



**CEQA EXEMPTION / NEPA CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION
DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 11/2020)**

Project Information

Project Name: Eureka Slough Bridges Replacement: Geotechnical Investigation

DIST-CO-RTE: 01-HUM-101

PM/PM: 79.50/80.20

EA: 01-0F200

Federal-Aid Project Number: 0115000088

Project Description

This geotechnical investigation is needed to characterize subsurface conditions to support the design and construction of the proposed replacement of northbound and southbound Eureka Slough Bridges on U.S. Highway 101 between post miles (PM) 79.50 and 80.20 in Humboldt county. See continuation sheet for additional details.

Caltrans CEQA Determination (Check one)

- Not Applicable** – Caltrans is not the CEQA Lead Agency
- Not Applicable** – Caltrans has prepared an IS or EIR under CEQA

Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, the project is:

- Exempt by Statute.** (PRC 21080[b]; 14 CCR 15260 et seq.)
- Categorically Exempt.** (PRC 21084; 14 CCR 15300 et seq.)
 - No exceptions apply that would bar the use of a categorical exemption (PRC 21084 and 14 CCR 15300.2). See the [SER Chapter 34](#) for exceptions.
- Covered by the Common Sense Exemption.** This project does not fall within an exempt class, but it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment (14 CCR 15061[b][3].)

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Jason Meyer

03/28/2023

Signature

Date

Project Manager

Jeff Pimentel

04/03/2023

Signature

Date



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Caltrans NEPA Determination (Check one)

Not Applicable

Caltrans has determined that this project has no significant impacts on the environment as defined by NEPA, and that there are no unusual circumstances as described in 23 CFR 771.117(b). See SER Chapter 30 for unusual circumstances. As such, the project is categorically excluded from the requirements to prepare an EA or EIS under NEPA and is included under the following:

23 USC 326: Caltrans has been assigned, and hereby certifies that it has carried out the responsibility to make this determination pursuant to 23 USC 326 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated April 18, 2019, executed between FHWA and Caltrans. Caltrans has determined that the project is a Categorical Exclusion under:

- 23 CFR 771.117(c): activity (c)(24)
23 CFR 771.117(d): activity (d)(Enter activity number)
Activity Enter activity number listed in Appendix A of the MOU between FHWA and Caltrans

23 USC 327: Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, Caltrans has determined that the project is a Categorical Exclusion under 23 USC 327. The environmental review, consultation, and any other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Caltrans pursuant to 23 USC 327 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated December 23, 2016, and executed by FHWA and Caltrans.

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Jason Meyer Signature Date 03/28/2023

Project Manager/ DLA Engineer

Jeff Pimentel Signature Date 04/03/2023

Date of Categorical Exclusion Checklist completion: 3/13/2023
Date of Environmental Commitment Record or equivalent: 3/13/2023

Briefly list environmental commitments on continuation sheet if needed (i.e., not necessary if included on an attached ECR). Reference additional information, as appropriate (e.g., additional studies and design conditions).



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Continuation sheet:

Project Description cont.:

The geotechnical investigation would include drilling and performing geophysical surveys on the proposed bridge alignments at or near the proposed foundation locations. Drilling would be performed at up to twenty-two (22) locations taking approximately 4 days each to complete. Mud-rotary drilling methods would be utilized for the geotechnical borings to support geotechnical sampling and the installation of instrumentation. The estimated maximum depth for the 4.75-inch diameter, vertical borings would be approximately 200 feet below ground surface. Solid PVC casings would be installed in two of the borings to support PS suspension logging. Geophysical surveys are planned for up to six (6) locations and would take approximately 2 days each to complete. Each of the survey lines (SL) would be between approximately 200 and 500 feet in length. Seismic refraction and electrical resistivity surveys would be performed at the proposed line locations. Seismic refraction and electrical resistivity surveys would help characterize the subsurface conditions, estimate the depth of soft mud, and evaluate geologic variability. No earthwork would be required to perform the proposed geophysical surveys. Most of the work would be located within the Caltrans right of way. Access agreements are needed to enter private property and perform drilling and a geophysical survey at one (1) location. Various agency permits would be required to perform the geotechnical investigation work. The project has been analyzed for biological, cultural, water quality, and hazardous waste impacts.

The following measures would be included as part of the geotechnical investigation activities:

- Before start of work, as required by permit or consultation conditions, a Caltrans biologist or ECL would meet with the site investigation team to brief them on environmental permit conditions and requirements relative to each stage of the proposed project, including, but not limited to, work windows, drilling site management, and how to identify and report regulated species within the project areas.
- To protect migratory and nongame birds (occupied nests and eggs), if possible, vegetation removal would be limited to the period outside of the bird breeding season (removal would occur between September 16 and January 31). If vegetation removal is required during the bird breeding season, a nesting bird survey would be conducted by a qualified biologist within one week prior to vegetation removal. If an active nest is located, the biologist would coordinate with CDFW to establish appropriate species-specific buffer(s) and any monitoring requirements. The buffer(s) would be delineated around each active nest and construction activities would be excluded from these areas until birds have fledged, or the nest is determined to be unoccupied.
- Artificial night lighting may be required. To reduce potential disturbance to sensitive resources, lighting would be temporary, and directed specifically on the portion of the work area actively under construction. Use of artificial lighting would be limited to Cal/OSHA work area lighting requirements.
- A Limited Operating Period would be observed, whereby all in-stream work



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below ordinary high water (OHW) would be restricted to the period between June 15 and October 15 to protect water quality and vulnerable life stages of sensitive fish species. Geotechnical drilling restricted to this period includes drilling through the bridge deck into the slough channel

- All equipment would be thoroughly cleaned of all dirt and vegetation prior to entering the job site to prevent importing invasive non-native species. Project personnel would adhere to the latest version of the *California Department of Fish and Wildlife Aquatic Invasive Species Cleaning/Decontamination Protocol (Northern Region)* for all field gear and equipment in contact with water.

- Prior to the start of work, flagging would be installed around Humboldt Bay owl's clover and Point Reyes bird's-beak occurrences that are within the ESL and no drilling or heavy equipment would occur in these areas. Geophysical surveys consisting of foot traffic to lay cables, geophones, and strike plates would be allowed in or adjacent to occurrences.

- Before geotechnical activities begin, the project environmental coordinator or biologist would discuss the implementation of the required BMPs with the site investigation team and identify and document environmentally sensitive areas and potential occurrence of listed species.

- When geotechnical drilling takes place, drilling fluid would be made up of water, or water mixed with bentonite clay without additives. Drilling would be conducted inside a casing so that all spoils are recoverable in a collection structure. All drilling fluids and materials would be self-contained and removed from the site after use, in accordance with Caltrans Drilling Services Quality Management Plan (Caltrans 2019).

- The boring holes would be backfilled with cement. To prevent contamination of sensitive areas with cement, for those boring holes in the slough channel, the top 20 feet would be filled with a non-toxic bentonite clay mixture. For those boring holes on land or in wetlands, the top 5 feet would be filled with native soils retained from the holes.

- The only equipment that would be parked or driven in wetlands would be a track-mounted drill rig. Temporary wetland protection mats would be used to prevent permanent damage and minimize temporary damage to wetlands from the track-mounted drill rig. With the exception of the track-mounted drill rig, no equipment parking or storage would occur within wetlands or special status plant communities.

- BMPs will be implemented as appropriate to control on-site and offsite releases from geotechnical drilling operations. In the event of a fluid spill, drilling will cease immediately to allow for containment and clean-up. The District 1 Spill Communication Plan will be followed, which outlines the process of spill response and notification of appropriate agencies and entities.

- Precautions during drilling will be employed to mitigate any possible equipment leaks or drilling fluid spillage. These may include, plastic tarps, absorption mats, and straw wattles where appropriate. Where risk exists of drilling fluid being sprayed or otherwise ejected beyond the controlled work zone, into an adjacent wetland area, removable barriers, such as plastic sheeting would be deployed.

- When drilling within the slough channel, potential leakage at the casing mud-line contact will be monitored. If leakage is detected, wet drilling will be stopped and the casing will be advanced by dry drilling to a depth at which leakage has stopped



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(adequately sealed off).

- Equipment would be inspected on a daily basis for leaks and completely cleaned of any external petroleum products, hydraulic fluid, coolants, and other deleterious materials prior to operating equipment.

- Maintenance and fueling of equipment and vehicles would occur at least 15 meters from the Ordinary High-Water Line (OHWL) or the edge of sensitive habitats (e.g., wetlands).

- Vegetation would be mowed or trimmed to a height greater than 4 inches. Existing vegetated areas would be maintained to the maximum extent practicable.

- A project Health and Safety Plan would address worker safety related to lead contaminated soils within the project area.

- Traffic control will be used continuously where required and to support entrance and exit from drilling locations.

- After the completion of each geotechnical boring, soil cuttings and drilling fluid generated by the operation will be pumped and/or shoveled into 55-gallon drums for hazardous waste characterization and disposal. Any cuttings and/or drilling fluid inadvertently

spilled onto the ground during drilling operations will similarly be shoveled or sponged up and disposed of in 55-gallon drums. If additional water is needed to clean pavement surfaces to prevent contamination of future storm-water or impacts to public safety, a minimal amount will be used and as much of the impacted water captured as practical. Any areas of ground disturbance created during off-road drilling activities will be mitigated with appropriate BMPs to prevent erosion and storm-water pollution

- Precautions during drilling will be employed using Best Management Practices (BMP) to mitigate excessive noise, possible equipment leaks, or drilling fluid spillage. These may include plastic tarps, absorption mats, and jute waddles. When drilling within the slough channel, potential leakage at the casing mud-line contact will be monitored. If leakage is detected the wet drilling will be stopped and the casing will be advanced by dry drilling to a depth at which leakage has stopped (adequately sealed off).

- In the event of a spill or leak, the District 1 Spill Communication Plan will be followed, which outlines the process of spill response and notifications to appropriate Agencies and Entities.

- Work window restrictions developed by Caltrans North Region Environmental would be followed for all exploration locations.

- Prior to beginning drilling on each day of drilling through the bridge deck into Eureka Slough, a qualified environmental staff member, or construction staff trained by environmental staff, would scan the water around the drill site for marine mammals. If any marine mammals are spotted within a 50-foot radius around the drill site, no drilling would occur until the marine mammal has left the area.

- Prior to beginning drilling in locations in the slough channel, qualified environmental personnel will survey the location to ensure drilling does not disturb eelgrass.









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Final Audit Report

2023-04-03

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