NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

To: Office of Planning and Research (OPR)
P.O. Box 3044
Sacramento, CA 95812

County Clerk-Recorder,
County of Monterey
168 W. Alisal Street, 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

FILED
AUG 21 2026
XOCHITL MARINA CAMACHO
MONTEREY COUNTY CLERK
DEPUTY
2026-027

From (Public Agency):

Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District (MPRPD)
P.O. Box 223340
Carmel, CA 93922-3340

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: Mill Creek Defensible Space and Roadside Fuel Reduction (EPP Project No.: d87d0796-3deb-4464-8a09-e9cfae7f6f2b)

Project Applicant: Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District

Project Location – Specific: Mill Creek Redwood Preserve, Palo Colorado Road, Big Sur, CA 93923. Approximate center of project area: 36.370655, -121.837160. Total treatment area 37 acres.

Project Location – City: Unincorporated community of Palo Colorado, Big Sur, CA 93923

Project Location – County: Monterey

DESCRIPTION OF NATURE, PURPOSE AND BENEFICIARIES OF PROJECT

The District will conduct manual understory thinning on approximately 37 acres within the Mill Creek Redwood Preserve to reduce hazardous fuel loading in areas of dense ladder fuels and brush adjacent to Preserve infrastructure and ingress/egress routes.

Work is limited to manual treatment. Brush and ladder fuels 8 inches DBH and under will be thinned, and trees over 8 inches DBH will be retained and will be limbed or pruned to create up to 8 feet of vertical separation from the crown. Dead/dying oaks infected with SOD may be thinned regardless of size. Work will follow established SOD hygiene BMPs, and no woody material will be removed from site. Treatment will prioritize dead, diseased, and invasive material. Brush outside the tree canopy will be thinned to a functional mosaic with horizontal spacing of roughly twice the height of the brush layer in order to retain habitat and prevent type conversion. Low-growing herbaceous understory an average of 18 inches and under will be retained for erosion control and habitat. Rare and sensitive species will not be treated, and prescriptions may be reduced in sensitive habitats, including seasonal stream, areas of slide potential, culturally sensitive areas, and areas identified to support sensitive species. Timing of treatment of areas of invasive French broom (*Genista monspessulana*) may be modified to limit seed cast potential.

Cut material will be chipped in place or lopped and scattered to a depth not exceeding 4 inches in sensitive areas and not to exceed 8 inches elsewhere; large downed logs over 10 inches DBH will be laid flat and retained as habitat. Biomass left on site will be placed where it cannot enter water bodies. Equipment is limited to hand and light powered tools, 4x4 trucks, UTVs, and trailered chippers, which will remain on established roads and service road/trails. No new roads will be constructed and no significant ground disturbance will occur.

The purpose of the Project is to reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfire originating in or spreading through the Preserve, to improve emergency ingress and egress along arterial evacuation routes, and to reduce roadside ignition

risk. Beneficiaries are the residents of the Palo Colorado community and the surrounding Monterey Peninsula communities, emergency responders, users of District lands, and the habitat resources of the Preserve itself.

APPROVING AND IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District

EXEMPT STATUS (CHECK ONE)

☐ Ministerial (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(b)(1); Guidelines § 15268)

☐ Declared Emergency (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(b)(3); Guidelines § 15269(a))

☒ **Emergency Project (Pub. Resources Code § 21080(b)(4); Guidelines § 15269(b), (c))**

☐ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: _____

☐ Statutory Exemption. State code number: _____

REASONS WHY PROJECT IS EXEMPT

Under Public Resources Code section 21080(b)(4) and CEQA Guidelines section 15269(c), a specific action necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency is not subject to CEQA.

