

Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Case Mountain Fire Fuel Reduction Project, Tulare County, California

JUNE 2021

PREPARED FOR
Tulare County Resources Conservation District

PREPARED BY
SWCA Environmental Consultants

**INITIAL STUDY/MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION
FOR THE
CASE MOUNTAIN FIRE FUEL REDUCTION PROJECT,
TULARE COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

Prepared for

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1 INTRODUCTION

California has experienced unprecedented tree mortality due to years of drought, overly dense forests, and the invasion of bark beetles. Decades of fire suppression and decreased vegetation management have led to natural overstocking of fuels, which threaten forest stands as competition and stress leads to die off. Additionally, drought conditions have allowed invasion of bark beetles and pathogen attack, which cause rapid mortality throughout forest stands. Historical logging practices and livestock grazing have also contributed to poor forest health throughout California, especially along the western slopes of the southern Sierra Nevada. Current forest conditions, including tree mortality and overly dense stands, increase the risk of high heat and crowning during wildfire events, which could result in catastrophic damage to the landscape and within the wildland–urban interface (WUI). Additionally, dead trees along roadways pose a threat to the public traveling on those roads. Giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) stands within the Case Mountain area are of high environmental value and are at risk of high-intensity wildfires caused by poor forest conditions. Without active vegetation management within the Case Mountain area, poor forest health and high-intensity fire could result in the loss of giant sequoia stands.

1.1 Project Location

The Tulare County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) proposes to implement fire fuel reduction activities on approximately 1,100 acres of land within the Case Mountain area, located in unincorporated Tulare County, California (project) (Figure 1). The project area is located approximately 6 miles east of the community of Three Rivers, approximately 3 miles west of Sequoia National Park, and 30 miles east of Visalia.

1.2 Existing Conditions

Existing land uses within the Case Mountain area consist of public recreational land, grazing land, and a timber production zone. The project area consists of private forested land within the Case Mountain area and is not accessible to the public. The project area is currently undeveloped with the exception of unpaved skid trails from previous logging practices. The project area has been previously disturbed by livestock grazing and logging activities.

1.3 Project Objectives

The TCRCD proposes to implement various vegetation and fuels treatment activities on approximately 1,100 acres of land over a 10-year period in the Case Mountain area to maintain a forest structure that would decrease the risk for catastrophic wildfire, reduce road hazards associated with dead trees, and promote the survival and growth of giant sequoia stands. The objective of the proposed project is to protect large legacy sequoia trees from high-intensity wildfire, restore a more diverse and resilient forest structure, return the role of fire to the ecosystem, and protect the public from road and wildland fire hazards within the Case Mountain area.

1.4 Project Description

The TCRCD proposes to implement vegetation and fuels treatment activities on approximately 1,100 acres of land using a phased approach over a 10-year period in the Case Mountain area. The vegetation and fuels treatment activities would be conducted within three phases over a 10-year period, with activities generally occurring during between May 15 and November 15.

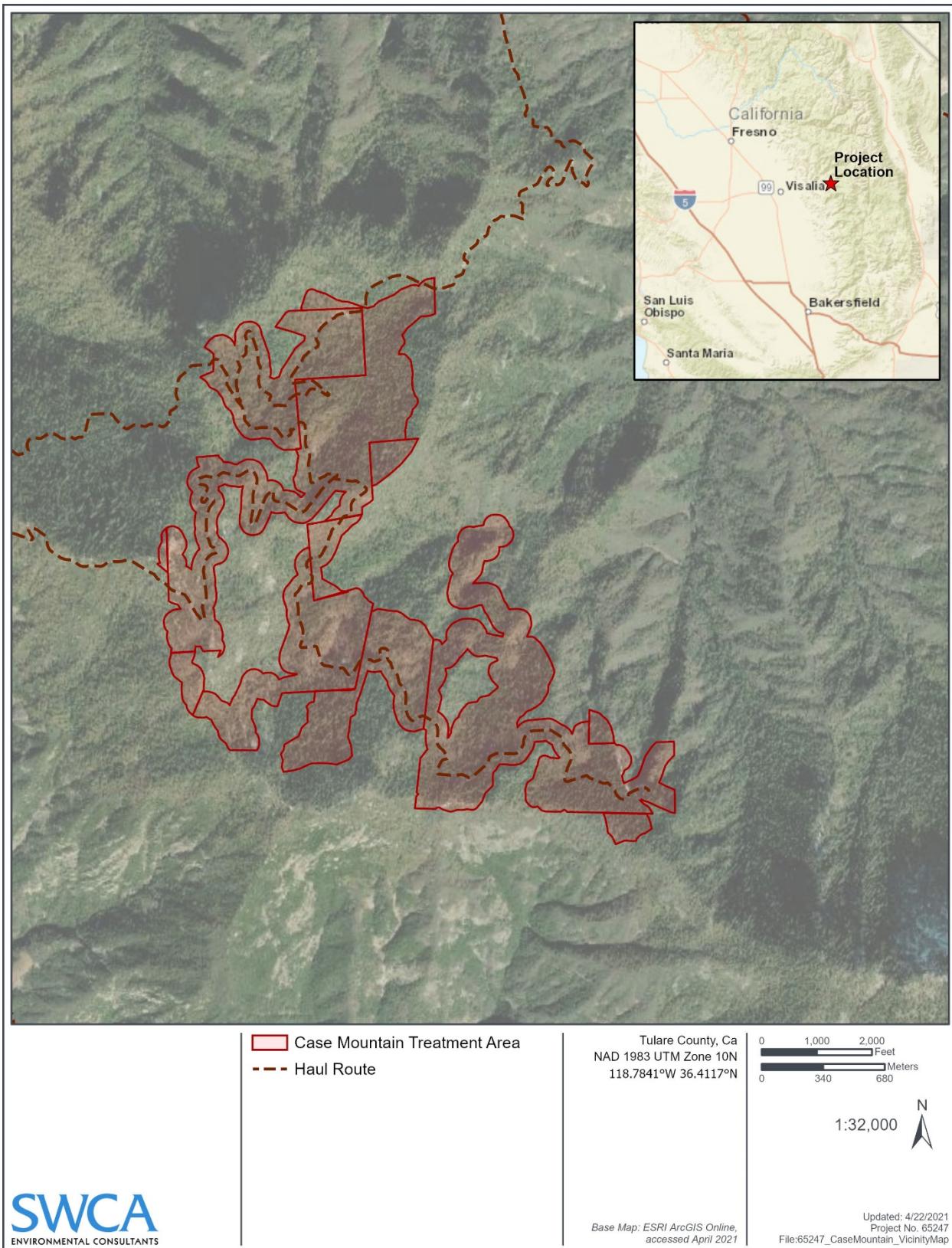


Figure 1. Project location map.

Prior to implementation of fuel treatment activities, each treatment area would be reviewed by the TCRCD for its potential fire risk, hazard, and values at risk, and treated accordingly. Proposed vegetation and fuels treatment activities are anticipated to include removal of hazardous trees, tree thinning within 200 feet of roadways, thinning of sequoia groves, and thinning understory trees and brush (Figure 2). Fuel disposal methods would predominantly include masticating, as well as piling and burning, chipping, and underburning. Where fuel hazard is determined to be low, no fuel hazard reduction treatment would be required. The overall objective would be to return fuel loading and arrangement to be consistent with a low- and mixed-severity fire regime. Fuel treatment and disposal methods proposed for each phase of treatment are described below.

1.4.1 Phase 1: Hazardous Tree Removal and Roadside Thinning

During Phase 1, hazardous trees would be removed within 200 feet of access roads within the project area. Hazardous trees include dead and dying trees that increase the risk for high-intensity wildfire. Green (living) trees within 200 feet of roads would be thinned to reduce fuels within the mid-story of sequoia groves. Hazardous tree removal and roadside thinning would be a priority to create a thinned fuel break to protect against wildfire and reduce risk of falling trees within public roads. Trees would be removed through ground-based or cable-based extraction, as follows:

- **Ground-Based Extraction:** In areas with less than 35 percent slope, woody biomass may be left in place and would be treated by lop and scatter, pile and burn, chipping, or mastication. Saw log material created from thinning activities would be cut, skidded, hauled, or chipped to landings or roadsides using low ground pressure machinery. Skidding equipment would be approximately 10 feet wide. Existing skid trails would be used for project activities and are approximately 12 feet wide. Skid trail locations are approximately 150 feet apart but may vary based on terrain.
- **Cable-Based Extraction:** On slopes greater than 35 percent, woody biomass may be left in place and would be treated by lop and scatter, pile and burn, chipping, or mastication. Saw log material created from thinning activities would be yarded to landings or roadsides. Cable yarding drags trees with one end suspended and the other on the ground. Typical corridors used for cable yarding would be less than 15 feet wide, depending on the size of trees to be removed and the terrain. Cable yarding corridors would be a minimum of 150 feet apart. In riparian areas, cable corridors would have a maximum clearing width of 12 feet and spaced a minimum of 150 feet apart. Full suspension would be required for logs yarded through riparian areas.
- **Disposal Methods:** Methods include piling and burning, masticating, chipping, or underburning. Fuel materials are not anticipated to be hauled to a local waste facility; however, some sawlogs generated by the project may be sold to the Terra Bella mill (Sierra Forest Products), located approximately 35 miles southwest from the project area.

1.4.2 Phase 2: Sequoia Grove Thinning

During Phase 2, the mid-story of sequoia groves would be thinned to reduce fuel load around legacy sequoia trees. Post-treatment canopy closure of mature stands would be greater than 60%.

- Young and mid-sized stands less than 21 inches diameter at breast height (dbh) would be extensively thinned to promote growth of smaller trees to create open stands. Thinning of small trees would require the use of chainsaws, wheeled and tracked chippers, skid steer-mounted masticators, and excavator-mounted masticators.

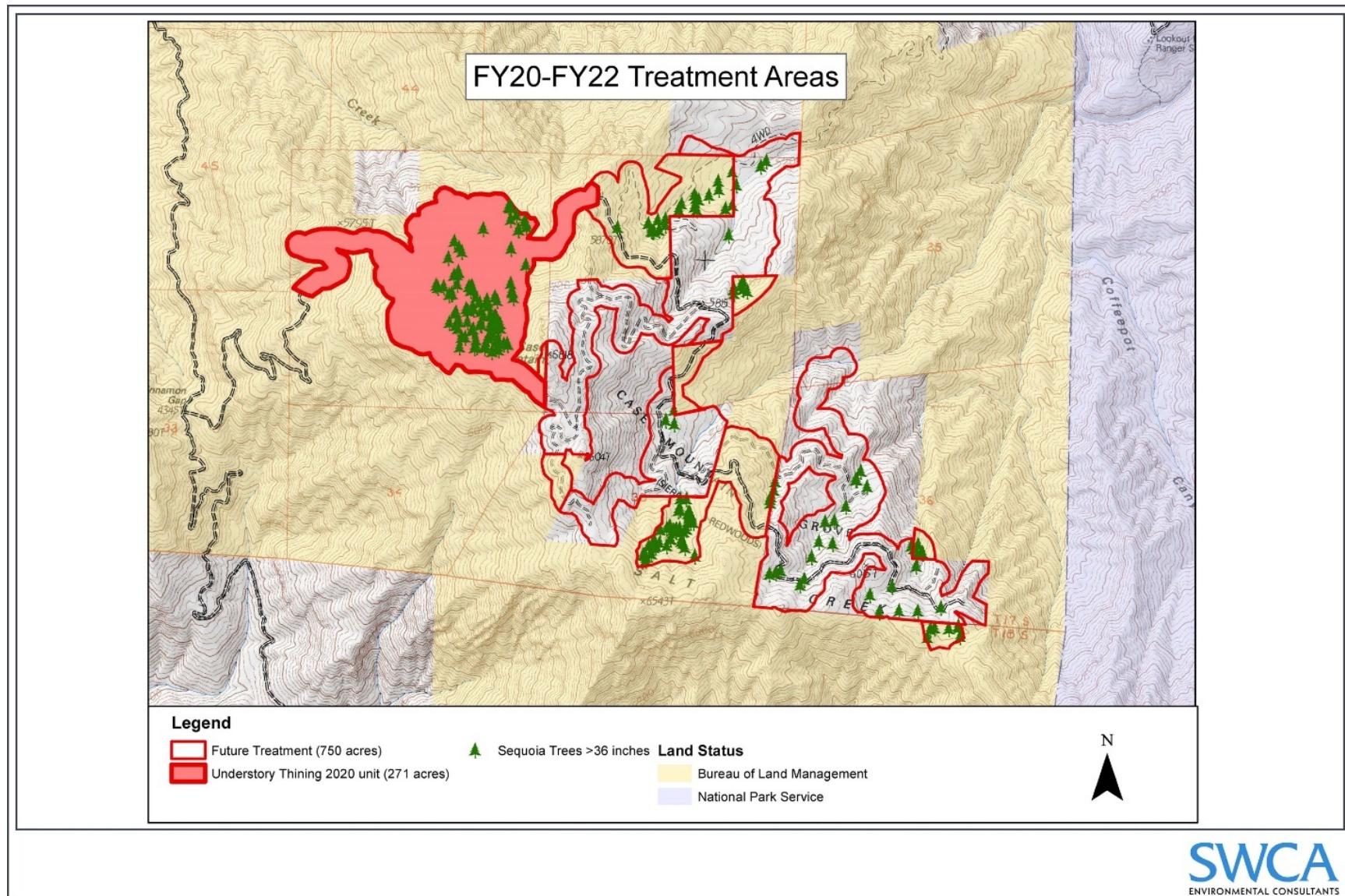


Figure 2. Proposed treatment map.

- Mature stands greater than 21 inches dbh would be lightly thinned to protect the large overstory tree layer from stand-replacing fire. Maximum tree size to be removed would be determined by biological surveys for threatened and endangered species. Commercial thinning would require the use of standard logging equipment, which includes dozers, rubber-tired skidders, tracked feller bunchers, and potentially the use of yarders. Additionally, commercial thinning could result in the use of up to four logging trucks per day.
- Tree-thinning activities also include the removal of small and mid-sized trees within 50 to 100 feet of legacy sequoia tree trunks in order to remove trees that are in direct competition with legacy sequoia trees.
- Disposal methods include piling and burning, masticating, chipping, and underburning.
- Thinning of commercial-sized trees would require the preparation of a Timber Harvest Plan (THP) by a Registered Professional Forester (RPF) to be overseen by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). All harvesting operations would be conducted in compliance with the California Forest Practice Rules.

Phase 1 and Phase 2 project activities would require approximately three crew rigs, which can carry approximately 36 to 42 crew members total, to access the project site and conduct proposed work. Crews would access the project site from Salt Creek Road (Figure 3) and may generate up to 10 trips per day. Heavy equipment would be stored on existing landings within the project area.

1.4.3 *Phase 3: Fuels Reduction*

During Phase 3, in areas with less than 40 percent slope, a low ground pressure masticator would be used to thin small understory trees and brush to decrease fuel loads or rearrange ladder and surface fuels that contribute to high-intensity wildfire. In other areas, the small trees and brush would be piled by hand and burned, when smoke and weather is conducive to the consumption of the piles. Underburns would occur throughout the duration of the project following the collection of enough understory vegetation to facilitate a cool, backing fire that would target the consumption of fine fuels on the forest floor. Burning would generally occur from November 15 to June 30, dependent on fuel moisture and weather.

- **Hand Piling and Burning:** Woody material, such as limbs, stems, cut boles, and other slash that are 1 to 6 inches in diameter and greater than 2 feet in length, would be placed in piles and covered with polyethylene plastic or alternate material. Pile size would be a maximum of 8 feet in diameter and 8 feet in height. Piles would be placed outside of the drip lines of leaved trees and away from large logs or stumps. Hand piles within riparian areas would be burned in a manner that would reduce or avoid potential hazardous effects to the area. Piles would be burned during the first wet season after they have cured or dried when the risk of fire spread (scorch or mortality) to nearby residual trees and shrubs is minimized, and environmental and air quality conditions are conducive to burning.
- **Understory Burning:** Understory burning is used to reduce the density of dead and down woody material, shrubs, and small trees in the understory. In addition, it is used to reduce living and dead branches close to the ground. This results in a low-to-moderate-intensity ground fire that consumes surface fuel but not the canopy. Flames are generally less than 4 feet in height. Fire is applied by lighting strips of fire perpendicular to the slope at predetermined widths based on fuel loading and moisture content. Understory burning is conducted primarily during the spring and fall months when fuel, weather, and soil conditions permit. Low-intensity understory burning following the initial fuel reduction helps to maintain desired fuel conditions.

Proposed fuel reduction activities could require up to 10 trucks for crew transportation, service trucks, fuel trucks, etc.

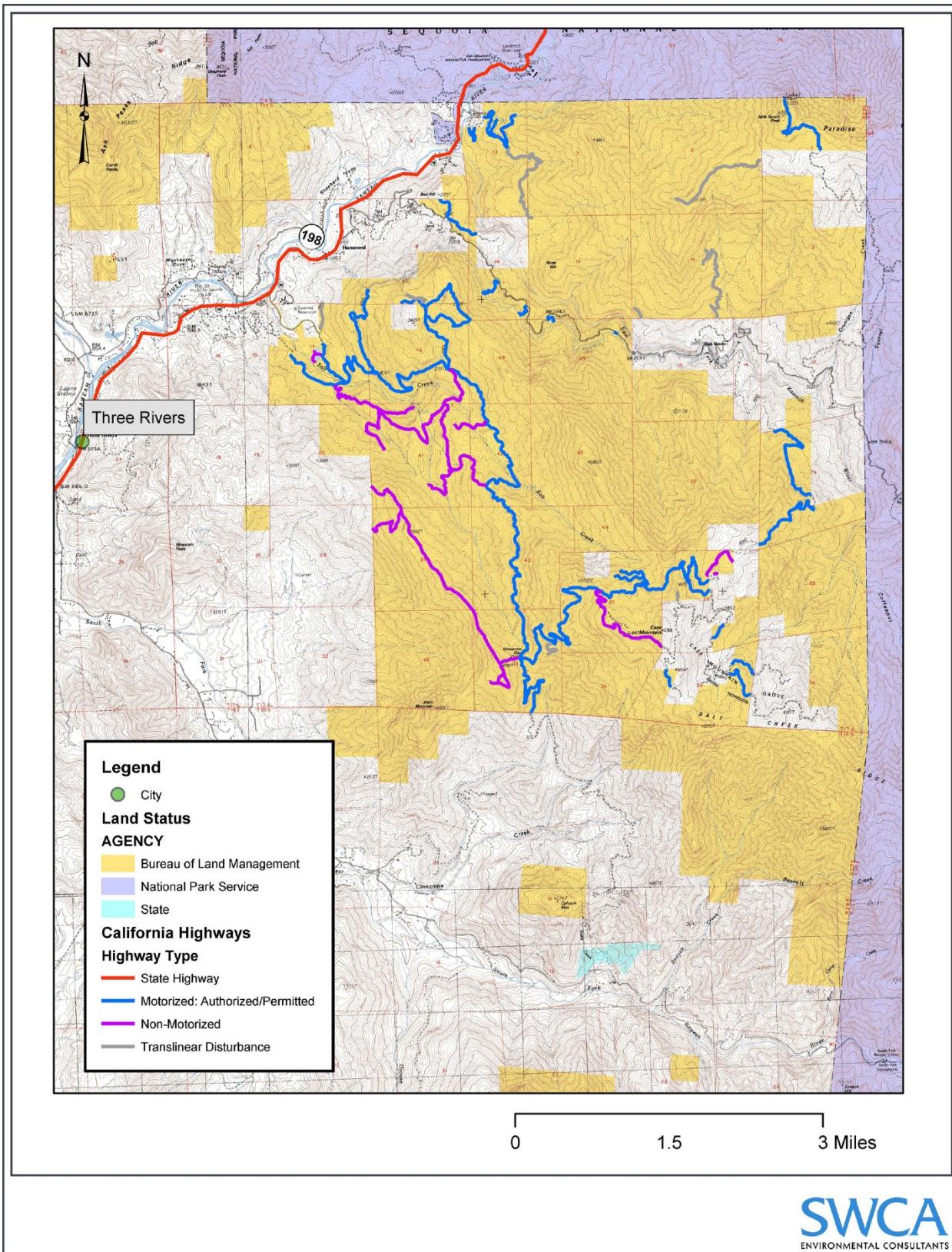


Figure 3. Haul routes map.

1.4.4 Transportation and Hauling Routes

The project does not propose the construction of new access routes, hauling corridors, or landings. Access routes, hauling corridors, and landings from previous logging activities in the Case Mountain area would be utilized for proposed fuel reduction activities. Existing transportation routes and hauling corridors proposed for use during implementation of project activities are shown on Figure 3.

1.4.5 Access

Project activities would be conducted on private lands within the Case Mountain Area. The TCRCD is coordinating with three private landowners that transect the project area for access to proposed treatment areas. The project area is not accessible to the public.

1.4.6 Project Design Features

The project includes the following design features to identify and avoid potential adverse impacts to aesthetic resources, agricultural resources, biological resources, cultural resources, hazards, soils, and water quality and riparian areas. These design features would be implemented prior to and during implementation of the proposed fuel reduction activities.

AESTHETIC RESOURCES

- No equipment would be parked or stored on portions of the road that can be viewed from surrounding public land.

AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

- All project workers or contractors would be informed of the possible presence of livestock within the project area, instructed to use caution when passing livestock on or adjacent to roadways, and instructed on the importance of preventing livestock from inadvertently straying beyond containment fences.
- All gates would be left open or closed as found after each use.
- Project vehicles would be required to yield to livestock on or adjacent to all roadways.

AIR QUALITY

- Prescribed fuel management activities that require burning would be required to conform with the California Air Resources Board (CARB) *Smoke Management Guidelines for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning* (CARB 2001) and be conducted during “permissive-burn” days as defined by the CARB.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

- The TCRCD would retain a qualified biologist or other qualified professional (RPF or Certified Rangeland Manager [CRM]) prior to implementation of any fuel reduction activities.
- Prior to implementation of any fuel reduction activities, the TCRCD would ensure pre-disturbance botanical surveys are conducted during the appropriate blooming period to identify locations of special-status plant species.

- The project would not be implemented within any areas without surveying the affected area for sensitive biological resources. In addition to surveys, existing resource inventories performed for the old growth giant sequoia would be used to characterize and monitor habitat.
- Prior to implementation of any fuel reduction activities, the TCRCD would ensure pre-disturbance nesting bird surveys are conducted during the nesting bird season (February 1–August 31) to identify locations of nest sites.
- Work activities (such as tree felling, yarding, hauling on roads not generally used by the public, and prescribed fire) would not be permitted within specified minimum distances up to 0.25 mile of any nest site or activity center of known pairs and resident singles between February 1 and August 31 (or until 2 weeks after the fledging period), unless nesting bird surveys have determined the activity center to be not occupied, non-nesting, or failed in their nesting attempt. March 1–June 30 is considered the critical early nesting period; the restricted season may be extended during the year of harvest, based on site-specific knowledge (such as a late or recycle nesting attempt). The buffer distance to the prescribed area may be modified by the project biologist or other qualified professional based on topographic features or other site-specific information. Buffer distance for prescribed fire may be reduced if substantial smoke from prescribed fire would not enter the nest stand. The restricted area is calculated as a radius from the assumed nest site (point).
- Fuel management activities, such as fuel reduction treatments and removal of ladder fuels, would focus only on small trees and should not remove any canopy cover, larger trees, large snags, large down logs, or any other activities that may substantially alter the appearance and structure of the area's natural landscape, which serves as valuable habitat for the Pacific fisher (*Pekania pennanti*) and California spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*). Pacific fisher and California spotted owl are particularly sensitive to vegetation thinning and reductions in canopy cover, forest density, the number of snags, and large downed logs.
- The following methods would be implemented to preserve habitat to support populations of Pacific fisher and California spotted owls (BLM 2020):
 - Retain all live trees greater than 12 inches dbh for the Pacific fisher, except during commercial harvesting operations;
 - Maintain high canopy cover;
 - Retain 60% canopy cover or greater in nesting, roosting, and foraging (NRF) habitat in spotted owl habitat.
 - Retain 40% canopy cover or greater in dispersal spotted owl habitat, and at least 60 % in NRF habitat within the riparian areas.
 - Retain or manage for abundant large snags;
 - Pacific fishers need a minimum 31-square-foot basal area of large snags over 12-inch dbh (Purcell et al. 2009);
 - California spotted owls need a minimum 20-square-foot basal area of snags or six to eight large snags per acre over 15-inch dbh) (Verner et al. 1992);
 - Ensure that the rate of implementation of biomass removal and prescribed burning does not exceed the recommendations in Zielinsky et al. 2013;
 - Consider the recommendations in the Southern Sierra Nevada Fisher Conservation Strategy (2016) and Interim Management Recommendation (2017) (BLM 2020);
 - Ensure there are abundant large down logs for Pacific fisher habitat; if larger snags or ladder fuels must be felled, a 31-square-foot basal area of large snags over 12-inch dbh should be left for fisher habitat. Consider habitat, denning, and nesting improvement, such as installing dry culverts under roadways, where appropriate.

- Retain large diameter (greater than 21 inches in diameter) tree species that exhibit fire-resilient characteristics, such as thickened, furrowed bark, and well-developed crowns.
 - Retain residual trees (trees from existing older stands) sufficient to maintain current California spotted owl habitat classification and continued stand improvement as spotted owl habitat.
 - Avoid degrading treatments within NRF habitat.
 - Maintain the primary constituent elements in spotted owl Critical Habitat Units that support feeding, breeding, sheltering, and dispersing of spotted owls by retaining key characteristics of the habitat (e.g., large snags, coarse woody debris).
- Special-status plant sites, including sites containing Kaweah monkey flower (*Mimulus norrisii*), identified through pre-disturbance surveys, shall be managed to maintain or restore populations and habitat consistent with species conservation needs. Protection measures would be determined on a site-by-site basis and would take into consideration the species and its habitat requirements, the proposed treatment, management recommendations if available, and current environmental conditions at the site.
- The following methods would be implemented to manage habitat to support other wildlife species:
 - Ground-disturbing heavy equipment would not be permitted around areas of western pond turtle (*Emys marmorata*) nesting habitat identified during pre-disturbance surveys.
 - Buffer distances would be determined by the project biologist or other qualified professional based on microsite conditions.
 - Manual fuel treatment methods could be employed within these buffers, although no slash piling would be permitted.
 - Snags greater than 20 inches dbh would be protected by pulling duff and slash back from the base prior to underburning.
 - Non-hazardous snags would be retained in all harvest units for wildlife habitat as determined by the qualified biologist or other qualified professional.
 - Within riparian areas, riparian tree species would be retained as necessary to ensure the diversity of the stand. Activities in this area would be designed to ensure that habitat conditions for the wildlife and plant species within riparian areas are not degraded.
 - Approximately 10–20% of each fuel treatment unit greater than 10 acres would remain untreated. The no treatment areas should be 0.25 to 1 acre or larger if they are linked to other no treatment areas designated for other resource concerns.
 - All chainsaw use, heavy equipment use, and prescribed burning would be restricted within up to 0.25-mile no line of site and 0.5-mile line of site around active bald or golden eagle nest sites, from January 1 to August 15, depending on nesting chronology.
- The following measures would be implemented to avoid the spread of invasive weeds:
 - The project areas would be surveyed for noxious weeds and treated prior to project implementation as time and funding are available. Noxious weed treatment areas would be monitored and retreated, as necessary.
 - Weed-free gravel and fill dirt would be used for road work to the extent feasible. Rock quarries and storage areas that would supply gravel or fill dirt would also be surveyed for noxious weeds.
 - Equipment that would be driven off system roads would be washed prior to entry into project areas to remove mud, dirt, and plant parts to reduce the risk of introducing or spreading noxious weeds.

- If necessary, native seed and certified weed-free mulch would be applied to skyline-cable yarding corridors where yarding has resulted in removal of vegetation and exposure of bare soils.
- If necessary, skid trails would be ripped, seeded, and mulched during the same season after use with native seed and certified weed-free mulch.
- In units containing noxious weed populations, burn-pile scars and exposed soil of underburned areas would be seeded with site-specific native plant species.
- Should new invasive plants be discovered, they may be treated with approved herbicides to prevent spread. Treated areas would be monitored to ensure invasive plants do not proliferate.

CULTURAL AND TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Prior to the commencement of any activities associated with the proposed project, cultural resource field surveys and tribal coordination will be conducted in order to identify cultural resources within the project Area of Potential Effect (APE).
- Culturally sensitive sites would be avoided through pre-designation; flagging-tape buffers would be established around identified cultural resources that have the potential to be affected by project activities. Cultural resources would be protected through avoidance during project implementation.
- Should inadvertent discovery of cultural resources occur during project implementation, all work within the vicinity of the find must be halted until a qualified archaeologist is retained to evaluate the nature, integrity, and significance of the find.
- Pursuant to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), as outlined in 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 10; the Archaeological Resources Protection Act at 43 CFR Section 7; Section 5097.98 of the California Public Resources Code (PRC); and Section 7050.5 of the State Health and Safety Code, in the event of the discovery of human remains, all work would stop in the vicinity of the discovery and the County of Tulare (County) Coroner would be immediately notified. If the remains are determined to be Native American, the TCRCD or contractor would address the discovery in accordance with the provisions of NAGPRA and coordinate that process with 36 CFR Section 800.13, as needed.

HAZARDS

- Mastication would not occur during the months of July, August, and September, so long as drought conditions persist, to avoid the risk of wildfire.

SOILS

- The following management practices would be implemented during ground-disturbing project activities to minimize adverse impacts related to geology and soils:
 - No harvest or yarding equipment would be permitted within distance of the first site-potential tree in riparian areas unless approved during site-specific analysis by the project hydrologist or soil scientist.
 - No treatment within riparian areas that consists of highly erosive soils.
 - Fire containment lines would be sufficiently blocked at all access points to preclude off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. This would include such measures as placing boulders, logs, and slash; falling trees less than 8 inches dbh; or other actions, as necessary.

