

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) was allocated \$54 million in bond funds through Proposition 84, passed by voters in 2006. Since 2007, the SNC has conducted multiple Proposition 84 grant rounds and funded over 300 successful projects throughout the Sierra Nevada Region. In December 2016, the SNC Board unanimously passed a motion delegating authority to the Executive Officer to approve and execute grants using any remaining Proposition 84 funds, under specified criteria. The Board required all grants awarded under authority delegated to the Executive Offer be reported at the next scheduled meeting. The first such grant award has been made to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for the French Meadows Watershed Resilience Project.

In September 2016, TNC, American River Conservancy (ARC), Placer County Water Agency (PCWA), Sierra Nevada Research Institute, and United States Forest Service (USFS) signed a memorandum of understanding to collaboratively plan and implement the French Meadows Watershed Resilience Project. SNC and Placer County joined these partners and each organization individually committed to an innovative, collaborative, all-lands approach to forest restoration and fuels reduction in the headwaters of the American River on the Tahoe National Forest in the northern Sierra Nevada.

The ecological health of the Middle Fork American River watershed has been degraded by overgrown forests, high-intensity wildfires, and land management practices during the last several decades. The French Meadows Projects area includes approximately 26,000 acres. Within the headwaters area, the USFS is the federal land manager responsible for approximately 16,000 acres in the project area. ARC acquired approximately 10,115 acres of land in the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the American River in August 2015, and intends to manage the land to protect and restore ecological values and for public recreation consistent with these values. PCWA owns and operates French Meadows Reservoir, located approximately 20 miles northeast of Foresthill, for public water supply, hydroelectric power generation, and recreation. In August 2016, SNC executed a SNC Proposition 1 Grant (#841) with ARC for forest thinning on 330 acres within the project area.

### **Current Status**

On July 17, 2017, under authority delegated by the Board, the SNC Executive Officer authorized Grant Agreement No. 914 to TNC for the French Meadows Project in the amount of \$100,000. This grant contributes to the completion of NEPA and CEQA for the Project. Specifically, this grant will pay for a NEPA/CEQA consultant to manage all the necessary environmental and archaeological studies and prepare the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA). This is part of the innovative approach being taken by the project in that the contracts for preparing the environmental documents are being managed by TNC and funded by a variety of partners. Staff believes that this represents an opportunity to explore new ways of doing business that will result in increasing the pace and scale of restoration activities.

**Next Steps**

SNC staff will continue to work with The Nature Conservancy and other partners to implement the grant project. Work supported by this grant is expected to be completed by June 30, 2018.

**Recommendation**

**This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Board members are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.**