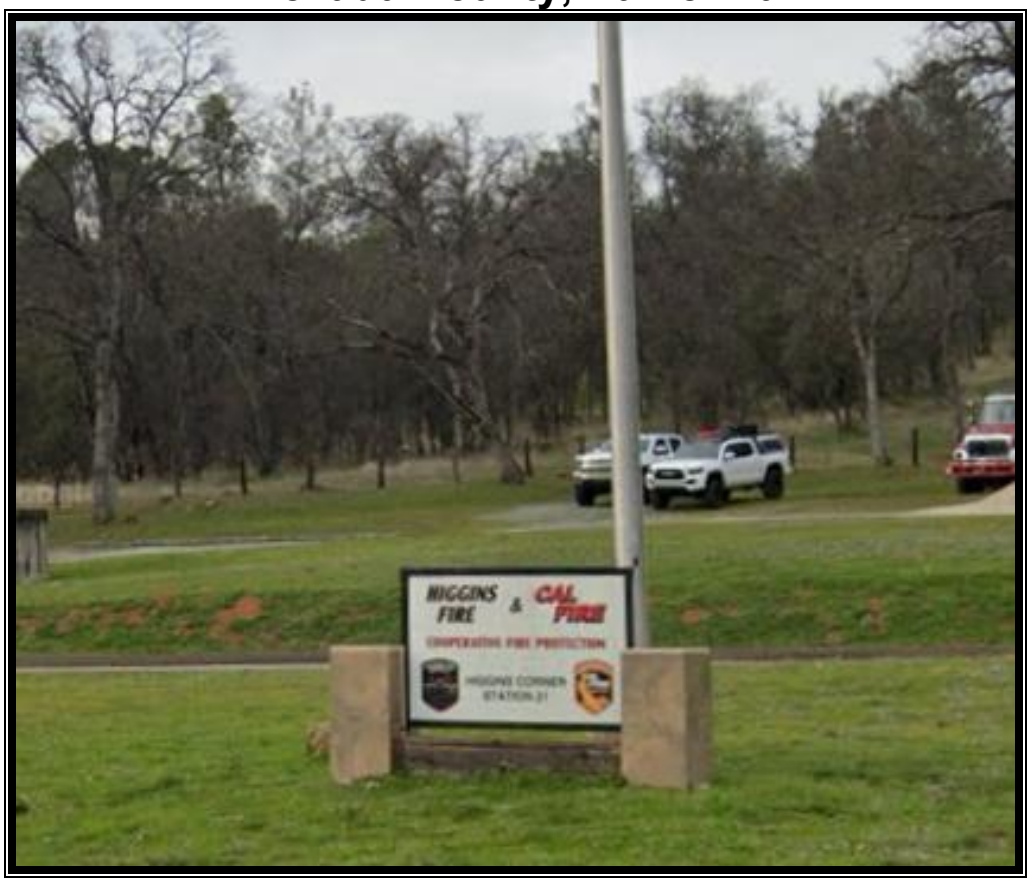
FINAL
Mitigated Negative Declaration for the proposed Higgins Fire Station
SCH #2025091350
Nevada County, California



Prepared by:
The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
The Lead Agency Pursuant to Section 21082.1 of the
California Environmental Quality Act

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November 18, 2025

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Advanced Clean Car Program
ADA	American with Disabilities Act
ADT	Average Daily Traffic
BMP	Best Management Practices
BRRPD	Bear River Recreation and Park District
CAA	Clean Air Act (Federal)
CAAQS	California Ambient Air Quality Standards
CABY	Consumnes, American, Bear, and Yuba Rivers
CARB	California Air Resources Board
CCAA	California Clean Air Act
CCR	California Code of Regulations
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CESA	California Endangered Species Act
CFS	Cubic Feet per Second
CGS	California Geological Survey
CNDDB	California Natural Diversity Database
CNRA	California Natural Resource Agency
CO	Carbon Monoxide
CO_2	Carbon Dioxide
CO_2e	Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
CRHR	California Register of Historic Places
CSWRCB/SWRCB	California State Water Resources Control Board
CVRWQCB	Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
DEIR	Draft Environmental Impact Report
DSA	Department of State Architect
DWR	Department of Water Resources
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EV	Electric Vehicle
FESA/ESA	Federal Endangered Species Act
FMMP	Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program
FS	Fire Station
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
HAP	Hazardous Air Pollutants
HVAC	Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning
IRWMP	Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
MCAB	Mountain Counties Air Basin
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NAHC	Native American Heritage Commission
NCIC	North Central Information Center
NCTC	Nevada County Transportation Commission
NID	Nevada Irrigation District
NO_2	Nitrogen Dioxide
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System

NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Services
NSAQMB	Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District
NWI	National Wetland Inventory
PM	Particulate Matter
PPV	Peak Particle Velocity
SLF	Sacred Lands File
SO_2	Sulfur Dioxide
SWMP	Storm Water Management Plan
SWPPP	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan
TAC	Toxic Air Contaminant
TAZ	Transportation Analysis Zone
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Federal)
UTV	Utility Task Vehicle
VMT	Vehicle Miles Traveled
ZEV	Zero Emission Vehicle

FINAL MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Higgins Fire Station Project (Project)

Lead Agency: State of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

Project Location: The project site is an approximate 7-acre parcel (APN 021-730-087) located at 23036 West Hacienda Drive, Grass Valley, CA 95949

Project Description: Construction of the new facility would include a 9,296 square foot (sf), two-engine fire station including an 18-bed barracks/3 bay apparatus building, 2,048 sf administration building, and an 816-sf storage building. Site development would include earthwork, drainage, stormwater system, roads, curbs and paving, gutters and sidewalks, a 2,000-gallon above ground fuel vault, fire suppression system, site lighting, hose drying rack, fencing, trash enclosure, flagpoles, bike racks, electric vehicle chargers, ground-mounted photovoltaic system, two 1,000-gallon propane tanks, fire sprinkler system, fire hydrant, backflow preventer, post indicator valve, fire department connection, 85 kW generator, and landscaping. Utilities would include connecting to the existing water main in Combie Road for potable, irrigation, and fire water, sewer connection to the existing manhole at Combie/W Hacienda intersection, electrical power, solar, LPG/natural gas, telephone, and radio. Depth of excavation is anticipated to be up to 3 feet.

Finding: Based on the information contained in the attached Initial Study, CAL FIRE finds that there will not be a significant effect on the environment because the mitigation measures will be incorporated as part of the proposed Project.

Public Review Period: October 1, 2025 to October 31, 2025.

MITIGATION MEASURES INCORPORATED INTO THE PROJECT TO AVOID SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

Regulatory Requirements, Permits and Approvals

The proposed Project may require the following environmental permits and CAL FIRE may be required to comply with the following state regulations:

1. National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (NPDES) – issued by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB).

2. Storm Water Construction General Permit (including the development and implementation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan – issued by the SWRCB.

3. Authority to Construct permit and Permit to Operate (for the generator and fuel tanks) – issued by the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District.

4. State Fire Marshal Review Approval.

5. State Architect Approval for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and structural review by the Department of the State Architect (DSA).

Mitigation Measures

The following four (4) mitigation measures will be implemented by CAL FIRE to avoid or minimize environmental impacts. Implementation of these mitigation measures will reduce the environmental impacts of the proposed Project to a less than significant level.

AES-1: Landscaping and Design Requirements

CAL FIRE shall implement applicable design and landscaping requirements contained within the Greater Higgins Area Plan with an emphasis on native and drought-tolerant (water efficient) plants shall be incorporated.

CR-1: Unanticipated Discoveries of Archaeological Resources

In the event that a prehistoric archeological site (such as any unusual amounts of stone, bone, or shell) or a historic-period archaeological site (such as concentrated deposits of bottles or bricks, amethyst glass, or other historic refuse), is uncovered during grading or other construction activities, all ground-disturbing activity within 100 feet of the discovery shall be halted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. CAL FIRE will be notified of the potential find and a qualified archeologist shall be retained to investigate its significance. If the find is a prehistoric archeological site, the appropriate Native American group shall be notified, and Mitigation Measure CR-1 shall be implemented. Any previously undiscovered resources found during construction will be recorded on appropriate California Department of Parks and Recreation 523 forms and evaluated for significance under all applicable regulatory criteria. If the archaeologist determines that the find does not meet the CRHR standards of significance for cultural resources, construction may proceed. If the find is determined to be significant by the qualified archaeologist (i.e., because the find is determined to constitute either an historical resource or a unique archaeological resource), the archaeologist shall work with CAL FIRE to follow accepted professional standards such as

further testing for evaluation or data recovery, as necessary. If artifacts are recovered from significant historic archaeological resources, they shall be housed at a qualified curation facility. The results of the identification, evaluation, and/or data recovery program for any unanticipated discoveries shall be presented in a professional-quality report that details all methods and findings, evaluates the nature and significance of the resources, and analyzes and interprets the results.

GEO-1: Soil Stability and Erosion
Recommendations contained in the Geotechnical Investigation and Geologic Hazards Evaluation for Higgins FS shall be adhered to during grading and site preparation as applicable to ensure that substantial erosion and instability does not occur.

TCR-1: Unanticipated Discoveries of Potential Tribal Cultural Resources
If any suspected tribal cultural resources are discovered during ground disturbing construction activities, including midden soil, artifacts, chipped stone, exotic rock (nonnative), or unusual amounts of baked clay, shell, or bone, all work shall cease within 100 feet of the find. Appropriate tribal representative(s) shall be immediately notified and shall determine if the find is a tribal cultural resource (pursuant to PRC Section 21074). The tribal representative will make recommendations for further evaluation and treatment, as necessary.

Preservation in place is the preferred alternative under CEQA and the tribes' protocols, and every effort must be made to preserve the resources in place, including through project redesign. Culturally appropriate treatment may be, but is not limited to, processing materials for reburial, minimizing handling of cultural objects, leaving objects in place within the landscape, returning objects to a location within the project vicinity where they will not be subject to future impacts. The Tribe does not consider curation of tribal cultural resources to be appropriate or respectful and requests that materials not be permanently curated, unless approved by the tribe. Treatment that preserves or restores the cultural character and integrity of a tribal cultural resource may include tribal monitoring, culturally appropriate recovery of cultural objects, and reburial of cultural objects or cultural soil.

Summary of Findings

This IS/MND has been prepared to assess the Project's potential effects on the environment and an appraisal of the significance of those effects. Based on this IS/MND, it has been determined that the proposed Project will not have any significant effects on the environment after implementation of mitigation measures. This conclusion is supported by the following findings:

1. The proposed Project will have no effect related to Agriculture and Forest Resources, Land Use and Planning, Mineral Resources, Public Services, and Recreation.

2. The proposed Project will have a less than significant impact on Air Quality, Biology, Energy, Hazards, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Population and Housing, Transportation, Utilities and Service Systems, and Wildfire.

3. Mitigation is required to reduce potentially significant impacts related to Aesthetics, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, and Tribal Resources, and Mandatory Findings of Significance.

The initial study-environmental checklist included in this document discusses the results of resource-specific environmental impact analyses, which were conducted by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). This initial study revealed that potentially significant environmental effects could result from the proposed Project. However, CAL FIRE has developed mitigation measures that will eliminate impacts or reduce environmental impacts to a less than significant level. CAL FIRE has found, in consideration of the entire record, that there is no substantial evidence that the proposed Project, as currently revised and mitigated, would result in a significant effect upon the environment. The IS/MND is therefore the appropriate document for CEQA compliance.

I hereby approve this Mitigated Negative Declaration:

DocuSigned by:
John Melvin
6569FF653A04422

11/18/2025

John Melvin, Assistant Deputy Director
Resource Protection and Improvement
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Date

MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PLAN (MMRP)

Introduction
In accordance with CEQA, an MND that identifies adverse impacts related to the construction activity for the Higgins Fire Station Project (Project) was prepared. Mitigation measures have been identified that would reduce or eliminate these impacts.

Section 21081.6 of the Public Resources Code and Sections 15091(d) and 15097 of the State CEQA Guidelines require public agencies to adopt a reporting and monitoring program for changes to the Project which has been adopted or made a condition of Project approval in order to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment. A MMRP is required for the proposed Project because the IS/MND identified potentially significant adverse impacts related to construction activity, and mitigation measures have been identified to mitigate these impacts. Adoption of the MMRP will occur along with the approval of the Project.

Purpose of the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan
This MMRP has been prepared to ensure that all required mitigation measures are implemented and completed according to schedule and maintained in a satisfactory manner during the construction and operation of the proposed Project. The MMRP may be modified by CAL FIRE during Project implementation as necessary, in response to changing conditions or other Project refinements. The following table has been prepared to assist the responsible parties in implementing the MMRP. This table identifies the category of significant environmental impact(s), individual mitigation measures, monitoring and mitigation timing, responsible person/agency for implementing the measure, monitoring and reporting procedures, and notation space to confirm implementation of the mitigation measures. The numbering of the mitigation measures follows the numbering sequence in the IS/MND.

Roles and Responsibilities
CAL FIRE, as the leavd agency, is responsible for oversight of compliance of the mitigation measures in the MMRP.

Higgins Fire Station Project Mitigation and Monitoring Reporting Plan

Mitigation Measure	Monitoring Activity/Timing/ Frequency/ Schedule	Implementation/ Responsibility/ Verification	Responsibility for Oversight of/ Compliance/ Verification	Outside Agency Coordination
AES-1: Landscaping and Design Requirements CAL FIRE shall implement applicable design and landscaping requirements contained within the Greater Higgins Area Plan with an emphasis on native and drought-tolerant (water efficient) plants shall be incorporated.	**AES-1 Activity:** A Landscaping Plan consistent with the Greater Higgins Area Plan shall be prepared as part of the Working Drawings for approval.	**CAL FIRE Project Engineer** Initials Date **Senior Environmental Planner** Initials Date	**Project Director** Initials Date	Potentially Nevada County

Mitigation Measure	Monitoring Activity/Timing/ Frequency/ Schedule	Implementation/ Responsibility/ Verification	Responsibility for Oversight of/ Compliance/ Verification	Outside Agency Coordination
CR-1: Unanticipated Discoveries of Archaeological Resources In the event that a prehistoric archeological site (such as any unusual amounts of stone, bone, or shell) or a historic-period archaeological site (such as concentrated deposits of bottles or bricks, amethyst glass, or other historic refuse), is uncovered during grading or other construction activities, all ground-disturbing activity within 100 feet of the discovery shall be halted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. CAL FIRE will be notified of the potential find and a qualified archeologist shall be retained to investigate its significance. If the find is a prehistoric archeological site, the appropriate Native American group shall be notified, and Mitigation Measure CR-1 shall be implemented. Any previously undiscovered resources found during construction will be recorded on appropriate California Department of Parks and Recreation 523 forms and evaluated for significance under all applicable regulatory criteria. If the archaeologist determines that the find does not meet the CRHR standards of significance for cultural resources, construction may proceed. If the find is determined to be significant by the qualified archaeologist (i.e., because the find is determined to constitute either an historical resource or a unique archaeological resource), the archaeologist shall work with CAL FIRE to follow accepted professional standards such as further testing for evaluation or data recovery, as necessary. If artifacts are recovered from significant historic archaeological resources, they shall	**CR-1 Activity:** Unanticipated cultural resources, consultation and determination. **Timing:** During ground disturbance/ construction. **Frequency:** As required.	**Project Contractor** Initials Date **Project Archaeologist** Initials Date	**Project Director** Initials Date **Senior Environmental Planner** Initials Date	Possible coordination with, NAHC, and tribal representatives.

Mitigation Measure	Monitoring Activity/Timing/ Frequency/ Schedule	Implementation/ Responsibility/ Verification	Responsibility for Oversight of/ Compliance/ Verification	Outside Agency Coordination
be housed at a qualified curation facility. The results of the identification, evaluation, and/or data recovery program for any unanticipated discoveries shall be presented in a professional-quality report that details all methods and findings, evaluates the nature and significance of the resources, and analyzes and interprets the results.				
GEO-1: Recommendations contained in the Geotechnical Investigation and Geologic Hazards Evaluation for Higgins FS shall be adhered to during grading and site preparation as applicable to ensure that substantial erosion and instability does not occur.	**GEO-1 Activity:** Adhere to Geotechnical Report **Timing:** During ground disturbance/site preparation. **Frequency:** As required.	**CAL FIRE Project Engineer** Initials Date **Senior Environmental Planner** Initials Date	**Project Director** Initials Date	Potentially Nevada County
TCR-1: Unanticipated Discoveries of Potential Tribal Cultural Resources If any suspected tribal cultural resources are discovered during ground disturbing construction activities, including midden soil, artifacts, chipped stone, exotic rock (nonnative), or unusual amounts of baked clay, shell, or bone, all work shall cease within 100 feet of the find. Appropriate tribal representative(s) shall be immediately notified and shall determine if the find is a tribal cultural resource (pursuant to PRC Section 21074). The tribal representative will make recommendations for further evaluation and treatment, as necessary. Preservation in place is the preferred alternative under CEQA and the tribes'	**TCR-1 Activity:** Unanticipated Tribal cultural resources **Timing:** During ground disturbance/ construction. **Frequency:** As required.	**Project Contractor** Initials Date **Project Archaeologist** Initials Date	**Project Director** Initials Date **Senior Environmental Planner** Initials Date	Possible coordination with NAHC and tribal representatives.

Mitigation Measure	Monitoring Activity/Timing/ Frequency/ Schedule	Implementation/ Responsibility/ Verification	Responsibility for Oversight of/ Compliance/ Verification	Outside Agency Coordination
protocols, and every effort must be made to preserve the resources in place, including through project redesign. Culturally appropriate treatment may be, but is not limited to, processing materials for reburial, minimizing handling of cultural objects, leaving objects in place within the landscape, returning objects to a location within the project vicinity where they will not be subject to future impacts. The Tribe does not consider curation of tribal cultural resources to be appropriate or respectful and requests that materials not be permanently curated, unless approved by the tribe. Treatment that preserves or restores the cultural character and integrity of a tribal cultural resource may include tribal monitoring, culturally appropriate recovery of cultural objects, and reburial of cultural objects or cultural soil.				

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

This section of the document contains copies of the comment letters received during the 30-day public review period, which began on October 1, 2025, and ended October 31, 2025. In conformance with Section 15088(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines, CAL FIRE has considered comments on environmental issues from reviewers of the Draft IS/MND and has prepared written responses. One letter was received, commenting on the Draft IS/MND. The responses to comments contained in the letter are provided in this section.

List of Comment Letters

A list of public agencies, organizations, and individuals that provided comments on the Draft IS/MND is presented below. The letters and the responses to the comments follow this page.

Letter Number	Sender	Date
1	Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board	10/30/25

30 October 2025

Christina Snow
California Department of Forestry
and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460
christina.snow@fire.ca.gov

COMMENTS TO REQUEST FOR REVIEW FOR THE MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION, HIGGINS FIRE STATION PROJECT, SCH#2025091350, NEVADA COUNTY

Pursuant to the State Clearinghouse's 30 September 2025 request, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Water Board) has reviewed the *Request for Review for the Mitigated Negative Declaration* for the Higgins Fire Station Project, located in Nevada County.

Our agency is delegated with the responsibility of protecting the quality of surface and groundwaters of the state; therefore our comments will address concerns surrounding those issues.

#1

I. Regulatory Setting

Basin Plan

The Central Valley Water Board is required to formulate and adopt Basin Plans for all areas within the Central Valley region under Section 13240 of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act. Each Basin Plan must contain water quality objectives to ensure the reasonable protection of beneficial uses, as well as a program of implementation for achieving water quality objectives with the Basin Plans. Federal regulations require each state to adopt water quality standards to protect the public health or welfare, enhance the quality of water and serve the purposes of the Clean Water Act. In California, the beneficial uses, water quality objectives, and the Antidegradation Policy are the State's water quality standards. Water quality standards are also contained in the National Toxics Rule, 40 CFR Section 131.36, and the California Toxics Rule, 40 CFR Section 131.38.

The Basin Plan is subject to modification as necessary, considering applicable laws, policies, technologies, water quality conditions and priorities. The original Basin Plans were adopted in 1975, and have been updated and revised periodically as required, using Basin Plan amendments. Once the Central Valley Water Board has

adopted a Basin Plan amendment in noticed public hearings, it must be approved by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board), Office of Administrative Law (OAL) and in some cases, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Basin Plan amendments only become effective after they have been approved by the OAL and in some cases, the USEPA. Every three (3) years, a review of the Basin Plan is completed that assesses the appropriateness of existing standards and evaluates and prioritizes Basin Planning issues. For more information on the *Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento and San Joaquin River Basins*, please visit our website:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/basin_plans/

Antidegradation Considerations

All wastewater discharges must comply with the Antidegradation Policy (State Water Board Resolution 68-16) and the Antidegradation Implementation Policy contained in the Basin Plan. The Antidegradation Implementation Policy is available on page 74 at:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/basin_plans/sacsjr_201805.pdf

In part it states:

Any discharge of waste to high quality waters must apply best practicable treatment or control not only to prevent a condition of pollution or nuisance from occurring, but also to maintain the highest water quality possible consistent with the maximum benefit to the people of the State.

This information must be presented as an analysis of the impacts and potential impacts of the discharge on water quality, as measured by background concentrations and applicable water quality objectives.

The antidegradation analysis is a mandatory element in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System and land discharge Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) permitting processes. The environmental review document should evaluate potential impacts to both surface and groundwater quality.

#2

II. Permitting Requirements

Construction Storm Water General Permit

Dischargers whose project disturb one or more acres of soil or where projects disturb less than one acre but are part of a larger common plan of development that in total disturbs one or more acres, are required to obtain coverage under the General Permit for Storm Water Discharges Associated with Construction and Land Disturbance Activities (Construction General Permit), Construction General Permit Order No. 2009-0009-DWQ. Construction activity subject to this permit includes clearing, grading, grubbing, disturbances to the ground, such as stockpiling, or excavation, but does not include regular maintenance activities performed to restore the original line, grade, or capacity of the facility. The Construction General Permit requires the development and implementation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). For more information on the Construction General Permit, visit the State Water Resources Control Board website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/constpermits.shtml

#3

Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit

If the project will involve the discharge of dredged or fill material in navigable waters or wetlands, a permit pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act may be needed from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). If a Section 404 permit is required by the USACE, the Central Valley Water Board will review the permit application to ensure that discharge will not violate water quality standards. If the project requires surface water drainage realignment, the applicant is advised to contact the Department of Fish and Game for information on Streambed Alteration Permit requirements. If you have any questions regarding the Clean Water Act Section 404 permits, please contact the Regulatory Division of the Sacramento District of USACE at (916) 557-5250.

#4

Clean Water Act Section 401 Permit – Water Quality Certification

If an USACE permit (e.g., Non-Reporting Nationwide Permit, Nationwide Permit, Letter of Permission, Individual Permit, Regional General Permit, Programmatic General Permit), or any other federal permit (e.g., Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act or Section 9 from the United States Coast Guard), is required for this project due to the disturbance of waters of the United States (such as streams and wetlands), then a Water Quality Certification must be obtained from the Central Valley Water Board prior to initiation of project activities. There are no waivers for 401 Water Quality Certifications. For more information on the Water Quality Certification, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/water_quality_certification/

#5

Waste Discharge Requirements – Discharges to Waters of the State

If USACE determines that only non-jurisdictional waters of the State (i.e., "non-federal" waters of the State) are present in the proposed project area, the proposed project may require a Waste Discharge Requirement (WDR) permit to be issued by Central Valley Water Board. Under the California Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, discharges to all waters of the State, including all wetlands and other waters of the State including, but not limited to, isolated wetlands, are subject to State regulation. For more information on the Waste Discharges to Surface Water NPDES Program and WDR processes, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at:https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/waste_to_surface_water/

Projects involving excavation or fill activities impacting less than 0.2 acre or 400 linear feet of non-jurisdictional waters of the state and projects involving dredging activities impacting less than 50 cubic yards of non-jurisdictional waters of the state may be eligible for coverage under the State Water Resources Control Board Water Quality Order No. 2004-0004-DWQ (General Order 2004-0004). For more information on the General Order 2004-0004, visit the State Water Resources Control Board website at:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/water_quality/2004/wqo/wqo2004-0004.pdf

#6 **Dewatering Permit**

If the proposed project includes construction or groundwater dewatering to be discharged to land, the proponent may apply for coverage under State Water Board General Water Quality Order (Low Threat General Order) 2003-0003 or the Central Valley Water Board's Waiver of Report of Waste Discharge and Waste Discharge Requirements (Low Threat Waiver) R5-2018-0085. Small temporary construction dewatering projects are projects that discharge groundwater to land from excavation activities or dewatering of underground utility vaults. Dischargers seeking coverage under the General Order or Waiver must file a Notice of Intent with the Central Valley Water Board prior to beginning discharge.

For more information regarding the Low Threat General Order and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/board_decisions/adopted_orders/water_quality/2003/wqo/wqo2003-0003.pdf

For more information regarding the Low Threat Waiver and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/board_decisions/adopted_orders/waivers/r5-2018-0085.pdf

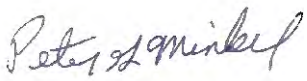
#7 **Limited Threat General NPDES Permit**

If the proposed project includes construction dewatering and it is necessary to discharge the groundwater to waters of the United States, the proposed project will require coverage under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. Dewatering discharges are typically considered a low or limited threat to water quality and may be covered under the General Order for *Limited Threat Discharges to Surface Water* (Limited Threat General Order). A complete Notice of Intent must be submitted to the Central Valley Water Board to obtain coverage under the Limited Threat General Order. For more information regarding the Limited Threat General Order and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/board_decisions/adopted_orders/general_orders/r5-2016-0076-01.pdf

#8 **NPDES Permit**

If the proposed project discharges waste that could affect the quality of surface waters of the State, other than into a community sewer system, the proposed project will require coverage under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. A complete Report of Waste Discharge must be submitted with the Central Valley Water Board to obtain a NPDES Permit. For more information regarding the NPDES Permit and the application process, visit the Central Valley Water Board website at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/help/permit/

If you have questions regarding these comments, please contact me at (916) 464-4684 or Peter.Minkel2@waterboards.ca.gov.



Peter G. Minkel
Engineering Geologist

cc: State Clearinghouse unit, Governor's Office of Planning and Research, Sacramento

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

Comment #1 Response: Comment noted. Additional language for clarification has been added to the Hydrology and Water Quality Environmental Setting section and discussion of analysis in question a).

Comment #2 Response: Comment noted. Please see Hydrology and Water Quality Environmental section and discussion of analysis in question a).

Comment #3 and #4 Response: No impacts would occur to waters of the U.S. A Section 404 or 401 permit is not required.

Comment #5 Response: The project would not discharge to any state or federal waters.

Comment #6 and #7 Response: Comment noted. Project construction activities are not expected to require dewatering activities. However, CAL FIRE will apply for all applicable permits issued by the CVRWQCB during its application process for the NPDES Permit pursuant to the Clean Water Act.

Comment #7 Response: CAL FIRE anticipates applying for an NPDES permit for the project. Please see discussion in the Hydrology and Water Quality Regulatory Section.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A

STATE OF CALIFORNIA NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY Gavin Newsom, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION
P.O. Box 944246
SACRAMENTO, CA 94244-2460
(916) 653-7772
Website: www.fire.ca.gov

Notice Date: 10/29/25

NOTICE OF INTENT
TO ADOPT A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Project Name: Higgins Fire Station Project

The State of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is the Lead Agency for the proposed Higgins Fire Station Project (Project). In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code § 21000 *et seq.*) and Department procedures, notification is hereby given to responsible and trustee agencies, interest groups and the general public, that the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection proposes to adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Project described below.

Project Location: The project site is an approximate 7-acre parcel located at 23036 West Hacienda Drive in Nevada County (APN 021-730-087).

Project Description: Construction of the new facility would include a 9,296 square foot (sf), two-engine fire station including an 18-bed barracks/3 bay apparatus building, 2,048 sf administration building, and an 816-sf storage building. Site development would include earthwork, drainage, stormwater system, roads, curbs and paving, gutters and sidewalks, a 2,000-gallon above ground fuel vault, fire suppression system, site lighting, hose drying rack, fencing, trash enclosure, flagpoles, bike racks, electric vehicle chargers, ground-mounted photovoltaic system, two 1,000-gallon propane tanks, fire sprinkler system, fire hydrant, backflow preventer, post indicator valve, fire department connection, 85 kW generator, and landscaping. Utilities would include connecting to the existing water main in Combie Road for potable, irrigation, and fire water, sewer connection to the existing manhole at Combie/W Hacienda intersection, electrical power, solar, LPG/natural gas, telephone, and radio. Depth of excavation is anticipated to be up to 3 feet.

Public Review Period: The Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration will undergo a 30-day public review period during which comments may be submitted. The review period begins on October 1, 2025, to October 31, 2025. Written comments regarding the contents of the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration should be sent to:

Christina Snow, Senior Environmental Planner
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Technical Services Section
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Phone Number: (916) 216-0553

Written comments may also be sent via e-mail using the e-mail address provided below:

Email: christina.snow@fire.ca.gov

A copy of the Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration is available for review at the following locations:

1. CAL FIRE Higgins Fire Station, 10106 Combie Road, Grass Valley, California 95949.

2. Grass Valley Public Library, 207 Mill Street, Grass Valley, California 95945.

3. CAL FIRE Internet at: https://CAL FIRE.app.box.com/s/6uzjbg146cfn018h1jw98871hp740x7t/folder/238725157425

4. CAL FIRE Technical Services, 1131 S Street, Sacramento, CA 95811.

The Notice of Intent is posted at the following locations:

1. CAL FIRE Higgins Fire Station, 10106 Combie Road, Grass Valley, California 95949.

2. On the project site at 23036 West Hacienda Drive (corner of Combie Road and W. Hacienda Drive).

3. Grass Valley United States Post Office, 185 E Main Street, Grass Valley, California 95945.

INTRODUCTION AND REGULATORY CONTEXT

Stage of CEQA Document Development

☐ **Administrative Draft.** This California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document is in preparation by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) staff.

☐ **Public Document.** This completed CEQA document has been filed by CAL FIRE at the State Clearinghouse and is being circulated for a 30-day agency and public review period. The public review period begins October 1, 2025, and ends on October 31, 2025.

☒ **Final CEQA Document.** This Final CEQA document contains the changes made by the Department following consideration of comments received during the public and agency review period. The changes are displayed in strike-out text for deletions and underlined text for insertions. The CEQA administrative record supporting this document is on file, and available for review, at CAL FIRE's Sacramento Headquarters, Environmental Protection Program, which is in the Natural Resources Building, 715 P Street, Sacramento, California 95814. It is also available for review at the CAL FIRE Technical Services building located at 1131 S Street, Sacramento, California 95811.

