

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

NAPA COUNTY PLANNING, BUILDING, & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
DEPARTMENT
1195 THIRD STREET, SUITE 210, NAPA, CA 94559

To: ☒ Office of Planning and Research ☒ Napa County Clerk
PO Box 0334 900 Coombs St
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121 Napa, CA 94559
Sacramento, CA 95814

EXEMPT FROM RECORDING FEE CG 27383**PROJECT TITLE:** WHITE RANCH AND WALT RANCH PRESCRIBED BURNS**PROJECT LOCATION - SPECIFIC:**

White Ranch: The project is located at 4647 Chiles Pope Valley Road, St. Helena, Ca 94574
APN: 025-010-~~105~~-000 in Napa County, California.
-015

Walt Ranch: The project area encompasses three sides of the community of Circle Oaks, a rural community with limited means of egress and extended emergency response times. The eastern boundary of the property borders Highway 121, a critical evacuation and access route for the communities of Circle Oaks, Capell Valley, and Berryessa Highlands.

APNs: 032-480-012, 032-490-012, 032-480-022, 032-490-009, 032-180-020, 032-490-008, 032-480-008, 032-490-005, 032-480-024, 032-490-018, 032-490-015, 032-480-014, 032-490-019, 032-480-027, 032-290-016, 032-490-017, 032-490-006, 032-480-021, 032-490-013, 032-480-007, 032-480-015, 032-480-028, 032-490-010, 032-490-011, 032-120-028, 032-480-017, 032-480-023, 032-480-013, 032-480-018, 032-480-011, 032-490-019, 032-490-004, 032-490-014 and 032-490-020 located in Napa County, California

PROJECT LOCATION – CITY (NEAREST): St Helena and Napa**PROJECT LOCATION - COUNTY:** Napa**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

White Ranch - The project will involve pile burning and broadcast burning to reduce and remove accumulated dead vegetation and other hazardous fuels across 18 burn units totaling approximately 103.6 acres located on a 197.59 acre parcel. These activities will help protect the rural communities of Pope Valley, Angwin, and surrounding areas, including critical ingress and egress routes. Broadcast burning will also assist in reducing the encroachment of invasive species. The property is located within an area of the County identified as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).

The project will involve pile burning operations to prepare the site for broadcast burning by reducing fuel loading and creating conditions suitable for low-intensity broadcast burning. Broadcast burning will then be utilized as a land management tool to help protect communities, maintain critical access and egress routes, and strengthen strategically important areas for wildfire suppression. The project will obtain a Smoke Management Plan approved by the Bay Area Air Quality Air District, in addition to LE-5 and 7 permits through CALFIRE.

Walt Ranch - The projects will involve pile burning operations and use of mastication to prepare the site for broadcast burning by reducing fuel loading and creating conditions suitable for low-intensity broadcast burning. Broadcast burning will then be utilized as a land management tool to help protect communities, maintain critical access and egress routes, strengthen strategically important areas for wildfire suppression, and promote long-term forest health, rangeland improvement, and watershed resilience.

The project will involve pile burning and broadcast burning to reduce and remove accumulated dead vegetation and other hazardous fuels remaining from the 2017 Atlas Fire. These activities will help protect the rural communities of Circle Oaks, Capell Valley, Berryessa Highlands, and surrounding areas, including critical ingress and egress routes. Broadcast burning will also assist in reducing the encroachment of invasive species and promoting more resilient native plant communities. The property is located within an area of the County identified as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ), where fuel reduction treatments are essential to reducing wildfire risk and improving community safety. Use of mastication is also proposed.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: CalFIRE, Sonoma Lake Unit, 1199 Big Tree Road, St. Helena, Ca 94574

Lead Agency: County of Napa, Planning, Building and Environmental Services Department
ADDRESS: 1195 Third Street – Suite 210 **PHONE:** (707) 253-4437

NAME OF PERSON OR AGENCY CARRYING OUT PROJECT: Napa County Fire Administrator and CalFIRE
ADDRESS: 1195 Third Street – Suite 310 **PHONE:** (707) 259-8199

EXEMPT STATUS (CHECK ONE):

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15268(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines (CEQAG) section number: ***Class 4 - Section 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land), and Class 8- Section 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources.***
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number:

REASONS WHY PROJECT IS EXEMPT: Staff has reviewed the proposed project to determine the required level of review under the CEQA and has determined the project to be Categorically Exempt from the CEQA pursuant to the following CEQA Guidelines:

- The project meets the requirements of CEQA Article 19 Class 4 (Section 15304) Categorical Exemption "Minor Alterations to Land" as the project aims to utilize mechanized equipment/techniques, including "pile burning" and "broadcast burning" with minimal to no ground disturbance to manage and maintain vertical and horizontal fire fuels in the County. The entirety of the proposed work is located in areas designated as having a High Fire Hazard Zone (HFHZ) or Very High Fire Hazard Zone (VHFHZ). The managing and maintaining of vertical and horizontal fire fuels is a common practice within communities. The project will manage and maintain fire fuels throughout the project area. This fuel reduction treatment is strategically located to improve defensible space, provide safe egress for evacuating citizens, provide safe ingress for emergency resources, protect critical infrastructure and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property from catastrophic wildfire events. Additionally, the project will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) and restoration efforts with non-invasive species to restore natural habitats and help prevent and/or reduce the amount of sediment and runoff into nearby

drainages/waterways. By managing and maintaining wildfire intensity and severity, it will improve our defensible space, provide safer egress for evacuating citizens, provide safer ingress for emergency resources, and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property. Also, project activities will not result in the taking of endangered, rare, and/or threatened plant or animal species, or cause sedimentation to surface waters. The project will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs), including restoration efforts with noninvasive species to restore natural habitats and help prevent and/or reduce the amount of sediment and runoff into nearby drainages/waterways.

The project meets the requirements of CEQA Article 19 Class 8 (Section 15308) Categorical Exemption "Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources" as the project consist of actions by regulatory agencies as authorized by state laws or local ordinances. The project will utilize mechanized equipment/techniques, including "pile burning" and "broadcast burning" with minimal to no ground disturbance to manage and maintain vertical and horizontal fire fuels within the proposed project areas to better help protect the County as a whole. The entirety of the proposed work is located in areas designated as having a High Fire Hazard Zone (HFHZ) or Very High Fire Hazard Zone (VHFHZ). The managing and maintaining of vertical and horizontal fire fuels is a common practice within communities. This fuel reduction treatment is strategically located to moderate the movement of wildfire, improve defensible space, provide safe egress for evacuating citizens, provide safe ingress for emergency resources, protect critical infrastructure, and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property from catastrophic wildfire events. The project will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) and restoration efforts with non-invasive species to restore natural habitats and help prevent and/or reduce the amount of sediment and runoff into nearby drainages/waterways. Additionally, the referenced agencies confirmed the hazardous fuel reduction clearance is mandatory to moderate the movement of wildfire, improve defensible space, provide safe egress for evacuating citizens, provide safe ingress for emergency resources, protect critical infrastructure, adhere to PRC 4291 / local ordinances and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property from catastrophic wildfire events.

County staff also reviewed all potential exceptions (Section 15300.2) to the categorical exemptions and determined that no exceptions would apply: (a) because there are no project impacts and/or no cumulatively significant impacts; (b) There would be no significant effects due to unusual circumstances because the routine maintenance and/or removal of hazardous forest/fire fuels to reduce wildfire intensity/severity, including the protection of life and property from catastrophic events is a common practice in communities; (c) There would be no damage to scenic resources, historic buildings, and/or rock outcroppings; (d) The project is not located on a hazardous waste site; and (e) The project is designed to require minimal to no ground disturbance. Furthermore, there are no known special circumstances that exist which would create a reasonable possibility that the project will have a significant adverse effect on the environment. Therefore, the project meets the criteria outlined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 and 15308 and would be categorically exempt from the requirements of CEQA. No further CEQA review is required.

LEAD AGENCY CONTACT PERSON: Dana Morrison, Supervising Planner

PHONE: (707) 253-4437

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: _____



Signed by Lead Agency



Signed by Applicant

Title: Supervising Planner

Date: 6/5/2026

Date received for filing at OPR: 6/5/2026.



