

Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations for CEQA Project-Specific Analysis and Addendum Regarding the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District, referred to herein as "Project Proponent" or "District," in the exercise of its independent judgment, makes and adopts the following findings regarding its decision to approve the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project as within the scope of the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP). In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (Pub. Resources Code, Sections 21000 et seq.) (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., Tit. 14, Sections 15000 et seq.), the District has considered the Program Environmental Impact Report prepared for the CalVTP, State Clearinghouse Number 2019012052, which was certified by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection in December 2019 ("CalVTP PEIR"), and the Project-Specific Analysis (PSA) and Addendum thereto, dated February 2022, for the District's approval of the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project ("PSA/Addendum February 2022").

The CalVTP PEIR, including the information contained in the PSA/Addendum dated February 2022, contains the environmental analysis and information necessary to support approval of the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project (hereafter, the "project"), as set forth below.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS FOR FINDINGS

Public Resources Code Section 21002 provides that "public agencies should not approve projects as proposed if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of such projects[.]" The same section provides that the procedures required by CEQA "are intended to assist public agencies in systematically identifying both the significant effects of projects and the feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures which will avoid or substantially lessen such significant effects." (Pub. Resources Code, Section 21002.) Section 21002 goes on to provide that "in the event [that] specific economic, social, or other conditions make infeasible such project alternatives or such mitigation measures, individual projects may be approved in spite of one or more significant effects thereof."

The mandate and principles announced in Public Resources Code Section 21002 are implemented, in part, through the requirement that agencies must adopt findings before approving projects for which EIRs are required. (See Pub. Resources Code, Section 21081, subd. (a); CEQA Guidelines, Section 15091, subd. (a).) For each significant environmental effect identified in an EIR for a project, the approving agency must issue a written finding reaching one or more of three permissible conclusions:

- (1) Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.
- (2) Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.

- (3) Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the final EIR.

(CEQA Guidelines, Section 15091, subd. (a); Pub. Resources Code, Section 21081, subd. (a).) Public Resources Code Section 21061.1 defines “feasible” to mean “capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, social, legal, and technological factors.” (See also *Citizens of Goleta Valley v. Bd. of Supervisors* (1990) 52 Cal.3d 553, 565.)

With respect to a project for which significant impacts are not avoided or substantially lessened, a public agency, after adopting proper findings, may nevertheless approve the project if the agency first adopts a Statement of Overriding Considerations setting forth the specific reasons why the agency found that the project’s “benefits” rendered “acceptable” its “unavoidable adverse environmental effects.” (CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15093, 15043, subd. (b); see also Pub. Resources Code, Section 21081, subd. (b).) The California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection (the Board), adopted Findings and a Statement of Overriding Considerations on December 30, 2019.

Here, as explained in the Board’s Findings and the Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (Draft PEIR) and the Final PEIR (collectively, the “PEIR”), the CalVTP would result in significant and unavoidable environmental effects to the following: Aesthetics; Air Quality; Archaeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resources; Biological Resources; Greenhouse Gas Emissions; Public Services, Utilities, and Service Systems; and Transportation. For reasons set forth in the Board’s Statement of Overriding Considerations, however, the Board determined that overriding economic, social, and other considerations outweigh the significant, unavoidable effects of the CalVTP.

When an agency approves a vegetation treatment project using a within the scope finding for all environmental impacts, it must adopt its own CEQA findings pursuant to Section 15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines, and if needed, a statement of overriding considerations, pursuant to Section 15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines. (See CEQA Guidelines section 15096(h).) When an agency approves a vegetation treatment project using an addendum, it must also adopt its own CEQA findings pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15164. Although each agency must adopt its own findings, such agencies have the option of reusing, incorporating, or adapting all or part of the findings adopted by the Board for the CalVTP PEIR to meet the agency’s own requirements to the extent the findings are applicable to the proposed vegetation treatment project. The following document sets forth the required findings for an agency’s project-specific approval that relies on and implements the CalVTP PEIR.

The Project Proponent adopts these findings to document its exercise of its independent judgment regarding the potential environmental effects analyzed in the PEIR and to document its reasoning for approving the vegetation treatment project under the CalVTP in spite of these effects.

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

BACKGROUND

The Board is supporting the preparation of PSA documents to create a library of example vegetation treatment projects that help guide state and local agencies in preparing their own PSAs under the CalVTP PEIR, as well as to achieve CEQA compliance for the proposed project. The Board selected Sonoma Land Trust’s proposed vegetation treatment project to be one of the PSAs that provides CEQA compliance for project approval and implementation and serves as an example PSA for other agencies seeking to use the CalVTP PEIR to accelerate approval of their own vegetation treatment projects. The District will enter into a partnership with Sonoma Land Trust to implement the proposed project. In the PSA/Addendum dated February 2022, Sonoma Land Trust is referred to as the “implementing entity,” reflecting its role as the lead implementer of the project and landowner and manager of the preserves.

The proposed vegetation treatments would be implemented on four of Sonoma Land Trust’s preserves (Little Black Mountain Preserve, Pole Mountain Preserve, and Laufenberg in Napa County, and Live Oaks Ranch Preserve in

Sonoma and Napa counties). The Pole Mountain Preserve is a 238-acre oak woodland property, and Little Black Mountain Preserve is a 500-acre preserve that has a variety of habitats including Douglas fir, mixed Douglas fir/hardwood, and chaparral/manzanita brush. The combination of intensive logging in the 1950s and the Creighton Ridge Fire in 1978 altered forest composition in Pole Mountain Preserve and Little Black Mountain Preserve; forest stands are overstocked with small diameter trees and contain excess fuel load. Live Oaks Ranch Preserve is a 572-acre ranch with madrone forests, oaks woodlands, grasslands, mixed conifer forests, chaparral, and riparian areas. The preserve is topographically diverse and straddles the Napa-Sonoma County boundary and their respective watersheds: the Russian River Watershed in Sonoma County and the Napa River Watershed in Napa County. In 2017, the Tubbs Fire burned across the preserve. The preserve has a long history of cattle ranching and has been moderately grazed for decades. Laufenburg Ranch Preserve is a 174-acre mosaic of natural and working land. The lack of wildfire or cultural burning has resulted in overstocking of small diameter trees, as well as the suppression of oak trees and other native hardwoods by the overabundance and shading by mature, sometimes decadent, Douglas firs.

Portions of the Sonoma Land Trust Preserve's treatment areas extend outside of the CalVTP treatable landscape described in the PEIR. In total, the area outside of the treatable landscape is approximately 191 acres; however, it is dispersed in small sections of the treatment areas. This scattered array of acres is located outside of the CalVTP treatable landscape because the boundary of the CalVTP treatable landscape was digitally developed, and the large scale of the area did not allow high mapping resolution. If the areas of the proposed project outside of the CalVTP treatable landscape have essentially the same, or at least substantially similar, landscape conditions as the adjacent areas within the treatable landscape, the environmental analysis in the PEIR would be applicable.

An Addendum to an EIR is appropriate when a previously certified EIR has been prepared and some changes or revisions to the project are proposed, or the circumstances surrounding the project have changed, but none of the changes or revisions would result in new or substantially more severe significant environmental impacts, consistent with CEQA Section 21166 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162, 15163, 15164, and 15168. In this case, there are no changed circumstances, but the proposed revision to or change in the project, compared to the PEIR, is the inclusion of areas outside of the CalVTP treatable landscape.

Therefore, the Project Proponent prepared a PSA/Addendum to analyze the entirety of the proposed project in compliance with CEQA.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CalVTP treatments are proposed on up to 1,350 acres across four preserves to improve overall forest health and provide watershed benefits. Objectives for the vegetation treatments are to reduce wildfire risk, protect and restore native ecological function, and return fire to a more historical and natural role on the landscape to improve native habitats.

Treatment Types

Proposed treatment types consist of fuel breaks and ecological restoration. Each treatment type is described in more detail below and is consistent with the treatment types described in the CalVTP. Both treatment types would occur on all four preserves.

ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

Ecological restoration treatments would be implemented outside of the shaded fuel break treatment areas. Treatments would seek to protect and restore native ecological function, including returning fire to a more historical and natural role on the landscape to improve native habitats, recreate healthy forest and woodland conditions, and create a natural landscape more resilient to wildfires. The vegetation treatment program seeks to improve overall forest, woodland, and grassland health and provide watershed benefits by supporting native habitat structure that is

resilient to future natural disturbances and climate scenarios. A healthy, functioning natural landscape would help reduce the impacts of climate change by sequestering carbon, protecting aquatic resources, and providing important habitat for native wildlife. A healthy natural landscape also can reduce the wildfire risk to surrounding human communities and protect the rich cultural landscape.

The ecological restoration treatment type is proposed on all four preserves. Ecological restoration treatment would focus on thinning small diameter trees from overstocked forest units and/or post-fire resprouts to promote the continued growth of mature trees and a healthy forest structure and improve wildlife movement and habitat. This treatment type involves removing excessive standing dead wood, retaining three to five snags per acre for wildlife habitat, controlling nonnative trees and shrubs, and removing encroaching conifers and bay saplings in oak woodlands to reduce competition and promote native flora and a healthier forest.

FUEL BREAKS

In strategic locations, fuel breaks create zones of vegetation removal, often in a linear layout, that reduce wildfire risk and support fire suppression by providing responders with a staging area or access to a remote landscape for fire control actions. They can also provide safe emergency egress during wildfires. Only shaded fuel breaks would be implemented in the treatment areas. In forested areas, the tree canopy would be thinned to reduce the potential for a crown fire to move through the canopy; however, larger trees would remain. The shade of the retained canopy also helps reduce the potential for rapid regrowth of shrubs and sprouting hardwoods and may reduce rill and gully erosion. The shaded fuel breaks also provide important control lines for prescribed fire activities.

Fuel breaks would be established on all four preserves along strategic topographic locations (e.g., on ridge tops); adjacent to roads, skid trails, and existing fuel breaks; and near high-use areas (e.g., cabins, infrastructure, parking areas, ranch roads). All shaded fuel breaks would occur within 100 feet of existing roads, skid trails, existing fuel breaks, and historic bulldozer lines. To create shaded fuel breaks, shrubs and understory trees would be removed to reduce surface and ladder fuels and create safer places for firefighters to stage equipment and fight wildfire. Live trees up to 10 inches diameter at breast height (dbh) would be felled; live trees greater than 10 inches dbh would be limbed up to 10–15 feet; and spaces of 15–20 feet width would be created between trees. In oak woodlands, treatment would focus on removing encroaching conifers and bay trees to promote protection of tree health in native oak woodland.

Treatment Activities

The proposed vegetation treatment activities are prescribed burning, mechanical treatment, manual treatment, and targeted ground application of herbicides. Each of these treatment activities is described in more detail below and consistent with the treatment activities described in the CalVTP. All treatment activities could occur on all four preserves with one exception. Herbicide application would not occur within Pole Mountain Preserve.

MECHANICAL TREATMENT

Mechanical treatments would primarily include masticating target vegetation and chipping biomass from manual and mechanical treatment activities. Equipment would include tractors/skidders, chippers, and masticators. Up to four crews may operate at the same time across the preserves. Typically, treatments would require several days to several months to complete. Equipment would be operated on or within 100 feet of roads or skid trails in fuel break treatment areas and on existing roads or skid trails or on flat to moderate slopes in ecological restoration treatment areas. Small-diameter trees, downed woody debris, and woody shrubs would be masticated to increase tree spacing and reduce fire fuel loads in targeted areas. The biomass would be disposed of via the process of mastication (which essentially mulches the vegetation). In some areas, prescribed burning may be used to dispose of chipped and masticated materials. Generally, mechanical treatments would:

- ▶ masticate target live woody shrubs and trees up to 10 inches dbh;

- ▶ remove limbs of large trees up to 15 feet high;
- ▶ prune trees with multiple stems (e.g., madrone) to two or three stems per tree;
- ▶ masticate standing dead trees/shrubs and downed woody debris up to 24 inches in diameter, while retaining at least three to five snags per acre;
- ▶ maintain at least 35 percent relative final density of chaparral vegetation;
- ▶ to the extent feasible, retain buckeye, mature madrone, true oaks, redwood, big-leaf maple, native shrubs (e.g., gooseberry and snowberry) and other desirable species as determined by Sonoma Land Trust; and
- ▶ target successional tree species, including tanoak, bay laurel, sprouting madrone, and Douglas fir, for thinning.

MANUAL TREATMENT

To implement manual treatments, crews of approximately eight to 20 members would use hand tools and hand-operated power tools, including chainsaws, hand saws, brush cutters, and loppers, to cut, clear, and/or prune trees, herbaceous vegetation, and woody shrubs and increase space between trees. Typically, treatments would require several days to several months to complete, depending on the treatment size, steepness of terrain, and type and density of vegetation. Trees would be removed, thinned, and pruned and woody shrubs would be cut and cleared. In madrone forests, the focus would be on thinning/cutting dense standing dead wood, including dead trees up to 24 inches dbh, while retaining three to five snags per acre for wildlife habitat. In oak woodland habitat, the focus would be on the removal of Douglas fir trees to reduce oak tree shading and therefore promote oak woodland habitat. Where feasible, treatments would focus on removing nonnative and invasive species. Manual treatment activities may occur within 100 feet of Class II or III streams to improve habitat and reduce undesirable wildfire hazards. Manual treatment within 100 feet of Class II or III streams would occur outside of bird nesting season if feasible. Cut vegetation would be left on site by lopping or chipping with scattering on the landscape. In some areas, removed vegetation would be piled for later pile burning or broadcast burning. The same general guidelines for tree and vegetation removal and retention would be followed as described above for mechanical treatments.

PRESCRIBED BURN TREATMENT

Prescribed burning consists of two general types, pile burning and broadcast burning (underburning). For pile burning, biomass from manual and mechanical treatment would be piled using equipment (e.g., skid steer, tractor, bulldozer or excavator) or hand crews and burned appropriately. Typically, dozers are equipped with a brush rake to reduce soil displacement and create "clean" piles. Pile burning would occur in an understory or in areas with little to no live overstory, including areas that have experienced previous wildfire. Broadcast burning would be used to promote forest health and native flora and reduce biomass and fuel loading in grassland, woodland, and forest vegetation. Pretreatment of vegetation using mechanical and manual activities or herbicide application would occur in areas proposed for prescribed burning. Prescribed burning in the grassland areas would help control nonnative plant species and reduce fine fuels. These treatments would also promote a more natural, sustainable, and wildfire resilient native landscape. Prescribed burning may require the construction of new control lines or enhancement of existing control lines using manual or mechanical treatments, primarily through mowing or using hand tools but use of a skid steer may be required.

Prescribed burning would require between 10 and 50 crew members, depending on size and site characteristics of the burn unit. Typically, each burn would last 1 day to 1 week. Equipment could include water trucks, fire engines, and chainsaws.

HERBICIDE TREATMENT

Herbicides would be used sparingly to control vegetation that threatens the native biodiversity and/or increases wildfire hazards. Post-wildfire invasive plant and noxious weed infestations may be treated to prevent their establishment. Consistent with the definitions applied in the CalVTP, invasive species are those plant species identified as invasive by the California Invasive Plant Council (Cal-IPC) or defined as noxious weeds under California law by the

California Department of Food and Agriculture. The occasional use of herbicides to treat invasive plant species and to control regrowth of native tree species (e.g., resprouting, multiple-stemmed tanoak, bay laurel, and madrone) may be implemented to promote native biodiversity. Herbicide application would not occur in Pole Mountain Preserve, because of organic certifications for this preserve. Herbicides proposed for use are glyphosate and other species-specific herbicides analyzed and included in the CalVTP PEIR, and herbicide application would be limited to ground-based methods, such as using a backpack sprayer or painting herbicide onto cut stems. No aerial spraying of herbicides would occur.

Biomass Disposal

The proposed vegetation treatments described above would be disposed of primarily by the following means:

- ▶ masticating (mulching) vegetative debris and placing it on the ground concurrently with vegetation removal (approximately 10 percent of biomass), and the biomass remaining after mastication would be no more than 6 inches deep;
- ▶ chipping (approximately 20 percent of biomass); materials within 100 feet on either side of a road, and chipped biomass would be spread over treatment areas and would not exceed 6 inches in depth;
- ▶ lopping and scattering within the treatment boundaries (approximately 20 percent) and would be left within 18 inches of the ground to promote decomposition;
- ▶ pile burning (approximately 20 percent of biomass), which may be used to dispose of slash, chipped, and masticated materials; or
- ▶ broadcast burning (approximately 30 percent of biomass).

Invasive plant and noxious weed biomass would be treated onsite to eliminate seeds and propagules or would be disposed of off-site at an appropriate waste collection facility to prevent reestablishment or spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds. Invasive plants and noxious weeds would not be chipped and spread, scattered, or mulched on-site.

Retreatment/Treatment Maintenance

Retreatment for maintenance of desired vegetation conditions (referred to as “treatment maintenance” in the CalVTP PEIR and referred to as “retreatment/treatment maintenance” or “maintenance” in this PSA/Addendum) in the areas initially treated for the proposed project would follow Sonoma Land Trust’s existing general land management practices and would be based on real-time monitoring of site conditions. In forested and woodland areas, retreatment is anticipated to occur every 2-5 years. In brush-dominated areas, retreatment is anticipated to occur every 5 years. In areas where initial treatment included removing multiple stems from stump-sprouting vegetation (e.g., madrone, California bay) retreatment would occur every 2-5 years. Retreatment/treatment maintenance methods would involve the same vegetation treatment activities used in the original treatment; however, Sonoma Land Trust anticipates the use of more hand crews than mechanical equipment in comparison to initial treatments. Periodic retreatment/treatment maintenance will occur as needed, determined by qualified staff who would monitor vegetation growth conditions on the preserves.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project PSA/Addendum was prepared in compliance with CEQA to document the District’s determination that the portions of the project area that are within the CalVTP treatable landscape are within the scope of the CalVTP PEIR and that a subsequent or supplemental EIR is not required for the portions of the project area that extend outside of the CalVTP treatable landscape. The PSA/Addendum contains a detailed and comprehensive review of the project and the resulting impacts, and

concludes that implementation of the project would not cause any new significant environmental impacts nor an increase in the severity of significant impacts previously identified and studied in the CalVTP PEIR. There have not been any substantial changes with respect to the circumstances under which implementation of the project would be undertaken that would require major revisions to the previously certified CalVTP PEIR. In addition, there is no new information of substantial importance, which was not known and could not have been known at the time that the CalVTP PEIR was certified, showing that new or more severe environmental impacts not addressed in the CalVTP PEIR would occur, that mitigation measures or alternatives found infeasible in the CalVTP PEIR would in fact be feasible, or that different mitigation measures or alternatives from those analyzed in the CalVTP PEIR would substantially reduce one or more significant impacts.

The PSA/Addendum analyzes the environmental effects of the project in relation to the environmental analysis in the CalVTP PEIR with regard to the following environmental topic areas: Aesthetics; Agricultural and Forestry Resources; Air Quality; Archeological, Historical, and Tribal Cultural Resource; Biological Resources; Energy; Geology and Soils; Greenhouse Gas Emissions; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Hydrology and Water Quality; Land Use and Planning and Population and Housing; Noise; Public Services, Utilities, and Service Systems; Recreation; Transportation; and Wildfire. It also identifies standard project requirements (SPRs) and mitigation measures adopted as part of the CalVTP PEIR relevant to the project that have been incorporated into and must be implemented as part of the project. All SPRs and mitigation measures in the CalVTP PEIR relevant to the project, as well as all components of the project described in the PSA/Addendum, are included in the Approval and are made conditions of the project.

The Project Proponent followed the evaluation and reporting process required under the CalVTP, as explained below.

On October 5, 2021, the Project Proponent submitted to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) the required information regarding this project when it began preparing the PSA/Addendum. The submittal included:

- ▶ GIS data that included project location (as a point);
- ▶ project size;
- ▶ planned treatment types and activities; and
- ▶ contact information for a representative of the project proponent.

Upon adoption of these findings and approval of the project, the Project Proponent will submit this completed PSA/Addendum and associated geospatial data to CAL FIRE at the time a Notice of Determination is filed. The submittal will include the following:

- ▶ The completed PSA/Addendum Environmental Checklist;
- ▶ The completed Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (using Attachment A to the Environmental Checklist); and
- ▶ GIS data that include:
 - A polygon(s) of the project area, showing the extent of each treatment type included in the project (ecological restoration, fuel break, WUI fuel reduction).

As required under the CalVTP, the Project Proponent will submit the following information to CAL FIRE after implementation of the treatment:

- ▶ GIS data that include a polygon(s) of the treated area, showing the extent of each treatment type implemented (ecological restoration, fuel break, WUI fuel reduction)
- ▶ A post-project implementation report that includes
 - Size of treated area (typically acres);
 - Treatment types and activities;
 - Dates of work;

- A list of the SPRs and mitigation measures that were implemented; and
- Any explanations regarding implementation if required by SPRs and mitigation measures (e.g., explanation for feasibility determination required by SPR BIO-12; explanation for reduction of a no-disturbance buffer below the general minimum size described in Mitigation Measures BIO-1a and BIO-2b).

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21167, subdivision (e), the record of proceedings for the Project Proponent's decision to approve the vegetation treatment project under the CalVTP includes the following documents at a minimum:

- ▶ The certified Final PEIR for the CalVTP, including the Draft PEIR, responses to comments on the Draft PEIR, and appendices;
- ▶ All recommendations and findings adopted by the Board in connection with the CalVTP and all documents cited or referred to therein;
- ▶ All reports, studies, memoranda, maps, staff reports, or other planning documents relating to the treatment project prepared by the Project Proponent and implementing entity, consultants to the Project Proponent and implementing entity, or responsible or trustee agencies with respect to the Project Proponent's compliance with the requirements of CEQA and with respect to the Project Proponent's action on the CalVTP;
- ▶ Matters of common knowledge to the Project Proponent, including but not limited to federal, state, and local laws and regulations;
- ▶ Any documents expressly cited in these findings, in addition to those cited above; and
- ▶ Any other materials required for the record of proceedings by Public Resources Code section 21167.6, subdivision (e).

