

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk

County of: _____

From: (Public Agency): _____

(Address)

Project Title: _____

Project Applicant: _____

Project Location - Specific:

University of California, Santa Barbara, Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory. 37.6138°N, -118.8317°E

Project Location - City: Mammoth Lakes Project Location - County: _____

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

UC Nature is proposing to install one (1) temporary Motus tower at the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory (SNARL) as part of the California Sentinel Sites for Nature (SSN) monitoring collaboration. The tower would be 30-feet in height and would sit on a new 9 square feet and 2.5-feet deep concrete pad. Three (3) stabilization wires from the top of the tower would be anchored by three (3) concrete pads measuring 1 by 1 square feet and 2.5-feet deep.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: _____

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: _____

Exempt Status: **(check one):**

- 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: _____
- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: of Small Structures & 15304, Minor Alterations to Land

Reasons why project is exempt:

Lead Agency

Contact Person: _____ Area Code/Telephone/Extension: _____

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: Reinah Urquiza Date: _____ Title: _____

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

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1325 Cheadle Hall
University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara CA 93106-2032
bap.ucsb.edu

MEMORANDUM April 2026

Project Name: UC Nature Motus Tower at Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory

Subject: California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exemption – Memo to File

Background: UC Nature is the network of 42 UC Natural Reserves across the state established in 1965. UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) manages seven of these Natural Reserves, including the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory (SNARL), which is part of the UCSB's Natural Reserve System (NRS). The mission of the UCSB NRS is to support research, education, and public service. UC Nature is part of California Sentinel Sites for Nature (SSN), a long-term monitoring collaboration established to create biodiversity baselines to assess change over time. As part of the SSN, Motus towers would be installed at some UC Nature Reserves, including the SNARL. Motus towers use passive automated radio telemetry to track the movement and behavior of small animals, like birds, bats, and insects. Installation of a Motus tower at SNARL would fill a critical gap in the coverage of the Motus tower and provide important data to SNARL and UCSB researchers. Installation and maintenance of the tower would be managed by UC Nature.

Purpose and Need: As part of the SSN research across the state, SNARL has been identified as a top priority to receive a Motus tower due to the gap and coverage around SNARL in the Motus network. The data would be available and actively used by UCSB researchers.

Setting and Program: SNARL is located at latitude 37.6138°N and longitude -118.8317°E longitude, in Mono County, California (Figure 1). SNARL is located south of Mammoth Lakes, California, along Convict Creek. The terrain elevation ranges from 7,070 to 7,179 feet above mean-sea level. SNARL's vegetation is characterized by a mixture of sagebrush grasslands, aspen meadows, and riparian habitat.

The Motus tower will be installed at SNARL in a flat open area surrounded by sagebrush at an elevation of 7,092 feet above mean-sea level (Figure 2). The location is accessible by dirt road and close to electrical infrastructure. The Motus tower is a temporary structure and would be within the footprint of SNARL and other research infrastructure. The area around SNARL has been developed since the 1930's and has served as a cattle ranch, family home, US wildlife research facility, and most recently, as a UCSB Natural Reserve.

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Project Overview

The location of the Motus tower will be next to an existing 20-foot shipping container used for storage where the area is already disturbed. There would be minimal surface ground disturbance to create four small holes for the tower. The Motus tower will be 30 feet tall and sit on a new concrete pad that will be 3 by 3 feet (9 square feet) and 3 feet deep in the ground (Figure 3). Three stabilization wires will be needed from the top of the tower down to three new concrete pads that will be 1 by 1 square feet and 2.5 foot deep in the ground, 17 feet away from the center of the tower. The project components also include the following:

- Four concrete pads will be installed in the ground. Excavation includes:
 - One (1) 3 by 3 foot (9 square feet) by 3-feet deep area would be excavated, removing 27 cubic feet of soil.
 - Three (3) 1 by 1 foot and 2.5 feet deep area would be excavated, removing 2.5 cubic feet of soil.
- Anchor bolts will be set directly in the three small concrete pads. These anchor bolts will be the attachment points for the Motus tower and stabilization wires.
- The tower will be a natural grey metal color.
- Electricity will run above ground from the existing 20-foot shipping container used for storage that is 10 feet away.
- Internet connectivity will be provided by the SNARL network.

