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## Millions To Help Reduce Sierra Nevada Tree Mortality



Dead trees along HWY 108

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Tracey Petersen, MML News Reporter

Auburn, CA – Two area counties have secured funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) to aid in the tree mortality crisis and protect watershed health.

The SNC Governing Board has approved \$3.1 million in grants for ten projects that will decrease wildfire risk, lessen tree mortality, and restore forest and watershed health in the region. Projects in Tuolumne and Mariposa counties will get some of that funding. The conservancy outlines the money usage here:

- Tuolumne County – The Lyons-South Fork Watershed Forest Resiliency Project, \$496,000: This grant to the Tuolumne Utilities District will complete forest thinning and fuel reduction treatments on 200 acres within the Stanislaus National Forest in Tuolumne County. These treatments will enhance forest health and resiliency, reduce fire hazards, allow for this forest to better withstand ongoing drought and bark beetle attacks, and protect critical ditch and flume infrastructure which act as the primary drinking water conveyance system for 90 percent of the residents of Tuolumne County. This grant will complete a portion of a larger project covering 733 acres of forestland across multiple landowners within the South Fork of the Stanislaus River watershed.
  
- Mariposa County – Gentry Creek Watershed Restoration Project, \$498,985: This grant to the Yosemite-Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council will treat approximately 300 acres of mixed-conifer timberland owned by 23 separate property owners, and is surrounded by U.S. Forest Service- and Bureau of Land Management-managed lands. The project area has suffered 80 percent visible bark beetle mortality, a figure that is expected to rise to 90 percent by 2017. The project will fall and remove all dead trees, and remaining slash will be masticated and spread on the forest floor. These activities will return the project area, which serves as the headwaters for Gentry Creek, a major tributary of the North Fork of the Merced River, to functional forest land that will aid in the protection of the downstream water supply.

The U.S. Forest Service reports 102 million trees have died statewide since 2010 and 95% are in the Sierra Nevada region. "Sierra forests are the source of more than sixty percent of California's developed water supply, but these forests have experienced rapid and significant change," says Jim Branham, Executive Officer for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. "The grants that were awarded by our board today are great examples of the kind of work we need to be encouraging across the entire Sierra to protect the source of California's water."

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy has funded 32 Proposition 1 projects to date totaling \$9,881,830 that support the restoration goals of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

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