Notice of Exemption

To: ☒ Office of Planning and Research
PO Box 3044, 1400 Tenth Street, Room 222
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: University of California, Berkeley
Physical & Environmental Planning
1995 University Avenue, Room 530
Berkeley, California 94704

Project Title: Grassland Conservation Study in Cannabis-impacted areas of the Eel River Watershed
Project Location – Eel River Watershed and Angelo Coast Range Reserve, public and private lands
Project Location – County: Mendocino County

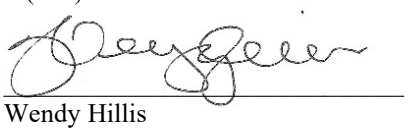
Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project (Project Description): the project involves studying the impact of cannabis cultivation on the diversity of native grasses, soil dwelling anthropods and soil microbiota in grassland habitats, and testing the capacity of three native grasses to re-establish below-ground biodiversity in abandoned cannabis cultivation sites. The project is part of the California Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Framework (CEMAF) developed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and involves establishing 12 study plots – six on cannabis-impacted sites and six on non-cannabis-impacted areas within Angelo Coast Range Reserve. The study plots are located on land and each will have a CEMAF monitoring station installed, consisting of two sound recorders, a trail camera and a knee-high perimeter wildlife-friendly drift fence. Soil at each study site will be extracted every two months between April and October for two years. All materials will be removed at the end of the two-year project. The six cannabis-impacted study sites will be located on private property and the six undisturbed sites will be located on the 4,450-acre Angelo Coast Range Reserve, which is managed by the University of California, Berkeley for research and teaching about watersheds and natural ecosystems. The goal of the project is threefold: 1) to quantify impacts of cannabis cultivation on native biodiversity; 2) gather data necessary to inform future restoration strategies; and 3) increase engagement with community members and partner organizations focused on grassland ecosystem conservation and awareness.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: University of California
Parties Undertaking Project: University of California
Exempt Status:

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080 (b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a);
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b) (c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: **Class 4 (15304): Minor Alterations to Land and Class 6 (15306): Information Collection**
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number: 20180.35
- ☐ General Exemption (Sec. 15061(b)(3)).

Reason Why Project is Exempt: the project is categorically exempt under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4 Minor Alterations to Land, for minor alterations to land, including installing perimeter fencing and small new equipment on land with a slope less than 10 percent, and digging up to five inches below the ground surface for soil sampling. The project is also categorically exempt from CEQA, on a separate and independent basis, under CEQA Guidelines Section 15306, Class 6 Information Collection, for basic data collection, research, experimental management and resource evaluation activities, which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. None of the exceptions to the exemptions pursuant to CEQA Section 15300.2 apply and there are no unusual circumstances creating the possibility that the project will have a significant effect on the environment, pursuant to CEQA Section 15300.2.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Raphael Breines, Senior Planner, Physical and Environmental Planning
Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (510) 642-6796

Signature: 

Wendy Hillis

Title: Campus Architect, Assistant Vice Chancellor

Date: December 11, 2025

☒ Signed by Lead Agency
☐ Signed by Applicant

Date received for filing at OPR