

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
P.O. Box 3044, 1400 Tenth Street, Rm. 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Habitat Conservation Planning Branch
Native Plant Program
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

Project Title: Post-Fire Recruitment of Western Joshua Tree (*Yucca brevifolia*) Study (Project)

Project Location: The Project will take place on two parcels that are permanently protected, owned, and managed by Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT) in San Bernardino County. The first parcel, identified as "Section 33," is located directly south of the MDLT headquarters at 60124 29 Palms Highway in Joshua Tree, CA. The second parcel, identified as "Danmark/Long Canyon Peak," is adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park.

Project Description: The California Department of Fish and Wildlife is issuing a California Endangered Species Act and Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act scientific, educational, or management permit pursuant to Fish and Game Code sections 2081, subdivision (a), and 1927.2, subdivision (h) (Permit No. 2081(a)-25-017-RP) for a project to investigate practical approaches to post-fire restoration of western Joshua trees in the Mojave Desert, a species limited by low germination and high seedling mortality. A pilot experiment will be implemented on MDLT property to compare differences in germination between two habitats (burned vs. unburned) with two different microclimates (open vs. underneath shrubs). The experiment will build on research indicating the importance of microclimates on the recruitment of this species. A thermal time germination model that was developed from growth chamber data will be used to help determine the best field sowing windows, matching soil conditions to the temperatures needed for germination. The pilot will test whether model-informed sowing combined with microsite selection and water addition can substantially improve germination and early survival in post-fire habitats. Up to 60 plots measuring 50 centimeters by 50 centimeters will be divided evenly between burned and unburned habitats. Forty western Joshua tree seeds will be sowed in each plot. Plots will be assigned to one of three treatments within each habitat (burned vs. unburned): (1) under shrub canopy; (2) open microsites; or (3) open microsites with water addition. A total of 40 plots will be caged to deter herbivory. Sensors will be deployed at a depth of <5 centimeters in a total of six plots to investigate whether microclimates differ in temperature and soil moisture. Plots receiving the water addition treatment will be irrigated with a backpack sprayer up to once a week for up to a 6-month period to simulate natural precipitation events during the early germination window. Soil volumetric water content, available soil moisture, soil temperature, precipitation, and ambient air temperature data will be collected. Plots will be monitored once a week for germination and survivorship. Data collected from the experiment will be used to validate the hydrothermal germination model to predict optimal germination conditions in burned and unburned habitats.

California Public Agency Approving Project: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Dr. Megan Korte, Assistant Specialist, University of California Riverside

Exempt Status:

- ☐ Ministerial;
- ☐ Declared Emergency;
- ☐ Emergency Project;
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. Type and section number: Section 15306, Class 6

Reasons why project is exempt: The Project consists of basic data collection and research that will inform post-fire restoration of western Joshua tree. The permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for the Project includes measures to ensure existing populations of western Joshua tree are adequately protected.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Joanne Heraty

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Signature: 

Isabel Baer, Native Plant Program Manager

Date: 11/12/2025

☐ Signed by Lead Agency

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____