



2.5 Million in "Healthy Forest" Grants to be Considered by Sierra Nevada Conservancy Governing Board

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By: Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC)

AUBURN, Aug. 23, 2012 - The Sierra Nevada Conservancy's (SNC) Governing Board will meet in Mariposa September 5-6 to consider awarding \$2.5 million in grants designed to reduce the risk of forest fires and protect California's watersheds. This will be phase two of the SNC's Healthy Forests grant program, which in June awarded \$4.5 million for 25 projects. The grants are funded by Proposition 84, the Safe Drinking Water Act passed by voters in 2006.

"We have already seen the devastation caused by major wildfires in the Sierra this year, so these grants are all the more important," said SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham. "Returning our forests to ecological health will reduce the threat of fire, protect California's major source of fresh water, and create a healthier environment for hundreds of species...including us humans."

The types of projects typically funded under the SNC's grant program include fuels reduction (removal of underbrush and thinning of some smaller diameter trees), forest and meadow restoration, and invasive plant species removal.

Many of the 25 projects that received SNC funding in June will be operational in the fall. Funds may be awarded to government agencies, non-profit organizations, or federally-recognized tribes. Projects may be on public or private land, but the outcome must serve to protect the watershed and provide public benefit.

"Because of decades of fire suppression and conflict over forest management, today's major forest fires can have a devastating impact on the landscape and on the watershed," said Branham. "The resulting erosion and siltation pollute our rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. By spending our precious dollars up in the Sierra proactively, we can reduce the risk and consequence of these fires, protecting the source of two-thirds of California's drinking water."

The board will also hear a staff update on the new Ranches and AgLands Grant Program, which has received 93 applications competing for \$5 million in available funding. SNC staff will be ranking these projects and submitting them for approval at the March, 2013 quarterly board meeting.

In a unique attempt at linking prevention and funding efforts to Sierra watersheds, the SNC is also updating the board on its Mokelumne River Avoided Cost Analysis study. The first phase of

the project will analyze how upper watershed restoration treatments, primarily fuel hazard reduction and forest health management, will benefit downstream beneficiaries and reduce operational costs of energy and water delivery agencies. Subsequent work will build the metrics, agreements and platforms necessary to facilitate actual investments in upper watershed restoration.

The SNC is working on this effort with federal land management agencies, utilities, conservation organizations and local stakeholders. The cost benefit analysis is scheduled to be completed in December.

Members of the board and staff will participate in a field tour September 5 to learn about the Stockton Creek Preserve and Trail project and "ag/nature" tourism in Mariposa County. The field tour will start at 1 p.m. from the parking lot of the Best Western, Yosemite Station Hotel, 4999 Highway 140, in Mariposa. Following the field tour, board members and staff will attend a reception at the Mariposa Park Pavilion, 4998 County Park Road, Mariposa, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

The board meeting will be held the following day at the Mariposa Fairgrounds, Sequoia Hall from 9 a.m. to approximately 1 p.m. The public is invited to all SNC activities and during the board meeting time is allotted for public comment.

Persons interested in attending the field tour must provide their own transportation. To RSVP for the field tour, reception, and board meeting, or for more information, visit www.SierraNevada.ca.gov, and look under "Announcements."

About the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Governing Board

Created in 2004, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is a state agency whose mission is to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. The SNC, which receives no general fund tax dollars, has awarded approximately \$43 million in grants for projects including fuels reduction, conservation easements and acquisitions, and watershed and habitat restoration. Funding for these projects comes from Proposition 84 passed by voters in 2006.

The SNC Governing Board meets quarterly around the Sierra Nevada Region, which spans 25 million acres, encompasses all or part of 22 counties and runs from the Oregon border on the north, to southeast of Bakersfield.