

Memo



UPPER SALINAS-LAS TABLAS
RESOURCE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Upper Salinas-Las Tablas
Resource Conservation District
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Date: May 1, 2023

To: California Coastal Commission and Interested Parties

From: Spencer Gordon, Project Manager, Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District

Subject: Notice of Impending Development (NOID) for the Hearst Ranch Forest Health Fuels Reduction Project (SLT-NOID-0002-23)

Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 30606 and California Coastal Commission (Commission) Regulations Section 13358 and Section 13359, this letter is presented to provide Notice of Impending Development (NOID) for the Hearst Ranch Forest Health Fuels Reduction Project in San Luis Obispo County. Such notice must be submitted to the Commission before a public agency proposing a public works project pursuant to a certified Public Works Plan (PWP) may commence with implementation of the project.

Project Description

CAL FIRE San Luis Obispo Unit is proposing the Hearst Ranch Forest Health Fuels Reduction Project (project or proposed project). The project consists of vegetation treatments on up to 762 acres of land, comprising up to 132 acres of project area at San Simeon Point and up to 630 acres of project area at Pico Creek. Both project areas are located near the unincorporated town of San Simeon in San Luis Obispo County. The vegetation treatments would be consistent with Coastal Vegetation Treatment Standards (Coastal VTS) and the objectives of the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP).

CAL FIRE San Luis Obispo Unit, in coordination with the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council, is facilitating the implementation of treatments on both project areas as the project proponent. Treatments would consist of Ecological Restoration, as defined in the CalVTP Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). Monterey pine forests in the region have been identified as rare, important forestland in need of restorative management focused on forest health and wildfire prevention. The goals for the proposed vegetation treatments are to increase the health and vigor of the Monterey pine forest, increase biological diversity, promote ecosystem resiliency, and reduce the severity of wildfire.

At both project sites, proposed treatment activities are proposed to consist of manual and mechanical treatments, prescribed burning, and selective herbicide application. Treated vegetation may be lopped and scattered on-site, processed into chips or residual masticated material, or burned on-site by way of broadcast or pile burning.

Treatment maintenance could be ongoing and continuous within the two project areas, as needed, that utilize similar treatment approaches to what is implemented during the initial treatment phase. Treatment crews on-site would range in size depending on the treatment activity, from one- to five-person crews for herbicide treatments to up to 45 workers for prescribed burns. Although there is the potential for the prescribed burning treatment activity to occur

during nighttime and weekend hours, manual, mechanical, and herbicide treatment activities would be limited to daytime hours. Treatments would begin in 2023 or as soon as possible following approval where feasible, and dependent on the availability of resources to implement the initial treatment. Implementation of initial treatments would occur over a span of approximately 3 years, after which maintenance treatments would be implemented in subsequent years to maintain the initial treatments and preserve conservation values promoted by a current conservation easement implemented on the property in 2005 and held in perpetuity by the California Rangeland Trust.

Environmental Documents

Coastal Zone Considerations – Public Works Plan

The Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District (US-LT RCD) Forest Health and Fire Resilience Public Works Plan (PWP) was certified by the Commission in 2021. The PWP provides a streamlined mechanism for Coastal Act compliance in combination with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance process facilitated by the CalVTP Program Environmental Impact Report for vegetation treatment projects within the Coastal Zone of a portion of San Luis Obispo County. The PWP requires that projects adhere to the Coastal VTS approved as part of the PWP and that additional information about project design be provided in site-specific detail.

California Vegetation Treatment Program

The CalVTP PEIR was certified by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection in 2019 to provide a streamlined mechanism for CEQA compliance for vegetation treatment projects. It evaluates the potential environmental effects of implementing qualifying Ecological Restoration, Wildland-Urban Interface, and Fuel Break treatments throughout the State Responsibility Area in California. It was designed for use by many state and local agencies and special districts to accelerate vegetation treatment project approvals by finding them to be within the scope of the PEIR through the preparation of a Project-Specific Analysis (PSA). The PSA must demonstrate that the proposed activities align with those in the CalVTP, the effects of proposed vegetation treatment are consistent with those analyzed in the PEIR, and Standard Project Requirements and Mitigation Measures (MMs) from the PEIR will be integrated into the treatment to avoid or minimize impacts.

A PSA was prepared that evaluates this project as a later activity covered by the CalVTP PEIR as required pursuant to CEQA and includes information that demonstrates the project's consistency with the Coastal VTS as required pursuant to the California Coastal Act and PWP. Coastal VTS documentation for the Hearst Ranch Forest Health Fuels Reduction Project can be found in Attachment D of the PSA.

This NOID, as well as all supporting environmental documents, including the PSA and the Coastal VTS, are available for public review from May 1, 2023 to June 9, 2023 at the California Coastal Commission office located at 455 Market Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California 94105. The documents will also be available for review and download online on the California Coastal Commission's Agenda webpage, found under Meetings, Monthly agenda at: <https://www/coastal.ca.gov/>.

Consistency with PWP

The Final US-LT RCD Forest Health and Fire Resilience PWP was approved by the US-LTRCD Board on September 16, 2021 and certified by the Commission on October 15, 2021. The project will be carried out pursuant to and consistent with the PWP as documented in the PSA and the Coastal VTS.

Approval Process

As defined in the CalVTP Program EIR and the PSA, the project proponent is a public agency that provides funding for vegetation treatment or has land ownership, land management, or other regulatory responsibility in the treatable landscape and is seeking to fund, authorize, or implement vegetation treatments consistent with the CalVTP. CAL FIRE San Luis Obispo Unit meets the definition of project proponent and serves as the responsible agency. CAL FIRE San Luis Obispo Unit, in coordination with the San Luis Obispo County Fire Safe Council, is facilitating the implementation of treatments on both San Simeon Point and Pico Creek. For Coastal Act compliance, CAL FIRE San Luis Obispo Unit, in coordination with the US-LT RCD as a verifying/monitoring entity, is responsible for partnering with other agencies to implement the procedures in the PWP and is responsible for maintaining oversight to confirm consistency with PWP processes.

The US-LT RCD Board approved this project at a Board meeting on April 27, 2023 (resolution #2023-02). The US-LT RCD staff contact for this project is:

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Consistent with the requirements of the PWP, the US-LT RCD notified the Commission in advance of its intent to submit a NOID for the project. After receiving the NOID, the Commission director has five days to deem the NOID complete and filed or request additional information. The Commission is also responsible for reviewing the PSA and response to the Coastal VTS, and for determining whether the project is consistent with the PWP. Commission review of a proposed project is deemed complete on the date that the project is determined to be consistent with the PWP. The proposed Commission hearing to approve the PSA and act on the NOID for this project begins on June 7, 2023 and extends through June 9, 2023. The Commission staff contact for this project is:

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