Planning, Building & Environmental Services

1195 Third Street, Suite 210
Napa, CA 94559
www.countyofnapa.org

Brian D. Bordona
Director

To:	Ryan Isham, Deputy Chief – Community Risk Reduction Sonoma Lake Napa Unit	From:	Dana Morrison, Supervising Planner Conservation Division, PBES
Date:	June 5, 2026	Re:	CEQA Determination – White Ranch and Walt Ranch Prescribed Burns

This memo is in response to your request for a determination of compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for two fire fuel management prescribed burn projects (White Ranch and Walt Ranch) proposed to occur within Napa County California. The projects will be implemented and management by the Napa County Fire Department with support from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Sonoma Lake Napa Unit. The goal of the White Ranch and Walt Ranch projects is to reduce hazardous fuel loads within approximately 2403.60 acres located within areas denoted as High Fire Hazard Severity Zone in Napa County.

White Ranch-

Location:

The property is located in a critical area for fire protection. Along the eastern boundary of the property is Chiles Pope Valley Road, which serves as a critical evacuation route for the communities of Pope Valley, Angwin, and Berryessa Estates. This project also complements major fuels reduction and forest health projects currently being implemented on the properties of Pacific Union College and Las Posadas State Forest. The project is located at 4647 Chiles Pope Valley Road, APN: 025-010-105-000 in Napa County, California. The proposed project area is largely undeveloped and rural, with limited rural residential development and access roads. A treatment map is provided at the end of this memo.

Project Description:

The project will involve pile burning and broadcast burning to reduce and remove accumulated dead vegetation and other hazardous fuels across 18 burn units totaling approximately 103.6 acres located on a 197.59 acre parcel. These activities will help protect the rural communities of Pope Valley, Angwin, and surrounding areas, including critical ingress and egress routes. Broadcast burning will also assist in reducing the encroachment of invasive species. The property is located within an area of the County identified as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).

The project will involve pile burning operations to prepare the site for broadcast burning by reducing fuel loading and creating conditions suitable for low-intensity broadcast burning.

Broadcast burning will then be utilized as a land management tool to help protect communities, maintain critical access and egress routes, and strengthen strategically important areas for wildfire suppression. The project will obtain a Smoke Management Plan approved by the Bay Area Air Quality Air District, in addition to LE-5 and 7 permits through CALFIRE.

BMPs:

- Use existing roads and previously disturbed areas for vehicle access.
 - Limit project disturbance; no entry into streambeds. No ignitions within established riparian zones. Fire is allowed to back into riparian buffers.
 - Conduct required botanical and nesting bird surveys based on blooming and nesting seasons and establish protective buffers where needed.
 - No heavy equipment will be used.
 - Tree removal will be limited to dead, dying, or invasive trees.
 - Living trees may be limbed to prevent fire spread into canopies during burning.
 - Heavy fuels will be piled and burned to ensure full consumption.
 - Prescribed burns will be low-intensity and patchy, designed to avoid impacts to mature scenic trees.
-
- Increased predation on special-status species due to food trash attractants from project personnel could be considered a significant impact in the context of CEQA. All trash and waste items generated by crew activities shall be properly contained in a covered trash receptacle and removed from the Project area daily. This includes biodegradable items, such as apple cores and banana peels, that attract predators such as raccoons and American crows that could prey upon sensitive wildlife species.

Walt Ranch Prescribed Burn-

Location:

The property is located within a critical area for fire protection. The project area encompasses three sides of the community of Circle Oaks, a rural community with limited means of egress and extended emergency response times. Along the western portion of the project is a strategic ridge located between Highway 121 and Atlas Peak Road, which provides important opportunities for wildfire control operations. The eastern boundary of the property borders Highway 121, a critical evacuation and access route for the communities of Circle Oaks, Capell Valley, and Berryessa Highlands.

The project will occur on the following APNs: 032-480-012, 032-490-012, 032-480-022, 032-490-009, 032-180-020, 032-490-008, 032-480-008, 032-490-005, 032-480-024, 032-490-018, 032-490-015, 032-480-014, 032-490-019, 032-480-027, 032-290-016, 032-490-017, 032-490-006, 032-480-021, 032-490-013, 032-480-007, 032-480-015, 032-480-028, 032-490-010, 032-490-011, 032-120-028, 032-480-017, 032-480-023, 032-480-013, 032-480-018, 032-480-011, 032-490-019, 032-490-004, 032-490-014 and 032-490-020 located in Napa County, California (image of project boundary below). The proposed project area is largely undeveloped and rural, with limited rural residential development and access roads.

