



September 10, 2019

Chief Porter, Director
Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
1416 9th Street, Suite 1505
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Webster Vegetation Management Project

Dear Chief Porter,

On March 22, 2019, Governor Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency involving forest conditions near vulnerable communities. The proclamation enables the Secretary for the California Environmental Protection Agency or Natural Resources Agency to suspend State environmental statutes, rules, regulations, and requirements to the extent necessary to complete priority fuel management projects started this calendar year. In considering whether to suspend any requirements, the Secretaries must determine that the proposed activities are eligible to be conducted under this suspension and will take protection of the environment into account while ensuring timely implementation.

CAL FIRE has requested suspension of Division 13 (commencing with section 21000) of the Public Resources Code and regulations adopted pursuant to that Division, commonly known as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), for the Webster Vegetation Management Project, which is one of thirty-five priority projects fulfilling Governor Newsom's commitment in the Community Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Report (February 22, 2019).

Project Description

The Webster Vegetation Management Project is a 1,016-acre fuel reduction project that will use crushing and burning to reduce dense, continuous stands of 8-foot tall chamise chaparral. Immediate implementation of this project is necessary to protect the communities of Creston and Parkhill, Santa Margarita and Atascadero in San Luis Obispo County.

CAL FIRE has incorporated protection of the environment into the design of this project. While specific measures may vary by emergency project, required protective measures include those described in CAL FIRE's "Protective Practices for CAL FIRE's 35 Emergency Fuels Reduction Projects" (April 2019). In addition, CAL FIRE has contacted local offices of the Department of Fish and Wildlife and Regional Water Quality Control Board to invite staff to visit the site and provide input on project design.

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Suspension

Because the Webster Vegetation Management Project is urgently needed to protect vulnerable communities and because CAL FIRE has incorporated environmental protection into project design, I find that this project is eligible under the Governor's Proclamation. Therefore, Division 13 (commencing with section 21000) of the Public Resources Code and regulations adopted pursuant to that Division are hereby suspended for that project. This suspension may be revised or further conditioned as necessary to protect public health and the environment. Suspension of additional regulatory requirements may be considered as project implementation proceeds. This suspension does not alter any requirements imposed by federal law.

Sincerely,



Wade Crowfoot
Secretary for Natural Resources

WEBSTER – Vegetation Management Project Webster Road (SR 229), San Luis Obispo County, CAL FIRE San Luis Obispo Unit

To fulfill Governor Newsom's [Executive Order N-05-19](#) issued on January 9, 2019, CAL FIRE released a report, called the [Community Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Report](#). This report delivered recommendations to reduce public safety hazards associated with catastrophic wildfire and specifically prioritized 35 projects that will protect 200 of California's most wildfire-vulnerable communities.

The Webster Vegetation Management Project is a 1,016-acre fuel reduction project that will use crushing and burning to reduce dense, continuous stands of 8-foot tall chamise chaparral. This project is located 4 miles south of the community of Creston, a small residential and viticulture area located 10 miles east of Atascadero in central San Luis Obispo County. The project will treat vegetation between Webster Road (State Route 229) and Huer Huero Creek. The entire area burned in the 1989 Chispa Fire which consumed 9,750 acres and remains the sixth largest wildfire in San Luis Obispo County history.

Webster Road connects the community of Creston with the more rural community of Parkhill to the south. Webster Road starts at State Route 58 east of Santa Margarita and travels north as a one-lane, windy mountain road, making emergency evacuation difficult. The communities of Parkhill and Creston face a significant threat by wildfire due to their location, surrounding topography, and vegetation.

1. Laws requested to be suspended:

Per directive 4 in the Emergency Proclamation issued March 22, 2019 the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) requests suspension of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Division 13 (commencing with section 21000) and regulations adopted pursuant to those Divisions be suspended for this priority fuels reduction project.

2. Project description:

Fire history demonstrates that fires in this vicinity grow rapidly and become large. The community of Creston is considered isolated, surrounded by native wildland fuels of chamise chaparral. Creston and the nearby wildland urban interface/intermix adjacent to the communities of Parkhill, Santa Margarita and Atascadero are vulnerable to wind-driven and fuel-driven fires from all

directions. The vegetation in this area requires immediate action to prevent future fires from endangering lives and property.

The objective of this project is to remove dense continuous 30-year old stands of 8-foot tall chamise chaparral using the dozer crushing and burning method. After crushing, and after a sufficient curing time of approximately two weeks, broadcast burning will be used to dispose of the slash. All burning will be completed by CAL FIRE engine companies and hand crews during periods of low fire danger.

Ancillary work includes pruning of residual trees and shrubs and continuous fire watch. Trees, mature shrub specimens, riparian zones, important habitat, rocky areas, and cultural sites will be flagged by CAL FIRE for avoidance, leaving a mosaic of treated and untreated areas where fuel continuity has been eliminated.

3. Communities protected:

Communities protected by this project include Creston, Parkhill, Santa Margarita, and Atascadero.

4. Considerations for ecological or cultural resources:

Project activities are designed to avoid significant effects and avoid taking special status species that are listed as rare, threatened, or endangered under Federal law; or rare, threatened, endangered, candidate, or fully protected under State law; or as a sensitive species by the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. A California Natural Diversity Database search has been completed and appropriate field review conducted to detect species prior to project disturbance. No protected species were found within the project boundary.

In addition, a current archeological records check has been completed. An archeological field review has been completed by a CAL FIRE Archaeologist. In addition, a Registered Professional Forester or designee will be onsite sufficiently during operations to evaluate the presence of cultural resources and ensure cultural resource protection through avoidance.

5. Best Management Practices that will be used in this project:

To ensure environmental protection when designing and constructing fuels reduction projects, CAL FIRE utilizes the standard protection practice of identifying and avoiding sensitive resources. A comprehensive list of required Best Management Practices (BMPs) has been developed by CAL FIRE through cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and

State Water Resource Control Boards. These required BMPs will be used to provide natural resource protection when implementing all 35 priority fuels reduction projects (See CAL FIRE Best Management Practices).

Additional BMPs may be implemented as necessary and in conjunction with information from the local CDFW office and the local Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB.)

6. California Natural Diversity Database(CNDDDB) search:

A query of CDFW's California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) was conducted. Species queried through the CNDDDB included plants and animals (Federal and State listed and special status species) that occur within or adjacent to the project. Additionally, much of this project had been surveyed for a previous fuel reduction project by a Registered Professional Forester (RPF). This RPF will assist with site planning and project layout, including flagging areas for avoidance. Based on these findings and interactions, CAL FIRE staff have determined that adverse impacts to these biological resources are unlikely to occur due to this project.

7. California Office of Historic Preservation, California Historic Information Centers (CHRIS) archeological database search:

The California Office of Historic Preservation, California Historic Information Centers (CHRIS) archeological database has been searched for sensitive cultural resources in the project area. A CAL FIRE Archeologist was consulted to help ensure cultural resource protection. Notification letters have been provided to local Native American Tribes describing the project and soliciting any information that will help ensure cultural resource protection. In addition, a Registered Professional Forester or designee will be onsite sufficiently during operations to evaluate the presence of cultural resources and ensure cultural resource protection through avoidance.

8. Outreach letter to the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB):

Notification letters via email have been submitted to the pertinent local RWQCB staff and are on file at the local CAL FIRE Unit.

9. Outreach letter to the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW):

Notification letters via email have been submitted to the pertinent local CDFW staff and are on file at the local CAL FIRE Unit.

10. Verbal outreach communication status with other agencies:

Initial outreach was provided to both RWQCB and CDFW local staff via letter to explain the project, as well as phone calls. Communication, consultation, and site visits will be ongoing as appropriate throughout the project.

11. Outreach to local government:

Local outreach for the project has been continual and ongoing. CAL FIRE's Fire Planning process coordinates local fuel reduction priorities with community protection to ensure projects are designed and implemented cooperatively. This allows for a sharing of resources to facilitate an informed, educated and efficient implementation of priority projects.

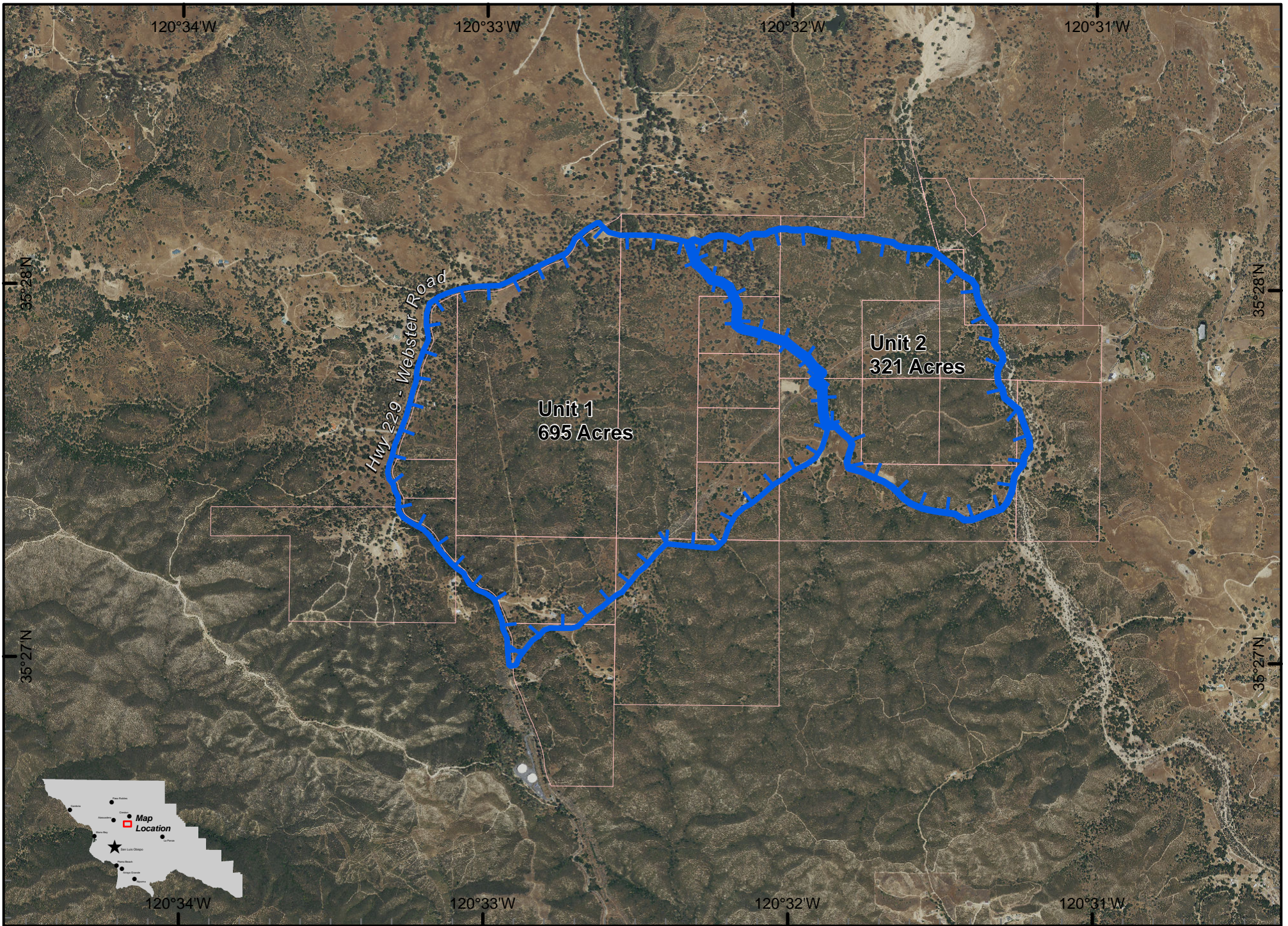
1. San Luis Obispo County Fire Department
2. Atascadero Fire Department
3. San Luis Obispo Fire Safe Council
4. San Luis Obispo County Office of Emergency Services
5. San Luis County Air Pollution Control District

12. Lead contact person for the project, and contact information:

Primary - Unit Forester – Alan Peters (805) 903-3406
Secondary – Unit Chief – Scott Jalbert (805) 543-4244

13. Estimated start date:

Immediately following CEQA clearance.



Webster VMP - Phase 1

Project Area
 Affected Parcels

