

PUBLIC NOTICE
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Assessment
Butte County Wildfire Mitigation Projects
FEMA-DR-4407-CA

Butte County and the Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC) have applied through the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for funding assistance under the Presidentially Declared Disaster FEMA-DR-4407-CA to perform three wildfire mitigation projects. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for three wildfire mitigation projects, including hazardous fuels reduction, building code enforcement assistance, and defensible space creation and hazardous tree removal.

The purpose of the projects is to protect people and property by reducing the risk of wildfire-related hazards within the Wildland-Urban Interface and within the High and Very High Fire Severity Zones in Butte County, California. High vegetative fuel loads along with rugged topography create the potential for catastrophic wildfires in Butte County. As such, FEMA proposes to fund wildfire mitigation projects throughout Butte County. The wildfire mitigation projects are needed to protect lives, reduce the likelihood of fire damage to property, and improve the safety of evacuation routes.

Alternatives discussed in the EA include three wildfire mitigation projects. Under the alternatives, Butte County would remove brush and small trees up to 35 feet from the edges of the road along 12 miles of Skyway (Alternative 1), Butte County would receive additional support to handle the post-fire surge in building permit reviews and inspections (Alternative 2), and BCFSC would create defensible space at up to 1,400 homesites and remove standing or downed fire-hazard trees at up to 1,200 homesites (Alternative 3). The County and BCFSC intend to implement all three alternatives, and collectively the three alternatives are referred to as the Action Alternatives in the Draft EA.

Alternative 1 has the potential to affect historic properties within the County right-of-way due to the physical disturbance or alteration of potential information-bearing archaeological deposits [36 CFR § 800.5(a)(2)(i)]. Under Alternative 3, the specific properties that would be included would remain undetermined until after the completion of the site identification process, and the effects of the alternatives on potential historic properties cannot be fully determined prior to approval of the Undertaking. A “historic property” is defined in the National Historic Preservation Act [54 U.S.C. § 300308] (NHPA) as any “prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register for Historic Places, including artifacts, records, and material remains related to such a property or resource.”

FEMA presently carries out the four-step Section 106 process as described in 36 CFR Part 800 (Protection of Historic Properties) through its Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Statewide Agreement), as amended on October 29, 2019. These steps include (1) Initiating Section 106 (800.3), (2) Identifying Historic Properties (800.4), (3) Assessing Effects (800.5), and (4) Achieving a Resolution of Adverse Effects (800.6). For this Undertaking, FEMA has determined to fulfill its responsibilities under Section 106 of the NHPA through the development and implementation of a Project-Specific Programmatic Agreement (PSPA) under Stipulation II.C.6.c of the current amended Statewide

Agreement. This PSPA will lay out a specific compliance strategy for the planning and implementation phases including identification and evaluation processes, consultation protocols, monitoring and reporting requirements, determination of effect, identification of treatment measures to mitigate adverse effects, and other requirements.

The Draft EA has been prepared in accordance with all requirements of NEPA, the NHPA, Executive Order 11988 (“Floodplain Management”), Executive Order 11990 (“Protection of Wetlands”), and the implementing regulations of FEMA, for the purpose of assessing the potential impacts of the Action Alternatives on the human and natural environment. The Draft EA summarizes the purpose of and need for the projects, alternatives considered, the affected environment, and potential environmental consequences of the projects. It is available for review and comment and can be viewed on and/or downloaded from FEMA’s website at <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/environmental-historic/nepa/environmental-assessment-wildfire>. Butte County will make the draft EA available on its website at: <https://www.buttecounty.net/363/Environmental-Review-Documents>. BCFSC will make the draft EA available on its website at: <https://buttefiresafe.net/document-library/>. Printed copies are also available for viewing or photocopying at the Butte County Office of Emergency Management, 25 County Center Drive #200 Oroville, CA 95969 (Monday-Friday 8:00am – 5:00pm) and at the Butte County Fire Safe Council, 6569 Clark Road Paradise, CA 95969 (Monday-Friday 8:30am – 4:30pm).

The comment period will conclude 30 days after the initial publication of this Public Notice. Written comments on the Draft EA can be mailed or emailed to the contact listed below. If emailing, please remember to include “Butte County EA” in your subject line. If no substantive comments are received, the Draft EA and associated Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will become final. Substantive comments received will be addressed as appropriate in a Final EA.

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