- Main skid trails would be blocked where they intersect roads and landings with an approved barricade and/or scattered slash to preclude OHV use.
- Skid trail crossings through dry draws would be limited and approved by the TCRCD; vehicles or equipment would not drive up the draw bottoms.
- Previously closed roads that have been identified and analyzed for use would be adequately blocked at the entrance and if applicable along its length to preclude vehicle use.
- Roads and spurs in use or in standby (contractual obligations not completed) would be protected from erosion.
- All ground-disturbing activities would be suspended if projected forecasted rain would saturate soils to the extent that there is potential for movement of sediment from the road to wetlands, floodplains, or streams. Exposed soils would be covered with material (e.g., straw mulch or slash) or temporarily stabilized during work suspension.
- All unpaved surface roads would be closed during the wet season (November 15–May 15) to protect roads from damage and to decrease the potential for off-site sediment movement. Some variations in these dates would be permitted dependent on weather and soil moisture conditions on roads.
- The following management practices would be implemented during project ground-based yarding activities:
 - Designated skid roads would be used to limit soil compaction to less than 12% of the project area.
 - For stands previously logged with tractors, existing skid roads would be used. If new skid trails are needed, they would not exceed the overall 12% compaction standard.
 - Skid trails would be located to minimize disturbance to coarse woody debris. Where skid trails encounter large coarse woody debris, a section would be bucked out for equipment access. The remainder would be left in place and not disturbed.
 - Mechanized equipment would be required to be capable of reaching 20 feet.
 - Mechanized equipment would be restricted to designated skid trails for high-traffic areas.
 - Mechanized equipment may be allowed to operate off designated skid trails if the conditions meet the following parameters, and it would not result in detrimental compaction of over 12% of the unit area as determined by the project soil scientist. This may be achieved by several ways based on site-specific assessment and includes, but is not restricted to, operation in dry (less than 15% soil moisture) conditions; walking mechanized equipment on slash; avoiding soil series at inherent risk to detrimental compaction; or the use of “ghost trails,” skid trails that have had only one or two passes. Implementation activities would be suspended when these conditions no longer exist. The 15% soil moisture standard could be modified based on moisture content at which specific soil is the most resistive to compaction.
 - Treatment would not occur on soils series at inherent risk to detrimental compaction.
 - Low pounds per square inch (psi), wide-track vehicles, or one-pass operations (one round trip) would be required for all mechanical harvester (includes felling and bunching) operations. For multiple passes, equipment must walk on 12 inches of slash for equipment greater than 6 psi or 8 inches of slash for equipment less than 6 psi.
 - Mechanized equipment would be restricted to designated skid trails for high-traffic areas.
 - No ground-based equipment would be allowed on fragile soils determined by the project soil scientist or hydrologist.

- The following measures would be implemented to reduce compaction:
 - Ground-based equipment would be restricted to slopes less than 40 percent.
 - Mechanical harvesting equipment (e.g., excavators, loaders, forwarders, harvesters) may be used on short pitch slopes of greater than 40 percent, but less than 45 percent when necessary, to access benches of lower gradient (length determined on a site-specific basis, generally less than 50 feet).
 - If the amount of available slash is not sufficient or if there is a need to reduce the percent of detrimentally compacted area in the unit, the TCRCD may stipulate mechanical decompaction of site-specific areas identified by the resource specialist. Post-harvest assessments would be conducted to determine where soil ripping is most beneficial to ameliorate compaction and improve soil productivity while minimizing root damage to residual trees.
- The following management practices would be implemented during project cable-based yarding activities:
 - On non-fragile soils:
 - Non-suspension yarding would be restricted to distances less than 300 feet.
 - Within non-suspension yarding corridors, slash would be placed over any areas where 50% of the topsoil is removed at a width of 5 feet or more.
 - On fragile soils:
 - Full or partial suspension cable-based yarding would be used.
 - Yarding and hauling would be restricted to the dry season (generally May 15–November 15).
- The following management practices would be implemented during project prescribed burn activities:
 - Low-intensity underburns would be implemented only in the spring (March–June) on fragile surface erosion (FM) and fragile slope gradient (FG) soils.
 - Firelines for underburns would be constructed manually on slopes over 35 percent.
 - Piles would be distributed across treatment areas. Understory and broadcast burns would be conducted only when a light-to-moderate burn can be achieved (spring-like conditions when soil and duff are moist). The intent is to retain no more than 50% of the mound depth/duff layer around trees, minimize tree stress, and adverse effects on tree roots and foliage.
 - Hand pile burning would not be allowed on FG and FM unless there is adequate vegetation between piles to intercept sediment displaced from piles. On FG soils, light piles from upper slope so fire backs into pile wherever possible. Limit handpiles on slopes that are greater than 65 percent.
 - Burning and storing materials (e.g., chips, slash, logs) would not be allowed in road ditchlines or on cut slopes above ditchlines.

WATER QUALITY AND RIPARIAN AREAS

- The following management practices would be implemented during project extraction activities in order to maintain and protect water quality and riparian areas:
 - Treatment activities would not be allowed within the primary shade zone of fish-bearing and perennial streams, springs, seeps, ponds, or wetlands with a minimum of 60 feet from ordinary high-water line.

- Treatment activities would not be allowed within the primary shade zone of intermittent streams with a minimum of 35 feet from ordinary high-water line.
- A minimum of 50% (60% in late-successional habitat) overstory canopy closure would be retained outside the no treatment area.
- Removal of riparian hardwood species such as willow, ash, maple, alder, etc. would not occur.
- Trees would be directionally felled away from the no treatment area.
- No logging slash would be piled within the no treatment area.
- Cable corridors across no treatment areas would have a maximum clearing width of 12 feet and would be spaced a minimum of 150 feet apart. Full suspension would be required for any logs yarded through the no treatment areas.
- When operationally feasible, all units would be yarded in such a way that the coarse woody material remaining after logging would be maintained at or greater than current levels in order to protect the soil surface.
- Wherever trees are cut to be removed, trees would be directionally felled away from dry draws. Trees would be felled toward skid trails.
- Ground-based equipment use would occur during the dry season, generally May 15–November 15, or on approval by the authorized officer or contracting officer's representative (COR). Variations in these dates would be dependent on review of weather and soil moisture conditions by the project soil scientist or hydrologist.
- The TCRCD would immediately shut down all harvest and yarding activities if there is potential for sediment movement to waterways due to weather or soil moisture conditions.
- The following management practices would be implemented during project activities in order to maintain and protect water quality and riparian areas during prescribed fire treatment activities:
 - No treatment (including hand piles) would occur within 60 feet of fish-bearing and perennial streams, springs, seeps, ponds, and wetlands.
 - No treatment (including hand piles) would occur within 35 feet of intermittent non-fish-bearing streams.
 - No treatment of riparian hardwood species such as willow, ash, maple, alder, and black oak would occur.
 - No ignition for understory burning would occur within 100 feet of fish-bearing and perennial streams, springs, seeps, ponds and wetlands.
 - No ignition for understory burning would occur within 50 feet of intermittent non-fish-bearing streams.
 - Firelines for understory burns would be constructed manually on all slopes greater than 35 percent.
 - Vegetation would be thinned using manual techniques. Slash created by the project would be hand piled or lopped and scattered.
 - Old skid trails would not be opened or driven on without the approval of the TCRCD.
 - Old skid roads not used for operations would not be treated near the intersections with system roads to provide a visual screen and discourage vehicular access.
 - Piles would be burned when soil and duff moisture are high.

- The following management practices would be implemented during project activities in order to maintain and protect water quality and riparian areas during hauling activities:
 - No hauling or landing activities would be allowed on native surface or rocked roads during the wet season (November 15–May 15) to protect the road from damage and decrease the potential for off-site sediment movement. Some variations in these dates would be permitted dependent on weather and soil moisture conditions of the roads.
 - Allow road or landing use on adequately rocked roads between those dates only during periods of dry weather (i.e., restrict use when soil moisture conditions or rain events could result in road damage or the transport of sediment to nearby stream channels).
 - Winter hauling would be allowed on paved roads or any road when at least 4 inches of packed frozen snow is present on hauling roads. Snow plowing would maintain at least 4 inches of packed snow on hauling roads. Provide drainage through the snowbank at periodic intervals to allow for snow melt to drain off the road surface.
 - Apply water or approved road surface stabilizers/dust control additives to reduce surfacing material loss and buildup of fine sediment that can enter into waterways. Prevent entry of road surface stabilizers/dust control additives into waterways during application.
- During project activities, the operator would be required to have an approved spill plan or other applicable contingency plan. In the event of any release of oil or hazardous substance into the soil, water, or air, the operator would immediately implement the site's plan. As part of the plan, the operator would be required to have spill containment kits present on the site during project activities. The following would be required:
 - Equipment refueling would be conducted within a confined area outside riparian areas.
 - Store all hazardous materials and petroleum products in durable containers outside of riparian areas.
 - Equipment containing toxic fluids would not be stored within riparian areas.

1.5 Required Discretionary Approvals

The project is not expected to require any permits. However, if impacts to any of the potentially jurisdictional drainages within the project area would occur as a result of the proposed project, the project would require the following approvals:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE): Section 404 Permit
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW): Section 1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement
- Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB): Section 401 Water Quality Certification
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD): Hazard Reduction Burn Permit

2 ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST AND ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED

The proposed project could have a “Potentially Significant Impact” for environmental factors checked below. Please refer to the attached pages for discussion on mitigation measures or project revisions to either reduce these impacts to less than significant levels or require further study.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetics | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Greenhouse Gas Emissions | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture and Forestry Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Hazards and Hazardous Materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Air Quality | <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrology and Water Quality | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Biological Resources | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Land Use and Planning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribal Cultural Resources |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cultural Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Utilities and Service Systems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Noise | <input type="checkbox"/> Wildfire |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geology and Soils | <input type="checkbox"/> Population and Housing | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mandatory Findings of Significance |

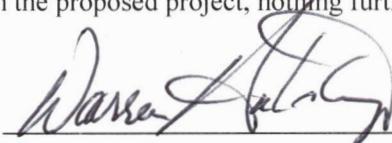
ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

- I find that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the project have been made by or agreed to by the project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a “potentially significant impact” or “potentially significant unless mitigated” impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measure based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

Date: 6-9-2021

Signed:



I. Aesthetics

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:</i>				
(a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The Case Mountain project area is located in Tulare County, approximately 6 miles east of the community of Three Rivers and approximately 3 miles west of Sequoia National Park. Case Mountain supports giant sequoia groves of high environmental value, as well as oak woodlands, mixed chaparral, and riparian vegetation. The *Tulare County General Plan 2030 Update* (General Plan) identifies goals and policies for the protection of scenic landscapes throughout the county (County of Tulare 2012). According to the General Plan, the county supports a complex structure of scenic landscapes, agricultural landscapes, and urban and rural communities. Many of the undisturbed landscapes in California are located in Tulare County. The county has experienced rapid population growth, and the natural and working landscapes within the county include growing communities and cities with expanding urban edges. The General Plan provides objectives for the protection and maintenance of visual resources, including natural landscapes, working landscapes, watercourses, designated scenic routes and highways, gateways to the sequoias, historic and cultural landscapes, and community design elements.

The California Scenic Highway Program was created by the State Legislature in 1963 with the intention of protecting and enhancing the natural scenic beauty of California highways and adjacent corridors. State Route (SR-) 198 and SR-190 are eligible scenic highways within Tulare County (California Department of Transportation [Caltrans] 2021).

Environmental Evaluation

a) **Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?**

A scenic vista is generally defined as an expansive view of highly valued landscape observable from a publicly accessible vantage point. In the project vicinity, publicly accessible vantage points are limited to public roads and recreation areas. The General Plan includes goals and policies intended to protect natural landscapes, which include the giant sequoia groves in the Case Mountain area (County of Tulare 2012).

The project includes vegetation management activities designed to protect and maintain a forest structure that would decrease the risk for catastrophic wildfire, reduce road hazards associated with dead trees, and

promote the survival and growth of giant sequoia stands. The objective of the proposed project is to protect large legacy sequoia trees from high intensity wildfire, restore a more diverse and resilient forest structure, return the role of fire to the ecosystem, and protect the public from road and wildland fire hazards within the Case Mountain area. The proposed treatment areas are not visible from any formally designated scenic vista or viewpoint as defined by the General Plan. Vegetation management activities associated with the project would likely not be visible to motorists on SR-198 and SR-190 due to the existing dense vegetative screening along the highways and intervening topography. The project would reduce surface fuels and ladder fuels, decrease crown density, and retain large, fire-resistant trees. The project would maintain the scenic resources of the treatment areas by retaining the existing forested characteristics and protecting against catastrophic wildfire that could denude the landscape. As the project area is not within view of any formally designated scenic vista, and since the project would not substantially alter the visual character of the forested site, it is expected that the project would result in a less-than-significant impact associated with an adverse effect on a scenic vista. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

b) *Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?*

According to the Caltrans State Scenic Highway System Map, SR-198 and SR-190, within the Case Mountain area are eligible Scenic Highways (Caltrans 2021). SR-198 and SR-190 are not officially designated as a State Scenic Highway; however, the General Plan designates SR-198 and SR-190 as “gateway highways,” which lead to the sequoia groves and feature the county’s history and scenery (County of Tulare 2012). Case Mountain is accessed via unnamed access roads that intersect with SR-198 from the community of Three Rivers. SR-198 and SR-190 do not extend through or adjacent to the project area. Proposed vegetation treatment areas would not be visible from SR-198 or SR-190, and vegetation modification would not change the overall forested condition of the treatment areas or visual character of the treatment areas as viewed from the surrounding area. No historic buildings would be affected by the proposed vegetation treatment activities and the project would result in no change in rock outcroppings. Project implementation would primarily involve hand thinning and mechanical mastication of vegetation in select areas of the forest. Large trees would be preserved in the treatment areas. Project activities would improve the long-term viability of the scenic landscape by creating conditions to promote a more fire-resilient forest and would reduce the potential for wildfire to damage structures in the area. Vegetation treatment activities would also reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, which could denude the landscape and alter scenic resources in the area. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

c) *In non-urbanized areas, would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage point). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?*

Case Mountain is located in a rural area of Tulare County and supports giant sequoia groves and other natural trees and vegetation. The vegetation treatment areas are in non-urbanized locations largely characterized by undeveloped forestland. As described above, the General Plan requires the protection of natural landscapes, which include the giant sequoia groves within the Case Mountain area (County of Tulare 2012). Vegetation management and fuels reduction activities include removal of dead and dying trees, thinning, and prescribed burning. The project does not propose the removal of any giant sequoia stands and would implement fuel reduction measures to avoid the loss of giant sequoias due to catastrophic wildfire. In addition, the project does not propose the development of aboveground structures that could result in permanent adverse impacts to views of the sequoia groves. The project would require the presence of temporary worker vehicles and construction equipment throughout the Case Mountain

area; however, the project design features of the project require that vehicles and equipment would not be parked or stored on portions of the road that could be viewed from surrounding areas. Project implementation could result in short-term effects to the existing visual character or quality of the public views in the project area where mechanical mastication and prescribed burning is anticipated to occur. However, the project site does not have established public access or recreation facilities and is generally only visible from a distance.

The project-related vegetation treatments are not anticipated to substantially degrade the visual character or quality of public views of the project area, as the site would remain in a forested condition. Impacts associated with degradation of the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings would be *less than significant*.

d) Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

The project does not propose the installation of new sources of light that would result in adverse effects to nighttime views in the area. Additionally, vegetation management and fuels reduction activities would be conducted during daylight hours and would not require temporary nighttime lighting. The project would not result in new sources of light; therefore, *no impact* would occur.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

II. Agriculture and Forestry Resources

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Dept. of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board. Would the project:</i>				
(a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
(e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

According to the California Department of Conservation (DOC) Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), the project area is designated as Nonagricultural or Natural Vegetation (DOC 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey (NRCS 2021), the project area is underlain by numerous soil types, including the following, which are considered Prime Farmland if irrigated or Farmland of Statewide importance:

- Auberry sandy loam, 9 to 15 percent slopes;
- Havaala loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes;
- Honcut sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes;
- Vista coarse sandy loam, 9 to 15 percent slopes, fewer frost-free days, Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 18; and
- Wyman loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes.