Introduction

This Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) describes the environmental impact analysis conducted for the proposed Project. This document was prepared by CAL FIRE staff utilizing information gathered from several sources including research and field review of the proposed Project area and consultation with environmental planners. Pursuant to Section 21082.1 of the CEQA, the lead agency, CAL FIRE, has prepared, reviewed, and analyzed the IS/MND and declares that the statements made in this document reflect CAL FIRE's independent judgment as lead agency pursuant to CEQA. CAL FIRE further finds that the proposed Project, which includes revised activities and mitigation measures designed to minimize environmental impacts, will not result in significant adverse effects on the environment.

Regulatory Guidance

This IS/MND has been prepared by CAL FIRE to evaluate potential environmental effects which could result following approval and implementation of the proposed Project. This document has been prepared in accordance with current CEQA Statutes (Public Resources Code §21000 *et seq*.) and current CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations [CCR] §15000 *et seq*.).

An initial study is prepared by a lead agency to determine if a Project may have a significant effect on the environment (14 CCR § 15063[a]), and thus, to determine the appropriate environmental document. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines §15070, a "public agency shall prepare…a proposed negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration…when: (a) The initial study shows that there is no substantial evidence…that the Project may have a significant impact upon the environment, or (b) The initial study identifies potentially significant effects but revisions to the Project plans or proposal are agreed to by the applicant and such revisions will reduce potentially significant effects to a less-than-significant level." In this circumstance, the lead agency prepares a written statement describing its reasons for concluding that the proposed Project will

not have a significant effect on the environment and, therefore, does not require the preparation of an environmental impact report. This IS/MND conforms to these requirements and to the content requirements of CEQA Guidelines Section 15071.

Purpose of the Initial Study

CAL FIRE has primary authority for carrying out the proposed Project and is the lead agency under CEQA. The purpose of this IS/MND is to present to the public and reviewing agencies the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed Project and describe the adjustments made to the Project to avoid significant environmental effects or reduce them to a less-than-significant level. This disclosure document is being made available to the public, and reviewing agencies, for review and comment. The IS/MND is being circulated for public and agency review and comment for a review period of 30 days as indicated on the notice of intent to adopt a mitigated negative declaration (NOI).

The requirements for providing an NOI are found in CEQA Guidelines §15072. These guidelines require CAL FIRE to notify the public by utilizing at least one of the following three procedures:

- Publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the area affected by the proposed Project,
- Posting the NOI on and off site in the area where the Project is to be located, or
- Direct mailing to the owners and occupants of property contiguous to the Project.

CAL FIRE has elected to utilize the second notification option. The NOI was posted at three prominent locations in the area where the Project is located for the entire 30-day public review period.

1. Notices were posted at the current Higgins Fire Station, on the project site, and the United States Post Office in Grass Valley.

A complete copy of this CEQA document is available for review by any member of the public requesting to see it at the locations identified in the NOI. An electronic version of the NOI and the CEQA document are available for review for the entire 30-day review period on the State of California's CEQAnet site at:

https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/Search

If submitted prior to the close of public comment, views and comments are welcomed from reviewing agencies or any member of the public on how the proposed Project may affect the environment. Written comments must be postmarked or submitted on or prior to the date the public review period will close (as indicated on the NOI) for CAL FIRE's consideration. Written comments may also be submitted via email (using the email address which appears below) but comments sent via email must also be received on or prior to the close of the 30-day public comment period. Comments should be addressed to:

Christina Snow, Senior Environmental Planner
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
Technical Services
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460
Phone: (916) 216-0553
Email: christina.snow@fire.ca.gov

After comments are received from the public and reviewing agencies, CAL FIRE will consider those comments and may (1) adopt the mitigated negative declaration and approve the proposed Project; (2) undertake additional environmental studies; or (3) abandon the Project. If the Project is approved and funded, CAL FIRE could design and construct all or part of the Project.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Background and Need for the Project

The Higgins Corner Fire Station (FS) is a two-engine station that was constructed in 1948 on leased land owned by Nevada County. Since 1978, Higgins Area Fire Protection District (HAFPD), a local government special district, has co-located with CAL FIRE at the current location of the Higgins FS. HAFPD contracts with CAL FIRE for both fire protection and administration of the district. The district houses two engines, one water tender, and rescue capability at this location. The station also supports a volunteer company with one HAFPD Fire Chief and one office manager. In 2008, a joint venture was developed between the HAFPD and CAL FIRE to construct a new replacement facility on the same site for continued co-location. HAFPD acquired the property from Nevada County as the first part of the joint venture. The plan at the time of purchase by HAFPD was to either enter a long-term lease with or sell a portion of the property to CAL FIRE and jointly develop plans for the replacement of the facility on the existing site. In 2013, the HAFPD's Board of Directors decided to start leasing the site and facilities to CAL FIRE; the lease is still in place as of today. In 2008, and again in 2014, the Higgins FS replacement project was authorized by the Legislature for acquisition of the existing site to build a replacement station. This authority was reverted in July 2016 because the original project scope changed.

The existing buildings, which were built in 1948 and remodeled extensively over the years, do not meet current building codes, current seismic codes, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, and require continual, expensive repairs. The facility does not meet operational requirements. The buildings have no fire alarm or sprinkler systems, are poorly insulated, have inadequate substandard, and failing heating, cooling, electrical and plumbing systems. The mess hall and barracks are not designed to handle the current staffing loads. The joint venture is no longer viable due to financial and political issues with HAFPD. The site is owned by HAFPD and CAL FIRE operates with a short-term lease of the site. The situation has made long-term planning and protection of the State Responsibility Area (SRA) unstable. CAL FIRE acquired a new site within the response area. Current staff are located at Unit Headquarters, ten miles away in the city of Auburn, but need to be located closer to the SRA. Having staff located away from the FS increases response time, requires staff to navigate through city traffic to get to the FS and then prepare to respond to emergencies.

This new 7-acre site is located at 23036 West Hacienda Drive (APN 021-730-087) in Grass Valley, California.

Project Objectives

The new Higgins FS will support CAL FIRE's mission to serve and safeguard the people and protect the property and resources within the Nevada Unit.

The following are the objectives of the proposed Project:

- Construct a new, modern facility that meets operational requirements.

- To improve CAL FIRE's ability to meet peak demand emergency incident workload through providing necessary operational facilities for fire crews that enhance the statewide fire protection and emergency response system.

Project Description

Construction of the new facility would include a 9,296 square foot (sf), two-engine fire station including an 18-bed barracks/3 bay apparatus building, 2,048 sf administration building, and an 816-sf storage building. Site development would include earthwork, drainage, stormwater system, roads, curbs and paving, gutters and sidewalks, a 2,000-gallon above ground fuel vault, fire suppression system, site lighting, hose drying rack, fencing, trash enclosure, flagpoles, bike racks, electric vehicle chargers, ground-mounted photovoltaic system, two 1,000-gallon propane tanks, fire sprinkler system, fire hydrant, backflow preventer, post indicator valve, fire department connection, 85 kW generator, and landscaping. Utilities would include connecting to the existing water main in Combie Road for potable, irrigation, and fire water, sewer connection to the existing manhole at Combie/W Hacienda intersection, electrical power, solar, LPG/natural gas, telephone, and radio. Depth of excavation is anticipated to be up to 3 feet.

Project Region and Description of Local Environment

Nevada County is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills and spans a 978 square mile area from the Sacramento Valley on the west to the Sierra Nevada Mountains (at the California/Nevada state line) on the East. Nevada County is bordered by Sierra County on the north, Yuba County on the northwest, and Placer County on the south. Access into and through the county is provided primarily by Interstate 80 and State Routes 49, 20, 89, 174, and 267.

Elevations in the county range from a low of 200 feet in the south westernmost portion of the county to a high of 9,143 feet in the easternmost portion of the county (Mount Lola peak). Three major watersheds in the county include the Truckee River basin, the Yuba River basin, and the Bear River basin. These watersheds are the primary areas for surface water drainage.

In the unincorporated area of the County, the greatest residential density occurs in the Alta Sierra area to the south of Grass Valley/Nevada City, Lake Wildwood to the west of Grass Valley/Nevada City, and Lake of the Pines to the south of Alta Sierra along the most southerly County boundary. The project site is within the Lake of the Pines area near existing development and within the Greater Higgins Area Plan (November 2022) area.

Specifically, the project site sits at the corner of West Hacienda Drive and Combie Road. Combie Road is a three-lane arterial with narrow bike lanes on the shoulder providing access for the entire Plan Area. There are no sidewalks on either side and is mostly level sitting in a valley with forested hills on both sides. This new site is approximately one mile east from the current Higgins FS location.

The new project site is an undeveloped urban lot that has seen prior disturbance and alteration. The project parcel is predominantly grassland with light oak and pine species on the west and northwestern parcel perimeter. The property slopes upward from the roadway to the adjacent property that is developed with a church (south to north) with an average slope of 14 percent.

Directly across Combie road to the south is currently undeveloped and contains oak woodlands although this area is designated for future development in the General Plan (Updated Land Use 2014). Parcels to the east and west contain a mixture of commercial and grasslands/oak woodlands mix and beyond this is a mixture of rural residential and planned residential communities.

Figure 1: Project Vicinity Map

Figure 2: Project Location Map

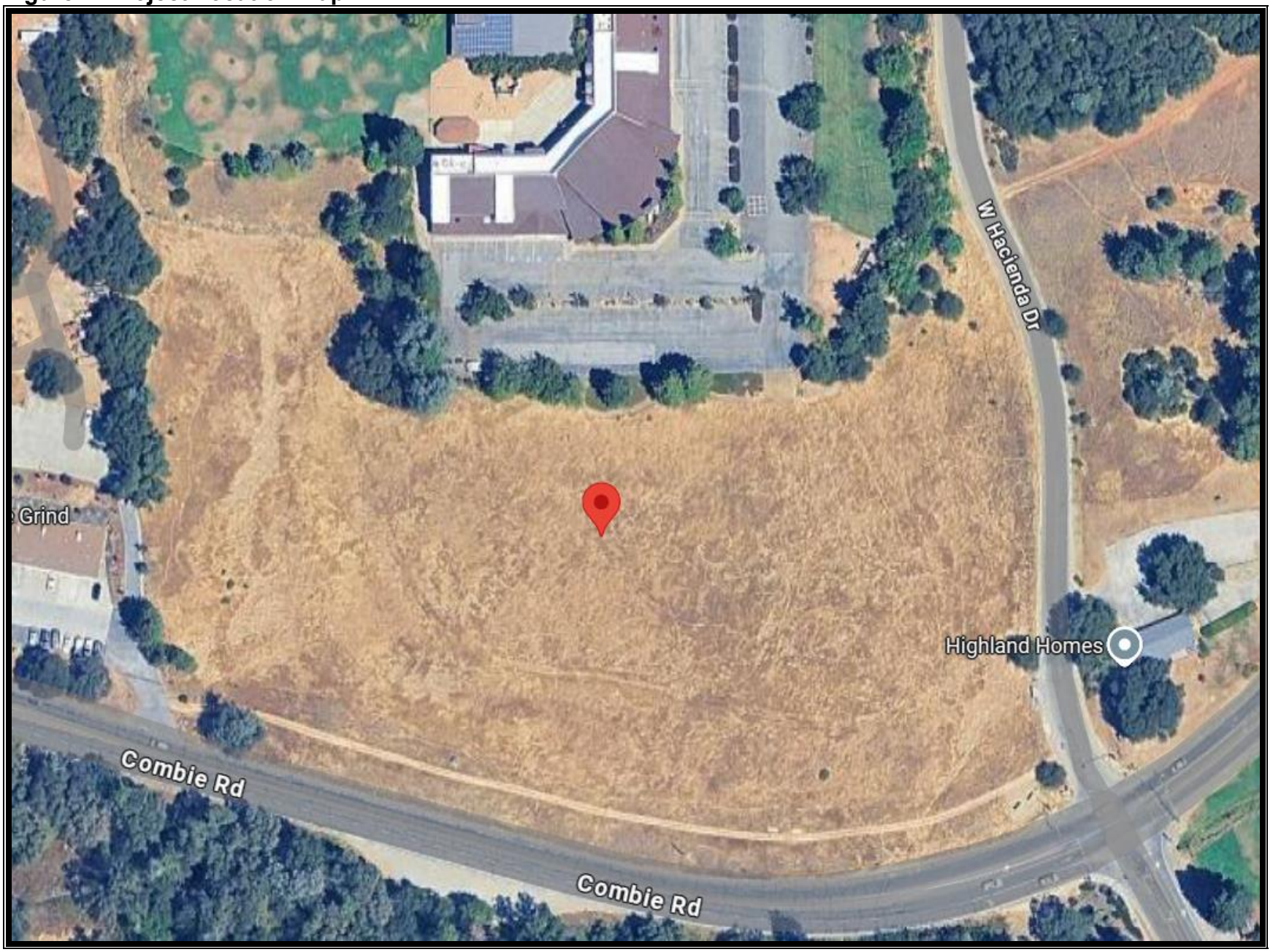


Figure 3: Proposed Site Plan Layout on Property

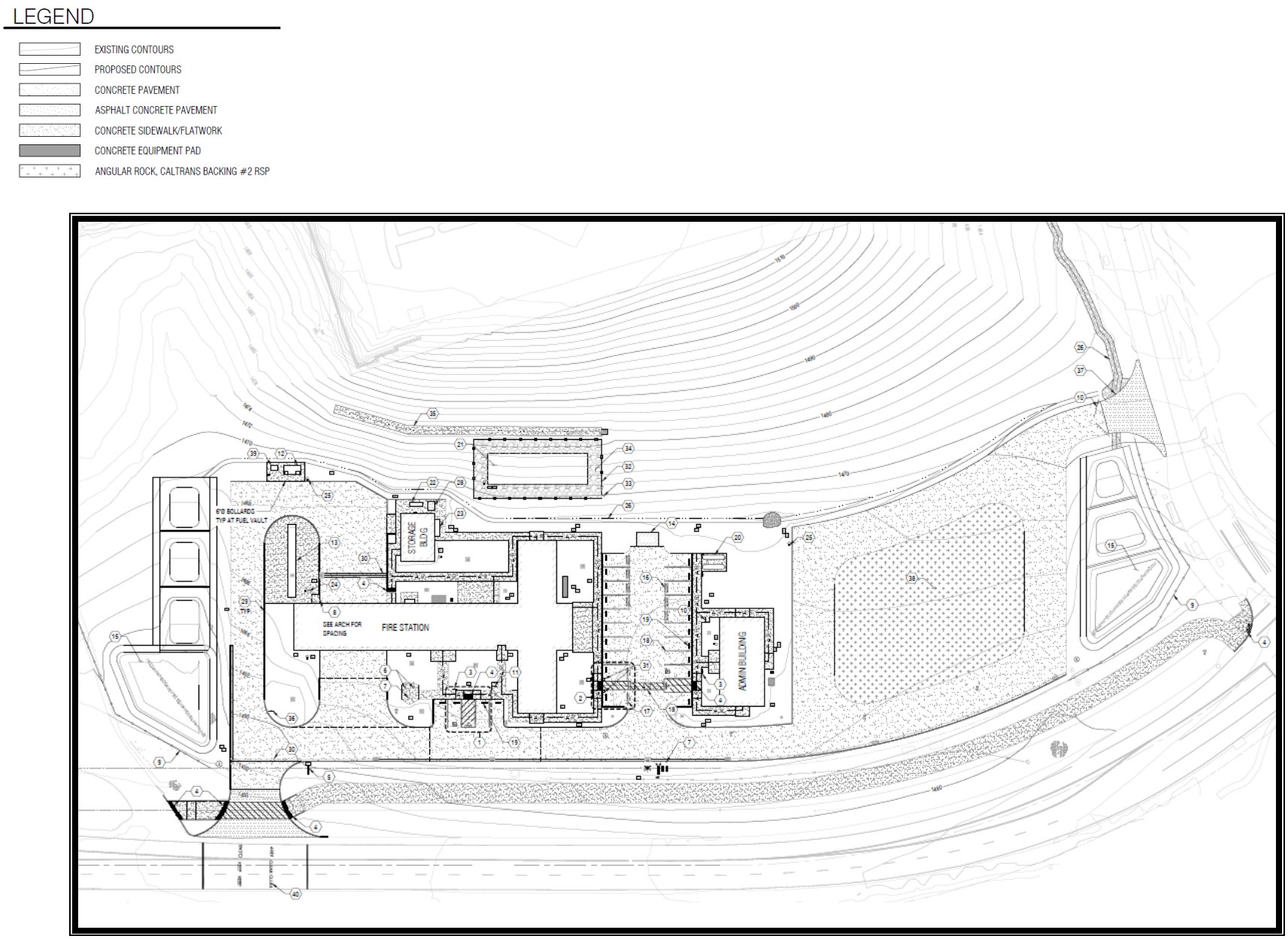


Figure 1: Project Site – Looking South Towards Combie Road

Figure 2: Project Site – Looking West

Figure 3: Project Site – Looking North Towards Compass Community Church

Figure 4: Project Site – Looking East

INITIAL STUDY/ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

PROJECT INFORMATION	
1. Project Title:	Higgins Fire Station
2. Lead Agency Name and Address:	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection P.O. 944246 Sacramento, CA 94244-2460
3. Contact Person and Phone Number:	Christina Snow 916-216-0553
4. Project Location:	APN # 021-730-087 located at 23036 West Hacienda Drive.
5. Project Sponsor's Name and Address:	CAL FIRE is project sponsor and lead agency
6. General Plan Designation:	Neighborhood Commercial, Urban High Density, & Open Space.
7. Zoning:	C1-SC-SP-PD, OS-SC-SP, and R3-SC-SP-PD
8. Description of Project: See Page 3 of this document	
9. Surrounding Land Uses and Setting:	Residential, Open Space, and Neighborhood Commercial
10: Other public agencies whose approval may be required:	Nevada County, Central Valley Water Quality Control Board

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED:

The environmental factors checked below are the ones which would potentially be affected by this proposed Project and were more rigorously analyzed than the factors which were not checked. The results of this analysis are presented in the detailed Environmental Checklist which follows.

☒	Aesthetics	☐	Agriculture and Forestry Resources	☐	Air Quality
☐	Biological Resources	☒	Cultural Resources	☐	Energy
☒	Geology / Soils	☐	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	☐	Hazards & Hazardous Materials
☐	Hydrology / Water Quality	☐	Land Use / Planning	☐	Mineral Resources
☐	Noise		Population / Housing	☐	Public Services
☐	Recreation	☐	Transportation / Traffic	☒	Tribal Resources
☐	Utilities / Service Systems	☐	Wildfire	☒	Mandatory Findings

Determination
On the basis of this initial evaluation:

☐ I find that the proposed Project **COULD NOT** have a significant effect on the environment, and a **NEGATIVE DECLARATION** would be prepared.

☒ I find that although the proposed Project **COULD** have a significant effect on the environment, there **WOULD NOT** be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the Project have been made by or agreed to by the Project proponent. A **MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION** will be prepared.

☐ I find that the proposed Project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT** is required.

☐ I find that the proposed Project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT** is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.

☐ I find that although the proposed Project **COULD** have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT** or **NEGATIVE DECLARATION** pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT or NEGATIVE DECLARATION**, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed Project, nothing further is required.

DocuSigned by:
John Melvin

9/25/2025

John Melvin, Assistant Deputy Director
Resource Protection and Improvement
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

Date

ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

AESTHETICS

Environmental Setting

The project site is within the southeastern portion of unincorporated Nevada County. This area includes residential development and neighborhood commercial development to serve those communities. The new fire station site is located near the gated community of Lake of the Pines consisting of upwards of 2,000 homes which is accessed via Combie Road. Combie Road is the major access point from State Highway 49 and is located adjacent to the project site. Although the area is designated for development the property directly south along Combie Road is undeveloped with dense oak woodland.

The site itself is an undeveloped urban lot that has seen prior disturbance and alteration. The project parcel is predominantly grassland with light oak and pine species on the west and northwestern parcel perimeter.

The property is the Greater Higgins Area Plan and is zoned as a Scenic Corridor Combining District (SC). This district is added to the existing zoning to preserve and enhance scenic resources and is subject to design standards within the Greater Higgins Area Plan that emphasize landscaping using native species where possible. Although much of the standards are applicable to residential and commercial development, there are items that should be considered when development is occurring on Combie Road.

The items that are applicable to the project include the following taken from the Greater Higgins Area Plan.

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR COMBIE ROAD

Scenic and Natural Resources (SNR)

Combie Road

- SNR-13: Fencing within 50' of the Combie Road roadway edge shall be in character with other fences in the corridor, which include split-rail fencing or other material that emulates a wood split-rail appearance, low metal fences or other materials in character with the rural setting. Chain-link fencing is not allowed.

- SNR-14: Signage shall adhere to County Standard L-II 2.7.7.D. In addition, there is a maximum sign dimension of 8' maximum in any direction.

- SNR-15: Parking areas should be located behind buildings to reduce visibility within the scenic corridor combining district. If visible parking areas are unavoidable, the parking area

shall be landscaped with shade trees and screened with landscaping or solid fencing (adhering to standard above).

Landscaping

- LA-1: Refer to Table A.1 for a recommended plant list with drought-tolerant, deer-resistant, and low-maintenance plant species.

- LA-2: Landscaping should include an abundance of trees, both deciduous and evergreen, providing shade and color during spring and summer months.

- LA-3: Existing on-site trees should be incorporated into the overall landscaping design. New landscaping should respect and utilize existing landscape elements, particularly native trees, including Blue Oak, Valley Oak, Gray Pine, and Interior Live Oak.

- LA-4: Landscaping should be used to define pedestrian areas and open spaces.

- LA-5: All cut slopes shall be landscaped or otherwise stabilized to avoid erosion and visual impacts.

- LA-6: Plant materials should always be distributed throughout parking areas, with larger islands and plantings alongside parking stalls.

- LA-7: Trees and shrubs should screen storage areas and outdoor equipment; however, consideration should first be given to relocating or architecturally screening unattractive features.

- LA-8: Create fire-resistant landscaping in all parts of the project outside of building footprints. Concepts to be followed include the following suggestions from the CAL FIRE website: Create fire-resistant hardscape zones through the use of stone walls, paved patios, and driveways. Use rock, mulch, and tended flower beds and gardens as ground cover and firebreaks. Select high-moisture plants that grow close to the ground and have low sap or resin content. Select fire-resistant shrubs such as rockrose, manzanita, currant, and buckwheat.

- LA-9: In addition to fire-resistant landscaping, ensure the use of non-invasive, drought-tolerant landscaping, except for limited areas of ornamental landscaping in areas near buildings or special gathering places.

Discussion	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Would the Project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Would the Project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? If the Project is in an urbanized area, would the Project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	☐	☒	☐	☐
d) Would the Project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	☐	☐	☒	☐

a) Scenic vistas are defined as expansive views of highly valued landscapes from publicly accessible viewpoints. Scenic vistas include views of natural features such as mountains, hills, valleys, water courses, outcrops, and natural vegetation, as well as man-made scenic structures.

The project parcel is predominantly grassland with light oak and pine species on the west and northwestern parcel perimeter. The site slopes significantly upwards from the southern boundary towards the northern portion.

Although the new fire station will add a structure and will slightly change the visual character of the site, the fire station will be built within an area that is surrounded by neighborhood commercial and residential development. The fire station is not visible by Lake of the Pines residents or other residential areas.

Additionally, CAL FIRE will utilize the “Greater Higgins Area Plan” Design Guidelines (November 2022) to ensure that appropriate plants for the area are planted (including deer resistant and native vegetation.

The fire station would not have a significant impact on a scenic vista.

b) Caltrans has designated certain highways throughout California as state scenic highways. Additionally, Caltrans also identifies those highways that are eligible for state scenic designation throughout the state. Counties throughout the state often designate areas that are scenic corridors in certain parts of the county as well.

The project is located within a scenic corridor as designated by Nevada County. The site will be developed as a fire station and will plant landscaping according to the Greater Higgins Area Plan. Although the site will be developed it is within an area that is designated for development and would not substantially damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway.

Impacts would be less than significant.

c) The Project consists of the construction of a new fire station in an area that is currently partially developed. Along the corridor there are scattered developments including neighborhood commercial and residential. Directly to the north of the project site on the hill is developed with a church.

The site is subject to the Design Guidelines contained in the Greater Higgins Area Plan (Plan) and is zoned as a Scenic Corridor Combining District (SC). As identified in the environmental setting discussion, the site is subject to design and landscaping standards. In order to ensure that the project adheres to these requirements the following measure shall be adhered to.

AES-1: Landscaping and Design Requirements
CAL FIRE shall implement applicable design and landscaping requirements contained within the Greater Higgins Area Plan to the extent feasible.

With implementation of this mitigation measure, impacts would be less than significant.

d) As indicated in the environmental setting above, the site is within an area that is partially developed. Although new lighting is being proposed, all lighting will have nighttime lighting installed that will ensure that the lighting will not create significant impacts.

All Project lighting will adhere to Title 24, Building Energy Efficiency Standards for Residential and Nonresidential Buildings (Part 6) exterior lighting requirements which include:

1) All outdoor luminaries will meet or exceed the Backlight, Uplight and Glare rating requirements. In addition, all fire station site lighting (parking lot) luminaires will be provided with a house side shield to reduce backlight pollution on the fire station.

2) All outdoor lighting will be controlled by a control panel with an astronomical time-switch, capable of automatically shutting off the lights when daylight is available. Furthermore, all outdoor fixtures mounted 24 feet above finished grade or less will be controlled by an integrated motion sensor. When the area under the fixture is unoccupied there will be a reduction in the lighting power of at least 50% but no more than 90%. This includes fixtures rated < 40 watts even though Title 24 does not require this type of control for these lower powered fixtures. Doing so, however, enables us to exceed our energy efficiency goals.

Project impacts regarding lighting or glare will be less than significant.

AGRICULTURE AND FOREST RESOURCES

Environmental Setting

The project site is located within the Higgins Corner/Combie Road Commercial Area. This area contains neighborhood commercial, residential development, and swaths of grassland and oak woodland areas.

No agricultural uses are located on the site or in the area adjacent to the proposed fire station. The site itself consists of disturbed grasslands and is currently not been used for agricultural purposes.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) was established in 1982 to track changes in agricultural land uses over time. It continues the farmland mapping efforts initiated in 1975 by the Soil Conservation Service (since renamed Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS]) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Important Farmland Maps produced under the FMMP identify five farmland categories: Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of Local Importance, and Grazing Land. Each of these categories is summarized below, as excerpted from A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (1994), prepared by the California Department of Conservation.

- Prime Farmland—Land with the best combination of physical and chemical features able to sustain the long-term production of agricultural crops. These lands have the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields.

- Unique Farmland—Land of less quality soils used for the production of the State's leading agricultural crops. This land is usually irrigated, but may include non-irrigated orchards or vineyards, as found in some climactic zones in California.

- Farmland of Statewide Importance—Land similar to Prime Farmland, but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or less ability to hold and store moisture.

- Farmland of Local Importance—Land of importance in the local agricultural economy, as determined by each county's Board of Supervisors and a local advisory committee.

- Grazing Land—Areas covered by vegetation, both natural and cultivated, that are suited to the grazing of livestock.

Williamson Act

The California Land Conservation Act, also known as the Williamson Act, was adopted in 1965. This voluntary tax incentive program allows the owners of land within established agricultural preserves who agree to maintain their land in agricultural use to have their property assessed based on its agricultural production, rather than the current market value. The property owner is thus relieved of having to pay higher property taxes as long as the land remains in agricultural production. The purpose of the Williamson Act is to encourage participating property owners to continue to farm their land, and to prevent the premature conversion of farmland to urban uses.

The Williamson Act applies to both prime and non-prime agricultural lands. As a result, agricultural uses on contracted land range from intensive agriculture to grazing. Lands under contract may also support uses that are "compatible with the agricultural, recreational, or open-space use of the land" subject to the contract (Government Code Section 51201[e]).

Discussion	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Would the Project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract?	☐	☐	☐	☒

c) Would the Project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code §12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code §4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code §51104(g))?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	☐	☐	☐	☒
e) Would the Project involve other changes in the existing environment, which, due to their location or nature, could result in the conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) The Project site is not mapped as farmland or agricultural land in the California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP).

No impact would occur.

b) The Project site is designated as Neighborhood Commercial, Urban High Density, and Open Space. The zoning for the site includes Neighborhood Commercial (NC), Scenic Corridor (SC), Site Performance (SP), Planned Development (PD), Residential High Density (R3), and Open Space (OS).

The Project site is not under a Williamson Act contract and the project would not conflict with existing zoning. **No impact would occur.**

c) As described in question b) the project is zoned several different zones that are not zoned as timberland. The site does not contain timberland resources and is not capable of timberland production. **No impact would occur.**

d) As indicated in the environmental setting, the site is located on land that is not zoned as forest land or timberland. The Project will not result in the conversion of forest land. **No impact would occur.**

e) The project site will be developed as a fire station that serves the surrounding area and other lands in Nevada County. The fire station would not result in changes to existing land uses surrounding the project site that would be converted to non-agricultural uses.

No impact would occur.

AIR QUALITY

Environmental Setting

The project area is located within the Mountain Counties Air Basin (MCAB) in Nevada County, which is under the jurisdiction of the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District (NSAQMD). The existing air quality conditions in this area are influenced by a combination of natural factors, including the region's topography, meteorology, and climate, as well as the quantity and type of emissions generated by existing air pollutant sources.

CLIMATE, METEOROLOGY, AND TOPOGRAPHY

Ambient concentrations of air pollutants are determined by the levels of emissions released by pollutant sources and the ability of the atmosphere to transport and dilute such emissions. Natural factors that affect transport and dilution include terrain, wind, atmospheric stability, and the presence of sunlight. In Nevada County, the terrain is dominated by the Sierra Nevada with a mix of forested area, grasslands, and urbanized regions. The county's topography includes steep slopes, valleys, and rolling hills, contributing to a diverse landscape. The climate in Nevada County varies by elevation, with lower elevations experiencing a Mediterranean climate of hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters, while higher elevations have colder winters with significant snowfall. Between June and September, normal rainfall is typically less than 1 inch per month in the lower elevations, whereas the higher elevations may receive slightly more precipitation. Annual precipitation averages approximately 50-70 inches, depending on elevation, with most of it occurring between November and March (NCEI 2024). Temperatures in Nevada County also vary significantly by elevation. At lower elevations, such as near Grass Valley, the annual average temperature is approximately 58 degrees Fahrenheit (°F), with summer highs in the low 70 °F and winter lows in the high 40 °F. In higher elevations, such as Truckee, average annual temperatures are lower, with summer highs in the high 50 °F and winter lows often below freezing. Annual average wind speeds in Nevada County are generally mild, at approximately 3–6 miles per hour (mph), with local variations due to topography (WRCC 2025a). Winds predominantly blow from the south or south-southwest, particularly in higher elevations, while lower elevations may experience variable wind directions (WRCC 2025b).

