

# NOTICE OF EXEMPTION



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

<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>	Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools RX		
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	USGS 7.5-minute Kenwood quad T6N R7W S1, T6N R6N S6 APN- 055-030-029, APN- 055-040-013	<b>COUNTY</b>	Sonoma
<b>LEAD AGENCY</b>	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
<b>CONTACT</b>	Ian Hosbein, Forestry Assistant II, Sonoma Lake Napa Unit		
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**Project Description**

Located in Sonoma County at Enterprise Ln and Bennett Valley Rd, this project site is a private property managed by Sonoma Land Trust (SLT) consisting of annual and perennial grasslands interspersed with oak woodlands. The Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pool burn proposes to treat approximately 60 acres through prescribed broadcast and pile burning. The primary goals are to reduce the cover of invasive species, particularly medusa head (*Elymus caput-medusae*) and yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), improve ingress and egress along Bennet Valley Road, while also providing valuable training opportunities for local and state fire personnel.

The fire will be conducted under a low- to moderate-intensity prescription to create beneficial ecological disturbance. Control lines will include wet lines, existing roads, and hand-constructed scratch lines as needed based on terrain and access. Use of heavy equipment will be restricted to existing roads to minimize soil compaction and erosion. Pre-burn treatments may include pruning lower oak limbs and moving dead or downed vegetation into units for full consumption during the burn.

The project area has been affected by past wildfires, including the 2017 Nuns and Tubbs Fires and more recent fire events during the 2020 and 2021 fire seasons. These wildfires caused extensive mortality and stress to oak woodlands, increasing fuel loads and fire risk. The proposed treatments aim to reduce this buildup, improve forest health, and enhance fire resilience for the ranch and surrounding landscapes. Prescribed burns in oak woodlands and general grasslands are scheduled for the fall, while targeted grassland burns focused on invasive species control will take place in the spring, before invasive seeds have. Seasonal timing of fire may be adjusted as personnel and staffing fluctuate.

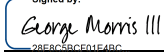
**EXEMPTION STATUS**

- Categorical Exemption    Type and Section: Class
- Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)
- Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(4); 15269(c))
- Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

**REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT**

Pursuant to CEQA Section 21080(b)(4) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15269 (c) a project is exempt from CEQA if it is a “specific action necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency.” On March 1, 2025, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist due to catastrophic wildfire risks created by forest conditions and found that conditions of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist within the State of California due to these conditions. Pursuant to the Emergency Proclamation, a critical fuels reduction project qualifies for CEQA exemption if: (1) it has as one of its primary objectives at least one of the following activities: (a) removal of hazardous, dead, and/or dying trees; (b) removal of vegetation for the creation of strategic fuel breaks as identified by approved fire prevention plans, including without limitation CAL FIRE Unit Fire Plans or Community Wildfire Preparedness Plans; (c) removal of vegetation for community defensible space; (d) removal of vegetation along roadways, highways, and freeways for the creation of safer ingress and egress routes for the public and responders and to reduce roadside ignitions; (e) removal of vegetation using cultural traditional ecological knowledge for cultural burning and/or prescribed fire treatments for fuels reduction; or (f) maintenance of previously-established fuel breaks or fuels modification projects; (2) has been approved by the appropriate Agency Secretary, or their designee, as being eligible to be conducted under the suspension; and (3) is conducted in accordance with the State Environmental Protection Plan (EPP). This project’s primary purpose has been approved by the Secretary of Natural Resources as being eligible to be conducted under the suspension and will be conducted in accordance with the EPP. The action is therefore exempt from CEQA. Documentation of the environmental review completed by the Department is kept on file at 1199 Big Tree Rd., St. Helena, CA.

**DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING**

Signed by:  George Morris III, Northern Region Chief California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection	10/13/2025  Date
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