The Case Mountain area is located within the Foothill Agriculture Zone (FA), as designated by the County. The FA zone designates areas for agricultural activities located within the foothill and mountain regions of the county. Land uses typically include orchard and vineyards, livestock grazing, resource extraction activities, agricultural facilities, and necessary public utility and safety. A portion of Case Mountain is also zoned as a Timber Production Zone (TPZ) (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***Would the project convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?***

The project area is designated as Nonagricultural or Natural Vegetation by the FMMP and is underlain by a limited number of soils that are considered Prime Farmland if irrigated and Farmland of Statewide importance (DOC 2016; NRCS 2021). The project area is not irrigated and is therefore not considered to be Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance. The project involves fuel reduction and vegetation management activities and would not result in the conversion of farmland; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) ***Would the project conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?***

The project area is zoned FA and TPZ, is currently used for livestock grazing, and is not under an active Williamson Act contract. Implementation of the project would result in short-term restrictions to grazing

activity; however, the project would not result in a conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c) Would the project conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?**

The Case Mountain area is predominantly zoned for FA with a portion of land on the eastern portion of the mountain zoned as TPZ. The TPZ designation prohibits public improvements and urban services, except where necessary and compatible (County of Tulare 2012). Project activities that occur within the TPZ would be consistent with TPZ zoning standards because they would not result in new development, businesses, or other incompatible urban uses. The project would be limited to vegetation management and fuel-reduction activities and would not result in new development or other features that would require rezoning of the area; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- d) Would the project result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?**

The project site encompasses the Case Mountain area, which is comprised of natural tree and vegetation cover zoned for FA and TPZ. The project requires the removal of dead and dying trees and thinning of living trees and vegetation in order to protect giant sequoia groves from catastrophic wildfire. Living trees within the area would only be thinned in order to reduce wildfire fuels. Implementation of the project would not result in the conversion of forest land to non-forest use; further, vegetation management and fuels reduction activities are consistent with the General Plan for maintenance of wildfire hazards. Implementation of the project would not result in the conversion of forest land to non-forest use and project activities would be consistent with the General Plan; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- e) Would the project involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?**

The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities within the Case Mountain area. The project does not propose the development of new buildings or structures within or near the project area that would directly or indirectly convert farmland to non-agricultural uses. Vegetation management and fuels reduction activities include removal of dead and dying trees, thinning, and prescribed burning to create a forest structure that would protect giant sequoia stands from catastrophic wildfire. Although the project would result in the removal of trees from the project area, project activities would be consistent with the General Plan for tree removal and other management activities; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

III. Air Quality

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. Would the project:</i>				
(a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The project is located within the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin (SJVAB) and is within the jurisdictional boundaries of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD), which has jurisdiction over Tulare County. The SJVAB is comprised of moderate-sized communities and rural uses. Although the emission levels within the Central Valley have been decreasing since the 1990s, the San Joaquin Valley is identified as having some of the worst air quality in the nation (County of Tulare 2012). Criteria air pollutants are defined as pollutants for which the federal and state governments have established ambient air quality standards, or criteria, for outdoor concentrations to protect public health. Criteria air pollutants that are evaluated include volatile organic compounds (VOCs, also referred to as reactive organic gases [ROGs]), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur oxides (SO_x), particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter less than or equal to 10 microns in size (PM_{10}), and particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter less than or equal to 2.5 microns in size ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$). VOCs and NO_x are important because they are precursors to ozone (O_3) formation. Criteria air pollutant emissions from construction activities are typically associated with operation of off-road construction equipment, on-road hauling and vendor (material delivery) trucks, and worker vehicle trips.

The main source of CO and NO_x is motor vehicles. The main sources of ROGs are mobile sources and agricultural operations. The SJVAB is ranked second worst in the United States for ozone. Direct $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ emissions are attributed to vehicles traveling on unpaved roads, and PM_{10} emissions are attributed to vehicles traveling on unpaved roads and agricultural operations (County of Tulare 2012). Currently, the SJVAPCD is not in attainment for federal standards established for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and 8-hour ozone (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [USEPA] 2021). Additionally, the SJVAPCD is not in attainment for state standards established for $\text{PM}_{2.5}$, 1-hour ozone, 8-hour ozone, or PM_{10} .

The significance criteria used to evaluate the project impacts to air quality is based on the recommendations provided in Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. In addition, Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines indicates that, where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district may be relied upon to determine whether a project would have a significant impact on air quality. The SJVAPCD has adopted thresholds to address the significance of air quality impacts resulting from a project. According to the SJVAPCD, if ROG and NO_x are each less than 10 tons per year, PM_{10} and $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ are each less than 15

tons per year, and project emissions do not cause or contribute to an exceedance of state or federal ambient CO emissions, impacts would be considered less than significant.

Environmental Evaluation

a) Would the project conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?

The project is located within the SJVAB under the jurisdiction of the SJVAPCD. The SJVAPCD has developed the *2018 Plan for the 1997, 2006, and 2012 PM 2.5 Standards* (PM_{2.5} Plan) using best available technology and research to develop a strategy to attain the federal health-based 1997, 2006, and 2012 national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS) for PM_{2.5} as expeditiously as possible (SJVAPCD 2018). The San Joaquin Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in the state. Typically, an increase in population means there will be an increase in long-term air pollutant emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) (SJVAPCD 2018). The proposed project is not anticipated to conflict with the PM_{2.5} Plan because the project is limited to vegetation management and fuels reduction activities. The project would not result in new buildings or structures that would facilitate population growth or increased VMT in the area. A temporary increase in VMT caused by worker vehicles, equipment, and trucks would occur during implementation of the project. The project would implement vanpooling by utilizing three crew rigs to transport 36 to 42 employees to the project site. Crew rigs are anticipated to generate up to 10 vehicle trips per day for transportation and additional trips would be generated by other worker trucks, fuel trucks, and service trucks. Equipment would be stored on existing landings within the project area and would not require daily trips to and from the site. The increase in VMT would be temporary in nature and would be reduced using vanpooling to reduce individual worker trips to and from the project site.

The SJVAPCD monitors “permissive-burn” days as defined by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). As identified in Section 1.4.6, Project Design Features, prescribed burning would only occur on allowable days and times as defined by the CARB and SJVAPCD.

Implementation of the project would result in a reduced risk for wildfire, which would release substantial pollutant emission in the event of a wildfire event. Additionally, the project does not propose new buildings or expanded infrastructure that would facilitate population growth or increase VMT to the area. Implementation of the project would result in a temporary increase of VMT; however, it would be temporary in nature and would be necessary to conduct project activities to protect against wildfire. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

b) Would the project result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?

Tulare County is not in attainment for federal standards established for PM_{2.5} and 8-hour ozone. Additionally, the SJVAB is not in attainment for state standards established for PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, and 1-hour and 8-hour ozone. Project activities have the potential to result in PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, and 1-hour and 8-hour ozone emissions from the use of heavy equipment, soil movement, and prescribed burning. Proposed activities would result in the temporary addition of pollutants to the local airshed caused by on-site sources (i.e., off-road construction equipment, soil disturbance, and prescribed burning) and off-site sources (i.e., worker vehicle trips). Prescribed burning would also result in emissions of PM, CO, and NO_x. There are a number of hazardous air pollutants released during wildland fire that have the potential to be released in limited amounts during prescribed burning, including benzene, formaldehyde, and methanol. Project emissions can vary substantially from day to day, depending on the level of activity; the specific type of operation; and, for dust, the prevailing weather conditions.

The project would comply with all applicable SJVAPCD rules and regulations during the treatment activities including, but not limited to, the following:

- Rule 2010 Permits Required
- Rule 3160 Prescribed Burning Fee
- Rule 4301 Fuel Burning Equipment
- Rule 8011 Fugitive PM₁₀ Prohibitions
- Rule 9110 Mobile and Indirect Sources General Conformity

Additionally, Mitigation Measure AQ-1 has been included to require implementation of applicable SJVAPCD standard control measures to ensure equipment and vehicle use during project activities does not result in air pollutant emissions that could exceed SJVAPCD thresholds.

The project would be implemented using a phased approach over a 10-year period, which would ensure the project does not exceed federal, state, or local emissions standards. Additionally, the project would comply with “permissive-burn” days and CARB’s *Smoke Management Guidelines for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning* (CARB 2001) in order to minimize smoke impacts to the public. Although project activities would result in short-term localized and mobile emissions, implementation of the project would be beneficial in the long-term by reducing the risk for future catastrophic wildfire and associated pollutant emissions. Due to the proposed project design, implementation of the prescribed burning is not expected to release criteria pollutants in exceedance of federal, state, or local standards. Additionally, implementation of Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would ensure heavy equipment use would not result in the generation of criteria pollutants that could exceed applicable thresholds; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

c) Would the project expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?

Air quality varies as a direct function of the amount of pollutants emitted into the atmosphere, the size and topography of the air basin, and the prevailing meteorological conditions. Air quality problems arise when the rate of pollutant emissions exceeds the rate of dispersion. Reduced visibility, eye irritation, and adverse health impacts upon those persons termed “sensitive receptors” are the most serious hazards of existing air quality conditions. Some land uses are considered more sensitive to changes in air quality than others, depending on the population groups and the activities involved. People most likely to be affected by air pollution include children, the elderly, athletes, and people with cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases. Sensitive receptors include residences, schools, playgrounds, child-care centers, athletic facilities, long-term health-care facilities, rehabilitation centers, convalescent centers, and retirement homes.

The greatest potential for toxic air contaminants (TACs) during construction would be diesel particulate matter (DPM) emissions from heavy equipment operations and/or heavy-duty trucks, prescribed burning during implementation of the proposed treatment activities, and the associated health impacts to sensitive receptors. Emissions of TACs are normally localized and not region-wide. The SJVAPCD’s thresholds for TACs are 20 in one million or more for carcinogens, a hazard index that equals or exceeds one for the maximally exposed individual (acute), or a hazard index that equals or exceeds one for the maximally exposed individual (chronic) for non-carcinogens.

The proposed project has the potential to expose surrounding residents to short-term construction-related emissions. As discussed in Impact Discussion III(b), project activities would generate emissions, including DPM and fugitive dust. Project emissions are not anticipated to exceed SJVAPCD thresholds,

and the project is located in a rural area approximately 6 miles east of the community of Three Rivers. Due to the distance from sensitive receptor locations, the project would not result in substantial pollutant concentrations from the use of heavy machinery near sensitive receptors. Prescribed burning has the potential to increase smoke-related emissions to the public. However, the project would be compliant with “permissive-burn” days and the smoke management plan defined by CARB to ensure public safety. In addition, the project would not require the extensive use of heavy-duty construction equipment, which is subject to CARB’s Airborne Toxic Control Measures for in-use diesel construction equipment to reduce DPM emissions, and it would not involve extensive use of diesel trucks. Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would be implemented to reduce the potential for a nuisance and exposure to DPM and fugitive dust. Therefore, potential impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

d) Would the project result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?

It is possible that odors could be released during implementation of the proposed treatment activities. Objectionable odors could be generated from vehicles and/or equipment exhaust emissions, and prescribed burning. The proposed treatment activities would occur in areas located away from residences and other occupied facilities, and the project does not include activities that are expected to result in odors inconsistent with normal motor vehicle or landscaping equipment operation; therefore, adverse effects are not anticipated. The project would comply with all applicable CARB and SJVAPCD regulations related to prescribed burning and burning would only be conducted on permissive burn days. The potential release of odors associated with treatment activities and equipment would be minor, temporary, and unlikely to be detectable from rural residential or public places in the vicinity of the project due to the distance; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

AQ-1 SJVAPCD Standard Regulation VIII Control Measures. During construction, the City shall ensure the following applicable San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Standard Regulation VIII control measures are implemented:

1. If any land-clearing, grubbing, scraping, excavation, land-leveling, grading, or cut and fill, activities are required during project activities, the activity shall be effectively controlled of fugitive dust emissions utilizing application of water or by presoaking.
2. Use alternative-fueled or catalyst-equipped diesel construction equipment, where feasible.
3. Minimize idling time (e.g., 5-minute maximum).
4. Limit the hours of operation of heavy-duty equipment and/or the amount of equipment in use.
5. Replace fossil-fueled equipment with electrically driven equivalents (provided they are not run with a portable generator set).
6. Curtail construction during periods of high ambient pollutant concentrations; this may include ceasing of construction activity during the peak-hour of vehicular traffic on adjacent roadways.
7. Implement activity management (e.g., rescheduling activities to reduce short-term impacts).

IV. Biological Resources

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or US Fish and Wildlife Service?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Tulare County is located in a geographically diverse region, with the Sierra Nevada mountain range located along the eastern portion of the region and the San Joaquin Valley located along the western portion of the region (County of Tulare 2012). The project area is primarily comprised of evergreen forest and shrub/scrub habitat, as identified by the National Land Cover Database. According to the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) Wetlands Mapper (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] 2020), numerous surface water resources, including Salt Creek, Cinnamon Creek, and the South Fork Kaweah River, are present in the Case Mountain area.

The General Plan identifies policies intended to protect biological resources, including rare and endangered species, environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs), riparian areas, native vegetation, open space, and oak woodlands (County of Tulare 2012).

Special-status species are plants, animals, and fish species that are legally protected under the federal Endangered Species Act (FESA), the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), or other regulations, as well as species considered sufficiently rare by the scientific community to qualify for such listing. Special-status species include:

- Species listed or proposed for listing as threatened or endangered under the FESA (50 CFR 17.12 [listed plants], 50 CFR 17.11 [listed animals], and various notices in the Federal Register [FR] [proposed species]).
- Species that are candidates for possible future listing as threatened or endangered under the FESA (69 FR 24876, May 4, 2004).
- Species listed or proposed for listing by the State of California as threatened or endangered under the CESA (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] 670.5).
- Species that meet the definitions of rare or endangered under CEQA (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15380).
- Plants listed as rare under the California Native Plant Protection Act (NPPA) (California Fish and Game Code [CFGC] Section 1900 et seq.).
- Plants considered by the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) to be “rare, threatened, or endangered in California” (Rank 1B and 2), plants ranked by CNPS as plants about which more information is needed to determine their status, and plants of limited distribution (Ranks 3 and 4), which may be included as special-status species on the basis of local significance or recent biological information.
- Animal Species of Special Concern (SSC) to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).
- Animals fully protected in California (CFGC Sections 3511 [birds], 4700 [mammals], and 5050 [amphibians and reptiles]).

Based on a search of the CDFW California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) (CDFW 2021b), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS 2021) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system, and the *Case Mountain Vegetation and Forest Health Plan Environmental Assessment/Initial Study and Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration* (BLM 2020) prepared for BLM-managed lands within the Case Mountain area, the special-status plant and animal species identified in Table 1 have the potential to occur in the project area.

Table 1. Special-Status Species with Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Species	Protection Status (FESA/CESA/Other)*	CNDDDB Occurrence Distance from Nearest Work Area	Rationale for Potential to Occur
Plants			
Kaweah brodiaea (<i>Brodiaea insignis</i>)	--/SE/1B.2	2 miles southwest (CNDDDB Occurrence [Occ.] 24)	Moderate. Occurs in granitic or clay soils in cismontane woodland, meadows and seeps and valley and foothill grassland at an elevation range of 150–1,400 meters. Typical blooming period: April–June.
Kaweah monkeyflower (<i>Erythranthe norrisii</i>)	--/~/1B.3	3 miles southwest (CNDDDB Occ. 3)	Moderate. Occurs in carbonate and rocky soils in chaparral and cismontane woodland at an elevation range of 365–1,300 meters. Typical blooming period: March–May.
San Joaquin adobe sunburst (<i>Pseudobahia peirsonii</i>)	FT/SE/1B.1	10 miles southwest (CNDDDB Occ. 12)	Low. Occurs in adobe clay soils in cismontane woodland and valley and foothill grassland at an elevation range of 90–800 meters. Typical blooming period: February–April.

Species	Protection Status (FESA/CESA/ Other)*	CNDBB Occurrence Distance from Nearest Work Area	Rationale for Potential to Occur
Springville clarkia (<i>Clarkia springvillensis</i>)	FT/SE/1B.2	4 miles northwest (CNDBB Occ. 2)	Moderate. Occurs in granitic soils in chaparral, cismontane woodland, and valley and foothill grassland habitat at an elevation range of 245–1,220 meters. Typical blooming period: March–July.
striped adobe-lily (<i>Fritillaria striata</i>)	--/ST/1B.1	13 miles southwest (CNDBB Occ. 11)	Low. Occurs in clay soils in cismontane woodland and valley and foothill grassland habitat at an elevation range of 135–1,455 meters. Typical blooming period: February–April.
Animals			
Birds			
bald eagle (<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)	MBTA/SE/FP	10 miles west (CNDBB Occ. 363)	Low. Occurs along ocean shore, lake margins, and rivers for both nesting and wintering. Most nest within 1 mile of water.
California condor (<i>Gymnogyps californianus</i>)	FE/SE/FP	6 miles west	Low. Occurs in open savannahs, grasslands, and foothill chaparral and in mountain ranges with moderate altitudes. Nests in deep canyons on rock walls with clefts.
California spotted owl (<i>Strix occidentalis</i>)	MBTA/--/SSC	Occurrences within project area	High. Generally inhabits older forests that contain structural characteristics necessary for nesting, roosting, and foraging. Nests are typically found in areas of high canopy cover, with a multi-layered canopy, old decadent trees, a high number of large trees, and coarse downed woody debris.
great gray owl (<i>Strix nebulosa</i>)	MBTA/SE/--	12 miles north (CNDBB Occ. 38)	Low. In the Sierra Nevada, nests in mature red fir, mixed conifer, or lodgepole pine forests near wet meadows or other vegetated openings between 2,500 and 8,900 feet.
northern goshawk (<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>)	MBTA/--/SSC	5 miles northeast (CNDBB Occ. 257)	High. Occurs within, and in vicinity of, coniferous forests, usually mature, open stands to promote below canopy maneuverability and prey capture. Uses old nests and maintains alternate sites. Known to occur in Yosemite National Park.
Other migratory nesting birds	MBTA	N/A	High. Annual grasslands, coastal scrub, chaparral, and oak woodlands may provide nesting habitat.
Amphibians			
California red-legged frog (<i>Rana draytonii</i>)	FT-- /SSC	90 miles southwest (CNDBB Occ. 469)	Low. Occurs in aquatic habitats with little or no flow and surface water depths to at least 2.3 feet. Prefers presence of fairly sturdy underwater supports, such as cattails.
foothill yellow-legged frog (<i>Rana boylii</i>)	--/SE/SSC	1.5 miles north (CNDBB Occ. 28)	High. Nests in dense colonies on sandy estuarine shores, on levees in salt ponds, and on islands in alkali and freshwater lakes.
southern mountain yellow-legged frog (<i>Rana muscosa</i>)	FE/SE/WL	5 miles east (CNDBB Occ. 194)	High. Always encountered within a few feet of water. Federal listing applies to populations within San Gabriel, San Jacinto, and San Bernardino Mountains only.
Invertebrates			
Crotch bumble bee (<i>Bombus crotchii</i>)	--/CE/SA	9 miles east (CNDBB Occ. 66)	Low. Inhabits grasslands and shrublands and requires hotter and drier environment than other bumblebee species.

Case Mountain Vegetation and Forest Health Plan
Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration

Species	Protection Status (FESA/CESA/ Other)*	CNDBB Occurrence Distance from Nearest Work Area	Rationale for Potential to Occur
valley elderberry longhorn beetle <i>(Desmocerus californicus dimorphus)</i>	FT/--/SA	7 miles northwest (CNDBB Occ. 154)	Low. Occurs in Central Valley of California and vicinity, in association with blue elderberry (<i>Sambucus mexicana</i>).
vernal pool fairy shrimp <i>(Branchinecta lynchii)</i>	FT/-- /SA	15 miles southwest (CNDBB Occ. 117)	Low. Occur in vernal pool habitats including depressions in sandstone, to small swale, earth slump, or basalt-flow depressions with a grassy or, occasionally, muddy bottom in grassland.
western bumble bee <i>(Bombus occidentalis)</i>	--/CE/SA	22 miles northwest (CNDBB Occ. 275)	Low. Found in a range of habitats, including mixed woodlands, farmlands, urban areas, montane meadows and into the western edge of the prairie grasslands.
Fish			
delta smelt <i>(Hypomesus transpacificus)</i>	FT/SE/SA	160 miles northwest (CNDBB Occ. 16)	No Potential. Euryhaline species (tolerant of a wide salinity range) occurring in estuarine waters up to 14 ppt salinity. Found only from the Suisun Bay upstream through the Delta in Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo Counties.
Mammals			
California wolverine <i>(Gulo gulo)</i>	--/ST/FP	5 miles south (CNDBB Occ. 114)	Low. Found in the North Coast Mountains and Sierra Nevada in wide variety of high elevation habitats. Needs water source; uses caves, logs, and burrows for cover and den area. Hunts in more open area; capable of traveling long distances.
fisher <i>(Pekania pennanti)</i>	--/--/SSC	100 miles northwest (CNDBB Occ. 95)	Low. Generally found in stands with high percent canopy closure, large trees and snags, large woody debris, large hardwoods, and multiple canopy layers between 2,000 and 8,500 feet in elevation.
fisher – Southern Sierra Nevada Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESU) <i>(Pekania pennanti</i> pop. 2)	FE/ST/SSC	Within project area (CNDBB Occs. 530 and 463)	High. This distinct population segment (DPS) is separated from Rocky Mountains and rest of taxon in central and eastern United States by natural physical barriers, including non-forested high desert areas of Great Basin in Nevada and eastern Oregon.
Sierra Nevada red fox <i>(Vulpes vulpes necator)</i>	FPE/ST/SA	7 miles southeast (CNDBB Occ. 38)	Moderate. Occupied habitats seem to be a composite typical of high Sierra: high elevation, barren conifer and shrub habitats; montane meadows; and subalpine woodlands and fell-fields.
Forested bat species	N/A	N/A	High. Found up to high elevations in Sierra Nevada, in montane coniferous forest habitats. Forages over water, close to trees and cliffs, and in openings in forests. Roosts primarily in large-diameter snags. Forms nursery colonies numbering hundreds of individuals, usually under bark or in hollow trees.

General references: Unless otherwise noted all habitat and distribution data provided by California Natural Diversity Database.

*Status Codes

--= No status

Federal: FE = Federal Endangered, FT= Federal Threatened, FC= Federal Candidate, CH= Federal Critical Habitat, PCH= Proposed Federal Critical Habitat, MBTA= Protected by Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act;

State: SE= State Endangered, ST= State Threatened, SCT= State Candidate Threatened

CDFW: SSC= Species of Special Concern, FP= Fully Protected Species, SA= Not formally listed but included in CDFW "Special Animal" List.

Environmental Evaluation

- a) **Would the project have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?**

The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities, which include the removal of dead and dying trees, vegetation thinning, and prescribed burning over approximately 1,100 acres of land within the Case Mountain area. Project activities have the potential to result in direct and indirect impacts to special-status plant and animal species in the form of injury, mortality, disturbance, and temporary habitat degradation if present in the project area at the time fuel reduction, vegetation management, and prescribed burning activities are implemented.

Implementation of the proposed design features identified in Section 1.4.6, Project Design Features, for biological resources would ensure potential impacts to special-status plant and animal species would be avoided through pre-disturbance surveys and avoidance and minimization measures. Impacts to surface water habitat would be avoided. Additionally, the project would result in a reduced risk for catastrophic wildfire that could result in the long-term loss of special-status plant and animal habitat and individuals if it were to occur. Mitigation Measure BIO-1 is included to ensure impacts to special-status plant species are avoided and/or minimized. Implementation of project design features and identified mitigation would ensure impacts to special-status plant and animal species would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

- b) **Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or US Fish and Wildlife Service?**

The Case Mountain area supports riparian vegetation along surface water and drainage areas. Proposed project activities include vegetation management, fuels reduction, prescribed burning, and maintenance of existing roads. Proposed activities have the potential to result in direct and indirect impacts to riparian habitat; however, implementation of proposed design features for the protection of biological resources, soils, and water quality and riparian areas would ensure impacts to riparian habitat and sensitive natural communities would be avoided and minimized through activity restrictions and setbacks.

Implementation of the proposed design features would ensure project activities would not result in increased erosion, siltation, or other pollution that could indirectly affect riparian habitat or other sensitive natural communities; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c) **Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?**

According to the NWI Wetlands Mapper, there are potential wetland resources located within the project area (USFWS 2020). Project activities include vegetation management, fuels reduction, prescribed burning, and maintenance of existing roads, which have the potential to result in direct and indirect disturbance to riparian vegetation and wetlands. Project design features for biological resources, soils, and water quality and riparian areas would ensure impacts to wetlands would be avoided and minimized through activity restrictions and setbacks; therefore, impacts to wetlands would be *less than significant*.

d) Would the project interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?

According to the NWI Wetlands Mapper, there are numerous surface water resources and riparian corridors that could support migratory fish or wildlife within the project area (USFWS 2020). According to the CDFW California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project, the project area supports wildlife corridors that allow for the movement of native and migratory animal species (CDFW 2021a).

Implementation of proposed project design features related to biological resources would ensure project activities do not adversely affect water resources or associated wildlife within the project area. The project does not propose features that would result in new development or other physical barriers that could impede wildlife movement. Additionally, the project proposes to implement project design features, which would protect listed animal and bird species in the area; therefore, the project would not disturb the movement of migratory fish or other wildlife species and impacts would be *less than significant*.

e) Would the project conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?

The General Plan provides policies for the conservation of biological resources, including oak woodlands, and includes goals and policies for vegetation management in order to protect the county from wildfire hazards. Proposed project activities would be consistent with the General Plan, which recognizes the need for the removal of dead and dying trees and other management activities (County of Tulare 2012). The project would remove hazardous trees in order to protect giant sequoia stands from catastrophic wildfire events. The project would be consistent with the General Plan; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

f) Would the project conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?

The project site is not located within an adopted or approved Habitat Conservation Plan or Natural Community Conservation Plan; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

Mitigation Measures

BIO-1 Special-Status Plants. Prior to commencement of ground-disturbing activities in previously undisturbed areas, the Tulare County Resource Conservation District shall retain a qualified biologist or other qualified professional to conduct botanical surveys in the areas proposed to be disturbed by project activities. The surveys shall be conducted in the spring and early summer months to capture the typical blooming period of special-status plants that have the potential to occur in the area. If no special-status plants are observed in the area proposed to be disturbed, the results of the survey shall be documented in a brief report to the Tulare County Resource Conservation District and no further mitigation will be necessary.

If any special-status plants are observed in the area proposed to be disturbed by project activities, the Tulare County Resource Conservation District shall implement the appropriate mitigation, as follows:

1. **California Endangered Species Act-Listed Species:** The applicant shall coordinate with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to obtain a Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit under the California Endangered Species Act. Under the Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit, mitigation ratios for state-

listed species may require purchasing replacement habitat that is occupied by the species and conducting rehabilitation efforts on the replacement land.

2. **California Native Plant Society Rare Plant Rank 1, 2, and 3 Species:** For each perennial California Native Plant Society Rare Plant Rank 1, 2, and 3 species impacted by the proposed project, the applicant shall plant two container plants of the same species for each one plant impacted (2:1). The replacement plantings shall be planted in appropriate habitat on the property. The replacement plantings shall be monitored and maintained for no less than 5 years. The replacement plantings shall realize a 75% success rate to be considered successful.

For annual California Native Plant Society Rare Plant Rank 1, 2, and 3 species impacted by the proposed project, the applicant shall implement a soil and seed bank conservation program that targets the impacted species. The annual species will be conserved on the property by broadcast seeding and relocating the soil seed bank. Seed to be broadcast will be collected from the project areas prior to start of construction. Soil from the project disturbance areas containing the target species' seed shall be collected and reapplied. To accomplish this, the upper 6 inches of soil located within the vicinity of the target individuals shall be collected and redistributed on the property. Soil collection shall occur immediately following completion of seed collection and prior to the first rainfall. The collected soil shall be immediately distributed on the property, in suitable habitat for the species, and outside of the permanent disturbance areas. The collected seed shall be broadcast over the relocated soil, and the receptor site shall be lightly raked to cover the seed.

V. Cultural Resources

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to § 15064.5?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to § 15064.5?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

As defined by CEQA, a historical resource includes:

- A resource listed in or determined to be eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR).
- Any object, building, structure, site, area, place, record, or manuscript that a lead agency determines to be historically significant or significant. The architectural, engineering, scientific, economic, agricultural, educational, social, political, military, or cultural records of California

may be considered to be a historical resource, provided the lead agency's determination is supported by substantial evidence.

The General Plan includes policies intended to protect natural resources, including cultural and archaeological sites. Goals and policies include designing new development to avoid impacts to cultural resources and identify and maintain significant resources in order to sustain the heritage of the county (County of Tulare 2012).

The Case Mountain area has been archaeologically documented through a period spanning several thousand years and is within the traditional territories of the Foothill Yokuts and Western Mono tribal groups. Archaeological sites associated with the history of Native American occupation of the region include bedrock mortar and milling stone food processing stations, village sites, and seasonal camps. From historical to modern times, the project area has been used primarily for grazing and intermittent timber harvesting among the pine forests at the upper elevations. Historical-period cultural sites in the area include remains associated with these uses, and primarily include dispersed evidence of logging activities such as skid roads (BLM 2020).

Cultural Resource Inventory for the Sierra Nevada Fuel Reduction Project, Fresno, Tulare, and Kern Counties, California was conducted by PaleoWest Archaeology for the BLM-managed Extensive Resource Management Area (ERMA) of Case Mountain. The Case Mountain ERMA is located adjacent to the proposed project area. According to extensive field surveys, cultural resource sites have been previously identified within the Case Mountain ERMA (PaleoWest Archaeology 2019).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to § 15064.5?**

There are no known historical resources within the project area. The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities over approximately 1,200 acres of undeveloped land within the Case Mountain area. Project activities do not include demolishing or removing any existing structures or buildings; therefore, the project would not result in the disturbance of historical resources and impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to § 15064.5?**

According to the Cultural Resource Inventory, which included the Case Mountain area, cultural resource sites have been previously identified within the BLM-managed Case Mountain ERMA (PaleoWest Archaeology 2019). The proposed project does not include vegetation management activities within the Case Mountain ERMA and would only occur on adjacent private lands. Based on the presence of archaeological resource sites on lands adjacent to the proposed project area, there is potential for unknown archaeological sites to occur within the project area.

The project does not propose substantial ground-disturbing activities; however, it is possible that vegetation thinning, and minor ground disturbance associated with fuels reduction activities could result in the inadvertent discovery of archaeological resources. Project design features are included that would require pre-disturbance surveys, tribal coordination, avoidance of culturally sensitive sites, and compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) to avoid potential impacts to archaeological resources if discovered during project implementation, as described in Section 1.4.6, Project Design Features. Mitigation Measure CUL-1 is included and would be implemented

in the event of inadvertent discovery of a historical or archaeological resource; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

c) Would the project disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?

There are no known human remains within the project area; however, this is potential for inadvertent discovery of human remains during activities that would require ground disturbance. Should human remains be discovered during project implementation, project design features are included that require all work to halt in the vicinity of the discovery and the County Coroner to be notified pursuant to NAGPRA, as outlined in 43 CFR Section 10, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act at 43 CFR Section 7, Section 5097.98 of the California Public Resources Code (PRC), and Section 7050.5 of the State Health and Safety Code. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

- CUL-1 Inadvertent Discovery.** Tulare County Resource Conservation District or the project contractor shall implement the following measure in the event of inadvertent discovery of a historical or archaeological resource. If buried or previously unidentified historic properties or archaeological resources are discovered during project activities, all work within a 100-foot radius of the find shall cease. Tulare County Resource Conservation District or the project contractor shall retain a professional archaeologist meeting the *Secretary of the Interior's Professional Standards for Archaeologists* to assess the discovery and recommend what, if any, further treatment or investigation is necessary for the discovery. Any necessary treatment/investigation shall be developed and coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officer or others, as necessary, and shall be completed before project activities resume in the vicinity of the discovery.

VI. Energy

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Result in a potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

There are federal regulations addressing energy efficiency in the built environment, fuel efficiency for motor vehicles, energy sources, and national conservation goals; none of these regulations and policies apply directly to the project. The State of California has passed several laws governing energy use. Assembly Bill (AB) 32 establishes regulatory, reporting, and market procedures to achieve quantifiable reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a cap on statewide GHG emissions; the most significant proposed GHG reductions are recommended through improving emission standards for light-duty vehicles and implementing the Low-Carbon Fuel Standard, energy efficiency measures in buildings

and appliances, and a renewable portfolio standard for electricity production. Title 24 establishes the energy efficiency standards for residential and nonresidential buildings, and the 2013 California Green Building Standards Code (CALGreen Code; 24 CCR 11), which took effect on January 1, 2014, requires buildings to reduce energy and water consumption and establishes specific performance standards that appliances and fixtures must meet. Under Senate Bill (SB) 350, signed into law in October 2015, the Clean Energy and Pollution Reduction Act of 2015 updates the Renewables Portfolio Standard and applies to all electricity retailers in California.

The project does not include the construction or operation of facilities that would require electricity from a regional or local utility provider. Proposed activities would include fuel use for vehicles, trucks, hand-held machinery, and heavy-duty equipment during temporary vegetation treatment activities. Energy use associated with the project would be limited to vehicle usage and short-term equipment and machinery usage.

The *Tulare County 2018 Climate Action Plan* (2018 CAP) details several goals and policies aimed at reduction of GHG emissions, including improving energy efficiency standards in existing buildings and new buildings (County of Tulare 2018). Additionally, the General Plan provides policies for energy conservation in new and existing development throughout the county (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) *Would the project result in a potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?***

Electricity is not anticipated to be required for the proposed treatment activities. The amount of electricity used during construction would be minimal and related to potential use of some electric hand tools and devices (e.g., phones, laptops, tablets, global positioning system [GPS] devices, etc.). Natural gas is not anticipated to be required for the proposed treatment activities. Fuels used for construction would primarily consist of diesel and gasoline. Any minor amounts of natural gas that may be consumed as a result of proposed energy resources during vegetation management activities would be temporary and negligible and would not have an adverse effect. Petroleum would be consumed throughout the duration of the project. Fuel consumed by equipment used for vegetation management activities would be the primary energy resource expended over the course of the treatment activities. Worker and equipment transport vehicles would also result in petroleum consumption as would operation of heavy equipment. As previously discussed, treatment activities would occur over a 10-year period. Once treatment activities cease, petroleum use from off-road equipment and transportation vehicles would be completed and no long-term operational use of petroleum would result from the project. Because of the short-term nature of the treatment activities, the project's petroleum consumption would be negligible when compared to California's daily total use of approximately 1.8 million barrels of petroleum. The electricity, natural gas, and petroleum used for project implementation would be temporary and minimal; therefore, project implementation would not result in a potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, and impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) *Would the project conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?***

The project would comply with applicable energy standards and regulations during implementation of all fuel reduction and vegetation management activities. The project does not propose the development of new buildings or structures that would be applicable to energy efficient building standards or mixed-use development of the General Plan or 2018 CAP. In addition, any equipment utilized by the project would be operated in accordance with all existing, applicable regulations at the time of the treatment activities.

Therefore, impacts related to the project's potential to conflict with plans for renewable energy and energy efficiency would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

VII. Geology and Soils

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:				
(i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iv) Landslides?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geological feature?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Tulare County does not contain any known Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones, as identified by the California Geological Survey. According to the Fault Activity Map of California and Adjacent Areas, no active faults are located on the Project site (DOC 2015). The county is designated as a "nil" and "low" severity zone for ground shaking. According to the General Plan, the project site is located in area with low potential for landslides, and the county has not been evaluated for liquefaction potential (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) Would the project directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:**
- a-i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.**

The project area is located in Tulare County, which does not contain any known active faults and has a low potential for seismic activity (County of Tulare 2012). According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Active Fault Zone Map, the nearest fault zone is the Kern Canyon fault zone located approximately 30 miles northeast (USGS 2021). There are no known faults within the project area; therefore, the project would not result in risk of loss, injury, or death due to rupture of a known fault and impacts would be *less than significant*.

a-ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?

Tulare County does not contain any known active faults and is designated as a “nil” and “low” severity zone for ground shaking (County of Tulare 2012). Additionally, the project does not propose the development of habitable structures that would result in risk of loss, injury, or death in the unlikely event of seismic ground shaking; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

a-iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?

Typically, liquefaction results from seismic ground shaking when unconsolidated sediments are saturated with groundwater (County of Tulare 2012). According to the General Plan, the project area has not been assessed for liquefaction potential. However, the potential for liquefaction within the project area is assumed to be low based on the soil types, depth to water table, and low potential for ground shaking. Additionally, the project would not result in the development of new habitable structures that would result in risk of loss, injury, or death due to liquefaction; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

a-iv) Landslides?

According to the General Plan, the county has a low potential for landslide hazards (County of Tulare 2012). The project would occur in a mountainous area with steep slopes, which increases the potential for landslides to occur. However, implementation of the project would not result in new habitable structures that would be at risk or put people at risk of loss, injury, or death due to landslides; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?

The project proposes vegetation management, fuels reduction, and prescribed burning within the Case Mountain area. The project does not propose the construction of new access routes or landings that would result in substantial soil disturbance. Heavy equipment and vehicle use and tree removal activities have the potential to result in increased erosion within work areas; however, the project includes design features that would be implemented to reduce the amount of erosion and loss of topsoil from project activities. As described in Section 1.4.6, Project Design Features, proposed design features identified for soils and water quality and riparian areas would minimize the potential for soil erosion and loss of topsoil.

Implementation of the project design features would ensure project activities would not adversely affect soils productivity or increase erosion or siltation in a manner that could result in the degradation of water quality; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c) Would the project be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?**

According to the USGS Areas of Land Subsidence in California Map, the project site is not located within an area of recorded subsidence (USGS 2018). Additionally, the project site is located in an area with low potential for liquefaction, landslides, and other ground-failure events. The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities within the Case Mountain area. Implementation of the project would reduce the risk for catastrophic wildfire and post-fire ground failure events. The project would not be located on an unstable geologic unit and would be beneficial to reduce risk of post-fire ground failure events; therefore, impact would be *less than significant*.

- d) Would the project be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?**

Typically, expansive soils are soils that have a high shrink/swell potential and are typically comprised of clay and clay materials. The project site is not underlain by soils with high clay content; therefore, the project site has a low shrink/swell potential. The project does not propose habitable structures that would be at risk if located on expansive soils. Soils at the project site have a low shrink-swell potential and would not expose people or structures to risk due to location on expansive soils; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- e) Would the project have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?**

The project does not propose the installation of septic tanks or wastewater disposal systems; therefore, *no impact* would occur.

- f) Would the project directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?**

The Case Mountain Area is predominantly underlain by gabbro and dark dioritic rocks of the Mesozoic era (USGS 2010). The project site is not underlain by paleontologically sensitive geologic formations (BLM 2020). In addition, the project does not propose excavation or deep cuts into the bedrock that could result in disturbance of unknown paleontological resources; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

VIII. Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Tulare County initially adopted the Tulare County CAP in August 2012, which has since been updated based on *California's 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan* (CARB 2017). The 2018 CAP is a guiding document for County actions aimed at reducing GHG emissions and adapting to the potential effects of climate change. The 2018 CAP incorporates new baseline and future year inventories to reflect the latest information and includes the County's updated strategy to address the SB 32 2030 target. The 2030 target requires the state to reduce emissions by 40% below 1990 levels. The 2018 CAP actions are summarized as follows:

- Identifies sources of GHG emissions caused by activities within the unincorporated areas of Tulare County and estimates how these emissions may change over time.
- Establishes a reduction target of reducing Tulare County's GHG emissions to demonstrate consistency with AB 32 (2006) and SB 32 (2016) and CARB Scoping Plan targets.
- Provides energy use, transportation, land use, water conservation, and solid waste strategies to bring Tulare County's GHG emissions levels to the reduction target.
- Mitigates the impacts of Tulare County activities on climate change (by reducing GHG emissions consistent with the direction of the State of California through AB 32, SB 32, Governor's Executive Order S-03-05, and the 2009 amendments to the State CEQA Guidelines to comply with SB 97 (2008). The State CEQA Guidelines encourage the adoption of policies or programs as a means of addressing comprehensively the cumulative impacts of projects (Sections 15064[h][3] and 15130[c]).
- Allows the GHG emissions inventory and CAP to be updated every 5 years and to respond to changes in science, effectiveness of emission reduction measures, and federal, state, regional, or local policies to further strengthen the County's response to the challenges of climate change.
- Provides substantial evidence that the emission reductions estimated in the CAP are feasible.
- Serves as the threshold of significance within Tulare County for climate change impacts, by which all applicable developments within the county will be reviewed.
- Proposed development projects that are consistent with the emission reduction and adaptation measures included in the CAP and the programs that are developed as a result of the CAP would be considered to have a less-than-significant cumulative impact on climate change and emissions consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064(h)(3) as amended to comply with SB 97.

Environmental Evaluation

a) Would the project generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?

Project activities include the removal of dead and dying trees, vegetation thinning, and prescribed burning. Three crew rigs would be used to transport crews to and from the project site and would result in approximately 10 vehicle trips per day. Construction equipment for the proposed project includes chainsaws, wheeled and tracked chippers, skid steer-mounted masticators, and excavator-mounted masticators for small tree thinning; standard logging equipment, including dozers, rubber tire skidders, tracked feller bunchers, dozers, and excavators; and up to 10 trucks, including worker trucks, service trucks, and fuel trucks, for prescribed burning. The use of heavy equipment and machinery has the potential to result in a temporary increase of GHG emissions during implementation of the project.

The project would be implemented using a phased approach over a 10-year period and would be compliant with “permissive-burn” days and the smoke management plan as defined by the CARB in order to minimize smoke impacts to the public. The project would not result in permanent new sources of operational GHG emissions. Implementation of the project would be beneficial by reducing the risk for future catastrophic wildfire that would result in substantial pollutant emissions if it were to occur. Compliance with all SJVAPCD rules and regulations and implementation of Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would ensure the project would not result in a significant increase in GHG emissions; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

b) Would the project conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?

The County developed the 2018 CAP as a guiding document for County actions aimed at reducing GHG emissions and adapting to the potential effects of climate change. The 2018 CAP incorporates new baseline and future year inventories to reflect the latest information and includes the County’s updated strategy to address the SB 32 2030 target, which requires the state to reduce emissions by 40% below 1990 levels. The 2018 CAP provides action items to identify and sources of emissions and strategies to reduce emissions to the target requirements. The project would be required to comply with the 2018 CAP. Table 2 shows the project’s consistency with the 2018 CAP.

Table 2. Project Consistency with 2018 Climate Action Plan

2018 CAP Measure	Compliance
Land Use: Project is consistent with the Tulare County General Plan policies listed in the CAP applicable to GHG emissions and sustainability.	The project would be consistent with the General Plan land use and zoning designations and applicable policies; however, policies related to mixed land use design, energy-efficient building design, and VMT reduction are not applicable to the project. Implementation of project design features, such as vanpooling, and Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would reduce emissions during project activities. Additionally, the project would be consistent with the CARB <i>Smoke Management Guidelines for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning</i> (CARB 2001) and would be conducted on “permissive-burn” days defined by CARB. Additionally, the project would be conducted using a phased approach over a 10-year period to avoid uncontrolled release of pollutant emissions during prescribed burning. Therefore, the project would be consistent with the 2018 CAP and General Plan.

2018 CAP Measure	Compliance
Land Use—Residential: Subdivisions and multifamily projects propose densities consistent with County commitments for the Tulare Blueprint. Densities in subdivisions within the boundaries of Valley rural communities must be at least 5.0 units per acre. (County R-1 zoning has a 6,000 square foot minimum lot size or 7.26 units per gross acre). Overall residential density is 5.3 units per acre for the entire County including the cities. Mountain subdivisions over 50 lots require review to determine if they are consistent with the Blueprint.	N/A
Land Use—Non-Residential: Retail and office projects should be constructed within the boundaries of Rural Communities, HDB, UDB, LDB, and in designated transportation corridors to provide needed local goods services to residents and the traveling public. Agricultural industrial projects may be constructed in rural locations as long as consistent with the General Plan.	N/A
Land Use Design: Projects that require construction of new roads or major intersection improvements provide a fair share of improvements such as sidewalks and pedestrian friendly crossings, and bike lanes/pathways connecting to schools, shopping, and other uses consistent with County development standards.	N/A
Energy Efficiency: Project complies with current version of Title 24. (Current version is 2016 Title 24)	N/A
Renewable Energy: Project includes solar panels or other alternative energy source meeting County Solar Ordinance or new Title 24 standards whichever is more stringent.	N/A
EV Charging: Project meets charging installation/charging ready requirements of the CalGreen Code.	N/A
CalGreen Building Code Water: Project complies with indoor and outdoor water conservation measures.	N/A
Water Conservation Landscaping	N/A
Solid Waste: Project has access to recycling service for homes and businesses meeting CalRecycle requirements.	Solid waste produced by the project would be organic material, including woody debris and shrubs. Waste would be disposed of on-site using chipping, burning, mastication, etc. Logs may be sold to Terra Bella mill (Sierra Forest Products), but the use of an off-site waste facility would not be necessary.
Large Employment Projects: Projects that will have large numbers of employees (over 100) are required to comply with Rule 9410 Employee Trip Reduction Plans (ETRIP). Provide a copy of the ETRIP plan to the County after approval of the plan by the SJVAPCD.	N/A
Industrial Projects: Industrial projects that are large employers will comply with Rule 9410. Industrial process related GHG emissions are not under the County's regulatory authority but will require permits from the SJVAPCD and may be subject to Cap-and-Trade.	N/A

Project activities would be limited to vegetation management and fuels reduction activities, which include removal of dead and dying trees, vegetation thinning, and prescribed burns. The project does not propose new development that would increase the population or long-term vehicle trips to the area. Additionally, the project would not result in new buildings that would be subject to energy efficiency and other design standards. Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would require implementation of applicable SJVAPCD control measures to ensure diesel idling and heavy equipment use does not result in GHG emissions that would exceed SJVAPCD thresholds. Prescribed burns would be conducted on “permissive-burn” days and would comply with the CARB *Smoke Management Guidelines for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning* (CARB 2001) to ensure emissions from burning do not adversely affect the public or the environment.

Based on the nature of the proposed project and design features of the project, the project would be consistent with the 2018 CAP and impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

Mitigation Measures

Implement Mitigation Measure AQ-1.

IX. Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List (Cortese List), which is a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to California Government Code (CGC) Section 65962.5, is a planning document used by the state, local agencies, and developers to comply with CEQA requirements related to the disclosure of information about the location of hazardous materials release sites. The project would not be in an area of known hazardous material contamination and is not on a site listed on the Cortese List (State Water Resources Control Board [SWRCB] 2021; California Department of Toxic Substance Control [DTSC] 2021).

The *Tulare County General Plan Health and Safety Element* (Chapter 10 of the General Plan) includes policies and goals for public safety in relation to hazards within the county. Hazards include, but are not

limited to, hazardous material use, wildfire, dam inundation, flooding, and other potential risks to public safety (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

a) *Would the project create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?*

The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities on approximately 1,100 acres of land within the Case Mountain area. Vegetation management and fuels reduction activities include removal of dead and dying trees, vegetation thinning, and prescribed burning. The project would require the use of gasoline and diesel fuel for worker vehicles and construction vehicles and equipment. Vehicles and equipment would be used in compliance with state and local regulations to avoid accidental fuel or gasoline leaks and spills. Any other hazardous materials would be used in accordance with state and local laws and regulations to ensure public safety. During project activities, the operator would be required to have an approved spill plan or other applicable contingency plan. In the event of any release of oil or hazardous substance into the soil, water, or air, the operator would immediately implement the site's plan. As part of the plan, the operator would be required to have spill containment kits present on-site during project activities. The following would be required:

- Equipment refueling would be conducted within a confined area outside riparian areas.
- All hazardous materials and petroleum products would be stored in durable containers outside of riparian areas.
- Equipment containing toxic fluids would not be stored within riparian areas.

Implementation of the proposed spill plan and compliance with existing state and local regulations for equipment use and handling of hazardous materials would ensure the project does not create a significant hazard to the public or the environment; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

b) *Would the project create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?*

The project does not propose the use of hazardous materials that would put the public at significant risk if accidentally released. Any hazardous material used for the project would be handled in accordance with state and local regulations to prevent accidental upset to the public. Additionally, the project proposes the implementation of a spill plan, as described in Section 1.4.6, Project Design Features, and under Impact Discussion IX(a), in the unlikely event of an accidental hazardous material spill. Additionally, prescribed burning would release smoke to the public. Prescribed burns would be conducted on "permissive-burn" days as defined by the CARB and implemented over a 10-year time frame to ensure a controlled release of smoke. Based on compliance with existing regulations and implementation of a hazardous materials spill plan, the project is not expected to create significant hazard to the public; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

c) *Would the project emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?*

The project is located in a rural area and is not located within 0.25 mile of an existing or proposed school; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

- d) Would the project be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?**

According to the DTSC EnviroStor database and the SWRCB GeoTracker database, there are no known active hazardous materials sites within the Case Mountain Area (DTSC 2021; SWRCB 2021). The nearest known hazardous materials sites are closed cases located approximately 6 miles west within the community of Three Rivers. There are no known active hazardous materials sites within the project area; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

- e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?**

The project is not located within 2 miles of an airport or within an Airport Land Use Plan (ALUP); therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

- f) Would the project impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?**

The County has established emergency response and prevention measures for wildfire and other potential hazards within the General Plan Health and Safety Element; the 2011 Multi-Jurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plans (LHMP); the Tulare County Emergency Operations Plans (EOP); the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Tulare Unit Strategic Fire Plan; and the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) (County of Tulare 2012). The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities within the Case Mountain area in order to reduce the risk for catastrophic wildfire in the area. The project would be consistent with goals and policies of the identified emergency response plans because it would result in the prevention of wildfire events. Additionally, the project does not propose any road closures or traffic controls that could impede emergency response throughout the area. The project site would be accessed via Salt Creek Road, which may temporarily slow the flow of traffic due to transportation of large trucks and equipment, however, the road would remain open and accessible to emergency and other vehicles; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- g) Would the project expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?**

Implementation of the project would result in fuel reduction activities, including lop and scatter, pile and burn, chipping, and mastication, which would reduce overall wildfire hazard in the Case Mountain area; however, due to existing drought conditions, there is potential for mastication to generate a wildfire event. A project design feature has been included to avoid mastication during the hot, dry months of July, August, and September, so long as drought conditions persist, in order to avoid the accidental ignition of wildfire. In addition, the project does not propose any new development that could expose people or structures to risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires. Vegetation management and fuel reduction activities would ensure existing structures, nearby residents, and visitors to the area are protected from potential wildfire events within the Case Mountain area; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

X. Hydrology and Water Quality

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:				
(i) Result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site;	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(iv) Impede or redirect flood flows?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The General Plan includes goals and policies for groundwater management and protection of water quality (County of Tulare 2012). The county, located within the Tulare Lake Basin, uses water supply from groundwater, local streams and rivers, and imported surface water. Groundwater in the valley of Tulare County occurs in an unconfined state throughout areas containing alluvial fans, and in the western portion of the county, groundwater occurs in a confined state. Extensive alluvial fans associated with the Kings, Kaweah, and Tule Rivers provide highly permeable areas in which groundwater in the unconfined aquifer system can be easily replenished. According to the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), the Tulare Lake Basin has a total estimated overdraft of 820,000 acre-feet per year (AFY), the greatest overdraft projected in the state (County of Tulare 2012).

The project area encompasses Case Mountain and several surface water resources, including Salt Creek, Cinnamon Creek, and the South Fork Kaweah River. There is also potential wetland and riparian habitat associated with surface water features in the area (USFWS 2020).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) Would the project violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?**

The project includes removal of dead and dying trees, vegetation thinning, and prescribed burning within the Case Mountain area. Implementation of the project has the potential to increase erosion and pollution that could runoff into various surface water resources and drainages present within the project area. The project includes proposed design features that would be implemented to reduce erosion and other pollutants from degrading water quality and disturbing riparian areas, as identified in Section 1.4.6, Project Design Features. The measures would require setbacks and other activity restrictions to minimize potential impacts related to water quality. Implementation of the project design features would ensure vegetation management and fuel reduction activities would not result in the degradation of water quality of water resources and riparian areas within the project area; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) Would the project substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?**

The project does not propose new development or other features that would create new impervious surfaces or otherwise interfere with groundwater recharge in the area or require the long-term use of groundwater. Implementation of the project may require limited amounts of water for dust suppression but would not substantially decrease groundwater supply; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c) Would the project substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:**

- c-i) Result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site?**

The project proposes the removal of dead and dying trees and the use of heavy machinery that has the potential to increase erosion and siltation throughout the project area. However, the project proposes the implementation of project design features that would protect water resources and riparian areas from erosion and siltation. Project design features would be implemented to ensure the project does not result in increased siltation or erosion; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c-ii) Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site?**

The project does not propose new development or installation of paved roads or other impervious surfaces or alter existing drainage patterns in a manner that could result in on- or off-site flooding. Project activities may result in temporary alteration of existing drainage patterns but are not anticipated to result in flooding due to the topography of the area, soil types present, and implementation of proposed design features intended to minimize impacts to soil and water resources. Implementation of the project design features would ensure the protection of existing drainage patterns; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

c-iii) Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff?

The project is located within a rural, mountainous area and does not propose new development or other features that would contribute runoff water that would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

c-iv) Impede or redirect flood flows?

As previously described, the project does not propose new development or other features that would increase impervious surface area or significantly alter drainage patterns in a manner that would impede or redirect flood flows. Additionally, the project site is located in an area with low potential for flooding; therefore, flood flows are not anticipated to occur on-site (County of Tulare 2012). The project includes design features that would ensure that, in the unlikely event of flooding, flood flows would not contain substantial amounts of sediment or pollutants from project activities; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, would the project risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?

According to the General Plan, the project area is not located within a 100-year flood zone or dam failure inundation zone (County of Tulare 2012). The project site is not located within an area that would be at risk for tsunami or seiche. Due to its location, the project is not at risk for pollutant release in the event of inundation; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

e) Would the project conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

The General Plan includes goals and policies for groundwater and water quality throughout the county (County of Tulare 2012). The project would not require the use of groundwater or a new source of water supply; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XI. Land Use and Planning

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Physically divide an established community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Tulare County encompasses approximately 4,839 square miles of land. Federal lands, including wilderness, national forests, monuments, and parks, make up approximately 52.2% of the county. Agricultural uses, including row crops, orchards, dairies, and grazing lands, encompass approximately 2,080.7 square miles, which is 43%, of the county. Remaining land within the county includes County parks, urban uses in incorporated cities, communities, hamlets, and infrastructure rights-of-way (County of Tulare 2012).

The General Plan identifies and describes designated land uses within the county and allowable uses within each designation (County of Tulare 2012). The Case Mountain area is zoned FA; typical land uses within the FA zone include orchards and vineyards, livestock grazing, resource extraction activities, agricultural facilities, and necessary public utility and safety facilities. An area within the eastern portion of Case Mountain is zoned TPZ; urban services are prohibited within TPZ unless necessary and compatible with existing land use (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

a) ***Would the project physically divide an established community?***

The project proposes vegetation management and fuel reduction activities within the Case Mountain Area, to the east of the community of Three Rivers. Vegetation management and fuel reduction activities would occur within a rural, forested area and does not propose development that would physically divide an established community; therefore, *no impact* would occur.

b) ***Would the project cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?***

Project activities would be limited to fuel reduction and vegetation management and would not result in new development or land uses that would conflict with the FA and TPZ zoning standards. The project proposes design features that would be implemented during project activities to protect natural resources, including biological resources, cultural resources, soils, and water quality and riparian habitat during implementation of the proposed project, which is consistent with the General Plan. Implementation of identified mitigation measures would ensure the project would not conflict with a land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating environmental effects; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

Mitigation Measures

Implement Mitigation Measures AQ-1, BIO-1, and CUL-1.

XII. Mineral Resources

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally- important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA; PRC Division 2, Chapter 9, Section 2710 et seq.) contains provisions for the inventory of mineral lands in the state. The State Geologist, in accordance with the State Mining and Geology Board *Guidelines for Classification and Designation of Mineral Lands* (DOC n.d.), must classify Mineral Resource Zones (MRZs).

According to the General Plan, mineral resources are defined as “naturally occurring materials in the earth that can be utilized for commercial purposes” (County of Tulare 2012). Economically, the most important minerals that are extracted within the county include sand, gravel, crushed rock, and natural gas. Other minerals that are extracted include tungsten and relatively small amounts of chromite, copper, gold, lead, manganese, silver, zinc, barite, feldspar limestone, and silica. The three streams that provide the main sources of high-quality sand and gravel in the county include the Kaweah River, Lewis Creek, and the Tule River. Other mining areas include the hard rock deposits of the foothills (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

a) Would the project result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?

According to the General Plan, the project site is not located within an identified MRZ (County of Tulare 2012). Additionally, the project proposes limited ground disturbance from the use of construction vehicles and equipment and removal of trees. The project would not result in excavation or large-scale ground-disturbing activities, conversion of undeveloped land, or otherwise result in the loss of a known mineral resource; therefore, *no impact* would occur.

b) Would the project result in the loss of availability of a locally- important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?

The General Plan includes policies intended to conserve identified or potential mineral deposits within the county and identifies MRZs within the county (County of Tulare 2012). The project area is not located within an MRZ identified in the General Plan; therefore, *no impact* would occur.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XIII. Noise

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project result in:</i>				
(a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The General Plan Health and Safety Element limits construction activities to the hours between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, when construction activity is located near sensitive receptor locations. For areas within the Foothill and Mountain Planning Areas and outside Foothill Development Corridors, the hourly equivalent continuous sound pressure level (L_{eq}) resulting from development or new noise-sensitive land uses or noise-generating sources shall not exceed 50 decibels (dB) between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. and 40 dB between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. when measured at the boundary of areas containing or planned and zoned for residential or other noise-sensitive land uses. For these same areas and under the same circumstances, the maximum A-weighted noise level (L_{max}) shall not exceed 70 dB during the day or 60 dB during the night (H.S. 8.12) (County of Tulare 2012).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***Would the project result in generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?***

The project proposes vegetation management and fuel reduction activities within the Case Mountain area. Construction equipment proposed for the project includes chainsaws, wheeled and tracked chippers, skid steer-mounted masticators, and excavator-mounted masticators for small tree thinning; standard logging equipment, including dozers, rubber tire skidders, tracked feller bunchers, dozers, and excavators; and up to 10 trucks, including worker trucks, service trucks, and fuel trucks, for fuel reduction activities. Due to the rural nature of the project area, the use of proposed equipment would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise within the project area. However, the project would not result in a new, permanent land use or other noise-generating features that would increase long-term noise ambient noise within the area. Noise generated by these activities would be minimal, short term, and intermittent and would only occur during daytime hours, consistent with the General Plan. These activities may result in a temporary increase in ambient noise levels; however, this increase is expected to be minor and short term, and is not anticipated to exceed 70 dB. The nearest sensitive receptor location is in the community of Three Rivers,

approximately 6 miles west of the project site; therefore, noise generated by project activities would not exceed established thresholds at sensitive receptor locations and impacts would be *less than significant*.

b) Would the project result in generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?

Groundborne vibration is not expected to occur as a result of the proposed project since no demolition or construction activities known to generate excessive groundborne vibration, such as pile driving, are proposed to occur. Any groundborne noise generated by project activities would be limited in nature and duration and would not be detected by distant sensitive receptor locations located approximately 6 miles west of the project area. Based on proposed project activities and the distance from the nearest sensitive receptor locations, impacts related to groundborne noise would be *less than significant*.

c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

The project area is not located within the vicinity of a public or private airstrip or with an ALUP; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XIV. Population and Housing

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The San Joaquin Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in the state, and the California Department of Finance (DOF) projects that the population of the valley will increase by 19.3% between 2015 and 2030, while the state of California is only projected to increase by 12.5% in that same period (SJVAPCD 2018). According to the General Plan, Tulare County is experiencing rapid population growth. The *Tulare County Housing Element 2015 Update* (Chapter 6 of the General Plan) includes a comprehensive assessment of current and future housing needs for all segments of the County's population (County of Tulare 2015). The General Plan Housing Element also includes specific programs and action items to accomplish the identified needs of the County. The General Plan anticipates population growth within the county, which would require a range of housing choices, neighborhood support services, and employment

producing uses that are centrally located in cities and unincorporated communities (County of Tulare 2015).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) **Would the project induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?**

The project does not propose the development of new residential units, businesses, or other occupiable structures that could directly induce population growth. Additionally, the project does not propose the development of new permanent roads or infrastructure that could indirectly induce population growth. The project is limited to vegetation management and fuel reduction activities and would not result in direct or indirect population growth to the area; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) **Would the project displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?**

The project does not propose the removal of existing housing or relocation of housing; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XV. Public Services

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:				
Fire protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Police protection?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schools?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other public facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Tulare County and special districts provide many important services to county residents and businesses in unincorporated communities, including fire protection services, law enforcement, and other public services. In 2006 the Tulare County Sheriff's Department had 450 officers serving the unincorporated

county. The nearest Sheriff's department station is the Lake Kaweah Tulare County Sheriff Lake Patrol, located approximately 10 miles southwest of the project area. Tulare County has a countywide fire department run jointly by the County and CAL FIRE (County of Tulare 2012). The nearest fire station is the Tulare County Fire Department Station 14, located approximately 6 miles west of the project area.

Case Mountain provides recreational opportunities throughout the public BLM-managed lands, including biking trails, hiking trails, and picnic areas (BLM 2021).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:***

Fire protection?

As described in Section XIV, Population and Housing, the project does not propose new development or other features that would increase population growth in the area. The project proposes vegetation management and fuel reduction activities and would not result in the development of new buildings, businesses, or structures that would increase demand on fire protection services. As the project is intended to reduce the on-site fuel load, it is intended to reduce the potential for wildland fire and could act to reduce the firefighting burden on firefighters during the fire season. Implementation of the project would not result in an increased demand on fire services; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Police protection?

The project does not propose new development or other features that would increase population growth in the area. The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities within the Case Mountain area and would not result in the development of new buildings, businesses, or other development that would result in an increased demand on police protection services. The project would not result in an increased demand on police protection services; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Schools?