CRITERIA AIR POLLUTANTS

As required by the federal Clean Air Act (CAA), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) for six criteria air pollutants: ozone, carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), sulfur dioxide (SO_2), respirable and fine particulate matter [PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$, which are particulate matter (PM) 10 microns or less in diameter and 2.5 microns or less in diameter, respectively], and lead. The state of California has also established California ambient air quality standards (CAAQS) for these six pollutants as well as sulfates, hydrogen sulfide (H_2S), vinyl chloride, and visibility-reducing particles. NAAQS and CAAQS were established to protect the public from adverse health impacts caused by exposure to these air pollutants. A brief description of the criteria for air pollutants and their effects on public health is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Sources and Health Effects of Criteria Air Pollutants

Pollutant	Sources	Acute[1] Health Effects	Chronic[2] Health Effects
Ozone	Secondary pollutant resulting from reaction of ROG and NO_X in presence of sunlight. ROG emissions result from incomplete combustion and evaporation of chemical solvents and fuels; NO_X results from the combustion of fuels	increased respiration and pulmonary resistance; cough, pain, shortness of breath, lung inflammation	permeability of respiratory epithelia, possibility of permanent lung impairment
Carbon monoxide	Incomplete combustion of fuels; motor vehicle exhaust	headache, dizziness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, death	permanent heart and brain damage
Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2)	combustion devices (e.g., boilers, gas turbines), and mobile and stationery reciprocating internal combustion engines	coughing, difficulty breathing, vomiting, headache, eye irritation, chemical pneumonitis or pulmonary edema; breathing abnormalities, cough, cyanosis, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, death	chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function
Sulfur dioxide (SO_2)	coal and oil combustion, steel mills, refineries, and pulp and paper mills	Irritation of upper respiratory tract, increased asthma symptoms	Insufficient evidence linking SO2 exposure to chronic health impacts
Respirable particulate matter (PM_{10}), Fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)	fugitive dust, soot, smoke, mobile and stationary sources, construction, fires and natural windblown dust, and formation in the atmosphere by condensation and/or transformation of SO_2 and ROG	breathing and respiratory symptoms, aggravation of existing respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, premature death	alterations to the immune system, carcinogenesis
Lead	metal processing	reproductive/ developmental effects (fetuses and children)	numerous effects including neurological, endocrine, and cardiovascular effects

Notes: NO_X = oxides of nitrogen; ROG = reactive organic gases.

[1] "Acute" refers to effects of short-term exposures to criteria air pollutants, usually at fairly high concentrations.

[2] "Chronic" refers to effects of long-term exposures to criteria air pollutants, usually at lower, ambient concentrations.

Sources: EPA 2025.

ATTAINMENT AREA DESIGNATIONS

The CAA and the California Clean Air Act (CCAA) require all areas of California to be classified as attainment, non-attainment, or unclassified as to their status with regard to the NAAQS and CAAQS. Under the CAA and the CCAA, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) is to designate portions of the State based on air quality monitoring data. Attainment status for Nevada County are contained in Table 2.

Nevada County is in nonattainment of the federal 8-hour ozone standard and the State 1-hour and 8-hour ozone standards and PM_{10} standard. However, the entire air district is either in attainment or unclassified for fine particulate matter, NO_2, SO_2, CO, Pb, H_2S, visibility-reducing particles, sulfates, and vinyl chloride.

Table 2 Attainment Status Designations for Nevada County

Pollutant	National Ambient Air Quality Standard[1]	California Ambient Air Quality Standard[2]
Ozone	Nonattainment (8-hour), Serious	Nonattainment (1-hour and 8-hour)
Respirable particulate matter (PM_{10})	Unclassified/Attainment	Nonattainment
Fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)	Unclassified/Attainment	Unclassified
Carbon monoxide (CO)	Unclassified/Attainment	Unclassified
Nitrogen dioxide (NO_2)	Unclassified/Attainment	Attainment
Sulfur dioxide (SO_2)	Unclassified/Attainment	Attainment
Lead (particulate)	Unclassified/Attainment	Attainment
Hydrogen sulfide	NA	Unclassified
Sulfates		Attainment
Visibility-reducing particles		Unclassified
Vinyl chloride		NA

[1] 2015 Standard

[2] Attainment status decided based on 2023 data.

NA=Not Applicable

Source: CARB 2025 and EPA 2024b.

TOXIC AIR CONTAMINANTS

A toxic air contaminant (TAC) is defined as an air pollutant that may cause or contribute to an increase in mortality or in serious illness, or that may pose a hazard to human health. TACs are usually present in relatively minute quantities in the ambient air; however, their high toxicity and associated health effects may pose a threat to public health even at low concentrations.

According to the *California Almanac of Emissions and Air Quality*, most health risks from TACs can be attributed to relatively few compounds, the most important being diesel PM (CARB 2013). Diesel PM differs from other TACs in that it is not a single substance, but rather a complex mixture of hundreds of substances. Although diesel PM is emitted by diesel-fueled internal

combustion engines, the composition of the emissions varies depending on engine type, operating conditions, fuel composition, lubricating oil, and whether an emissions control system is being used. Unlike the other TACs, no ambient monitoring data are available for diesel PM because no routine measurement method currently exists. However, CARB has made preliminary concentration estimates based on a PM exposure method. This method uses the CARB emissions inventory PM_{10} database, ambient PM_{10} monitoring data, and the results from several studies to estimate concentrations of diesel PM. These estimates can be used as a surrogate for diesel PM where information specific to diesel PM is limited due to its highly dispersive character. In addition to diesel PM, the TACs for which data are available that pose the greatest existing ambient risk in California are benzene, 1,3-butadiene, acetaldehyde, carbon tetrachloride, hexavalent chromium, para-dichlorobenzene, formaldehyde, methylene chloride, and perchloroethylene.

ODORS

Odors are generally regarded as an annoyance rather than a health hazard. However, manifestations of a person's reaction to foul odors can range from psychological (e.g., irritation, anger, or anxiety) to physiological (e.g., circulatory and respiratory effects, nausea, vomiting, and headache). The ability to detect odors varies considerably among the population and overall is quite subjective. Some individuals can smell very minute quantities of specific substances; others may not have the same sensitivity but may have sensitivity to odors of other substances. In addition, people may have different reactions to the same odor; an odor that is offensive to one person may be perfectly acceptable to another (e.g., fast food restaurant). It is important to also note that an unfamiliar odor is more easily detected and is more likely to cause complaints than a familiar one. This is because of the phenomenon known as odor fatigue, in which a person can become desensitized to almost any odor and recognition, only occurs with an alteration in the intensity. Odor sources of concern include wastewater treatment plants, sanitary landfills, composting facilities, recycling facilities, petroleum refineries, chemical manufacturing plants, painting operations, rendering plants, and food packaging plants. None of these odorous land uses are within proximity to the project site.

SENSITIVE RECEPTORS

Sensitive receptors include those land uses where exposure to pollutants could result in health-related risks to sensitive individuals, such as children or the elderly. Residential dwellings, schools, hospitals, playgrounds, and similar facilities are of primary concern because of the presence of people particularly sensitive to pollutants and/or the potential for increased and prolonged exposure to pollutants. The closest sensitive receptors to the project boundary are single-family residences located approximately 185 feet west of the project area.

Regulatory Setting

As an agency of the State of California, CAL FIRE is not subject to local government planning and land use plans, policies, or regulations. Nevertheless, in the exercise of its discretion, CAL FIRE does reference, describe, and address local plans, policies, and regulations where appropriate and for informational purposes. This evaluation is also intended to be used by local agencies for determining, as part of their permit processes, the project's consistency with local plans, policies, and regulations.

Air quality in the project area is regulated through the efforts of various federal, state, regional, and local government agencies. These agencies work jointly, as well as individually, to improve air quality through legislation, planning, policymaking, education, and a variety of programs. The agencies responsible for improving air quality within the MCAB are discussed below.

FEDERAL

US Environmental Protection Agency

The EPA has been charged with implementing national air quality programs. EPA's air quality mandates draw primarily from the federal CAA, which was enacted in 1970. The most recent major amendments were made by Congress in 1990. EPA's air quality efforts address both air pollutants and hazardous air pollutants.

Criteria Air Pollutants

Criteria air pollutants are compounds that, at certain concentrations, can cause harm to human and animal health and the environment. Extensive scientific and economic research has been conducted to evaluate the specific concentrations where these pollutants may cause harm to health and the environment and are reflected in EPA's NAAQS. The primary standards protect public health, and the secondary standards protect public welfare. The CAA also required each state to prepare a State Implementation Plan (SIP) for attaining and maintaining the NAAQS. The federal CAA Amendments of 1990 added requirements for states with nonattainment areas to revise their SIPs to incorporate additional control measures to reduce air pollution. California's SIP is modified periodically to reflect the latest emissions inventories, planning documents, and rules and regulations of the air basins as reported by their jurisdictional agencies. EPA is responsible for reviewing all SIPs to determine whether they conform to the mandates of the CAA and its amendments and whether implementation will achieve air quality goals. If EPA determines a SIP to be inadequate, EPA may prepare a federal implementation plan that imposes additional control measures. If an approvable SIP is not submitted or implemented within the mandated time frame, sanctions may be applied to transportation funding and stationary air pollution sources in the air basin.

Hazardous Air Pollutants and Toxic Air Contaminants

TACs, or in federal parlance, hazardous air pollutants (HAPs), are a defined set of airborne pollutants that may pose a present or potential hazard to human health. A TAC is defined as an air pollutant that may cause or contribute to an increase in mortality or in serious illness, or that may pose a hazard to human health. TACs are usually present in minute quantities in the ambient air; however, their high toxicity or health risk may pose a threat to public health even at low concentrations.

A wide range of sources, from industrial plants to motor vehicles, emit TACs. The health effects associated with TACs are quite diverse and generally are assessed locally, rather than regionally. TACs can cause long-term health effects such as cancer, birth defects, neurological damage, asthma, bronchitis, or genetic damage; or short-term acute effects such as eye watering, respiratory irritation (a cough), running nose, throat pain, and headaches.

For evaluation purposes, TACs are separated into carcinogens and non-carcinogens based on the nature of the physiological effects associated with exposure to the pollutant. Carcinogens are assumed to have no safe threshold below which health impacts would not occur. This contrasts with criteria air pollutants for which acceptable levels of exposure can be determined and for which the ambient standards have been established (Table 3). Cancer risk from TACs is expressed as excess cancer cases per one million exposed individuals, typically over a lifetime of exposure.

EPA and, in California, CARB regulate HAPs and TACs, respectively, through statutes and regulations that generally require the use of the maximum achievable control technology or best available control technology (BACT) for air toxics to limit emissions.

STATE

California Air Resources Board

CARB is the agency responsible for coordination and oversight of State and local air pollution control programs in California and for implementing the CCAA. The CCAA, which was adopted in 1988, required CARB to establish CAAQS (Table 3).

Criteria Air Pollutants

CARB has established CAAQS for sulfates, hydrogen sulfide, vinyl chloride, visibility-reducing particulate matter, and the above-mentioned criteria air pollutants. In most cases, the CAAQS are more stringent than the NAAQS. Differences in the standards are generally explained by the health effects studies considered during the standard-setting process and the interpretation of the studies. In addition, the CAAQS incorporates a margin of safety to protect sensitive individuals.

The CCAA requires that all local air districts in the state endeavor to attain and maintain the CAAQS by the earliest date practical. The CCAA specifies that local air districts should focus particular attention on reducing the emissions from transportation and area-wide emission sources. The CCAA also provides air districts with the authority to regulate indirect emission sources.

Table 3 National and California Ambient Air Quality Standards

Pollutant	Averaging Time	California (CAAQS)[a,b]	National (NAAQS)[c]	
			Primary[b,d]	Secondary[b,e]
Ozone	1-hour	0.09 ppm (180 µg/m^3)	–[e]	Same as primary standard
	8-hour	0.070 ppm (137 µg/m^3)	0.070 ppm (147 µg/m^3)	
Carbon monoxide (CO)	1-hour	20 ppm (23 mg/m^3)	35 ppm (40 mg/m^3)	Same as primary standard
	8-hour	9 ppmf (10 mg/m^3)	9 ppm (10 mg/m^3)	
Nitrogen dioxide	Annual arithmetic	0.03 ppm (57	53 ppb (100	Same as

Pollutant	Averaging Time	California (CAAQS)[a,b]	National (NAAQS)[c]	
			Primary[b,d]	Secondary[b,e]
(NO_2)	mean	µg/m^3)	µg/m^3)	primary standard
	1-hour	0.18 ppm (339 µg/m^3)	100 ppb (188 µg/m^3)	—
Sulfur dioxide (SO_2)	24-hour	0.04 ppm (105 µg/m^3)	—	—
	3-hour	—	—	0.5 ppm (1300 µg/m^3)
	1-hour	0.25 ppm (655 µg/m^3)	75 ppb (µg/m^3)	—
Respirable particulate matter (PM_{10})	Annual arithmetic mean	20 µg/m^3	—	Same as primary standard
	24-hour	50 µg/m^3	150 µg/m^3	—
Fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)	Annual arithmetic mean	12 µg/m^3	12 µg/m^3	15.0 µg/m^3
	24-hour	—	35 µg/m^3	Same as primary standard
Lead [f]	Calendar quarter	—	1.5 µg/m^3	Same as primary standard
	30-Day average	1.5 µg/m^3		
	Rolling 3-month Average	—	0.15 µg/m^3	Same as primary standard
Hydrogen sulfide	1-hour	0.03 ppm (42 µg/m^3)	No national standards	
Sulfates	24-hour	25 µg/m^3		
Vinyl chloride [f]	24-hour	0.01 ppm (26 µg/m^3)		
Visibility-reducing particulate matter	8-hour	Extinction of 0.23 per km		

Notes: µg/m^3 = micrograms per cubic meter; km = kilometers; ppb = parts per billion; ppm = parts per million (by volume).

[a] California standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, SO_2 (1- and 24-hour), NO_2, particulate matter, and visibility-reducing particles are values that are not to be exceeded. All others are not to be equaled or exceeded. California ambient air quality standards are listed in the Table of Standards in Section 70200 of Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations.

[b] Concentration expressed first in units in which it was promulgated. Equivalent units given in parentheses are based on a reference temperature of 25 degrees Celsius (°C) and a reference pressure of 760 torr. Most measurements of air quality are to be corrected to a reference temperature of 25°C and a reference pressure of 760 torr; ppm in this table refers to ppm by volume, or micromoles of pollutant per mole of gas.

[c] National standards (other than ozone, particulate matter, and those based on annual averages or annual arithmetic means) are not to be exceeded more than once a year. The ozone standard is attained when the fourth highest 8-hour concentration in a year, averaged over three years, is equal to or less than the standard. The PM10 24-hour standard is attained when the expected number of days per calendar year with

a 24-hour average concentration above 150 µg/m3 is equal to or less than one. The $PM_{2.5}$ 24-hour standard is attained when 98 percent of the daily concentrations, averaged over three years, are equal to or less than the standard.

[d] National primary standards: The levels of air quality necessary, with an adequate margin of safety to protect the public health.

[e] National secondary standards: The levels of air quality necessary to protect the public welfare from any known or anticipated adverse effects of a pollutant.

[f] The California Air Resources Board has identified lead and vinyl chloride as toxic air contaminants with no threshold of exposure for adverse health effects determined. This allows for the implementation of control measures at levels below the ambient concentrations specified for these pollutants.

Source: CARB 2024a, EPA 2024b.

Toxic Air Contaminants

TACs in California are regulated primarily through the Tanner Air Toxics Act (Assembly Bill [AB] 1807, Chapter 1047, Statutes of 1983) and the Air Toxics Hot Spots Information and Assessment Act of 1987 (AB 2588, Chapter 1252, Statutes of 1987). AB 1807 sets forth a formal procedure for CARB to designate substances as TACs. Research, public participation, and scientific peer review are required before CARB can designate a substance as a TAC. To date, CARB has identified 21 TACs and adopted EPA's list of HAPs as TACs. Particulate matter exhaust from diesel engines (diesel PM) is one of the TACs identified by CARB. The Hot Spots Act requires that existing facilities that emit toxic substances above a specified level prepare an inventory of toxic emissions, prepare a risk assessment if emissions are significant, notify the public of significant risk levels, and prepare and implement risk reduction measures.

LOCAL

Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District

The NSAQMD developed guidelines for assessing and mitigating air quality impacts of land use projects (NSAQMD 2024). The district requires of all projects a set of standard minimum dust control measures:

1. Provide name and contact details for the person responsible for ensuring that all dust control measures are implemented in a timely and effective manner.
2. All material excavated, stockpiled, or graded shall be sufficiently watered, treated, or covered to prevent fugitive dust from leaving the property boundaries and/or causing a public nuisance. Watering during summer months should occur at least twice daily, with complete coverage of disturbed areas.
3. All areas with vehicle traffic shall be watered or have dust palliative applied as necessary to minimize dust emissions.
4. All on-site vehicle traffic shall be limited to a speed of 15 mph on unpaved roads.
5. All land clearing, grading, earth moving, or excavation activities on a project shall be suspended as necessary to prevent excessive windblown dust when winds are expected to exceed 20 mph.
6. All inactive portions of the development site shall be covered, seeded, or watered or otherwise stabilized until a suitable cover is established.

7. All material transported off-site shall be either sufficiently watered or securely covered to prevent it being entrained in the air, and there must be a minimum of six inches of freeboard in the bed of the transport vehicle.
8. Paved streets adjacent to the project shall be swept or washed at the end of each day, or more frequently if necessary, to remove excessive accumulations or visibly raised areas of soil which may have resulted from activities at the project site.
9. Prior to final occupancy, the applicant shall re-establish ground cover on the site through seeding and watering.

If the emission of air contaminants would occur from a stationary source proposed as part of a project, an Authority to Construct/Permit to Operate may be required from the District. This applies to generators, spray booths, boilers, solvent tanks, fueling facilities, and a wide variety of other sources.

The district also has the following regulations related to air quality:

Rule 202, Visible Emissions
This rule prohibits the discharge of air contaminants or other material from any single source of emission whatsoever any air contaminants for a period aggregating more than three minutes in any one hour which is:

A. As dark or darker in shade as that designated as No. 1 on the Ringlemann Chart, as published by the United States Bureau of Mines, or
B. Of such opacity as to obscure an observer's view to a degree equal to or greater than does smoke described in (A).

Rule 205, Nuisance
A person shall not discharge from any source whatsoever such quantities of air contaminants or other material which cause injury, detriment, nuisance or annoyance to any considerable number of persons, or to the public, or which endanger the comfort, repose, health or safety of any such persons, or the public, or which cause to have a natural tendency to cause injury or damage to business or property.

Rule 207, Particulate Matter
A person shall not release or discharge into the atmosphere from any source or single processing unit, exclusive of sources emitting combustion contaminants only, particulate matter emissions more than 0.1 grains per cubic foot of dry exhaust gas at standard conditions.

Rule 219. Storage of Gasoline Products at Bulk Facilities
A person shall not place, store, or hold gasoline in any stationary tank, reservoir or other container of more than forty thousand (40,000) gallons capacity unless such tank, reservoir, or other container is a pressure tank maintaining working pressures sufficient at all times to prevent

gasoline vapor or gas loss to the atmosphere, or is designed and equipped with one of specified vapor loss control devices, properly installed, and in good working order.

Rule 226, Dust Control
Dust control techniques shall be applied to limit the emission and/or airborne transport of fugitive dust from a site including: application of water, chemical stabilizers/suppressants, soil stabilizers, or other liquids, covering, paving, enclosing, shrouding, compacting, planting, cleaning, or such other measures the Air Pollution Control Officer may approve to accomplish satisfactory results for temporary and/or extended suppression of PM-10 emissions.

Rule 230, Architectural Coatings
This rule regulates the Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) content of architectural coatings used in Western Nevada County. The rule sets specific VOC content limits for various coating categories, including flat, nonflat, and specialty coatings such as primers, sealers, stains, and wood coatings. For interior and exterior projects, it's crucial to select coatings that meet the specific VOC limits for each category. For instance, flat coatings have a limit of 50 g/L, while nonflat coatings have a limit of 100 g/L. The rule also addresses the use of colorants, thinning, and container labeling.

Rule 401, Permit to Required (Regulation IV: Authority to Construction)
Any person building, altering, or replacing any source of air contaminants shall first obtain an “Authority to Construct” from the Air Pollution Control Officer. An Authority to Construct shall remain in effect until the Permit to Operate for that source for which the application was filed is either granted or denied or until termination pursuant to other provisions of this Regulation.

Rule 501, Permit Required (Regulation V: Permit to Operate)

Before any source may be operated, a Permit to Operate shall be obtained from the Air Pollution Control Officer. No Permit to Operate shall be granted either by the Air Pollution Control Officer or the Hearing Board for any source constructed or modified without authorization as required in Regulation IV until the information required is provided to the Air Pollution Control Officer and such source is altered, if necessary, and made to conform to the standards set forth in Regulation IV and elsewhere in these Rules and Regulations.

METHODOLOGY
The short-term construction-related and long-term operational emissions associated with the proposed projects were estimated using the California Emissions Estimator Model (CalEEMod) 2022.1.1.14 using a combination of project-specific information and model defaults.

Thresholds of Significance

Per Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines, the following thresholds are used to determine whether implementing the Project would result in a significant air quality impact.

- Conflict with or obstruct implementation of an applicable air quality plan.

- 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.
- Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.
- Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people.

In determining whether a project has significant air quality effects on the environment, CEQA practitioners typically apply the local air district's thresholds of significance to projects in the environmental review process. NSAQMD has published a guidance document for the preparation of the air quality portions of environmental documents that include thresholds of significance to be used in evaluating land use proposals. Thresholds of significance are based on a source's project impacts and are a basis from which to apply mitigation measures (NSAQMD 2024). The District has developed a tiered approach to significance levels: a project with emissions meeting Level A thresholds will require the most basic mitigations; projects with projected emissions in the Level B range will require more extensive mitigations; and those projects which exceed Level C thresholds will require the most extensive mitigations. The NSAQMD tiered thresholds for Level A, B, and C are identified in Table 4. Daily maximum carbon monoxide emissions should be estimated to inform the public, although there is no established threshold (NSAQMD 2024).

Table 4 NSAMD Recommended Significance Thresholds

Significance Level	Projected- Generated Emissions (lbs/day)		
	NO_x	ROG	PM_{10}
Level A	< 24	< 24	< 79
Level B	24 – 136	24 – 136	79 - 136
Level C	≥136	≥136	≥136

Notes: lb/day = pounds per day, ROG = reactive organic gases, NO_X = oxides of nitrogen, CO = carbon monoxide, SO_X = sulfur oxides, PM_{10} = respirable particulate matter, $PM_{2.5}$ = fine particulate matter, NSAQMD = Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District, Source: NSAQMD 2024.

District thresholds generally mirror those of Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. Project-related air quality impacts would be considered to conflict with or obstruct implementation of an applicable air quality plan if they would:

- Exceed NSAQMD-recommended Level C significance thresholds, as identified in Table 4. In accordance with NSAQMD-recommended thresholds of significance, project-generated short- or long-term increases in emissions in excess of Level C thresholds for NO_X, ROG, or PM_{10} would be considered significant. The NSAQMD has not adopted thresholds of significance for $PM_{2.5}$. However, because $PM_{2.5}$ is a subset of PM_{10}, significant increases in PM_{10} would be considered to also result in significant increases in $PM_{2.5}$.

- Exceed the NSAQMD health risk public notification thresholds set at 10 excess cancer cases in a million for cancer risk, or a Hazard Index of greater than one (1.0) for non-cancer risk.

- Contribute to localized concentrations of air pollutants at nearby receptors that would exceed applicable ambient air quality standards.

- Result in the frequent exposure of sensitive land uses to odorous emissions

Discussion	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Conflict with or obstruct Implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	☐	☐	☒	☐
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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	☐	☐	☒	☐

a) The proposed project involves the construction and operation of a new 9,296 square foot fire station and associated facilities on an approximately 7-acre site. The project would not introduce new growth outside of the assumptions of the Nevada County General Plan. Additionally, as discussed below under Criterion (b), the project's emissions of criteria air pollutants would not be substantial and would not interfere with the 2015 Ozone Attainment Plan or the 2015 Reasonable Available Control Technology SIP for Western Nevada County. Therefore, the project would not conflict with or obstruct the implementation of the SIP or any relevant plan to reduce air pollution. **This impact would be less than significant.**

b) Nevada County is designated as attainment or unclassified for all NAAQS and CAAQS except ozone. As shown in Table 5 and Table 6, the construction and operation of the project would not exceed NSAQMD thresholds of significance for new stationary source emissions. The construction and operation of the project are discussed in further detail below.

Construction

Construction activities would be temporary and intermittent in nature and would include site preparation, earthwork, and excavation for building foundations and utilities. Construction vehicles and equipment would access the project site via US Route (US) 97 and all construction equipment and vehicle staging would occur within the limits of the project site. The project is expected to be operational in 2028; thus, for modeling purposes, the earliest potential start date for construction (i.e., September 2026) was assumed, with a model default duration of approximately 20 months, with completion in early 2028.

As discussed above, based on Rule 6.1, Standards for Permits to Construct in the NSAQMD Rules and Regulations, if construction of the proposed project would exceed the NSAQMD's quantitative thresholds, the project would result in a significant impact (NSAQMD 2024). Maximum daily emissions were estimated and compared to the NSAQMD quantitative thresholds. The estimate of daily emissions of criteria pollutants over the construction period for the project is presented in Table 5. Additional modeling assumptions and details are provided in Appendix A.

Table 5 Estimated Maximum Daily Construction Emissions

	ROG	NO_x	CO	PM_{10}[1]	$PM_{2.5}$[1]
Daily Emissions					
Maximum (lb/day)	42	43	31	14	6
NSAQMD Significance Threshold (lb/day)	136	136	-	136	136
Exceeds Threshold?	**No**	**No**	**NA**	**No**	**No**

[1] PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ emissions shown include the sum of fugitive dust and exhaust particulate matter.

Notes: lb/day = pounds per day, ROG = reactive organic gases, PM_{10} = respirable particulate matter, $PM_{2.5}$ = fine particulate matter, NSAQMD = Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District.

Source: Modeling performed by Ascent in 2024.

As shown in Table 5, maximum daily construction-generated emissions of ROG, NO_x, PM_{10}, and $PM_{2.5}$ would not exceed the NSAQMD thresholds of significance. Additionally, dust control measures would be implemented during construction activities, further reducing PM emissions.

Operation

Operational emissions may be both direct and indirect emissions and would be generated by area and mobile sources associated with the project. Project-generated area-source emissions would be associated with maintenance activities (e.g., landscape equipment and painting) while mobile-source emissions would include vehicle trips by CAL FIRE personnel, including worker commute trips and incident-related vehicle use. The emissions associated with operation of the new fire station were estimated and compared to the NSAQMD thresholds of significance in Table 6. Emissions were quantified using CalEEMod, Version 2022.1.1.14, using a combination of project-specific information and model defaults. Additional details are

available in Appendix A. Emission estimates associated with the operation of the proposed project are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Estimated Maximum Daily Operation Emissions

	ROG	NO_X	CO	PM_{10}[1]	$PM_{2.5}$[1]
Maximum (lb/day)	2	2	11	2	<1
NSAQMD Significance Threshold (lb/day)	136	136	-	136	136
Exceeds Threshold?	**No**	**No**	**NA**	**No**	**No**

[1] PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$ emissions shown include the sum of fugitive dust and exhaust particulate matter.

Notes: lb/day = pounds per day, ROG = reactive organic gases, PM_{10} = respirable particulate matter, $PM_{2.5}$ = fine particulate matter, NSAQMD = Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District

Source: Modeling performed by Ascent in 2025.

As shown in Table 6, the maximum daily operational emissions would not exceed the NSAQMD thresholds of significance.

Summary

Neither construction nor operational emissions would exceed the NSAQMD thresholds of significance. Additionally, the construction of the project would align with the 2015 Reasonable Available Control Technology SIP for Western Nevada County. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of any applicable air quality plan and the **impact would be less than significant.**

c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?

The project site is bounded by Compass Community Church to the north, West Hacienda Drive to the east, Combie Road to the south, and commercial development to the west. The nearest off-site sensitive receptors include the church approximately 48 feet north of the project site, a residence approximately 185 feet west of the project site, and single-family residences located approximately 380 feet west of the proposed project area. The residences represent the nearest sensitive receptors with the potential to be affected by construction and operation of the proposed project.

Construction

The greatest potential for TAC emissions resulting from construction of the proposed project would derive from diesel PM emissions associated with heavy equipment operations. A variety of gasoline or diesel-powered equipment would be required for project site preparation and building construction. Most diesel PM emissions associated with material delivery trucks and construction worker vehicles would occur off-site and would not substantially contribute to TAC emissions in the project area.

Regarding exposure to diesel PM, the dose to which receptors are exposed is the primary factor used to determine health risk. Dose is a function of the concentration of a substance or

substances in the environment and the duration of exposure to the substance. It is positively correlated with time, meaning that a longer exposure period would result in a higher level of health risk for any exposed receptor. Thus, the risks estimated for an exposed individual are higher if a fixed exposure occurs over a longer period.

During construction, diesel PM is an issue of concern; however, project construction activities would be temporary, and long-term exposure of nearby sensitive receptors to diesel PM would not occur. Additionally, based on the construction emissions modeling conducted (see Table 6 above), maximum daily emissions of PM_{10} would be less than 1 pound during peak construction, which is below the NSAQMD significance threshold of 136 lbs/day.
Because construction activity on the project site would generate a relatively low mass of diesel PM emissions; diesel PM-emitting construction activity at the project site would occur for a relatively short duration (i.e., 20 months); and the nearest sensitive receptor is 185 feet to the west, project construction would not expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollution concentrations. **This impact would be less than significant.**

Operation
Regarding TAC mobile-sources, high-volume roadways (i.e., major freeways) and truck routes traveled primarily by heavy-duty diesel trucks have the greatest potential for resulting in high TAC exposure. The primary mobile-source pollutant of localized concern is CO. Local mobile-source CO emissions near roadway intersections are a direct function of traffic volume, speed, and delay. The proposed project would not result in a substantial increase in traffic volume. Additionally, from CalEEMod results, maximum daily emissions of CO would be approximately 11 lb/day. NSAQMD has not established a threshold for CO. **Impacts would be less than significant.**

Summary

Considering the distance to the nearest sensitive receptors, and that the estimated maximum of construction and operation emissions would not exceed the NSAQMD thresholds of significance, the proposed project would not expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. This impact would be less than significant.

d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?

Less-than-significant impact. Potential sources that may emit odors during the construction of the proposed project would include exhaust from diesel construction equipment. Implementation of the project would include standard construction techniques and any odors from off-road equipment and on-road vehicles would be typical of most construction sites and temporary in nature. Additionally, the project site is in a rural area with few surrounding sensitive receptors. Operation of the proposed project does not include any major sources of odor. As a result, project construction and operational activities would not create objectionable odors adversely affecting a substantial number of people. The impact would be less than significant.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Environmental Setting

VEGETATIVE COMMUNITIES

The new proposed development area is an undeveloped urban lot that has seen prior disturbance and alteration. The project parcel is predominantly grassland with light oak and pine species on the west and northwestern parcel perimeter. The site sits at approximately 1,500 feet in elevation and the area has a warm Mediterranean climate.

