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Notice of Exemption

To:
Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
CEQA Submit

From:
Department of Fish and Wildlife

Watershed Restoration Grants Branch
Street Address:
1010 Riverside Pkwy
West Sacramento, CA 95605

For U.S. Mail:
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090

Project Title: Juniper *(Juniperus occidentalis)* Removal to Restore Sagebrush Ecosystems, Groundwater, and Climate Resilience in the Modoc Region (Project)

Project Location: The Project is located on 773 acres of the Modoc National Forest, located at 41.73339, -120.75683, in Modoc County, CA.

Project Description: On March 30, 2026, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) executed a $320,265 grant with Nature Based Solutions: Wildlife Corridors funding to the Mule Deer Foundation for the Project. The Project is designed to benefit pronghorn migration corridors and greater sage-grouse habitat identified in the Modoc ecoregion of the California State Wildlife Action Plan. The Project includes restoring 773 acres of sage-steppe habitat through mechanical removal of western juniper while retaining heritage individuals; increasing forage availability, improved visibility, and enhancing habitat permeability within pronghorn migration corridors and winter range; and improving habitat suitability for greater sage-grouse and other sage-steppe dependent Species of Greatest Conservation Need identified in the California State Wildlife Action Plan.

Public Agency Approving Project: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Person or Public Agency Carrying Out Project: Mule Deer Foundation

Exempt Status: ☒ California Environmental Quality Act Class 4 Categorial Exemption (Minor Alterations to Land)

Reasons Why Project is Exempt: CDFW has determined that the Project meets the qualifying criteria set forth in Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 14, § 15304 subdivision (d). CDFW's determination that the Project qualifies as a "minor alteration[s] in land, water, and vegetation on existing officially designated wildlife management areas or fish production facilities which result in improvement of habitat for fish and wildlife resources or greater fish production" is supported by (1) the project is located in the Modoc National Forest, (2) the project will focus on encroaching western juniper trees and those exhibiting old growth or heritage characteristics will not be removed, (3) the removal of encroaching western juniper will improve habitat by restoring sagebrush and perennial grass dominance and reestablish open shrub-grassland structure, (4) this restoration will enhance forage availability, improved visibility, and habitat permeability within pronghorn migration corridors and greater sage-grouse habitat, while reducing fuel continuity and increasing landscape resilience to drought and wildfire.

CDFW Contact Person: Elizabeth Buttler, Policy and Outreach Manager, (916) 594-3879, Elizabeth.Buttler@Wildlife.ca.gov

Signature: Matt Wells — *Date:* 3/30/26

Matt Wells, Branch Chief

Date received for filing at LCI: _____