-native annual grasses and forbs will diminish in numbers, and that native sedges and perennial grasses would expand.

The Project would expand the contiguous restoration footprint in the basin, providing resilience to fragmentation. The hydrologic improvements at McKenzie Meadows are expected to make the meadow self-sustaining, ensuring this habitat is available for species that have reduced habitat under drier conditions. Expansion of meadow habitat would also improve habitat quality for willow flycatcher, greater sandhill crane, pallid bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, western red bat, and the herd of Rocky Mountain elk that is expanding in northern California.

The improved ecological condition of meadow and riparian habitat will enhance and expand vegetation used by meadow birds. Post-restoration avian monitoring will be repeated post-implementation to evaluate the effectiveness of the project in meeting wildlife habitat objectives. Revegetation efforts to restore the riparian shrub habitat have been incorporated into the Project; these efforts may increase the pace of bird response, and effective restoration has the potential to support breeding of three special status meadow bird species: willow flycatcher, yellow warbler, and the already present greater sandhill crane (Ibid).

The Project includes several procedures for the protection of the environment - including implementation during the dry season, salvaging existing vegetation in disturbance areas, and ensuring compliance with all permit requirements. Additionally, surveys will be conducted if work is planned outside the limited operating periods and protocol surveys will be completed for sensitive species or species of concern. All staging areas shall be surveyed for noxious weeds and treated prior to work.

The Project provides for continued monitoring including monthly and continuous groundwater elevation data, soil carbon analysis, CRAM Wetland Assessment, water temperature monitoring, avian surveys, and project performance monitoring to evaluate the need for maintenance and inform long-term adaptive management needs.

Public Agencies that will be involved with the project:

Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Army Corp. of Engineers


Lead Agency Contact Person:

Kelsey Siemer, District Manager

Plumas Corp. McKenzie Meadows Creek Restoration Project CEQA NOE

NOTICE OF CEQA EXEMPTION

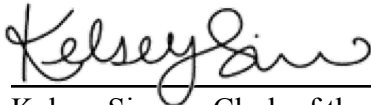
Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District
530-260-0067

Signature:  _____ Date: 06/26/2025
Jesse Claypool, Chairman
Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District

ATTEST:

I, Kelsey Siemer, Clerk of the Board of Directors, Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District, do hereby certify that the Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District approved this Notice of Exemption on the 26th day of June, 2025 by the following vote:

Ayes:	<u>5</u>	Abstentions:	<u>0</u>
Noes:	<u>0</u>	Absent:	<u>0</u>



Kelsey Siemer, Clerk of the Board of Directors
Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District