Prescribed herbivory using goats has been used to control grasses and weeds that comprise most of the site since 2022. The site was surveyed in 2022 for initial prescribed herbivory CEQA scoping and no special status species were found in or near project area. No nests or nesting birds or activity were identified in the project area in 2022 or during the more recent 04/14/2025 biologic survey of the parcel. No riparian, mesic, or aquatic habitat exist within the project area. In 2022 the site contained overgrown grasses and weeds, with minimal bushes and trees on the parcel perimeter of the west side of the project area. The recent site visit confirmed that conditions have the same characteristics.

Observed plant species identified during the surveys include hairy vetch (*Vicia villosa*), broadleaf filaree (*Erodium botrys*), yellow salsify (*Tragopogon dubius*), common fiddleneck (*Amsinckia intermedia*), crimson clover (*Trifolium incarnatum*), American yellowrocket (*Barbarea orthoceras*), coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), dwarf lupine (*Lupinus bicolor*), field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), blue dicks (*Dipterostemon capitatus*), western buttercup (*Ranunculus occidentalis*), various thistles, interior live oak (*Quercus wislizeni*), rusty popcornflower (*Plagiobothrys nothofulvus*), henbit dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*), tarweed, and dandelion. Some ponderosa (*Pinus ponderosa*) and gray pines (*Pinus sabiniana***)** are on the northwest project boundary, and no birds or active nests have been observed in bordering trees of the project area in 2022 or 2025 surveys. Striped skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*) were observed on the property in 2022 but were not observed in the 2025 survey.

POTENTIAL WATERS OF THE U.S.

The surveys and the use of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wetland Inventory (NWI) mapper was used to determine potential wetlands within the project area. No potential Waters of the U.S. were found within the project area, and there are no wetland features onsite identified on the NWI map. Two nearby watercourses on the NWI map include Ragsdale Creek and a decorative pond. Ragsdale Creek, a seasonal intermittent watercourse, is approximately 150 feet to the south of the project parcel on the opposite side of heavily commuted Combie Road. The decorative pond is perennial and is located 300 feet southeast of the project parcel, near the entrance to the large Lake of the Pines gated community.

WILDLIFE

General wildlife in the vicinity that have been observed onsite include skunks, deer, and various birds. The site is urban and nearby Combie Road located immediate south of the parcel is a heavily trafficked road and the area is not well suited for wildlife use during the daylight hours. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) was searched and there are no known wildlife corridors that lie within the project site or immediate area.

SPECIAL-STATUS WILDLIFE

No special-status animals have been observed by CAL FIRE personnel within the project area. However, several special status animals have been documented within the nine-quadrangle (9-quad) biological assessment area of the project site. The special-status animals are provided in Table 7 below**.**

Site Visits and Surveys

A biological assessment was prepared for the proposed project by CAL FIRE staff in November 2024. The purpose of the assessment was to collect information on the biological resources that had potential to be present within the project area and to determine any biological constraints to site construction. A biological survey of the project area was conducted on 04/14/2025, and no special status species were detected during survey efforts.

The assessment provided information on the potential for sensitive vegetation communities and special-status plants and wildlife species, including species listed as endangered or threatened under the California or Federal Endangered Species Act (CESA and ESA), to occur onsite. Additional information was obtained from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) and California Native Plant Society (CNPS) Rare Plant Ranking System. Qualifying criteria for species consideration were Federally or CA State endangered, threatened, proposed or candidate threatened or endangered, rare, Federal or State ranked G1-G3/S1-S3 species, CDFW Species of Special Concern (SSC), Fully Protected (FP), or Watch List (WL) species, or CNPS rank 1A,1B,2A, and 2B ranked plant species.

SPECIAL-STATUS WILDLIFE

No special-status animals have been observed by CAL FIRE personnel within the project area. However, several special status animals have been documented within the nine-quadrangle (9-quad) biological assessment area of the project site. The special-status animals are provided in **Table 7** below**.**

Table 7: Special-Status Wildlife Species Within Nine Quadrangle (9-Quad) Biological Assessment Area of Project Site:

Common Name	Scientific Name	Taxon Group
foothill yellow-legged frog - north Sierra DPS	*Rana boylii pop. 3*	Amphibians
Galile's cave harvestman	*Banksula galilei*	Arachnids

California black rail	*Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus*	Birds
yellow-breasted chat	*Icteria virens*	Birds
American peregrine falcon	*Falco peregrinus anatum*	Birds
steelhead - Central Valley DPS	*Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus pop. 11*	Fish
western bumble bee	*Bombus occidentalis*	Insects
valley elderberry longhorn beetle	*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*	Insects
Cosumnes stripetail	*Cosumnoperla hypocrena*	Insects
Townsend's big-eared bat	*Corynorhinus townsendii*	Mammals
North American porcupine	*Erethizon dorsatum*	Mammals
Fisher	*Pekania pennanti*	Mammals
western pearlshell	*Margaritifera falcata*	Mollusks
tight coin (=Yates' snail)	*Ammonitella yatesii*	Mollusks
northwestern pond turtle	*Actinemys marmorata*	Reptiles
coast horned lizard	*Phrynosoma blainvillii*	Reptiles

Amphibians

Foothill yellow-legged frog *(Rana boylii)*

The foothill yellow-legged frog is found in or near rocky perennial streams and rivers in a variety of habitats including riparian, mixed conifer, and wet meadow types below 6,000' elevation. This species inhabits rocky streams and is highly aquatic, seldom venturing more than a few meters from the stream channel. Low-gradient stream reaches are often preferred for breeding. The project area does not contain suitable habitat for the foothill yellow-legged frog. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is 4 miles east of the project area, within the Bear River. Ragsdale Creek is approximately 150 feet away to the south of the project area at its closest point. The USFWS NWI map lists Ragsdale Creek as seasonably dry and the creek does not likely contain perennial aquatic habitat the species prefers and is unlikely to be within the creek. No impact to *Rana boylii* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Arachnids

Galile's cave harvestman *(Banksula galilei)*

The Galile's cave harvestman is known from nine specimens collected from a singular cave in 1966. Species inhabits lime rock caves and the only CNDDB occurrence for the species is within the North Fork of the American River drainage 8 miles southeast of the project area. No lime rock caves exist within the project area and species is not present within the project area. No impact to *Banksula galilei is* expected to occur due to project activities.

Birds

California black rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus*)

California black rail inhabits freshwater marshes, wet meadows and shallow margins of saltwater marshes bordering larger bays. The project parcel and immediate area do not contain the habitat

preferred by the species and it is unlikely to be within the project area. The nearest CNDDB occurrence of the species is 5 miles northwest of the project area, near Cole Hill. No impact to *Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Yellow-breasted chat (*Icteria virens*)
The yellow-breasted chat is an uncommon summer resident and migrant in coastal California and in foothills of the Sierra Nevada. This species is found in valley foothill riparian areas and requires riparian thickets of willow and other brushy tangles near watercourses for cover. The nearest CNNDB recording of the species is 10 miles northwest of the project area, within the CDFW Spenceville Wildlife Area. No suitable habitat for the species is present within the project area. Ragsdale Creek is 150 feet to the south of the project area and does contain the bushy riparian habitat the species is known to prefer. If the species was present within the Ragsdale Creek drainage during summer project work/activities, all project work would at minimum occur 150 feet away from the creek and no impact on the species would occur from the project activities due to the buffered distance from the creek to the project parcel. No impact on *Icteria virens* is expected to occur due to project activities.

American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*)
American peregrine falcon occurs in many terrestrial biomes in North America. The presence of suitable nesting structure is a key habitat element. Breeding peregrine falcons most often nest on cliffs, but occasionally nest on man-made structures such as towers (Sauer et al. 2015, White et al. 2002). Peregrine falcons generally utilize open habitats for foraging, but the nest location is typically near water (Zeiner et al. 1988-1990). The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is 10 miles southeast of the project area, near Cool, CA. The project area does not contain rocky cliffs or tall man-made structure the species uses for nesting habitat. The project area does contain open grassy sections that could be used for American peregrine falcon foraging. The project area and nearby Combie Road is heavily trafficked, and the species is not likely to be within or use the project area for nesting or foraging. The species is more likely to be in more open and less populated areas near large water sources where suitable nesting locations occur, which are far outside of the immediate project area. No impact on the Falco *peregrinus anatum* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Fish
Steelhead Central Valley DPS *(Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus)*
These fish are federally listed as threatened (distinct population segment which includes all naturally spawned populations of steelhead in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and their tributaries) and is a CDFW Species of Special Concern (SSC). Steelhead is a name used for anadromous rainbow trout, a salmonid species native to western North America and the Pacific coast of Asia. Adult migration from the ocean to spawning grounds occurs during much of the year, with peak migration occurring in the fall or early winter. Migration through the Sacramento River mainstem begins in July, peaks at the end of September, and continues through February or March. Central Valley steelhead are mostly “winter steelhead” and may contain some “summer steelhead.” Winter steelheads mature in the ocean and arrive on the spawning grounds nearly ready to spawn. Central Valley steelhead spawn primarily in upper stream reaches and smaller tributaries. No riparian or riverine habitat is present within the project area. Nearby Ragsdale Creek is 10 miles away from the nearest CNDDB recording of *O. mykiss irideus’*

known habitat, and the species is unlikely to be seasonally present within the creek as the waterway does not provide suitable habitat or substrate for spawning and redd creation. No impact on *Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Insects

Valley elderberry longhorn beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*)

Federal status for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle is threatened. This insect is found intimately associated with elderberry (*Sambucus*) trees and shrubs as it spends its larval stage within the canes of this woody species. The presence of beetles is usually determined by the discovery of quarter-inch exit holes in the canes or stems of plants although the lack of observable exit holes does not preclude the presence of longhorn beetles. Elderberries are rarely found in dense patches, more typically as a few plants or single specimens within a variety of habitat types including riparian scrub and oak woodland. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is located 4.5 miles southeast of the project area, near Meadow Vista, CA. The entire project area has been surveyed, and no elderberry plants have been observed within any portion of the project area. No impact on *Desmocerus californicus dimorphus* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Consumnes stripetail (*Cosumnoperla hypocrena*)

The Cosumnes stripetail is a stonefly that is found in intermittent streams on western slopes of central Sierra Nevada foothills in the American and Cosumnes river basins. The nearest CNDDB occurrence of the species is 9.5 miles southeast of the project area, near Cool, CA. No intermittent streams that support species presence exist within the project area. Nearby Ragsdale Creek is an intermittent stream but is not part of the Cosumnes or American river drainages where the species is known to occur and inhabit, and the species is unlikely to be present within the creek. No impact to *Cosumnoperla hypocrena* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Western bumble bee (*Bombus occidentalis*)

The Western bumble bee is a Candidate Endangered species for listing within the CESA. Western bumble bees rely on pollen and nectar gathered from a wide variety of flowering plants primarily determined by mouthpart morphology (Evans et al. 2008, Hatfield et al. 2014). This species occupies open grassy areas, mountain meadows, and chaparral/shrub vegetation communities (Williams et al. 2014). The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is located 8.5 miles northeast of the project area, near Colfax, CA. The project site does not contain habitat to support this species. No impact on *Bombus occidentalis* is expected to occur due to project activities.

Mammals

Townsend big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*)

This species is a CDFW species of special concern and is known to utilize cave environments as well as old buildings and potentially large cavities in trees for roosting and maternity roosts. Suitable habitat does not exist within the project area, however, it may exist outside of the project area in the form of old structures, hollow trees, or other cavities suitable for bat roosting, either natural or manmade. The nearest CNDDB record of the species is located 9 miles southeast of the project area, near Cool, CA. No potential roosting habitat has been observed within the

project area, and no trees are proposed to be removed within the project area. No impact to *Corynorhinus townsendii* is expected to occur.

North American porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)
This species is a state rank (S-rank) of S3-Vulnerable within the state of California. The North American porcupine is found throughout the Sierra Nevada and Cascades, south in the Coast Ranges, and from San Mateo County. south to Los Angeles County. Populations tend to be localized. They are most common in montane conifer, Douglas-fir, alpine dwarf-shrub, and wet meadow habitats and less common in hardwood, hardwood-conifer, montane and valley-foothill riparian, aspen, pinyon-juniper, low sage, sagebrush, and bitterbrush. The species uses caves, large rock crevices, hollow logs, and trees for cover. The nearest CNDDB record of the species is located 10 miles southeast of the project area, near Cool, CA. The project area does not contain suitable habitat to support species denning and cover requirements and the species is unlikely to be present or use the project area. Species is listed by CDFW as less likely to be within the foothill hardwood conifer environment of the project area and is more likely to be found at higher elevations and in less populated areas, where the current closest CNDDB recordings exist. No impact on *Erethizon dorsatum*is expected to occur.

Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*)
Fisher is an uncommon permanent resident of the Sierra Nevada and occurs in intermediate to large-tree stages of coniferous forests and deciduous-riparian habitats with a high percentage of canopy closure. Fishers den in a variety of protected cavities, brush piles, logs, or under upturned trees. Hollow logs, trees, and snags are especially important (Zeiner *et al.* 1988-1990). The nearest CNDDB recording is 11 miles northeast of the project area, within the North Fork American River drainage. The open grassy habitat of the project area does not contain suitable habitat to support species denning or foraging requirements. Additionally, fishers are sensitive to human disturbance and the proximity and heavy use of nearby Combie Road and Lake of The Pines subdivision likely deters the species' potential presence and usage of the greater extent around the project area. No impact on *Pekania pennanti* is expected to occur.

Reptiles
Western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*)
This turtle is listed as a CDFW species of special concern and is federally proposed as Threatened. The turtle's habitat is thoroughly aquatic, found in ponds, marshes, rivers, streams and irrigation ditches with aquatic vegetation. In streams, they avoid fast-moving and shallow water and tend to be concentrated in pools and backwater areas. Western pond turtles need basking sites and suitable (sandy banks or grassy open fields) upland habitat for egg laying. Pond turtles are uncommon in heavily shaded areas. The nesting season extends from April through August, and their nests may be excavated more than a quarter mile from water in exposed (unshaded) upland locations. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is 1 mile northwest of the project area and is located within the Wolf Creek watershed. The project area is nonnative grassland and does not contain suitable habitat for the species and it is more than ¼ mile away (species travel distance for aestivation) from the closest known occurrence. Ragsdale Creek is 150 feet to the south of the project area and is overgrown with vegetation and lacks basking sites the species requires. One perennial decorative pond is located at the entrance to the Lake of The Pines subdivision 300 feet southeast of the project area and could potentially

support western pond turtle presence. All project work will occur at least 300 feet away from this pond and no western pond turtles are anticipated to be found within the project area. No impact on *Emys marmorata* is expected.

Coast horned lizard (*Phrynosoma blainvillii*)
This lizard is listed as a CDFW species of special concern. Coast horned lizards occupy open areas with sandy soils up to about 8,000 feet in elevation. They are found in a wide variety of habitat types ranging from grasslands to conifer-dominated forests, and hardwood woodlands and chaparrals. Key habitat elements include open areas with low vegetation and sandy soils (Stebbins and McGinnis 2012). The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is 7.5 miles northeast of the project area and is located near Colfax, CA. The soils of the project area are not sandy or easily friable and the species is unlikely to be present within the project area. Additionally, the site has been surveyed for prior vegetation treatments during the spring and summer seasons and no coast horned lizards have been observed within the project area. No impact to *Phrynosoma blainvillii* is expected.

Mollusks
Western pearlshell (*Margaritifera falcata*)
Western pearlshell is a freshwater mussel that lives in perennial cold-water rivers and streams. The species prefers low-velocity waters and its young require salmonids as a host fish to survive. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is locate 9.5 miles east of the project area within the North Fork American River drainage. The nearby Ragsdale Creek is an intermittent waterway and is unable to support the species' presence due to its seasonal nature and lack of salmonid activity. No impact on *Margaritifera falcata* is expected.

Tight coin (*Ammonitella yatesii*)
This species is a small snail and is also known by the common name of Yate's snail. They Inhabit limestone caves and outcroppings and favor north-facing slopes. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is located 10 miles south of the project area, near Cool, CA. The Project area does not contain habitat the species is known to prefer and inhabit. No impact to *Ammonitella yatesii* is expected.

SPECIAL STATUS PLANTS
The following twelve (12) special-status plants were identified in the CNDDB as occurring within the nine-quadrangle biological assessment area of the project site. The special-status special status plants are provided in Table 8**.** Data from the California Geological Survey (CGS) indicates that no serpentine or gabbro soils are known to occur within the project area and the soils of the project area may contain volcanic or metavolcanic soils.

Table 8: Special-Status Plant Species Within Nine Quadrangle (9-Quad) Biological Assessment Area of Project Site:

Common Name	Scientific Name	Lifeform	Bloom Period
brownish beaked-rush	*Rhynchospora capitellata*	Perennial grasslike herb	July-August
chaparral sedge	*Carex xerophila*	Perennial herb	March-June
finger rush	*Juncus digitatus*	perennial grasslike herb	May-June
Jepson's onion	*Allium jepsonii*	Perennial herb (bulb)	April-August
oval-leaved viburnum	*Viburnum ellipticum*	Perennial deciduous shrub	May-June
Pine Hill flannelbush	*Fremontodendron decumbens*	Perennial evergreen shrub	April-July
Red Hills soaproot	*Chlorogalum grandiflorum*	Perennial herb (bulb)	(Apr)May-Jun
Scadden Flat checkerbloom	*Sidalcea stipularis*	Perennial Rhizomatous Herb	July-August
Sierra blue grass	*Poa sierrae*	Perennial Rhizomatous Herb	April-July
Spicate calycadenia	*Calycadenia spicata*	Annual Herb	May-September
Stebbins' morning-glory	*Calystegia stebbinsii*	Perennial Rhizomatous Herb	April-July

Brownish beaked-rush (*Rhynchospora capitellata*)
Brownish beaked-rush is a perennial herb found in lower and upper montane coniferous forests, meadows and seeps, marshes, and swamps. This species blooms between July and August and is found at elevations between 150 and 5,600 feet and is found in mesic areas. The nearest CNDDB occurrence is 11 miles north of the project area, near Grass Valley, CA. The project area is open grassland and does not contain mesic areas that the plant is known to inhabit. The plant is unlikely to be present within the project area. No impact on *Rhynchospora capitellata* is expected.

Chaparral sedge (*Carex xerophila*)
Chaparral sedge is known to inhabit chaparral, cismontane woodland, and lower montane coniferous forest habitat types. This species blooms between March and June and is found at elevations between 1,440 and 2,500 feet. The species may have a preferred microhabitat of gabbro or serpentine soils, but local recordings of plant locations are not contained within such soils. The nearest CNDDB occurrence is 9 miles northwest of the project area, near American

Ranch Hill, CA. The project area is comprised of overgrown grassy areas that have a low to moderate potential for the species to be present. Project area was surveyed for chaparral sedge and the species was not found. No impact on *Carex xerophila* is expected.

Finger Rush (*Juncus digitatus*)
Finger rush is a perennial herb found in vernally mesic areas within cismontane woodland, lower montane coniferous forest, seeps, vernal pools, and swales on gentle slopes over volcanic bedrock. This species blooms between May and June and is found at elevations between 2,300 and 2,620 feet. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is located 12.5 miles northeast of the project area, near Nevada City. The plant is known in California for only one CNDDB recording in Nevada County and two recordings 100 miles northwest in Shasta County. Suitable habitat types for the species are not present within the project area. No impact to *Juncus digitatus* is expected.

Jepson's onion (*Allium jepsonii*)
Jepson's onion is a perennial bulbiferous herb that is found on serpentine or volcanic soils within the chaparral, cismontane woodland, and lower montane coniferous forest habitat types between 980 and 4,330 feet in elevation. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is located 5.5 miles south of the project area, near Auburn, CA. The project area does contain volcanic parent material soil that the plant is known to occur in and commonly inhabits. The project site was surveyed for Jepson's onion and the species was not found. No impact to *Allium jepsonii* is expected.

Oval-leaved viburnum (*Viburnum ellipticum*)
Oval-leaved viburnum is a perennial shrub that is found within chaparral, cismontane woodland, and lower montane coniferous forest habitat types. This species blooms between May and June and is found between 650 and 4,600 feet in elevation. The nearest CNDDB recording of the species is located 8 miles southeast of the project area, near Lake Clementine, CA. The project area consists of mostly open nonnative grassland and has a low potential to be present within the project area. The entire project area was surveyed, and no viburnum plant species were found. No impact on *Viburnum ellipticum* is expected.

Pine Hill flannelbush (*Fremontodendron decumbens*)
Pine Hill flannelbush is a perennial evergreen shrub that is found on gabbroic and serpentinite soils and rocky areas within chaparral and cismontane woodland habitat types. This species blooms from April to July and is found between 1,400 and 2,500 feet in elevation. The nearest CNDDB occurrence is recorded 9 miles northwest of the project area, near American Ranch Hill in California. No serpentine, gabbro, or rocky soils are known to occur within the project area and the plant has a low potential to occur. The entire project area was surveyed and no flannelbush plant species were found. No impact on *Fremontodendron decumbens* is expected.

Red Hills soaproot (*Chlorogalum grandiflorum*)
Red Hills soaproot is a perennial bulbiferous herb that is found on serpentinite, gabbroic, and other soils within the chaparral, cismontane woodland, and lower montane coniferous forest habitat types. This species blooms from April to July and is found between 800 and 5,550 feet in elevation. The nearest CNDDB occurrence is recorded 7.5 miles northeast of the project area,

near Gillis Hill. No serpentine or gabbro soils are known to occur within the project area and the plant has a low potential to occur. The entire project area was surveyed and Red Hills soaproot plant species were not found. No impact on *Chlorogalum grandiflorum* is expected.

Scadden Flat checkebloom (*Sidalcea stipularis*)
Scadden Flat checkerbloom is a perennial rhizomatous herb found in freshwater marsh and swamp, wetland, and wet montane marshes fed by springs. This species blooms between July and August and is found at elevations between 2,300 and 2,400 feet. The nearest CNDDB occurrence is recorded 11.5 miles northeast of the project area, near Peardale. The plant is only known to occur near Grass Valley and Peardale areas (three total populations statewide). Suitable wet montane marshes fed by springs habitat type that the species prefers are not present within the project area. No impact to *Sidalcea stipularis* is expected.

Sierra blue grass (*Poa sierrae*)
Sierra blue grass is a perennial rhizomatous herb found within lower montane coniferous forest, on shady, moist, and rocky slopes. The species occurs often in canyon habitat types within elevations of 1,200 to 4,900 feet and blooms between April and July. The nearest CNDDB occurrence is recorded 9 miles northeast of the project area, near Colfax. No shady, moist, and rocky slopes that the species is known to inhabit are present within the project area. The species has an affinity for shaded or partially shaded areas that are not present within the project site. No impact to *Poa sierrae* is expected.

Spicate calycadenia (*Calycadenia spicata*)
Spicate calycadenia is an annual herb found in valley and foothill grassland, and cismontane woodland habitat types. This species blooms between May and September and is found within elevations of 130 to 4,600 feet. The nearest CNDDB occurrence of the plant species is recorded 11.5 miles northwest of the project area, near Grass Valley. The project area does contain foothill grassland habitat that the plant is known to occur in. The entire project area was surveyed, and no spicate calycadenia species were found. No impact on *Calycadenia spicata* is expected.

Stebbins's morning-glory (*Calystegia stebbinsii*)
Stebbins's morning-glory is listed as Endangered by both the Federal and California Endangered Species Acts. The plant is a perennial rhizomatous herb found in chaparral and cismontane woodland habitat types and is commonly found within serpentine, gabbro, and red clay soils. This species blooms between April and July and is found within elevations of 600 and 3,500 feet. The nearest CNDDB occurrence of the plant species is recorded 9 miles northwest of the project area, near American Ranch Hill. Historically, Stebbins' morning-glory has only been found in two areas of the northern California foothills in El Dorado and Nevada Counties (CDFW). Serpentine, gabbro, and red clay soils are not present within the project area. The entire project area was surveyed, and no Stebbins's morning-glory species were found. No impact to *Calystegia stebbinsii* is expected.

Discussion	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project 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 or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	☐	☐	☐	☒
a) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c) Would the Project conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	☐	☐	☐	☒

d) Would the Project conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) A biological survey of the project area was conducted on 04/14/2025, and no special status species were detected during survey efforts. General wildlife in the vicinity that have been observed onsite include skunks, deer, and various birds. The site is within more of an urban area and adjacent to Combie Road located immediately south of the parcel. Combie Road is a heavily trafficked major arterial connecting several residential developments and neighborhood commercial to State Highway 49.

The area is not well suited for wildlife use during the daylight hours and no special-status animals have been observed by CAL FIRE personnel within the project area. However, several special status species have been documented within the nine-quadrangle (9-quad) biological assessment area of the project site (see Table 7 and 8).

Species in the CNDDB search of the area include 14 plants and 16 other species as indicated in the Tables. The general lack of habitat for these sensitive species, soil conditions, current land use, and surveys indicate that no special status species will be impacted.

Impacts would be less than significant.

b) The Project site consists of disturbed grasslands and is surrounded by developed areas including a heavily trafficked roadway. No riparian habitat or other sensitive natural communities are identified on the Project site. **No impact would occur**.

c) The Project site consists of disturbed grassland. No state or federally protected waterways or water bodies occur on the Project site or area. **No impact would occur.**

d) No migratory fish are present on or near the Project site and no impacts to streams or water bodies will occur as a result of Project activities. The site is not within a wildlife corridor as the site is adjacent to a heavily trafficked roadway and is close to neighborhood commercial and residential development areas. **No impacts would occur as a result of the project.**

e) No tree removal will occur, and the Project would not conflict with any other local policies or ordinances. **No impact would occur.**

f) The proposed Project site is not within the boundaries of a Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other habitat conservation plan. The Project does not conflict with implementation of any plan for Nevada County. **No impact would occur.**

Cultural Resources

Environmental Setting

Records Search and Survey

A California Historical Resources Information System records search was conducted through the North Central Information Center (NCIC) at California State University, Sacramento (File No. NEV-24-82). The results (November 29, 2024) revealed that no cultural resources, either built environment or archaeological, were known within the project site, and no cultural resources have been recorded within the one-half-mile search radius. The NCIC search also indicated no cultural resources studies have been completed within the project site, and six cultural resources studies have been completed outside the project site but within the one-half-mile search radius. Review of the BLM Plat map, aerial images, and topographic maps did not identify any development within the project site (Ascent 2025).

A pedestrian survey of the project site was conducted on December 4, 2024, by Ascent's staff archaeologist. No archaeological resources or built environment features were identified as a result of the pedestrian survey.

Archaeological Sensitivity

Topography and soil characteristics, and overall landscape were used to analyze the potential to encounter buried cultural resources within the project site. There is one geologic unit present in the project site, Mesozoic age containing metavolcanic rocks. Because the majority of the Mesozoic material formed long before the first human occupation of the area (250 to 66 million years ago), it is not likely to contain or to have buried archaeological resources. However, the overlaying soils of the Boomer series, Josephine Series, Sobrante series, and Sites Series are younger, dating to the Late Holocene (2,000 to 150 years ago; Meyer and Rosenthal 2004) and so are generally more sensitive for buried cultural remains.

Landscape evolution and historic and modern development can impact the visibility of the archaeological record, but research has shown that archaeological sites tend to occur in specific geo-environmental settings (e.g., near reliable water sources and on stable land surfaces) rather than randomly throughout the landscape. For example, geoarchaeological studies have found that distance to water sources (e.g., stream, lake, spring) and landform slope (generally <18 percent) are two environmental variables that help accurately predict a location's potential to contain buried archaeological deposits. The topography of the terrain in the project area is slightly sloping and the site is undeveloped. The Bear River runs north-south into Lake Combie approximately 3 miles southeast of the project site. The geography, geology, and soils across the project site suggest that the potential for the presence of buried deposits of cultural resources in the project site is low (Ascent 2025).

Would the Project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	☐	☒	☐	☐
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	☐	☐	☒	☐

DISCUSSION

a) There are no built-environment structures within the project site and the records revealed no built-environment historical resources within the project vicinity. Therefore, there would be **no impact** on historical resources.

b) Although the NCIC records search and pedestrian survey did not reveal any archaeological resources and the project site has a low sensitivity for buried resources, project-related ground-disturbing activities could result in discovery or damage of yet undiscovered archaeological resources as defined in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5. **This impact would be potentially significant, and the implementation of the Mitigation Measure CR-1 would ensure any potential impacts would be less than significant.**

Mitigation Measure CR-1: Unanticipated Discoveries of Archaeological Resources
In the event that a prehistoric archeological site (such as any unusual amounts of stone, bone, or shell) or a historic-period archaeological site (such as concentrated deposits of bottles or bricks, amethyst glass, or other historic refuse), is uncovered during grading or other construction activities, all ground-disturbing activity within 100 feet of the discovery shall be halted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. CAL FIRE will be notified of the potential find and a qualified archeologist shall be retained to investigate its significance. If the find is a prehistoric archeological site, the appropriate Native American group shall be notified, and Mitigation Measure CR-1 shall be implemented. Any previously undiscovered resources found during construction will be recorded on appropriate California Department of Parks and Recreation 523 forms and evaluated for significance under all applicable regulatory criteria. If the archaeologist determines that the find does not meet the California Register of Historical Resources standards of significance for cultural resources,

construction may proceed. If the find is determined to be significant by the qualified archaeologist (i.e., because the find is determined to constitute either an historical resource or a unique archaeological resource), the archaeologist shall work with CAL FIRE to follow accepted professional standards such as further testing for evaluation or data recovery, as necessary. If artifacts are recovered from significant historic archaeological resources, they shall be housed at a qualified curation facility. The results of the identification, evaluation, and/or data recovery program for any unanticipated discoveries shall be presented in a professional-quality report that details all methods and findings, evaluates the nature and significance of the resources, and analyzes and interprets the results.

c) There are no known cemeteries or burials on the project site or immediate area. However, because earthmoving activities associated with project construction would occur, there is potential to encounter buried human remains or unknown cemeteries in areas with little or no previous disturbance. **The impact would be less than significant.**

California law recognizes the need to protect Native American human burials, skeletal remains, and items associated with Native American burials from vandalism and inadvertent destruction. The procedures for the treatment of Native American human remains are contained in California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 and California Public Resources Code Section 5097.

These statutes require that, if human remains are discovered, potentially damaging ground-disturbing activities in the area of the remains shall be halted immediately, and the County coroner shall be notified immediately. If the remains are determined by the coroner to be Native American, the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) shall be notified within 24 hours and the guidelines of the NAHC shall be adhered to in the treatment and disposition of the remains. Following the coroner's findings, the NAHC-designated Most Likely Descendant and the landowner shall determine the ultimate treatment and disposition of the remains and take appropriate steps to ensure that additional human interments, if present, are not disturbed. The responsibilities for acting upon notification of a discovery of Native American human remains are identified in PRC Section 5097.94.

Compliance with California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 and California Public Resources Code Section 5097 would provide an opportunity to avoid or minimize the disturbance of human remains, and to appropriately treat any remains that are discovered. Therefore, this impact would be **less than significant**.

ENERGY

Environmental Setting

PHYSICAL SETTING

Energy Facilities and Services in the Project Area

Electric services in Nevada County are provided by Pioneer Energy and Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E).

REGULATORY SETTING

As an agency of the State of California, CAL FIRE is not subject to local government planning and land use plans, policies, or regulations. Nevertheless, in the exercise of its discretion, CAL FIRE does reference, describe, and address local plans, policies, and regulations where appropriate and for informational purposes. This evaluation is also intended to be used by local agencies for determining, as part of their permit processes, the project's consistency with local plans, policies, and regulations.

State

Warren-Alquist Act

The 1974 Warren-Alquist Act established the California Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, now known as the California Energy Commission (CEC). The creation of the act occurred as a response to the state legislature's review of studies projecting an increase in statewide energy demand, which would potentially encourage the development of power plants in environmentally sensitive areas. The act introduced state policy for siting power plants to reduce potential environmental impacts and additionally sought to reduce demand for these facilities by directing CEC to develop statewide energy conservation measures to reduce wasteful, inefficient, and unnecessary uses of energy. Conservation measures recommended establishing design standards for energy conservation in buildings that ultimately resulted in the creation of the Title 24 Building Energy Efficiency Standards (California Energy Code), which have been updated regularly and remain in effect today. The act additionally directed CEC to cooperate with the Office of Planning and Research, the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA), and other interested parties in ensuring that a discussion of wasteful, inefficient, and unnecessary consumption of energy is included in all environmental impact reports required on local projects.

State of California Energy Action Plan

CEC is responsible for preparing the State Energy Plan, which identifies emerging trends related to energy supply, demand, conservation, public health and safety, and the maintenance of a healthy economy. The current plan is the 2003 California Energy Action Plan (EAP, 2008 update). The plan calls for the State to assist in the transformation of the transportation system to improve air quality, reduce congestion, and increase the efficient use of fuel supplies with the

least environmental and energy costs. To further this policy, the plan identifies a number of strategies, including assistance to public agencies and fleet operators in implementing incentive programs for zero-emission vehicles and addressing their infrastructure needs; and encouragement of urban design that reduces vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and accommodates pedestrian and bicycle access. On August 2005, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) approved Energy Action Plan II (EAP II) Implementation Roadmap for Energy Policies, jointly prepared by CPUC and CEC. EAP II specified actions in the near term to mitigate California's contributions to climate change from the electricity, natural gas and transportation sectors.

2022 Climate Change Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality

CARB adopted the *Final 2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality* (2022 Scoping Plan) on December 16, 2022, establishing the state's pathway to achieve carbon neutrality and an 85 percent reduction in 1990 emissions goal by 2045 using a combined top-down, bottom-up approach under various scenarios. The 2022 Scoping Plan identifies the reductions needed by each GHG emission sector (e.g., transportation [including off-road mobile source emissions], industry, electricity generation, agriculture, commercial and residential, pollutants with high global warming potential, and recycling and waste) to achieve these goals. CARB and other state agencies also released the January 2019 Draft California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan consistent with the carbon neutrality goal of Executive Order B-55-18 (CalEPA et al. 2019).

Integrated Energy Policy Report

Senate Bill (SB) 1389 (Chapter 568, Statutes of 2002) required CEC to: "conduct assessments and forecasts of all aspects of energy industry supply, production, transportation, delivery and distribution, demand, and prices. The Energy Commission shall use these assessments and forecasts to develop energy policies that conserve resources, protect the environment, ensure energy reliability, enhance the state's economy, and protect public health and safety" (Public Resources Code Section 25301[(a]). This work culminated in the Integrated Energy Policy Report (IEPR).

CEC adopts an IEPR every two years and an update every other year. The 2022 IEPR is the most recent IEPR, which was adopted in 2023. The 2022 IEPR provides a summary of priority energy issues currently facing the State, outlining strategies and recommendations to further the State's goal of ensuring reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible energy sources. Energy topics covered in the report include identifying progress toward statewide renewable energy targets and issues facing future renewable development; increasing energy efficiency in existing and new buildings; achieving energy efficiency targets and potential by utilities; improving coordination among the State's energy agencies; streamlining power plant licensing processes; documenting results of preliminary forecasts of electricity, natural gas, and transportation fuel supply and demand; identifying future energy infrastructure needs; meeting the need for research and development efforts to statewide energy policies; and identifying issues facing California's nuclear power plants.

California Building Energy Efficiency Standards (Title 24, Part 6) and California Green Building Standards (Title 24, Part 11)

See Section 3.3.2 for a summary of the State's Title 24, Part 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards (California Energy Code) and Part 11 (California Green Building Standards Code [CalGreen]) as it pertains to energy conservation and efficiency. The Energy Code requires buildings to be insulated properly to meet R-Values (thermal resistance) for walls, roofs, and floors. The Energy Code also sets mandatory efficiency standards for electrical, plumbing, and heating and cooling systems. CalGreen encourages improved thermal envelope performance, water-efficiency plumbing fixtures and systems, energy-efficient electrical systems to reduce building energy use.

Greenhouse Gas Reduction Goals

The State has passed legislation that aims to reduce GHG emissions, which often have an added benefit of reducing energy consumption. AB 1279 requires a statewide GHG emission reduction of at least 85 percent below 1990 levels and carbon neutrality by no later than 2045.

Implementation of the State's legislation associated with GHG reduction will have the co-benefit of reducing California's dependency of fossil fuel and making land use development and transportation systems more energy efficient. More details about legislation associated with GHG reduction are provided in the regulatory setting of "Greenhouse Gas Emissions."

LOCAL

Nevada County General Plan

The Nevada County General Plan was adopted in 1993. The General Plan's Energy Element evaluates Countywide energy uses and renewable energy development and establishes energy strategies to meet future needs (Nevada County 1993). The following policies pertain to the project:

- **Policy 13:** The County shall cooperate with energy utilities and other local agencies in promoting energy efficient building construction and renovation practices, particularly weatherization of inefficient dwellings.

- **Policy 21:** All future construction of new County facilities shall incorporate energy efficiency measures deemed to be cost-effective within the projected life of the facility.

DISCUSSION

Would the Project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	☐	☐	☒	☐

a) **Less-than-significant impact.** The proposed energy use for construction and operation of the proposed project are discussed below.

Construction

Construction activities would primarily consume nonrenewable energy resources such as diesel and gasoline through construction equipment operation, material deliveries, and debris hauling. However, construction-related energy consumption would be temporary (i.e., over the duration of approximately 20 months). In addition, activities involving the use of nonrenewable energy resources would follow construction site best management practices, such as reducing idling time of equipment and vehicles to reduce energy use. Although the one-time energy expenditure required to construct the project would be nonrecoverable, energy resources would not be consumed in a wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary manner.

Operation

Project operation would require energy for the operation and maintenance of the fire station and associated facilities, such as the electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. The project would result in 35 trips per day, which is below OPR's 110 daily trips screening criteria for VMT impacts. The proposed project components would be designed, constructed, operated, and maintained in compliance with CALGreen and the California Energy Code, which are designed to ensure new construction achieves energy efficiency. Therefore, energy demand during project operations would be minimized. The project would replace an existing CAL FIRE facility located approximately one mile west of the project site at the corner of Combie Road and Highway 49. in Auburn, CA which does not meet State building code requirements. The project design features electric vehicle chargers and a ground-mounted photovoltaic system, which align with CalGreen's requirement for energy efficiency. As a result, the operation of the project would be much more efficient than the existing facilities, and is not anticipated to result in wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources.

Summary
The project would result in energy consumption from temporary construction activities. However, construction activities would consume the necessary amount of fuel/energy to complete work in an efficient and timely manner. The project would implement energy-efficient features as required by the California Energy Code which are designed to reduce energy consumption, which results in the generation of fewer GHG emissions. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources. The project would also introduce a new fire station to a rural area prone to wildfire and would result in the decreased consumption of gasoline and diesel fuel attributed to the movement of firetrucks from stations of greater distance to potential future fires. This impact would be less than significant.

b) In the absence of a local plan to promote renewable energy or energy efficiency, the most applicable plan to the project is the 2022 Scoping Plan. The project involves the construction of a two-engine fire station, an office/administration building, and a storage building. However, the project would replace the existing CAL FIRE facility located approximately one mile west on Combie Road; thus, from an energy perspective would not result in a long-term increase in energy requirements over existing conditions. In addition, the existing facility currently does not meet State building code requirements and currently has subpar and inadequate building systems and insulation, all of which would be improved with the new facility that would be designed to the current code requirements, resulting in an overall benefit regarding energy efficiency and demand compared to current operations. **This impact would be less than significant.**

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Environmental Setting
At approximately 1,500 feet above mean sea level, the Higgins area is located on the western edge of the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, a geologic block approximately 400 miles long and 80 miles wide which extends in a north-south band along the eastern portion of California. The Greater Higgins area is comprised of rolling foothills with areas of valleys. The geologic substructure of the Higgins area is indicative of the Western Foothill broad group, which is reflected in the surface soils. This area, extending from the Yuba County border to just northeast of the Grass Valley/Nevada City area, is generally comprised of metavolcanic and granitic formations. According to the Nevada County Soil Survey there is a wide variety of soil types in the area. In general, the Higgins area soils are variable; the soil permeability ranges from very slow to very rapid, and the erosion hazard ranges from light to very high. The soil erosion hazard ratings of moderate to high are typically associated with slopes that are fifteen percent (15%) or greater.

Based on the Geotechnical Investigation Report prepared for the project site (Geocon Consultants, January 2024) the site is located within the northwestern portion of the Sierra Nevada geomorphic province of California, a tilted bedrock fault block east of the alluvial Great Valley sediments to the west to elevations exceeding 14,000 feet. Published geologic mapping depicts the site vicinity underlain by Mesozoic-age Lake Combie complex, which includes

metavolcanic rock, mafic to felsic flows, tuffs, breccias, and volcaniclastic rocks (Saucedo and Wagner, 1992). Subsurface conditions encountered during the field investigation at the site were generally consistent with the mapped geology of the area, indicative of the mafic rock and varying degrees of weathered breccias.

In each of the test pits residual soil was encountered. The soil is a combination of shallow fill (generally associated with the unimproved road) and/or in-place residual soil (soil weathered from bedrock). The upper 12 inches of soil appears to have been disturbed by periodic disking/plowing performed for grass abatement/vegetation control. The surficial soil as encountered generally consists of damp to moist, soft to medium stiff sandy lean clay with varying amounts of sand.

According to the Geotechnical Report the site is not located within a mapped geologic hazard zone associated with seismic hazards, landslides, liquefaction, tsunami/seiche or surface fault rupture. The closest known fault with recent displacement activity (1975), Cleveland Hill Fault, is located northwest of Nevada County near Oroville (approximately 33.4 miles from the project site).

Other fault zones located near the project site include the West Tahoe-Dollar Point fault zone, located approximately 52.5 miles east of the site, and the Mohawk Valley Section of the Mohawk Valley fault zone, located approximately 53.2 miles northeast of the site. The closest mapped pre-Holocene (Quaternary) fault to the site is a section of the Foothills fault zone variably identified as the Highway 49 fault and the Wolf Creek fault zone, a well constrained fault of unspecified dip and movement, located approximately 0.7 miles west of the site.

Discussion

a) Would the Project directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
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 California Geological Survey Special Publication 42.)	☐	☐	☒	☐
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	☐	☐	☒	☐

iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	☐	☐	☐	☒
iv) Landslides?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Would the Project result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	☐	☒	☐	☐
c) Would the Project 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 on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d) Would the Project be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Would the Project have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?	☐	☐	☐	☒
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site of unique geologic feature?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a)

Ground Rupture

i. The building site is not within a currently established State of California Earthquake Fault Zone for surface fault rupture hazards. No Holocene-active or pre-Holocene faults with the potential for surface fault rupture are known to pass directly beneath the site. Therefore, the potential for surface rupture due to faults occurring beneath the site during the design life of the proposed development is considered low. **Impacts would be less than significant.**

Strong seismic ground shaking

ii. As with all of California, the site has experienced historic earthquakes from various regional faults, although the local site region has a history of relatively low seismicity in comparison with more active seismic regions such as the San Francisco Bay Area or southern California.

The Geotechnical Investigation Report indicated that the site may have experienced ground shaking equivalent to a modified Mercalli Intensity (MMI) of V to VII (intensity of shaking). Although intense ground shaking has not occurred in the project area since 1892.

All projects that are constructed in California are required to follow current building codes which include standards for areas that are within earthquake zones. **Impacts would be less than significant.**

Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction

iii. Liquefaction is a condition in which loose, saturated, cohesionless soil deposits located beneath the groundwater table lose strength when subjected to intense and prolonged ground shaking. As a result, building foundations may sink or tilt and ground settlement may occur. Other effects may include sand boils (ground loss) and lateral spreading if the liquefiable soil is located adjacent to a steep slope.

Liquefaction typically occurs in areas where the water table is less than 50 feet below ground surface, and the soils are predominately clean poorly graded sand deposits of loose to medium-dense relative density.

The site is not located on a hazard zone for liquefication and based upon the Geotechnical report prepared for the site, the subsurface conditions encountered at the site including shallow bedrock, liquefaction is not a hazard for the site. **No impact would occur.**

Landslides

iv. The site has not been evaluated with respect to seismic landslide hazard by California Geological Survey (CGS), and no landslide data are available on the California Department of Conservation interactive Landslide Inventory map (https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/cgs/lsi/). Site elevations vary by approximately 60 feet and existing slopes are relatively gentle (approximate inclinations between 4:1 and 5:1 horizontal to vertical. However, no signs of slope failure or landslides were noted on or adjacent to the site during the geotechnical investigation. **No impact would occur.**

b) The soil report prepared by GEOCON did not identify any issues related to substantial soil erosion or loss of topsoil. However, the site slopes downward towards Combie Road with an elevation of approximately 1,500 ft at the property line adjacent to the church (northern boundary) to 1,459 ft at Combie Road (southern boundary).

To construct the project, a building pad will be created by cutting into the hillside and removing a substantial portion of soil (approximately 60,000 cubic yards). The Geotechnical Report indicates that the cut and fill slopes should be constructed no steeper than a 2 to 1 slope ratio. The report also recommends vegetating the slope as soon as possible to prevent potential erosion.

Additionally, best management practices (BMPs) will be incorporated as part of the Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan that will be prepared for the proposed Project and will be implemented to manage erosion and the loss of topsoil during construction-related activities (see ***Hydrology and Water Quality Section***).

To prevent any significant impacts from occurring the following measures will be implemented.

GEO-1: Recommendations contained in the Geotechnical Investigation and Geologic Hazards Evaluation for Higgins FS shall be adhered to during grading and site preparation as applicable to ensure that substantial erosion and instability does not occur.

Soil impacts would be reduced to a less than significant impact.

c) Although the site exhibits approximately 60 feet of topographic change, lateral spreading is not anticipated due to shallow bedrock within four feet of surface across the site. Strong seismic shaking can induce settlement of unsaturated, loose sandy soil. Based on the results of the subsurface investigation, the site is underlain by shallow bedrock within four feet of ground surface. Therefore, unsaturated seismic settlement is not a significant hazard for the site.

Subsidence occurs when a large portion of land is displaced vertically, usually due to the withdrawal of groundwater, oil, or natural gas. Soils that are particularly subject to subsidence include those with high silt or clay content. The site is not located within an area of known ground subsidence and no large-scale extraction of groundwater, gas, oil, or geothermal energy has occurred or planned at the site or in the general site vicinity. There appears to be little or no potential for ground subsidence due to withdrawal of fluids or gases at the site.

No impact would occur.

d) Laboratory Plasticity Index (PI) tests on near surface soil samples indicate low to moderate plasticity. Based on laboratory PI and grain-size distribution testing completed by Geocon, near-surface soil at the site contains approximately 45% to 84% fines (silt and clay). Based on the overall composition of the soil/rock at the site, overall expansion potential will be low. Therefore, expansive clay soil is not a significant hazard for the site. **No impact would occur.**

e) The project area is served by municipal sewer (Nevada County Sanitation District No. 1) and will be connected to an existing sewage line. No septic systems are proposed. **No impact would occur.**

f) Nevada County has low potential for significant vertebrate or invertebrate paleontological resources because its geology consists primarily of igneous and metamorphic bedrock, which typically do not preserve fossils due to the excessive heat. These rocks are formed from molten rock (igneous) or from existing rock subjected to high heat and pressure (metamorphic). No impacts will occur.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

This section presents a summary of regulations applicable to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; a summary of climate change science and GHG sources in California; quantification of project-generated GHGs and discussion about their contribution to global climate change.

Environmental Setting

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Certain gases in the earth's atmosphere, classified as GHGs, play a critical role in determining the earth's surface temperature. Solar radiation enters the atmosphere from space, a portion of which is absorbed by the earth's surface, and a smaller portion is reflected toward space. The absorbed radiation is then emitted from the earth as low-frequency infrared radiation. Most solar radiation passes through GHGs; however, infrared radiation is absorbed by these gases. As a result, radiation that otherwise would have escaped back into space is instead "trapped," resulting in the warming of the atmosphere. This phenomenon, known as the greenhouse effect, is responsible for maintaining a habitable climate on earth.

Prominent GHGs contributing to the greenhouse effect are CO_2, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, and sulfur hexafluoride. Human-caused emissions of these GHGs in excess of natural ambient concentrations are found to be responsible for intensifying the greenhouse effect and leading to a trend of unnatural warming of the earth's climate, known as global climate change or global warming. It is "extremely likely" that more than half of the observed increase in global average surface temperature from 1951 to 2010 was caused by the anthropogenic increase in GHG concentrations and other anthropogenic forcing (IPCC 2014).

Climate change is a global problem. GHGs are global pollutants, unlike criteria air pollutants and toxic air contaminants, which are pollutants of regional and local concern. Whereas most pollutants with localized air quality effects have relatively short atmospheric lifetimes (approximately 1 day), GHGs have long atmospheric lifetimes (1 year to several thousand years). GHGs persist in the atmosphere long enough to be dispersed around the globe. Although the lifetime of any GHG molecule depends on multiple variables and cannot be determined with any certainty, it is understood that more CO_2 is emitted into the atmosphere than is sequestered by ocean uptake, vegetation, and other forms of sequestration. Of the total annual human-caused CO_2 emissions, approximately 55 percent are estimated to be sequestered through ocean and land uptake every year, averaged over the last 50 years, whereas the remaining 45 percent of human-caused CO_2 emissions remain stored in the atmosphere (IPCC 2013).

The quantity of GHGs in the atmosphere responsible for climate change is not precisely known but is considered to be enormous. No single project alone would measurably contribute to an incremental change in the global average temperature or to global or local climates or microclimates. From the standpoint of CEQA, GHG impacts relative to global climate change are inherently cumulative.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION SOURCES

GHG emissions are attributable in large part to human activities. The total GHG inventory for California in 2020 was 370 million $MTCO_2e$ (CARB 2022a). This is less than the 2020 target of 431 million $MTCO_2e$ (CARB 2022a).

Table 9 summarizes the statewide GHG inventory for California. As shown in Table 9, transportation, industry, and electricity generation are the largest GHG emission sectors.

Table 9 Statewide GHG Emissions by Economic Sector (2020)

Sector	Emissions ($MMTCO_2e$)	Percent
Transportation	141	38%
Industrial	85	23%
Electricity generation (in state)	41	11%
Agriculture and Forestry	33	9%
Residential	30	8%
Commercial	22	6%
Electricity generation (imports)	19	5%
Total	370	100%

Notes: $MMTCO_2e$ = metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent

Sources: CARB 2022a.

Emissions of CO_2 are byproducts of fossil fuel combustion. Methane, a highly potent GHG, primarily results from off-gassing (i.e., the release of chemicals from nonmetallic substances under ambient or greater pressure conditions) and is largely associated with agricultural practices and landfills. Nitrous oxide is also largely attributable to agricultural practices and soil management. CO_2 sinks, or reservoirs, include vegetation and the ocean, which absorb CO_2 through sequestration and dissolution (i.e., CO_2 dissolving into the water), respectively, two of the most common processes for removing CO_2 from the atmosphere.

EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, global average temperature will increase 3.7 to 4.8 degrees Celsius (°C) (6.7 to 8.6 degrees Fahrenheit [°F]) by the end of the century unless additional efforts to reduce GHG emissions are made (IPCC 2014: 10). According to *California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment*, with global GHGs reduced at a moderate rate California will experience average daily high temperatures that are warmer than the historic average by 2.5 °F from 2006 to 2039, by 4.4 °F from 2040 to 2069, and by 5.6 °F from 2070 to 2100; and if GHG emissions continue at current rates then California will experience average daily high temperatures that are warmer than the historic average by 2.7 °F from 2006 to 2039, by 5.8 °F from 2040 to 2069, and by 8.8 °F from 2070 to 2100 (OPR et al. 2018).

California has experienced several of the most extreme natural events in its recorded history since 2012: a severe drought from 2012–2016, an almost non-existent Sierra Nevada winter snowpack in 2014-2015, increasingly large and severe wildfires, and back-to-back years of the warmest average temperatures (OPR et al. 2018). According to California Natural Resource Agency's *Safeguarding California Plan: 2018 Update,* California experienced the driest 4-year statewide precipitation on record from 2012 through 2015; the warmest years on average in 2014, 2015, and 2016; and the smallest and second smallest Sierra snowpack on record in 2015 and 2014 (CNRA 2018:55). In contrast, the northern Sierra Nevada experienced its wettest year on record during the 2016–2017 water year (CNRA 2018:64). The changes in precipitation exacerbate wildfires throughout California, increasing their frequency, size, and devastation.

As temperatures increase, the amount of precipitation falling as rain rather than snow also increases, which could lead to increased flooding because water that would normally be held in the snowpack of the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range until spring would flow into the Central Valley during winter rainstorm events. This scenario would place more pressure on California's levee/flood control system (CNRA 2018). Furthermore, in the extreme scenario involving the rapid loss of the Antarctic ice sheet and the glaciers atop Greenland, the sea level along California's coastline is expected to rise 54 inches by 2100 if GHG emissions continue at current rates (OPR et al. 2018: 190-192). Furthermore, in the extreme scenario involving the rapid loss of the Antarctic ice sheet, the sea level along California's coastline is expected to rise 54 inches feet by 2100 if GHG emissions continue at current rates (OPR et al. 2018: 6). Changes in temperature, precipitation patterns, extreme weather events, wildfires, and sea-level rise have the potential to threaten transportation and energy infrastructure, crop production, forests and rangelands, and public health (CNRA 2018: 64, 116–117, 127; OPR et al. 2018: 7–14).

Regulatory Setting

As an agency of the State of California, CAL FIRE is not subject to local government planning and land use plans, policies, or regulations. Nevertheless, in the exercise of its discretion, CAL FIRE does reference, describe, and address local plans, policies, and regulations where appropriate and for informational purposes. This evaluation is also intended to be used by local agencies for determining, as part of their permit processes, the project's consistency with local plans, policies, and regulations.

FEDERAL

In *Massachusetts et al. v. Environmental Protection Agency et al*., 549 US 497 (2007), the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that CO_2 is an air pollutant as defined under the CAA and that EPA has the authority to regulate GHG emissions. In 2010, the EPA started to address GHG emissions from stationary sources through its New Source Review permitting program, including operating permits for "major sources" issued under Title V of the CAA.

STATE

Statewide GHG Emission Targets and Climate Change Scoping Plan

Reducing GHG emissions in California has been the focus of the state government for approximately two decades. Executive Order B-55-18 called for California to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045 and achieve and maintain net negative GHG emissions thereafter. AB 1279 codifies Executive Order B-55-18 and requires a statewide GHG emission reduction of at least 85 percent below 1990 levels and achieving carbon neutrality by no later than 2045. These targets are in line with the scientifically established levels needed in the US to limit the rise in global temperature to no more than 2°C, the warming threshold at which major climate disruptions, such as super droughts and rising sea levels, are projected; these targets also reflect efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5°C (United Nations 2015:3).

CARB adopted the *Final 2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality* (2022 Scoping Plan) on December 16, 2022, establishing the state's pathway to achieve carbon neutrality and an 85 percent reduction in 1990 emissions goal by 2045 using a combined top-down, bottom-up approach under various scenarios. The 2022 Scoping Plan identifies the reductions needed by each GHG emission sector (e.g., transportation [including off-road mobile source emissions], industry, electricity generation, agriculture, commercial and residential, pollutants with high global warming potential, and recycling and waste) to achieve these goals. CARB and other state agencies also released the *January 2019 Draft California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan* consistent with the carbon neutrality goal of Executive Order B-55-18 (CalEPA et al. 2019).

The state has also passed more detailed legislation addressing GHG emissions associated with transportation, electricity generation, and energy consumption, as summarized below.

Transportation-Related Standards and Regulations

As part of its Advanced Clean Cars program (ACC), CARB established more stringent GHG emission standards and fuel efficiency standards for fossil fuel–powered on-road vehicles. In addition, the program's zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) regulation requires battery, fuel cell, and plug-in hybrid EVs to account for up to 15 percent of California's new vehicle sales by 2025 (CARB 2018). In August 2022, CARB adopted the ACC II program, which sets sales requirements to reach the goal of 100 percent ZEV sales in the state by 2035.

Executive Order B-48-18, signed into law in January 2018, requires all state entities to work with the private sector to have at least 5 million ZEVs on the road by 2030, as well as 200 hydrogen fueling stations and 250,000 EV-charging stations installed by 2025. It specifies that 10,000 of these charging stations must be direct-current fast chargers.

CARB adopted the Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) in 2007 to reduce the carbon intensity (CI) of California's transportation fuels. Low-CI fuels emit less CO_2 than other fossil fuel-based fuels such as gasoline and fossil diesel. The LCFS applies to fuels used by on-road motor vehicles and by off-road vehicles, including construction equipment (Wade, pers. comm., 2017).

Senate Bill 743 of 2013

SB 743 changes the way that public agencies evaluate the transportation impacts of projects under CEQA. The proposed revisions to the State CEQA Guidelines would establish new criteria for determining the significance of a project's transportation impacts that will more appropriately balance the needs of congestion management with statewide goals related to infill development, promotion of public health through active transportation, and reduction of GHGs. As detailed in SB 743, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) was tasked with developing potential metrics to measure transportation impacts and replace the use of delay and level of service (LOS).

In 2018, OPR adopted changes to the CEQA Guidelines, including the addition of Section 15064.3 that would implement SB 743. In support of these changes, OPR also published its *Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA*, which recommends that the transportation impact of a project be based on whether it would generate a level of VMT per capita (or VMT per employee) that is 15 percent lower than existing development in the region (OPR 2017: 12-13). OPR's technical advisory explains that this criterion is consistent with Section 21099 of the California Public Resources Code, which states that the criteria for determining significance must "promote the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions" (OPR 2017: 18).

Building Energy Efficiency Standards (Title 24, Part 6)

The energy consumption of new residential and nonresidential buildings in California is regulated by the State's Title 24, Part 6, Building Energy Efficiency Standards (California Energy Code). The CEC updates the California Energy Code every three years, typically including more stringent design requirements for reduced energy consumption, which results in the generation of fewer GHG emissions.

The 2022 California Energy Code went into effect on January 1, 2023. The 2022 California Energy Code advances the onsite energy generation progress started in the 2019 California Energy Code by encouraging electric heat pump technology and use, establishing electric-ready requirements when natural gas is installed, expanding solar photovoltaic (PV) system and battery storage standards, and strengthening ventilation standards to improve indoor air quality. CEC estimates that the 2022 California Energy Code will save consumers $1.5 billion and reduce GHGs by 10 million metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent over the next 30 years (CEC 2021).

California Green Building Standards (Title 24, Part 11)

The California Green Building Standards, also known as CALGreen, is a reach code (i.e., optional standards that exceed the requirements of mandatory codes) developed by CEC that provides green building standards for statewide residential and nonresidential construction. The current version is the 2022 CALGreen Code, which took effect on January 1, 2023. As compared to the 2019 CalGreen Code, the 2022 CalGreen Code strengthened sections pertaining to EV and bicycle parking, water efficiency and conservation, and material conservation and resource efficiency, among other sections of the CalGreen Code. The CALGreen Code sets design requirements equivalent to or more stringent than those of the California Energy Code for energy

efficiency, water efficiency, waste diversion, and indoor air quality. These codes are adopted by local agencies that enforce building codes and used as guidelines by state agencies for meeting the requirements of Executive Order B-18-12.

LOCAL

Nevada County Air Pollution Control District

NSAQMD is the primary agency responsible for addressing air quality concerns in Nevada County. Its role is discussed further in "Air Quality." NSAQMD has not adopted a planning document containing policies, plans, or actions relating to GHG reductions or GHG emissions.

Regional Transportation Plan

The Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) is the designated regional transportation planning agency for the County. The NCTC has developed the transportation policy, actions, and funding recommendations that will meet the short- and long-term access and mobility needs of Nevada County residents over the next twenty years (Nevada County 2018). The following policies pertain to the proposed project:

- **Policy 3.2**: Assist the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District with the development of transportation control measures that will be needed to meet the required emission reductions of the California Clean Air Act.

- **Policy 3.7:** Support continued expansion of electric vehicle charging station networks.

- **Policy 3.8**: Encourage the use of alternative fuels and electric vehicles to reduce impacts on air quality as feasible.

Environmental Impacts

METHODOLOGY

CalEEMod was used to estimate project emissions of GHGs. CalEEMod modeling was based on project-specific information where available, reasonable assumptions based on anticipated construction activities, and default values in CalEEMod that are based on the project's location and land use type. See Appendix A for a detailed description of modeling assumptions, CalEEMod outputs, and calculations.

THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance criteria used to evaluate project impacts on climate change under CEQA are based on Section 15064 of the CEQA statute and relevant portions of Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, which recommend that a lead agency consider a project's consistency with relevant, adopted plans and discuss any inconsistencies with applicable regional plans, including plans to reduce GHG emissions. Implementation of a project would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to climate change if it would:

- generate GHG emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment; or

- conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of GHGs.

With respect to GHG emissions, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.4(a) states that lead agencies "shall make a good-faith effort, based to the extent possible on scientific and factual data, to describe, calculate or estimate" GHG emissions resulting from a project. The State CEQA Guidelines note that an agency has the discretion to either quantify a project's GHG emissions or rely on a "qualitative analysis or performance-based standards" (14 CCR Section15064.4[a]). A lead agency may use a "model or methodology" to estimate GHG emissions and has the discretion to select the model or methodology it considers "most appropriate to enable decision makers to intelligently take into account the project's incremental contribution to climate change" (14 CCR Section15064.4[c]). The State CEQA Guidelines provide that the lead agency should consider the following when determining the significance of impacts from GHG emissions on the environment (14 CCR Section15064.4[b]):

- The extent a project may increase or reduce GHG emissions as compared to the existing environmental setting.

- Whether the project emissions exceed a threshold of significance that the lead agency determines applies to the project.

- The extent to which the project complies with regulations or requirements adopted to implement a statewide, regional, or local plan for the reduction or mitigation of GHG emissions.

State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G is a sample Initial Study checklist that includes a number of factual inquiries related to the subject of climate change, as it does on a whole series of additional environmental topics. Notably, lead agencies are not obligated to use these inquiries in fashioning thresholds of significance on these subjects, or on any subject addressed in the checklist. Rather, with a few exceptions, CEQA grants agencies discretion to develop their own thresholds of significance. However, lead agencies commonly take the language from the inquiries set forth in Appendix G and use that language in establishing thresholds. CAL FIRE has done so here.

NSAQMD has not adopted numerical GHG thresholds for the purpose of assessing potential project-related GHG impacts and determining the significance of GHG emissions. However, other air districts in California, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD), for example, have adopted numerical thresholds for determining a project's significance. SMAQMD recommends a significance threshold of 1,100 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year ($MTCO_2e$/year) for construction-generated GHG emissions. SMAQMD also recommends an operational emissions screening level of 1,100 $MTCO_2e$/year after a project has implemented SMAQMD's recommended Tier 1 best management practices,

which focus on electric-vehicle infrastructure installation and building electrification. For projects that meet these conditions, GHG emissions would not be considered substantial and project would be consistent with CARB's 2022 Scoping Plan.

Considering available guidance, implementation of a project would result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to climate change if it would:

- Generate construction emissions that exceed 1,100 $MTCO_2$/year, or
- Conflict with the 2022 Scoping Plan

Discussion

Would the Project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases?	☐	☐	☒	☐

a) **Less-than-significant impact.** Total emissions for the construction and operation of the proposed project are summarized in Table 10 and discussed below.

Table 10 Project-Generated Construction and Operational Annual GHG Emissions

Emissions Category	**GHG Emissions ($MTCO_2e$/year)**
Construction (Maximum Year)	325
Operation (Annual)	
Mobile Source	09
Area Sources	<1
Energy Usage	43
Water and Wastewater	5.3
Solid Waste Disposal	5.4
Refrigerants	<1
Operational Total	153

Emissions Category	GHG Emissions ($MTCO_2e$/year)
Applicable Threshold of Significance[1]	1,100
Exceeds Threshold?	No

Note: $MTCO_2e$/year = metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

[1]Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD) threshold of significance

Source: Ascent Environmental 2025.

Construction-related activities that would generate GHGs include worker commute trips and off-road construction equipment. As shown in Table 10, construction activities would result in maximum annual emissions of 325 $MTCO_2e$ per year. This level of one-time GHG emissions is below the applicable significance threshold of 1,100 MT of CO_2e emissions per year as recommended by SMAQMD. As such, the construction of the project would not result in emissions of GHGs that would exceed the applied thresholds. Operational activities of the proposed project would result in maximum annual emissions of 153 $MTCO_2e$/year, as shown in Table 10. While the SMAQMD's adopted thresholds employ a qualitative approach to analysis, they also include an operational screening emissions level of 1,100 $MTCO_2e$ which is applied to projects to determine if additional reductions are required to reduce impacts to less than cumulatively considerable. The project would not exceed that level; thus, GHG emissions can be said to be relatively minor in the context of global climate change. Further, the project is ultimately replacing an existing CAL FIRE station located one mile west of the new project site that is currently operating under a short-term lease with the Higgins Area Fire Protection District (HAFPD). Once the lease ends, the new facility will allow CAL FIRE to improve long-term planning and protection of the State Responsibility Area (SRA), in a new facility that meets operational, health, safety, and building code requirements. From a GHG perspective, replacing an existing facility with a new more energy-efficient building and relocating operational activities to the project site would not result in an increase in operational GHG emissions above existing conditions, as the few facility would require a similar number of staff and associated operational daily activities and the building would operate more efficiently compared to the currently outdated facility in disrepair. The project's short-term construction emissions would not exceed applicable thresholds of significance and operational GHG emissions would not result in long-term increases over existing conditions. **This impact would be less than significant.**

b) In the absence of a local GHG reduction plan, the 2022 Scoping Plan is the most relevant plan applicable to the project. As discussed above, the project emissions would be minimal and below the adopted thresholds. The proposed project would enhance the current CAL FIRE operations within the SRA of Nevada County by providing a dedicated new facility, replacing an existing facility in Auburn leased from the HAFPD. The existing facility was constructed in 1948 and has undergone a number of expensive repairs over the years but currently does not have adequate building systems (e.g., HVAC, plumbing) has no fire sprinkler or alarm systems, does not meet current building code or ADA requirements and cannot adequately support CAL FIRE's objective to project wild and forest lands. Relocating to a new facility that supports CAL FIRE's current staffing needs will allow better long-term planning and protection of wild and forest lands, which includes such activities as fuel management, local programs to develop defensible space and fire breaks, that ultimately

support healthy and resilient wildlands, reduce the magnitude and severity of fires, and supporting fire preparedness and adaptation; these are all necessary to combat climate change. In addition, the project would assist with forest management, thus improving carbon sequestration and furthering the 2022 Scoping Plan's direction to nurture the natural and working lands sector. For these reasons, the project would not conflict with the 2022 Scoping Plan, the applicable GHG reduction plan to the project, and the **impact would be less than significant.**

HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Environmental Setting

The Project site is located on the corner of Combie Road and West Hacienda Drive. The irregular U-shaped Site generally consists of vacant land with no improvements. The surrounding vicinity consists of rural land, office, retail, and church property development. The topography of the site is sloping hillside terrain at an approximate mid-slope elevation of 1,500 feet above mean sea level and the regional topography is characterized by similar hillside terrain.

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment Report (ESA) was prepared for the site (GEOCON Consultants, Inc. 2019). The purpose of the ESA is to assess the property for the presence of regulated or hazardous materials, as defined in Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) of 1980, and Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Title 22 of CCR. GEOCON performed the ESA in conformance with the scope and limitations of American Society of Testing and Materials ASTM Practice E 1527-13 (ASTM 2013) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed rules for all appropriate Inquiry standards, set forth in Title 40, Section 312.10 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

The report indicated that a search of the California State Water Resources Control Board's (CSWRCB) GeoTracker there was one site located approximately 500 feet west of the project site that had a leaking underground storage tank (LUST) facility at 10594 Combie Road. This case was closed and remediated. No other sites were identified as hazardous near the project site. The project site is not listed on any regulatory databases for hazardous materials.

Discussion

Would the project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Would the Project emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d) Would the Project be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code §65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	☐	☐	☐	☒
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?	☐	☐	☐	☒
f) Would the Project impair implementation of physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒
g) Would the Project expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires?	☐	☐	☒	☐

a) The proposed Project would include the transport, short-term storage and use, and disposal of hazardous materials related to construction, operation and maintenance of the new station. BMPs stipulating proper storage of hazardous materials would be implemented during construction as part of the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and general construction permit. CAL FIRE and all hired contractors are required to follow all applicable federal, state, and local regulations, including California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, California Fire Code, and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requirements, and manufacturer instructions for the management, storage, and handling of hazardous materials and hazardous waste for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Project. **Impacts would be less than significant.**

   Although diesel fuel and oil will be used during construction and occasionally during operations and maintenance, proper handling and storage will be implemented in accordance with the BMPs listed in the SWPPP.

b) As indicated in item a), routine use, storage, and handling of hazardous substances would be conducted in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

   Impacts would be less than significant.

c) The Project site is not located within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school and will not emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous materials, substances, or waste. **No impact would occur.**

d) The project is not listed on any hazardous material sites. There is only one property located within ¼-mile of the project site that is listed on a database. This site is identified as a gas station (Combie Gas) as follows.

   Combie Gas (500 feet west of Site) - this former gasoline station facility is listed on the SWEEPSUST, CA FID UST, HIST UST, LUST, HIST CORTESE and CERS databases for gasoline and diesel UST release to soil. The USTs and contaminated soil were removed in 1990. The facility received regulatory “no further action required” closure status in 1996 from the California Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. Based on the information provided in the EDR report and distance from the site, the potential for this facility to have impacted the Site appears to be low.

   The subject property is not listed, and no active regulated release/assessment/remediation facilities were noted within ¼-mile of the Site. **No Impacts would occur.**

e) The Project is not located within an airport land use plan or within two miles of a public airport. **No impact would occur.**

f) Due to recent fire incidents in Nevada County, the county has taken steps to create Emergency Plans for several types of emergencies. CAL FIRE works closely with Nevada County to respond to emergencies and fire incidents throughout the county.

The Project will not impair implementation of or physically interfere with emergency evacuation procedures, and as an emergency responder, CAL FIRE would be involved in implementing evacuation orders. **No impact would occur.**

g) As indicated in question f), CAL FIRE works closely with the county to respond to fire incidents. The construction of a replacement fire station that meets the current operational and building standards will assist CAL FIRE in providing improved incident response. The new station will ensure that adequate fire and emergency services are met within this portion of the county.

Although the Project is located within a high fire hazard severity zone the new upgraded fire station will ensure adequate response time and improved fire suppression activities. **Impacts are less than significant.**

HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

Environmental Setting

Portions of three major watersheds are within Nevada County: the Truckee River Basin, the Yuba River Basin, and the Bear River Basin. The project site lies within the Bear River Basin tributary of Wolf Creek in the western portion of the county. These watersheds supply water to serve portions of both northern California and western Nevada, and many of the creeks and rivers produce hydroelectricity as well. The watersheds are dependent on winter rain and snowfall, with the Sierra snowpack being the primary source of water for all the watersheds.

In the highest rainfall years, winter flows can average 3,400 to 5,600 cubic feet per second (cfs). In normal years, winter flows are 600–800 cfs. In the driest years, flows average only 20–65 cfs in winter months, down to 0 cfs in all other months. Bear River flow patterns are typical of foothill streams with high winter and spring flows and very low summer and fall flows. Bear River flows are regulated almost entirely by several storage reservoirs with numerous diversions.

The Bear River is the second largest tributary to the Feather River, with a watershed area of 300 square miles. The river stems from the Sierra Nevada, forming the boundary between Nevada and Placer Counties for much of its course. The Bear River Watershed is wedged between two much larger watersheds, the Yuba to the north and American to the south. The watershed is heavily managed for water conveyance for agricultural water supply and hydropower development that serves the western foothills region and beyond. Areas of the watershed have been severely degraded by historical hydraulic mining and mercury contamination.

The Bear River watershed is extensively managed for water conveyance. Both Nevada Irrigation District (NID) and PG&E utilize the Bear River watershed to convey water supplies to residents, farms, and ranches of Nevada and Placer Counties, as well as to generate hydropower for the California electric grid. Water is imported from the Yuba and American Rivers into this watershed. An estimated 200,000-acre feet (AF) of water is imported annually from the South

Yuba River, from Spaulding Lake through the Drum Canal system, and from the North Fork of the North Fork American River through the Lake Valley Canal. Water in the upper Bear watershed is directed into Rollins Reservoir. PG&E's Bear River Canal (below Rollins Reservoir) and the NID's Combie Phase I Canal (below Combie Reservoir), serve as important conveyance systems as well.

WATER MANAGEMENT

An Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) for the Consumnes, American, Bear, and Yuba Rivers (CABY) major watersheds was updated and adopted in December 2006 and was recently updated in 2021. The plan identifies broadly supported goals, objectives, strategies, actions and projects within the CABY region to address long-term water supply needs, protection of water quality, and enhancement of environmental and habitat resources.

Although the State of California recognizes up to nearly 300 subwatersheds within the CABY boundary, for the purposes of the IRWMP, the CABY region is divided into 11 major subwatersheds. The combined watersheds drain large volumes of water that flow into the Sacramento and Mokelumne Rivers.

Groundwater

A groundwater basin is defined as an area underlain by permeable materials capable of furnishing a significant supply of groundwater to wells or storing a significant amount of water. It includes both the surface extent and all the subsurface fresh-water-yielding material. These underground reservoirs, along with the surface waters, compose the water resources of the CABY region. Groundwater basins are delineated for some parts of California and subdivided into subbasins to distinguish groundwater systems. Many of these boundaries are not precise, and little is known about the hydrogeology and groundwater levels of many of the basins. The CABY planning area occurs primarily in the Sacramento River Hydrologic Region (the Yuba, Bear, and American watersheds); the Cosumnes River watershed portion of the planning area is in the San Joaquin Hydrologic Region. In 2005, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) published the California Water Plan Update, which added the Mountain Counties Area as a Hydrologic Region. The Mountain Counties are portions of the headwater areas of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and contain the foothill and mountain areas of these two hydrologic regions. The counties that constitute the CABY planning area are all within the Mountain Counties Area.

The groundwater resources of the region are poorly understood. Most of the water management agencies within the region (i.e., irrigation and water districts) do not use groundwater resources as a primary water supply. The only organizations that manage the use of groundwater resources and water quality are the cities and counties that issue well drilling permits and mandate water quality testing.

In general, groundwater in this area is an inadequate and unreliable water supply for large-scale use. However, many rural homes, farms, and ranches throughout the CABY region rely on groundwater supplies with individual wells. The fractured bedrock formations that constitute much of the Sierra Nevada foothills and western slopes of the mountains are poorly suited to contain large quantities of groundwater. Water cannot penetrate the rocks unless there are

fractures, as there is no pore space between the grains of the rock. Where rock fractures are present, small amounts of water can be stored and made available to wells that intersect the fractures. While there can be groundwater resources within meadow complexes in the high valleys throughout the region, these sources are limited in scope. As a result, groundwater makes up a small portion of water supply in the region, and nearly all the publicly supplied water is provided by surface waters.

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act requires the formation of Groundwater Sustainability Agencies and the generation of Groundwater Sustainability Plans for priority basins throughout California. There are no defined groundwater basins in the CABY region, so the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act does not apply.

Regulatory Setting

CLEAN WATER ACT

The Clean Water Act was amended in 1972 to prohibit discharge of pollutants to Waters of the U.S. from any point source unless it is in compliance with a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. In 1987, further amendments to the CWA added Section 402(p), established a framework for regulating municipal and industrial storm water discharges under the NPDES Program. In November 1990, the EPA finalized regulations establishing storm water permit requirements for specific industries. These regulations provide that storm water discharges to waters of the U.S. from construction projects with five or more acres of soil disturbance are prohibited unless the discharge is in compliance with the NPDES Permit. Further regulations (titled the Phase II Rule), which became final on December 8, 1999, lowered the permitting threshold from five acres to one acre.

These regulations have been updated throughout the years, with the most recent being published on February 12, 2019. While EPA regulations allow two permitting options for storm water discharges (Individual Permits and General Permits), the California State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) has elected to adopt only one statewide General Permit that applies to most storm water discharges associated with construction activities. On August 19, 1999, the State Water Board reissued the General Construction Storm Water Board amended Order 99-08-DWQ to apply to sites as small as one acre (SWRCB 2010).

The State Water Board adopted the 2009 Construction Stormwater General Permit (Order No. 2009-0009-DWQ) on September 2, 2009, and became effective July 1, 2010. This permit will soon expire, and no new enrollments are allowed. Existing construction sites previously enrolled under the 2009 Construction General Permit may continue permit coverage until August 31, 2025. New construction activities must file for coverage under the 2022 Construction Stormwater General Permit. The latest General Construction Permit (Order No. 2022-0057-DWQ), which the proposed Project will comply with, went into effect on September 1, 2023.

REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD

The project site is located within the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB), which develops and enforces water quality objectives and implements water

quality plans. The counties covered include Modoc, Shasta, Lassen, Plumas, Butte, Glen, Colusa, Lake, Sutter, Yuba, Sierra, Nevada, Placer, Yolo, Napa, (N. East), Solano (West), Sacramento, El Dorado, Amador, Calaveras, San Joaquin, Contra Costa (East), Stanislaus, Toulumne, Merced, Mariposa, Madera, Kings, Fresno, Tulare, Kern. (Very small portions of San Benito, San Luis Obispo) counties.

The CVRWQCB is required to formulate and adopt Basin Plans for all areas within the Central Valley region under Section 13240 of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act. As a result, the Central Valley Water Board regulates activities and industries that can impact groundwater and surface water quality in the largest region in California. The Central Valley Region stretches from the Goose Lake watershed on the Oregon border to northern Los Angeles County – about 60,000 square miles, or nearly 40 percent of the state. All or part of 38 of California's 58 counties fall within the Central Valley Region.

The CVRQCB issue permits pursuant to the Clean Water Act NPDES program, as well as the State's Water Quality Certifications, Waste Discharge, Storm Water, and several other programs in California.

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or groundwater quality?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Would the Project substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the Project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Would the Project 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 on-or off-site?	☐	☐	☒	☐
ii. Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or	☐	☐	☒	☐

off-site?				
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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) In a flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to Project inundation?	☐	☐	☐	☒
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) During Project construction, water quality impacts and discharge could occur during storm events if proper controls are not implemented. Loose soils, chemical and fuel spills from vehicles, and equipment or miscellaneous construction materials and debris could be transported off-site in overland flow, degrading surface and groundwater quality. During heavy rainfall, runoff from construction areas could flow off-site and reach nearby surface water drainage facilities.

The proposed Project is subject to the State Water Resources Control Board and the statewide NPDES stormwater permit for construction which is administered through the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB). CAL FIRE would obtain a general permit for storm water discharges associated with the construction and land disturbance activities (estimated at a little over an acre).

Specifically, CAL FIRE will submit a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) to the CVRWQCB that will identify BMPs to prevent construction pollutants and products from violating any water quality standard or waste discharge requirements.

In addition to construction related BMPs, CAL FIRE will design and construct a post-construction storm water conveyance system pursuant to federal, state, and county standards. A Storm Water Management Plan (SWMP) will be submitted for approval that identify onsite BMPs per all applicable regulations. An erosion and sediment control plan will be included as required under Nevada County's requirements implemented under the "Water Quality Control Plan (Basin Plan) for the California Regional Water Quality Control Board Central Valley Region Fifth Edition (Revised February 2019).

Although CAL FIRE does not need to obtain any discretionary permits from Nevada County, the county codes related to water quality standards, waste discharge, and flood control requirements will be adhered to through the CVRWQCB process.

The proposed Project will adhere to all state, federal and local regulations regarding water quality and will prevent the discharge of any materials or substances that may degrade water

quality. Adherence to the NPDES requirements as part of the permit obtained from the CVRWQCB will control any polluted sources of water that would have the potential to impact water quality. **A less than significant impact would occur.**

b) The proposed Project will construct a new fire station that will connect to existing water supply lines that are managed by the Nevada Irrigation District. The water demand associated with the proposed Project would not substantially decrease groundwater supply or interfere with groundwater recharge as most of the water supply in the region comes from surface water/reservoirs.

   A less than significant impact would occur.

c) The proposed Project will require grading, trenching, and the installation of paved areas with an increase in additional impervious surfaces. The increase in impervious surfaces compared to the existing undeveloped ground conditions would alter the current runoff or drainage patterns. These changes would not be substantial as the amount of impervious surfaces would not cover the entire site and a stormwater conveyance system will be constructed pursuant to Nevada County and CVRWQCB regulations. **Impacts would be less than significant.**

   Development of the proposed Project would not exceed the capacity of the planned stormwater drainage facilities, as the facilities will be designed to accommodate stormwater and ensure a proper filtration system. Additionally, the project would not create flooding. **A less than significant impact would occur.**

d) Based on the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the site is located in Zone X, which is not designated as a high-risk flood area (Area of Minimal Flood Hazard). Additionally, according to the Nevada County GIS website, the Project site is not located within any lake or dam inundation area.

   No impact would occur.

e) CAL FIRE will be subject to waste discharge restrictions through the Water Quality Certification process (NPDES), SWMP, and the SWPPP. The Project would not conflict or obstruct any groundwater management plans or Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Plans for the region. **No impacts would occur, and no mitigation is required.**

LAND USE AND PLANNING

Environmental Setting

The State of California and state-owned land are not subject to local city or county land use development permits. However, the state is subject to the requirement under CEQA to assess Project-related impacts that may occur due to conflicts between existing and proposed land

uses. Additional county ordinances, programs, and policies may be applicable to the Project through state mandated policy (e.g. General Plans). The Project was reviewed to determine consistency with Nevada County plans and policies.

Nevada County's total land area is 958 square miles. Seventy percent is privately owned while thirty percent is public land. With just under 100,000 residents, Nevada County is the 36th most populous county in California. The incorporated areas are home to 33% of the county's population with 17% in Truckee, 13% in Grass Valley, and 3% in Nevada City.. The remaining 67% of residents live in outlying unincorporated areas. The population grew from 92,033 in 2000 to 98,764 in 2010 and is now estimated at 97,466 in 2021. Nevada County saw its highest growth between the 1950s and 1990s. Preliminary data indicates that the population will remain stable.

Existing Land Uses Nevada County is composed of a mosaic of residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and public land use patterns. While the City of Grass Valley, City of Nevada City, and Town of Truckee are focal points for the development of multiple land uses, there has also been considerable growth in unincorporated areas of the County since the 1970s.

The predominant type of residential development has been single-family dwelling units, with multiple-family development occurring mainly in the Grass Valley and Nevada City areas. In the unincorporated area of the County, the greatest residential density occurs in the Alta Sierra area to the south of Grass Valley/Nevada City, Lake Wildwood to the west of Grass Valley/Nevada City, and Lake of the Pines to the south of Alta Sierra along the most southerly County boundary. While residences are found along many of the highways and roadways in the rural areas of the County, residential development is also found in a dozen or so smaller rural communities. Land development in the eastern portion of Nevada County tends to be more consolidated than in the western portion.

Most of the commercial and industrial development in western Nevada County is located in or around the City of Grass Valley and Nevada City. Commercial uses are concentrated in the downtown areas of each City, the Brunswick/Glenbrook Basin area, and the Pine Creek Shopping Center on Highway 49 south of Grass Valley. Within the Grass Valley Community Region, the Loma Rica Industrial Park is a major location for industrial development and also includes commercial land uses adjacent to the Nevada County Airport. Within the last decade, the Higgins Corner-Lake of the Pines Village Center in South County has experienced increased commercial development. Based on recent development proposals, such as the Higgins Marketplace shopping center, this commercial development pattern is expected to continue.

For several decades, Nevada County has continued to transition from a predominantly resource based (timber, mining, farming and ranching) rural county to a much more varied and diverse population and economic base which is reflected by the increase in commercial, industrial, rural residential and recreational uses.

While cattle ranching remains the main producer of Nevada County's agriculture lands, vineyards and wineries are steadily increasing on the landscape. In addition, the promotion of

local agriculture has increased opportunities for direct agricultural marketing, certified farmers markets and agritourism attractions. Agriculture in Nevada County is evolving in response to emerging markets that incorporate a wide range of activities including on-farm direct marketing, entertainment, farm accommodations, outdoor recreation, and educational programming.

The extent of public land is a major factor in the County's land use pattern. There are several key public land ownerships that cover a significant amount of the County's total land area. About 169,045 acres or 265 square miles of land in Nevada County is owned by the Federal Government for the Tahoe National Forest, operated by the U. S. Forest Service. The U.S. Forest Service lands are primarily located on the summit and north of Truckee. The Bureau of Land Management has some 20,000 acres of land in Nevada County. The Spenceville Wildlife and Recreation Area contains 11,000 acres or 17.19 square miles, with half the tract in western Nevada County and the other half in Yuba County. These three areas cover a total of 314 square miles of Nevada County's 943 square miles.

HIGGINS CORNER/COMBIE ROAD COMMERCIAL AREA

The project site lies within this area of Nevada County. The area is the most visible and commonly frequented area for residents and visitors, as it includes the commercial establishments to the north and south of Combie Road. It includes the major intersection of Combie Road at Highway 49 and extends until the intersection of Combie Road/West Hacienda Drive/Magnolia Road.

Combie Road is a three-lane arterial with narrow bike lanes on the shoulder providing access for the entire Plan Area. There are no sidewalks on either side. Ragsdale Creek runs parallel to Combie Road in this section. The Higgins Area Plan includes a design goal to enhance and protect Ragsdale Creek as a common design theme throughout the Higgins Area to preserve drainage, visual, and habitat resources.

Higgins Corner is located at the intersection of Highway 49/Combie Road and has commercial land uses at every corner of the intersection. Additionally, Higgins Fire Protection District Station 21 and CAL FIRE's Fire Station is co-located at the northeast corner. Higgins Village is a significant commercial shopping center on the south side of Highway 49 and includes a commercial center with CVS as the anchor at the southeast corner. Higgins Marketplace shopping center is located south of Higgins Village with the Holiday Market.

Along Combie Road to the east, there are occasional commercial buildings and a small shopping center (Combie Plaza) along Combie Road, with Armstrong Road serving as its entry drive. There is also a newer single-family residential community (Cascade Crossing), with 80 homes ranging between 1,500 and 3,000 square feet, within the Plan Area off Combie Road. Several vacant parcels front onto Combie Road, including the project site.

Compass Community Church is located at the northwest corner of the Combie Road/West Hacienda Drive/Magnolia Road intersection, but fronts onto West Hacienda Drive and is not directly adjacent to Combie Road. The proposed Higgins FS will be constructed on the corner of Combie Road and West Hacienda Drive with direct access from Combie Road.

The project site contains three different General Plan designations: Neighborhood Commercial (NC), Urban High Density (UHD), and Open Space (OS). The zoning on the site includes several zones corresponding to the General Plan including High Density Multi-Family (R3) – Scenic Corridor (SC) – Site Performance Combining District (SP) – Planned Development Combining District (PD); Open Space (OS) - Scenic Corridor (SC) – Site Performance Combining District (SP); and OS-SC-SP.

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project physically divide an established community?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) The project is situated at the intersection of Combie Road and West Hacienda Drive. This area contains commercial uses and beyond Combie Road where the road becomes Magnolia Road are areas of residential development, most notably, Lake of the Pines.

The project would not divide an established community. The project sits on the corner of an area that is planned for neighborhood commercial development. The fire station will provide emergency responses to the surrounding community. **No impact would occur.**

b) Currently, CAL FIRE is located on leased land that is owned by Nevada County near Highway 49 and Combie Road West of the new project site. As indicated in the environmental setting, Combie Road is partially developed with neighborhood commercial and residential uses.

The zoning on the site allows for emergency services with a Nevada County Development Permit or Use Permit. The scenic corridor combined district requires that community design standards shall be implemented (see Aesthetics).

Although development on the site would normally require a permit from Nevada County, as a state agency, CAL FIRE is not subject to this permit process. The new fire station will be subject to state requirements and regulations that include policies adopted in the Nevada County General Plan.

The project, as a public emergency service, is allowed with a development permit and will not conflict with a land use plan, policy, or regulation. **No impact would occur.**

MINERAL RESOURCES

Environmental Setting

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) of 1975 requires the identification and classification of mineral resources in areas within the state that are subject to urban development or other land uses that could otherwise prevent the extraction of important mineral resources. These Mineral Resource Zones (MRZs) are classified by the State Geologist by analyzing associated geologic and economic factors. There are four general classifications based upon the State Geologist's determination of identified mineral resource significance. The four classifications are as follows:

MRZ-1: Areas where adequate information indicates that no significant mineral deposits are present, or where it is judged that little likelihood exists for their presence.

MRZ-2: Areas where adequate information indicates that significant mineral deposits are present, or where it is judged that a high likelihood exists of their presence.

MRZ-3: Areas containing mineral deposits the significance of which cannot be evaluated from available data.

MRZ-4: Areas where available information is inadequate for assignment to any other MRZ.

Nevada County has a rich history of mining during the Gold Rush and has mines still in existence. Mineral resources in the county include gold, copper, silver, lead, zinc, chromite, and small amounts of other resources. Many of the historic mines have been closed and are no longer in operation due to environmental and development concerns.

The project site has not been designated as an area that contains mineral resources and has never been utilized for mining. Additionally, there are no mines near the project site.

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) The California Geological Survey (CGS) does not identify any active mines within a two-mile radius of the Project site.

   The Project site is not located within an area that has been identified as containing significant mineral resources by the CGS, has never been mined, and there are no known mineral resources on site. **No impact would occur.**

b) As indicated above, the site is not located within an area that is delineated as a mineral resource recovery site. **No impact would occur.**

NOISE

Environmental Setting

ACOUSTIC FUNDAMENTALS

Sound is mechanical energy transmitted in the form of a pressure wave from a disturbance or vibration. Noise is generally defined as sound that is loud, unpleasant, unexpected, or disagreeable. The human ear is sensitive to a wide range of sound pressure fluctuations. Sound pressure levels are expressed in logarithmic units called decibels (dB). Because the human ear is not equally sensitive to all sound frequencies, a "dBA" (i.e., A-weighted) frequency-dependent rating scale is used to reflect the range of sensitivity for the average human ear from the faintest sound audible to the maximum sensitivity. Based on the dBA scale, a 10 dBA increase is perceived by the average human ear as a doubling of the loudness, thus a 70 dBA sound is twice as loud as a 60 dBA sound. Negative effects of noise exposure include nuisance effects (e.g., annoyance, sleep disturbance) and physical damage to the human auditory system. The dBA scale is used for purposes of environmental noise assessment and regulation.

Vibration is an oscillatory motion through a solid medium in which the motion's amplitude can be described in terms of displacement, velocity, or acceleration. The peak particle velocity (PPV) is defined as the maximum instantaneous peak of the vibration signal and is a measure typically used to describe potential vibration effects to buildings. The root mean square (RMS) amplitude

is most frequently used to describe the effect of vibration on the human body. The effects of ground vibration can vary from no perceptible effects at the lowest levels, low rumbling sounds and detectable vibrations at moderate levels, up to causing building damage at the highest levels. Damage to structures from vibration is primarily architectural (e.g., the loosening and cracking of plaster or stucco coatings) and rarely results in structural damage. Ground vibration generated by construction equipment spreads through the ground and diminishes in strength with distance.

DEFINITIONS OF COMMON NOISE TERMS

The following are definitions of technical noise terms used throughout this section.

- **Equivalent Continuous Sound Level (L_{eq}):** L_{eq} represents an average of the sound energy occurring over a specified period. In effect, L_{eq} is the steady-state sound level containing the same acoustical energy as the time-varying sound level that occurs during the same period (Caltrans 2013). For instance, the 1-hour equivalent sound level, also referred to as the hourly L_{eq}, is the energy average of sound levels occurring during a 1-hour period.

- **Maximum Sound Level (L_{max}):** L_{max} is the highest instantaneous sound level measured during a specified period (Caltrans 2013, FTA 2018).

- **Community Noise Equivalent Level**: This is the energy average of the A-weighted sound levels occurring over a 24-hour period, with a 10-dB penalty applied to sound levels occurring during the nighttime hours between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m., and a 5-dB penalty applied to the sound levels occurring during evening hours between 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. (Caltrans 2013).

