



WILDFIRE AND FOREST RESILIENCE

Directed Grant Program

2021 Immediate Action



Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy initiates, encourages, and supports efforts that improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region, its communities, and the citizens of California.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Background

In January 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom proposed funding for the fiscal year (FY) 2020-21 State Budget to address immediate wildfire and forest resilience priorities. The governor's Forest Management Task Force identified these priorities in [California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan: A Comprehensive Strategy](#). In April 2021, \$20 million was appropriated from the General Fund to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) for local assistance as part of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP). The WIP is a large-scale restoration program designed to restore the health of California's primary watershed and create resilient Sierra Nevada communities. It is recognized by state policy and planning documents as a model program for addressing the growing challenges facing the Sierra Nevada Region in a changing climate.

The SNC's role in the Region is to initiate, encourage, and support efforts that improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada, its communities, and the people of California in general. SNC's Strategic Plan identifies a Healthy Watersheds and Forests Regional Goal. This goal continues the SNC's priority focus on healthy forests and broadens efforts to better integrate watershed elements into its programs, reinforcing the SNC's commitment to preserve, protect, and restore the health of the Region's watersheds, regardless of the threats they face.

Fires are becoming larger and more damaging and the SNC is taking significant steps to fund "ready projects" that can reduce wildfire risks. According to the California Public Utilities Commission fire risk map, 43 percent of the state's overall elevated or extreme fire risk falls within the SNC's Region. The Sierra Nevada Region is home to roughly 600,000 residents and attracts more than 50 million visitors every year. The Region is the source of more than 60 percent of the state's developed water supply, stores half of California's carbon in its forests, and supports a wide variety of wildlife species. Investing in the Sierra Nevada provides benefits to all Californians.

This program seeks to create more-resilient forest landscapes and reduce wildfire risk. The climate and ecological benefits of forest restoration treatments are well known. Ecologically sound forest management, including prescribed fire, and community protection are critical in securing the overall well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. SNC seeks projects that will help secure carbon stability in the Sierra Nevada by reducing the risk for large, damaging wildfires. Landscape-scale forest health treatments reduce the intensity of wildland fires. The reduced intensity of wildland fire also makes it safer for firefighting resources to utilize fuel breaks to protect structures if a fire enters the wildland urban interface (WUI).

Program Funding

All projects funded under the 2021 Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program must be complete by January 1, 2025. An extension of time past this date will not be available.

Additional Funding Sources

If additional funding sources become available with purposes consistent with SNC's Strategic Plan, the Forest Management Task Force Action Plan, and the 2021 Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program as described in these guidelines, SNC may allocate those funding sources to the support of this grant program.

Project requirements or limitations tied to specific funding sources or state budget allocations will be included in project selection criteria and grant agreements.

Program Priorities

The specific focus of the 2021 Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program is the implementation of forest health projects that address wildfire recovery and resilience and support the goals of California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan and the WIP.

[California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan](#) identifies three goals that are strongly aligned with the WIP: healthy and resilient natural places, safe communities, and sustainable economies. Both plans also stress the importance of climate resiliency, regionally tailored solutions, the linkages between ecological and economic health, the importance of low-intensity fire, and the need to work strategically across land ownership boundaries.

The program aims to support projects that result in a combination of multiple watershed, ecosystem, and community benefits. Examples of such benefits include reduced likelihood of high-intensity fire and the negative consequences of such fires, protection and enhancement of natural resources, habitat and recreation, improved air and water quality, increased carbon sequestration and reduced GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions, and supporting regional economies.

All projects must be ready to proceed upon award and must be complete by January 1, 2025.

II. PROGRAM INFORMATION

Applicant Eligibility

Grant funds may be authorized for:

- Public agencies: any city, county, special district, joint powers authority, state agency, or federal agency
- Qualifying 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations: "Nonprofit Organization" means a private, nonprofit organization that qualifies for exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of Title 26 of the United States Code, and whose charitable purposes are consistent with the purposes of the SNC
- Eligible Tribal Entities: an Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, or a tribal agency authorized by a tribe, which is one or both of the following: (1) Recognized by the United States and identified within the most current Federal Register; (2) Listed on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission as a California Native American tribe

Eligible tribal entities are encouraged to apply. On September 25, 2020, the governor released a [Statement of Administration Policy on Native American Ancestral Lands](#) to encourage every state agency, department, board, and commission subject to his executive control to seek opportunities to support California tribes' co-management of and access to natural lands that are within a California tribe's ancestral land and under the ownership or control of the State of California. The SNC may give favorable consideration to projects which "assist California tribes with procurement, protection or management of natural lands located within their ancestral territories, subject to available resources."

NOTE: SNC's governing statute does not allow grants to mutual water companies.

Project Eligibility

To be **eligible** to receive a grant award from the SNC under this program, projects must meet all of the following criteria:

- 1) Have completed environmental compliance.
- 2) Be located within the Sierra Nevada Region as defined by current SNC governing legislation.
- 3) Be consistent with the SNC mission and program areas as defined in the SNC Strategic Plan.
- 4) Be consistent with the requirements of the funding source and budget provisions.
- 5) Be complete by January 1, 2025.
- 6) Requests no less than \$200,000.
- 7) Results in a clear, demonstrable, and enduring public benefit.

Consistent with provisions of the program funding and objectives of the proposed project, the SNC may give favorable consideration to projects which involve California Native

American tribes, employ a collaborative approach in project development or implementation; directly benefit severely disadvantaged (SDAC) or disadvantaged (DAC) communities; leverage private, federal, or local resources; or enable the equitable geographic distribution of SNC resources.

Project Examples

Examples of potential projects include, but are not limited to:

- Implementation of strategic fuel treatment projects (including mechanical treatments, hand treatments, and/or prescribed fire) that will reduce wildfire risks and promote watershed health
- Creation and maintenance of fuel breaks
- Fuel reduction in the Wildland Urban Interface
- Strategically located fuel reduction projects that protect public assets or public infrastructure
- Reforestation and implementation of suitable stand-improvement activities after wildfire or post-tree-mortality clearing efforts
- Forest management work to improve habitat conditions and/or protect biodiversity
- Forestry work that benefits fire evacuation routes
- Forest treatment projects that prevent and/or address the impacts of severe tree mortality

Ineligible Projects

Examples of ineligible projects include:

- Planning projects
- Grants to service or repay loans
- Projects dictated by a legal settlement or mandated to address a violation of, or an order (citation) to comply with, a law or regulation
- Research, education, outreach, or event-related projects, although these types of activities may be included as a small part of the overall implementation of a project eligible for SNC grant funds
- Fee title/easement acquisitions
- Any projects that do not meet the program priorities described in these guidelines

This list is not exhaustive and is offered only as guidance to potential applicants. The SNC will make determinations of eligibility on a project-by-project basis. If an applicant has questions about the eligibility of their project, they should consult with their [SNC Area Representatives](#).

Eligible Costs

Direct Project Costs

For project costs to be eligible for reimbursement, the costs must be within the scope of the project, supported by appropriate documentation, and completed by the required deadline as identified in the grant agreement. Costs related to project-specific performance measures, project reporting, required signage, and cultural monitoring are eligible costs; they must be included in the project budget if being requested by the applicant.

Costs for travel and lodging directly related to the project are eligible but may not exceed the current state lodging and mileage reimbursement rates. Food and entertainment are not eligible expenses under this program. Please note that travel and related costs as part of a subcontract for project implementation are not subject to these limitations.

Administrative Costs

Administrative costs are shared overhead expenses rather than direct costs. Administrative costs may not exceed 15 percent of the SNC-funded direct project costs. In the event of an audit, projects with budgets that include administrative costs must be able to document the appropriateness of these expenses. A typical method for documentation of administrative overhead expenses is a Cost Allocation Plan (CAP). A CAP is a formal accounting plan used to calculate and document the method for recovering overhead costs. SNC strongly recommends that grantees consult with an accounting professional to develop an appropriate method for calculating overhead rate and prepare a CAP.

Ineligible Costs

Examples of ineligible costs include, but are not limited to:

- Establishing or increasing a legal defense fund or endowment
- Monetary donations to other organizations
- Food or refreshments not part of a negotiated subcontract related to project implementation
- Costs associated with fundraising
- Grant writing expenses
- Any expenses incurred before a grant agreement is executed or after the project completion deadline, as identified in the grant agreement

III. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Right of Access for Project Implementation

Proposals must include a letter from all property owners/managers indicating their awareness of and willingness to implement the project and granting access to the property to conduct pre-project due diligence or other necessary activities. If the grantee does not own the property on which the project is implemented before a grant agreement is executed, the grantee must enter into a land tenure agreement with the landowner assuring ten years of access for project implementation and maintenance.

Environmental Compliance Documents

The SNC requires all projects comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) at the time the Board authorizes a grant. Since the complexity of CEQA compliance will vary depending on the proposed project activities and the type of applicant, it is very important that applicants consult with SNC staff as early as possible to discuss which CEQA documents will be required. If CEQA is not complete at the time of proposal, the lead agency for CEQA must be identified in the proposal, with a letter of support or other documentation from the agency stating that they are eligible and willing to serve as lead. In cases where a project is not exempt from CEQA and the partners do not have standing to act as lead agency, the SNC will consider acting as lead agency.

If the project is subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a NEPA decision must be in effect at the time the proposal is submitted.

NOTE: When projects have previously completed CEQA or NEPA documentation and the baseline environmental conditions of the project area have significantly changed (due to fire, tree mortality, etc.), applicants must provide confirmation from the agency responsible for preparing the original environmental compliance documents that the analysis and determinations remain valid.

Long-Term Management

Projects receiving support through this program must demonstrate a clear and enduring public benefit. This includes long-term viability of any programs developed through the project as well as on-the-ground site improvement components of a project. All site improvement project sites shall be maintained, operated, and used in a manner consistent with the purposes of the project. Additionally, the grantee and/or property owner shall not use any portion of the project site for mitigation or as security for any debt. The long-term management plan for site improvement or program development projects must include a description of how project deliverables will be managed and maintained over time, by whom, and how funding will be provided for such work.

Performance Measures and Reporting

Performance measures are used to track progress toward project goals and desired outcomes. They provide a means of reliably measuring and reporting the outcomes and

effectiveness of a project and how it contributes to the SNC achieving its programmatic goals. Detailed information and recommended performance measures can be found on the [SNC Performance Measures](#) webpage.

SNC requires all grantees consider four specific quantitative performance measures:

- 1) Number and type of jobs created
- 2) Number and value of new, improved, or preserved economic activities
- 3) Resources leveraged for the Sierra Nevada
- 4) Number of people reached

In addition, each grantee will be required to report on one to three additional project-specific performance measures that will help describe project outcomes in a measurable way. Examples of additional performance measures can be found on the [SNC Performance Measures](#) webpage.

Applicants may also propose alternative performance measures, which will be subject to the approval of SNC staff if the grant is authorized. The proposed measures will be finalized in consultation with SNC staff prior to grant agreement approval.

All grantees will be required to provide six-month progress reports and a final report for the entire project timeline. The final report must include data associated with the project performance measures.

Engagement with California Native American Tribes

Recognizing that Native Americans have inhabited and cared for the land of present-day California since time immemorial, the SNC strongly encourages engagement with Native American tribes as early as possible in the development, planning, and implementation of projects. SNC staff can assist project proponents with identifying Native American tribes whose ancestral homelands may be in the project area and help provide contact information for those tribes. The SNC will notify the appropriate tribal contacts regarding all eligible grant projects being considered for funding in their area. SNC may prioritize projects in which tribal communities are involved.

Cooperation with Local Agencies

In compliance with the SNC's governing statute, local government agencies, such as counties, cities, and local water districts, are notified of eligible grant projects being considered for funding in their area.

For all proposals under consideration, SNC staff will notify the county and/or city and public water agency affected (when appropriate), and request comments within 15 business days following notification. The SNC will make all reasonable efforts to address concerns raised by local governments.

If there are privacy concerns related to information contained in a proposal, please notify SNC staff before submission.

Registered Professional Foresters

In compliance with the [Professional Foresters Law](#) (PRC Sections 750-753, et seq.), projects that directly impact the management and treatment of the forest resources and timberlands of this state are required to use Registered Professional Foresters. Projects implemented on federally managed lands will be permitted to use “qualified but exempt” federal staff to satisfy this requirement.

Additional Requirements

Any additional requirements or restrictions, including those specific to additional funding sources or new state budget requirements, will be included in updated program guidance documents.

IV. PROGRAM PROCESS

Proposal Development

As the 2021 Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience program is a directed grant program, proposals are developed in conjunction with SNC. To initiate consideration of a project, an applicant must contact the appropriate SNC Area Representative or other SNC staff. The Area Representative will assist the applicant organizer to determine if the project meets SNC criteria. If it is determined that SNC will consider partnering on the project, the Area Representative/SNC staff will share the SNC proposal form with the applicant and assist in developing the project.

The development of a proposal includes the following:

- Applicants must [contact the SNC Area Representative assigned to their county](#) to determine whether a potential project is eligible for consideration.
- Proposals will be accepted on a continuous basis while funding remains available.
- A site visit may be conducted for eligible projects.
- All project proposals are required to identify and state progress and projected dates of issuance for all permits necessary to implement the project.
- All project implementation MUST be complete by January 1, 2025.

Schedule

Proposals will be accepted and reviewed on a continuous basis as funding is available. Recommendations will be made to the SNC Governing Board no less than quarterly.

Evaluation Process

The SNC will work closely with applicants in the development of the project and project proposal.

- 1) The project proposal will be reviewed by an environmental compliance expert.
- 2) Proposals will be shared with appropriate county/city planning, water agency, tribal representatives, and SNC Board Subregional representatives. If there are any privacy concerns related to information in a proposal, please discuss them with SNC staff before submission.
- 3) An SNC Evaluation Team will independently review and meet to discuss the proposals based on the evaluation criteria described in the following section.
- 4) The Evaluation Team will prepare a recommendation for SNC's Executive Team.
- 5) After the evaluation process is complete, including all due diligence and analysis by SNC, funding recommendation(s) will be placed on a future Board meeting agenda at the discretion of SNC's Executive Officer.

NOTE: The SNC may consider the geographic distribution of projects, tribal involvement, project locations related to disadvantaged communities, and project types when considering recommendations to the Board.

Evaluation Criteria

The Evaluation Team will score the proposals based on the evaluation criteria described below. Proposals scoring 80 or more points may be eligible for a recommendation for award:

#1 Natural Resource and Public Benefits, and Alignment with Funding and Program Goals (20)

The degree to which the project aligns with funding program goals, improves forest and watershed health, and results in multiple, tangible public benefits. How strong is the need for the specific project and the natural resources benefits expected as outcomes?

#2 Project Readiness (15)

The degree to which the project is ready to proceed promptly and can meet funding expenditure requirements, if funded. Is project planning and coordination complete? Is access secured, environmental compliance, permitting, or other necessary preparations complete as appropriate? Is all funding identified or secured?

#3 Project Design and Budget (15)

Clarity on the project purpose, goals, deliverables, treatment approach, schedule, and budget. Is the project design supported by science and proven methodologies or the use of new or innovative technology or practices? Are the proposed deliverables appropriate for the project? Is the budget adequate and reasonable to implement the project, with costs clearly defined and supported?

#4 Long-Term Management (10)

Is a plan, funding, and the responsible entity in place for carrying out long-term management? How will public benefits be sustained?

#5 Likelihood of Success (15)

Does the project organizer have the necessary experience and sufficient capacity to implement the project as described? Will the project be completed by January 1, 2025?

#6 Community and Tribal Support and Collaboration (10)

The degree to which the project has public and institutional support at the local, Regional, or larger scale and the local community or other stakeholders are engaged in project planning or delivery. Was the project developed as part of collaborative? Is there clear and demonstrable community outreach and support for the project and any community economic benefits? Is there tribal support for, or tribal participation in, the project?

#7 Landscape-Level Context (10)

The degree to which the proposed project is part of a larger plan, coordinated effort, or is proximate to public lands or recreational amenities. Does the project support a broader, cumulative effort to restore/protect strategic goals?

#8 Leveraging (5)

The degree to which a project provides in-kind services and/or secured federal, state, private, or local cost share funding. Have non-monetary and/or funding resources of agencies and organizations other than SNC been identified and secured?

Grant Awards and Agreements

For each awarded grant, the SNC develops an individual grant agreement with detailed provisions and requirements specific to that project. Please be aware that if an entity is awarded a grant from the SNC, the provisions listed below will apply.

- Administrative costs are limited to no more than 15 percent of the actual direct project costs.
- Grant-eligible costs may be incurred by the grantee only after the grantee has entered into a fully executed agreement with the SNC.
- All grantees will be required to provide six-month progress reports and a final report for the entire project timeline.
- To the extent practicable, site improvement projects will be required to include onsite signage indicating that the project was funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. The required acknowledgement language is included in the grant agreement. Reasonable costs associated with creation and installation of the sign are eligible expenses and should be included in the project budget.

The SNC will provide assistance to the grantee to ensure the grantee's clear understanding and interpretation of the terms and conditions of the grant.

V. ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Cost Allocation Plan
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
DAC	Disadvantaged Community
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
Plan	Sierra Nevada Conservancy Strategic Plan
PRC	Public Resources Code
SDAC	Severely Disadvantaged Community
SNC	Sierra Nevada Conservancy
WIP	Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program
WUI	Wildland Urban Interface

VI. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Unless otherwise stated, the terms used in these grant guidelines shall have the following meanings:

Acquisition – To obtain fee title ownership of real property. Leaseholds and rentals do not constitute acquisition.

Administrative Costs – Administrative costs include any expense which is not directly related to project implementation. Similar to the traditional definition of ‘overhead,’ administrative costs include shared costs, such as rent, utilities, travel, per diem, office equipment, services such as internet and phone, shared bookkeeping costs, etc.

Applicant – The entity applying for a SNC grant pursuant to these guidelines.

Board – The governing body of the SNC as established by PRC Section 33321.

CEQA – The California Environmental Quality Act as set forth in the PRC Section 21000 et seq. CEQA is a law establishing policies and procedures that require agencies to identify, disclose to decision makers and the public, and attempt to lessen significant impacts to environmental and historical resources that may occur as a result of a proposed project to be undertaken, funded, or approved by a local or state agency.

CEQA/NEPA Compliance – Activities an entity performs to meet the requirements of CEQA and/or NEPA.

Collaborative Process – Cooperation between stakeholders with different interests to solve a problem or make decisions that cut across jurisdictional or other boundaries; often used when information is widely dispersed, and no single individual, agency, or group has sufficient resources to address the issue alone.

Conservancy – The Sierra Nevada Conservancy as defined in PRC Section 33302 (b).

Data – A body or collection of facts, statistics, or other items of information from which conclusions can be drawn.

Design – Preliminary project planning or identification of methodologies or processes to achieve project goals.

Disadvantaged Community (DAC) – A community with a median household income less than 80 percent of the statewide average. [View maps of DAC areas](http://www.parksforcalifornia.org/communities) (<http://www.parksforcalifornia.org/communities>).

Eligible Costs – Expenses incurred by the grantee during the performance period of an approved agreement, which may be reimbursed by the SNC.

Enhancement – Modification of a site to increase/improve the condition of streams, forests, habitat, and other resources.

Executive Officer – Executive Officer of the SNC appointed by the Governing Board, pursuant to PRC Section 33328, to manage the SNC.

Fee Title – The primary interest in land ownership that entitles the owner to use the property subject to any lesser interests in the land and consistent with applicable laws and ordinances.

Forest Health – A healthy forest is a forest that possesses the ability to sustain the unique species composition and processes that exist within it. Forest health occurs when resilience, recurrence, persistence, and biophysical processes lead to sustainable ecological conditions.

Grant – Funds made available to a grantee for eligible costs during an agreement term.

Grant Agreement – An agreement between the SNC and the grantee specifying the payment of funds by the SNC for the performance of the project scope according to the terms of the agreement by the grantee.

Grantee – An entity that has an agreement with the SNC for grant funds.

Grant Scope – Description of the items of work to be completed with grant funds as described in the application form and cost estimate.

In-kind Contributions – Non-monetary donations that are utilized on the project, within the project scope and timeframe, including materials and services. These donations shall be eligible as “other sources of funds” when providing budgetary information for application purposes.

Land Tenure – Legal ownership or other rights in land, sufficient to allow a grantee to conduct activities that are necessary for completion of the project consistent with the terms and conditions of the grant agreement. Examples include fee title ownership, an easement for completion of the project consistent with the terms and conditions of the grant agreement, or agreements or a clearly defined process where the applicant has adequate site control for the purposes of the project.

NEPA – [The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969](https://www.eco.gov/), as amended. NEPA (<https://ceq.doe.gov/>) is a federal law requiring consideration of the potential environmental effects of a proposed project whenever a federal agency has discretionary jurisdiction over some aspect of that project.

Nonprofit Organization – A private, nonprofit organization that qualifies for exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of Title 26 of the United States Code, and whose charitable purposes are consistent with the purposes of the SNC as set forth in PRC Section 33300 et seq.

Other Sources of Funds – Cash or in-kind contributions necessary or used to complete the site improvement/restoration project beyond the grant funds provided by this program.

Performance Measure – A quantitative measure used by the SNC to track progress toward project goals and desired outcomes.

Permitting – The process of obtaining any necessary regulatory approvals from appropriate governmental agencies to implement the project.

Pre-Project Due Diligence – The analysis necessary to prepare a future on-the-ground project for implementation.

Project – The work to be accomplished with grant funds.

Proposal – The individual grant application form and its required attachments pursuant to the SNC Grant Program.

Public Agencies – Any city, county, district, joint powers authority, or state agency.

Region – The Sierra Nevada Region as defined in PRC Section 33302 (f).

Resilience – The ability of an ecosystem to regain structural and functional attributes that have suffered harm from stress or disturbance.

Region-wide – The overall breadth of the SNC Region or multiple Subregions within the Region.

Restoration – Activities that initiate, accelerate, or return the components and processes of a damaged site to previous historical ecological site conditions.

Severely Disadvantaged Community (SDAC) – A community with a median household income less than 60% of the statewide average. [View maps of SDAC areas](http://www.parksforcalifornia.org/communities) (<http://www.parksforcalifornia.org/communities>).

Study/Report – Research or the detailed examination and analysis of a subject.

Tribal Entities – Includes any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, or a tribal agency authorized by a tribe, which is one or both of the following: (1) Recognized by the United States and identified within the most current Federal Register. (2) Listed on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission as a California Native American tribe.