On March 1, 2025, Governor Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist within the State of California due to the catastrophic wildfire risks created by forest conditions across the state, finding under Government Code section 8558(b) that conditions of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property exist as a result of those conditions. Paragraph 2 of the Proclamation suspends state statutes, rules, regulations, and requirements within the jurisdiction of the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) and the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) — expressly including CEQA, Public Resources Code sections 21000 et seq. — to the extent necessary for expediting critical fuels reduction projects. Executive Order N-38-25, signed December 31, 2025, extended the Proclamation. Under the Proclamation, only projects submitted by May 1, 2026 are eligible for a secretarial suspension authorization.

Under the Proclamation, a critical fuels reduction project may proceed under the suspension where (1) it includes as a primary objective at least one of the activities listed in Paragraph 4 of the Proclamation; (2) the appropriate Agency Secretary, or the Secretary's designee, has determined that the project is eligible to be conducted under the suspension (Paragraph 3); and (3) the project is carried out in accordance with the Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan (EPP) (Paragraph 5).

The Project satisfies each condition:

1. Primary objectives. The Project has as primary objectives the removal of hazardous, dead, and/or dying trees; the removal of vegetation for the creation of strategic fuel breaks as identified by approved fire prevention plans; the removal of vegetation for community defensible space; the removal of vegetation along roadways for the creation of safer ingress and egress routes for the public and responders and to reduce roadside ignitions; and the maintenance of previously established fuel breaks or fuels modification projects — Paragraph 4(a), (b), (c), (d), and (f) of the Proclamation.

2. Secretarial suspension authorization. CalEPA issued a Secretarial Suspension Authorization for the Project on July 16, 2026, signed by Alana Mathews, Deputy Secretary for Law Enforcement and General Counsel, as designee of the Secretary for Environmental Protection. CNRA issued its Secretarial Suspension Authorization on July 17, 2026, signed by Keali'i Bright, Undersecretary, as designee of the Secretary for Natural Resources. Both authorizations find that the Project was submitted by May 1, 2026, that it has a permissible primary objective, and that issuance serves the purpose of expediting critical fuels reduction activities while protecting public health and the environment. The CNRA authorization expressly suspends Public Resources Code sections 21000–21189.91 (CEQA) and all implementing regulations as to the Project.

3. Environmental Protection Plan. The Project will be conducted in conformance with the Statewide Fuels Reduction Environmental Protection Plan (EPP), as required by the Secretarial Suspension Authorizations.

Consistent with the EPP, the Project involves manual treatment only, no new road construction, no watercourse crossings, and no significant ground disturbance. District staff have reviewed the Project and identified no circumstances that would preclude reliance on this exemption.

The suspension applies only to state statutes, rules, and regulations. The District will comply with all applicable local and federal requirements, including the federal Endangered Species Act as to any federally listed species, for which the District will coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Documentation supporting this determination — the Proclamation, Executive Order N-38-25, the EPP, the District's suspension application and project maps, the CalEPA and CNRA Secretarial Suspension Authorizations, and the CDFW Biological Resources Advisories — is on file with the District's Planning and Conservation Management Department at 4860 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel, CA 93923 and is available for public review. Project details may also be found online at the CalEPA/CNRA/CALFIRE Request to Suspend State Statutes and Regulations Application and Dashboard (https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/44774e7d2cb1438ca901a38793e2fdec/page/Approved-Projects-Dashboard).

LEAD AGENCY CONTACT

Contact Person: Jake Smith, Planning & Conservation Program Manager

Telephone: 831-372-3196 x116

Email: jsmith@mprpd.org

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

Not applicable. The District is both the public agency approving the Project and the agency carrying it out.

