



A BIOECONOMY PLAYBOOK FOR MARIPOSA COUNTY

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CLERE

California Law Empowering Renewable Energy

MARIPOSA COUNTY



RESOURCE
CONSERVATION DISTRICT



Central Sierra
Economic Development District



CA Governor's Office of
**Land Use and
Climate Innovation**

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Current Bioeconomy Business Landscape in Mariposa County

Introduction

This Bioeconomy Playbook examines the current business landscape in Mariposa County and identifies strategic opportunities that advance wildfire mitigation and forest health objectives, which can strengthen and expand forest-based economic activities. The bioeconomy, encompassing biomass utilization, value-added forest products, and commercial timber activities, represents a critical economic engine for rural communities in the Sierra Nevada region. This plan was developed through a collaborative partnership between the Central Sierra Economic Development District (CSEDD), with financial support from the Mariposa RCD and the associated program funded by the Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation. By describing existing resources, stakeholder networks, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure, this document provides a foundation for identifying barriers to bioeconomy development and proposes targeted improvements that can enhance economic opportunities, support sustainable forest management, and build community resilience in Mariposa County.

The intended audiences for this document are businesses, public agencies, and nonprofits from out of the area who want to get a succinct overview of the opportunities for the bioeconomy in Mariposa County. Beyond just a “who’s who” - this document also gives technical advice related to land use development, specifics about current competitive businesses developing in the area, and cites other resources about biomass availability, economic development resources, and other information helpful to understanding the future of Mariposa County in this sector. To begin, the Playbook starts with an explanation of the different collaborative and advocacy groups and public organizations that are engaged in fuel reduction activities, and describes their role in these projects. There are also some examples of recent successful public outreach on the topic of the bioeconomy. The last section of the first part goes over existing businesses in the space, as well as those in development.

The Second Part of the Playbook describes the critical process that new construction for any bioeconomy based business would need to undergo. First, there is a brief description of the California Environmental Quality Act, and a general discussion about how this law works, and subsequent descriptions of more bioeconomy-specific issues. Also, the county regulatory environment is discussed, including the County General Plan and Zoning. This information forms the basis for any successful business development that would involve the construction of a new building or other facility. While this document focuses on Mariposa County, the framework and strategies described herein may also be applicable to other counties within the region, with appropriate adjustments for local conditions.

Local Collaborative and Advocacy Groups

Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD)

The Mariposa County Resource Conservation District plays a central role in implementing forest health, fuels reduction, and watershed restoration projects throughout the County. The organization works in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies, as well as private landowners, to plan and carry out vegetation management and wildfire resilience activities. In addition to landscape-scale forest health work, MCRCD also supports home hardening and defensible space programs, including implementation of wildfire resilience measures for structures in high-risk areas.

In December 2019, MCRCD secured \$3.4 million in grants for large-scale fuel reduction projects countywide, including a \$2 million CAL FIRE California Climate Investments Forest Health grant that supported the removal of 3,222 tons of dead and downed trees and a \$1.3 million Proposition 68 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board focused on fuels reduction around the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. Since that time, MCRCD has received \$4.9 million in 2020 and \$7 million in 2024 from CAL FIRE, as well as \$5 million from the Wildlife Conservation Board in 2020, enabling continued expansion of forest health and wildfire resilience work.

MCRCD manages ongoing fuel reduction partnerships with Yosemite National Park, funded by CAL FIRE, which include mechanical removal of dead and downed trees and the transportation of forest biomass to commercial biomass facilities in the region. Consistent with grant requirements and project protocols, forest wood waste generated through MCRCD-managed projects is not disposed of in landfills. Contractors are required to deliver sawlogs and slash to cogeneration plants, sawmills, or similar facilities for beneficial use as energy or wood products, and grant revenue generated from these activities is credited directly to project budgets to support ongoing forest health work. To date, MCRCD has removed close to 35,000 tons of biomass and treated approximately 3,600 acres through its fuels reduction and forest health programs.

In addition to fuels reduction implementation, MCRCD has advanced community-scale biomass utilization infrastructure as a complement to its forest health work. In 2017, MCRCD received a \$5 million Electric Program Investment Charge (EPIC) grant from the California Energy Commission to support the design and development of a forest biomass-to-energy facility located in Mariposa County's industrial park. The project is designed as a community-scale thermal biomass conversion facility intended to convert locally sourced forest wood waste into renewable, grid-connected electricity, with an anticipated generation capacity of up to approximately 2.4 megawatts and estimated annual production of 15,000 to 18,500 megawatt-hours. The facility is intended to provide a long-term outlet for low-value woody biomass

generated through forest health and wildfire risk reduction activities, strengthening the linkage between fuels treatment and biomass utilization.

The Mariposa Biomass Project is also one of three Sierra Nevada community-scale biomass facilities included in a broader funding portfolio supported by the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations, totaling approximately \$30 million, aimed at advancing rural bioenergy deployment, forest resilience, and local economic development across the region.

Prescribed fire is also an important component of forest management in areas where MCRCD collaborates with federal and state partners. Since 1970, Yosemite National Park has conducted prescribed burning across more than 1,821 hectares (approximately 4,500 acres) in and around the Mariposa Grove to reduce accumulated fuel loads. These burns are closely coordinated with the Mariposa County Air Pollution Control District to ensure favorable conditions and minimize smoke impacts on surrounding communities. The Sierra National Forest also implements prescribed fire and reforestation activities in its management zone, including projects funded by the Wildlife Conservation Board, with approximately 150 acres of reforestation completed near the Mariposa Grove and Fish Camp area in partnership with MCRCD.

In addition to landscape-scale forest management and infrastructure development, MCRCD maintains a strong focus on public outreach and education. The organization participates annually in the Mariposa Wildfire Preparedness Fair, where residents receive information on defensible space, home hardening, and wildfire preparedness resources. MCRCD also develops educational videos and materials to support community wildfire prevention, provides technical assistance to landowners, supports youth conservation education programs, and partners with regional organizations to deliver educational resources tailored to local landowners.

CalFRAME Regional Planning and Playbook Development

Building on its on-the-ground fuels reduction and biomass utilization work, MCRCD has led regional planning and analytical efforts under the State's CalFRAME (California Forest Residue Aggregation for Market Enhancement) initiative. Through funding from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research Forest Sector Analysis Pilot Program, MCRCD served as the lead entity for the South-Central Sierra Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilot, covering Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa, and Tuolumne Counties.

The CalFRAME pilot was implemented in phases and produced a coordinated body of technical, policy, and market-development studies. These included analyses conducted by TSS Consultants, ERG, and CLERE Inc., examining forest and urban biomass feedstock availability, market and workforce barriers, governance and organizational models, and the potential role

of public entities in supporting biomass utilization markets. The pilot also incorporated geospatial data layers and mapping analysis developed by Spatial Informatics Group (SIG) to support feedstock aggregation planning, along with spatial mapping and business siting analysis performed by Wildephor Consulting, which evaluated feedstock distribution, transportation constraints, and potential locations for biomass utilization and wood products facilities. As part of this effort, MCRCD convened regional partners and stakeholders to review findings and discuss practical implementation pathways, including a regional public workshop held in March 2025 that brought together land managers, local governments, economic development organizations, and industry representatives. The work helped clarify regional priorities and next steps for advancing biomass utilization.

In May 2025, the Central Sierra Economic Development District (CSEDD) Board agreed to incorporate forest biomass and wood products development into its ongoing regional economic development workload. Building on the CalFRAME pilot, CSEDD established LEAF (Land, Energy, Agriculture, and Forestry) as a regional convening platform to support continued cross-sector coordination and implementation. The woody biomass playbook and related implementation guidance developed through this effort were funded through the CalFRAME program and are intended to support continued regional collaboration, market development, and project advancement aligned with California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan.

Central Sierra Economic Development District (CSEDD)

CSEDD was formed in 1976 as a Joint Powers Authority and established as a federally recognized Economic Development District. CSEDD serves five California counties (Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa, and Tuolumne), along with the cities of Sonora and Angels Camp, and is headquartered in Sonora. The organization's mission is to serve as an economic development resource and leader in communications between local counties and state or federal governments, focusing on workforce development, business resiliency, infrastructure improvements, and disaster planning. CSEDD is administered by Mother Lode Job Training (MLJT) staff and partners with MLJT and local economic development offices to bring workforce and economic development assistance to businesses and residents throughout the Mother Lode Region.

CSEDD develops and implements a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that promotes economic vitality, partnering with local economic development offices, government agencies, educational institutions, and private stakeholders to support bioeconomy development. The organization's current bioeconomy work is closely aligned with California Law for Empowering Renewable Energy (CLERE), which supported the South-Central Sierra Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilot led by Mariposa County Resource Conservation District. This multi-county effort spanning Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Mariposa, and Tuolumne

counties focused on understanding and addressing barriers to forest fuels reduction, forest restoration, and woody biomass utilization. Insights from this pilot now inform CSEDD-supported regional initiatives focused on forestry entrepreneurship, biomass business development, and CEQA streamlining to advance the Sierra region's emerging bioeconomy.

CSEDD hosts regional conferences and convenings to bring together stakeholders from across the Sierra region. The organization's LEAF (Landscapes, Environment, Agriculture, and Forestry) Conference provides a free, hybrid platform (both in-person and online) for landowners, farmers, entrepreneurs, forestry leaders, clean energy experts, educators, and community leaders to share knowledge, build partnerships, and tackle regional challenges. These events feature networking opportunities, workshops, breakout sessions on topics like agricultural resilience and natural working lands, and guidance on resources and funding opportunities.

Mariposa County Fire Safe Council (MFSC)

The MFSC is a leading organization dedicated to wildfire safety and resilience throughout Mariposa County. MFSC was created in January 1998 as a grassroots community effort to inform Mariposa County residents about the dangers of wildfire in the wildland-urban interface and teach people how to maintain defensible space around their homes. The organization is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-governmental, non-regulatory community partnership of Mariposa County residents, land/property owners, businesses, organizations, and agencies working together to reduce the vulnerability to the threat of wildland fire.

MFSC is funded by CAL FIRE to provide residential brushing and chipping services through the 2022-2025 grant program to help homeowners meet California Public Resources Code Section 4291 defensible space requirements. The Chipping Program is open to all residents of Mariposa County and offers a free service designed to help homeowners comply with California's Public Resources Code (PRC) 4291, which mandates that homeowners maintain at least 100 feet of defensible space around their properties to reduce the risk of wildfire damage. In addition to the general chipping service, the Brush & Chip Program provides targeted assistance for low-income residents enrolled in programs such as PG&E CARE and SierraTel Lifeline, as well as individuals who are disabled or participate in the PG&E Medical Baseline program. The Storm Program offers free assistance to these same vulnerable populations impacted by storm-related ground fuel hazards. These grant-funded programs are available exclusively for inhabited residential properties and do not cover fuel reduction efforts beyond the mandated 100-foot defensible space or on commercial properties.

The organization develops and maintains strategic fuel breaks serving as community protection zones, including the Stumpfield Mountain Road Fuel Break spanning approximately six miles and treating an estimated 275 acres with a 300-foot-wide shaded fuel break originally created

in 2008 and retreated in 2020. The Chamberlain Bear Creek Fuel Reduction Project was completed in 2018. Completed during 2024-2025, the Bumgardner Ridge Fuel Break was funded by CAL FIRE through the California Climate Investments Fire Prevention Grant Program and established a critical fire protection zone for the surrounding community.

MFSC conducts education and outreach as a core component of its mission to empower the community and deliver support when needed. The organization maintains an active presence at community events and participates in collaborative wildfire preparedness initiatives throughout Mariposa County. MFSC is a participating organization at the annual Mariposa Wildfire Preparedness Fair held each May, where attendees can learn about creating defensible space by managing vegetation around their homes, explore home hardening techniques such as ember-resistant vents and fire-resistant building materials, and receive information about available grant programs and services. The MFSC Board of Directors plays an important role in guiding the organization and supporting the community it serves. Board members help oversee grant programs, ensure the organization's financial stability, and represent MFSC in collaboration with local partners and the public.

To request chipping services, residents visit the MFSC website to review the Chipping Guidelines before submitting the request form. After submission, a private contractor contacts residents directly to arrange the service. Scheduling is based on geographic area rather than the order of requests received, and current weather conditions may impact service timelines. The mission of the Mariposa Fire Safe Council is to protect the people of Mariposa County and their property from the effects of catastrophic wildfire through education, cooperation, innovation, and action.

Yosemite/Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council (Y/S RC&DC)

The Y/S RC&DC serves the rural and foothill communities of Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, Tulare, and Northern Kern counties. Council members are diverse and range from Tribal Governments, Resource Conservation Districts, County Boards of Supervisors, Fire Safe Councils, Community Development Councils, Economic Development Councils, educational institutes, and other community groups. Y/S RC&DC has 26 sponsor organizations, including counties, Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), Fire Safe Councils (FSCs), local tribes (federally and/or non-federally recognized), and economic and tourism organizations. Y/S RC&DC and its sponsor organizations share a common vision for conservation and economic development in the southern Sierra Nevada.

The Council, in conjunction with its partners and supporters, develops projects and programs that directly benefit the local community while maintaining a regional platform. Projects and programs typically evolve from direct needs of community groups. The organization assists with

letters of support, funding opportunities, program development, grant writing, and preparation, obtaining non-profit status, providing fiscal agent services, and more. In April 2024, Y/S RC&DC unveiled the Mariposa Strategic Wildfire Mitigation Project, spanning approximately 70 acres or 1.5 miles along Boyer and Homestead Road, establishing a 300-foot shaded fuel break funded by CAL FIRE's Wildfire Prevention Grants Program. Central to the project is the establishment of a 300-foot shaded fuel break on either side of Boyer and Homestead Road, involving the careful thinning and management of vegetation and fuels designed to dramatically reduce the potential intensity of wildfires and prevent the spread of fires across the landscape. The project protects areas surrounding Boyer and Homestead Road and bolsters the wider network of fire treatment strategies across the Sierra region, safeguarding communities, residents, businesses, schools, and vital infrastructure, particularly those in the high-risk zones of Mariposa, Eastern Madera County, and the Southern reaches of Yosemite National Park. A 300-foot shaded fuel break on Homestead Road connects and extends the existing Boyer Road and Lush Meadows fuel breaks, creating safer ingress and egress and saving precious time in gaining access to a fire's perimeter for fire suppression responders.

Y/S RC&DC actively conducts public outreach and education through webinars, community meetings, and collaborative partnerships. The organization hosts educational webinars featuring expert speakers on topics such as prescribed and cultural burning, wildfire resilience, and watershed conservation. The Yosemite/Sequoia RC&DC Council holds regular meetings to guide organizational direction and projects. The organization maintains open communication with the public and provides opportunities for community engagement in conservation and development initiatives throughout the five-county service area.

Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation is a federally recognized Tribe with ancestral and cultural ties to the Mariposa region and surrounding Sierra Nevada foothills. The Tribe maintains an active role in matters related to land stewardship, cultural resource protection, and natural resource management within its traditional territory.

The Tribe participates in regional discussions and coordination efforts related to forest management, wildfire resilience, and environmental protection. Tribal perspectives are particularly relevant for projects involving ground disturbance, vegetation management, or development in areas with potential cultural resources.

Historic Timber Industry and Biomass to Electricity Plants Today

Timber Harvest and Forest Resources

Mariposa County is the location of Yosemite National Park, a defining geographic and economic feature of the region. Approximately 40 percent of the park lies within Mariposa County, including Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, with the remainder of the park extending primarily into Tuolumne County. The park serves as a major driver of tourism and influences transportation, land use, and economic activity throughout the County. The dominance of federal land ownership in Mariposa County fundamentally constrains commercial timber operations, as nearly 95 percent of Yosemite's acreage is designated wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act, which bans commercial timber extraction, while the Stanislaus and Sierra National Forests face similar restrictions that have dramatically reduced harvest volumes across California's national forests since the 1990s. This federal land profile stands in stark contrast to California's major timber-producing counties in the northern part of the state, where extensive private industrial timberlands support sustained commercial harvesting operations, and it directly explains why Mariposa County's timber harvest has declined significantly from a 2018 peak of 17,679 thousand board feet to merely 477 thousand board feet in 2024¹, a collapse far exceeding typical market volatility and reflecting the fundamental incompatibility between the county's federal land ownership and commercial timber operations. The county's minimal timber production has created instead a tourism-based economy centered on Yosemite, with tourism spending totaling \$433.2 million in 2023 supporting approximately 5,500 tourism-related jobs representing roughly 50 percent of the county's total workforce, as millions of annual visitors are attracted to Yosemite's iconic granite formations like El Capitan and Half Dome, its waterfalls including Yosemite Falls at 2,425 feet, ancient giant sequoias in the Mariposa Grove exceeding 3,000 years in age, and vast wilderness areas whose preservation would be fundamentally compromised by commercial logging operations. Mariposa County's position as one of California's smallest timber-producing counties—harvesting only 3.6 thousand board feet (0.2 percent) of the state's total 1,425 million board feet in 2012—reflects deliberate policy choices made more than a century ago prioritizing preservation and recreation over extractive uses, demonstrating how federal land ownership and conservation mandates can effectively eliminate commercial forestry as an economic activity even in historically forested regions, while the absence of local sawmill facilities further limits opportunities for the limited timber base that remains on private and tribal lands where minimal harvesting continues.

Forest Fuel Reduction Activities

Fuel reduction activities in Mariposa County are carried out through a coordinated network of local, state, federal, and tribal partners, as described in the preceding sections. These efforts, supported by state and federal funding programs, focus on reducing hazardous fuel loads,

¹ <https://www.bber.umd.edu/fir/harvestT1.aspx?co=06043>

improving forest health, and protecting communities in high fire-risk areas. Across jurisdictions, treatments generally include mechanical thinning, removal of dead and downed material, reduction of ladder fuels, and construction of shaded fuel breaks. While specific projects vary, the overall approach is consistent: reduce wildfire risk while generating woody biomass as a byproduct of forest management activities.

That biomass is managed through a combination of on-site treatment and off-site utilization, depending on project design and market conditions. As outlined above, material may be chipped and redistributed, pile burned under permit or transported to regional facilities for use in energy production or wood products. This system of coordinated fuel reduction and biomass management provides the foundation for Mariposa County's emerging bioeconomy by linking forest restoration activities with potential utilization pathways and economic development opportunities.

Wood Products Manufacturing Infrastructure

Mariposa County currently has no sawmills, veneer plants, or primary wood products manufacturing facilities operating within its borders. According to California's Forest Products Industry and Timber Harvest reports, Mariposa County had zero active primary wood products facilities in 2021. The absence of local sawmills means timber harvested in Mariposa County must be transported to processing facilities in other counties for manufacturing.

The closest operating sawmill to Yosemite is Sierra Pacific Industries in Sonora (Tuolumne County), located approximately 72 miles from Yosemite Valley via Highway 120. Sierra Forest Products in Terra Bella (Tulare County), founded in 1967, remains the only sawmill in the Southern Sierra region but is nearly 195 miles from Yosemite. Sierra Pacific Industries also operates sawmills at other Northern California locations, but none in Mariposa County.

Biomass Infrastructure Development

Mariposa County is actively developing biomass energy infrastructure to address wildfire fuel reduction needs. The Mariposa Biomass Project, a nonprofit organization formed in 2014, has been working to establish a small-scale biomass-to-electricity facility in Mariposa County. West Biofuels is developing a 3-megawatt BioMAT power plant in Mariposa County scheduled to open in 2026. This bioenergy facility will use gasifier technology to convert sustainably sourced forest wood waste into renewable electricity connected to PG&E's power grid and sustainable biochar co-product for soil amendment.

In December 2023, Mariposa Bioenergy LLC received a \$2 million grant from CAL FIRE to support development of the bioenergy facility constructed by West Biofuels. The grant funding will help complete site grading, preparation of a feedstock area, installation of a fire prevention

system, and fabrication of bioenergy equipment. In May 2024, the Mariposa County Planning Commission voted 4-1 to certify that West Biofuels had met all relevant conditions in the Conditional Use Permit, and the county issued a Grading Permit for the project. The facility will be located in the Mariposa Industrial Park near the Mariposa County Solid Waste Facility and PG&E substation. The facility is expected to process woody biomass from forest thinning projects and tree mortality removal, creating a revenue stream to help finance forest thinning projects and attract new industries and jobs to the county.

Land use and CEQA Law; its application to Fuel Reduction & Biomass Use Projects

What is CEQA?

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) stands as a foundational pillar of environmental governance in California, mandating rigorous assessment and mitigation of environmental impacts for both public and private projects requiring governmental approval. Enacted in 1970, CEQA has evolved into a complex regulatory framework that still acts to support decision-makers and the public by ensuring that both are fully informed about the environmental consequences of proposed actions, while promoting sustainable outcomes through mitigation measures and alternatives. By requiring transparency and public participation, CEQA fosters accountability in land use planning and project development, making it one of the most influential environmental laws in the United States.

CEQA's regulatory structure is codified in the California Public Resources Code (PRC) and further elaborated in the CEQA Guidelines, administrative rules maintained by the California Natural Resources Agency pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21083. The law defines a "project" as any activity undertaken, funded, or approved by a public agency that may cause direct or indirect physical changes to the environment. This broad definition encompasses everything from infrastructure development and zoning changes to regulatory approvals for private construction. However, not all projects require full environmental review, as certain activities may qualify for exemptions, including statutory exemptions created by the Legislature and categorical exemptions for classes of projects determined to have no significant environmental effect enacted through regulation. When environmental review is required, agencies may prepare either a Negative Declaration (ND or MND) for projects with potentially significant impacts that can be reduced to less than significant levels through mitigation measures, or a comprehensive Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for projects with unavoidable significant environmental effects that require detailed analysis of impacts, alternatives, and mitigation measures.

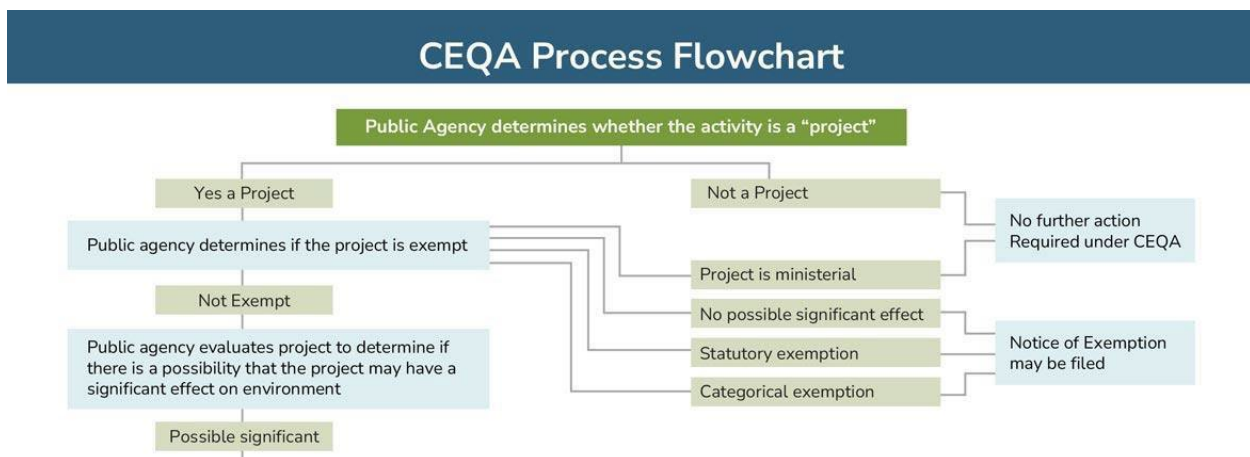
Central to CEQA's framework is the concept of the "lead agency," the public entity with primary authority to approve or carry out a project. The lead agency is responsible for determining the appropriate level of environmental review, preparing necessary documentation, and ensuring compliance with CEQA's procedural requirements. Other entities, termed "responsible agencies" and "trustee agencies," may also participate by providing expertise on specific resources such as water quality or endangered species.

The CEQA Process: Initial Determinations, Exemptions, and Analysis

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) establishes a structured environmental review process designed to systematically evaluate potential impacts, engage stakeholders, and ensure informed decision-making. This process unfolds through distinct phases, each with specific requirements and opportunities for public participation, while incorporating various exemptions to streamline review for projects with minimal environmental effects.

Threshold Determination and Exemption Analysis

The initial phase of CEQA compliance involves determining whether a proposed activity that requires a permit from a public agency qualifies as a “project” under the law. A “project” is broadly defined as any activity undertaken, funded, or approved by a public agency that may cause direct or indirect physical changes to the environment. This includes both public infrastructure initiatives and private developments requiring discretionary government approvals. If the activity is not a “project” then the CEQA is not triggered and no further analysis or action need be taken.



If an activity that needs a permit is considered a project under CEQA, the next question to ask is whether the project qualifies for one of the multiple pathways for exemption, which fall into two primary categories: statutory exemptions and categorical exemptions. Statutory exemptions, established by the California Legislature, removes activities from the definition of “project” thereby completely exempting the activity from CEQA review. These activities include ministerial actions (e.g., issuing building permits), emergency projects (e.g., disaster response), and activities explicitly excluded by law. For instance, emergency repairs to roads following landslides or wildfires qualify for statutory exemptions under CEQA Guidelines Section 15269. Such exemptions are absolute and apply regardless of environmental impacts.

Categorical exemptions

Categorical exemptions, outlined in CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301–15333, apply to classes of projects typically deemed to have minimal environmental impacts, such as minor land alterations, routine maintenance of existing facilities, or small-scale construction. Examples include replacing a commercial structure of less than 10,000 square feet or minor repairs to existing facilities. If the activity does not fall within a specific exemption, there is also a commonsense exemption which applies when a project’s environmental impacts are plainly nonexistent, such as administrative actions with no physical footprint.

Categorical exemptions are not absolute, however, as there are exceptions which apply if a project affects sensitive resources such as scenic highways, hazardous waste sites, or historical resources. For example, a minor land division that encroaches on a designated historic district would lose its categorical exemption. Lead agencies must carefully evaluate whether exemptions are appropriate, considering both the project’s characteristics and potential exceptions. If an exemption applies, the agency may proceed without further environmental documentation, though some jurisdictions require a notice of exemption (NOE) to be filed.

Initial Study and Scoping Determination

If a project is not exempt, the lead agency conducts an Initial Study (IS) to identify potential environmental effects. This preliminary assessment is described in a “CEQA Checklist,” which evaluates impacts across 18 environmental factors, including air quality, biological resources, cultural heritage, noise, traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and fire impacts. This process also examines cumulative impacts when combined with past, present, or reasonably foreseeable projects. For instance, a proposed housing development might be assessed for its contribution to regional traffic congestion or habitat fragmentation when considered alongside nearby industrial expansions.

Based on the Initial Study’s findings, the lead agency prepares one of three environmental documents:

A Negative Declaration (ND) is issued if the study concludes the project will have no significant environmental impacts. *A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)* is used when identified impacts can be reduced to less-than-significant levels through enforceable measures, such as modifying construction schedules to protect nesting birds or installing noise barriers. These documents must be available for public review for 30 days before project approval, and the lead agency must respond to any comments received and file a Notice of Determination within five days of adopting the ND or MND.

For projects with unavoidable significant impacts, if significant impacts remain after mitigation, the agency must adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations justifying the project’s benefits despite environmental costs. This statement might emphasize economic benefits,

housing needs, or public safety imperatives, as seen in approvals for critical infrastructure projects in fire-prone areas, and an *Environmental Impact Report (EIR)* is required. The EIR provides a comprehensive analysis of impacts, proposes mitigation strategies, and explores alternatives, including the “no project” option. Alternatives must achieve most of the project’s basic objectives while minimizing harm; for example, a highway expansion might consider route modifications or public transit enhancements as alternatives to reduce air pollution.

For projects requiring an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), a Notice of Preparation (NOP) is issued, initiating a 30-day comment period to identify key issues and alternatives. Scoping meetings may be held for complex projects, particularly those of regional significance, to ensure all concerns are addressed early in the process. This phase is critical for avoiding oversights and reducing litigation risks by incorporating diverse perspectives. The EIR preparation process includes a draft phase released for public review (typically 30–45 days) and a final phase incorporating responses to comments. For state-level projects, the draft EIR undergoes a 45-day review through the State Clearinghouse to coordinate agency feedback.

Public Review and Agency Decision

CEQA mandates transparency through public review periods, allowing community members, organizations, and agencies to submit comments on environmental documents. For EIRs, the review period is typically 30–45 days, while Negative Declarations require at least 20 days. During this phase, the lead agency must address substantive comments in writing, explaining how concerns were resolved or why they were dismissed. For example, if residents raise concerns about a project’s impact on local water quality, the agency might revise mitigation measures or provide additional data on groundwater monitoring. Note that during any of the pathways, the lead agency solicits input from other agencies, tribal governments, and the public to refine the analysis.

Final approval requires the agency to certify by making findings that the EIR or a Mitigated Negative Declaration accurately reflects the project’s environmental consequences and that mitigation measures are feasible.

Mitigation Measures and Alternatives

CEQA requires lead agencies to adopt all feasible measures to mitigate significant environmental impacts. Mitigation strategies include avoidance (e.g., rerouting a road to protect wetlands), minimization (e.g., using low-noise pavement), rectification (e.g., restoring degraded habitats), and compensation (e.g., funding off-site conservation easements). For example, a coastal development project might mitigate habitat loss by purchasing and preserving equivalent acreage elsewhere.

The law also mandates analysis of project alternatives that could achieve similar objectives with fewer impacts. Alternatives must be “feasible” and “capable of avoiding or substantially lessening environmental harm.” In urban infill projects, alternatives might include reducing building height, increasing green space, or incorporating renewable energy systems. The “no project” alternative serves as a baseline for comparison, illustrating the environmental consequences of inaction.

By integrating rigorous analysis, public engagement, and adaptive mitigation, the CEQA process ensures that environmental considerations remain central to California’s development trajectory while providing flexibility for projects with minimal impacts through well-defined exemptions.

Tribal Consultation Requirements and Early Coordination (AB 52)

Assembly Bill 52 (2014) amended the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to formally recognize tribal cultural resources and establish a consultation process between lead agencies and California Native American tribes. Under this framework, tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with a project area may request notification of projects subject to CEQA. If a tribe requests consultation, the lead agency is required to initiate consultation within 30 days and engage in good faith discussion prior to making environmental determinations.

AB 52 defines “tribal cultural resources” to include sites, features, places, cultural landscapes, sacred places, and objects that are significant to a tribe. These resources may or may not be formally listed in historical registers. During consultation, the lead agency and tribe may identify potential impacts to tribal cultural resources and consider measures to avoid or mitigate those impacts, including project redesign, preservation in place, or cultural monitoring during ground-disturbing activities.

The statute also provides confidentiality protections for sensitive tribal information, allowing certain details, such as the location of cultural sites, to be withheld from public disclosure. Because consultation must occur prior to the completion of environmental review, AB 52 can influence project timelines, environmental analysis, and site planning, particularly for projects involving ground disturbance.

In practice, early coordination with tribes prior to formal CEQA milestones may help streamline the AB 52 process. Lead agencies and applicants could consider initiating informal outreach during pre-application or early project design phases to better understand whether tribal cultural resources may be present and whether design adjustments may be appropriate. Early communication may allow potential concerns to be identified before formal consultation is triggered, which can reduce the likelihood of later project changes, delays, or the need for substantial mitigation measures during environmental review.

CEQA Requirements for Fuel Reduction vs Bioeconomy Business Development

Fuel reduction projects enjoy access to multiple categorical exemption pathways beyond the commonly used Class 4 exemption. In addition, certain fuel reduction projects on federal lands may qualify for a statutory exemption under Public Resources Code Section 4799.05(d)(1), which applies to prescribed fire, thinning, and other fuel reduction activities that have completed NEPA review where the primary role of the state or local agency is to provide funding or staffing support. Emergency project exemptions under Section 15269(c) are available for fuel management activities that constitute "specific actions necessary to prevent or mitigate an emergency," where "emergency" is statutorily defined as "a sudden, unexpected occurrence, involving a clear and imminent danger, demanding immediate action to prevent or mitigate loss of, or damage to, life, health, property, or essential public services". This exemption is particularly applicable for fire or catastrophic risk mitigation around existing facilities, provided the threat is immediate and substantial rather than speculative or long-term. Each time such an exemption is used, the use must be documented and explained in order for the exemption to hold up under scrutiny.

There are several differences in what a wood products business faces in terms of environmental impacts and policy objectives, which leads to differing regulatory frameworks than fuel reduction projects. Although both types of projects are important to meet state climate and safety goals, fuel reduction initiatives are more straightforward rural impacts on forested lands, and the policy objectives are clear: reduce fire risk. As such, they are granted streamlined regulatory pathways and multiple environmental review exemptions to facilitate wildfire prevention. Fuel reduction in most cases, is treated as an emergency response activity deserving expedited regulatory treatment².

Enterprises that can handle wood waste disposal are largely treated as unrelated to the fuel reduction effort. This is because wood product businesses that use forest residue are one step removed from the work in the forest. While essential to drive markets and make entire projects feasible, sometimes their purpose is lost on those who are not following the issue. Also, some wood products businesses do have environmental impacts that must be mitigated. As such, they encounter more intricate commercial and industrial permitting processes, limited exemptions, and more extensive environmental review requirements³⁴. Despite this confusion

² [California Code of Regulations, Article 2, Section 1052 - Emergency Notice | California Code of Regulations | Justia](#)

³ [California Streamlines CEQA for Housing and Public Projects](#)

⁴ [With growing fire risk, Governor Newsom proclaims state of emergency to fast-track critical wildfire prevention projects statewide | Governor of California](#)

about the value of wood utilization in some circles, the state's recognition that biomass residual waste management cannot solely be managed by prescribed fire or chip-and-scatter methods lead squarely to the need to develop other methods for disposal.

Wood product businesses contribute to climate goals and rural economic development but operate within a regulatory framework that emphasizes procedure over action. Recently proposed categorical exemptions for wood utilization facilities represent recognition that current CEQA requirements may impede beneficial biomass utilization projects⁵.

Specific CEQA Issues with both Bioenergy and Wood Products Development Projects

Several aspects of CEQA review are particularly important when developing bioeconomy projects in Mariposa County that use forest residues, agricultural byproducts, or other biomass as feedstock. Among these, air quality and greenhouse gas impacts typically warrant the greatest attention, as such facilities may generate criteria pollutant emissions and project-related greenhouse gases that must be evaluated against applicable CEQA significance thresholds.

Air quality analysis is critical because bioeconomy operations, including biomass processing, biofuel production, biochar generation, and agricultural waste conversion, may emit criteria air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide. These pollutants are subject to federal and state ambient air quality standards and may trigger CEQA significance thresholds depending on the scale of the project, its operational characteristics, and the attainment status of the applicable air basin. CEQA review must quantify both construction-phase and operational emissions and evaluate whether those emissions would exceed applicable air district thresholds or result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to air quality impacts when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

In conducting this analysis, lead agencies must consider the rural development context of Mariposa County, including the limited number of permitted stationary emission sources and the absence of concentrated industrial activity. Cumulative impact determinations should therefore be based on a realistic assessment of existing emission sources and foreseeable development patterns within the county, rather than on theoretical buildout assumptions or analytical frameworks developed for more industrialized regions. While construction-related fugitive dust, equipment exhaust, and increased vehicle trips associated with feedstock delivery and product transport must be carefully evaluated, the cumulative significance of these

⁵ [WFR_May_2024_GovUpdate05_07.pdf](#)

emissions should be assessed in light of the county's actual emissions landscape and applicable regulatory thresholds.

Air quality analysis under CEQA must also distinguish between emissions that are directly attributable to a proposed project and broader regional air quality conditions that are episodic or not causally related to project operations. While regional air quality events such as wildfire smoke may affect baseline conditions, CEQA requires that significance determinations and mitigation measures focus on emissions that can be reasonably attributed to the project itself. Mitigation measures should therefore address controllable sources, including construction practices, material handling, on-site equipment, and haul truck operations, through dust suppression, equipment standards, operational controls, and best available control technologies where required.

Greenhouse gas analysis is similarly required for bioeconomy projects under CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.4, which directs lead agencies to make a good-faith effort to quantify and evaluate project-related greenhouse gas emissions. This analysis should address emissions from construction activities, energy use, and vehicle traffic, and should evaluate consistency with applicable state, regional, or local climate policies. For projects that utilize biomass feedstocks, the greenhouse gas analysis may also provide contextual information regarding alternative feedstock management pathways, such as open burning, pile disposal, or natural decomposition, to inform the assessment of the project's contribution to long-term greenhouse gas emissions. While CEQA does not require full lifecycle assessments in all cases, a qualitative discussion of avoided emissions and biogenic carbon dynamics may be appropriate to support a reasoned significance determination.

In addition to air quality and greenhouse gas impacts, bioeconomy projects in Mariposa County must be evaluated for potential effects on traffic, noise, water quality, biological resources, cultural resources, soils and geology, aesthetics, and hazards. Traffic analyses should account for increased vehicle trips associated with material delivery and product transport and their interaction with local road conditions. Noise assessments should evaluate construction noise and operational equipment impacts on nearby sensitive receptors. Water quality review should address stormwater runoff, erosion, and sedimentation risks associated with biomass storage and handling areas. Biological and cultural resource evaluations are necessary to identify and protect sensitive habitats and archaeological resources, while soils and geology analyses ensure safe grading and erosion control practices. Aesthetic analyses consider changes to visual character, and hazard evaluations examine fire risk, fuel and material storage, emergency access, and compliance with applicable fire and safety regulations.

Suggestion to Improve CEQA for Business Development

CEQA Exemption Application and Expansion

Statutory CEQA Exemptions for Advanced Manufacturing

In June 2025, Senate Bill 131 added Public Resources Code Section 21080.69(a)(4), creating a new statutory CEQA exemption for certain advanced manufacturing projects, including industrial biotechnology facilities as defined in Public Resources Code Section 26003. When applicable, this exemption eliminates the requirement to prepare an Environmental Impact Report and allows qualifying projects to proceed without full CEQA review. The exemption applies only to projects located exclusively on land zoned for industrial use and expressly excludes projects located on natural and protected lands, wetlands, prime farmland, hazardous waste sites, or projects involving oil and gas infrastructure or large warehouse distribution centers. The exemption took effect immediately upon enactment and is intended to expedite development of specified clean technology and biomanufacturing facilities while maintaining restrictions on sensitive locations.

Because the exemption expressly includes industrial biotechnology and advanced manufacturing, certain bio industrial facilities that process or convert biomass feedstocks into fuels, chemicals, or bio-based products may qualify, provided all statutory siting and eligibility criteria are met. Projects that do not meet these requirements remain subject to standard CEQA review.

Categorical Exemptions for Regulatory Agency Actions

Certain categorical exemptions under the CEQA Guidelines apply only to actions taken by regulatory agencies and do not extend to project approvals sought by private or commercial applicants. For example, revisions adopted by air districts to implement or update permitting requirements for biomass boilers have relied on the Class 8 categorical exemption under CEQA Guidelines Section 15308, which applies to actions by regulatory agencies for the protection of the environment. This exemption may be used for rulemaking or permitting actions undertaken by an air district but does not apply to the approval of new bioenergy or wood-products facilities proposed by private parties.

In addition, many existing categorical exemptions are limited to modifications of existing facilities and do not apply to the construction of new facilities. As a result, while limited exemption pathways exist for certain regulatory actions or facility upgrades, most new bioeconomy development projects must rely on statutory exemptions such as SB 131, where applicable, or proceed through standard CEQA review processes.

CEQA Process in Mariposa County: What Applicants Should Know

Environmental review in Mariposa County is administered through the Development Services Department, which consolidates planning, building, environmental health, and related functions. CEQA review is integrated with discretionary land use approvals and occurs concurrently with project permitting rather than as a separate process.

Mariposa County operates within a rural context with limited infrastructure outside of the Mariposa Town Planning Area, where most properties rely on private wells and septic systems. As a result, project feasibility, environmental review, and permitting requirements are often closely tied to site-specific conditions.

For applicants considering bioeconomy, wood products, or biomass-related projects, several key factors may influence the pace and predictability of CEQA review in Mariposa County.

1. Application Completeness and Site Constraints Are Closely Linked

Project review in Mariposa County is highly dependent on site-specific conditions, including water supply, wastewater treatment, access, and wildfire risk. Applications that clearly define these elements early are generally better positioned to move efficiently through CEQA review.

Benefit: Early identification of site constraints may reduce the likelihood of redesigns or additional analysis later in the process.

2. CEQA Review Is Integrated Within a Consolidated Department Structure

Mariposa County's Development Services Department combines multiple functions, including planning, building, and environmental health. CEQA review occurs within this integrated structure and is coordinated across these functions during project review.

Benefit: Consolidated review may improve coordination across departments, but clear and complete submittals remain important to support efficient processing.

3. Zoning Allows Resource-Based Uses but May Require Project-Specific Review

Wood products and biomass-related uses are generally consistent with the County's resource-oriented land use framework; however, these uses are not always defined as distinct categories in the zoning code. Projects may require discretionary review and case-by-case interpretation depending on scale, location, and operational characteristics.

Benefit: Early coordination with staff may help clarify allowable uses and reduce uncertainty during CEQA review.

4. Infrastructure Limitations Can Influence CEQA Scope

Outside of the Mariposa Town Planning Area, most development relies on wells and septic systems, and roadway access may be limited in rural areas. These conditions can influence CEQA analysis related to water supply, wastewater, and transportation.

Benefit: Understanding infrastructure limitations early may help applicants better anticipate environmental review requirements.

5. Interagency Coordination Is Common for Biomass and Industrial Projects

Projects involving biomass processing or wood products manufacturing may require coordination with agencies such as air districts, CAL FIRE, and state or federal resource agencies.

Benefit: Early identification of required agency coordination may reduce the likelihood of delays during CEQA review.

6. Common Environmental Review Considerations

CEQA review for bioeconomy-related projects in Mariposa County typically focuses on:

- Water supply and wastewater capacity
- Air quality and emissions
- Traffic and access
- Wildfire risk and emergency response
- Biological and cultural resources

Benefit: Anticipating these issue areas early may help streamline environmental analysis and reduce resubmittals.

Potential CEQA Process Improvements (For Mariposa County Consideration)

1. Clarify Wood Products and Biomass Uses in the Zoning Code

Wood products and biomass-related uses are generally consistent with resource-based land uses but are not always clearly defined as distinct categories. The County could consider developing clearer definitions and permit pathways for these uses.

Potential Benefit: May improve predictability for applicants and reduce delays related to zoning interpretation.

2. Provide Expanded Applicant Guidance for Rural Project Conditions

Project feasibility in Mariposa County is often influenced by site-specific infrastructure constraints such as wells, septic systems, and access. The County could consider providing

additional guidance materials outlining typical requirements and considerations for development in rural areas.

Potential Benefit: May improve application completeness and reduce resubmittals.

3. Develop Standardized CEQA Guidance for Recurring Project Types

Bioeconomy and wood products projects often involve recurring environmental issue areas. The County could consider developing guidance or templates to help applicants understand the level of detail needed for CEQA review.

Potential Benefit: May improve consistency across projects and reduce repetitive analysis.

4. Encourage Early Coordination Across Departments and Agencies

Given the County's consolidated structure and the need for coordination with external agencies, early communication may help identify requirements and potential issues before formal submittal.

Potential Benefit: May reduce late-stage revisions and improve overall timeline predictability.

5. Utilize Existing Environmental Documents Where Applicable

The County's General Plan and prior CEQA documents may provide context for evaluating projects consistent with adopted land use designations.

Potential Benefit: May reduce duplication of analysis and support more efficient environmental review where applicable.

Potential Future Actions that Require Rulemaking or Legislation

The Joint Institute for Wood Products proposed several amendments to CEQA guidelines in its recent CEQA Handbook⁶ including plans to "create a categorical exemption for projects that utilize forest biomass waste located on properties zoned as industrial and outside zones of extreme air quality nonattainment," this exemption remains only as a proposal in 2026. Other parts of the Handbook recommendations focus on reducing procedural burdens for projects on previously developed sites and incorporating lifecycle emission benefits into CEQA's energy-efficiency guidelines. A proposed new brownfield reuse exemption could allow redevelopment of former industrial properties, as long as the new exemption provided that existing environmental baselines are maintained and no new significant impacts occur, such a new idea could improve project success. Also, enhancements to the energy-efficiency checklist would recognize the full life-cycle advantages of bioenergy facilities—extending beyond onsite

⁶ [CEQA Handbook for Bioenergy and Wood Products Businesses page 113](#)

efficiency to include avoided emissions from alternative waste-disposal methods. Together, these reforms seek to balance environmental protection with the urgent need to scale up renewable energy and sustainable forest management.

The Mariposa Air District could also consider copying the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District's revision of Rule 2.43 for biomass boilers demonstrates one available exemption pathway within air district permitting, which relies on the Class 8 categorical exemption under Section 15308 as an "Action by Regulatory Agency for Protection of the Environment". This exemption applies specifically to regulatory agency actions for environmental protection and cannot be used by private or commercial parties for their own project approvals but could be useful for public agency development projects.

General Plan and Zoning related to the Wood Products Businesses

Land Use Classifications

Mariposa County's General Plan (adopted December 18, 2006) establishes land use classifications that govern timber production and wood products manufacturing activities. Two classifications specifically accommodate wood products businesses:

Agriculture/Working Landscape Land Use Classification defines lands for production, extraction, or harvesting of food, fiber, timber, and minerals on large parcels of 160 acres or greater. Primary uses include single-family dwellings on large parcels, agritourism in conjunction with primary agriculture, agriculture, timber, and mining activities requiring large acreages, and processing. Secondary or accessory uses include feed lots, lumber mills, and other uses associated with primary uses subject to site-specific compatibility review. Maximum density is two dwelling units per 160 acres or one per legally existing lot smaller than 160 acres, with maximum building intensity of 10 percent lot coverage or up to 700,000 square feet per parcel. Minimum parcel size for new subdivisions is 160 acres.

Natural Resource Land Use Classification defines lands for open space, recreation, ecosystem conservation, watershed protection, environmental protection, conservation of natural resources, and public health and safety. Extent of uses includes lands in public ownership, single-family dwellings on large parcels (40 acres or greater), ranches, farms, vineyards, public access, timber management and harvesting, natural resource-compatible recreation, and land conservation uses or easements. Maximum density is one dwelling unit per 40 acres, with 10 percent lot coverage for residential or recreation

development. A conditional use permit is required if non-residential lot coverage exceeds 25 percent.

General Plan Goals and Policies

The General Plan includes Goal 5-12 and Policy 5-12a to protect significant timberlands and provide for sustainable management and harvesting of timber resources. The County uses the Timber Preserve zoning district to protect timberlands and limit non-timber development. The General Plan emphasizes sustainable timber management and includes policies to prevent conversion of timberlands to non-timber uses. Collaborative planning with agencies such as the California Department of Forestry is encouraged to support responsible timber resource management.

Zoning Districts Related to Timber and Wood Products

The Mariposa County Development Code (Title 17, September 2024) establishes specific zoning districts for agricultural and resource uses.

Timber Exclusive Zone (TE) provides for areas suitable for growing and harvesting timber and uses which are integral parts of timber management operations. Land designated Timber Exclusive shall be restricted for a minimum of ten years to growing and harvesting timber and compatible uses as defined by California Government Code Section 51104(h). This zone implements the Agriculture/Working Landscape land use classification in the General Plan.

General Forest Zone (GF) preserves lands best suited for low density residential, timber management, agriculture, and mining. This zone is applied to lands under private ownership located primarily within the boundaries of national forest lands and implements Residential, Agriculture/Working Landscape, and Natural Resource land use classifications.

Permitted Uses in Timber-Related Zones

According to Table 2-1 in the Development Code, permitted uses in the TE zone include:

- Sustained Yield Timber Management - Allowed by right (P) in GF and TE zones.
- Timber Growing and Harvesting Facilities - Allowed by right (P) in TE zone only.
- Timber Processing Facilities - Requires Conditional Use Permit (CUP) in TE zone.
- Firewood Harvesting and Sales - Allowed by right (P) in AE, GF, MP, and TE zones.

In the Scenic Highway Overlay Zone (SH), portable sawmills are conditionally permitted uses.

Timber Exclusive Zone Requirements

Each parcel prior to acceptance into the TE zone must have a minimum of 10,000 board feet per acre or meet the minimum timber stocking standards of the State within five years. The

subject parcel must currently meet timber stocking standards specified in Section 4561 of the Public Resources Code and forest practice rules adopted by the California State Board of Forestry, or the parcel owner must execute an agreement with the Board to meet such stocking standards and forest practice rules within five years.

Listed conditional uses in the TE zone shall only be allowed if the use is secondary or incidental to timber growing and harvesting on the parcel. Property owners must provide the Department with a biennial report confirming that the subject property meets the minimum thresholds for timber stocking per the State. The Department and Assessor's Office actively monitor the program by periodically reviewing biennial reports to determine whether property owners are complying with their approved timber management plan.

The timber management plan must be prepared by a registered professional forester and shall establish a program to ensure the property will comply with minimum stocking standards within five years. Any proposed use within the TE zone may be required to provide a Timber Management Plan or an updated Timber Management Plan subject to review and approval by the Department or the Commission.

Development Standards

Development standards for the TE zone include minimum parcel area of 40 acres, allowable density per General Plan Table 1-1, maximum structure coverage of 10 percent per 5 acres for residential and 10 percent for agriculture/working landscape or natural resource designations. Front setback is minimum 25 feet and 55 feet from centerline of dedicated access easement, with side and rear setbacks of 25 feet or 10 percent of parcel width/depth (whichever is less). Maximum height is 35 feet.

Wood Waste Disposal in Mariposa County

Forest biomass, timber slash, and other non-merchantable woody residues generated from fuel-reduction and roadside vegetation projects in Mariposa County are managed through site-specific treatment prescriptions designed to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health. Project descriptions for shaded fuel breaks and strategic wildfire-mitigation efforts reference mechanical and hand thinning, mastication, chipping with chips redistributed onsite, and pile burning conducted in compliance with applicable air-district permits. Depending on project objectives, funding, and site conditions, woody material may be retained onsite or prepared for removal.

Woody residues on private residential properties are addressed through defensible-space programs operated by the Mariposa County Fire Safe Council and its partners. Brushing and chipping programs funded in part through grants from CAL FIRE provide chipping services for

qualifying piles of cut brush and limbs that residents stack along accessible driveways, subject to size and placement requirements. Program guidance explains that chipped material is typically left onsite or redistributed on the property, supporting chip-and-scatter management of small-diameter fuels as an alternative to open burning.

Mariposa County provides solid waste and recycling services at county facilities where residents may dispose of municipal solid waste and certain recyclable or organic materials pursuant to an adopted fee schedule. Public program summaries confirm the existence of disposal services but do not consistently provide detailed, current per-cubic-yard rates for wood, green waste, stumps, or treated wood. Specific fee categories and material-acceptance rules should therefore be confirmed against the most recent County rate schedule before citing exact figures.

Residential hazard-reduction burning is regulated through permit and burn-day requirements administered by CAL FIRE and applicable regional air-quality authorities. Burning is allowed only on permissive burn days and is subject to conditions governing allowable materials, clearance requirements, supervision, and fire-control measures, reflecting the combined oversight of fire-safety and air-quality standards.

Project documentation further indicates that woody biomass generated through county and grant-funded forest health work may either remain onsite for soil and carbon benefits or be removed for beneficial use. CAL FIRE-funded forest health projects led by the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District identify dead and downed roadside material for removal and conversion to energy or biochar as part of designated biomass-utilization efforts. In practice, when biomass is removed from larger projects, it may be transported to regional bioenergy or biochar facilities outside the county when markets and transportation economics allow.

ATTACHMENT A

Key Contacts, Planning Portals, Fee Schedules, and Guidance Resources for Mariposa County

Mariposa County provides centralized permitting and environmental review services through its Planning function, which operates within a consolidated Development Services structure. Applicants typically coordinate directly with staff to confirm requirements and access application materials through the County's official website.

Mariposa County Planning Department (CEQA Lead Agency)

The Planning Department serves as the primary point of contact for discretionary permits, zoning interpretation, General Plan implementation, and CEQA review. The County acts as the CEQA lead agency for most development projects and integrates environmental review into the permitting process.

- Website: <https://www.mariposacounty.gov/80/Planning>
- Phone: (209) 966-5151
- Address: 5100 Bullion Street, Mariposa, CA 95338

The Planning Department webpage serves as the central access point for:

- General Plan materials
 - Zoning information
 - Permit application guidance
 - CEQA-related processes
-

Development Services / Permitting Access

Mariposa County utilizes an online permitting system for application submittal and tracking; however, access to the system is typically provided through the Planning Department webpage rather than a standalone public portal link.

Applicants are generally directed to:

- Access application materials through the Planning page

- Coordinate with staff to initiate submittals and confirm requirements
-

Building Division

The Building function operates within the County's consolidated Development Services structure and provides plan review, building permits, and inspections. Building review is coordinated with Planning and CEQA review during project processing.

- Access via Planning Department webpage
 - Phone: (209) 966-5151
-

Environmental Health Division

The Environmental Health Division regulates septic systems, water supply, and environmental health compliance. This division plays a key role in project feasibility, particularly in rural areas outside the Mariposa Town Planning Area.

- Website: <https://www.mariposacounty.org/113/Environmental-Health>
 - Phone: (209) 966-5151
-

Zoning Code and General Plan

Mariposa County's zoning regulations and General Plan provide the policy framework for land use decisions and CEQA review.

- Zoning Code (Municipal Code):
https://library.municode.com/ca/mariposa_county/codes/code_of_ordinances
 - General Plan:
Accessed through the Planning Department webpage
-

Fee Schedules and Cost Information

Mariposa County provides fee information through departmental resources and publicly available documents; however, fee schedules are not maintained on a single centralized webpage.

- Document Center: <https://www.mariposacounty.org/DocumentCenter>

Applicants are encouraged to confirm current fees directly with County staff, as costs vary based on project scope, required studies, and CEQA review level.

Air Quality Coordination

Air quality permitting and CEQA coordination are handled by the **Mariposa County Air Pollution Control District**, which is a locally administered district.

- General County Resources: <https://www.mariposacounty.org>

Projects involving emissions, combustion equipment, or industrial processes may require permits or consultation with the local air district.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission conducts public hearings and makes recommendations or decisions on discretionary land use applications and associated CEQA findings.

- Access via County website: <https://www.mariposacounty.gov>
-

Practical Use of County Resources

In practice, applicants typically begin with the Planning Department to confirm zoning, permitting requirements, and CEQA pathways. Mariposa County's consolidated structure allows for coordination across planning, building, and environmental health functions, but early communication with staff is important to clarify submittal expectations and project feasibility, particularly for development in rural areas.

ATTACHMENT B

Getting Started in Mariposa County: CEQA FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions for Bioeconomy and Wood Products Developers

1. What level of CEQA review will my project require?

The level of CEQA review depends on the project's scale, location, and potential environmental impacts. Projects may qualify for a statutory or categorical exemption, a Negative Declaration or Mitigated Negative Declaration, or an Environmental Impact Report. The appropriate level of review is determined by Mariposa County as the CEQA lead agency based on an Initial Study and available evidence.

2. Who determines the level of CEQA review?

Mariposa County, acting as the CEQA lead agency, determines the appropriate level of environmental review. This determination is made as part of the discretionary permitting process and is reflected in staff analysis and decisions by the Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors, depending on the required approvals.

3. How does CEQA review work in Mariposa County?

CEQA review is integrated into the County's discretionary permitting process and is administered through the Planning function within the County's Development Services structure. Environmental review occurs alongside approvals such as use permits, subdivisions, and zoning actions and is incorporated into staff reports and public hearings.

4. How long does CEQA review typically take?

CEQA timelines vary depending on project complexity, completeness of the application, and the level of environmental analysis required. State law establishes minimum public review periods, including at least 20 days for Negative Declarations and 30 days or more for Environmental Impact Reports. Overall timelines vary based on project-specific conditions and coordination with other agencies.

5. Should I meet with the County before submitting an application?

Early coordination with the Planning Department is strongly recommended. Given the County's rural context and reliance on site-specific infrastructure such as wells and septic systems, early communication may help identify potential constraints, required studies, and applicable permits before formal submittal.

6. Where are wood products or biomass projects typically located?

Wood products and biomass-related uses are generally consistent with the County's resource-

oriented land use designations. However, project location and feasibility depend on site-specific factors such as access, available infrastructure, and proximity to sensitive resources.

7. Are wood products or biomass uses clearly defined in the zoning code?

These uses are not always identified as distinct categories in the zoning code and are typically evaluated under broader industrial, manufacturing, or resource-based classifications. Projects may require discretionary review and case-by-case interpretation depending on their characteristics.

8. Will my project require coordination with other agencies?

Many projects require coordination with other agencies depending on project characteristics. This may include the local air district, CAL FIRE or local fire authorities, and regional or state resource agencies. These agencies may provide input during CEQA review and may require separate permits.

9. What are the most common CEQA issues for wood products or biomass projects?

Common areas of review include water supply and wastewater capacity, air quality and emissions, traffic and access, wildfire risk and emergency access, and biological and cultural resources. The specific issues will depend on the project site and operational characteristics.

10. How can I reduce the risk of delays during CEQA review?

Providing a clear and consistent project description, coordinating early with County staff, and identifying infrastructure constraints and interagency requirements early in the process may help reduce resubmittals and improve overall predictability.

ATTACHMENT C

Prepare Your CEQA Submittal: Applicant Checklist (Mariposa County)

Before submitting a project application in Mariposa County, applicants may benefit from confirming the following:

Project Definition

- Clear description of project purpose and operations
- Site plan showing layout, access, and circulation
- Identification of equipment, processing activities, and expected throughput
- Consistent project description across all materials

Zoning and Land Use

- Confirmation that the proposed use is allowed within the applicable zoning district
- Identification of required discretionary approvals (e.g., use permit, subdivision, zoning amendment)
- Early discussion with staff if land use classification is unclear

Site and Infrastructure Considerations

- Identification of water supply (well or public system)
- Wastewater treatment approach (septic or sewer, if available)
- Site access, roadway conditions, and haul routes
- Evaluation of wildfire risk and emergency access requirements

Environmental Considerations

- Preliminary identification of potential impact areas, including:
 - Water supply and wastewater capacity
 - Air quality and emissions
 - Traffic and access
 - Noise and operational characteristics
 - Wildfire risk and emergency access

- Biological and cultural resources
- Initial consideration of potential mitigation measures

CEQA Strategy

- Understanding that the CEQA pathway will be determined by the County.
- Awareness that CEQA review evaluates the full scope of the project (“whole of the action”)
- Consistency between project description and anticipated environmental analysis.

Technical Studies (as applicable)

- Water supply and septic feasibility analysis
- Air quality or emissions estimates
- Traffic or access analysis
- Noise analysis
- Biological or cultural resource studies, if required
- Fire safety considerations.

Coordination

- Early coordination with the Planning Department (strongly recommended)
- Identification of other agencies that may require permits or input, such as:
 - Mariposa County Air Pollution Control District
 - CAL FIRE or local fire authorities
 - State or federal resource agencies
- Confirmation of permitting requirements prior to submittal

Application Materials

- Complete application submitted through the County’s permitting system.
- Supporting documents clearly labeled and organized
- Alignment between plans, studies, and project description
- Contact information for the applicant and project team

Benefit: A complete and well-prepared submittal, combined with early coordination and clear identification of site constraints and interagency requirements, may help reduce resubmittal cycles and support a more predictable CEQA review process in Mariposa County.