

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) was allocated \$54 million in Proposition 84, passed by the voters in 2006. Approximately \$50 million of this amount was available for grant awards to eligible nonprofit organizations, public agencies and federally recognized tribal organizations. To date approximately \$40 million has been awarded to a variety of projects consistent with Proposition 84's requirements and SNC's governing statute.

At its September 2011 meeting, the Board approved Grant Guidelines for the FY 2011-12 grant cycle to support Healthy Forests as identified in the SNC's Strategic Plan. For the purposes of this grant program, Healthy Forest activities include projects that are designed to preserve or improve Sierra Nevada conifer and mixed conifer forest health by reducing the risk and impacts of large, damaging fires and/or preserving or restoring ecosystem function in forests and meadows. Approximately \$5 million dollars from Proposition 84 will be used to support this area of focus. An equal amount will be allocated in the next grant cycle for FY 2012-13 to support Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands as defined in SNC's Strategic Plan (it appears as if the amount available for these two cycles will be greater than \$10 million and staff will provide an update and recommendation at the March 2012 meeting on this matter).

Staff has been actively involved with a variety of partners, including the California Fire Safe Councils, CAL FIRE, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Forest Services, Bureau of Land Management, Resource Conservation Districts, and others to solicit pre-applications. Efforts have also been undertaken to leverage other state and federal funding sources for similar forest-related work.

### **Current Status**

Our outreach efforts have been very successful. The SNC began accepting pre-applications for grants on September 26, 2011 and received 196 pre-applications by the October 21 deadline, representing more than \$25 million in requests from 122 organizations. Of the 196 pre-applications received, 134 were for site improvement projects, while 62 were for pre-project activities. Pre-applications were received from every Subregion. Staff will provide a verbal update and printed hand-outs to the Board with the total number of invitations issued to submit full applications, at the meeting.

SNC Area Representatives are currently working with invited applicants to develop high quality projects. It is anticipated that the number of full applications submitted will be significantly less than the number of invitations, given that many organizations submitted numerous pre-applications and SNC staff will be working with them to focus efforts on the strongest projects. Completed applications are due to the SNC by January 23, 2012.

### **Next Steps**

SNC staff will be working with a panel of technical experts to evaluate and score applications following the submission deadline. Any appraisals received to support

conservation easement acquisition proposals will be reviewed by the Department of General Services. Review of environmental documents for CEQA compliance will be conducted by SNC staff, legal counsel, and professional technical consultants.

Due to the large number of pre-applications, and the likelihood of a larger than expected number of full applications, SNC staff is assessing how best to complete the evaluation and recommendation process consistent with our current plan of having recommendations for the Board at the June 2012 Board meeting.

While this continues to be our goal, our highest priority is to provide a thorough, fair and transparent evaluation process that complies with our Grant Guidelines. If it not feasible to complete such a process in time for the June 2012 Board meeting, an alternative might be to prioritize evaluation of Category 1 applications, so that those projects can be brought forward on schedule, allowing for on the ground work to occur during next year's work season. This could result in Category 2 projects, and perhaps some Category 1 projects, not being acted upon by the Board until September 2012. As staff continues to analyze the situation, other alternatives may emerge.

Because decisions will need to be made by the staff regarding evaluation prioritization prior to the March Board meeting, staff recommends a committee of the Board be appointed to assist staff in this matter, as well as addressing the amount to be awarded in each cycle, given the likely increased amount available. If any aspect of the approach chosen requires Board action, the matter will be brought to the Board at the March 2012 meeting.

**Recommendation**

**Staff recommends that a committee of the Board be appointed to consult with staff regarding the best approach to utilize as it relates to evaluation priorities and funding allocations.**