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NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

For the Carmel Valley Fuelbreak Project

This notice is to inform the public and interested agencies that in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County is circulating an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Carmel Valley Fuelbreak Project for public comment.

Project/Location: The Carmel Valley Fuelbreak Project location is in multiple sites across Carmel Valley, including: Carmel Views, Rancho Tierra Grande, Robles del Rio, Santa Lucia Preserve, Garland Park, Cachagua, and Tularcitos Ridge. Please see IS/MND for exact project locations.

Project Description: The Proposed Project consists of fuelbreak maintenance at four (4) existing Strategic Fuelbreaks as well as implementation of strategic community fuel treatment programs at three (3) Community Treatment Areas to reduce the risk of wildfire and prevent the spread of non-native plant species. All Project components are located in Carmel Valley in unincorporated Monterey County. A total of 491 acres would be maintained under this project, including 254 acres of community fuels treatments and approximately 237 acres of fuelbreak maintenance treatments.

Carmel Valley Fuelbreak Project Treatments

Generalized fuelbreak maintenance treatment description

- Mastication of woody vegetation eight inches in diameter at breast height (dbh) or under in the fuelbreak area, with the exception of desired leave trees and shrubs.
 - Masticated material will be piled no higher than eight (8") inches in any given area
 - Excessive woody material may be chipped in areas that are accessible by a chipper to a depth no greater than eight inches from the soil surface.
 - Shrubs will maintain existing shrub canopy cover if it is deemed safe within the fuelbreak area. Remaining shrubs will have enough spacing between them to significantly slow down wildfire spread; this will be site-specific and will be implemented depending on fuelbreak slope and surrounding vegetation. Steeper slopes of fuelbreaks will have greater horizontal distance between shrubs. Non-native shrubs will be removed even if they meet spacing requirements.
- Mowing of non-woody vegetation in the fuelbreak area, with the exception of any identified rare or sensitive plant species or habitats and/or other sensitive resource areas, including cultural, wildlife and/or sensitive soils.
- Existing trees on the fuelbreaks will not be removed; trees may be limbed or pruned up to a minimum height of at least eight (8') feet from the ground wherever feasible.

"Conserving and improving natural resources, integrating the demand for environmental quality with the needs of agricultural and urban users"

- Fuelbreaks will be mowed or masticated to an approximation of the original fuelbreak width (25-100 ft). Fuelbreaks will not be expanded beyond their original implemented width.
- Piling and burning of excessive woody material from implementation may be used with landowner concurrence; otherwise, lop and scatter, chipping or an air curtain burner will be used to treat woody materials. Woody materials will not be hauled off-site.
- Targeted mapping and treatment of invasive French broom (*Genista monspessulana*) and/or other invasive plants species.
 - Treatment of French broom may consist of either manual treatment (hand pulling, lopping or chainsaw), mechanical (mowing/mastication) or herbicide application with a backpack sprayer. Herbicide to be used for foliar spraying will be either an approved formulation of triclopyr or glyphosate.
 - Treatments may be modified depending on implementation timing to avoid spread of seeds or propagules.
- Where feasible, existing roads or trails will be utilized as the centerline of the fuelbreak.

Generalized community fuels treatment description

- Removing ladder fuels and invasive plants (primarily French broom). In areas under a tree canopy, this will approximate a shaded fuelbreak-style treatment.
 - Trees will be pruned or limbed to a minimum height of eight feet from the ground, unless this removes more than 25% of the available canopy.
 - Shrubs/woody vegetation under tree canopies will be trimmed back or in some cases fully removed to provide at least eight (8') vertical feet of spacing between the lowest tree limbs and the top of the shrub.
 - Shrubs/woody vegetation not under tree canopies will be treated to have horizontal spacing between remaining shrubs an average minimum distance depending on slope of the local area:
 - Flat to 20% slope- horizontal spacing between shrubs a minimum of twice shrub height;
 - 20% to 40% slope- horizontal spacing between shrubs a minimum of four times shrub height;
 - Over 40% slope- horizontal spacing between shrubs a minimum of six times shrub height.
 - Shrubs that have significant value or are identified as rare/sensitive plants will not be treated and instead will have a no-treatment buffer.
 - Woody residue left over from treatments will be either lopped and scattered in place or chipped, to a depth no greater than six inches, or a mobile air curtain burner will be utilized to burn the woody debris, if accessible. Lopped or chipped material will not be spread or piled under tree canopies.

- Invasive plant material will be piled separately from other woody material; woody material of invasive plants can be burned in piles, air curtain burner or can be covered with material such as a tarp or paper to reduce seed spread and accelerate decomposition of piled material.
- Areas not under a tree canopy may be mowed, masticated or hand-treated, depending on existing vegetation conditions.
 - If woody vegetation, such as types of chaparral habitat, are treated, patches of woody vegetation will be left in a mosaic pattern to reduce risks of soil erosion, provide wildlife habitat and cover, and also a seed source for re-vegetation of nearby areas. Average spacing of shrub patches will use the criteria described for under-canopy treatments, dependent on slope and existing vegetation height.
 - Masticated and/or cut vegetation material will not exceed a depth of more than eight inches (8") from the soil surface.
- Invasive shrubs (French broom, jubata grass) will be treated with a combination of mechanical treatment, hand tools and/or herbicide use. These populations will be mapped before treatment and then treated during the appropriate season in order to prevent further spread within the project areas of these populations.
 - If other invasive species are found, removal of those species will occur first, unless they are in flower/seed set. If in seed set, decisions will be made on site based on contextual information about the species.
- If areas in the project area have Sudden Oak Death (SOD) identified, SOD protocols and Best Management Practices from the California Oak Mortality Task Force (www.suddenoakdeath.org) will be used.
- Treatments will not occur within private parcel boundaries unless a landowner agreement has been signed by the owner to allow treatment and to minimize liability for the RCDMC contractors.

Document Availability: The Initial Study/MND will be available for review at the following location beginning on Tuesday, September 30th, 2025:

- Resource Conservation District of Monterey County website: <https://www.rcdmonterey.org/public-notice-alerts>

Public Review Period: The 30-day public review period for the IS/MND is from Tuesday, September 30th, 2025 to Wednesday, October 29th, 2025.

Comments: Any person who wishes to comment on the RCDMC's intent to adopt the MND must submit written comments no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 29th, 2025. Written comments may be sent by e-mail (preferred) to jtlewis@rcdmonterey.org or by mail to: Jamie Tuitele-Lewis, Resource Conservation District of Monterey County, 744-A LaGuardia St, Salinas, CA 93905.

Project Impacts: Based on the findings of the Initial Study, it has been determined that the Carmel Valley Fuelbreak Project will not have a significant effect upon the environment based on mitigating measures, which will be attached to the project as conditions of approval.

Public Hearing: A hybrid virtual/public hearing will be held on October 27th, 2025 at 1:00 pm at the Discovery Center, Palo Corona Regional Park, 4860 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA, 93923. Public comments will be heard during this session.

Public Hearing Link: Contact jtlewis@rcdmonterey.org for meeting Zoom link.

