Notice of Determination

To: ☒ Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, 1400 Tenth St. Room 222
Sacramento, Ca. 95812-3044

☒ Tuolumne County Clerk
2 South Green St.
Sonora, Ca. 95370

From: Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District
81 N. Washington St. STE B
PO Box 4394
Sonora, Ca. 95370

Subject: Filing of Notice of Determination
In Compliance with Section 21108 0r 21152 of the Public Resources Code.

State Clearinghouse Number: 2019012052
CalVTP ID Number: 2026-01

Project Title: Big Hill-Lyons Bald Mountain Fuels Management Project

The Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) is proposing the Big Hill-Lyons Fuels Management Project in portions of the Peppermint Creek-Woods Creek, Lower South Fork Stanislaus River, and Sullivan Creek watersheds near the communities along Big Hill Road and adjacent to Sonora, Phoenix Lake, Quail Ridge Ranch, Comstock Ranch and Cedar Ridge in Tuolumne County. Treatment types and activities will occur on up to an eventual 14,856 acres. This acreage includes some areas that may not end up being treated for lack of landowner acceptance and funding and contractor availability or site specific conditions such as steep slopes, economic feasibility or site specific concerns (e.g. cultural sites or sensitive species).

Proposed Treatments:

The CalVTP treatment types that may be implemented are WUI Fuels Reduction and Shaded Fuel breaks for both initial and maintenance treatment cycles. The proposed CalVTP treatment activities for both initial and maintenance treatments may include mechanical and manual treatments, prescribed herbivory, herbicide application and prescribed burning including both broadcast burning and the burning of piles.

Project Location: The project area is located in Township 2 North, Range 14 East in portions of Sections 12 and 25; Township 2 North, Range 15 East in portions of Sections 1 through 24 and 26 through 34; Township 2 North, Range 16 East in portions of Sections 6, 7, and 18, Township 3N, Range 15 East, portion of section 36 in the Mount Diablo Base Meridian. The project is primarily located in the Columbia SE Quadrangle with some slight overlap in the Columbia, Sonora, and Standard Quadrangles. The project area is accessed by Big Hill Road, Lyons- Bald Mountain Road, Phoenix Lake Road, Kewin Mill Road and Sawmill Flat Road.

Project Description: The goal of the Big Hill-Lyons Fuels Management Project is to reduce the risk of wildland fire to land adjacent to portions of the Phoenix Lake, Quail Ridge Ranch, Comstock Ranch,

Cedar Ridge and Big Hill communities, residences along Lyons Bald Mountain Road and the City of Sonora by decreasing the amount and continuity of hazardous fuel loading in the wildland urban interface (WUI) and creating strategic shaded fuel breaks along major ingress and egress routes. These vegetation treatment types and activities are intended to create conditions that will minimize fire behavior and to create a mosaic condition that is more resistant to stand replacing type fires. Of the 14,856 acres in the project area, 14,523 acres are located in the CalVTP Treatable Landscape and 333 acres are outside of, but adjacent to, the mapped Treatable Landscape. The acres outside of the Treatable Landscape have similar topographic, environmental, and vegetative conditions that are essentially the same to those acres within the Treatable Landscape.

This project ranges from 2,200 feet to 5,000 feet in elevation and contains varying aspects and topography with slopes ranging from less than 10% to over 60%. The vegetation types in this project would best be described as tree and shrub with overstory species consisting primarily of interior live oak, California gray pine, valley oak, California black oak, blue oak, ponderosa pine and incense cedars and understory species consisting of manzanita, chamise, poison oak, toyon, yerba santa and ceanothus.

Initial and Maintenance Treatments

The treatment types that may be implemented are shaded fuel breaks and wildland urban interface (WUI) fuel reduction. The shaded fuel breaks were strategically located along roadsides that provide critical ingress and egress routes for residents and emergency personnel and would have a maximum width of 300 feet. WUI fuel reduction areas were determined to be the locations where the proximity of private property and high fuel loads were very close and posed a high likelihood that a fire that started in one location could impact the other. Generally, brush vegetation and smaller trees would be removed and thinned in a mosaic pattern to reduce ladder fuels and canopy connectivity while still maintaining patches of vegetation throughout the project area to enhance habitat quality. Larger trees would be retained to try and shade out shrub regeneration.

The proposed treatment activities for both initial and maintenance treatments may consist of mechanical treatment, manual treatment, prescribed herbivory, herbicide application and prescribed burning (broadcast and piles).

Mechanical treatment will often be utilized in both initial and maintenance treatment phases based on current vegetation loads, site conditions, economic factors, and different landowner preferences. The entire Big Hill area is covered in dense stands of vegetation and will benefit from the controlled break up of vegetation that mechanical treatments may provide over other methods when in proximity of private property (like in the WUI), along roadways, and near sensitive areas. Mechanical treatment will occur over the primary area of the project (up to 14,447 acres) and consist of uprooting vegetation or masticating and chipping material to a specified maximum length and depth and dozer piling. Masticators, skid steers, dozers, excavators, brush rakes, chippers, and equipment operators will be used during implementation with crew sizes anticipated to be between one and 60 crew members. Up to five crews could be conducting treatments simultaneously across the project area. Slash disposal will be distributed across the landscape or piled for burning. Some biomass removal off site may occur.

The project has several areas that are too steep or deemed to be more sensitive (like WLPZs) that preclude the effective use of mechanical treatment. As such, manual treatment may be utilized in order to cut, clear, and prune vegetation. Manual treatment will consist of hand crews thinning or pruning vegetation with chain saws, and either lop and scattering, chipping, or piling (for burning) the material. Manual treatment is expected to occur year round (up to 14,447 acres) weather permitting, unless precluded by a sensitive species.

Prescribed burning may consist of pile burning (up to 11,182 acres) or broadcast burning (up to 14,856 acres). This method of vegetation management is intended to manage fuel loading by reducing the amount of cut material left on the landscape after mechanical and manual treatments and allows for fuel removal in areas that are harder to access by other methods (like rock outcrops). Generally, pile burning may be used as a complement to initial mechanical and manual treatments, while broadcast burning would be more of a maintenance option. Broadcast burning reintroduces fire back to the landscape and more closely mimics the natural fire regime of the area. Prescribed burning will generally occur after manual and mechanical treatments have been completed to allow for appropriate fuel loads, time to dry piled material, and favorable weather conditions, likely late fall to early spring.

Prescribed herbivory may be used as an initial treatment in areas that preclude the effective use of other methods; however, it is generally proposed as a maintenance treatment expected to occur at least 1 year after initial treatments depending on vegetation regeneration and the availability of funding and contractors. Prescribed herbivory will be used to slow the regeneration of understory shrubs and maintain low fuel loads utilizing goats, cattle, or sheep. It could occur on up to 13,478 acres in the project area during the appropriate window for the species being targeted, unless precluded by a sensitive species or area.

Herbicide application may be used as an initial treatment in areas that preclude the effective use of other methods; however, it is generally proposed as a maintenance treatment expected to occur at least 1 year after initial treatments depending on vegetation regeneration and the availability of funding and contractors. Herbicide application may include any of the 10 listed herbicides analyzed in the PEIR depending on the primary species that regrows within the project area.

This Notice of Determination is to advise that the Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District (☒ Lead Agency or ☐ Responsible Agency) has approved the above described project on _10/21/2026__ and has made the following determinations regarding the PSA:

1. The project (☒ will ☐ will not) have a significant effect on the environment.
2. The Big Hill-Lyons Fuels Management Project Specific Analysis and Addendum to the CalVTP Program EIR, CalVTP ID #2026-01 was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.
3. The CalVPT Program EIR sufficiently analyzes and addresses potential environmental impacts from the project and the project will not trigger any of the criteria requiring additional CEQA review pursuant to the CEQA Guidelines Section 15162. The project will not result in new significant impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of the significant environmental impacts identified in the CalVPT Program EIR. The proposed project is within the scope of the CalVPT Program EIR consistent with the CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(c)(2) as documented in the PSA.
4. Mitigation measures and standard project requirements from the CalVPT Program EIR were made a condition of the approval of the project. No new project specific mitigation measures are required.
5. The implementation of applicable CalVTP Program EIR mitigation measures and standard project requirements will be monitored and reported pursuant to the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program that was adopted for this project.
6. The previous statement of overriding considerations in the CalVTP Program EIR was reaffirmed and adopted for this project by the Tuolumne County Resource Conservation District.
7. Findings were made pursuant to the provisions of State CEQA Guidelines Section 15091.

This is to certify that the Big Hill-Lyons Fuels Management Project PSA and Addendum and record of project approval are available to the general public. The custodian of these documents is Frank Lewicki, District Forester-RPF #2559. Please contact Frank Lewicki at frank@tcrcd.org or 530-557-9632 to arrange document viewing. The document can also be found on the TCRCD website at: https://www.tcrcd.org/.

Signature:

Lindsay Mattos

Title: District Manager

Date: 10/29/2026

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

Authority cited: Sections 21083, Public Resources Code. Reference Section 21000-21174, Public Resources Code.