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15091, subdivision (e), the documents constituting the record of proceedings are available for review during normal business hours at Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District website <https://www.northernsonomacountyfire.org/>. The custodian of these documents is Anneke Turbeville, Northern Sonoma County Fire Protection District, (707) 857.4373.

MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM

A Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) was adopted by the Board for the CalVTP, and the applicable SPRs and mitigation measures for this treatment project have been identified in the PSA/Addendum. The Project Proponent will use the MMRP to track compliance with the CalVTP mitigation measures and standard project requirements. The MMRP will remain available for public review during the compliance period. The Final MMRP is attached to and is approved in conjunction with the approval of the treatment project and adoption of these Findings.

FINDINGS FOR DETERMINATIONS OF LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The Project Proponent has reviewed and considered the information in the Final PEIR for the CalVTP addressing potential environmental effects, proposed mitigation measures, and alternatives. The Project Proponent, relying on the facts and analysis in the Final PEIR and the treatment project PSA/Addendum, which were presented to the District and reviewed and considered prior to any approvals, concurs with the conclusions of the Final PEIR and the

treatment project PSA/Addendum regarding the potential environmental effects of the CalVTP and the treatment project.

The Project Proponent concurs with the conclusions in the Final PEIR and treatment project PSA/Addendum that all of the following impacts will be less than significant:

AESTHETICS AND VISUAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Impact AES-1: Result in Short-Term, Substantial Degradation of a Scenic Vista or Visual Character or Quality of Public Views, or Damage to Scenic Resources in a State Scenic Highway from Treatment Activities
- ▶ Impact AES-2: Result in Long-Term, Substantial Degradation of a Scenic Vista or Visual Character or Quality of Public Views, or Damage to Scenic Resources in a State Scenic Highway from WUI Fuel Reduction, Ecological Restoration, or Shaded Fuel Break Treatment Types

AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY RESOURCES

- ▶ Impact AG-1: Directly Result in the Loss of Forest Land or Conversion of Forest Land to a Non-Forest Use or Involve Other Changes in the Existing Environment Which, Due to Their Location or Nature, Could Result in Conversion of Forest Land to Non-Forest Use

AIR QUALITY

- ▶ Impact AQ-2: Expose People to Diesel Particulate Matter Emissions and Related Health Risk
- ▶ Impact AQ-5: Expose People to Objectionable Odors from Diesel Exhaust

ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Impact CUL-1: Cause a Substantial Adverse Change in the Significance of Built Historical Resources
- ▶ Impact CUL-3: Cause a Substantial Adverse Change in the Significance of a Tribal Cultural Resource
- ▶ Impact CUL-4: Disturb Human Remains

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Impact BIO-5: Interfere Substantially with Wildlife Movement Corridors or Impede Use of Nurseries
- ▶ Impact BIO-6: Substantially Reduce Habitat or Abundance of Common Wildlife

ENERGY RESOURCES

- ▶ Impact ENG-1: Result in Wasteful, Inefficient, or Unnecessary Consumption of Energy

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

- ▶ Impact GEO-1: Result in Substantial Erosion or Loss of Topsoil
- ▶ Impact GEO-2: Increase Risk of Landslide

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

- ▶ Impact GHG-1: Conflict with Applicable Plan, Policy, or Regulation of an Agency Adopted for the Purpose of Reducing the Emissions of GHGs

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND SAFETY

- ▶ Impact HAZ-1: Create a Significant Health Hazard from the Use of Hazardous Materials
- ▶ Impact HAZ-2: Create a Significant Health Hazard from the Use of Herbicides

HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY

- ▶ Impact HYD-1: Violate Water Quality Standards or Waste Discharge Requirements, Substantially Degrade Surface or Ground Water Quality, or Conflict with or Obstruct the Implementation of a Water Quality Control Plan Through the Implementation of Prescribed Burning
- ▶ Impact HYD-2: Violate Water Quality Standards or Waste Discharge Requirements, Substantially Degrade Surface or Ground Water Quality, or Conflict with or Obstruct the Implementation of a Water Quality Control Plan Through the Implementation of Manual or Mechanical Treatment Activities
- ▶ Impact HYD-4: Violate Water Quality Standards or Waste Discharge Requirements, Substantially Degrade Surface or Ground Water Quality, or Conflict with or Obstruct the Implementation of a Water Quality Control Plan Through the Ground Application of Herbicides
- ▶ Impact HYD-5: Substantially Alter the Existing Drainage Pattern of a Treatment Site or Area

LAND USE AND PLANNING, POPULATION AND HOUSING

- ▶ Impact LU-1: Cause a Significant Environmental Impact Due to a Conflict with a Land Use Plan, Policy, or Regulation
- ▶ Impact LU-2: Induce Substantial Unplanned Population Growth

NOISE

- ▶ Impact NOI-1: Result in a Substantial Short-Term Increase in Exterior Ambient Noise Levels During Treatment Implementation
- ▶ Impact NOI-2: Result in a Substantial Short-Term Increase in Truck-Generated SENL's During Treatment Activities

PUBLIC SERVICES, UTILITIES, AND SERVICE SYSTEMS

- ▶ Impact UTIL-1: Result in Physical Impacts Associated with Provision of Sufficient Water Supplies, Including Related Infrastructure Needs
- ▶ Impact UTIL-2: Generate Solid Waste in Excess of State Standards or Exceed Local Infrastructure Capacity
- ▶ Impact UTIL-3: Comply with Federal, State, and Local Management and Reduction Goals, Statutes, and Regulations Related to Solid Waste

RECREATION

- ▶ Impact REC-1: Directly or Indirectly Disrupt Recreational Activities within Designated Recreation Areas

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ Impact TRAN-1: Result in Temporary Traffic Operations Impacts by Conflicting with a Program, Plan, Ordinance, or Policy Addressing Roadway Facilities or Prolonged Road Closures
- ▶ Impact TRAN-2: Substantially Increase Hazards due to a Design Feature or Incompatible Uses

WILDFIRE

- ▶ Impact WIL-1: Substantially Exacerbate Fire Risk and Expose People to Uncontrolled Spread of a Wildfire
- ▶ Impact WIL-2: Expose People or Structures to Substantial Risks Related to Post-Fire Flooding or Landslides

SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The PEIR identified a number of significant and potentially significant environmental effects (or impacts) that the CalVTP will contribute to or cause. The Board determined that some of these significant effects can be fully avoided through the application of feasible mitigation measures. Other effects, however, cannot be avoided by the adoption of feasible mitigation measures or alternatives and thus will be significant and unavoidable. For reasons set forth in Section 10.2 of the Board's Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations, however, the Board determined that overriding economic, social, and other considerations outweigh the significant, unavoidable effects of the CalVTP.

The Board adopted the findings required by CEQA for all direct and indirect significant impacts. The findings provided a summary description of each impact, described the applicable mitigation measures identified in the PEIR and adopted by the Board, and stated the Board's findings on the significance of each impact after imposition of the adopted mitigation measures. A full explanation of these environmental findings and conclusions can be found in the Final PEIR; and the Board incorporated by reference into its findings the discussion in those documents supporting the Final PEIR's determinations. In making those findings, the Board ratified, adopted, and incorporated into the findings the analyses and explanations in the Draft PEIR and Final PEIR relating to environmental impacts and mitigation measures, except to the extent any such determinations and conclusions were specifically and expressly modified by the findings.

Not every individual treatment project will have all of the significant environmental impacts that the CalVTP was determined to contribute to or cause. Additionally, some of the environmental impacts predicted by the CalVTP PEIR to be significant and unavoidable or less than significant after mitigation may be determined in a PSA to be less severe for an individual treatment project than determined in the statewide PEIR. The impacts and mitigation measures identified below reflect the conclusions of the PSA/Addendum by indicating which of the CalVTP's impacts that this treatment project will contribute to or cause. By indicating the project-specific effects of this treatment project as follows, the Project Proponent's decisionmaker or decision-making body is hereby making the required findings under CEQA regarding the application or feasibility of mitigation measures to reduce those impacts.

FINDINGS FOR IMPACTS MITIGATED TO LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The Project Proponent finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the treatment project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effects indicated below, as identified in the Final PEIR and the PSA/Addendum. Implementation of the mitigation measures indicated below to be applicable to the treatment project, which have been required or incorporated into the project, will reduce these impacts to a less than significant level. The Project Proponent hereby directs that these mitigation measures be adopted.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL, AND TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Impact CUL-2: Cause a Substantial Adverse Change in the Significance of Unique Archaeological Resources or Subsurface Historical Resources
 - Mitigation Measure CUL-2: Protect Inadvertent Discoveries of Unique Archaeological Resources or Subsurface Historical Resources

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

- Impact BIO-1: Substantially Affect Special-Status Plant Species Either Directly or Through Habitat Modifications
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-1a: Avoid Loss of Special-Status Plants Listed under ESA or CESA
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-1b: Avoid Loss of Special-Status Plants Not Listed Under ESA or CESA
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-1c: Compensate for Unavoidable Loss of Special-Status Plants
- Impact BIO-2: Substantially Affect Special-Status Wildlife Species Either Directly or Through Habitat Modifications
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2a: Avoid Mortality, Injury, or Disturbance and Maintain Habitat Function for Listed Wildlife Species and California Fully Protected Species (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2b: Avoid Mortality, Injury, or Disturbance and Maintain Habitat Function for Other Special-Status Wildlife Species (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2c: Compensate for Mortality, Injury, or Disturbance and Loss of Habitat Function for Special-Status Wildlife if Applicable (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2d: Implement Protective Measures for Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2e: Design Treatment to Retain Special-Status Butterfly Host Plants (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2f: Avoid Habitat for Special-Status Beetles, Flies, Grasshoppers, and Snails (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2g: Design Treatment to Avoid Mortality, Injury, or Disturbance and Maintain Habitat Function for Special-Status Bumble Bees (All Treatment Activities)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-2h: Avoid Potential Disease Transmission Between Domestic Livestock and Special-Status Ungulates (Prescribed Herbivory)
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-3a: Design Treatments to Avoid Loss of Sensitive Natural Communities and Oak Woodlands
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-3b: Compensate for Loss of Sensitive Natural Communities and Oak Woodlands
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-3c: Compensate for Unavoidable Loss of Riparian Habitat
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-4: Avoid State and Federally Protected Wetlands
- Impact BIO-3: Substantially Affect Riparian Habitat or Other Sensitive Natural Community Through Direct Loss or Degradation that Leads to Loss of Habitat Function
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-3a: Design Treatments to Avoid Loss of Sensitive Natural Communities and Oak Woodlands
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-3b: Compensate for Loss of Sensitive Natural Communities and Oak Woodlands
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-3c: Compensate for Unavoidable Loss of Riparian Habitat

