

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION



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

PROJECT TITLE:	Groveland Highway 120 Area Fuel Breaks Maintenance Project		
PROJECT LOCATION	T1S, R17E, Sections 32 & 33; T2S, R17E Section 5; T1S, R16E Sections 21, 22, 26 & 27; MDBM.	COUNTY	Tuolumne
LEAD AGENCY	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
CONTACT	Roger Petersen, Unit Forester CAL FIRE Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit	PHONE	(209) 754-3831
ADDRESS	785 Mountain Ranch Rd., San Andreas, CA 95249		

Project Description: This project will reduce brush, trees less than 12-inches diameter at breast height, and surface fuels to maintain two shaded fuel breaks near the community of Groveland. The intent of the operation is to reduce the amount of vegetation that has regrown in the two fuel breaks and to eliminate the vertical and horizontal continuity of understory fuels, surface fuels, and crown fuels to maintain a shaded fuel break condition. The Smith Station Road Fuel Break consists of the area approximately 150-feet on either side of Smith Station Road, from Highway 120 south to the Mariposa County line. This project area is approximately 70 acres in size. The Highway 120 fuel break consists of the area approximately 150-feet to the north side of the highway, from Tenaya Elementary School, east to the east entrance of Old Highway 120. This project area is approximately 42 acres in size. Both project areas have been maintained at least once in the past. Vegetation would best be described as Sierra Mixed Conifer; however, there are portions of the project area where interior live oak is the primary overstory species. The understory is primarily manzanita, ceanothus, toyon, yerba santa, blackberry and poison oak. Surface and ladder fuels will be reduced or modified by mastication, chipping, or by hand cutting, piling and burning. Mastication may be conducted by a variety of track laying type tractors. Hand work for chipping, as well as piling and burning will be conducted by hand crews using chainsaws and other hand tools. Trees less than 12-inches in diameter at breast height (dbh), surface fuels and ladder fuels will be treated to achieve a target residual tree spacing of 25 to 30-feet between stems. Residual trees will be pruned to a height of approximately 8 to 10-feet above ground level. Dead trees of any size may be felled and chipped, piled and burned, or masticated. Masticated or chipped material will be left on site. The reduction in vegetation will maintain a shaded fuel break condition that will minimize fire behavior and maintain a stand structure that is resistant to stand replacing fires.

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

This project fits under 15304- Minor Alterations to Land. The project will consist of removing surface and ladder fuels to maintain two existing fuel breaks. The project is located in an urban interface area. The project will maintain an open stand condition. 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 dominant and co-dominant 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 carefully designed to avoid adverse impacts to archaeological resources. The project was designed to reduce hazardous fuel loading in a strategic area around the community of Groveland, and will make Tuolumne County more resilient regarding wildfires.

Field 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

Digitally signed by: Mike Van Loben Sels 7/16/2025
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 Mike van Loben Sels, Southern Region Chief Date:
 California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection