



# A BIOECONOMY PLAYBOOK FOR ALPINE COUNTY

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MARIPOSA COUNTY



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

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## Introduction

This Bioeconomy Playbook examines the current business landscape in Alpine 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 (LCI). 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 Alpine 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 Alpine 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 Alpine 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. In summary, this Bioeconomy Playbook for Alpine County can serve as an important first look at the region when considering the placement of a new wood products or bioenergy themed business in the area.

## The Wood Waste Challenge in Alpine County

Forest health and wildfire mitigation efforts in Alpine County are generating increasing volumes of woody material from thinning, shaded fuel breaks, defensible space projects, post-fire recovery, and roadside vegetation management. Much of this material consists of small-diameter trees, tops, limbs, brush, and other non-merchantable biomass that does not qualify as commercial sawtimber. While these treatments are essential for reducing wildfire risk and improving forest resilience, they also create a recurring material management challenge.

In the absence of local processing infrastructure, woody biomass generated through fuel-reduction activities is typically managed on-site or transported out of county, limiting opportunities for local value creation. Although these approaches reduce fuel loads, they do not create economic value and often require additional handling, equipment time, and operational cost. Transportation to out-of-county facilities is generally not economical for low-value biomass, particularly given Alpine County's remoteness and seasonal access constraints. As a result, a significant portion of potentially usable material is either treated as a disposal issue or left in place for ecological purposes rather than being incorporated into productive economic pathways.

This dynamic creates a structural gap between forest restoration objectives and local economic development. Public agencies, nonprofit partners, and private landowners are investing substantial resources in hazardous-fuels reduction, yet the by-products of those efforts rarely generate revenue or offset treatment costs. The result is a landscape in which forest health work is active and necessary, but material utilization remains limited.

Addressing this wood waste challenge does not require replicating the industrial timber economies of larger Sierra counties. Instead, it requires identifying appropriately scaled, restoration-aligned utilization pathways that can reduce disposal costs, capture incremental value from treatment by-products, and operate within Alpine County's geographic and infrastructure constraints. The following sections describe the current industry landscape, collaborative capacity, and structural conditions that inform development of such a right-sized bioeconomy strategy.

## Current Wood Product Landscape in Alpine County

Alpine County has an extremely limited wood products industry with minimal timber harvest activity and no primary wood products manufacturing infrastructure. Available harvest data show annual harvest volumes in the low tens of thousands of board feet, making Alpine one of the smaller timber producing counties in California. Most harvests have occurred on private

lands, and there has been little to no commercial harvest on federal or state lands in recent years. The absence of significant timber output reflects the county's limited commercially viable timberland base and the lack of nearby processing infrastructure.

There are no operating sawmills, veneer plants, or other primary wood products manufacturing facilities within the county. As a result, any merchantable timber harvested locally must be transported out of the county for processing. The closest operating commercial sawmill serving the region is the Tahoe Forest Products facility in Carson City, Nevada, which opened in December 2023 and is designed to process small diameter logs from Nevada and eastern California associated with forest health and post fire recovery efforts. Even with a nearby regional outlet, economic feasibility remains limited.

As discussed above, much of the material generated through fuels reduction consists of small-diameter and non-merchantable biomass that does not enter traditional lumber markets. In the absence of local utilization facilities, this material is typically managed through on-site treatments or limited disposal programs rather than incorporated into value-added pathways. This dynamic reinforces the gap between forest restoration activity and economic utilization.

In 2022, Alpine County initiated a process to solicit proposals from consulting firms to prepare an independent feasibility analysis regarding the potential development of a biomass facility in Eastern Alpine County. The purpose was to provide objective technical information concerning feedstock supply, infrastructure requirements, environmental considerations, traffic, emissions, and potential economic effects prior to voter consideration of a ballot initiative. The initiative sought to prohibit the construction or operation of any biomass plant, biomass to electric energy facility, or trash incineration facility designed to produce electric power within Eastern Alpine County. Following public debate, the measure was approved by voters, effectively prohibiting grid connected biomass power generation facilities within the specified area unless modified by a future vote.

Although Alpine County's General Plan and zoning framework permit timber production and related forest management activities, including the growing and harvesting of forest products within the Timber Preserve zoning district, these provisions have not translated into sustained commercial wood products development. Given limited commercially viable timberland, absence of local processing infrastructure, and the County's broader economic orientation toward recreation, tourism, and resource conservation, wood utilization activity remains small in scale and largely tied to forest health objectives rather than commodity production.

## Local Collaborative and Advocacy Groups

### *Alpine Fire Safe Council (AFSC)*

The Alpine Fire Safe Council is a nonprofit organization working to develop a fire-safe environment in eastern Alpine County through education, planning, and community-scale fuels mitigation projects. For more than two decades, AFSC has assisted local landowners in understanding defensible space requirements and implementing hazardous-fuels treatments guided by the county's Community Wildfire Protection Plan. As a community-based council, AFSC applies all funds it receives to local projects that enhance fire safety, support ongoing education efforts, and develop literature and other materials for distribution to residents and visitors. Primary funding sources include Title III Secure Rural Schools Act payments, CAL FIRE wildfire prevention grants, and local fundraising activities such as serving as a vendor at the annual Death Ride Tour of the California Alps. Recent CAL FIRE grants awarded to AFSC focus on wildfire prevention, including hazardous-fuels reduction, wildfire prevention planning, and public education campaigns tailored to eastern Alpine County communities. AFSC also partners with the County Department of Public Works and Eastern Alpine Fire/Rescue to provide the free Biomass Pile/Fuels Reduction program, which offers residents no-cost disposal of vegetation during spring and fall operating periods. The Council continues to convene public meetings, such as its November 17, 2025, session, to share updates on fuels projects, funding opportunities, and preparedness actions with local residents.

### *Alpine Biomass Collaborative (ABC)*

The Alpine Biomass Collaborative operates under the mission statement "Unifying partners to promote forest and watershed health and local economic development." ABC functions as a convener and coordination hub rather than an implementing organization, facilitating collaboration among land management agencies, tribes, nonprofits, and county staff so that fuels-reduction, restoration, and biomass-utilization projects complement one another at the watershed and landscape scales. The Collaborative received a \$12,000 Capacity Building grant from the National Forest Foundation in March 2016 to strengthen its organizing and partnership-building role. ABC does not conduct projects for its own account; instead, it helps other organizations maximize the impact of their work by aligning priorities, identifying opportunities for joint implementation, and supporting funding efforts. ABC's chair, Alpine County Supervisor David Griffith, also serves on the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District Board, helping connect local forest-health and biomass-utilization discussions with regional air-quality and smoke-management considerations.

ABC is currently participating in a Tree and Native Plant Nursery Feasibility Study funded by a \$114,700 Sierra Jobs First Catalyst Grant, which is evaluating potential markets for tree and

native-plant seedlings in the eastern Sierra and western Great Basin in partnership with The Beck Group, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California's Environmental Protection Department, and the Alpine Watershed Group. In recent years, ABC has deferred to Alpine County and the Forest Health Community Working Group for convening regular community meetings and workshops on forest health, resilience, and the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, while remaining an active partner in collaborative initiatives. ABC helped bring together agencies and community members for the July 26, 2024, prescribed fire field workshop in Markleeville, which focused on collaborative prescribed-burning programs, forest restoration efforts, and public education about the role of good fire in local landscapes.

#### *Alpine Watershed Group (AWG)*

The Alpine Watershed Group is a community-based nonprofit founded in 2001 to monitor and restore Alpine County's watersheds. AWG's mission is to protect, conserve, and restore local watersheds by promoting sustainable, community-driven, and science-based collaborative solutions. The organization leads volunteer monitoring programs that track watershed conditions, engages partners in restoration and fuels-related projects that support watershed and forest health, and accepts tax-deductible donations to sustain protection of the California Alps headwaters. AWG is currently focused on building local capacity in Alpine County and helping fund fuels treatments in key areas such as Hope Valley to enhance forest resilience and protect water resources.

In August 2025, AWG, in partnership with the National Forest Foundation and US Forest Service staff, hosted a public tour of the West Fork Carson River Fuels Reduction and Aspen Monitoring Project in Hope Valley, where community members and local stakeholders learned about fuels-reduction work to enhance aspen stands and restore meadow ecosystems. AWG also works closely with the Forest Health Community Working Group on outreach activities, field tours, and volunteer events that connect watershed protection with forest-health and wildfire-resilience goals.

#### *Forest Health Community Working Group (FHCWG)*

The Forest Health Community Working Group is a collaborative forum dedicated to creating fire-safe communities and restoring forests and watersheds in Alpine County to a healthy and resilient condition. FHCWG engages community members, local groups, and partner agencies to provide educational opportunities and space for constructive dialogue about living amid fire-adapted forests, climate change, and evolving fire regimes. The working group helps coordinate forest-health efforts across organizations and, as of 2024, has become a primary convener for meetings and activities on forest resilience, implementation of the Community

Wildfire Protection Plan, and related topics as the Alpine Biomass Collaborative has shifted its focus toward support and coordination roles.

FHCWG sponsors hands-on restoration projects and public workshops that connect residents directly with on-the-ground forest-health activities. In October 2025, the group hosted a volunteer tree-planting event at the BLM Indian Creek Day Use Area, where volunteers planted 500 Jeffrey pine seedlings provided by the Sugar Pine Foundation and pinyon pine seedlings from the Washoe Tribe. Earlier restoration work at Turtle Rock Park, where volunteers planted seedlings in April 2023, showed successful two-year-old growth as of April 2025, demonstrating the effectiveness of FHCWG-supported efforts. On May 31, 2025, FHCWG conducted a workshop titled “What’s that Plant, and How do I Get Rid of It? Tips for reducing fire risk on your land,” which helped attendees identify native and invasive plants and understand vegetation-management techniques for reducing fire risk around homes and properties. The group also co-hosted the August 18, 2025 West Fork Carson River Fuels Reduction and Aspen Monitoring Project tour in Hope Valley with Alpine Watershed Group, the National Forest Foundation, and US Forest Service staff, providing an opportunity for the public to learn about landscape-scale fuels treatments and meadow restoration.

### *Alpine Trails Association*

The Alpine Trails Association is a volunteer-driven organization focused on improving and maintaining recreation opportunities in Alpine County. In the wake of the Tamarack Fire, the Association has contributed to multiple tree-planting and restoration efforts, helping stabilize burned areas, support reforestation, and restore trail-adjacent habitats. Alpine Trails Association collaborates with the Forest Health Community Working Group and other partners on educational workshops and restoration activities that link trail stewardship, recreation access, and wildfire-resilient landscapes. Through this work, the Association helps engage the recreation community in forest-health and fuels-reduction conversations, strengthening local support for long-term resilience projects.

## Major Collaborative Projects and County Programs

The Markleevillage Fuels Reduction Project, completed in 2019, treated approximately 234 acres to reduce hazardous fuels, increase forest vigor, enhance local wildlife habitat, and improve the watershed’s capacity to filter water. Funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the project was implemented through collaboration among Alpine County, the Carson Ranger District, Alpine Watershed Group, and the Alpine Fire Safe Council. When the Tamarack Fire reached the edges of the Markleevillage treatment area in 2021, the altered fuel conditions caused the fire behavior to shift from a high-intensity crown fire to a less intense surface fire, allowing firefighting crews to engage more safely and protect nearby homes. On July 26, 2024,

partners including CAL FIRE, Alpine County officials, the Alpine Biomass Collaborative, the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and others held a prescribed fire field workshop in Markleeville to discuss collaborative prescribed-burn programs, forest restoration strategies, and lessons learned from projects such as Markleevillage.

Alpine County has also developed a Wildfire Risk Mitigation Plan (WRMP) to reduce wildfire risk and protect important resources countywide. The WRMP identifies up to 12 fuels-reduction projects that can be implemented over the next 10 years, including three top-priority projects slated for implementation in the next two years, and encompasses all communities within Alpine County. The Planning Commission held a public hearing to review the WRMP, and associated environmental documents were made available through CEQAnet; members of the public may obtain further information from the Community Development Director.

To support parcel-level mitigation, Alpine County operates a Biomass Pile/Fuels Reduction program, typically offered twice per year in spring and fall, which provides county residents with free disposal of woody material and yard debris at designated sites. The fall 2025 program ran from August 23 through October 26 and was delivered by the Alpine County Department of Public Works in cooperation with Eastern Alpine Fire/Rescue and the Alpine Fire Safe Council, with funding from CAL FIRE's Wildfire Prevention Grants Program as part of the California Climate Investments initiative. On the eastern side of the county, Firewise Communities host public meetings—such as the March 15 and March 22, 2025, sessions—to share information about wildfire-risk mitigation, defensible space, and neighborhood-level preparedness, providing another venue for residents to engage with local fire-prevention efforts and community planning.

## Structural Constraints and Design Parameters for a Viable Bioeconomy in Alpine County

Building on the wood waste challenge described above, development of a viable bioeconomy in Alpine County must be grounded in the structural, economic, geographic, and market conditions that define what is feasible. Although voters have prohibited biomass-to-electric generation facilities in Eastern Alpine County, broader structural realities would limit large-scale industrial development even in the absence of that prohibition. Feedstock scale, remoteness, land ownership patterns, infrastructure limitations, and market economics therefore function less as barriers and more as design parameters for a right-sized, restoration-aligned bioeconomy strategy.

Alpine County's commercial timber base is modest when viewed from an industrial perspective. Technical assessments of accessible lands within the Carson Ranger District have projected limited annual yields of sawtimber and biomass under long-term treatment scenarios, with

volumes constrained by elevation, weather, and seasonal operating windows. Industrial facilities typically require consistent year-round throughput to remain financially viable. In Alpine County, both the scale and variability of available material make it difficult to sustain fixed, high-capacity operations dependent on steady supply.

Geographic isolation further affects feasibility. The county's remoteness and seasonal access over high mountain passes increase transportation costs, particularly for low-value biomass, where hauling expenses can quickly exceed delivered value. The majority of Alpine County consists of federal lands, while privately owned industrial parcels are scarce. As a result, feedstock availability depends heavily on federal land management decisions and environmental review timelines, and opportunities to site larger facilities on appropriately zoned private land with adequate utilities are limited.

Infrastructure and market conditions reinforce these constraints. Alpine County lacks many of the industrial utilities common in larger timber counties, including widespread three-phase power, natural gas distribution, and industrial-scale wastewater capacity. The local workforce is small, and local demand for lumber, pellets, or industrial heat is limited. Any sizable processing facility would therefore depend on exporting products to regional markets, increasing exposure to transportation costs and competitive pressures.

These structural realities narrow the range of viable options and point toward distributed, restoration-aligned utilization models that fit Alpine County's geographic and economic context. Rather than relying on fixed, high-throughput facilities, a viable approach would focus on modular and intermittent operations tied directly to forest health treatments. This could include localized firewood production, small-diameter wood products, portable biochar systems producing soil amendments, and limited-scale milling integrated with seasonal fuels projects. By creating value near the point of material generation, such models reduce dependence on long-haul transportation and large capital investments while remaining consistent with the county's size, infrastructure, and land use patterns.

## Solid Waste and Wood Waste Management in Alpine County

Alpine County does not operate an in-county landfill or biomass processing facility. Municipal solid waste and construction debris generated within the county are transported to regional facilities in neighboring jurisdictions, including Carson City and Douglas County, Nevada. This reliance on out-of-county disposal infrastructure also shapes how woody biomass is managed.

Residential-scale vegetative material is addressed through periodic Biomass Pile and Fuels Reduction events, typically held in spring and fall, as well as permitted private pile burning. These programs are designed primarily for wildfire risk reduction and defensible space compliance rather than material recycling or economic utilization. Material collected through

these programs is generally burned under appropriate authorization rather than processed into higher-value products.

Woody debris generated from fuels reduction, roadside vegetation management, and forest health projects follow similar pathways. Material is commonly chipped and redistributed on-site, masticated, or pile burned. Larger volumes that cannot be treated in place may be transported out of county when economically feasible.

In the absence of local processing infrastructure, wood waste management in Alpine County remains decentralized, project-specific, and disposal-oriented rather than utilization-driven.

This disposal-dependent structure reinforces the broader bioeconomy challenge identified earlier: forest health activities generate recurring woody material streams, but the county lacks localized mechanisms to convert those streams into durable economic value.

## Public Outreach in Alpine County: Examples from Recent Years

*Example 1: Firewise Community Public Meetings – Forest Health Community Working Group and Alpine Fire Safe Council (March 2025)*

On March 15 and March 22, 2025, the Forest Health Community Working Group, in concert with the Alpine Fire Safe Council and the eastern Alpine County Firewise communities, hosted community meetings at the Turtle Rock Park Community Center and the Woodfords Fire Station. The meetings promoted the Firewise USA program, allowed existing Firewise communities to share their experiences and accomplishments, and included presentations from the CAL FIRE Amador–El Dorado Unit prevention staff and representatives of the Markleevillage/Carson Ridge and Mesa Vista Firewise communities. The meetings were well attended and included discussion about forming an additional Firewise community in the Woodfords area.

*Example 2: Native Plant and Fire-Risk Reduction Workshop – Forest Health Community Working Group (May 2025)*

On May 31, 2025, the Forest Health Community Working Group, Alpine Trails Association, and Sierra Speakers Series conducted a workshop titled "What's that Plant, and How do I Get Rid of It? Tips for reducing fire risk on your land". David Board of the US Forest Service provided an overview of different plant species with both high and low fire risk, and Andy Lovell demonstrated how to remove certain high-risk species to create defensible space. Materials presented at the workshop included the University of Nevada, Reno "Backyard Native Plants" guide, and the event served as a practical education opportunity for homeowners seeking to reduce ignition risk on their properties.

*Example 3: West Fork Carson River Fuels Reduction and Aspen Monitoring Project Tour – Alpine Watershed Group and Partners (August 2025)*

On August 18, 2025, members of the public and local stakeholders joined the Alpine Watershed Group, National Forest Foundation, and US Forest Service staff for a tour in Hope Valley of the West Fork Carson River Fuels Reduction and Aspen Monitoring Project, hosted in partnership with the Forest Health Community Working Group. The tour included discussion and presentation of fuel-reduction work completed to enhance aspen stands and restore meadows. Projects in the area are funded by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife through its Watershed Restoration Grant Program and by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy through its Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Program.

*Example 4: Prescribed Fire Field Workshop in Markleeville – Multi-Agency Partnership (July 2024)*

On July 26, 2024, a prescribed-fire field workshop was held in Markleeville, featuring a bus tour to field sites in Markleeville and Woodfords and a facilitated discussion about collaboration and prescribed fire in Alpine County. The workshop brought together CAL FIRE, Alpine County officials, the Alpine Biomass Collaborative, the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and other partners. The event was organized through the Forest Health Community Working Group and provided attendees with an opportunity to learn about prescribed burning as a tool for forest restoration and community protection.

*Example 5: Biomass Pile/Fuels Reduction Program – Alpine County (Fall 2025)*

Alpine County's fall 2025 Biomass Collection program at Turtle Rock Park operated from August 23 through October 26, open on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The program accepted natural vegetation, shrubs, branches, limbs, pine needles, grasses, and leaves free of charge for all Alpine County residents. The program was provided by Alpine County Community Development in cooperation with the Alpine Fire Safe Council, with funding from CAL FIRE's Wildfire Prevention Grants Program as part of the California Climate Investments Program.

# 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 Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) and the Natural Resources Agency. 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.

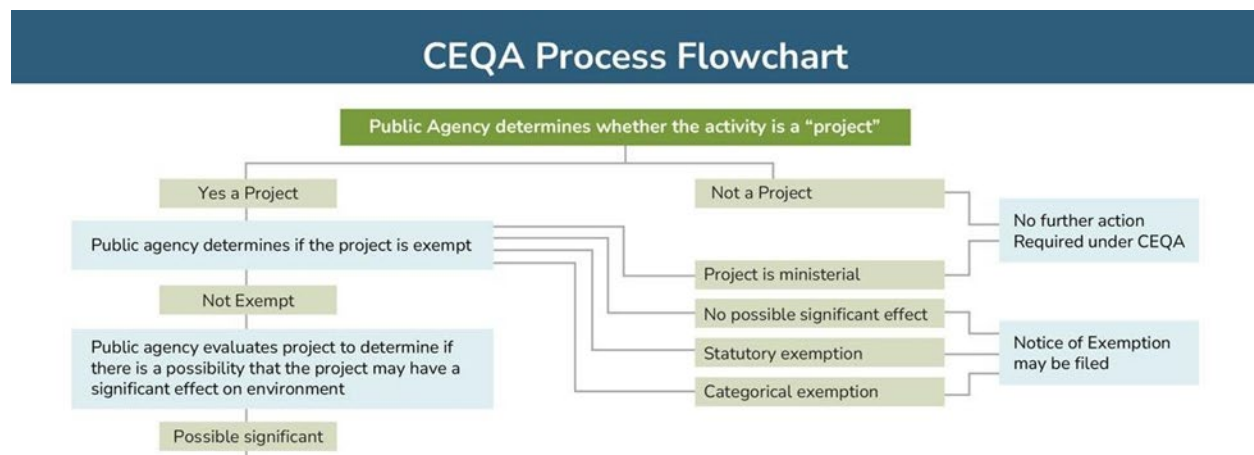
Central to CEQA's framework is the concept of the "lead agency," the public entity with primary authority to approve or carry out a project. The lead agency is responsible for determining the appropriate level of environmental review, preparing necessary documentation, and ensuring compliance with CEQA's 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, 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 treatment<sup>1</sup>.

Enterprises that can handle wood waste disposal are 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 requirements<sup>23</sup>. Despite this confusion about the

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<sup>1</sup> [California Code of Regulations, Article 2, Section 1052 - Emergency Notice | California Code of Regulations | Justia](#)

<sup>2</sup> [California Streamlines CEQA for Housing and Public Projects](#)

<sup>3</sup> [With growing fire risk, Governor Newsom proclaims state of emergency to fast-track critical wildfire prevention projects statewide | Governor of California](#)

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 projects<sup>4</sup>.

### *Categorical Exemptions*

Fuel reduction projects enjoy access to multiple categorical exemption pathways beyond the commonly used Class 4 exemption. Some projects may qualify for statutory exemptions, as demonstrated by the documentation provided by a project manager or agency. 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.

## Specific CEQA Issues with Bioeconomy Business Development

Several aspects of CEQA review are particularly important when developing bioeconomy projects in Alpine County that utilize forest residues, agricultural byproducts, or other biomass as feedstock. 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 (PM2.5 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 project scale, operational characteristics, and the attainment status of the applicable air basin. CEQA review must quantify construction-phase and operational emissions and evaluate whether those emissions would exceed applicable air district thresholds or result in a

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<sup>4</sup> [WFR May 2024 GovUpdate05\\_07.pdf](#)

cumulatively considerable contribution to air quality impacts when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

Lead agencies should consider the rural and working landscape context of Alpine County when evaluating air quality impacts, including the limited concentration of permitted stationary sources and the presence of other rural commercial and resource-related activities. Cumulative impact determinations should therefore be based on a realistic assessment of existing emission sources, planned development, and foreseeable land use patterns within the county, rather than assumptions derived from urban or heavily industrialized regions. Construction-related fugitive dust, equipment exhaust, and emissions associated with material handling and vehicle trips must be carefully evaluated, with particular attention to truck traffic along state highways and local roadways that serve both industrial and residential uses.

Air quality analysis under CEQA must 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 required for bioeconomy projects under CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.4 and must include 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 evaluate consistency with applicable state, regional, or local climate policies. For projects utilizing 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 support a reasoned significance determination.

In addition to air quality and greenhouse gas impacts, bioeconomy projects in Alpine 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 state highways and local roads. 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 soil and geology analyses ensure safe grading and erosion control practices. Aesthetic analyses consider changes to visual character, and hazard evaluations examine fire risk, 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.

#### *Limits of Categorical Exemptions and 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.

## Alpine County Environmental Review

In Alpine County, all discretionary land use projects are subject to CEQA review as part of the county's standard permitting process. I found that the Planning Division determines the required level of environmental review when a project application is submitted. The Alpine County Board of Supervisors is the final decision-maker on legislative actions (General Plan amendments, zoning, ordinances), while the Planning Commission (advisory to the Board) hears and decides permits such as use permits, rezoning, subdivisions, and variances. The County certified a General Plan EIR (adopted 1999) and relies on it programmatically for consistent projects. Environmental review is fully integrated into project processing: staff prepare an Initial Study to decide if a project qualifies for a statutory/categorical exemption or requires a Negative Declaration, Mitigated ND, or full EIR. Required public hearings are noticed in advance. Upon project approval, the County Clerk files the Notice of Determination or Notice of Exemption and deposits it with the State Clearinghouse. All CEQA documents (NDs, EIRs, etc.) and notices are made available through the State's CEQA database and the County's Document Center. In summary, Alpine County's environmental review follows standard CEQA practice: decisions are made by the Board or Planning Commission, CEQA compliance is embedded in the discretionary review process, and the full range of document types (Exemptions, ND, MND, EIR) is used as appropriate, with records accessible on CEQAnet and the County website

### *Local Ordinances*

#### *Fire Restrictions and Fuels Reduction Ordinance - Chapter 8.20*

Alpine County adopted a comprehensive fire restrictions and fuels reduction ordinance (Ordinance 727 in 2018) codified in Chapter 8.20 of the Alpine County Code. The purpose of this ordinance is to provide rules and regulations designed to mitigate fire hazard in Alpine County. The ordinance requires all persons who own, lease, control, operate, or maintain a building or structure in mountainous areas, forest-covered lands, brush-covered lands, grass-covered lands, or any land covered with flammable material to maintain defensible space in compliance with California Public Resources Code Section 4291.

The ordinance defines "defensible space" as the area within the perimeter of a lot or parcel where basic wildfire protection practices are implemented, providing the key point of defense from an approaching wildfire or escaping structure fire. This area must be characterized by establishment and maintenance of emergency vehicle access, emergency water reserves, street names and building identification, and fuel modification measures. Property owners are required to maintain 100 feet of defensible space from structures.

The ordinance includes provisions for addressing situations where property owners cannot achieve the required 100-foot defensible space due to property line restrictions. Upon filing of a complaint by a property owner who alleges inability to achieve 100 feet of defensible space due to property line restrictions, fire inspection officials will inspect both the occupied property and adjacent lot to determine if the adjacent lot must provide defensible space for the occupied lot to meet safety standards. Complaints must be made on a form provided by fire inspection officials and must contain evidence that all efforts to meet compliance through cooperation with adjacent lot owners have been exhausted, including evidence of written contact with adjacent lot owners.

## CEQA Process in Alpine County: What Applicants Should Know

Environmental review in Alpine County is administered through the Community Development Department, which integrates Planning, Building, and Public Works functions within a single organizational structure. CEQA review is conducted as part of the County's discretionary permitting process rather than as a separate procedural track.

Project applications are submitted through the County's online permitting system, and applicants typically coordinate directly with staff to confirm zoning, permitting requirements, and environmental review pathways. Due to the County's small staff and limited development volume, CEQA review is conducted on a project-specific basis and may involve coordination across departments and with external agencies. Environmental determinations are incorporated into staff analysis and presented to the Planning Commission and/or Board of Supervisors, depending on the type of entitlement required.

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

### *1. CEQA Review Is Fully Integrated with Permitting*

In Alpine County, CEQA review occurs concurrently with discretionary permit processing. Upon application submittal, staff evaluates whether a project qualifies for a statutory or categorical exemption or requires further environmental analysis. Environmental review progresses alongside project review and is incorporated into staff reports and decision-making.

*Benefit:* Integrated review may allow environmental considerations to be addressed early and reduce duplication between CEQA and permitting processes.

## *2. Project Volume Is Limited, but Reviews May Be Complex*

Alpine County processes a relatively small number of discretionary projects. However, projects that do arise often involve complex environmental and logistical considerations, including wildfire exposure, limited roadway access, steep terrain, water supply constraints, and seasonal access conditions.

*Benefit:* While staff may be able to focus attention on individual projects, site-specific complexity may influence review timelines and documentation requirements.

## *3. Interagency Coordination Is Often Required*

A significant portion of Alpine County consists of federally managed land, and many projects require coordination with agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, CAL FIRE, Caltrans, and regional water boards. Coordination may address access, fire protection, biological resources, and infrastructure considerations.

*Benefit:* Early identification of required agency coordination may help reduce the likelihood of delays or late-stage revisions during CEQA review.

## *4. General Plan Framework and Program-Level Context*

Alpine County's General Plan was originally adopted in 1999 and has been updated through subsequent amendments to individual elements, including land use, circulation, housing, and safety. This framework provides the policy basis for land use decisions and environmental review. Where projects are consistent with adopted General Plan policies and assumptions, prior environmental analysis may provide context for CEQA review. However, due to the County's rural character and limited development assumptions, most discretionary projects require project-specific environmental analysis.

*Benefit:* Consistency with the General Plan may support more focused environmental review, but applicants should expect site-specific analysis in most cases.

## *5. Wildfire Risk Is a Central CEQA Consideration*

Wildfire exposure is one of the most significant environmental considerations in Alpine County. CEQA review commonly evaluates emergency access, evacuation constraints, defensible space, water availability for fire suppression, and consistency with wildfire mitigation plans and local ordinances.

*Benefit:* Addressing wildfire-related issues early in project design may support a more efficient and defensible CEQA process.

## *6. Common Environmental Issues for Bioeconomy Projects*

For biomass utilization, wood products, and bioeconomy-related projects, CEQA review typically focuses on:

- Air quality and emissions
- Traffic and haul routes, particularly on constrained roadway networks
- Wildfire risk, emergency access, and fuel management
- Water supply, wastewater, and drainage
- Biological and cultural resources
- Noise and visual impacts

*Benefit:* Early identification and analysis of these issues may reduce the likelihood of significant revisions during environmental review.

## Potential CEQA Process Improvements (For County Consideration)

### *1. Regional On-Call CEQA Consultant Pool and Shared Services Framework*

Alpine County currently administers CEQA review within a small organizational structure with limited internal capacity for specialized technical analysis. The County could consider establishing a qualifications-based, multi-year on-call CEQA consultant pool to support environmental review and technical studies on an as-needed basis. In addition, the County could explore shared services arrangements with neighboring jurisdictions to access specialized expertise, coordinate training, and improve cost efficiency for infrequent but complex projects.

*Potential Benefit:* May reduce procurement delays, expand access to technical expertise, and improve consistency in environmental analysis.

### *2. Structured Wildfire Impact Analysis Framework*

Wildfire risk is a primary environmental concern in Alpine County, yet the structure and presentation of wildfire analysis may vary across CEQA documents. The County could consider developing a standardized framework for evaluating wildfire impacts, including emergency access, defensible space, water supply, and consistency with wildfire mitigation plans.

*Potential Benefit:* May improve analytical consistency, enhance clarity for decision-makers, and strengthen the administrative record.

### *3. Early Interagency Coordination Memorandum Process*

Given the County's reliance on coordination with federal and state agencies, Alpine County could consider formalizing an early coordination process for projects expected to involve multiple agencies. This could include distributing a brief project summary to relevant agencies early in the review process to solicit initial input.

*Potential Benefit:* May reduce the likelihood of late-stage revisions and improve predictability in multi-agency review.

#### *4. Board-Level CEQA Policy on Thresholds and Consistency Findings*

Variability in how CEQA thresholds and General Plan consistency findings are applied may create uncertainty for applicants and decision-makers. The County could consider adopting a policy resolution clarifying how these determinations are made within Alpine County's context.

*Potential Benefit:* May improve transparency, promote consistency, and strengthen defensibility of project approvals.

## General Plan and Zoning related to the Wood Products Businesses in Alpine County

Alpine County's General Plan and zoning regulations expressly recognize timber production and related forest product activities as lawful land uses within the county. The Alpine County General Plan, originally adopted in 1999 and updated through subsequent amendments including 2017 revisions to the Goals and Policies document, establishes policy direction for natural resource management and timberland preservation. The General Plan includes Policy No. 12, which states that property owners should be encouraged to apply for timber preserve zoning in order to obtain property taxation based on timber yields. The Plan also directs compliance with the requirements of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, including the preparation and approval of timber harvest plans by a registered professional forester pursuant to the California Forest Practice Act. The General Plan further includes an objective requiring that county ordinances remain consistent with the adopted General Plan, reflecting state law requirements that zoning conform to general plan designations.

The primary zoning district that accommodates timber production and wood products activities in Alpine County is the Timber Preserve zone, codified in Chapter 18.24 of the Alpine County Code. The stated purpose of the Timber Preserve zone is to preserve timberlands as a renewable source of timber and wood products in accordance with the Forest Taxation Reform Act of 1976 and the applicable provisions of the California Government Code. Lands placed in the Timber Preserve zone are subject to a ten year use restriction that automatically renews each year unless withdrawal proceedings are initiated by the property owner. In exchange for

this restriction, timberland is assessed based on its restricted use rather than full market value, consistent with the state timber yield taxation framework.

Within the Timber Preserve zone, the growing and harvesting of forest products and uses directly related to those activities are permitted. The code expressly includes roads, log landings, and log storage areas as allowable activities associated with timber operations. Watershed management, fire control, erosion control, fish and wildlife habitat management, and grazing activities are also permitted uses. Pre existing single family dwellings that were located on parcels at the time of Timber Preserve zoning remain allowed. Sawmills, shingle mills, and other forest products processing operations utilizing power equipment are not permitted by right but may be approved through issuance of a use permit under Section 18.24.030. This structure allows timber harvesting and related land management activities while requiring discretionary review for industrial scale processing facilities.

The Agriculture zoning district, codified in Chapter 18.16 of the Alpine County Code, also provides for certain wood products processing activities through conditional use permits. The code authorizes agricultural processing plants and forest products manufacturing and processing facilities capable of processing up to five thousand board feet per day as conditional uses within the Agriculture zone. This provision allows limited scale forest product processing subject to discretionary review and applicable development standards.

The Alpine County Code defines timber production in Section 18.08.790 as the systematic harvesting and reseedling of timber stands in accordance with the State Forest Practice Act and applicable county or state regulations. This definition explicitly incorporates state forest practice requirements into the county's land use framework. Commercial timber harvesting on timberlands within Alpine County requires preparation and approval of a Timber Harvest Plan by CAL FIRE pursuant to the Forest Practice Act and Forest Practice Rules.

The zoning ordinance also includes a general consistency framework linking zoning districts to General Plan land use designations. The Timber Preserve zoning classification is identified as consistent with Open Space land use designations in the General Plan. Through this structure, timber production activities are integrated into the county's broader natural resource and open space policies.

Property zoned as Timber Preserve is subject to California's Timber Yield Tax system rather than traditional ad valorem property taxation on standing timber. Under this system, taxes are assessed when timber is harvested rather than annually on the value of the standing timber, consistent with Government Code provisions governing timberland preserve zones.

Taken together, Alpine County's General Plan policies, Timber Preserve zoning provisions, Agriculture zoning standards, and incorporation of state forest practice law establish a land use

framework that allows timber production and certain wood products processing activities subject to defined permitting requirements and state regulatory oversight.

# ATTACHMENT A

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

Alpine County provides a centralized set of resources through its Community Development Department, which integrates Planning, Building, and Public Works functions. Due to the County's small size and limited staffing, permitting and environmental review activities are coordinated through a unified structure and a single online application system.

### **Alpine County Community Development Department (Land Use and CEQA Lead Agency)**

The Community Development Department serves as the primary point of contact for discretionary permits, zoning interpretation, General Plan implementation, and CEQA review. Planning, Building, and Public Works functions are housed within this department, and applicants coordinate directly with staff for project review and permitting.

- Website: <https://alpinecountyca.gov/156/Community-Development>
- Phone: (530) 694-2140
- Address: 50 Diamond Valley Road, Markleeville, CA 96120

The Community Development website provides access to application materials, development standards, and departmental guidance.

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### **Online Permit Center (iWorQ System)**

Alpine County utilizes an online permitting system (iWorQ) to support application submittal and tracking. The system is accessed through the Community Development Department and serves as the primary intake platform for Planning, Building, and Public Works applications.

- Access Point: <https://alpinecountyca.gov/156/Community-Development>

Applicants typically submit materials and coordinate directly with staff through this system.

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### **Building Safety Division (Permitting and Inspections)**

The Building Safety Division provides permit processing, plan review, and inspection services, and works in coordination with Planning for development projects.

- Website: <https://alpinecountyca.gov/157/Building-Safety-Division>

- Forms and Documents: <https://alpinecountyca.gov/158/Building-Documents-References>

The County provides building permit guidance materials and reference documents through this division to assist applicants with submittal requirements.

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### **Fee Schedules and Cost Information**

Alpine County does not maintain a single consolidated fee schedule webpage. Fee information is generally provided through application materials and departmental guidance, with fees adopted by the Board of Supervisors and applied at the time of application.

Applicants are encouraged to coordinate directly with Community Development staff to confirm current fee structures and obtain project-specific cost estimates.

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### **Environmental Health (Health and Human Services)**

Environmental Health functions are administered through the County's Health and Human Services structure and may be involved in CEQA review for projects affecting wastewater systems, water supply, and public health. Due to the County's size, these functions are coordinated directly with staff rather than through a dedicated standalone online portal.

- Phone: (530) 694-2235
- 

### **Development Standards and Guidance Documents**

Alpine County provides development standards and technical guidance through adopted manuals and code provisions.

- Development Standards Manual: <https://alpinecountyca.gov/648/Development-Standards>

These materials establish design, construction, and maintenance standards applicable to development projects within the County.

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### **Planning Commission (Public Hearings and Decisions)**

Planning Commission functions are administered through the Community Development Department. Meeting materials and hearing information are typically accessed through direct coordination with staff rather than a standalone webpage.

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**Practical Use of County Resources**

In practice, applicants initiate coordination directly with the Community Development Department to confirm zoning, permitting requirements, and CEQA pathways. Applications are submitted through the County's iWorQ system, with Planning, Building, and Public Works review coordinated within a single department. Alpine County's highly centralized structure reflects its limited staffing and low development volume, and direct communication with staff is often necessary to clarify application requirements, fees, and review timelines.

## ATTACHMENT B

### Getting Started in Alpine County: CEQA FAQ and Submittal Checklist

#### 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 Alpine County as the lead agency based on an Initial Study and available evidence.

##### **2. Who determines the level of CEQA review?**

Alpine County, acting as the lead agency, determines the appropriate level of CEQA review. This determination is made as part of the discretionary permitting process and is reflected in staff analysis and decision-making by the Planning Commission and/or Board of Supervisors, depending on the project.

##### **3. How does CEQA review work in Alpine County?**

CEQA review is integrated into the County's discretionary permitting process and is administered through the Community Development Department. Upon application submittal, staff evaluates whether a project qualifies for an exemption or requires further environmental analysis. Environmental review proceeds alongside permit review and is incorporated into staff reports and public hearings.

##### **4. How long does CEQA review typically take?**

CEQA timelines in Alpine County vary depending on project complexity, completeness of the application, level of environmental analysis required, and the extent of interagency coordination. State law establishes minimum public review periods, including at least 20 days for Negative Declarations and 30 days for Environmental Impact Reports, with longer periods required for State Clearinghouse review. Overall timelines may vary due to site-specific conditions and coordination with external agencies.

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

Pre-application coordination is strongly recommended in Alpine County. Due to the County's small staff and project-specific review process, early communication with Community Development staff may help clarify zoning requirements, identify potential environmental issues, and determine likely CEQA pathways prior to formal submittal.

**6. Will my project require coordination with other agencies?**

Many projects in Alpine County require coordination with other agencies due to the high proportion of federally managed land and limited local infrastructure. Depending on project characteristics, this may include the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, CAL FIRE, Caltrans, regional water boards, and other agencies.

**7. Can my project rely on the County's General Plan EIR?**

Alpine County's General Plan provides a policy framework for land use decisions, and prior environmental analysis may provide context for CEQA review where applicable. However, due to the County's rural character and limited development assumptions, most projects require project-specific environmental analysis rather than relying solely on program-level review.

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

Common areas of review include air quality and emissions, traffic and haul routes on limited roadway networks, wildfire risk and emergency access, water supply and wastewater, biological and cultural resources, noise, and visual impacts. Wildfire-related considerations are often a central component of environmental review.

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

Early coordination with County staff, submission of complete and consistent application materials, and early identification of environmental issues and required agency coordination may help reduce the likelihood of resubmittals and improve overall predictability.

# ATTACHMENT C

## Prepare Your CEQA Submittal: Applicant Checklist (Alpine County)

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

### **Project Definition**

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

### **Environmental Considerations**

- Preliminary identification of potential impact areas, including:
  - Air quality and emissions
  - Traffic and haul routes, including seasonal access constraints
  - Wildfire risk, defensible space, and emergency access
  - Water supply, wastewater, and drainage
  - Biological and cultural resources
  - Noise and visual impacts
- Initial consideration of potential mitigation measures

### **CEQA Strategy**

- Preliminary understanding of the likely CEQA pathway (as determined by the lead agency)
- Review of General Plan land use designations and zoning
- Consideration of consistency with adopted plans and prior environmental analysis
- Awareness that most projects will require site-specific environmental review

### **Technical Studies (as applicable)**

- Air quality or emissions estimates
- Traffic or transportation analysis, including haul routes
- Biological or cultural resource evaluations, if required
- Water supply, wastewater, or hydrology analysis, if applicable
- Wildfire-related analysis (e.g., access, defensible space, fire protection considerations)

### **Coordination**

- Early coordination with Community Development Department (strongly recommended)
- Identification of other agencies that may require permits, approvals, or consultation, including:
  - U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management
  - CAL FIRE
  - Caltrans
  - Regional water boards
  - Local fire districts or water providers

### **Application Materials**

- Complete and organized submittal through the County’s online permitting system (iWorQ)
- Supporting documents clearly labeled and formatted
- Alignment between project description, plans, and technical studies
- Contact information for applicant and project team

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