- **Day-Night Noise Level (L_{dn}):** The energy-average of the A-weighted sound levels occurring over a 24-hour period, with a penalty of 10 dB applied to A-weighted sound levels occurring during the nighttime hours (10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.).

- **Vibration Decibels (VdB):** VdB is the vibration velocity level in the decibel scale (FTA 2018).

- **Peak Particle Velocity (PPV):** PPV is the peak signal value of an oscillating vibration waveform. Usually expressed in inches/second (FTA 2018).

EXISTING NOISE- AND VIBRATION-SENSITIVE LAND USES

Noise-sensitive land uses are generally considered to include those where noise exposure could result in health-related risks to individuals, as well as places where quiet is an essential element of their intended purpose. Residential dwellings are of primary concern because of the potential for nighttime noise to result in sleep disruption. The County General Plan also considers land uses such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes, churches, and libraries to be considered sensitive to increases in noise levels (Nevada County 2014: 9-2). The area surrounding the project site is primarily developed and includes residential, public, and commercial land uses. The nearest existing noise-sensitive receptors to the project site are the Compass Community Church, adjacent

to the northern boundary of the project site; a residence approximately 185 feet west of the project site; and residences along Armstrong Road, approximately 380 feet west of the project site.

EXISTING NOISE SOURCES

The sound levels in most communities fluctuate, depending on the activity of nearby and distant noise sources, time of the day, or season of the year, with major roads and highways typically the primary sources of ambient noise in a community. Alta Sierra Airport is a privately owned day use (i.e., sunrise to sunset) airstrip located approximately 4.6 miles northeast of the project site (ASAOA 2024). The nearest public use airport is Auburn Municipal Airport located approximately 6 miles south of the project site.

Traffic noise contours were developed for the Nevada County General Plan Draft EIR (General Plan DEIR) (Nevada County 1995). While quite dated, the traffic noise contours developed for the General Plan DEIR are not only the best available information but based on the rural setting and the volume of traffic necessary to substantially change the locations of noise contours, it is reasonable to conclude that they still represent traffic noise conditions in the vicinity. Specifically, the traffic noise contours for roadway segment 46 (i.e., Combie Road east of SR 49) are used in this analysis. Table 11 shows the distances from the roadway centerline to the 60 and 65 dB L_{dn} traffic noise contours under "existing" (i.e., 1990) and General Plan Buildout conditions.

Table 11 Existing (1990) and General Plan Buildout Traffic Noise Levels and Contour Distances (dB L_{dn})

Roadway Segment[1]	Corridor and Segment	60 dB Contour Distance (feet) Existing Conditions	65 dB Contour Distance (feet) Existing Conditions	60 dB Contour Distance (feet) General Plan Buildout	65 dB Contour Distance (feet) General Plan Buildout
46	Combie Road, east of SR 49	177	82	242	113

Notes: dB = decibel; L_{dn} = Day-Night Noise Level
[1] Roadway segment number as listed in the Nevada County General Plan Draft EIR
Source: Nevada County 1995: 105-108.

REGULATORY SETTING

FEDERAL

Federal Transit Administration

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Division of Environmental Analysis developed the *Transit Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment Manual*, which provides guidance to engineers, planners, and consultants in assessing vibration from construction, operation, and maintenance of projects. To address the human response to ground vibration, FTA has set forth guidelines for maximum-acceptable vibration criteria for different types of land uses. These guidelines are presented in Table 12.

Table 12 Groundborne Vibration Impact Criteria for General Assessment for Human Response

Land Use Category	Ground-Borne Vibration Impact Levels for Human-Response (VdB re 1 microinch/second)	Ground-Borne Vibration Impact Levels for Human-Response (VdB re 1 microinch/second)	Ground-Borne Vibration Impact Levels for Human-Response (VdB re 1 microinch/second)
	Frequent Events[1]	Occasional Events[2]	Infrequent Events[3]
Category 1: Buildings where vibration could interfere with interior operations.	65[4]	65[4]	65[4]
Category 2: Residences and buildings where people normally sleep.	72	75	80
Category 3: Institutional land uses with primarily daytime uses.	75	78	83

Notes: VdB re 1 microinch/second = vibration decibels referenced to 1 microinch/second and based on the root mean square (RMS) velocity amplitude.

[1] "Frequent Events" is defined as more than 70 vibration events of the same source per day.

[2] "Occasional Events" is defined as between 30 and 70 vibration events of the same source per day.

[3] "Infrequent Events" is defined as fewer than 30 vibration events of the same source per day.

[4] This criterion is based on levels that are acceptable for most moderately sensitive equipment such as optical microscopes. Vibration-sensitive manufacturing or research would require detailed evaluation to define acceptable vibration levels.

Source: FTA 2018.

In addition, FTA has established construction vibration damage criteria as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 FTA Construction Damage Vibration Criteria

Land Use Category	PPV, in/sec
Reinforced-concrete, steel or timber (no plaster)	0.50
Engineered concrete and masonry (no plaster)	0.30
Non-engineered timber and masonry buildings	0.20
Buildings extremely susceptible to vibration damage	0.12

Notes: PPV in/sec = peak particle velocity, inches per second
Source: FTA 2018.

In addition to vibration criteria, FTA has established construction noise criteria based on the land use type affected by noise and the time of day the noise would occur. The FTA residential noise criteria are 90 dBA L_{eq} for daytime and 80 dBA L_{eq} for nighttime and 100 dBA L_{eq} for nonresidential uses.

STATE

California Building Code Sound Transmission Standards

Within habitable units, noise that is attributable to external sources is regulated by the California Building Standards codified in California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 24, Part 2, Section 1207. These standards are enforceable at the time of construction or during occupancy and apply to habitable units with common interior walls, partitions, and ceilings or those adjacent to public areas such as halls, corridors, stairways, and service areas. Under these standards the interior noise levels attributable to exterior sources shall not exceed 45 dB in any habitable room. The noise metrics used to measure these levels can be L_{dn} or CNEL, consistent with the local general plan. Under California Public Resources Code Section 25402.1(g), all cities and counties in the state are required to enforce the adopted California Building Code, including these standards for noise in interior environments.

LOCAL

Nevada County Code of Ordinances

The Nevada County Municipal Code incorporates specific noise standards to control noise within the unincorporated county. Section 12.04.070 “Noise” includes general noise regulations and exemptions. The following standards included in the Nevada County Code of Ordinances are relevant to the project.

Section 12.04.070 Noise Standards

All land use projects requiring a development permit or a use permit shall comply with the noise standards provided herein (Table 14 in this analysis). Permitted residential land uses, including parcel and tentative maps, are not subject to these standards.

Table 14 Nevada County Exterior Noise Limits

Land Use Category	Zoning Districts	Time Period	Noise Level dBA L_{eq}	Noise Level dBA L_{max}
Rural	AG, TPZ, AE, OS, FR, IDR	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	55	75
		7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.	50	65
		10:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m.	40	55
Residential and Public	RA, R1, R2, R3, P	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	55	75
		7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.	50	65
		10:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m.	45	60
Commercial and Recreation	C1, CH, CS, C2, C3, OP, REC	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	70	90
		7:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m.	65	75
Business Park	BP	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	65	85
		7:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m.	60	70
Industrial	M1, M2	Any Time	80	90

Notes: dBA = A-weighted decibels; L_{eq} = Equivalent Continuous Sound Level; L_{max} = maximum sound level

Source: Nevada County Municipal Code Section 12.04.070.

Projects with the potential for generating noise impacts shall incorporate design controls to assist in minimizing the impacts through the use of increased setbacks, landscaped earthen berms, solid fencing, placement of structures, or other effective means.

The above standards shall not apply to those activities associated with the actual construction of a project or to those projects associated with the provision of emergency services or functions.

DISCUSSION

Would the Project:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Generate 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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Generate excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	☐	☐	☒	☐
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 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) **Less-than-significant impact.** The project would result in the construction and operation of a new two-engine fire station with an administration and storage building and onsite parking. This impact includes an analysis of short-term construction noise and long-term operational noise.

Construction Noise (Temporary)

To assess potential short-term construction noise impacts, sensitive receptors were identified using aerial imagery. Project-generated construction source noise levels were determined based on methodologies, reference emission levels, and usage factors from the FTA *Guide on Transit Nosie and Vibration Impact Assessment Methodology* (FTA 2018) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) *Roadway Construction Noise Model User's Guide* (FHWA 2006). Reference noise levels for specific equipment and activity types are well documented, and the usage thereof is common practice in the field of acoustics.

Construction is typically a temporary activity and noise from construction ceases once construction is complete. Construction noise levels vary from hour to hour and day to day, depending on the equipment in use, the operations being performed, and the distance between the noise source and receiver. Project construction is anticipated to begin in September 2026 and is expected to be completed in 2028 (Eccleston, pers. comm., 2024). Construction of the

project would include excavation for building utilities and construction of a 9,296 square-foot building as well as ingress/egress driveways and onsite parking.

The project would be constructed on undeveloped land and therefore, no demolition would be required. Typical equipment that would be used during construction would include heavy-duty trucks, front-end loaders, excavators, paving equipment, and bulldozers. Construction equipment with substantially higher noise-generation characteristics, such as pile drivers, rock drills, and blasting equipment, would not be used any phase of project construction. The typical maximum noise levels (i.e., L_{max}) for pieces of construction equipment that could be used are presented in Table 15. However, construction equipment operates in alternating cycles of full power and low power, producing average noise levels less than the maximum noise level. The average sound level of construction activity also depends on the amount of time that the equipment operates and the intensity of construction activities during that time.

Table 15 Typical Noise Levels from Construction Equipment

Equipment Type	Typical Noise Level (dBA L_{max}) at 50 feet
Backhoe	80
Concrete Mixer	85
Compactor	80
Crane/Lift	85
Compressor (Air)	80
Dozer	85
Dump Truck	84
Excavator	85
Flat Bed Truck	84
Front End Loader	80
Generator	70
Grader	85
Paver	85
Roller	85
Pickup Trucks	54

Notes: dBA = A-weighed decibels; L_{max} = maximum noise level. Assumes all equipment is fitted with a properly maintained and operational noise control device, per manufacturer specifications. Noise levels listed are manufacture-specified noise levels for each piece of heavy construction equipment.

Source: FTA 2018.

As shown in Table 15, construction equipment could result in maximum noise levels of up to 85 dBA L_{max} at 50 feet. Section L-II4.1.7.D8 exempts construction activity from the County exterior noise standards, however the County has not adopted construction-specific noise standards. Thus, the FTA construction noise standards are used in this analysis to assess construction noise impacts. FTA has a daytime construction noise standard of 90 dBA L_{eq} for residential uses and 100 dBA L_{eq} for commercial/industrial uses (FTA 2018: 179). The FTA daytime construction noise

standard for residential uses is also applied to other noise-sensitive land uses (e.g., place of worship, school) in this analysis.

Given the size of the project site, modeling for on-site construction noise conservatively assumed the simultaneous operation of three pieces of heavy equipment (i.e., a front-end loader, excavator, and a dozer) that could be used during site development. These three pieces of equipment would generate a combined noise level of 81.6 dBA L_{eq} and 85.6 dBA L_{max} at 50 feet. See Appendix B for detailed modeling inputs. The attenuated daytime construction noise levels at the nearest noise-sensitive receptor (i.e., the Compass Community Church) approximately 48 feet northeast of the project boundary would be 82.0 dBA L_{eq} and 86.0 dBA L_{max}. The other nearby sensitive receptors are located farther from the project site than the Community Church and thus would experience lower construction noise levels. Therefore, noise generated by the loudest onsite construction activities would not be expected to exceed the FTA daytime construction noise standard of 90 dBA L_{eq} for noise-sensitive uses or the 100 dBA L_{eq} for commercial/industrial uses. Detailed noise calculations are provided in Appendix B.

In addition to onsite construction, implementation of the project would involve off-site utility installation including sewer connections to the existing manhole at Combie Road/West Hacienda Drive intersection and connection to the existing water main in Combie Road (Eccleston, pers. comm., 2024). Off-site utility installation would involve different activities than on-site construction and therefore would require different types of equipment. In addition, because utility installation is linear, elevated noise levels would only occur temporarily in the location where the construction occurs before moving along the roadway. The construction noise modeling for utility installation assumed the simultaneous operation of three pieces of heavy equipment used for trenching (i.e., an excavator, a front-end loader, and a flatbed truck). Based on reference noise levels and accounting for typical usage factors of individual pieces of equipment, off-site construction-related activities could generate noise levels of 79.6 dBA L_{eq} and 83.6 dBA L_{max} at 50 feet from the source. This analysis assumes that off-site utility installation would occur at the intersection of Combie Road and West Hacienda Drive; and thus, off-site construction noise would attenuate, through distance alone, to 58.2 dBA L_{eq} and 62.2 dBA L_{max} at the nearest sensitive receptor (i.e., Compass Community Church). Therefore, utility installation would not exceed the applicable daytime noise standards of 90 dBA L_{eq} at nearby sensitive receptors. Both onsite and offsite construction activities would result in temporary perceptible (i.e., 5 dBA) increases above existing noise levels. However, because project construction would occur during the less-sensitive daytime hours, it would not result in noise level increases that could result in adverse health effects (i.e., sleep disruption) to nearby sensitive receptors.

Long-Term Traffic Noise

Because the project site is currently undeveloped, implementation of the project would result in the generation of new vehicle trips. These trips would result in an increase in average daily traffic volumes and an associated increase in traffic noise levels along the surrounding roadway network. It is expected that up to 10 employees will be on site daily (Eccleston, pers. comm., 2024). Assuming employees do not carpool and thus generate two trips per employee per day, implementation of the project would result in an average of 20 new employee-generated trips per day. In addition, it is anticipated that the fire station would average four calls per day for approximately 1,460 calls per year (Eccleston pers. comm., 2024). Thus, in addition to employee

trips, it is assumed that implementation of the project would result in 8 new fire engine trips per day. It is widely accepted that people can begin to detect sound level increases of 3 dBA in typical noisy environments. Further, a 5 dBA increase is generally perceived as a distinctly noticeable increase, and a 10 dBA increase is generally perceived as a doubling of loudness (Caltrans 2013: 2-10). Therefore, a traffic noise increase of 3 dB or greater would be considered substantial. Generally, a doubling of noise sources (e.g., twice as much traffic) is required to result in an increase of 3 dB (Caltrans 2013). According to the most recent traffic counts conducted by the NCTC, Combie Road west of West Hacienda (i.e., the roadway segment south of the project site) experienced approximately 12,508 average daily trips (ADT) per month (NCTC 2024), or approximately 403 ADT per day. Therefore, the addition of 28 (20 employee-generated trips and 8 fire engine trips) new daily trips would be negligible compared to the existing traffic on Combie Road and would not result in a substantial increase (i.e., a doubling of traffic volumes for a 3+ dB increase) in traffic noise. Thus, it is anticipated that traffic noise would not adversely affect any nearby sensitive receptors due to the implementation of the project.

Long-Term Stationary Noise

Noise sources associated with the project would include mechanical equipment (i.e., a generator; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning [HVAC] equipment) and emergency vehicles and warnings (e.g., sirens). These noise sources are discussed separately, below. The church located north of the project site is located on lands zoned as residential/public, and the commercial buildings located east and west of the project site are zoned as commercial (Nevada County 2024). Therefore, this analysis evaluates long-term stationary noise in comparison to the daytime, evening, and nighttime noise sources associated with these land use categories (Table 14).

Mechanical Equipment

Implementation of the project would introduce new stationary noise sources associated with building mechanical equipment including HVAC units and a generator. The project site plans show that three HVAC units would be located outside the northeast corner of the fire station (See Appendix B). However, detailed information regarding the stationary equipment models to be installed is not currently available. Noise levels from HVAC equipment vary depending on the unit efficiency, size, and location, but generally range from 60 to 70 dBA L_{eq} at 3 feet (Carrier 2022). For the most conservative analysis, the noise level of 70 dBA L_{eq} at 3 feet was used. Using this reference noise level, from distance alone, noise from the three HVAC units would attenuate to 39.8 dBA L_{eq} at the church located approximately 299 feet north of the proposed HVAC units. Therefore, noise would not exceed the applicable exterior daytime (i.e., 55 dBA L_{eq}), evening (i.e., 50 dBA L_{eq}), or nighttime (i.e., 45 dBA L_{eq}) at the church. Noise from the three HVAC units would attenuate to 37.6 dBA L_{eq} at the nearest commercial use (i.e., the building located 385 feet west of the proposed HVAC equipment) and thus would not exceed the applicable daytime (i.e., 70 dBA L_{eq}) or nighttime (i.e., 60 dBA L_{eq}) exterior noise standards for commercial uses. In addition, from distance alone, noise associated with the three HVAC units would attenuate to 32.7 dBA L_{eq} at the nearest residence, located approximately 675 feet west of proposed HVAC equipment; and thus, noise would not exceed the applicable exterior daytime (i.e., 55 dBA L_{eq}), evening (i.e., 50 dBA L_{eq}), or nighttime (i.e., 45 dBA L_{eq}) at any nearby residential uses.

In addition to the three HVAC units, implementation of the project would include installation of an 85-kilowatt (kW) generator, north of the proposed storage building (see Appendix B). According to

the civil site plan, the generator would be enclosed. Thus, this analysis conservatively applies a reference noise level for a 100-kW enclosed generator of 71 dBA at 7 feet (Generac 2022). Applying this reference noise level, the enclosed generator could generate noise levels of up to 40.5 dBA L_{eq} at the church located approximately 235 feet north of the proposed enclosed generator. Therefore, noise would not exceed the applicable exterior daytime (i.e., 55 dBA L_{eq}), evening (i.e., 50 dBA L_{eq}), or nighttime (i.e., 40 dBA L_{eq}) noise standards at the church. Furthermore, because the church is not a location where people sleep, the operation of the generator would not result in adverse health effects (i.e., sleep disruption) during nighttime hours.

Noise from the generator would attenuate to 38.7 dBA L_{eq} at the nearest commercial land use (i.e., the building located approximately 288 feet west of the proposed enclosed generator) and thus would not exceed the applicable daytime (i.e., 70 dBA L_{eq}) or nighttime (i.e., 60 dBA L_{eq}) exterior noise standards for commercial uses. In addition, from distance alone, noise associated with the generator would attenuate to 32.7 dBA L_{eq} at the nearest residence located approximately 575 feet west of the proposed generator; and thus, noise would not exceed the applicable exterior daytime (i.e., 55 dBA L_{eq}), evening (i.e., 50 dBA L_{eq}), or nighttime (i.e., 45 dBA L_{eq}) noise standards any nearby residential uses.

Fire Truck Noise

It is anticipated that the fire station would average four calls per day for approximately 1,460 calls per year (Eccleston, pers. comm., 2024). Noise associated with emergency vehicles include sirens that could disrupt the surrounding community. Although fire trucks could generate noise levels that are disruptive, the noise would be short in duration (i.e., only occur as the truck is passing by) and would not result in long-term effects to any single sensitive receptor that could result in substantial increases in noise leading to adverse health effects. In addition, noise associated with emergency services or functions (e.g., emergency backup generator) is exempt from County exterior noise pursuant to Section 12.04.070 of the County Municipal Code.

Emergency sirens can generate noise levels of 100 dBA at 100 feet (City of Goleta 2018). The nearest residence is located east of Armstrong Road, approximately 185 feet west of the project site boundary and 448 feet west of the proposed onsite fire station from which fire engines would be dispatched. At this distance, the nearest residence would experience peak short-duration exterior noise levels of approximately 87.0 dBA L_{max} an average of four times per day as the fire truck leaves the project site to respond to an emergency (See Appendix B for detailed modeling inputs). Applying a 20 dBA noise reduction for buildings with the windows closed (Caltrans 2013), the fire truck siren would result in an interior noise level of approximately 67 dBA at the nearest sensitive receptor. The duration of exposure to peak exterior noise levels of approximately 87 dBA is estimated to last for approximately 10 seconds, as emergency vehicles turn onto Combie Road and accelerate rapidly away from the fire station. Therefore, nearby residents would be exposed to high noise levels for approximately 10 seconds an average of four times per day. Fire truck noise would not be considered a significant impact because average noise levels at sensitive receptors would not change.

Summary
Project operation would result in new stationary noise sources including onsite HVAC equipment and noise associated with emergency services (i.e., fire truck noise). As detailed above, these noise sources would not exceed applicable County noise standards or result in long-term adverse health effects (i.e., sleep disruption) to nearby sensitive receptors. **The impact would be less than significant.**

b) **Less-than-significant impact.** Construction activities that may expose people to excessive vibration, resulting in sleep disturbance or prolonged disruption to daily activities and work, are more likely to occur during extended construction schedules that involve impact equipment (e.g., pile drivers, jackhammers), blasting, or large haul trucks. Nevada County has not established vibration thresholds; therefore, the vibration associated with implementation of the project are evaluated using the FTA vibration thresholds are used in this analysis. Based on FTA guidance, construction vibration that exceeds 0.2 in/sec PPV could cause structural damage to nearby structures. In addition to thresholds for structural damage, FTA recommends a threshold of 80 VdB for the purpose of evaluating disturbance to sensitive land uses where people sleep. The project would not introduce any major sources of long-term or permanent ground vibration such as commercial railways or passenger rail transit lines. Therefore, the project would not result in long-term operational activities associated with permanent or substantial levels of ground vibration. Thus, this analysis focuses on construction vibration; operational vibration is not discussed further.

Structural Damage
Based on the proposed construction activity and types of equipment that would be used, a vibratory roller, which could be used for soil compaction, would generate the highest vibration levels. A vibratory roller operated within approximately 26 feet of an existing building or structure could expose that structure to levels of ground vibration that exceed the FTA threshold of 0.20 in/sec PPV for structural damage. There are no structures located within 26 feet of the project site. Therefore, the use of vibratory equipment would not exceed the structural damage threshold of 0.20 in/sec PPV.

Human Response
Vibration levels can result in annoyance to residents in homes or other land uses where people sleep (e.g., hotels). Based on the FTA recommended procedure for applying propagation adjustments to these reference levels, vibration levels from the use of a vibratory roller could exceed the FTA threshold of significance for structures where people sleep (i.e., 80 VdB) within 74 feet of activity. There are no residences located within this distance; the nearest residential receptors are located approximately 380 feet west of where a vibratory roller could be operated on the project site. At this distance, vibration would attenuate to approximately 59 VdB and thus would not exceed the applicable FTA standard (i.e., 80 VdB). Therefore, the FTA thresholds for human response and annoyance to vibration at residential uses would not be exceeded.

Summary
Based on the reference vibration levels and the vibration modeling conducted, construction activity that includes the use of a vibratory roller would not exceed the FTA vibration damage

thresholds (i.e., 0.20 in/sec PPV) or the vibration annoyance thresholds (i.e., 80 VdB at residences) at any off-site receptors. Thus, this impact is **less than significant.**

c) **No Impact.** The project site is not located within an airport land use plan, or within 2 miles of a public airport, public uses airport, or within 2 miles of a private airstrip. As detailed under "Environmental Setting," Alta Sierra Airport is a privately owned day-use (i.e., sunrise to sunset) airstrip located approximately 4.6 miles northeast of the project site (ASAOA 2024). The nearest public use airport is Auburn Municipal Airport located approximately 6 miles south of the project site. Therefore, the project would not result in noise impacts related to the exposure of people residing or working in the project area to excessive aircraft-related noise levels. There would be **no impact**.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

Environmental Setting

With just under 100,000 residents, Nevada County is the 36th most populous county in California. The population grew from 92,033 in 2000 to 98,764 in 2010 and is now estimated at 97,466 in 2021. Nevada County saw its highest growth between the 1950s and 1990s. Preliminary data indicates that the population will remain stable.

The incorporated areas of the County are home to 33% of the population, with 17% in Truckee, 13% in Grass Valley, and 3% in Nevada City. The remaining 67% of Nevada County residents live in outlying unincorporated areas.

An estimated 60% of all housing is in the unincorporated area of the County. According to the Counting California Report (2000), 14% of housing units in Nevada County were second homes at that time, which continues to contribute to a lack of housing availability today. Second home ownership is especially prevalent in Truckee, a popular resort community in the Tahoe region. An estimated 45,957 housing units are single-family, 5,352 housing units are multi-family, and 3,194 are mobile housing units.

There are two residential developments located just off Combie Road near the proposed fire station and include Cascade Crossing (to the west) and Lake of the Pines (to the east).

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project 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)?	☐	☐	☒	☐

b) Would the Project displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) The Project is proposing to construct a new fire station to replace the existing old station that is currently located approximately one mile west of the project site at 10106 Combie Road (in existence since 1948).

No new homes, road extensions or other infrastructure are included as a part of the Project that would induce population growth and although there may be additional capacity to hire fire fighters in the future, this increase would not exceed the FS capacity and would not have a substantial impact. **Impacts would be less than significant**.

b) The proposed Project will construct a new fire station to replace an outdated fire station that is currently in use at 10106 Combie Road approximately one mile west of the Project site. Project construction activities will occur onsite and will not extend beyond the property boundaries. No residential development exists adjacent or near the project site as it is surrounded by roadways, neighborhood commercial, and woodland.

The proposed Project will not displace existing homes, and **no impact will occur** due to Project implementation.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Environmental Setting

FIRE PROTECTION

Fire protection services in the county are currently provided by the Higgins Fire Protection District (Fire District). The Fire District provides fire protection and emergency service response to an estimated 12,000 permanent residents in southern Nevada County. The Fire District's 90-square mile area is primarily rural zoning, except for the Lake of the Pines gated community, and is serviced by three fire stations located geographically at six-mile intervals.

The Fire District is a combination department, consisting of career staff and paid call firefighters. Additionally, the District contracts with CAL FIRE to provide additional staffing. Currently the two agencies are co-located at the main station on Combie Road near Highway 49. CAL FIRE will relocate to this proposed project location once completed. The Fire District also maintains mutual and automatic aid agreements with surrounding fire districts and other fire agencies in Nevada and Placer Counties.

POLICE PROTECTION

Nevada County Sheriff's Office (174 employees) provides police protection for the unincorporated areas of Nevada County. Services include all prevention, response, and investigation of crime. They patrol in both on and off- highway vehicles, boats, UTVs and

motorcycles. Other services include maintaining the county jails, providing court security at both the Nevada City and Truckee facilities, and serves the civil process and execution of lawful orders of the courts. Additionally, they perform as the Coroner and Public Administrator functions pursuant to law.

The office has administrative offices in both Nevada City and Truckee and two sub-stations in the community for staff to meet with reporting parties and victims. One in the community of Penn Valley and one near the entrance to Lake of the Pines.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Project area is served by the Pleasant Ridge School District that serves the communities of Auburn, Lake of the Pines, Grass Valley, and Alta Sierra. The district includes two K-5 elementary schools and one intermediate school for 6th-8th grades and works with the K-12 charter academy.

The school district educates over 1,400 students at its four schools: Alta Sierra Elementary School, Arete Charter Academy, Cottage Hill Elementary School, and Magnolia Intermediate School.

The area is also served by the Nevada Joint Union High School District (NJUSD) that educates approximately 3,000 and offers placement at four comprehensive high schools (including independent study) and two non-traditional schools. Bear River High School is located west of the project site on Magnolia Road.

PARKS

The Bear River Recreation and Park District (BRRPD) provides recreation facilities and programs in this part of the county. The district serves approximately 22,000 residents within a 109 square mile area that encompasses the unincorporated communities of Alta Sierra and Lake of the Pines, and nearby unincorporated areas of Nevada County from Grass Valley to the Placer County line and from the Western Gateway Recreation District to the Bear River. The district is primarily rural in character, with the main concentration of development in the Lake of the Pines and Alta Sierra areas.

The goal of the BRRPD is to provide five acres of accessible developed park land for every 1,000 residents. The park land can include both active and passive use areas. Nevada County has established a separate standard for regional parks of 3 acres per 1,000 people.

Currently, the district does not own or operate the desired recreational acreage and has been planning opportunities to obtain the goals outlined in the Bear River Recreation & Park District Master Plan (2003).

OTHER PUBLIC FACILITIES

There are six public libraries in Nevada County. The library serving the area near the project site is the Bear River Library located on Combie Road in the Lake Center Plaza near the entrance to Lake of the Pines.

The library opened at its location in 2024 after sharing a library space with the Bear River High School for over 20 years. The new location is approximately 2,500 square feet and offers outdoor seating, a community meeting room, and an area for children to enjoy storytime.

Discussion

a) Would the Project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, or the 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:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
	☐	☐	☐	☒
Fire protection?	☐	☐	☐	☒
Police protection?	☐	☐	☐	☒
Schools?	☐	☐	☐	☒
Parks?	☐	☐	☐	☒
Other Public Facilities	☐	☐	☐	☒

FIRE PROTECTION

CAL FIRE provides this region with fire protection in cooperation with Nevada County. The new fire station will enhance these services and will not create a need for additional fire protection resulting in new facilities that would create adverse environmental impacts. No impacts would occur as a result of the proposed Project.

POLICE PROTECTION

The Sheriff's Department provides many services to protect the residents of Nevada County. CAL FIRE works in conjunction with the Sheriff to provide emergency response. CAL FIRE

personnel are onsite and provide their own security protection measures working closely with law enforcement.

The proposed Project will not require the need for additional police protection that would result in new facilities that would cause environmental impacts. No impact would occur.

SCHOOLS

The Pleasant Ridge School District and Nevada Joint Union High School District serve the Project area. The relocation of the current Higgins FS to the proposed new project site will not increase school enrollment or require new or altered schools or related facilities. No impact would occur.

PARKS

The proposed Project will not create additional demand for any nearby parks or recreational areas. The new replacement fire station will not require new or altered park facilities. No impact would occur.

OTHER PUBLIC FACILITIES

The newly relocated Higgins FS will not create additional demand for public facilities within the area. The Project will replace an existing FS within the area and will not add additional population to the area. No impact would occur.

RECREATION

Environmental Setting

The Community Development Agency is leading the development of the first-ever Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan to identify recreation needs and articulate a long-term vision for managing open spaces and recreation resources that range from local parks, playgrounds, sports fields, and facilities to rivers, trails, and outdoor access. Additionally, the plan will address environmental and human-related impacts including, but not limited to, wildfires, natural disasters, drought, a changing climate, and increased visitation.

Although the project may be in the planning process the county plans to engage diverse partners, including, but not limited to, public lands managers, nonprofit stakeholders, and user groups, to plan, fund, and implement sustainable solutions. The plan will include clear identification of viable, prioritized recreation enhancement and development projects, and related funding strategies, in unincorporated Nevada County and that involve Nevada County government.

The Bear River Recreation and Park District is collaborating with other stakeholders to meet the recreational needs of over 22,000 people who live in Southwestern Nevada County. The purpose of this Master Plan (Recreation & Resiliency Master Plan, June 2024). is to assess how well the

district is currently meeting that responsibility, and to provide a road map to guide the district in its operations for the next 20 years.