The project does not propose new development or other features that would permanently increase population growth or the number of school-aged children in the area. The project would not result in an increased demand on local schools; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Parks?

The project would not result in population growth in the area. Proposed activities would not result in the deterioration of existing recreational facilities or the need for new or expanded facilities; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Other public facilities?

The project does not propose any development or other features that would increase population growth or result in an increased demand on public services or facilities; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XVI. Recreation

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
(a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The Case Mountain area includes BLM-managed recreational lands and private lands. The Case Mountain area includes approximately 444 acres of sequoia grove and humanmade lakes that offer public recreational opportunities. Additionally, the Case Mountain area provides numerous recreational opportunities, including mountain biking trails, hiking trails, equestrian trails, picnic tables, areas for wildlife observation and photography, and other opportunities to explore (BLM 2021).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?***

The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities on private lands within the Case Mountain area and is not expected to have an effect on recreational lands managed by the BLM. The project does not propose any features that would result in direct or indirect population growth. The project would not increase the use of existing public parks and recreational facilities that could result in substantial physical deterioration; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) ***Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?***

The project does not propose the development of new recreational facilities or the expansion of existing recreational facilities that could result in adverse environmental effects; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XVII. Transportation

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Would the project conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Tulare County is served by highway, rail, aviation, public transportation, and bicycle and pedestrian circulation. According to the General Plan, the safe and efficient transport of people and goods within the county is crucial to the wellbeing of residents and economic viability of the County (County of Tulare 2012). The county consists of two major regional highways—SR-99 and SR-198. SR-99 connects Tulare County with Fresno and Sacramento Counties to the north and Kern County to the south. SR-198 connects with U.S. Route 101 (US 101) on the west and extends east toward Tulare County into Sequoia National Park. The county also consists of state highways, county-maintained roads, and local streets (County of Tulare 2012).

Level of Service (LOS) is an operational analysis typically focused on intersections rather than road segments. LOS is used to rank traffic operations of various types of facilities based on traffic volumes and roadway capacity using a series of letter designations from A to F. Generally, LOS A represents free flow of traffic and LOS F represents forced flow (County of Tulare 2012).

VMT is a performance measure used in transportation planning for a variety of purposes. It measures the amount of vehicle travel in a geographic region over a given period of time. When one vehicle travels a distance of 1 mile, it generates 1 vehicle mile traveled. In this guideline, VMT is measured in terms of vehicle miles traveled per day. In the case of VMT analyses conducted for CEQA transportation studies, the vehicles to be analyzed are autos and light trucks. Goods movement is specifically excluded from a requirement to conduct VMT analysis. VMT, as used in this guideline, is often expressed in efficiency measures, including VMT per capita and VMT per employee. In order to determine VMT per capita, the total VMT generated per day would be divided by the number of residents in a given area (for example a project, a traffic analysis zone, or all of Tulare County). VMT per employee is calculated similarly using employees rather than residents (County of Tulare 2012).

The General Plan includes planning objectives, policies, and standards to reduce GHG emissions, make the most of efficient use of urban land and transportation infrastructure, and improve public health. The *Tulare County General Plan Transportation and Circulation Element* (Chapter 13 of the General Plan) includes programmatic policies that provide a guide for a balanced, multi-modal transportation network that meets County needs (County of Tulare 2020).

Environmental Evaluation

a) Would the project conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?

According to the General Plan, traffic impacts occur when projects generate more than 100 peak hour trips per day or when LOS D, or worse, occurs (County of Tulare 2020). The project does not propose new development or other features that would increase long-term trips. The project site is located in a rural area; therefore, plans and policies related to public transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities are not applicable. The project would result in a temporary increase in vehicle trips for project activities; however, it is not expected to result in more than 100 peak hour trips or degrade access roads to LOS D; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

b) Would the project conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?

The project proposes vegetation management and fuel reduction activities within the Case Mountain area and would require three crew rigs to carry approximately 36–42 workers to and from the project site and would generate approximately 10 trips per day. Additionally, prescribed burning and other fuel reduction activities would require up to 10 trucks, including worker trucks, service trucks, and fuel trucks, that would generate vehicle trips. Furthermore, the project would require the transportation of equipment that would be stored on existing landings within the project area and would only require trips as needed for maintenance or other related activities.

According to the General Plan Transportation and Circulation Element, VMT would be calculated by VMT per employee. As described above, the project would require approximately 36–42 employees; however, the employees would be transported using three crew rigs and would not generate individual vehicle trips to and from the project site. Therefore, this calculation would not be accurate in determining VMT generated by the project. Fuel reduction activities would result in a temporary increase in VMT; however, the project would implement vanpooling as a VMT reduction strategy to reduce the overall VMT generated by the project. Additionally, the project does not propose the development of new residential units, businesses, or other buildings that would generate long-term vehicle trips; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

c) Would the project substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

The project would utilize existing access routes and roads during project activities and does not propose the development of new temporary or permanent access routes or roads as part of the project. The project would not result in new access routes or roads that could increase hazards due to a geometric design feature; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

d) Would the project result in inadequate emergency access?

The project proposes to utilize existing access routes and roads, including Salt Creek Road, to access the project site. Large trucks and equipment transportation along Salt Creek Road may temporarily increase congestion; however, due to the rural setting and the restricted access along access routes, the project is not anticipated to require traffic controls or road closures that could impede emergency access to the project area. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XVIII. Tribal Cultural Resources

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
(a) Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:				
(i) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

Approved in 2014, AB 52 added tribal cultural resources to the categories of resources that must be evaluated under CEQA. Tribal cultural resources are defined as either of the following:

- 1) Sites, features, cultural landscapes, sacred places, and objects with cultural value to a California Native American tribe that are either of the following:
 - a. Included or determined to be eligible for inclusion in the CRHR; or
 - b. Included in a local register of historical resources as defined in PRC Section 5020.1(k).
- 2) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in PRC Section 5024.1(c). In applying these criteria for the purposes of this paragraph, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American Tribe.

Recognizing that tribes have expertise with regard to their tribal history and practices, AB 52 requires lead agencies to provide notice to tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of a proposed project if they have requested notice of projects proposed within that area. If the tribe requests consultation within 30 days upon receipt of the notice, the lead agency must consult with the tribe regarding the potential for adverse impacts on tribal cultural resources as a result of a project. Consultation may include discussing the type of environmental review necessary, the presence and/or significance of tribal cultural resources, the level of significance of a project's impacts on the tribal

cultural resources, and available project alternatives and mitigation measures recommended by the tribe to avoid or lessen potential impacts on tribal cultural resources.

Native American tribes were notified about the project on April 20, 2021, consistent with state regulations under AB 52. As of May 14, 2021, the TCRCD has not received any responses.

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:***
- a-i) ***Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k)?***
- a-ii) ***A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.***

The TCRCD has provided notice of the opportunity to consult to appropriate tribes per the requirements of AB 52 and has not received any responses as of May 14, 2021. As described in Section V, Cultural Resources, there are previously identified cultural resource sites located within lands adjacent to the project area. Field surveys conducted by PaleoWest Archaeology did not reveal any potential tribal cultural resources located within the project area or adjacent lands (PaleoWest Archaeology 2019). The project area does not contain any known tribal cultural resources that have been listed or been found eligible for listing in the CRHR, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in PRC Section 5020.1. As described in Section 1.4.6, project design features are included that would require pre-disturbance surveys, tribal coordination, avoidance of culturally sensitive sites, and compliance with NAGPRA to avoid potential impacts to archaeological resources if discovered during project implementation. In addition, Mitigation Measure CUL-1 has been included to halt work if a discovery is made until a qualified archaeologist can assess the significance of the find. Therefore, impacts related to a substantial adverse change in the significance of tribal cultural resource would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

Mitigation Measures

Implement Mitigation Measure CUL-1.

XIX. Utilities and Service Systems

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>Would the project:</i>				
(a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(d) Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

The County owns and operates sewer and water systems throughout Tulare County. All public water systems are required to meet the requirements identified by the Safe Drinking Water Act, and water distributed by the County is treated to provide safe drinking water to the public (County of Tulare 2021).

Water districts supply water to communities throughout the county. Most communities have wastewater treatment systems; however, several communities, including Three Rivers, Plainview, Alpaugh, and Ducor, use individual septic systems. Stormwater drainage facilities are generally constructed and maintained in conjunction with transportation improvements or new subdivisions in communities. Solid waste collection in the county is divided into service areas, as determined by the Board of Supervisors. Southern California Edison (SCE) provides electricity service to the southern and central areas of the county, while Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) provides electricity service in the north. The Gas Company is the primary provider of natural gas throughout the county (County of Tulare 2012). The county uses water from groundwater resources, local streams and rivers, and imported surface water.

Environmental Evaluation

- a) **Would the project require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?**

The project does not require the relocation or construction of new or expanded utility infrastructure; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

- b) **Would the project have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?**

The project does not propose new development or other features that would require the long-term demand for water. Implementation of the project may require limited amounts of water but would not substantially decrease water supply. The project does not propose features that would require connection to groundwater or other water supply; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c) **Would the project result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?**

The project does not require new or expanded connections to a wastewater treatment provider; therefore, *no impacts* would occur.

- d) **Would the project generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?**

Implementation of the project would result in organic waste in the form of dead and dying trees and other vegetation and woody debris. Logs that are removed during project activities may be sold to the Terra Bella mill (Sierra Forest Products). Vegetation would be disposed of by piling and burning, chipping, masticating, or underburning and would not require the use of a local waste facility. Due to the nature of disposal, the project would not generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- e) **Would the project comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?**

As described above, organic waste produced by project activities would be disposed of on-site and would not require the use of a waste facility for disposal. Due to the nature of solid waste disposal, the project would be compliant with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XX. Wildfire

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
<i>If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:</i>				
(a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Setting

California has experienced unprecedented tree mortality due to years of drought, overly dense forests, and the invasion of bark beetles. Decades of fire suppression and decreased vegetation management have led to natural overstocking of fuels, which threaten forest stands as competition and stress leads to die off. Additionally, drought conditions have allowed invasion of bark beetles and pathogen attack, which cause rapid mortality throughout forest stands. Historical logging practices and livestock grazing have also contributed to poor forest health throughout California, especially along the western slopes of the southern Sierra Nevada. Current forest conditions, including tree mortality and overly dense stands, increase the risk of high heat and crowning during wildfire events, which could result in catastrophic damage to the landscape and within WUIs. Giant sequoia stands within the Case Mountain area are of high environmental value and are at risk of high-intensity wildfires caused by poor forest conditions. Without active vegetation management within the Case Mountain area, poor forest health and high-intensity fire could result in the loss of giant sequoia stands.

Tulare County is at risk for both urban and wildland fire hazards (County of Tulare 2012). The County has adopted several plans that identify active fire prevention measures. Along with the General Plan Health and Safety Element, the following plans provide active fire prevention measures for the County (County of Tulare 2012):

1. The 2011 Multi-Jurisdictional LHMP for the Tulare Operational Area was developed in accordance with the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 and was guided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 2008 LHMP. The LHMP identifies and profiles hazards and creates mitigation actions to reduce or eliminate the risk for hazards. Implementation of these mitigation actions include short- and long-term strategies for planning, policy changes, programs, projects, and other activities.
2. The Tulare County EOP establishes emergency management organization and assigns functions and tasks consistent with California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

3. The CAL FIRE Tulare Unit Strategic Fire Plan is a product of the implementation of the California State Fire Plan. The plan includes a local road map to create and maintain defensible landscapes in order to protect important areas. The goal of the Strategic Fire Plan is to reduce firefighting costs and property loss, increase public and firefighter safety, minimize risk to communities, and contribute to ecosystem health. The plan identifies fire prevention projects with the goal of preventing the impacts of wildfire. The main components of the Strategic Fire Plan include the following:
 - Improved availability and use of information on hazard and risk assessment.
 - Land use planning, including general plans, new development, and existing developments.
 - Shared vision among communities and the multiple fire protection jurisdictions, including county-based plans and community-based plans, such as CWPPs.
 - Establishing fire resistance in assets at risk, such as homes and neighborhoods.
 - Shared vision among multiple fire protection jurisdictions and agencies.
 - Levels of fire suppression and related services.
 - Post-fire recovery.
4. The TCRCD-Sequoia Fire Safe Council implemented a CWPP for the northern and southern half of Tulare County. The goal of the CWPP is to heighten cooperation, collaboration, and commitment to watershed protection and fire prevention.

According to the CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) viewer, the project area is located within High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones within a State Responsibility Area (SRA) (CAL FIRE 2021).

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?***

The project site encompasses the Case Mountain area, which is located within high and very high FHSZs (CAL FIRE 2021). According to the General Plan, the county is at risk for urban and wildland fire hazards. Active fire prevention measures for the county are identified in the General Plan Health and Safety Element, 2011 Multi-Jurisdictional LHMP, Tulare County EOP, CAL FIRE Tulare Unit Strategic Fire Plan, and CWPP. The project proposes vegetation management and fuels reduction activities within the Case Mountain area in order to reduce the risk for catastrophic wildfire in the area. The project would be consistent with goals and policies of the identified emergency response plans because it would result in the prevention of wildfire events; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- b) ***Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, if located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?***

The project is located in the Case Mountain area, which is at an elevation of approximately 6,550 feet above mean sea level (msl) (BLM 2021). Currently, the project area is at a high risk for wildfire risk due to poor forest conditions. Proposed activities include lop and scatter, pile and burn, chipping, and mastication to reduce vegetation within the Case Mountain area. Fuel reduction activities would result in an overall reduction of wildfire risk in the area; however, due to existing drought conditions, mastication

has the potential to ignite a wildfire if conducted in hot, dry conditions. A project design feature has been included to avoid mastication during the months of July, August, and September, so long as drought conditions persist, in order to avoid the accidental ignition of wildfire in the area. In addition, the project does not propose new development that would be at risk due to its location in a very high FHSZ. Implementation of the project would result in vegetation management and fuels reduction activities that would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire within the area. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not exacerbate wildfire risk but would be beneficial by reducing wildfire risk to surrounding areas; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- c) If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?**

The project does not propose the development or expansion of any roads, utilities, or other infrastructure that may exacerbate fire risk. Project activities would utilize existing access routes and landings within the area. The project would be limited to vegetation thinning and removal of dead and dying trees near existing roads in order to reduce wildfire risk and other hazards in the area; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

- d) If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?**

The project does not propose new development of aboveground features that would be at risk for post-fire events. Additionally, the project would result in management activities aimed at improving overall forest health and protection from wildfire events, which would reduce the potential for post-fire hazards. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant*.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation is not necessary.

XXI. Mandatory Findings of Significance

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
(a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Environmental Issues	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
(b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Environmental Evaluation

- a) ***Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?***

Project activities include the removal of dead and dying trees, vegetation thinning, and prescribed burning, and have the potential to result in impacts to biological and cultural resources; however, the project proposes design features to avoid and reduce impacts to biological and cultural resources during implementation of project activities. The design features are described throughout the document and, combined with applicable mitigation measures, would ensure project activities do not significantly impact resources within the Case Mountain area; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

- b) ***Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)?***

When project impacts are considered along or in combination with other impacts, the project-related impacts may be significant. The project proposes design features that would reduce project impacts to aesthetic resources, biological resources, cultural resources, soils, and water quality and riparian areas. Implementation of the project would contribute to cumulative levels of air pollutant and GHG emissions. Mitigation measures have been incorporated to reduce project-related impacts to a less-than-significant level; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

- c) ***Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?***

The project proposes design features that would reduce direct and indirect impacts on human beings. Implementation of the design features and mitigation measures identified within this document would ensure project activities would not result in adverse effects to human beings; therefore, impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation*.

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