Schedule: The proposed project is expected to begin in Summer 2026 and will take approximately 1 week to complete.

Removal plan and timing: The Motus tower will remain in place as long as the observational technology provided by it provides resource to researchers, and educators. The Motus network has over 2,400 towers across the globe and has provided useful research and educational resources to date. The installation can be removed without any permanent changes to the area by removing the tower, breaking and removing the concrete, picking up the gravel, and replanting native grasses.

Maintenance: The tower's equipment will be maintained by UC Nature. No other maintenance defensible space is required.

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CEQA Determination

The project is categorically exempt from CEQA under CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 (Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) and Section 15304 (Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land). The scope of work involves the installation of a temporary Motus tower. None of the exceptions to exemptions listed in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 are applicable. The evaluation in the following subsections document justification for the exemption.

A. Class 3, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures

The project qualifies for the Class 3 Categorical Exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303 as the project involves the installation of a temporary small structure for institutional use. The Motus tower uses automated radio telemetry to track the movement and behavior of small animals, filling a critical gap in coverage of the Motus tower network for the furtherance of research and education of SNARL and UCSB.

B. Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land

The project qualifies for the Class 4 Categorical Exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304. The project involves minor excavation including the installation of four (4) small concrete pads to provide the tower base and anchor for three (3) stabilization wires. The project site is already disturbed and has bare ground patches surrounding by sagebrush grasslands. There are no sensitive biological and cultural resources identified in the project site.

C. Exceptions to Categorical Exemptions

CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 include a number of exceptions to the use of Categorical Exemptions, including location, cumulative impact, significant effect, scenic highways, hazardous waste sites, and historical resources. As discussed below, these exceptions are determined to not apply to the project.

1. Location

The "location" exception is for exemptions under Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11. The project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Class 3 and 4. Additionally, the project is located in a disturbed area that is not a sensitive environment. Therefore, the exception for location does not apply.

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2. Cumulative Impact

The “cumulative impact” exception applies when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place over time is significant. The project relates to the installation of a temporary Motus tower that do not involve any other iterative or ongoing projects. As such, the project is not expected to contribute to a significant cumulative impact.

3. Significant Effect

The “significant effect” exception applies when there is a reasonably possibility that the proposed activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. The project does not involve unusual circumstances, and as such, the exception for significant effect does not apply.

4. Scenic Highways

The “scenic highways” exception applies when the project may result in damage to scenic resources within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. The project is not located in a designated state scenic highway. Therefore, the exception for scenic highway does not apply.

5. Hazardous Waste Sites

The “hazardous waste sites” exception applies when the project is located on a site included on any list pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code. These lists include:

- All hazardous waste facilities subject to corrective action
- All land designated as hazardous waste property or border zone property
- All information received by the Department of Toxic Substances Control
- All sites listed pursuant to Section 25356 of the Health and Safety Code
- All public drinking water wells that contain detectable levels of organic contaminants and that are subject to water analysis
- All underground storage tanks for which an unauthorized release report is filed
- All solid waste disposal facilities from which there is a migration of hazardous waste and for which a California regional water quality control board has notified the Department of Toxic Substances Control

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- All cease-and-desist orders issued after January 1, 1986
- All cleanup or abatement orders issued after January 1, 1986
- All solid waste disposal facilities from which there is a known migration of hazardous waste

The project is not located on any aforementioned sites, and as such, the exception for hazardous waste sites does not apply.

6. Historical Resources

The “historical resources” exception applies to projects that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. The project site does not contain a historical resource, and as such, the exception does not apply.

Conclusion: The proposed installation of a Motus tower is categorically exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15303, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures and Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land. None of the exceptions apply.

References:

Philson, Conner

2026. University of California Preliminary Environmental Assessment. UC Nature Motus Tower at Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Laboratory. April, 2026.

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Figure 1. Location of SNARL in relation to Mammoth Lakes, CA.

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Figure 2. Location of proposed Motus Tower in relation to SNARL's primary facilities.

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Figure 3. Example of a Motus tower already installed at a UC Nature research at UCLA's White Mountain Research Center. The proposed Motus tower at UCSB's SNARL would be nearly identical.