CEQA Environmental Checklist

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

Project Title: Balch-Blue Ridge Fuels Reduction Project

Lead agency name: Tulare County RCD **Address:** 3530 W. Orchard Ct., Visalia, CA 93277

Contact person: Antonia Perez **Phone number:** 559-754-3155

Address: 3530 W. Orchard Ct., Visalia, CA 93277

Project Location:

Zoning: Foothill Agricultural, Agricultural, Rural Residential, Timber Preserve Zone,

Description of project:

The project is located in the foothills and middle elevations of the Sierra Nevada mountains in eastern Tulare County, CA. The legal location is Township 18 South, Range 29 East, Sections 32 and 33; Township 19 South, Range 29 East, Sections 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 25, 35, and 36; Township 19 South, Range 30 East, Sections 17, 18, 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, and 30; Township 20 South, Range 29 East, Sections 2 and 3, Mount Diablo Base and Meridian. Elevation ranges from 1800' to 5600', however most of the project occurs below 3600'. All aspects are present. The project includes a buffer off of Balch Park road, Blue Ridge road, and an unnamed private road, as well as broadcast fuels treatments on private lands near the intersection of Balch Park and Blue Ridge. Portions of the project occur on federal lands, which fall under the post-fire NEPA exemption for the Castle Fire. Project activities include masticating, mechanical piling, hand piling, pile burning, broadcast burning, chipping, and falling dead trees.

Surrounding land uses and setting: The project is situated in the foothills and mountains of the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Surrounding land uses include agriculture, ranching, timber production, and outdoor recreation.

Other public agencies whose approval is required (e.g. permits, financial approval, or participation agreements)**:**

Sequoia National Forest, Western Divide Ranger District; Bureau of Land Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Cal Fire Tulare Unit

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This checklist identifies physical, biological, social and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with the projects indicate no impacts. A NO IMPACT answer in the last column reflects this determination. Where there is a need for clarifying discussion, the discussion is included either following the applicable section of the checklist or is within the body of the environmental document itself. The words "significant" and "significance" used throughout the following checklist are related to CEQA, not NEPA, impacts. The questions in this form are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

AESTHETICS

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	No Impact
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	No Impact
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	No Impact

The aesthetic characteristics of the project area are differentiated by lower elevation (foothill chapparal) and higher elevation (timberland). As such, the aesthetic impact of each will be evaluated.

Portions of the lower elevations of the project area are very heavy with brush, which is not generally aesthetically pleasing, and also obstructs the viewshed. The aesthetic value of these areas will be improved by this project. Other parts of this area are near homes, which often resemble a well-kept front yard. These areas are not targeted for treatment. The lower elevations of the project area are within the viewshed of the surrounding mountains. The effect the project may have on the scenic vista as viewed from the mountains will be that Balch Park road will be more visible due to the reduction

of vegetation within the 60' right-of-way. The impact on the scenic vista will not be significant, as Balch Park Road is already visible.

The higher elevation part of the project area was partially affected by the Castle Fire. The area burned with extremely high intensity, leaving a residual stand of dead trees and regenerating brush species with no aesthetic value. Treatment in these severely burned areas will improve aesthetic value by removing brush and dead trees, and removing obstructions to the viewshed of the valley below and surrounding mountains. The timbered areas which weren't burned are overstocked and have a brushy understory, but are otherwise of moderate aesthetic value. By removing dead trees and thinning the understory, the aesthetic value of the stand will be improved and the views of the valley and surrounding mountains will be restored. The project will have a net positive effect on aesthetic resources.

AGRICULTURE AND FOREST RESOURCES

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Dept. of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board. Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) 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?	No Impact
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	No Impact
c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?	No Impact
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact

This project involves removing brush and dead trees to reduce fuels along egress routes and strategic locations. No commercial crops or commercially viable timber are targeted for treatment. This project will have no negative impact on agriculture or forest resources.

AIR QUALITY

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	No Impact
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?	No Impact
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	Less Than Significant Impact
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	Less Than Significant Impact

Potential effects of the project on air quality include exhaust from heavy equipment, dust, and smoke from pile burning. There are few sensitive receptors in the project vicinity; the project area is sparsely populated, but there are a few year-round residents in the lower elevations and seasonal residents in the timber.

Diesel exhaust sources will include heavy equipment, Class A trucks, and pickup trucks. Emissions from diesel engines will be temporary and transient in nature, as heavy machinery moves around within the project area. This ensures that no single sensitive receptor will be exposed to diesel exhaust for a significant period of time. Additionally, all diesel-powered equipment will be equipped with the state-required emissions technology.

Similarly, dust will be transient and temporary within the project area. Due to Cal Fire grant conditions, no operations may occur within 100’ of any structure; while dust can travel further than 100’, it will have dispersed to some degree before reaching a sensitive receptor.

Smoke from pile burning is generally short in duration and mild in intensity. All Cal Fire and Air Pollution Control District regulations will be followed during pile burning.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) 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, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or NOAA Fisheries?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	No Impact
c) 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?	No Impact
d) 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?	No Impact
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	No Impact
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	No Impact

A biological assessment has been prepared for this project. The results of a 16-quad CNDDB query were compiled and analyzed as part of the assessment. No significant impact is expected.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to in §15064.5?	No Impact
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to §15064.5?	Less Than Significant Impact
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	Less Than Significant Impact

A confidential archaeological report has been prepared for this project and submitted to CAL FIRE. The report includes a current archaeological records check, copies of information request letters sent to local tribes, survey results, site records, and protection measures for known sites. Known sites shall be protected by avoidance and any discovered sites shall be avoided and discussed with CAL FIRE. There are no adverse impacts expected because of this project.

ENERGY

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?	No Impact
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	No Impact

This project will have not impact due to wasteful or inefficient use of energy, nor any impact on renewable energy plans.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: 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 Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	No Impact
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	No Impact
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	No Impact
iv) Landslides?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	Less Than Significant Impact
c) 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?	Less Than Significant Impact
d) 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?	No Impact
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?	No Impact

Question	CEQA Determination
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	No Impact

No known unstable areas exist within the project area. Slopes under 45% are targeted for mechanical treatment. This project will have no impact on geology and soils.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	No Impact

The project will generate greenhouse gases by way of pile burning and use of fossil fuels. These emissions will be less than that of a wildfire which may be prevented or stopped by this project. This project will have no impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) 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?	Less Than Significant Impact
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	No Impact
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	No Impact
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?	No Impact
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	No Impact

Hazardous materials used in this project will likely include diesel fuel, gasoline, and hydraulic oil. Hazardous materials will be handled and stored outside of watercourse and lake protection zones. No impact is expected as a result of the use of hazardous materials. The purpose of this project is to maintain and improve the egress and ingress route in the area for evacuees and first responders in the event of a wildfire. This project will have no negative effects due to wildfires.

HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?	No Impact
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	No Impact
c) 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;	Less Than Significant Impact
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or offsite;	No Impact
(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; or	No Impact
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?	No Impact
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	No Impact
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	No Impact

The use of the Forest Practice Rules Watercourse and Lake Protection Zone (WLPZ) widths and protection measures as best management practices will avoid negative impacts to hydrology and water quality.

LAND USE AND PLANNING

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Physically divide an established community?	No Impact
b) 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?	No Impact

This project will have no impact on land use and planning.

MINERAL RESOURCES

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) 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?	No Impact
b) 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?	No Impact

This project will have no impact on valuable or important mineral resources.

NOISE

Would the project result in:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Generation of 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?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	Less Than Significant Impact
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 two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	No Impact

Heavy equipment operation will create noise during activities. Hours of operation shall be limited to normal working hours Monday -Friday 7am to 5pm near residences. No significant impacts are expected from activities.

POPULATION AND HOUSING

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) 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)?	No Impact
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	No Impact

This project will have no impact on population and housing.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, 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 following public services:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Fire protection?	No Impact
b) Police protection?	No Impact
c) Schools?	No Impact
d) Parks?	No Impact
e) Other public facilities?	No Impact

This project will have no negative impact on public services.

RECREATION

Question	CEQA Determination
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?	No Impact
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	No Impact

There are few recreational facilities near the project area. Balch park road is a secondary, lesser-used entrance to Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest and Balch Park. The project will have no impact recreation.

TRANSPORTATION

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	No Impact
b) Would the project conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	No Impact
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	No Impact

Question	CEQA Determination
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	No Impact

The purpose of the project is to improve emergency access in the event of a fire. There will be no change to the infrastructure of the transportation system in the project area. No impact on transportation is expected.

TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

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:

Question	CEQA Determination
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), or	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.	No Impact

A confidential archaeological report has been prepared for this project and submitted to CAL FIRE. The report includes a current archaeological records check, copies of information request letters sent to local tribes, survey results, site records, and protection measures for known sites. Known sites shall be protected by avoidance and any discovered sites shall be avoided and discussed with CAL FIRE. There are no adverse impacts expected because of this project.

UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

Would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	No Impact
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	No Impact

Question	CEQA Determination
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which 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?	No Impact
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?	No Impact
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	No Impact

This project will have no impact on utilities and service systems

WILDFIRE

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
b) 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?	No Impact
c) 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?	No Impact
d) 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?	No Impact

The purpose of the project is to reduce the fuel loading along egress routes and in strategic areas. No negative impact will occur.

MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Question	CEQA Determination
a) Does 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 a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	No Impact
b) Does 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)?	No Impact
c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	No Impact