Eric Morgan 08-21-2026

Signature Date

Print Name and Title: Eric Morgan, General Manager

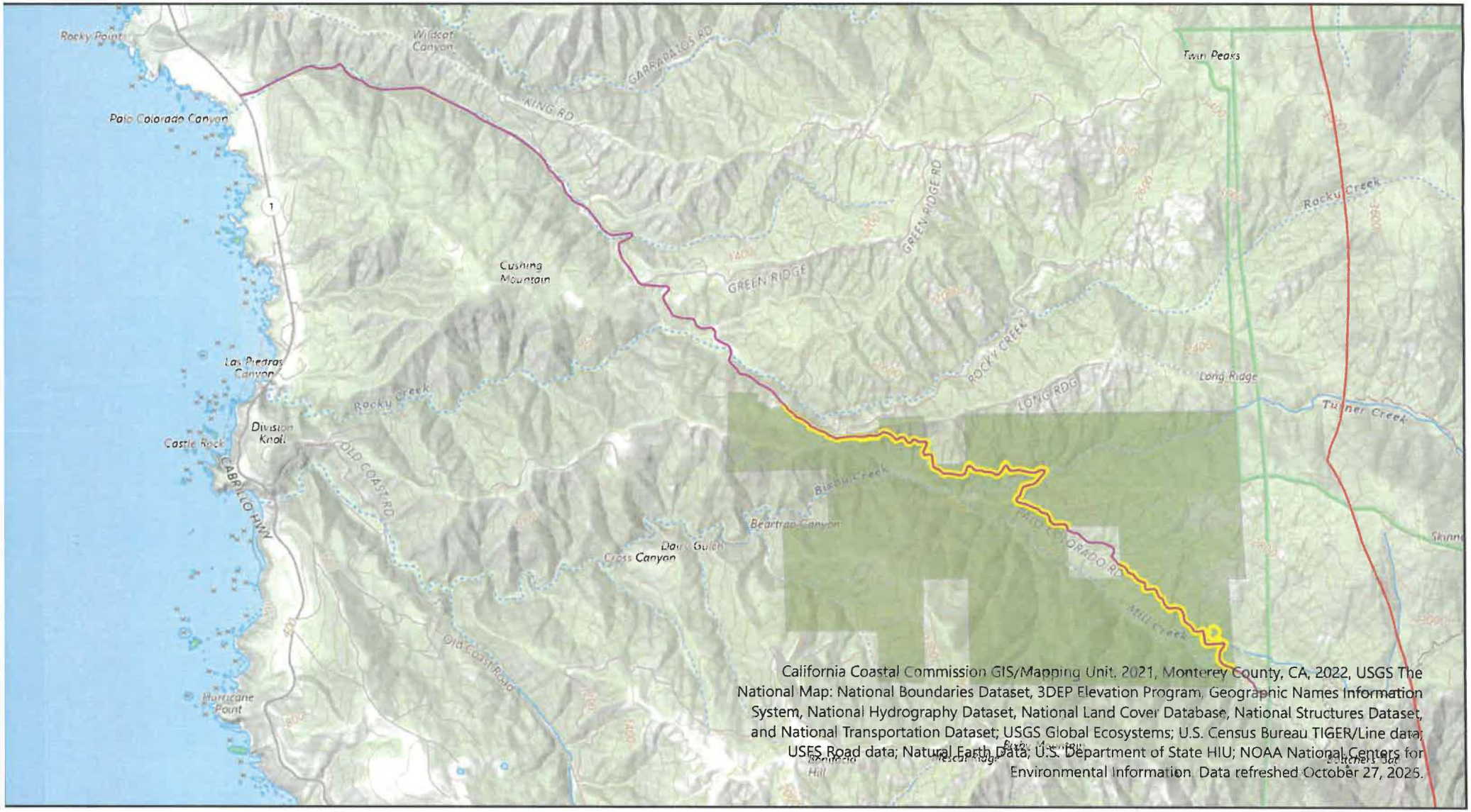
☒ Signed by Lead Agency ☐ Signed by Applicant

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

Date Received for Filing: _____

Mill Creek Defensible Space and Roadside Fuels Reduction

Upper Right: 121°48'6"W 36°24'20"N



Legend

- Fuels Treatment Boundary
- Coastal_Zone_Boundary
- MPRPD_LandHoldings
- Access_Palo Colorado Road

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

N

Author: Joshua Carpenter

Copy Write: 2026 MPRPD