Project Description:

The projects will involve pile burning operations and use of mastication to prepare the site for broadcast burning by reducing fuel loading and creating conditions suitable for low-intensity broadcast burning. Broadcast burning will then be utilized as a land management tool to help protect communities, maintain critical access and egress routes, strengthen strategically important areas for wildfire suppression, and promote long-term forest health, rangeland improvement, and watershed resilience.

The project will involve pile burning and broadcast burning to reduce and remove accumulated dead vegetation and other hazardous fuels remaining from the 2017 Atlas Fire. These activities will help protect the rural communities of Circle Oaks, Capell Valley, Berryessa Highlands, and surrounding areas, including critical ingress and egress routes. Broadcast burning will also assist in reducing the encroachment of invasive species and promoting more resilient native plant communities. The property is located within an area of the County identified as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ), where fuel reduction treatments are essential to reducing wildfire risk and improving community safety. Use of mastication is also proposed.

BMPs:

- Use existing roads and previously disturbed areas for vehicle access.
 - Conduct mastication off existing unpaved roadways
 - Limit project disturbance; no entry into streambeds. No ignitions within established riparian zones. Fire is allowed to back into riparian buffers.
 - Conduct required botanical and nesting bird surveys based on blooming and nesting seasons and establish protective buffers where needed.
 - No heavy equipment will be used.
 - Tree removal will be limited to dead, dying, or invasive trees.
 - Living trees may be limbed to prevent fire spread into canopies during burning.
 - Heavy fuels will be piled and burned to ensure full consumption.
 - Prescribed burns will be low-intensity and patchy, designed to avoid impacts to mature scenic trees.
-
- Increased predation on special-status species due to food trash attractants from project personnel could be considered a significant impact in the context of CEQA. All trash and waste items generated by crew activities shall be properly contained in a covered trash receptacle and removed from the Project area daily. This includes biodegradable items, such as apple cores and banana peels, that attract predators such as raccoons and American crows that could prey upon sensitive wildlife species.

No Biological Resource Assessment Report was prepared for these two projects. The project areas do support local movement patterns of terrestrial wildlife species and provide food and cover resources for common wildlife species. However, the projects would not include the removal of any healthy, mature, or scenic trees. Hazardous trees (e.g., dead or dying trees) identified by Napa County Fire Department and CAL FIRE staff would be removed as well as fire-hazardous trees up to 10 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) although typically fire-hazardous trees would be less than 6 inches DBH. Downed dead trees and logs would be removed and cleared. Standing dead vegetation would be removed and cleared, leaving mature, healthy trees. Temporary effects due to noise and increased

human activity during project activities would not permanently interfere with local movement patterns of wildlife over time or affect the ability of these species to forage or reproduce. Post fire can also create snags for cavity-nesting birds and create even more viable nesting habitat. The controlled burn proposed is designed to be low-intensity which should reduce negative impacts and a Best Management Practice (BMP) has been included to require a survey of the project areas for bird active nests prior to commencing work. Additional BMPs have been included to ensure the project help ensure protection of sensitive resources. Furthermore, due to the fact that the proposed projects are not development proposals and instead involve fuel management attempting to reduce future potential wildfire risk and provide safe ingress/egress during wildfire events and according to the Napa County Fire Department and CAL FIRE these controlled burns typically help native vegetation to establish while enhancing public safety and defensibility during wildfire events, which should leave the environment in better conditions compared to pre-project.

CEQA Determination:

Pursuant to CEQA Section 15300, the proposed project would be considered Categorically Exempt based on at least two Exemption Classes. The project site is not listed on any hazardous waste sites enumerated under Government Code Section 65962.5. As a result, there is no reasonable possibility that the project will have a significant effect on the environment.

EXEMPT STATUS (CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION SECTIONS):

- Class 4 15304 (Minor Alterations to Land): Minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes.
- Class 8 15308 Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources: Actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment. Construction activities and relaxation of standards allowing environmental degradation are not included in this exemption.

FINDINGS FOR EXEMPTIONS:

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) {Section 21000, et. seq. of the California Public Resources Code}, requires analysis of agency approvals of discretionary 'projects. " A "project, „under CEQA, is defined as "the whole of an action, which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment. " The Project is defined as a project under CEQA.