- Impact BIO-4: Substantially Affect State or Federally Protected Wetlands
 - Mitigation Measure BIO-4: Avoid State and Federally Protected Wetlands

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS, PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Impact HAZ-3: Expose the Public or Environment to Significant Hazards from Disturbance to Known Hazardous Material Sites
 - Mitigation Measure HAZ-3: Identify and Avoid Known Hazardous Waste Sites

FINDINGS FOR SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

The CalVTP PEIR determined that some impacts of the program would be significant and unavoidable, even after implementation of all feasible mitigation. The Project Proponent finds that the treatment project would contribute to or cause the following significant and unavoidable impacts as indicated. Incorporating and implementing the following mitigation measures indicated to be applicable to the treatment project will reduce the severity of this impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. The Project Proponent hereby directs that these mitigation measures be adopted. The Project Proponent therefore finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the treatment project that will substantially lessen, but not avoid, the significant environmental effect as identified in the PEIR and PSA/Addendum.

The Project Proponent finds that fully mitigating these impacts is not feasible; there are no feasible mitigation measures beyond the mitigation measures indicated below to reduce these impacts. These impacts will remain significant and unavoidable. The Project Proponent concludes, however, that the benefits of the CalVTP and the vegetation treatment project outweigh the significant unavoidable impacts of the Program and treatment project, as set forth in the Board's Statement of Overriding Considerations.

AIR QUALITY

- Impact AQ-1: Generate Emissions of Criteria Air Pollutants and Precursors During Treatment Activities that Would Exceed CAAQS Or NAAQS and Conflict with Regional Air Quality Plans
 - Mitigation Measure AQ-1: Implement On-Road Vehicle and Off-Road Equipment Exhaust Emission Reduction Techniques
 - No feasible mitigation is available.

Additional information to support CalVTP finding for the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project:

Implementation of Mitigation Measure AQ-1 was required or incorporated into the CalVTP by the Board to reduce the severity of this impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. Emission reduction techniques included in Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would be infeasible for the District or Sonoma Land Trust to implement and, for the same reasons explained in the PEIR, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable. Because the treatments would be implemented by a non-profit land trust with limited funding, it is cost prohibitive to use equipment meeting the latest efficiency standards including meeting U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Tier 4 emission standards, using renewable diesel fuel, using electric- and gasoline-powered equipment, and using equipment with Best Available Control Technology. In addition, crew sizes would be small and are not expected to all be employed with the same company. Therefore, carpooling may not be feasible to implement for most of the workers or recommended during a pandemic.

The District has incorporated all feasible measures to prevent and minimize this potential impact pursuant to SPRs AD-4, AQ-1 through AQ-4, and AQ-6. The District finds that fully mitigating this impact is not feasible; there are

no feasible mitigation measures to reduce this impact. The District has reviewed all mitigation measures and finds them infeasible. This impact will remain significant and unavoidable. The District concludes, however, that the benefits of the CalVTP outweigh the significant unavoidable impacts of the Program, as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations, below. The District therefore finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the proposed project that will substantially lessen, but not avoid, the significant environmental effect as identified in the PEIR.

Impact AQ-4: Expose People to Toxic Air Contaminants Emitted by Prescribed Burns and Related Health Risk

No feasible mitigation is available.

Additional information to support CalVTP finding for the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project:

All feasible precautions and notifications have been incorporated into the CalVTP to reduce the severity of this impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. No additional feasible measures are available for the District or Sonoma Land Trust to implement and, for the same reasons explained in the PEIR, this impact would remain potentially significant and unavoidable. The District incorporated all feasible measures to prevent and minimize smoke emissions as part of the precautionary measures required in Smoke Management Plans, pursuant to SPR AQ-2, and in Incident Action Plans and other burn safety procedures, pursuant to SPR AQ-6, for the unintended occurrence of when a prescribed burn may go out of prescription and adversely affect offsite receptors. Additionally, SPR AD-4 will alert the public to planned prescribed burns and give them adequate notice to take precautionary measures such as using respirators, closing windows, or temporarily vacating the area to reduce the potential for exposure. Although all feasible precautions and notifications have been included in standard project requirements, the potential remains that short-term exposure to TACs from unpredictable weather changes during prescribed burning could occur.

Considering actions taken by the public to reduce exposure to smoke from prescribed burns are voluntary, there are no additional feasible methods to compel the public to reduce its exposure. Therefore, this impact will remain significant and unavoidable. The District concludes, however, that the benefits of the CalVTP outweigh the significant unavoidable impacts of the Program, as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations, below. The District therefore finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the proposed project that will substantially lessen, but not avoid, the significant environmental effect as identified in the PEIR.

Impact AQ-6: Expose People to Objectionable Odors from Smoke During Prescribed Burning

No feasible mitigation is available.

Additional information to support CalVTP finding for the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project:

All feasible precautions and notifications have been incorporated into the CalVTP to reduce the severity of this impact, but not to a less-than-significant level. No additional feasible measures are available for the District or Sonoma Land Trust to implement and, for the same reasons explained in the PEIR, this impact would remain potentially significant and unavoidable. The District incorporated all feasible measures to prevent and minimize smoke emissions as part of the precautionary measures required in Smoke Management Plans, pursuant to SPR AQ-2, and in Incident Action Plans and other burn safety procedures, pursuant to SPR AQ-6, for the unintended occurrence of when a prescribed burn may go out of prescription and adversely affect offsite receptors. Additionally, SPR AD-4 will alert the public to planned prescribed burns and give them adequate notice to take precautionary measures such as closing windows or temporarily vacating the area to reduce the potential for exposure to odors. Although all feasible precautions and notifications have been included in standard project requirements, the potential remains that short-term exposure to odorous smoke emissions from unpredictable weather changes during prescribed burning could occur.

