



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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To:
Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
[CEQA Submit](#)

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

Project Title: North Coast Wildlife Area Facilities Maintenance Project

Project Location (Del Norte County): The North Coast Wildlife Area Facilities Maintenance Project ("Project") is located in portions of Sections 5, 7 and 30 of Township 16 North, Range 1 West, and Sections 19, 30, 31, and 32 of Township 17 North, Range 1 West on the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute quadrangle maps for Crescent City, California. The latitude and longitude of the most northern work area at the Lake Earl Wildlife Area ("LEWA") is 41.847055° and -124.217757°. The latitude and longitude of the Tolowa Visitor Center well that would be replaced is 41.797984, -124.215926. The latitude and longitude of the Pebble Beach staircase (parking lot) is 41.756764, -124.221391.

Project Description: The project includes infrastructure improvements at three discrete locations owned and managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife ("CDFW"):

- Lake Earl Wildlife Area – Includes replacement of four existing water control structures ("WCS") or culverts (wooden headwalls and/or corrugated metal pipelines with risers), construction of one water crossing along a poorly drained two-track dirt trail/road, and installation of boulder barriers and signage at two beach access points to deter unauthorized motor vehicle use within sensitive dune habitats.
 - Culvert Replacement - Each culvert will be replaced in-kind (same location, same purpose) with a new culvert and pre-cast concrete riser located under a recontoured road/trail. Earthwork will largely be limited to the existing road/trail footprint where the structures are currently located, with some minor encroachment into ditches to remove sediment and debris at the inlet/outlet, and to stabilize ditch banks.
 - Water Crossing - A water crossing will be located along approximately 40 linear feet of a 6-foot wide two-track dirt road that is currently a barrier for water

conveyance across a wetland. The crossing will be comprised of Class 2 base rock, elevated approximately 6-inches above grade, to allow water to flow through/under the road. Crushed gravel will extend north and south from the crossing for 20 feet at a 1% slope to gradually match the crossing elevation to the existing road elevation. Improvements will be limited to the prism of the existing road and will not extend into the adjacent wetland habitats.

- Beach Access Boulder Barriers - Boulders and associated signage will be placed at two access points along the beach to deter the use of motor vehicles in areas where a breeding population of western snowy plover (*Anarhynchus nivosus nivosus*) occur. One series of boulders will be placed across a beach access point on the south side of Ramey Street. A second series of boulders will be placed at a beach access point on the west end of Stukey Street. Several kiosks will be placed along the boulder barriers in two locations, and will include signage describing allowed uses, the use of the beach by native wildlife, and the importance of the area to the Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation. A 14-foot-wide locking gate will also be integrated into the boulder barrier to provide limited maintenance vehicle access along the beach.

Staging areas for work at LEWA will be located in disturbed/weedy ruderal areas adjacent to a barn east and south of the most northern water control structure (WCS 1), on the north and south side of the exiting two-tract road southwest of WCS 3 and 4, and adjacent to the boulder placement areas. Construction access will be provided by existing roads. Work will require some vegetation removal at the culvert replacement locations; rare plants identified during special-status plant surveys by CDFW (2026) will be avoided. A cultural resources assessment of the project area identified no known historic or tribal resources in work areas (Helix 2025).

- Tolowa Visitor Center – Includes replacement of an existing pump and filtration system that provides potable water to the Tolowa Visitor Center. Work to replace the pump will be limited to the area associated with the well casing and surrounding concrete pad (no ground disturbance is proposed). The pump will be sized to provide the same service (capacity) as the existing pump.
- Pebble Beach Staircase – Includes improving the Pebble Beach staircase and associated public access amenities along South Pebble Beach Drive in Crescent City. Staircase improvements will include removing/replacing the concrete access at the top of the stairs; placing a new concrete overlay on the existing staircase; installing landings at the bottom of the north and south stairs; and repairing/replacing the railing along the staircase. The project will make other minor improvements to public access amenities at the site, including improving the fencing that demarcates the

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edge of the bluff; marking parking spaces and adding/signing an ADA parking location in the parking lot; replacing the existing light post and light adjacent to the parking area; and replacing interpretive panels. Staging and access will be provided at the existing parking area.

Work will require some vegetation removal along the sides of the staircase; rare plants identified during special-status plant surveys by CDFW will generally be avoided, with the exception of several Wolf's evening primrose (*Oenothera wolfii*, California Rare Plant Rank: 1B.1) that will be temporarily disturbed by work at the staircase (CDFW 2026). Impacts to native coastal bluff habitat, including Wolf's evening primrose, will be offset by invasive plant removal and native plant seeding along about 1500 square feet of coastal bluff adjacent to the staircase, and by improving the fence between the bluff edge and parking lot to both allow for focused management of native coastal bluff species and to minimize ongoing disturbance and erosion of the bluff proximate to the staircase. A cultural resources assessment completed in 2025 identified no known historic resources (including the staircase, recommended as not eligible for listing). CDFW has also coordinated with the Tolowa Dee-Ni' Nation on interpretive signage and cultural monitoring at this location.

Public Agency Approving Project: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Public Agency Carrying Out Project: CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Exempt Status:

☐ Statutory Exemption.

☒ Categorical Exemption. Type – Class 1, 2, 4, 33; California Code of Regulations, title 14, section (15301, 15302, 15304, 15333)

Reasons why project is exempt: The project meets the CEQA criteria for exemption from environmental review under Class 1 (15301) Existing Facilities; Class 2 (15302) Replacement or Reconstruction; Class 4 (15304) Minor Alterations to Land; and Class 33 (15333) Small Habitat Restoration Projects.

Class 1 consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use.

The key consideration for use of a Class 1 exemption is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of an existing use. For the project, the Class 1 exemption covers removal and in-kind replacement of culverts at LEWA; installation of the water crossing along an existing road/pedestrian path to facilitate water conveyance within a wetland;

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placement of boulders, a gate, and signage at two beach access points at LEWA (where the use of motor vehicles is already prohibited); replacement of the existing pump and filtration system that provides potable water to the Tolowa Visitor Center; and repair of the Pebble Beach staircase and improvements to other public access amenities (i.e., parking area, lighting fixture, barrier fencing). These projects improvements will not expand the existing uses of the targeted infrastructure or facilities.

Class 2 consists of replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities where the new structure will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced.

The Class 2 exemption covers removal and replacement of existing culverts at LEWA; replacement of the existing pump and filtration system that provides potable water to Tolowa Visitor Center; reconstruction of the Pebble Beach staircase; and replacement of the light fixture and fencing adjacent to the staircase access point. As noted above, none of these improvements will result in an expansion of the capacity of any infrastructure.

Class 4 consists of 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.

The Class 4 exemption covers placement of boulders, a gate, and signage at two beach access points at LEWA, which would be installed to restrict motor vehicle use into sensitive dune and beach habitats utilized by native wildlife species such as breeding populations of western snowy plover. No trees will be removed to implement those elements of the project.

Class 33 consists of projects not to exceed five acres in size to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife provided that:

- a) There would be no significant adverse impact on endangered, rare or threatened species or their habitat pursuant to section 15065.
- b) There are no hazardous materials at or around the project site that may be disturbed or removed.
- c) The project will not result in impacts that are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.

The Class 33 exemption covers all work at LEWA, including the replacement of four culverts, construction of a water crossing on an existing road/pedestrian path, and placement of boulders and signage at two beach access points to deter unauthorized motor vehicle uses in sensitive dune habitat.

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DocuSigned by:

Signature: _____ Date: 6/18/2026
Jason Roberts, Acting Regional Manager, Northern Region

Date received for filing at LCI: