



828, Hirschman's Pond Forest Health Project Nevada County, Upper Yuba Watershed



**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY**

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 (Proposition 1)**

Applicant: Sierra Streams Institute

Project Title: Hirschman's Pond Forest Health Project

Subregion: Central

County: Nevada

SNC Funding: \$156,069.00

Total Project Cost: \$217,936.00

Application Number: 828

Final Score: 91

PROJECT SCOPE

The Hirschman's Pond project is a partnership between Sierra Streams Institute and the City of Nevada City. This implementation grant follows a planning grant funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The project site area is 85.34 acres of heavily overgrown mixed-conifer forested landscape. Project work consists of hand-thinning of woody debris, ladder fuels, and small diameter trees on 63.5 acres, and includes chipping of woody debris with disbursement on the site, and 21 acres will be treated for extensive invasive species, including 15 acres of Scotch Broom. Exposed areas will be replanted with native vegetation to improve habitat, and reduce risk of fire. The project includes biological and water monitoring during and after the treatment work.

The project site is in very close proximity to downtown Nevada City, so a wildfire initiated or burning through this property poses an immediate threat to a large number of homes and businesses. The project site includes a 2.4 mile trail that receives heavy recreational use. The heavily overgrown aspect of the forest, combined with large amounts of fire susceptible invasive weeds, as well as high vulnerability of ignition from recreational usage and its position along Highway 49, presents a high fire hazard to Nevada City.

The project area includes Woods Ravine, a tributary to Deer Creek. Potential post-wildfire erosion on the property and adjacent lands would compromise water quality in Woods Ravine, Deer Creek, and the Yuba River.

This project will utilize a large volunteer effort in the removal of the invasive weeds.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Finalize subcontracts/agreements	June 15, 2016
Forest thinning and chipping	July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018
Invasive plants removal	July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018
Revegetation	July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2018
Progress Reports	Nov. 30, 2016, May 31, 2017, Nov. 30, 2017, May 31, 2018
Monitoring Report	July 31, 2018
Final Report	August 31, 2018
FINAL PAYMENT/FINAL PAYMENT REQUEST	Sept. 30, 2018

PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Direct*	\$108,812.00
Indirect**	\$26,900.00
Administrative***	\$20,357.00
GRAND TOTAL	\$156,069.00

* Direct: Direct costs are expenses necessary to acquire, construct, or to adapt property to a new or different use, or to improve property including land, buildings, and equipment. The property/expense must have a useful life longer than one year.

** Indirect: Expenses involve ongoing operations, repair, or maintenance costs, regardless of whether the repair or maintenance may last more than one year.

*** Administrative: Expenses associated with the administration of a project and may not exceed 15 percent of the total SNC grant request for direct and indirect costs.

PROJECT LETTERS SUPPORT/OPPOSITION

- Support
 - Bear Yuba Land Trust
 - City of Nevada City
- Oppose
 - None

PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES

There are four Performance Measures common to all grants. In addition, grantees are required to include between one and three project-specific measures. Performance Measures listed here represent those proposed by applicants and may be modified through further discussion with SNC staff.

- Acres of land improved or restored

Notice of Exemption

Form D

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 212
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: (Public Agency) _____

County Clerk
County of _____

(Address)

Project Title: _____

Project Location - Specific: _____

Project Location – City: _____ Project Location – County: _____

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project: _____

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: _____

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: _____

Exempt Status: **(check one)**

Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);

Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));

Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));

Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: _____

Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt: _____

Lead Agency

Contact Person: _____ Area Code/Telephone/Extension: _____

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.

2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Title: _____

Signed by Lead Agency

Date received for filing at OPR: _____

Signed by Applicant

Revised 2005

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project (continued):

By reducing the risk of catastrophic fire and subsequent erosion and sedimentation, implementation of the Plan will create a healthier forest for native plants, animals, and people. The Plan is consistent with Nevada City's 2010 Vision and Planning Study for Hirschman's Property, which contains management practices for caring and preserving the property, as well as with City Ordinances. The project will benefit the citizens of the Nevada City, Nevada County, and the general public.

Reasons why project is exempt: (continued):

Trees will be removed and thinned to improve forest health and reduce fire risk using methods that will protect water quality and improve habitat values. The project consists of minor land alterations involving the removal of surface vegetation and the planting of conifer trees. Biological, archeological, and hazardous materials surveys were performed on the proposed project site, and the project has been designed in a manner that would not affect any identified sensitive resources.

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION
CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15304

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 1 Grant Application Number 828
Hirschman's Pond Forest Health Project

Description of Activities

The Sierra Streams Institute is requesting \$156,069 in funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program for site improvement/restoration activities on approximately 85 acres of forestland. Hirschman's Pond Forest Health project includes mixed conifer/oak woodland centered on a pond that is a relic of hydraulic mining operations. The project area includes Woods Ravine, a tributary to Deer Creek. Restoring health to the forested areas of Hirschman's Pond is essential for maintaining the integrity of the wildlife habitat that this open space area provides. This project will reduce forest fuel loads through removal of highly flammable woody understory and invasive species, such as Scotch broom, and through thinning and relocation of high concentrations of woody debris and ladder fuel species. The project will implement fuels reduction work in 63.5 acres and remove invasive vegetation from 21 acres, including 15 acres of Scotch broom. The overall goal of the project is to restore health to the forested areas of Hirschman's Pond and maintain it in perpetuity, preventing catastrophic wildfires and improving recreational opportunities. These goals will be met by focusing on non-native vegetation management and hand thinning of dense forest stands.

Specific site improvement/restoration work will include:

- 1) *Fuels Management*: Guided by the Hirschman's Pond Land Management Plan, the project team will select and flag trees and ladder fuels for removal within the 63.5 acres of the project site identified as being in need of fuels reduction work, as delineated in the Site Plan. The prescription for hazardous fuels management includes selective thinning of dense and diseased trees under 6" diameter at breast height (DBH) using hand tools (e.g., saws and small chainsaws). The project will also remove downed woody debris from areas without resident rodent populations to minimize ladder fuels. Woody debris will be mulched and dispersed throughout the project area. Fuels management guidelines are further specified in the *Long-term Land Management Plan for Hirschman's Pond, Nevada City, CA*.
- 2) *Invasive Species Removal*: Sierra Streams Institute will remove invasive non-native vegetation, particularly Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry, from the project site, using hand tools, and working with CCC and AmeriCorps members and community volunteers. The workplan will target 21 acres that are infested with invasive vegetation, including 15 acres of Scotch broom. Biomass will be removed prior to development of seeds, hand-mulched to facilitate decomposition, and dispersed throughout the removal area.
- 3) *Revegetation*: Sierra Streams Institute will work with community volunteers to replant non-native vegetation removal areas, using native plant species known for their ability to establish quickly and outcompete Scotch broom, and for their fire-safe qualities. Guided by the Land Management Plan, plant species chosen from the project plant palette to restore a naturally diverse community of native plants.

Reasons Why the Project is Exempt

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a categorical exemption provides for an exemption from CEQA environmental documentation requirements for a class of projects determined not to have a significant effect on the environment. Categorical Exemptions are addressed in Article 19 of the CEQA Guidelines, where a list of 32 classes of projects has been identified. Projects falling within one of these classes of projects are generally exempt from the provisions of CEQA.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15304: Minor Alterations to Land

The Hirschman's Pond Forest Health project is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4, which consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes.

The Hirschman's Pond Forest Health project consists of minor land alterations involving the thinning and removal of surface vegetation for forestry purposes (improved forest health and fire risk reduction) and revegetation using native species on approximately 85 acres; there are no hazardous materials on or around the project site; and the site improvement/restoration work will not result in significant adverse impacts.

No Exceptions to a Categorical Exemption

Categorical exemptions represent activities that generally do not result in significant environmental impacts. However, there are six exceptions to categorical exemptions, defined in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2. Generally, a categorical exemption does not apply if a project would occur in certain specified sensitive environments, would affect scenic resources within an official state scenic highway, or would be located on a designated hazardous waste site. In addition, a categorical exemption would not apply if the project causes substantial adverse changes in the significance of a historical resource or would be considered significant within the cumulative context. Table 1 identifies the exceptions from CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 and includes a brief discussion of why each exception does not apply to the Hirschman's Pond Forest Health project.

Table 1 Categorical Exemption Exceptions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2)	
Exception	Applicability
<p>(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may impact an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.</p>	<p>The goals of this approximately 85- acre site improvement/restoration project are to restore health to the forested areas of Hirschman's Pond and maintain it in perpetuity, preventing catastrophic wildfires and improving recreational opportunities. These goals will be met by focusing on non-native vegetation management and hand thinning of dense forest stands. Maintaining a fire-safe forest in the Hirschman's Pond area will also prevent potential water quality impacts to Woods Ravine by preventing erosion that ensues after catastrophic fires, and ensuring that resulting sedimentation and nutrient addition to Woods Ravine are avoided. The fire safety improvements will help support resident populations of Western pond turtles, Pacific chorus frogs, and many migrating and resident waterfowl species. Further habitat and forest health improvements will be achieved by replanting non-native vegetation removal areas, using native plant species.</p> <p>This project work consists of minor land alterations involving the removal of surface vegetation. The project work does not involve</p>

	<p>activities in or adjacent to streams or waterbodies, nor will project work occur on areas know to contain hazardous substances. The project activities will not occur in locations that contain known significant cultural or biological resources</p> <p>The anticipated timeline for the project is from May 2016 through July 2018. Site improvement/restoration work will include: fuels management, invasive species removal, and revegetation.</p>
<p>(b) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.</p>	<p>The site improvement/restoration activities will not adversely affect environmental resources, and will therefore not contribute to any cumulative environmental impact in relation to other restoration projects in the region. The site improvement/restoration will result in beneficial effects to the region's forests, creeks, watersheds, associated lands, and adjacent neighborhoods by providing wildfire risk reduction, and natural resource management and protection.</p>
<p>(c) Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.</p>	<p>The site improvement/restoration project will not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. Specific environmental topics are addressed below:</p> <p>Aesthetics. The site improvement/restoration will result in a minor change in the appearance of the Hirschman's Pond Park due to the removal of surface vegetation and replanting with native plants. The goals of this approximately 85-acre site improvement/restoration project is to restore health to the forested areas of Hirschman's Pond and maintain it in perpetuity, preventing catastrophic wildfires and improving recreational opportunities. All intended management practices such as site preparation, thinning, and burning can be conducted with limited visibility or detection from surrounding properties.</p> <p>Agriculture/ Forestry. The project site does not contain any grazing or agricultural resources; consequently, the project will have no impact on agricultural resources. The project will reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire on</p>

approximately 85 acres by thinning dense stands and removal of invasive plant species.

Air Quality/GHGs. The project activities will result in nominal fugitive dust and mobile source emissions. Mobile source emissions will be limited to those associated with vehicle trips to/from the site improvement/restoration areas, and mechanized equipment. Mechanized equipment will be used for restoration activities (i.e., small chainsaws and chipper). Nearby sensitive receptors will not be exposed to substantial pollutant concentrations. The restoration will not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the region's applicable air quality plan and will not violate any air quality standard or contribute to an existing or projected air quality violation.

Biological Resources. No work will occur in the vicinity of sensitive resources. Biological surveys were performed on the project area in 2013, 2014, and 2015. A search of the California Natural Diversity Database was completed in 2014, which found no sensitive or listed plant species present or dependent upon the project area. The western pond turtle, a state Species of Special Concern, is present in Hirschman's Pond, where no vegetation removal will occur. The pond – especially the north side of the pond, which has no trail access – is home to a great variety of wildlife, both migratory and resident. This area will serve as a "wildlife sanctuary" where animals and their habitat can remain undisturbed from human activity and any potentially disruptive management activities. All work will maintain a variable-width buffer, dependent on location and work type, around the pond area itself.

Two avian Species of Special Concern were identified during bird surveys: the yellow warbler and the yellow-breasted chat. The yellow warbler is a second priority species, while the yellow-breasted chat is a third priority species. Both species nest primarily in riparian vegetation and brush and not in coniferous areas, and are only a special priority during breeding season. All work will be conducted in non-breeding season and avoid riparian habitat areas that include preferred vegetation species such as willow (*Salix* sp.). Therefore, the project will have no impact on these species.

	<p>The integrity of native plant communities will be enhanced with removal of invasive vegetation from 21 acres of the site and replanting with native plant species known for their ability to establish quickly and outcompete Scotch broom, and for their fire resistant qualities. In addition, wildlife habitat will be improved by removing overstocked stands while also maintaining quality downed snags for wildlife habitat purposes.</p> <p>Cultural Resources. See (f).</p> <p>Geology/Soils. Site improvement/restoration activities will not expose people or structures to loss, injury, or death due to seismic activity or unstable soils. The work planned as part of the Hirschman's Pond Forest Health project would include removal of non-native vegetation near Hirschman's Pond, but would be limited to removal using hand tools and would not result in adverse effects on the pond. Valuable soils will be retained onsite to grow trees and support wildlife.</p> <p>Hazards/Hazardous Materials. See (e).</p> <p>Hydrology/Water Quality. See (a) and Geology/Soils.</p> <p>Noise. Site improvement/restoration activities will generate temporary noise. However, given that restoration activities will be limited to daytime business hours (the least sensitive hours of the day), and the limited extent to which these activities could expose sensitive receptors to increased noise levels, the project will not cause significant noise effects.</p> <p>Transportation. There will be limited additional trips on local roadways during project implementation. No vehicular transportation over sensitive habitat will occur. The vehicles will not block traffic and no traffic delays will occur due to restoration activities.</p> <p>Other CEQA Issues. The project will have no effect on land use, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, recreation, or utilities and service systems.</p>
(d) Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption	State Route (SR) 49 to the south of the project

<p>shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.</p>	<p>site is eligible for designation as a scenic highway. The project involves selective reduction in tree density through careful thinning and removal of trees under 6" DBH and invasive plant species. In the vicinity of the project, views to the east along SR 49 are of forested areas. Travelers on SR 49 may have intermittent, temporary views of project activities. The proposed project will not result in the removal of, or damage to, any trees, rock outcroppings, historic buildings or other resources within the viewshed of a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.</p>
<p>(e) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.</p>	<p>The site is not located on toxic sites listed pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code. The <i>Preliminary Abandoned Mine Land Characterization for Hirschman's Pond</i> prepared by Holdrege and Kull identified elevated levels of arsenic and lead in the waste rock pile on the southern end of the pond. The project will not include any work in this area and therefore will not risk exposure to hazardous materials.</p>
<p>(f) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.</p>	<p>An Archaeological Inventory Survey was performed by Jensen and Associates and was submitted with the Indian Trails Subdivision map, which covers the open space parcels dedicated to the City of Nevada City which are a part of the Hirschman's Pond Trail project. Within the area covered by the survey, evidence of two prehistoric sites and 15 historic sites were identified. The survey concluded none of the sites have been qualified as significant per CEQA and no mitigation for project related disturbance was recommended.</p> <p>However, due to the historic occupation of the region there is the remote possibility of encountering subsurface cultural resources during invasive species removal activities. If such resources are encountered or suspected, work shall be halted immediately and shall not resume until the area is cleared by qualified individuals. No work will occur in the vicinity of sensitive resources. The project will not result in an adverse change in the significance of any archaeological or historical resource and will not disturb or destroy any human remains or paleontological resources.</p>