Considering actions taken by the public to reduce exposure to smoke from prescribed burns are voluntary, there are no additional feasible methods to compel the public to reduce its exposure. Therefore, this impact will remain

significant and unavoidable. The District concludes, however, that the benefits of the CalVTP outweigh the significant unavoidable impacts of the Program, as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations, below. The District therefore finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the proposed project that will substantially lessen, but not avoid, the significant environmental effect as identified in the PEIR.

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Impact GHG-2: Generate GHG Emissions through Treatment Activities

Mitigation Measure GHG-2: Implement GHG Emission Reduction Techniques During Prescribed Burns

TRANSPORTATION

Impact TRAN-3: Result in a Net Increase in VMT for the Proposed CalVTP

No feasible mitigation is available.

Additional information to support CalVTP finding for the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project:

Implementation of Mitigation Measure AQ-1 was required or incorporated into the CalVTP to reduce the severity of this impact. This impact was identified as potentially significant and unavoidable in the PEIR because implementation of the CalVTP would result in a net increase in VMT. If multiple treatments occur simultaneously at more than one preserve, there is the potential for VMT attributable to the project to exceed 110 trips per day, which would be significant. Emission reduction techniques included in Mitigation Measure AQ-1 would be infeasible for the District or Sonoma Land Trust to implement and, for the same reasons explained in the PEIR, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable. Because the treatments would be implemented by a non-profit land trust with limited funding, it is cost prohibitive to use equipment meeting the latest efficiency standards including meeting U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Tier 4 emission standards, using renewable diesel fuel, using electric- and gasoline-powered equipment, and using equipment with Best Available Control Technology. In addition, crew sizes would be small and are not expected to all be employed with the same company. Therefore, carpooling may not be feasible to implement for most of the workers or recommended during a pandemic.

The District finds that fully mitigating this impact is not feasible; there are no feasible mitigation measures to reduce this impact. This impact will remain significant and unavoidable. The District concludes, however, that the benefits of the CalVTP outweigh the significant unavoidable impacts of the Program, as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations, below. The District therefore finds that changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the proposed project that will substantially lessen, but not avoid, the significant environmental effect as identified in the PEIR.

STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS¹

As set forth in the Board's adopted Findings, the Board determined that the CalVTP will result in significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided even with the adoption of all feasible mitigation measures, and there are no feasible project alternatives that would mitigate or substantially lessen the impacts. Despite these effects, however, the Board, in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15093, chose to approve the CalVTP because, in its view, the benefits to life, property, and other resources, and the other benefits of the CalVTP, will render the significant effects acceptable.

¹ If the PSA indicates that the project proponent's treatment project will not contribute to or cause any of the significant and unavoidable impacts determined in the PEIR, the proponent need not adopt a statement of overriding considerations.

In the Board's judgment, the CalVTP and its benefits outweigh its unavoidable significant effects. The Board's Findings were based on substantial evidence in the record. The Board's Statement of Overriding Considerations identified the specific reasons why, in the Board's judgment, the benefits of the CalVTP as approved outweigh its unavoidable significant effects.

Exercising its independent judgment and review, the Project Proponent concurs that the benefits of the CalVTP and the proposed treatment project outweigh the significant environmental effects and hereby incorporates by reference and adopts the Board's Statement of Overriding Considerations for the CalVTP, as applicable to the proposed treatment project.

Any one of the reasons listed in the Statement of Overriding Considerations is sufficient to justify approval of the treatment project. Thus, even if a court were to conclude that not every reason is supported by substantial evidence, the Project Proponent would stand by its determination that each individual reason is sufficient. The substantial evidence supporting the various benefits can be found in the preceding findings, which are incorporated by reference into this section, and the documents found in the Record of Proceedings, which are described and defined in Section 5, above.

- ▶ The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project will reduce dire risks to life, property, and natural resources in California.
- ▶ The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project reflect the most current and commonly accepted science and conditions in California and allows for adaptation in response to potential evolution and changes in science and conditions.
- ▶ The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project reflect the Board's and CAL FIRE's goals. The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project will help the Board and CAL FIRE achieve their central goals for reducing and preventing the impacts of fire in the state, as outlined in the *2018 Strategic Fire Plan for California*. The CalVTP will help to establish a natural environment that is more resilient and built assets that are more resistant to the occurrence and effects of wildland fire.
- ▶ The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project will help implement Executive Orders, including:
 - EO B-42-17: Governor Brown's order issued to bolster the state's response to unprecedented tree die-off through further expediting removal of millions of dead and dying trees across the state; and
 - EO B-52-18: Governor Brown's order to improve forest management and restoration, provide regulatory relief, and reduce barriers for prescribed fire.
- ▶ The Board is required by law to comply with SB 1260, signed into law by Governor Brown in February 2018, which improves California forest management practices to reduce the risk of wildfire in light of the changing climate and includes provisions for the CalVTP PEIR to serve as the programmatic CEQA coverage for prescribed burns within the SRA. The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project will bring the Board into compliance with these requirements.
- ▶ The CalVTP and the Sonoma Land Trust Preserves Vegetation Treatment Project will help to meet California's GHG emission goals consistent with the California Forest Carbon Plan, California's 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan, Fire on the Mountain: Rethinking Forest Management in the Sierra Nevada, and California 2030 Natural and Working Lands Climate Change Implementation Plan.