Staff has reviewed the proposed project to determine the required level of review under the CEQA and has determined the project to be Categorically Exempt from the CEQA pursuant to the following CEQA Guidelines:

- The project meets the requirements of CEQA Article 19 Class 4 (Section 15304) Categorical Exemption "Minor Alterations to Land" as the project aims to utilize mechanized equipment/techniques, including "pile burning" and "broadcast burning" with minimal to no ground disturbance to manage and maintain approximately 350 acres of vertical and horizontal fire fuels in the County. Out of the 350 acres, approximately 350 acres is within the High Fire Hazard Zone (HFHZ). The managing and maintaining of vertical and horizontal fire fuels is a

common practice within communities. The project will manage and maintain fire fuels throughout the project area. This fuel reduction treatment is strategically located to improve defensible space, provide safe egress for evacuating citizens, provide safe ingress for emergency resources, protect critical infrastructure and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property from catastrophic wildfire events. Additionally, the project will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) and restoration efforts with non-invasive species to restore natural habitats and help prevent and/or reduce the amount of sediment and runoff into nearby drainages/waterways. By managing and maintaining wildfire intensity and severity, it will improve our defensible space, provide safer egress for evacuating citizens, provide safer ingress for emergency resources, and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property. Also, project activities will not result in the taking of endangered, rare, and/or threatened plant or animal species, or cause sedimentation to surface waters. The project will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs), including restoration efforts with noninvasive species to restore natural habitats and help prevent and/or reduce the amount of sediment and runoff into nearby drainages/waterways.

- The project meets the requirements of CEQA Article 19 Class 8 (Section 15308) Categorical Exemption "Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of Natural Resources" as the project consist of actions by regulatory agencies as authorized by state laws or local ordinances. The project will utilize mechanized equipment/techniques, including "pile burning" and "broadcast burning" with minimal to no ground disturbance to manage and maintain approximately 350 acres of vertical and horizontal fire fuels throughout the County. Out of the 350 acres, approximately 350 acres is within the High Fire Hazard Zone (HFHZ). The managing and maintaining of vertical and horizontal fire fuels is a common practice within communities. This fuel reduction treatment is strategically located to moderate the movement of wildfire, improve defensible space, provide safe egress for evacuating citizens, provide safe ingress for emergency resources, protect critical infrastructure, and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property from catastrophic wildfire events. The project will implement Best Management Practices (BMPs) and restoration efforts with non-invasive species to restore natural habitats and help prevent and/or reduce the amount of sediment and runoff into nearby drainages/waterways. Additionally, the referenced agencies confirmed the hazardous fuel reduction clearance is mandatory to moderate the movement of wildfire, improve defensible space, provide safe egress for evacuating citizens, provide safe ingress for emergency resources, protect critical infrastructure, adhere to PRC 4291 / local ordinances and ultimately facilitate in the protection of life and property from catastrophic wildfire events.

County staff also reviewed all potential exceptions (Section 15300.2) to the categorical exemptions and determined that no exceptions would apply: (a) because there are no project impacts and/or no cumulatively significant impacts; (b) There would be no significant effects due to unusual circumstances because the routine maintenance and/or removal of hazardous forest/fire fuels to reduce wildfire intensity/severity, including the protection of life and property from catastrophic events is a common practice in communities; (c) There would be no damage to scenic resources, historic buildings, and/or rock outcroppings; (d) The project is not located on a hazardous waste site; and (e) The project is designed to require minimal to no ground disturbance. Furthermore, there are no known special circumstances that exist which would create a reasonable possibility that the project will have a significant adverse effect on the environment. Therefore, the project meets the

criteria outlined in CEQA Guidelines Section 15304 and 15308 and would be categorically exempt from the requirements of CEQA. No further CEQA review is required.

This determination is solely based on information provided by the Napa County Fire Department and Ryan Isham, CAL FIRE Sonoma Lake Napa Unit. Should the proposed project be modified, or new evidence be presented that environmental impacts have not been fully disclosed, this determination would not be valid.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Dana Morrison at (707) 253-4437 or by e-mail at dana.morrison@countyofnapa.org.

White Ranch:



Walt Ranch:

