

Background

On December 6, 2018, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Governing Board (Board) approved the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Proposition 68 Grant Program Guidelines to fund no less than \$1.675 million for projects that "will provide resources for capacity building and technical support to enable local agencies, organizations, and tribes to design, manage, and implement projects that will increase community resiliency against and recovery from natural disasters and ecological and economic challenges." The Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities program is a directed grant program that accepts concept proposals on a continuous basis with projects developed in conjunction with SNC.

On December 6, 2018, the Board also approved the SNC Strategic Plan which identified a "Strategic Lands Conserved" Regional goal, which included a strategy to "assess the land conservation priorities of other agencies and partners, climate vulnerability assessments and existing funding programs to identify the highest priority SNC activities to support strategic land conservation."

The Sierra Nevada Region provides clean air, abundant water, timber reserves, productive rangelands, recreation, and tourism. These natural resources and services are vital to the sustainability of local communities and to the state of California. With over 80 years of working to conserve private lands in the Region, the Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council (Council) – a collaboration of 17 regional land trusts – has protected over 725,000 acres of resource-rich lands. However, critical natural and economic assets are facing threats driven by impacts from climate change, land management practices, and land and resource use. The Council recognizes the need to collaborate on strategic conservation priorities to achieve maximum conservation outcomes and coordinate grant opportunities offered by multiple agencies to expedite the protection of strategic conservation lands.

The Council's conservation actions will reflect the goals of the Safeguarding California Plan, which is the state's roadmap for protecting communities, infrastructure, services, and the natural environment from climate change impacts. This includes 1) developing management practices to help safeguard species and ecosystems from climate risk by improving habitat connectivity and protecting climate refugia, and 2) supporting environmental stewardship across sectors by creating, maintaining, and supporting tools that help resource managers determine when and where to focus conservation activities that will protect biodiversity in the face of climate risks. Additionally, because the project is focused on private lands, it is in synch with the Forest Carbon Plan's goal to improve health and resilience on private and state/local public forestland.

Current Status

The Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council has submitted proposal RC001 to the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities program to coordinate the development of a prioritization tool to identify local conservation gaps and prioritize high value projects for directed

funding programs. The tool will provide regional land trusts, the SNC, other state agencies, and funders of land conservation with a strategic means to focus investments on private land conservation. It will result in projects brought forward for public funding that are stronger, fully vetted, and better aligned with Regional goals. The Council requests \$163,405 to support

1. a land conservation assessment,
2. a gap analysis between the assessment and state/local conservation goals, and
3. recommendations for land conservation priorities.

The final product will be a prioritization tool land trusts can use to expedite projects that qualify for directed, strategic investments. Please refer to [Project Details and the Notice of Exemption](#) for a more detailed project description.

The project parallels both the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities and Strategic Land Conservation goals in the SNC Strategic Plan. SNC recognizes that the outcome of this project will directly inform the Strategic Land Conservation program, however this project is not an eligible project under Strategic Land Conservation Grant Guidelines because a prioritization tool is not “necessary for a specific future land conservation acquisition.”

The Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities goal concentrates on efforts to increase the environmental, economic, and social resilience of Sierra Nevada communities. To bring the Sierra Nevada Region to holistic health, communities within the Region need support that empowers their efforts to address urgent needs, plan for the future, develop organizational capacity, and envision new tools and partnerships. Among the many needs for capacity-technical assistance identified in the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Regional goal, the SNC identified regional planning and project prioritization, as well as partnership and collaborative development, as needed activities. The structure and approach of this project best meets these needs under the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities program; thus, staff is recommending that this project be considered under the Resilient Communities guidelines.

CEQA Compliance: The project is Statutorily Exempt under Section 15262. Feasibility and Planning Studies and Categorically Exempt under Class 6 Section 15306. Information Collection.

- To access the complete proposal, [click here](#).
- To access the Project Details and the Notice of Exemption, [click here](#).

Next Steps

Upon approval by the Board, staff will file the Notice of Exemption, prepare a grant agreement, and continue partnering with the Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council to implement the project.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board:

Authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the *Strategic Land Conservation Action Plan project (RC001)*, authorize a grant award to the *Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council* in the amount of \$163,405, and authorize staff to enter into the necessary agreements to move forward with the project.