



Forest  
Service

Sequoia National Forest and  
Giant Sequoia National Monument  
Kern River Ranger District

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File Code: 1950/2400  
Route To:

Date: OCT 20 2017

Subject: Caltrans Highway 178 Hazard Tree Mitigation 2017

To: Kevin B. Elliott, Forest Supervisor

From: Philip DeSenze, Acting District Ranger 

I have determined the Caltrans Highway 178 Hazard Tree Mitigation 2017, allowing removal of dead and dying hazard trees, falls within a category of actions listed in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) that may be excluded from environmental documentation. The particular category is found at FSH 1909.15, Chapter 32.12 (4) Categories Established by the Chief – *Repair and maintenance of roads* [36 CFR 220.6(d)(4)].

This category is appropriate because the project authorizes routine road maintenance by the removal of dead or dying trees in high hazard zones that threaten power lines, roads and critical community infrastructure along State Highway 178. Attached is a checklist completed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documenting there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with the project necessitating preparing an environmental analysis or environmental impact statement.

enclosure



**NEPA COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST**  
*internal use only*

**Sequoia National Forest  
Kern River Ranger Districts**

**Name of Project:** Caltrans Highway 178 Hazard Tree Mitigation 2017

**Description of Project:** Hazard Tree mitigation along State Highway 178

The purpose of this project is to remove dead and dying trees from both sides of the State Highway 178 in Kern County. The trees have died as a result of the ongoing drought, beetle infestation, or both and are being removed to eliminate potential fall hazard of the trees into the traveled way. The purpose is to protect the public health and safety by removing dead or dying trees in these high hazard zones that threaten power lines, roads and other evacuation corridors, critical community infrastructure, and other existing structures.

Prior to removal, each tree will be recorded for GPS location, diameter, and species by a contractor. Tree locations and sizes will be provided to the Forest Service at least two weeks prior to removal. Each tree will be cut at the base of the tree, 6 inches above the soil. The tree will then be lifted by crane, where feasible, to a paved location for further cutting and processing. If crane is not feasible, trees may be endlined or left in place.

Most tree removal will occur within the state right-of-way. Other tree removal work will occur within private land, U.S. Forest Service, or other public land where dead trees have the potential to impact the Caltrans traveled way. This removal work will occur generally 100 feet in each direction from the centerline of the highway. Taller trees beyond 100 feet from the highway that could impact the highway will also be removed.

**Purpose of Checklist:** For projects categorically excluded under NEPA that do not require a decision memo, this checklist documents that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that warrant further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

<b>Applicable Categorical Exclusions for Projects Not Requiring a Decision Memo</b> For full description of each category and examples refer to FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30.			
32.11 Categories Established by the Secretary 7 CFR 1b.3		32.12 Categories Established by the Chief 36 CFR 220.6(d)	
	(1) Policy admin. development/planning		(1) Prohibit for resource protection
	(2) Activities related to funding/money		(2) Admin procedures, processes, instructions
	(3) Inventories, research activities, studies		(3) Repair/maintain Admin. Sites
	(4) Educational and information activities	X	(4) Repair/maintain roads, trails, landlines
	(5) Law enforcement and investigation		(5) Repair/maintain Rec. Sites/Facilities
	(6) Advisory or consultative activities		(6) Acquisition of land or interest in land.
	(7) Trade /market development		(7) Sale or exchange of land with same land use
			(8) Approve/modify/continue less than 1 year Special Use Permit
			(9) New Permit for existing ski area for administrative changes only
			(10) Amend/Replace existing Special Use Permit for administrative changes only
<b>31.4 Statutory NEPA Exception</b>			
	16 USC 6236 – Organization Camp Special Use Authorization		

<b>Determination of Extraordinary Circumstances for the Proposal 36 CFR 220.6(a)</b>				
Resource Conditions 36 CFR 220.6(b)	Resource Present?		For Resource Conditions that are Present, the following Findings are made:	Reference material supporting finding of no extraordinary circumstance
	Yes	No		
Federally listed or Proposed, Threatened, or Endangered Species or Designated or Proposed Critical habitat, or FS sensitive wildlife species	X		Two slender salamanders being considered for federal listing occur in the project area. Special care to lift trees out in moist or rocky draws will minimize or eliminate effects on rare slender salamander species.	Forest Aquatic Ecologist

Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds	X		Trees in Streamside Management Zones (i.e., within 100 feet of a waterbody), not removed by crane, will be hand felled and end-lined out of the Streamside Management Zone. If this BMP is followed, the activities authorized by this project will not adversely affect any flood plains, wetlands, or watersheds. The project is near the Kern River.	District Hydrologist. The activities authorized by the project are not ground disturbing.
Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or National Recreation Areas	X		The activities authorized by this project are near the Lower Kern River, designated as wild and scenic eligible (recreation and scenic) under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. However the limited scope of work will not affect this designation.	District Recreation Officer. The activities authorized by the project will not impact these areas.
Inventoried Roadless Areas or potential wilderness areas		X	The activities authorized by this project are outside of and will not adversely affect any inventoried roadless or potential wilderness areas.	District Planner. The activities authorized by the project will not impact these areas.
Research Natural Areas		X	The activities authorized by this project are outside of and will not adversely affect any RNAs. No extraordinary circumstances exist for this resource condition.	District Planner. The activities authorized by the project will not impact these areas.
American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites	X		Implementation of the Proposed Action would not <u>adversely</u> affect American Indian religious or cultural sites. No extraordinary circumstances exist for this resource condition. A requirement of the project will be to leave any cultural resource discovered, stop all activities, and immediately notify FS. Areas under project are used by the general public.	District Archeologist. The project is deemed exempt as no ground-disturbing activities are proposed. This project will not pose an adverse effect to cultural resources or restrict public access to these areas during the event.
Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas		X	No archeological sites or sites eligible for National Historic Register listing will be <u>adversely</u> affected by this proposal. No extraordinary circumstances exist for this resource condition.	See (6) above.

I have considered the above listed resource conditions and determined there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. None of the extraordinary circumstances described in 36 CFR 220.6 (b) exist.

Signature   
**PHIL DESENZE**  
 Acting District Ranger

Date 12/20/17



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