Discussion

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?	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
	☐	☐	☐	☒

The proposed Project consists of a new fire station approximately one mile east from the existing operational fire station. The relocation of the existing fire station will not add residential uses or other activities that would increase the use of existing neighborhood or regional parks or other recreational facilities. No impact would occur.

b) Would the Project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
	☐	☐	☐	☒

The proposed Project does not include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities. The proposed Project is relocating an existing operational fire station that does not add additional staff or residential uses that would increase population. No impact would occur.

TRANSPORTATION

Environmental Setting

ROADWAY NETWORK

The unincorporated portions of Nevada County are served by a roadway network consisting of federal and state highways, major and minor arterials, and local roadways. The Nevada County General Plan establishes the following roadway classifications (Nevada County 2010: 4-1).

- **Interstate Highways and Freeways:** Limited access highways carrying regional and interstate traffic.

- **Principal Arterials:** Roadways carrying some regional traffic and connecting the major population centers within the county.

- **Minor Arterials:** Roadways providing primary access from freeways and principal arterials to major origins and destinations.

- **Collectors (Major and Minor):** Streets connecting arterials to local roads.

- **Locals:** Streets providing primary access to individual properties.

- **Regional Emergency Access:** Roadways that provide emergency access between arterial or collector roads but are not needed by the County for general circulation purposes.

Access to the project site is provided by the following roadways:

- **SR 49** is a north-south highway that operates between Oakhurst and Vinton. SR 49 provides regional access to the project site.

- **Combie Road** is an east-west three-lane minor arterial roadway that operates between SR 49 and Magnolia Road and provides direct access to the project site. There are Class II bicycle lanes along Combie Road; however, no pedestrian facilities along Combie Road in the vicinity of the project site.

- **West Hacienda Drive** is a north-south two-lane local roadway that would provide direct access to the project site. There are no bicycle or pedestrian facilities along West Hacienda Drive in the vicinity of the project site.

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

The bicycle and pedestrian transportation network in Nevada County is composed of bikeways and trails. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) classifies bicycle facilities into the following types (Caltrans 2020a):

- **Class I Shared-Use Paths**: Paths completely separated from motor vehicle traffic used by people walking and biking, making them comfortable for people of all ages and abilities. Typically located immediately adjacent and parallel to a roadway or in its own independent right-of-way.

- **Class II Bicycle Lanes**: A dedicated lane for bicycle travel adjacent to traffic. A painted white line separates the bicycle lane from motor vehicle traffic.

- **Class III Signed Bicycle Routes**: Streets with signs and/or pavement markings that indicate people biking share the travel lane with motor vehicles.

- **Class IV Bikeways**: A bikeway is for the exclusive use of bicycles and includes a separation between the separated bikeway and the through vehicular traffic. The separation may include, but is not limited to, grade separation, flexible posts, inflexible barriers, or on-street parking.

According to the most recently updated County Active Transportation Plan, the active transportation network in the unincorporated county is comprised of approximately 288 miles of recreational trails and 24.6 miles of Class I, Class II, and Class III bicycle facilities (Nevada County 2019: Table 2). Class II bicycle lanes are present along Combie Road between SR 49 and Combie Road, south of the proposed project site boundary, and a Class I shared-use path is present along the northern portion of Magnolia Road between Lakeshore North and Kingston Lane, approximately 550 feet east of the project site (Nevada County 2019: 34). There are no bicycle or pedestrian facilities present along West Hacienda Drive in the vicinity of the project site.

TRANSIT SYSTEM

The Transit Services Division of the Nevada County Department of Public Works (Nevada County Connects) operates local and regional fixed-route bus service and specialized paratransit services throughout Western Nevada County (Nevada County 2024). Nevada County Connects operates Monday through Friday between 5:30 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. with limited Saturday service for specific routes (i.e., Routes 1 through 6, and Alta Sierra) between 7:15 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. (Nevada County 2024). The nearest bus service to the project site is provided by Route 5, which operates between the Amtrak Station in Auburn and Sacramento Street and Adams Lane in Grass Valley. The nearest Route 5 bus stop is located approximately 775 feet south of the project site along Combie Road.

REGULATORY SETTING

STATE

California Code of Regulations Section 15064.3

On December 28, 2018, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3 was introduced to address the determination of significance for transportation impacts. This amendment mandates that transportation analyses be based on VMT rather than congestion metrics such as level of service. Following approval by the Office of Administrative Law, the updated State CEQA Guidelines took effect statewide on July 1, 2020, implementing the provisions outlined in CCR Section 15064.3.

In December of 2018, the California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) (formerly the Governor's Office of Planning and Research [OPR]) published the most recent version of the *Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA* (Technical Advisory), which provides guidance for VMT analysis. The Technical Advisory provides guidance related to screening thresholds for projects to indicate when detailed analysis is needed or if a project can be presumed to result in a less-than-significant VMT impact. Generally, projects that generate or attract fewer than 110 trips per day or are within 0.5 miles of a major transit stop may be assumed to cause a less-than-significant transportation impact, absent substantial evidence indicating otherwise (OPR 2018). In accordance with Public Resources Code

§21064.3, the Technical Advisory defines a major transit stop as “a site containing an existing rail transit station, a ferry terminal served by either a bus or rail transit service, or the intersection of two or more major bus routes with a frequency of service interval of 15 minutes or less during the morning and afternoon peak commute periods” (OPR 2018: 11).

California Fire Code

The 2022 California Fire Code, which is codified at Part 9 of Title 24 of the CCR, incorporates by adoption the 2021 International Fire Code and contains regulations related to construction, maintenance, access, and use of buildings. Topics addressed in the California Fire Code include fire department access (especially circulation and width of on-site roadways), fire hydrants, automatic sprinkler systems, fire alarm systems, fire and explosion hazards safety, hazardous materials storage and use, provisions intended to protect and assist fire responders, industrial processes, and many other general and specialized fire-safety requirements for new and existing buildings and the surrounding premises. The California Fire Code contains specialized technical regulations related to fire and life safety. The California Fire Code is revised and published every 3 years by the California Building Standards Commission.

California Department of Transportation

Caltrans is the state agency responsible for the design, construction, maintenance, and operation of the California State Highway System, as well as the segments of the Interstate Highway System that lie within California. Caltrans District 3 is responsible for the operation and maintenance of SR 49 in the vicinity of the project site. Caltrans requires a transportation permit for any transport of heavy construction equipment or materials that necessitates the use of oversized vehicles on state highways. Additional relevant Caltrans programs and policies are summarized below.

California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Part 6: Temporary Traffic Control

The *California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (CA-MUTCD), Part 6: Temporary Traffic Control provides principles and guidance for the implementation of temporary traffic control to ensure the provision of reasonably safe and effective movement of all roadway users (e.g., motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians) through or around temporary traffic control zones while reasonably protecting road users, workers, responders to traffic incidents, and equipment. In addition, this document notes that temporary traffic control plans and devices shall be the responsibility of the authority of a public body or official having jurisdiction to guide road users (Caltrans 2024: 1029).

LOCAL

As an agency of the State of California, CAL FIRE is not subject to local government planning and land use plans, policies, or regulations. Nevertheless, in the exercise of its discretion, CAL FIRE does reference, describe, and address local plans, policies, and regulations where appropriate and for informational purposes. This evaluation is also intended to be used by local agencies for determining, as part of their permit processes, the project’s consistency with local plans, policies, and regulations.

Regional Transportation Plan

The NCTC is the designated regional transportation planning agency for Nevada County and coordinates transportation planning for Grass Valley, Nevada City, Nevada County, and the Town of Truckee (NCTC 2024). NCTC is responsible for the preparation of, and updates to, the county regional transportation plan. Adopted in 2018, the Nevada County Regional Transportation Plan serves as a planning blueprint to document short-term (2016-2026) and long-term (2026-2036) planning needs and facilitate the efficient development and implementation of transportation projects designed to maintain and improve the regional transportation system (NCTC 2018: 4). The following policies from the Regional Transportation Plan pertain to the project:

- **Policy 2.1:** Maintain existing and proposed facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists, and regularly clear these facilities of debris.

- **Policy 2.2:** Support roadway and street designs that avoid bicycle-auto, pedestrian-auto, and bicycle-pedestrian conflicts.

Active Transportation Plan

The Nevada County Active Transportation Plan aims to make walking and bicycling safer, easier, and more enjoyable for everyone in Nevada County, including the three incorporated cities of Grass Valley, Nevada City, and the Town of Truckee (NCTC 2019). It establishes goals and objectives intended to maintain and enhance active transportation in the county. The following goals and objectives from the Active Transportation Plan are relevant to the project:

- **Goal 1:** Enable all to move safely on the bicycle and pedestrian networks.

- **Goal 2:** Increase walking and biking.

- **Goal 3:** Improve bicycle and walking mobility for residents and visitors by connecting destinations to the bicycling and pedestrian networks.

    - **Objective:** Implement infrastructure such as bike parking and trailheads to support biking and walking.

In addition to establishing goals and objectives, the Active Transportation Plan also includes an inventory of existing and proposed active transportation facilities throughout the county.

General Plan Circulation Element

The Nevada County General Plan Circulation Element was adopted in 1996 and amended in 2010. The General Plan Circulation Element establishes goals and policies that address the County transportation system. The following goals are relevant to the project (Nevada County 2010):

- **Goal MV-4.1:** Provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods in a manner that respects the rural character of Nevada County.

- **Goal RD-4.3:** Decrease vehicle miles traveled while encouraging increased transit ridership and vehicle occupancy.

    - **Policy RD-4.3.6:** Sidewalks, walkways, bicycle facilities, and paths should be provided where necessary, on an equitable basis with roadway improvements.

Traffic Impact Analysis Guidelines

The Nevada County *Traffic Impact Analysis Guidelines* are used to determine the need for traffic analysis for development projects and to establish the parameters for such analysis. The guidelines are intended to ensure consistency of analyses and to aid County staff in the consideration of project approval (Nevada County 2020). The *Traffic Impact Analysis Guidelines* also outline screening criteria by which development projects may be exempt from detailed VMT analysis and provide methodologies to analyze project-generated VMT if the screening criteria are not met. The following criteria must be met to meet the requirements for VMT screening:

- The project is consistent with the General Plan

- The project is consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan

- The project meets one of the following criteria:

    - The project is a local-serving retail project of 50,000 square feet or less

    - The project is a residential or work-related land use located in a TAZ with similar land uses, and the project is in a TAZ with total VMT per service population equal to or less than 14.3 percent below the subarea mean

    - The project is a residential-related land use located in a TAZ with home-based VMT per resident equal to or less than 14.3 percent below the subarea mean

    - The project is a work-related land use located in a TAZ with home-based VMT per employee equal to or less than 14.3 precent below the subarea mean

    - The project is located in the western Nevada County travel forecasting model area and generates less than 630 VMT per day

DISCUSSION

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

a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities?

Implementation of the project would include the construction of a two-engine fire station building with an 18-bed barracks, three-bay apparatus building, an administration building, and a storage building, as well as the construction of a new internal roadway. The project would not require the construction, redesign, or alteration of any public roadways other than the construction of ingress/egress access driveways along Combie Road and West Hacienda Drive to allow access to the project site. There are no existing pedestrian or transit facilities within 500 feet of the project site. There are Class II bicycle lanes present along Combie Road. In addition, the County Active Transportation Plan proposes a Class I shared-use path along Combie Road between SR 49 and Magnolia Road (NCTC 2019: 75). Implementation of the project would not permanently modify the existing bicycle facilities or interfere with the facilities proposed in the County Active Transportation Plan. In addition, the project would include internal pedestrian accessible routes and the installation of bicycle parking facilities, and thus, would support Goal 3 of the County Active Transportation Plan which aims to implement infrastructure to support biking and walking. An encroachment permit would be required for any work conducted in the public right-of-way (e.g., lane closures) and an engineered traffic control plan would be developed and submitted to facilitate the safe movement of all travelers, in accordance with the County requirements for obtaining an encroachment permit. Implementation of a traffic control plan would minimize

disruption to the existing bicycle facilities during construction consistent with Goal 1 of the County Active Transportation Plan which aims to enable safe movement on the bicycle and pedestrian networks. For these reasons, the project would not adversely affect an existing or planned roadway, transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facility; and would not conflict with any adopted plans, policies, or standards related to such facilities. This impact would be **less than significant**.

b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?

Less-than-significant impact. CAL FIRE has not adopted its own VMT guidelines and thresholds that address CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3. The County *Traffic Analysis Guidelines* has established VMT screening thresholds for development projects. However, the guidelines do not establish specific screening thresholds for public facilities such as the proposed project. Therefore, in the absence of lead agency-adopted VMT guidelines and thresholds as well as applicable County VMT standards for public service projects, the VMT analysis herein relies on the guidance provided in CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3 and the OPR Technical Advisory.

Construction

The project involves the construction and operation of a new 9,296 square foot two-engine fire station and associated facilities on an approximate 7-acre parcel. Project construction would be temporary and intermittent in nature, occurring over approximately 2 years (Eccleston, pers. comm., 2024), and thus, would not result in long-term increases in vehicular trips. The number of anticipated daily one-way construction worker trips per phase of construction are presented in Table 16.

Table 16 CAL FIRE Higgins Corner Station Construction Worker Trip Rates

Phase of Construction	One-Way Vehicle Trips per Day
Site Preparation	13
Grading	10
Building Construction	18
Paving	23
Architectural Coating	4

Source: Ascent 2025.

The largest number of daily trips that would be generated during project construction (i.e., trips during the paving phase) as shown in Table 16 are used in this analysis to provide a conservative estimate of potential trip generation during project construction. The project would generate, at most, 23 one-way (i.e., 46 round-trip) commute trips per day during construction. Therefore, the number of daily construction trips generated would be fewer than 110 trips per day, thus satisfying the screening threshold for small projects as detailed in the OPR Technical Advisory.

Operations

The project would include the construction of a new 9,296 square foot fire station, a 2,048 square foot administration building, and an 816 square foot storage building on an approximately 7-acre site. The number of new operational trips that would be generated by the project was estimated using the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Trip Generation Manual 11th edition (ITE 2021). The ITE Trip Generation Manual provides weekday average daily trip generation rates for the land use category "Small Office Building" (ITE Land Use Code 712). In the ITE Trip Generation Manual, small office buildings are defined as those "with less than or equal to 10,000 square feet of gross floor area where affairs of business, commercial or industrial organization, or professional person or firm are conducted" (ITE 2021). The ITE Trip Generation Manual also provides weekday daily trip generation rates for the land use category "Fire and Rescue Station" (ITE Land Use Code 575). As defined in the ITE Trip Generation Manual, a fire and rescue station is a building "that houses emergency services equipment, firefighting apparatus, and the individuals that provide emergency firefighting services" (ITE 2021). Table 17 shows the weekday daily trip generation rates for the proposed project's land use categories.

Table 17 Project Trip Generation Rates

Land Use	ITE Code	Independent Variable	Quantity	Weekday Daily Trip Rate (trip/KSF)	Average Weekday Daily Trips
Fire and Rescue Station	575	1,000 square feet GFA	9,296 square feet	0.48	5
Small Office Building	712	1,000 square feet GFA	2,864 square feet[1]	14.39	41
Total Trips					**46**

Notes: ITE = Institute of Transportation Engineers; GFA = gross floor area; KSF= one thousand square feet.
[1] Square footage includes the 816 square foot storage building.
Source: ITE 2021.

To provide a conservative estimate of the number of average daily trips potentially generated by the project, the square footage of the project's associated facilities (i.e., the 816 square foot storage building) was added to the square footage of the land use category with the highest trip rate, "Small Office Building." As presented in Table 17 above, the project is estimated to generate approximately 46 trips per weekday. Because the project would generate fewer than 110 trips per day, the project would be consistent with the screening threshold for small projects as detailed in the OPR Technical Advisory. **Therefore, the project is presumed to result in a less-than-significant impact as it relates to VMT.**

Summary

Construction and operation of the proposed project would meet the screening criteria for small projects as established in the OPR Technical Advisory. Therefore, the project would not conflict with or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3(b). This impact would be less than significant.

c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

Less-than-significant impact. The project would include the construction of a new internal roadway connecting from West Hacienda Drive and traversing through the project site to Combie Road. The project impacts related to transportation hazards during construction and operation are detailed below.

Construction

Implementation of the project would involve the construction of driveways along West Hacienda Drive and along Combie Road. The County requires an encroachment permit for any work performed within the public right-of-way. In accordance with the County encroachment permit conditions of approval, an engineered traffic control plan would be submitted prior to the start of construction and adequate provision for the protection of the traveling public (e.g., vehicles, bicycle) would be provided (Nevada County n.d.). The project contractor would implement traffic control measures (e.g., barricades, flaggers) that comply with the CA-MUTCD to ensure that any increased hazards related to transportation during construction would be minimized. **Therefore, the project would not substantially increase transportation hazards during construction.**

Operations

The project would include the construction of a two-engine fire station, an administration building, and a new internal roadway as well as ingress/egress access along West Hacienda Drive and Combie Road. All new roadways and access improvements would be designed and constructed in accordance with State and local roadway design standards such as those included in the California Fire Code Regulations and the Nevada County Standards and Drawings to ensure the safe movement of all modes of transportation. In addition, the project plans would be subject to review by the County Department of Public Works to ensure that applicable design standards and regulations are met to minimize transportation hazards during project operations. For these reasons, **the project would not substantially increase hazards due to a design feature or incompatible uses.**

Summary

The project would be subject to, and comply with, all local and State design standards and safety regulations that are intended to reduce transportation hazards. The construction contractor would be required to prepare and submit a traffic control plan to ensure that impacts during construction in the public right-of-way are minimized. In addition, the project plans would be subject to review by the County to ensure that applicable design standards and specifications are met to minimize transportation hazards during operations. For these reasons, the project would not substantially increase hazards due to design features or incompatible use. **This impact would be less than significant.**

e) Result in inadequate emergency access?

Less-than-significant impact. Implementation of the project would include the construction of a new 9,296 square-foot fire station, thus enhancing emergency services in the area. The project would be required to comply with the most up to date version of the California Fire Code which

includes requirements to maintain emergency vehicle access during construction as well as design standards to ensure adequate fire apparatus access during operations. Compliance with these regulations would ensure that adequate emergency access is provided during construction and operations. Furthermore, the project site plans would be subject to review by CAL FIRE, ensuring that the project would maintain emergency access during construction and operation. For these reasons, the project would not result in inadequate emergency access. This impact would be less than significant.

TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

Environmental Setting

The project is located in the ethnographic territory of the Nisenan tribe (also known as the Southern Maidu). Prior to European-American contact, Nisenan territory included the southern extent of the Sacramento Valley, east of the Sacramento River between the North Fork Yuba River and Cosumnes Rivers on the north and south, respectively, and extended east into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Range. Neighboring groups included the Plains Miwok to the south, Southern Patwin to the west across the Sacramento River beyond the Yolo Basin, and Konkow and Maidu to the north. The traditional culture and lifeways of the Nisenan who inhabited the fertile plains between Sacramento and the Sierra foothills, were disrupted beginning in the early 1800s. Although Spanish explorers entered Nisenan territory as early as 1808, there is no record of the forced movement of Nisenan to the missions. During the Mexican period, native peoples were affected by land grant settlements and decimated by foreign disease epidemics that swept through the densely populated Central Valley. An epidemic that swept the Sacramento Valley in 1833 caused the death of an estimated 75 percent of the Valley Nisenan population, wiping out entire villages (Ascent 2025).

In the heart of Nisenan territory, the discovery of gold in 1848 at Sutter's Mill on the American River near Coloma had a devastating impact on the remaining Nisenan, as well as other groups of Native Americans in the Central Valley and along the Sierra Nevada foothills. By 1850, with their lands, resources and way of life being overrun by the steady influx of non-native people during the Gold Rush, surviving Nisenan retreated to the foothills and mountains or labored for the growing ranching, farming, and mining industries. Nisenan descendants reside on the Auburn, Berry Creek, Chico, Enterprise, Greenville, Mooretown, Shingle Springs, and Susanville rancherias, as well as on the Round Valley Reservation (Ascent 2025).

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

Under PRC section 21080.3.1 and 21082.3, CAL FIRE must consult with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated with the project site that have requested formal notification and responded with a request for consultation. The parties must consult in good faith. Consultation is deemed concluded when the parties agree to measures to mitigate or avoid a significant effect on a tribal cultural resource when one is present or when a party concludes that mutual agreement cannot be reached. Mitigation measures agreed on during the consultation process must be recommended for inclusion in the environmental document.

On January 11, 2025, CAL FIRE sent notification letters that the project was being addressed under CEQA, as required by PRC Section 21080.3.1, to the 12 Native American tribes that had previously requested such notifications:

- Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians
- Morongo Band of Mission Indians
- Mishewal Wappo Tribe of Alexander Valley
- San Manuel Band of Mission Indians
- Elk Valley Rancheria
- Rincon Band of Luiseno Indians
- Wilton Rancheria
- Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria
- Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians
- Wiyot Tribe
- United Auburn Indian Community
- Pit River Tribe

Additionally, on November 19, 2024, a search of the Sacred Lands File database conducted by the NAHC returned negative results for Native American resources within or in the vicinity of the project site.

DISCUSSION

Tribal Cultural Resources.

Has a California Native American Tribe requested consultation in accordance with Public Resources Code section 21080.3.1(b)?	☐ Yes	☒ No

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:

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)?	☐	☐	☐	☒
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 subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe?

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:

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)?

The NCIC records search revealed that the project site contains no cultural resources, including tribal cultural resources, that are listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources. Therefore, there would be **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 subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe?

Less than significant with mitigation incorporated. The NAHC SLF was negative and the NCIC revealed no previously identified tribal cultural resources on the site. Additionally, following letters sent to tribes on January 11, 2025, no tribes requested project consultation pursuant to PRC 21080.3.1. Nevertheless, it is possible that yet-undiscovered tribal cultural resources could be encountered or damaged during ground-disturbing construction activities. This impact would be potentially significant.

Mitigation Measure TCR-1: Unanticipated Discoveries of Potential Tribal Cultural Resources
If any suspected tribal cultural resources are discovered during ground disturbing construction activities, including midden soil, artifacts, chipped stone, exotic rock (nonnative), or unusual amounts of baked clay, shell, or bone, all work shall cease within 100 feet of the find. Appropriate tribal representative(s) shall be immediately notified and shall determine if the find is a tribal cultural resource (pursuant to PRC Section 21074). The tribal representative will make recommendations for further evaluation and treatment, as necessary.

Preservation in place is the preferred alternative under CEQA and the tribes' protocols, and every effort must be made to preserve the resources in place, including through project redesign. Culturally appropriate treatment may be, but is not limited to, processing materials for reburial,

minimizing handling of cultural objects, leaving objects in place within the landscape, returning objects to a location within the project vicinity where they will not be subject to future impacts. The Tribe does not consider curation of tribal cultural resources to be appropriate or respectful and requests that materials not be permanently curated, unless approved by the tribe. Treatment that preserves or restores the cultural character and integrity of a tribal cultural resource may include tribal monitoring, culturally appropriate recovery of cultural objects, and reburial of cultural objects or cultural soil.

Significance Conclusion

The implementation of Mitigation Measure Tribal-1 would reduce impacts to tribal cultural resources to a **less-than-significant** level by requiring appropriate treatment and proper care of significant tribal cultural resources, in the case of a discovery.

UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

Environmental Setting

WATER

The project area is served by the Nevada Irrigation District (NID) Zone 3. Water managed by NID originates as snowmelt from 70,000 acres of high elevation watershed near the headwaters of the Yuba River, Bear River and Deer Creek.

Zone 3 geographical area includes communities such as Alta Sierra, Lake of the Pines in Nevada County, and a portion of northern Placer County. NID oversees 29 reservoirs, six water treatment plants for filtration and purification, canals, and several waterlines throughout Nevada County. All the water passes through hundreds of miles of canal and pipe to become drinking or irrigation water for 25,000 homes, farms and businesses.

WASTEWATER

The Wastewater Division of the Public Works Department administers and maintains sewage collection systems and treatment facilities for Nevada County Sanitation District.

There are 10 zones within the Sanitation District with facilities that collect and treat 1,245,000 gallons of wastewater each day. The Sanitation District provides sewer service to 5,230 accounts in western Nevada County with a population of 14,000.

The nearest wastewater district is Zone #2, the Lake of the Pines/Darkhorse system which is a PVC gravity sewer system with manholes, 12 lift stations, 11 pump stations and some force mains to a tertiary treatment plant. The system serves mostly residential connections. Commercial connections are isolated to one area and grease-generating food establishments have grease traps

STORM DRAINAGE

Nevada County manages stormwater through a combination of infrastructure projects, regulatory compliance with state and federal permits, green infrastructure initiatives, and public education to protect water quality and reduce pollutant runoff. Stormwater management in the county

operates under state and federal regulations and complies with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits issued by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These permits regulate discharges from all sources to control pollutants and protect water bodies in the county.

SOLID WASTE/LANDFILLS

Waste Management operates the three (3) transfer stations in Western Nevada County; McCourtney Road Transfer Station (MRTS), North San Juan transfer station and The Town of Washington Transfer Station. In addition, they provide curbside garbage collection service to residents of the unincorporated Nevada County. Currently curbside collection services in unincorporated Nevada County include (3) bins; black for regular waste, green for organic waste and blue for co-mingled recyclables.

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electrical power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the Project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Would the Project result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider that 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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	☐	☐	☒	☐

a) The proposed project would connect to water lines that are provided by Nevada Irrigation District (NID). Additionally, the Project includes the installation of new storm water drainage components and a sewer treatment system as part of the new fire station. All sewage

disposal, water wells, or water systems are regulated and will be subject to standards set by Nevada County regulations. As required under the Clean Water Act, a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be prepared to ensure that all applicable temporary and permanent BMPs are implemented and to minimize the movement of sediment (see ***Hydrology and Water Quality***).

Existing power lines adjacent to the site will be utilized for telecommunications and power.

These onsite improvements and connections will not require relocation or expansion of existing utilities or service systems. **Impacts will be less than significant.**

b) Water will be supplied by the Nevada Irrigation District and according to the "2020 Urban Water Management Plan" has capacity under normal hydrologic years.

However, the District projects supply to demand shortages during single and 5-year drought periods due to projected reduced watershed runoff. NID manages these shortages by identifying six drought stages that include actions for NID and customers to implement to either reduce demand and/or increase supplies. Additionally, drought impacts can be significantly mitigated through purchase of supply from PGE.

The proposed project would not have a significant impact on the water supply in the region as it's a single FS. **Impacts will be less than significant.**

c) As indicated in the discussion, the nearest treatment plant is the Lake of the Pines plant. There is no indication that the project would not have the capacity to serve the FS. There is only one known capacity restriction in the collection system. Lift station 7 sometimes reaches the high-level float during severe rainstorms. During those events, the Sanitation District parks a combination truck next to the lift station so that in the event of a high-level alarm the district can pump out additional wastewater. The lift station is small, has a small contributing area, and is shallow so trucking wastewater has been effective at preventing a spill. In general, even during the worst rainstorms the other lift stations run with only one pump and there are no repeat overflow locations.

The project will include all wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and will obtain appropriate permits from Nevada County pursuant to the Regional Water Quality Control Board and Clean Water Act (see Hydrology and Water Quality section).

The solid waste that will be generated at the project site will be approximately the same as the current Higgins FS waste that is located near Highway 49 on Combie Road. The area lies within Service Area 16. There is currently sufficient capacity to serve the new fire station. Waste generation would not exceed state or local standards. **Impacts will be less than significant.**

d) The Project will comply with federal, state, and local reduction statues and regulations related to solid waste. **Impacts will be less than significant.**

WILDFIRE

Environmental Setting

The County also has a history of large, damaging wildfires, including the 1988 49er Fire (36,343 total acres/185 homes destroyed or damaged), the 1994 Trauner Fire (536 total acres/12 homes destroyed or damaged), the 2001 Martis Fire, (14,127 total acres/4 structures destroyed or damaged), and the 2021 River Fire (2,619 acres/163 structures destroyed or damaged). Nearly 318,000 acres of the County (excluding federal land) are mapped as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZs) (CAL FIRE 2023a, 2024c).

There is federal, state, local, and private lands in Nevada County that are within high fire severity zones and although each jurisdiction provides fire suppression support for lands they oversee, these agencies work together when necessary to prevent catastrophic impacts from fire events. Recently Nevada County prepared a "Community Wildfire Protection Plan" (February 2025) to address fire potential, fire response (including evacuations), and ways to minimize impacts from wildfires.

The Project lies an area that is within a State Responsibility Area (SRA) and has been designated as a high-fire severity zone. As discussed in the Public Services section of this document, the area is served by the Higgins Fire Protection District (Fire District) and includes CAL FIRE staff.

The Fire District's 90-square mile area is primarily rural, except for the Lake of the Pines gated community, and is serviced by three fire stations located geographically at six-mile intervals.

The Fire District is a combination department, consisting of career staff and paid call firefighters. Additionally, the District contracts with CAL FIRE to provide additional staffing. Currently the two agencies are co-located at the main station on Combie Road near Highway 49. CAL FIRE will relocate to this proposed project location once completed. The Fire District also maintains mutual and automatic aid agreements with surrounding fire districts and other fire agencies in Nevada and Placer Counties.

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the Project substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒

b) If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c) If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the Project 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?	☐	☐	☐	☒

a) The proposed Project is located within an area that is protected by Higgins Fire Protection District (Fire District) which includes CAL FIRE and local county fire fighters. CAL FIRE has been involved with Nevada County fire protection and recently collaborated with the county to prepare the “Community Wildfire Protection Plan” (February 2025). CAL FIRE is instrumental in carrying out emergency response within the area, including evacuation plans. **No impact will occur.**

b) The Project is located within the SRA high-fire severity zone. The fire station would serve the lands surrounding the project site and would not have an impact regarding increased pollutant concentrations as the fire station supports fire suppression efforts. **No impact will occur.**

c) The proposed Project would connect to existing power lines that are located along the Project site. As part of the Project, a stormwater system and associated utility and water lines will be installed for operational purposes. The installation of these components would not exacerbate fire risk or have a significant impact on the environment. **Impacts will be less than significant.**

d) As indicated in the previous questions, the fire station is within the CAL FIRE SRA that is classified as a high fire hazard severity zone. The new fire station will improve operations that serve this area and surrounding SRAs.

The Higgins FS is located within this area to provide fire suppression activities and to prevent significant loss of vegetation, structures, and life. The Project **will not have an impact.**

MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Discussion

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would 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 an endangered, rare, or threatened species, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	☐	☒	☐	☐
b) Would 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.)	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Would the Project have environmental effects that would cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	☐	☒	☐	☐

a) With mitigation measures described in this initial study, the proposed Project will not have a significant impact on fish and wildlife species or their habitat or eliminate important examples of major periods of California history or prehistory.

b) A search of the CEQAnet Database did not identify any current or proposed projects within the Project area, that when combined with the proposed project, would have a cumulatively significant impact. Impacts will be less than significant.

c) Direct and indirect impacts to human beings would be less than significant with the implementation of mitigation measures listed in this initial study.

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