NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

State of California
The Natural Resources Agency
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

PROJECT TITLE	Palomar Divide Fuelbreak Project (14-SRA-HF-01-0377)		
PROJECT LOCATION	Portion of Section 26 and 27, T 9S, R 1E, SBB&M	**COUNTY**	San Diego
LEAD AGENCY	California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)		
CONTACT	Suzanne Leininger Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department (PMVFD)		
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Project Description:
The intent of the project is to establish a fuelbreak along a 2-mile section of Palomar Divide Truck Trail in the unincorporated community of Palomar Mountain, in the northeastern portion of San Diego County. The project is located on the California Institute of Technology (Cal Tech) property; which includes Palomar Observatory. The project intends to reduce hazardous vegetation along the Palomar Divide Truck Trail. Should a wildfire start in the vicinity or spread towards Cal Tech property, the treated area is expected to reduce fire intensity, enhance fire suppression opportunities, and decrease the threat of wildfire spreading further into Cal Tech property and into the community area Palomar Mountain.

Several wildfires have burned near this area; however, the last recorded fire within the project area was in 1928. With the absence of fire in the project area, the fuel loading is moderate to high. The project focuses on reducing the vertical and horizontal continuity of fuels adjacent to Palomar Divide Truck Trail. The fuelbreak is approximately 2 miles in length, 150 feet wide and varies from 25 feet to 125 feet on either side of the roadway – based on aspect and slope steepness. The fuelbreak starts near the western gate on Palomar Divide Truck Trail and follows the road to the eastern gate. Overall, the project intends to treat approximately 75% of the vegetation on 36 acres. Treatment focuses on reducing brush species, such as manzanita, ceanothus, and scrub oak species by mechanical and hand treatments without the removal of the root structure. Larger diameter trees, approximately 6 inches or greater in size will be retained and may be limbed and pruned to further separate the vertical clearance. In isolated locations, smaller diameter trees may be cut for clearance. The cut material from masticating or chipping will be spread on site and not to exceed four inches in depth. While mechanical equipment will operate in the project area to masticate brush species, no significant soil disturbing activities is expected with this project. The life span of this review is expected to be valid for five years and be applicable for minor maintenance to retain the effectiveness of the fuel break.

EXEMPTION STATUS

- [x] Categorical Exemption Type/Section: Class 4 1530. Minor Alterations to Land
- [ ] Statutory Exemption (state code section):
- [ ] Ministerial (§21080(b)(1); 15268)
- [ ] Declared Emergency (§21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- [ ] Emergency Project (§21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c))

REASONS PROJECT IS EXEMPT

This project fits under the description for a Class 4 Categorical Exemption pertaining to minor alterations to land as identified in the CEQA Guidelines. After completing an environmental analysis, the Department has determined this project will have no significant impact on the environment. This determination is based on field assessments, a CNDDB and RareFind, and BIOS search, greenhouse gas emission calculations, and an archaeological review completed under contract by a Registered Professional Forester (RPF) through the PMVFD.

Field review by CAL FIRE staff and RPF confirmed that no exceptions apply which would preclude the use of a Notice of Exemption for this project. The Department has concluded that no significant environmental impact would occur to aesthetics, agriculture and forestland/timberland, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation/traffic, or to utilities and service systems. Documentation of the environmental review is kept on file at CAL FIRE MVU Headquarters in El Cajon and is also available at the PMVFP station in Palomar Mountain.

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING
Governor's Office of Planning & Research

FEB 02 2016

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

1/27/16

Helge Eng, Deputy Director — Date
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection