

SIERRA NEVADA
CONSERVANCY

**SNC Governing
Board Meeting**

September 2, 2021

This meeting will be
held online.

BOARD MEETING



Board Meeting Agenda

September 2, 2021 — Virtual

Board Meeting

September 2, 2021

9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (End time is approximate)

Board Meeting 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. (End time is approximate)

Pursuant to Executive Order N-8-21 issued by Governor Gavin Newsom on June 11, 2021, certain provisions of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act are suspended due to a State of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistent with this Executive Order, the September 2021 Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Governing Board Meeting will be conducted virtually through the Zoom Webinar Platform. Members of the public may join the meeting using either of the following steps:

[Join the webinar](#)

Or

Dial either of these numbers and enter the conference code to join the meeting by telephone:

Dial:

USA 636 651 3142 US Toll

USA 877 402 9757 US Toll-free

Conference code: 347291

Meeting materials are available on the [SNC Board Meetings page](#) (<https://sierranevada.ca.gov/our-board/board-meetings/>). Members of the public can make comments on agenda items during the meeting by using either method of joining the meeting – virtually or telephonically – and by following the moderator’s directions on how to indicate their interest in speaking. Public comment will be taken at the appropriate time during each agenda item and during the Public Comment agenda item at the end of the meeting for non-agenda items. Additional information on ways to provide public comments on agenda items is available on the SNC Board Meetings page.

For additional information, please contact Ms. Armstrong at (530) 721-0018, or (530) 823-4670, or via email to tristyn.armstrong@sierranevada.ca.gov.

For assistance with joining the meeting by telephone or the Zoom meeting link, please contact SNC Technical Support (ITSupport@sierranevada.ca.gov). Any person who has a disability and requires reasonable accommodation to participate in this public meeting should contact Ms. Armstrong no later than five (5) working days prior to meeting.

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

3. Approval of June 3, 2021, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

4. Approval of July 15, 2021, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

5. Board Chair's Report

6. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

- a. Executive Officer Update
- b. Administrative Update
- c. Policy & Outreach Update

7. Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grants Program Grant Award Recommendations (ACTION)

The Board may take action to file a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Notice of Exemption and award a grant to the following project.

- a. #1278, the Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange project submitted by the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West in the amount of \$282,380 with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

8. Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Staff will provide the Board with an update on Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program activities and early successes in the Region.

9. Science Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Staff will provide an update on current science relevant to the Sierra Nevada.

10. Boardmembers' Comments

Provide an opportunity for members of the Board to make comments on items not on the agenda.

11. Public Comments

Provide an opportunity for members of the public who have not previously addressed the Board to comment on non-agenda items. The Board Chair reserves the right to limit the time allocated for each person providing public comment.

12. Adjournment

Additional Board Materials

- [Key Meetings and Presentations](#)
- [Letters of Support](#)
- [News Articles](#)

Additional Information

Meeting materials are available on the [SNC website](http://sierranevada.ca.gov) (sierranevada.ca.gov). For additional information, or to submit written comment on any agenda item, please contact Ms. Armstrong at (530) 721-0018, or (530) 823-4670; via email to tristyn.armstrong@sierranevada.ca.gov; in person or by mail at: 11521 Blocker Drive, Suite 205, Auburn CA 95603. For reasonable accommodations, including documents in alternative formats, please contact Ms. Armstrong at least **five (5)** working days in advance.

Closed Session

Following, or at any time during, the meeting, the Board may recess or adjourn to closed session to consider pending or potential litigation, property negotiations, or personnel-related matters. Authority: Government Code Section 11126



Board Meeting Minutes June 3, 2021 — Virtual Meeting

Board Meeting

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. Oath of Office for New Board Members

Board Chair Terry O'Brien gave the Oath of Office to the newest Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Boardmembers; Heather Bernikoff, Governor's Office Appointee, and Elizabeth Berger, United States Forest Service (USFS) designee.

3. Roll Call

Present:

- Terry O'Brien
- Aaron Albaugh (joined at 10:12 a.m.)
- Heather Bernikoff
- John Brissenden
- Ron Hames
- Nathan Magsig
- Jessica Morse
- Lori Parlin
- Susana Reyes
- Paul Roen
- Rosemarie Smallcombe
- Liz Berger
- Christopher Heppe
- Jim Richardson

Absent:

- Robert Johnston
- Richard Gillihan

4. Approval of March 4, 2021, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

ACTION:

Boardmember Paul Roen moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to approve the March 4, 2021, Meeting Minutes.

After a roll call vote, the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, and Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

5. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair Terry O'Brien welcomed the Board to another virtual Board meeting.

Chair O'Brien announced that plans have begun for the September in-person Board meeting.

6. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Item 6a: Executive Officer Update

Executive Officer Angela Avery welcomed Board members and thanked the five County Supervisor Boardmembers that participated in a wildfire funding benefits and preparedness video series that the SNC put together on very short notice.

Avery provided the Board with an update on the applications for the \$20 million in Early Action Funding saying that grant guidelines were released the same day as the governor's funding announcement. Avery told the Board that the SNC received 32 proposals for \$38 million, noting that staff has been working hard to evaluate and prepare application packages for Board approval in July. Avery thanked the Field Operations, Grants Management, and Communications teams for their work to push these projects forward.

Avery discussed the \$50 million in Early Action Funding the Department of Conservation (DOC) received for the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity program (RFFCP). Avery reminded the Board that this program was modeled on the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program. The SNC expects to receive \$7.77 million in RFFCP money and is currently working on the scope of work for this interagency agreement. Staff anticipates this scope of work to be completed by the end of July. The SNC will apply funding in two very broad categories. The first category will provide Regional subgrants to support capacity building, planning, environmental studies, and project support; the second category will support the costs SNC incurs related to implementing the program.

Avery said that Governor Newsom announced the California Comeback Plan that includes funding for Sierra Nevada Wildfire Resilience, and she is hopeful that SNC will receive another \$50 million to fund forest health and fuel reduction programs. Avery also said that SNC is watching another budget line item which may provide an additional \$50 million to DOC to establish a biomass gasification facility in the Sierra Nevada. Avery told the Board that these increases in investment in the Sierra Nevada is a clear demonstration that the administration is beginning to understand the scope of the issues plaguing the Region.

Avery provided the Board with an update on Senate Bill 208 which is co-authored by Senators Dahle and Laird. This bill proposes a potential boundary and name change for SNC. The bill passed the Senate and will now move forward to the Assembly. The last day for the bill to come out of the house is September 10 and the governor's deadline is October 10.

Avery provided an update on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Bagley-Keene Act, and on related Executive Orders that effect virtual and in-person meetings and return to work. Avery said that many of these issues involve other state agencies, so staff are waiting for more information. Avery said that SNC staff is currently moving forward with an in-person Board meeting in September though this is subject to change.

Avery provided the Board with an update on the Roadmap to Resilience program and the related Spatial Informatics Group (SIG) report that was presented to the Board and the last meeting. Avery said that the next steps include a staff review of the SIG recommendation and feedback will be gathered on the recommendations. Actionable items will be compiled based on the SNC staff review and feedback. Staff may present the Board with the final SIG report and a list of SNC action items at the September meeting.

Item 6b: Administrative Update

Deputy Executive Officer Amy Lussier provided the Board with an update on the Administrative Division functions and tasks. Lussier told the Board that the budget continues to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which includes accommodations for continued work in the virtual world. Lussier used travel as an example of budget/spending changes due to COVID-19 stating that there has been about \$73,000 less spent on travel than in previous years.

Lussier told the Board that SNC continues to support events in the Region noting that, in the past fiscal year, SNC spent \$19,000 in event sponsorships. Lussier reminded the Board that the budget provided in the Board package was prepared in March. She updated the Board with some adjusted percentages for spending saying that with one month left in the Fiscal Year, SNC has spent 92 percent of its budget.

Lussier told the Board that SNC is waiting for CalHR to issue a Telework Policy so management can move forward with future decisions related to return to work, virtual workspaces, and travel.

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe asked about additional funding for staffing to accommodate additional workload related to new funding coming to SNC. Lussier said that SNC has authorization for three new positions and management is looking at how to best utilize these positions.

Boardmembers engaged in further conversation about plans for return-to-work guidelines and policies related to the pandemic.

Item 6c: Policy & Outreach Update

Policy & Outreach Division Chief Brittany Covich provided the Board with a PowerPoint presentation which included a legislative update. Covich said that SNC is currently tracking bills that may directly affect SNC including SB 208, SB 624, and AB 642.

Covich said SNC is also tracking other key bills such as SB 604, SB 456, AB 9, SB 45, and AB 1500.

Covich told the Board that Julia Hart recently accepted an analyst position within SNC and will now be reporting to the Administration Division. Covich said Hart will be missed and thanked her for her critical work and contributions to the Policy & Outreach Division.

Covich provided a Policy update by highlighting a few Regional workshops. Covich said that the California Natural Resources Agency hosted several Regional workshops in the Sierra Nevada that were designed to help inform the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy and the Pathways to 30x30 document. Several other workshops opportunities were listed including the SNC co-hosted Regional Nature Based Solutions Workshop with the Nature Conservancy for the Sierra Cascades Region. Covich said that there are multiple upcoming opportunities to weigh in on State policy as it relates to natural and working costs.

Covich provided examples of “The Sierra Spotlight” posts and said that the platform has provided an outlet for the SNC to share its voice throughout the Region and beyond. Covich also shared an update on the recent video series that was developed with the County Supervisor Boardmembers on the value of state wildfire and forest resilience funding in the Sierra Nevada.

Item 6d: Field Operations & Grants Update

Field Operations & Grants Division Chief Andy Fristensky provided special recognition to the Field Operations & Grants team and the many Regional partners that SNC works with for the work completed to roll out the early action grant money.

Fristensky provided updates on two recent land conservation grants awarded by the Board. He also provided status updates on grants that are currently being implemented or have recently closed out and said that SNC is currently managing 120 active grants.

7. Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grant Award Recommendations (ACTION)

Field Operations Manager Luke Hunt provided a PowerPoint presentation with a brief program background followed by a review of each project summary and staff recommendation. Staff recommended a total of two Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grant Awards for a total of \$270,581.

- a) #1277, the Camp Hi-Sierra Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan project in Tuolumne County, in the amount of \$70,581 to the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council, Boy Scouts of America, with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

No public comment.

ACTION:

Boardmember Nathan Magsig moved, and Boardmember Paul Roen seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Camp Hi-Sierra Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan project (#1277), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$70,581 to the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council, Boy Scouts

of America, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote, the results were: Aye – 11, Nay – 0, and Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

- b) #1280, the Forest Projects Plan in Amador, Calaveras, and Alpine counties, in the amount of \$200,000 to the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

No public comment.

ACTION:

Boardmember Ron Hames moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Forest Projects Plan project (#1280), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$200,000 to the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote, the results were: Aye – 11, Nay – 0, and Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

8. Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Program Directed Grant Award Recommendations (ACTION)

Field Operations Manager Luke Hunt provided a PowerPoint presentation with a brief program background followed by a review of the project summary and staff recommendation. Staff recommended a total of one Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Directed Grant Award for a total of \$221,000.

- a) #1279-RT, The Colby Mountain Recreation Area project in Lassen County, in the amount of \$221,000 to the Butte County Resource Conservation District with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Doug Teeter, Butte County Supervisor – Supervisor Teeter provided written comment which was read for the record.

Thad Walker, District Manager of Butte County RCD – Mr. Walker addressed concerns about tribal engagement and review while implementing and developing the project. Walker thanked the Board for their consideration of the project.

ACTION:

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe moved, and Boardmember John Brissenden seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Colby Mountain Recreation Area project (#1279-RT), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$221,000 to the Butte County Resource Conservation District, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote, the results were: Aye – 11, Nay – 0, and Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

9. 2020-21 Action Plan Reporting (INFORMATIONAL)

Chief Deputy Executive Officer Julie Alvis provided a review of the staff report provided in the Board materials. Alvis shared a video with the Board which highlighted the many accomplishments of SNC during the 2020-21 Action Plan period. Alvis said that overall, the SNC achieved the 47 standalone actions that were identified in the plan. Two of the identified actions were not achieved due to travel restrictions related to COVID-19.

10. 2021-22 Action Plan (ACTION)

Chief Deputy Executive Officer Julie Alvis outlined the draft 2021-22 Action Plan provided in the Board meeting materials. Alvis said that this Action Plan was designed to work with, and make progress on, the five-year Strategic Plan which runs from 2019-2023. The Plan also supports the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Plan goals. Alvis said that the structure of this action plan supports the SNC mission and is in alignment with SNC Core Functions. Alvis said this plan also leaves room for flexibility and adaptability for unforeseen emerging situations. The PowerPoint presentation provided by Alvis highlighted standalone activities for each of the SNC divisions.

ACTION:

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe moved, and Boardmember Nathan Magsig seconded, a motion to approve the draft 2021-22 Action Plan and direct staff to take the necessary actions for its successful implementation.

After a roll call vote, the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 1, and Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

11. Boardmembers' Comments

Boardmember Nathan Magsig brought to the Board's attention a current lawsuit that could affect SNC projects and work moving forward. Boardmembers and SNC staff engaged in conversation around this and any future lawsuits that may come up in the future.

Boardmember Paul Roen provided a brief update about the Loyalton Facility stating that by June they are hopeful to be "sawing logs."

Boardmember Liz Berger thanked the Board for welcoming her and thanked SNC staff for the partnerships and professionalism they have provided as she's settled into in her new role.

Boardmember Jessica Morse commended the SNC staff and team for "driving so hard" on the early action dollars that are being distributed to SNC. Morse emphasized the importance of this early funding and timing. Morse asked that the Board continue to advocate for the additional increase of \$1.2 billion so that SNC can continue to make an impact.

12. Public Comments

David Goldemberg, District 1 Supervisor in Tuolumne County, currently the Tuolumne County Board Representative to the SNC – Goldemberg introduced himself to the Board and provided his background as it relates to the work SNC does. Goldemberg provided thanks and appreciation for the work that SNC does and is looking forward to being more involved with SNC in the future.

13. Adjournment

Executive Officer Angela Avery announced to the Board that SNC received confirmation that it can hold the interim July 15 meeting virtually.

Board Chair Terry O'Brien adjourned the meeting at 11:58 a.m.



Board Meeting Minutes

July 15, 2021—Virtual Meeting

Board Meeting

1. Call to Order

The Board Meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. Roll Call

Present:

- Terry O'Brien
- Aaron Albaugh
- Heather Bernikoff
- John Brissenden
- Ron Hames
- Bob Johnston
- Jessica Morse
- Lori Parlin
- Susana Reyes
- Rosemarie Smallcombe
- Liz Berger
- Christopher Heppe
- Jim Richardson

Absent:

- Richard Gillihan
- Nathan Magsig
- Paul Roen (Roan joined the meeting after the 11:00 break.)

Board Chair Terry O'Brien stated that Boardmember Paul Roen might not be able to join the meeting because he was helping in the efforts to contain the wildfire near Loyalton.

3. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Angela Avery apprised the Board that the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) received \$20 million as part of Governor Newsom's Early Action Wildfire Budget Package. Avery then informed the Board that during the two-week open application period, SNC received 32 applications totaling over \$38 million in requests for \$19 million in available funds. Avery thanked SNC staff for the amazing job done evaluating and processing these applications in such a short turnaround.

Boardmember Jessica Morse shared a budget update stating that the governor's proposed budget package totals \$1.2 billion, \$536 million of this was budgeted for Early Action funds that the Board is considering today. Morse is optimistic that the full budget request will be awarded.

Morse also encouraged SNC to obtain the fast-track permit template used and developed by the California Vegetation Treatment Program.

4. Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Funding Grant Award Recommendations (ACTION)

Field Operations and Grants Division Chief Andy Fristensky provided a PowerPoint presentation with a brief background of the grant program followed by project details and a review of each project recommendation. Staff recommended 15 Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Funding Grant Program grants for a total of \$19,095,700.

a. Grant #1300

The West Fork Carson and Monitor Pass Project in Alpine County, in the amount of \$1,401,520 to the National Forest Foundation with a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Notice of Exemption.

Boardmembers discussed the need for resources across the Region and restoration goals for both the Aspen and meadow portions of the recommended project.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember John Brissenden moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the West Fork Carson and Monitor Pass Project (#1300), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$1,401,520 to the National Forest Foundation, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

b. Grant #1305

The Thompson Peak Initiative Bootsole Forest and Watershed Restoration Project in Lassen and Plumas Counties, in the amount of \$3,671,725 to the Lassen Fire Safe Council, Inc. with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff inquired about tribal engagement and if specific criteria or incentives are being offered within the grant guidelines. Fristensky responded that tribal notification of proposed projects is part of the SNC due diligence which extends beyond the requirements of CEQA or NEPA. Fristensky added that because of this outreach, the SNC has been able to connect tribal organizations with federal agencies that can offer additional resources to tribes.

Bernikoff also asked Fristensky about whether SNC tracks its communications with and responses from tribes. Fristensky responded that while he has noticed an increased response rate, it certainly is not at 100 percent.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Aaron Albaugh moved, and Boardmember Heather Bernikoff seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Thompson Peak Initiative Bootsole Forest and Watershed Restoration Project (#1305), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$3,671,725 to the Lassen Fire Safe Council, Inc., and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

c. Grant #1312

The Concow Resilience Project: Implementation project in Butte County, in the amount of \$2,127,857 to the Butte County Resource Conservation District with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

While presenting the project summary, Fristensky told the Board that recent discussions with the applicant have resulted in an additional \$450,000 of leveraged funds from the United States Forest Service (USFS).

Boardmembers engaged in conversation about utilizing and sharing lessons learned from these types of projects. Fristensky mentioned that the USFS and Butte County Resource Conservation District (RCD) will be sharing lessons learned, which might inform future endeavors in the Sierra Nevada.

Avery also noted that SNC's participation in various collaboratives and partnerships across the Sierra Nevada create additional opportunities to share lessons learned.

Public Comment

Ryan Davy, District Silviculturist, Feather River Ranger District, thanked the Board for considering the project.

Action

Boardmember Susana Reyes moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Concow Resilience Project: Implementation project (#1312), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$2,127,857 to the Butte County Resource Conservation District, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed. Boardmember Aaron Albaugh was not present for this vote due to technical difficulties.

d. Grant #1314

The Sierra Brooks - Smithneck Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project in Sierra County, in the amount of \$1,075,059 to the Sierra Valley Resource Conservation District with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmembers engaged in discussion about mapping and the options and details that SNC requests or requires as part of the application process. Fristensky provided the Board with information related to mapping, site visits, and the monitoring program required by SNC. Avery also noted that SNC utilizes satellite data that is updated every three to six months. Boardmember Morse provided detail on the use of statewide Lidar projects and grants that may assist with targeted and high priority watershed protection projects in the future. Morse said that the SNC has been leading the way in utilizing these analytic tools to demonstrate the effects of treatment and project outcomes.

Public Comment

Annie Tipton, Sierra Valley RCD, provided written comment in support of the project which was read for the record. Tipton also thanked the Board for considering the project.

Action

Boardmember John Brissenden moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Sierra Brooks - Smithneck Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project (#1314), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$1,075,059 to the Sierra Valley Resource Conservation District, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

e. Grant #1317

The Quincy Wildfire Protection Project in Plumas County, in the amount of \$433,280 to the Plumas County Fire Safe Council with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Board Chair Terry O'Brien asked if there will be individuals in the community volunteering to help with the project. Fristensky stated that the Plumas Fire Safe Council includes many volunteers from the community and noted that he is unsure whether volunteers are identified in the project application. Boardmember Lori Parlin noted that there are certification requirements for Firewise communities that document the work that is done by community members.

Public Comment

Hannah Hepner, Program Manager for Plumas County Fire Safe Council, thanked the Board for considering the project and stated that the bulk of the project is on land that is owed by a timber company which will provide a significant amount of match funds. Hepner also stated there will be a significant amount of community engagement on the project.

Action

Boardmember Ron Hames moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Quincy Wildfire Protection Project (#1317), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$433,280 to the Plumas County Fire Safe Council, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

f. Grant #1319

The Mohawk Valley Wildfire Resilience Project in Plumas County, in the amount of \$1,022,082 to the Feather River Resource Conservation District with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff moved, and Boardmember Bob Johnston seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Mohawk Valley Wildfire Resilience Project (#1319), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$1,022,082 to the Feather River Resource Conservation District, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed. Boardmember Aaron Albaugh was not present for this vote due to technical difficulties.

g. Grant #1322

The Michigan Bluff Community Protection Project in Placer County, in the amount of \$3,042,670 to the National Forest Foundation with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Aaron Albaugh moved, and Boardmember Susana Reyes seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Michigan Bluff Community Protection Project (#1322), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$3,042,670 to the National Forest Foundation, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

h. Grant #1325

The Twofer Pillikin Fuels Reduction Project in El Dorado County, in the amount of \$1,255,225 to the Great Basin Institute with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation regarding downstream users that benefit from the work of SNC and how or whether these organizations reciprocate support. Ongoing maintenance of projects was also discussed.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe moved, and Boardmember Ron Hames seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Twofer Pillikin Fuels Reduction Project (#1325), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$1,255,225 to the Great Basin Institute, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

At approximately 11:00 a.m. Chair O'Brien called for a 10-minute break. Boardmember Albaugh left the meeting at 11:01 a.m. The meeting resumed at approximately 11:10 a.m. and O'Brien confirmed that a quorum was present.

Boardmember Paul Roen joined the meeting at 11:10 a.m. There was a short discussion regarding the wildfire near Loyalton and appreciation for Roen's efforts.

i. Grant #1327

The Trestle Mastication project in El Dorado County, in the amount of \$370,300 to the National Wild Turkey Federation with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

O'Brien expressed his appreciation for SNC partnering with the National Wild Turkey Federation and commented on the severity of the overgrown forests in the presentation.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Trestle Mastication project (#1327), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$370,300 to the National Wild Turkey Federation, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed. Boardmember Bob Johnston was not present for this vote due to technical difficulties.

j. Grant #1328

The Wagner Ridge Fuel Break project in Mariposa County, in the amount of \$607,782 to the Mariposa County Fire Safe Council with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmember Smallcombe stated that Mariposa County values the partnership that it has with SNC on area projects.

Public Comment

Barbara Cone, Mariposa County FireSafe Council, thanked the Board for considering the project and spoke about the Council's sustained relationship with local tribal partners.

Action

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe moved, and Boardmember Ron Hames seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Wagner Ridge Fuel Break project (#1328), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$607,782 to the Mariposa County Fire Safe Council, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

k. Grant #1330

The Tiger Creek Fuel Break Enhancement Project in Amador County, in the amount of \$220,200 to the Amador Fire Safe Council with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Chair O'Brien noted the ongoing positive work happening in the project area.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Lori Parlin moved, and Boardmember Susana Reyes seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Tiger Creek Fuel Break Enhancement project (#1330), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$220,200 to the Amador Fire Safe Council, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

Boardmember Paul Roen left the meeting at 11:35 a.m.

l. Grant #1337

The Middle Fork American River Watershed Restoration Project in Placer County, in the amount of \$1,000,000 to the Placer County Water Agency with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmember Brissenden noted this was the first grant without letters of support and commended staff and partners for getting so much support for the other grants.

Chair O'Brien stated that there has been a lot of work done in this area and this is the type of project that needs to continue for forest health and wildfire protection in the state. O'Brien asked Field Operations & Grants Division Chief Andy Fristensky why the cost per acre was so high for this project. Fristensky responded that the high cost is due to the location of the project.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember John Brissenden moved, and Boardmember Lori Parlin seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Middle Fork American River Watershed Restoration Project (#1337), authorize a grant

award in the amount of \$1,000,000 to the Placer County Water Agency, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

m. Grant #1338

The Rim Fire Plantation Thin / Biomass Treatment Project in Tuolumne County, in the amount of \$1,368,000 to the Stanislaus National Forest with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmember Bob Johnston asked staff to clarify if the project was thinning trees that were planted by the USFS and asked if feedback would be provided to the USFS regarding their pine planting protocols. Fristensky stated that the trees are from old USFS planting projects and the USFS has since changed their planting processes. Boardmember Liz Berger stated that Fristensky was correct and that the USFS has learned from the past and over time has transitioned to new planting processes.

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff asked about area tribal engagement for this project. Staff invited Jason Kuiken, USFS, to respond to Boardmember questions.

Public Comment

Jason Kuiken, USFS, Stanislaus National Forest, addressed the Board to provide clarification on reforestation and planting methods being used in this grant project and others. Kuiken stated that the USFS has a fantastic relationship with the Tuolumne band of Miwok (the Miwok also represent other tribes that are involved) and the tribe has been consulted on this project.

Action

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe moved, and Boardmember Heather Bernikoff seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Rim Fire Plantation Thin / Biomass Treatment project (#1338), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$1,368,000 to the Stanislaus National Forest, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

n. Grant #1341

The Big Chico Creek Forest Resilience Project in Butte County, in the amount of \$1,000,000 to the Butte County Fire Safe Council with a CEQA Notice of Determination as a Responsible Agency.

Boardmember Lori Parlin and Boardmember Susana Reyes encouraged the training opportunities offered in this grant to be offered in future grants. Boardmember

Jessica Morse provided information about the pending Governor's budget, which will provide funding for job creation and workforce development.

Public Comment

Eli Goodsell, CSU, Chico Ecological Reserve, provided written comment in support of the project, which was read for the record.

Action

Boardmember Lori Parlin moved, and Boardmember Ron Hames seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination as a Responsible Agency for the Big Chico Creek Forest Resilience Project (#1341), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$1,000,000 to the Butte County Fire Safe Council, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

o. Grant #1343

The Forbestown Forest Resilience Project in Butte County, in the amount of \$500,000 to the Butte County Fire Safe Council with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Action

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff moved, and Boardmember Ron Hames seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Forbestown Forest Resilience Project (#1343), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$500,000 to the Butte County Fire Safe Council, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed

5. Boardmembers' Comments

Board Chair O'Brien provided thanks to the SNC staff for the work done to process the grants and get the projects moving. Boardmembers Hames, Smallcombe, Brissenden, and Berger echoed the Chair's comments and provided thanks for all the work to move the projects forward.

Boardmember Jessica Morse provided thanks to SNC and said that SNC is part of a much larger picture with all state agencies dispatching this on-the-ground, immediate funding. Morse also thanked SNC for being the model and leader.

Boardmember Susana Reyes also expressed the need for the Board to support these projects as they continue and require monitoring.

6. Public Comments

No public comment.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:17 p.m.

Additional Information

Meeting materials are available on the [SNC website](http://sierranevada.ca.gov) (sierranevada.ca.gov). For additional information, or to submit written comment on any agenda item, please contact Ms. Armstrong at (530) 721-0018, or via email to tristyn.armstrong@sierranevada.ca.gov; in person or by mail at: 11521 Blocker Drive, Suite 205, Auburn CA 95603. For reasonable accommodations, including documents in alternative formats, please contact Ms. Armstrong at least **five (5)** working days in advance.

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy
September 2, 2021**

Agenda Item 6b: Administrative Update

Current Status

COVID-19 Impacts

Given the uncertainty of changes due to the pandemic, and reflecting on the recent rise in infection rates and the emergence of the Delta and Lambda variants of COVID-19 in the U.S., the management team has cautiously moved forward in assessing masking and distancing requirements, and their effects on returning to the office and conducting in-person meetings. Staff is also monitoring progress on updating the regular telework policy.

Returning to the Office: In June, CalOSHA released new regulations to continue employee health and safety protections in the workplace, keeping a focus on stopping the spread of COVID-19 while allowing more choices based on vaccination status. These actions were taken to coordinate state guidelines with those provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the national level. The SNC is updating its COVID Prevention Plan and various other guidance documents to reflect changes to requirements for proof of vaccination, mandatory testing, masking, distancing, screening, meetings, outbreak notifications, travel, and participation in in-person meetings.

In-Person Meetings: While adapting well to remote work, the biggest impact felt by the COVID-19 restrictions has been in travel and in-person meetings. The SNC has continuously assessed the ability to provide for essential travel while keeping safety considerations paramount, and how to facilitate in-person meetings, including quarterly governing board meetings. Plans were being made to accommodate an in-Region September Board meeting, however, as infection and hospitalization rates have been increasing, and with new mandatory testing requirements being developed, it was decided that the safest route was to continue with a virtual meeting. Sights will be set on the potential for an in-Region meeting in December, if conditions allow.

Mandatory COVID-19 Testing Policy: In response to the impacts statewide on rising infection rates, particularly the 600 percent higher case rate among the unvaccinated compared with those who are vaccinated, the California Department of Human Resources (CalHR) stated that effective immediately, all state departments are required to develop and implement procedures to collect proof of vaccination for all employees required to work on site (including travel on state business). All unvaccinated employees required to travel or work on site will be subject to mandated COVID-19 testing as an additional health and safety standard to protect the state workforce and the public it serves, and to ensure that employees critical to the continuity of state operations will be able to perform their duties. Details on the testing program and how it will be implemented are being developed.

Telework Policy: Along with most other state departments, SNC has been waiting for an update of the model telework policy, developed by CalHR in partnership with the employee unions, to guide us in updating the SNC Telework Policy. Various obstacles have presented themselves over the past 10 months and CalHR has not been able to produce the final

model policy. Following guidance from California Natural Resources Agency, SNC is considering how and when it may prepare for changes and issue a new policy moving staff from emergency teleworking schedules to long-term regular teleworking schedules. In the meantime, staff will remain in full-time telework under the emergency telework policy, with the ability to schedule time in the office as needed and allowed.

Human Resources

On August 30, SNC welcomed new staff member Emily Blackmer to the Policy & Outreach Division as the Policy Analyst. Blackmer comes to us from the Sierra Business Council and has a master's degree in Natural Resources Policy and Planning. Blackmer is filling the position that was previously held by Julia Hart, who recently transferred to the Administrative Services Division.

Budgets and Accounting

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy's 2020-21 budget closed as anticipated. The SNC's baseline funding in the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF) was fully spent and staff estimates that SNC received \$6.02 million in reimbursements and \$1.74 million in federal reimbursements in 2020-21.

For the current year (2021-22), SNC received an appropriation of \$4,699,000 for its baseline budget under ELPF, which is on par with appropriations in previous years. This appropriation was enacted in the 2021-22 budget signed by Governor Newsom on June 28, 2021. As noted in previous reports, SNC is still required to meet a five percent reduction in operating expenses as called for in the Department of Finance (DOF) [Budget Letter 20-37](#).

The Personal Leave Program, which reduced staff salaries by 9.23 percent and gave employees up to 16 hours per month of leave, ended June 30, 2021. Some bargaining units were delayed due to their ratification measures, but all staff are back up to regular pay as of the time of this writing. A pay increase of 4.55-7.63 percent was also approved for SNC staff, depending on bargaining unit. The SNC's budget will be augmented to cover these increases via a Budget Letter from DOF in the upcoming months.

As of July, SNC is also authorized to spend and receive \$6,383,000 in reimbursements in the Federal Trust Fund and Sierra Nevada Conservancy Fund combined, and support appropriations for bond funds were received as expected. As previously reported, SNC is hopeful about receiving General Funds in the Wildfire Resilience Package. Because of the unique and dynamic nature of this package, a verbal update will be provided to the Board, including the status of the staff positions that are expected to come along with it.

A breakdown of the 2021-22 budget can be found on pages 3 - 4 of this report.

Recommendation

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

2021-22 SNC Budget (as of July 2021)

Support (Non-Reimbursable)

Environmental License Plate Fund Support	Budgeted
Personal Services	\$3,573,288
Operating Expenses & Equipment (OE&E)	\$1,125,712
Total ELPF (Personal Services + OE&E)	\$4,699,000

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Fund Support	Budgeted
Personal Services	\$135,633
Operating Expenses & Equipment (OE&E)	\$3,881,367
Total SNC Fund (Personal Services + OE&E)	\$4,017,000

Proposition 1 Total	Budgeted
Program Delivery	\$103,000

Proposition 68	Budgeted
Program Delivery – Conservancy allocation	\$316,000
Program Delivery – Forest restoration allocation	\$229,000
Total Proposition 68	\$545,000

Proposition 84 Total	Budgeted
Planning & Monitoring	\$50,000

Reimbursements

SNC Fund Reimbursements – Projected	Projected
CAL FIRE	\$3,602,031
CNRA/DOC	\$1,010,030
CHIPs	\$349,591
HCD/NDRC	\$93,441
Stewardship Council	\$23,441
Total Projected Reimbursements	\$5,078,534

Federal Funding – Total Projected	Projected
USFS-Plumas National Forest	\$2,514,386

Sierra Nevada Conservancy
September 2, 2021

Agenda Item 6c: Policy & Outreach Update

Background

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) policy and outreach activities support sound, science-based agency action and educate key decision makers about the statewide importance of the Sierra Nevada to encourage appropriate investment in the Region. This is done by understanding the latest scientific studies on forestry, watershed health, and other relevant issues; utilizing the recommendations and outcomes of that research to inform policy recommendations; and sharing those recommendations and outcomes through SNC's outreach efforts. Developing and maintaining relationships with legislators and their staff, state and federal agencies, local governments, Regional partners, the research community, and traditional and non-traditional media contacts are key to the success of SNC's policy and outreach efforts. In addition, while SNC's policy and outreach activities support all the Regional Goals in the SNC's Strategic Plan, they focus heavily on the cultivation of an impactful Regional identity for the Sierra Nevada Region.

Current Status

State Budget Update

On June 14, the state legislature passed a \$262.6 billion budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 which met the legal requirements to craft a spending plan by July 1, 2021. Details on key expenditures, including \$1 billion proposed for wildfire prevention and forest resilience, were included as placeholders in the budget plan, but with specific appropriation details withheld to allow time for additional negotiation between the governor and the legislature.

On July 9, Governor Newsom signed a budget trailer bill, [AB 161](#), which included \$258 million from the General Fund on a one-time basis for wildfire prevention and forest resilience activities. The bill also gave the Department of Finance the authority to make an additional \$500 million available in FY 2021-22 from the General Fund on a one-time basis for wildfire prevention and forest resilience activities. At the time of this report, specific allocations to departments and programs were still being negotiated between the legislature and the governor's office. The governor's January budget proposal included \$50 million for SNC as part of the larger \$1 billion package focused on wildfire prevention and forest resilience. Staff will continue to track final decisions and budget hearings once the legislature reconvenes from recess on August 16, 2021.

Legislative Update

At the time of this report, legislators were on summer recess. The legislative session will resume August 16 and bills that are being considered this calendar year will need to pass by September 10. The governor will have until October 10 to sign those bills. A handful of bills directly impacting SNC's work are making their way through the process and will have until the September 10 deadline to pass. Those bills include:

Senate Bill 208

SB 208 (Dahle - Bieber) would modify SNC's boundaries by adding a portion of Siskiyou County and Trinity County to the Region and increasing the area of Shasta County within the Region. The same legislation was introduced last session through SB 989. At the time of this report, SB 208 had been rereferred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee and placed on the suspense file due to the anticipated fiscal impact of the bill. Near the end of the 2021 legislative session, bills placed on the suspense file will be reviewed and may be considered for passage at that time.

Senate Bill 624

SB 624 (Hueso - San Diego) would establish the Environmental Equity and Outdoor Access Act, which sets forth the state's commitment to ensuring all Californians can benefit from, and have meaningful access to, the state's rich cultural and natural resources. The bill would, among other things, promote inclusivity and representation, and improve competency among staff of the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and each department, board, office, conservancy, and commission within the CNRA, to ensure all Californians and visitors of the state feel safe and welcome in the outdoors. At the time of this report, SB 624 had been referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Assembly Bill 9

AB 9 (Wood - Santa Rosa) would codify the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program under the Department of Conservation to build local and regional capacity and develop, prioritize, and implement strategies and projects that create fire-adapted communities by improving watershed health, forest health, community wildfire preparedness, and fire resilience. At the time of this report, AB 9 had been referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Assembly Bill 642

AB 642 (Friedman - Glendale) among other things, proposes a number of activities designed to support prescribed fire including certifying Native American tribes with cultural burning experience as burn bosses, considering prescribed burn suspensions at the unit level, where feasible, rather than the state or regional level, and developing a proposal for the establishment of a prescribed fire training center. The SNC is called out currently in this bill as an entity that should be consulted on the development of this prescribed fire training center proposal. This bill has passed the Assembly and will

move on to the Senate. At the time of this report, AB 642 had been recommended for the consent calendar in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Several of the bills that staff had been tracking that had relevance to SNC's work have shifted to two-year bills, extending the conversation and development of these bills out into 2022. SB 604 (Hueso - San Diego), the Nature and Parks Career Pathway and Community Resiliency and Equity Act of 2021, which staff have reported on previously, is one of those bills. SB 604 would require state conservancies and the Wildlife Conservation Board to establish grant programs to fund climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience, natural disaster, and other climate emergency projects.

Both climate resilience bond bills, SB 45 (Portantino - La Cañada Flintridge) and AB 1500 (Garcia - Coachella), failed to pass out of their house of origin by the deadline required to move the bill through the full legislative process in 2021. The state budget surplus offered an opportunity to advance many of the priorities laid out in these bills and, at the time of this report, discussions about using one-time General Fund money to advance those priorities were occurring.

Staff will continue to track these bills and others that may impact SNC's work and the work of SNC's Regional partners.

Communications Update

The SNC staff worked to publicize the Governing Board's July 15 Immediate Action Forest and Wildfire Resilience Grant awards. Staff published a [Sierra Spotlight post](#) regarding the board action with quotes from the SNC Executive Officer and Boardmembers Jessica Morse and Liz Berger. The digital news article included a link to a newly created webpage containing maps and more detailed [information about the 15 SNC-funded projects](#). The web resources and associated media outreach resulted in widespread coverage of the awards in Regional newspapers including: [Lassen County Times](#), [Plumas News](#), [Sierra Sun](#), Gold Rush Camera, [Mtn Democrat](#), [MyMotherlode.com](#), and [Gold Country Media](#). The SNC comms efforts received an additional boost when [Secretary Wade Crowfoot posted a link to the Lassen County Times to his twitter account](#) as an example of the forest and wildfire resilience work rolling out across California as a result of the state's early action budget investments.

The SNC staff published the summer edition of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Capacity News email newsletter focusing on forest health project pipeline development. The newsletter linked to two Sierra Spotlight posts highlighting Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Grant recipients in the [East Subregion](#) and in the [North Central and South Central Subregions](#). Those articles were also picked up by the Sierra Sun for short articles in their online edition.

Next Steps

Staff will actively track state budget discussions and the final decisions on bills impacting SNC's work. Many of the state policy efforts that staff is engaged in, like the State Climate Adaptation Strategy update, the 30x30 conservation plan development, and the Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy development, will be entering or wrapping up their stakeholder engagement phase over the next quarter. Staff will begin reviewing and assessing alignment opportunities presented in strategy drafts and will provide final feedback to the agencies leading their development. Staff will also continue to communicate about the impacts that large, damaging wildfires in the Sierra Nevada have on the state and will elevate the work done by partners in the Region to reduce wildfire risk and establish more resilient Sierra Nevada landscapes.

Recommendation

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

Sierra Nevada Conservancy
September 2, 2021

Agenda Item 7: Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grant Award Recommendations

Background

California voters passed Proposition 68, the California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for all Act of 2018, on June 5, 2018.

Proposition 68 includes two allocations of funding for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC):

- Section 80135(c) allocates \$25 million for competitive grants towards implementation of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) for projects related to forest health and climate resiliency, and
- Section 80110(b)(9) allocates \$30 million for purposes consistent with SNC's governing statute.

The Budget Act of 2020 appropriated \$5 million to SNC for local assistance from Section 80110(b)(9) dedicated to conservancy purposes. In June 2020, the Board authorized grant guidelines for the following programs with the associated funding distribution:

- \$3 million for Forest and Watershed Health
- \$1 million for Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities
- \$1 million for Vibrant Recreation and Tourism

Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grant Program

The current Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grant Program includes four focus areas. Projects must fall within one of these focus areas to be considered for funding.

1. **Implementation of prescribed fire** to improve watershed health.
2. **Large-landscape planning** projects for forest health that demonstrate multiple watershed and ecosystem benefits. These projects must complete project planning on a minimum of 10,000 acres.
3. **Implementation of forest health planning projects** for which SNC previously funded the planning phase.
4. Projects that connect and serve **underserved partners**. Strategic partners that have received no more than one SNC grant since the start of the WIP Forest Health Program (in Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-16 with funding from Proposition 1) will be eligible for grants to support planning or implementation of multi-benefit forest and watershed health projects.

Designed as a directed grant program, SNC staff works closely with local partners to identify and develop projects. Concept proposals and subsequent full proposals are evaluated on a quarterly basis.

Previous Awards

In March and June 2021, the Board awarded the four Forest and Watershed Health Grants below:

- Project #1275: The Thompson Peak Initiative planning project in Lassen and Susanville counties, in the amount of \$250,000, to the Lassen Fire Safe Council
- Project #1276: The Fandango planning project to restore over 20,000 acres in Modoc National Forest in Modoc County, in the amount of \$120,000, to the California Deer Association
- Project #1277: The Camp Hi-Sierra Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan project in Tuolumne County, in the amount of \$70,581, to the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council, Boy Scouts of America
- Project #1280: The Forest Projects Plan project in Amador and Calaveras counties, in the amount of \$200,000, to the Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority

After these awards, there is \$2,359,419 remaining for Forest and Watershed Health Grant awards, planned for distribution through FY 2021-22.

Current Status

The SNC staff is working closely with local partners to develop Forest and Watershed Health projects. The project below has been evaluated through SNC's directed grants process and is now recommended for Board approval.

[Project #1278](#)

Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West
\$282,380

The Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative (SSBC) is a collaborative composed of Sierra Native American Tribes, private landowners, and other fire practitioners in Fresno and Madera counties. The SSBC is working to build on the skills and expertise of its members to restore a working fire culture on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. With this project, the SSBC will: 1) cooperatively conduct prescribed and cultural burns on 115 acres across three privately owned parcels adjacent to the Sierra National Forest; 2) contribute to the development of tribal and other local prescribed fire crews by conducting training events in conjunction with the burns; and 3) gather and preserve recordings and transcripts of oral histories and other interviews with tribal and local fire experts. The project area is in the upper Kings River watershed in eastern Fresno

County. Nearby communities include Dinkey Creek, Shaver Lake, Tollhouse, and Trimmer Springs. The three burns will represent initial steps toward restoring historical fire stewardship in the southern Sierra, with a long-term vision of restoring “chains” of less-flammable islands along historical tribal trails and trade-routes.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Compliance: The project is statutorily exempt under Section 15304, Class 4, which consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes.

- [Access the Project Details and the Notice of Exemption \(Project #1278\)](#)

Next Steps

Upon authorization by the Board, staff will file all adopted CEQA documentation and prepare agreements for the authorized grant.

Staff will continue to work with partners to develop additional Forest and Watershed Health projects and anticipates recommending projects at future Board meetings to award the full amount of funds available. If the recommended grants presented in this report are authorized, a minimum of \$2,077,039 is available for future awards under the current appropriation.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the *Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange* project (#1278), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$282,380 to the Huntington-University of Southern California Institute on California and the West, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

Exhibit A

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Forest and Watershed Health Grant Program SNC Project Number 1278

SNC ID Number: 1278

Applicant: Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West

Project Title: Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

SNC Subregion: South

County: Fresno

Funding Amount Requested: \$282,380

Funding Amount Recommended: \$282,380

Total Project Cost: \$320,380

Funding Authority: Proposition 68, Chapter 8, Section 80110(b)(9)

Project Scope / Description

The Sierra Sequoia Burn Cooperative (SSBC) is composed of Native American tribes, private landowners, and other fire practitioners in Fresno and Madera counties. The SSBC builds upon the skills and expertise of its members to restore a working fire culture on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada. With this project, the SSBC will: 1) cooperatively conduct prescribed and cultural burns on 115 acres across three privately owned parcels adjacent to the Sierra National Forest; 2) expand tribal and other local prescribed fire crews by conducting training events in conjunction with the burns; and 3) advance cultural burning practices through interviews with tribal and local fire experts.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC)-funded treatments will occur on three private properties in the upper Kings River watershed in eastern Fresno County. Nearby communities include Dinkey Creek, Shaver Lake, Tollhouse, and Trimmer Springs.

- **Property 1 – Forked Meadow/Van Bossuyt:** This property is in the mixed conifer zone along the historic Holkoma Mono travel and trade route and on the migration route for the North Kings River deer herd. Dinkey Creek runs through the property. Treatment will consist of a 45-acre underburn, complementing earlier fuels-reduction treatments.
- **Property 2 – Camp El-O-Win:** Camp El-O-Win is also located along the Holkoma Mono travel and trade route and Dinkey Creek. Project work will include widening an existing, 2000-foot fire line along the northern property boundary adjacent to the Sierra National Forest, handline construction around

infrastructure within the burn footprint, and a 20-acre underburn to reduce fuels and help protect the camp from wildfire.

- **Property 3 – Haslett Basin:** This preserve is co-owned by the Sierra Foothill Conservancy and Cold Springs Rancheria and is located along Nutmeg Creek. Haslett Basin lies at the intersection of several indigenous trade routes and is an important ceremonial area for local tribes. Project work includes burning 50 acres of burn piles. Seeds of culturally important plants will be collected prior to burning and then raked into the soil and ash after burning.

All burns will be conducted as Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX), with priority given to participation by local tribal members. Tribal elders and other cultural subject matter experts will present workshops at each training event so that all participants can learn local fire history and culture. Evaluators from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC) will certify the advancement of at least 20 participants toward multiple qualifications. Burn plans will be developed by a California licensed Professional Forester or qualified burn boss. Burning will occur between the months of October and February and all ignitions will be set back from Watercourse and Lake Protection Zones.

In addition to the burns and trainings, SNC will fund the purchase of hand tools, personal protective equipment, and a trailer to transport SSBC-member equipment so that the SSBC can continue to provide fuel reduction and prescribed fire services in the southern Sierra. Nearby forest health projects include the Dinkey Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project and projects completed by Southern California Edison near Shaver Lake and Dinkey Creek.

The project applicant, the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West (ICW) has successfully managed a number of large government grants. Under contract with ICW, Jared Aldern will coordinate the project. The ICW will assist tribes and other partners with the preservation of digital recordings and transcripts of interviews for sustained future use by practitioners, educators, and researchers working on cultural burning practices.

This project leverages \$38,000 in in-kind support from numerous partners. Landowners will contribute in-kind resources for burn preparation, and WRTC and TNC will donate the time of TREX Coaches, mentors, and training instructors. Tribal partners include the Big Sandy Rancheria Band of the Western Mono Indians, the Cold Spring Rancheria of Mono Indians of California, the Dunlap Band of Mono Indians Tribe, and the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians.

This project is aligned with SNC's Strategic Plan and will aid in preserving working landscapes, reducing the risk of wildfire disasters, and protecting and improving water quality and air quality. Project burn sites are located along tributaries to the Kings River watershed, which provides water to the top agricultural producing region in California.

Project Schedule

Project Tasks and Deliverables	Timeline
Camp El-O-Win Burn prep: Widen existing fuelbreak from 3 feet to 6 feet, handline construction around infrastructure within burn footprint	2021 – 2022
Haslett Burn Prep: clear defensible space around burn piles, prep piles for burning; collect seeds of culturally important plants	2021 – 2022
Burn plans and permits secured	2022
8 days of NWCG training for minimum 20 participants	2021 – 2023
Van Bossuyt Property: 45-acre underburn and TRES training	November 2022 – February 2024
Camp El-O-Win Property: 20-acre underburn and TRES training	2022 – 2024
Haslett Basin: 50-acres of piles burned and TRES training; hand sow previously collected seeds	2022 – 2024
Video documentation and/or interview transcripts	2022 – 2024
Two newsletters and/or press releases associated with TRES events	2021 – 2024
Plan for the long-term management and use of SSBC burn tools.	2021 – 2024
SNC sign installation	2024
Six-month progress reports and final report	Every 6 months: December 2021 – June 2024
Estimated Project Completion Date	June 2024

Project Costs

Project Costs	SNC Funding
Project management	\$30,000
Nighttime burn monitoring crews	\$22,500
Burn preparation crews	\$45,000
TREX: burn crew labor and training time	\$73,200
Burn Bosses: planning and management	\$15,000
Personal protective equipment	\$19,000
Tools and trailer	\$32,000
Stipends for tribal elder and other expert participation in TREX and oral interview (\$250 x 10)	\$2,500
TREX outreach materials, SNC Signage	\$1,000
Documentation of traditional ecological knowledge	\$12,000
Administrative Costs	\$30,180
Total	\$282,380

Project Letters of Support or Opposition

Support:

- Big Sandy Band of Western Mono Indians
- Cold Springs Rancheria of Mono Indians of California
- Dunlap Band of Mono Indians
- North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians of California
- Dave and Melinda Van Bossuyt
- Friends of Camp El-O-Win
- Sierra Foothills Conservancy
- Dr. Reynaldo J.S. Arroyo, Professor of Forestry and Natural Resources, Bakersfield College
- Jeremy Bailey, Director of Prescribed Fire Training for The Nature Conservancy's North America Fire Team
- Ben Kimbler, local rancher
- Watershed Research and Training Center
- Yosemite Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council
- Highway 169 Fire Safe Council
- Southern California Edison
- Southern Sierra Prescribed Fire Council
- University of California Cooperative Extension, Mariposa County
- USDA Forest Service, Sierra National Forest, High Sierra Ranger District

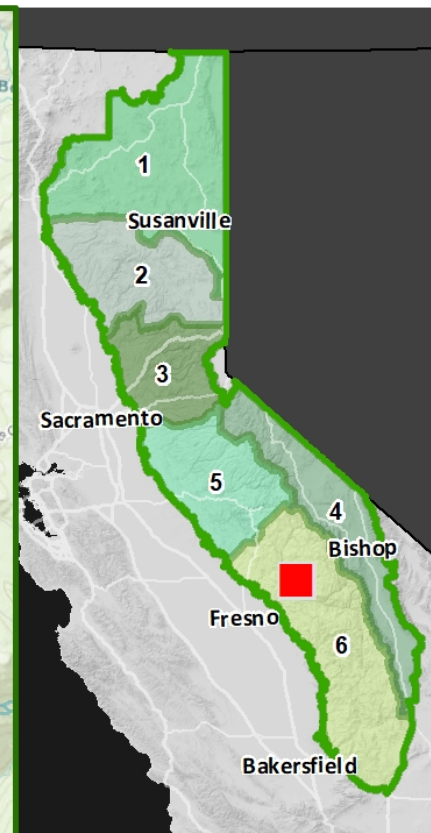
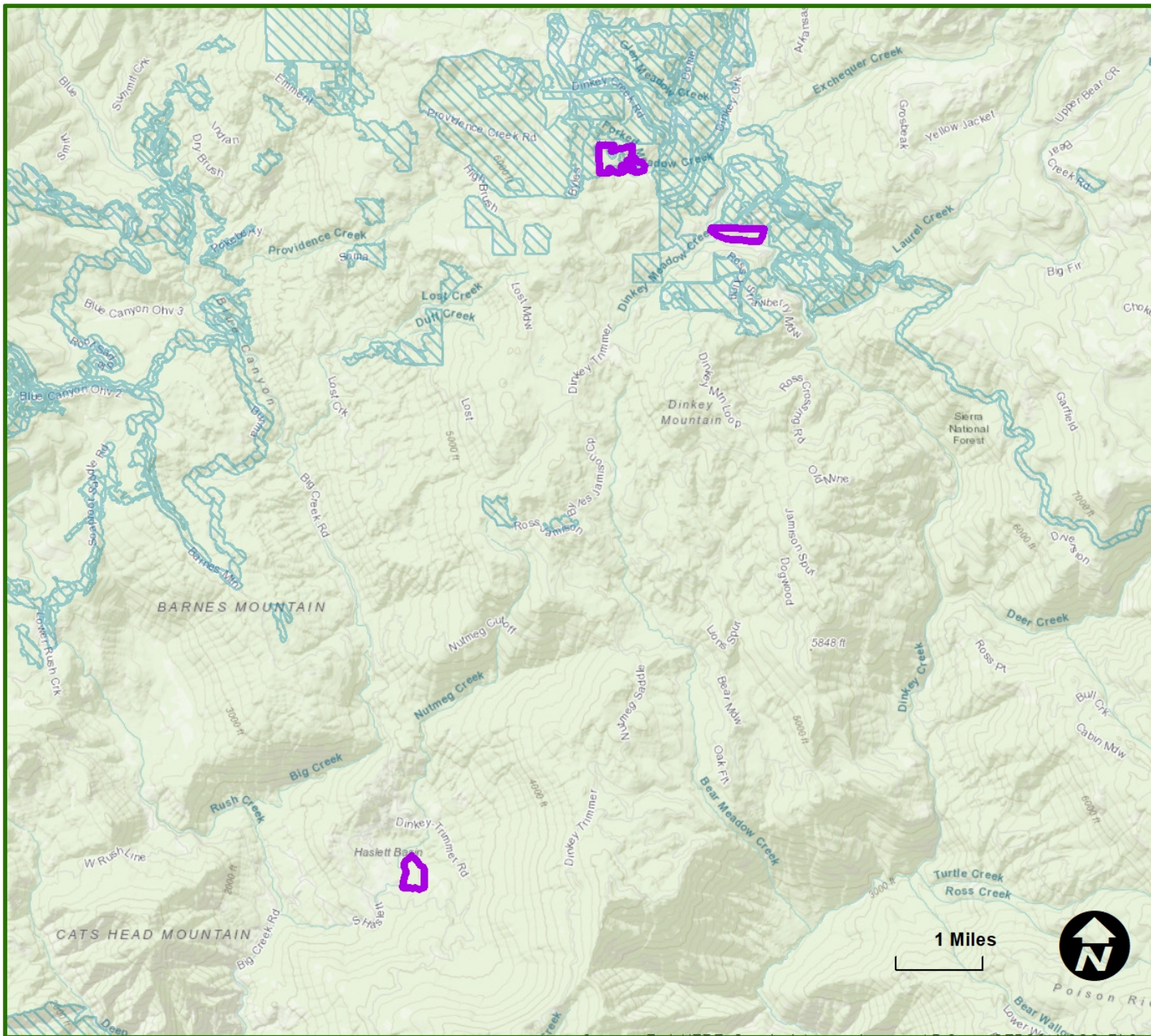
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





- None received

Project Performance Measures

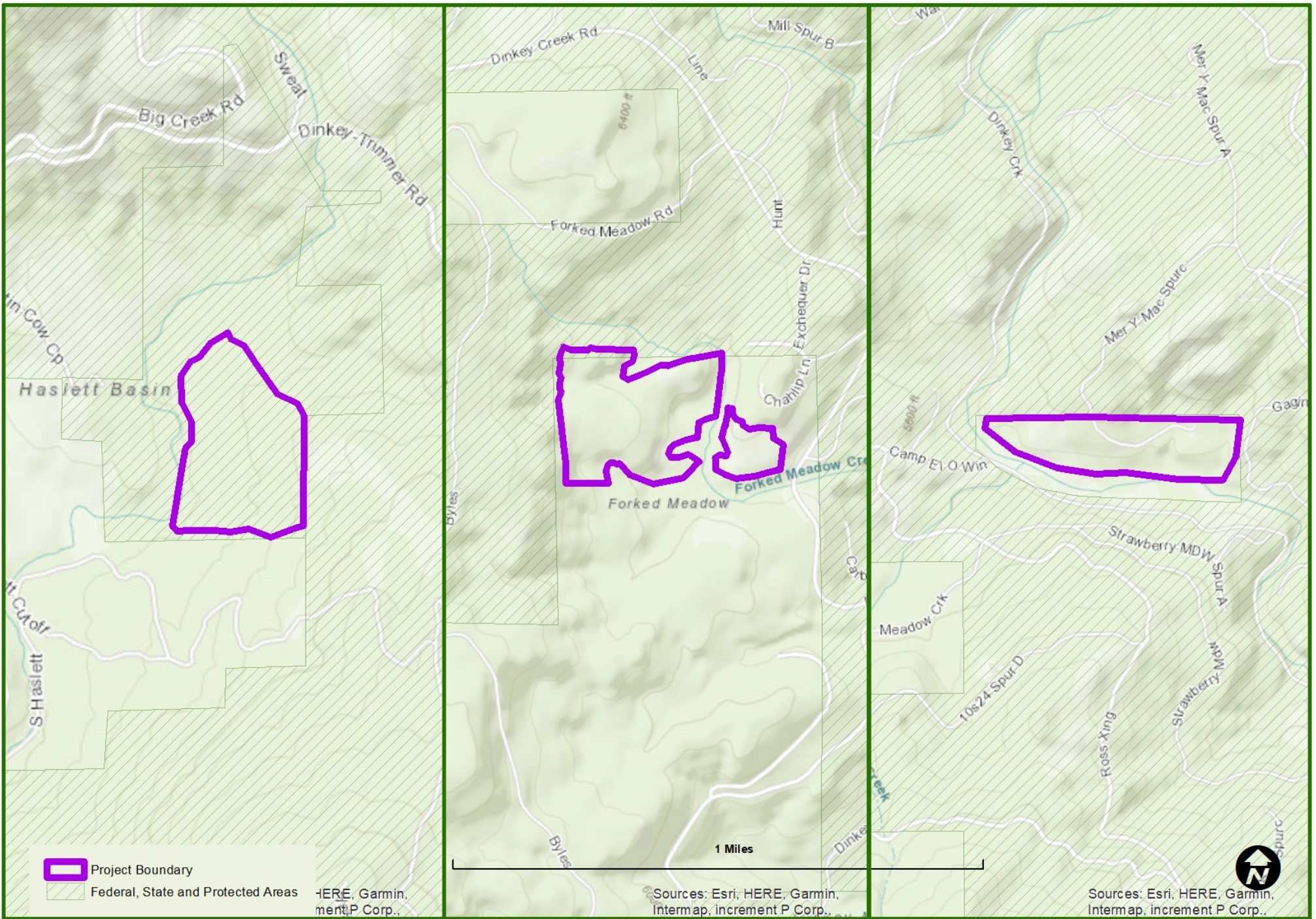
There are four Performance Measures common to all grants. In addition, grantees are required to identify one to three project-specific Performance Measures in their application. Please note, Performance Measures listed here represent those proposed by applicants and may be modified before the grant agreement is executed.

- Acres of Land Improved or Restored

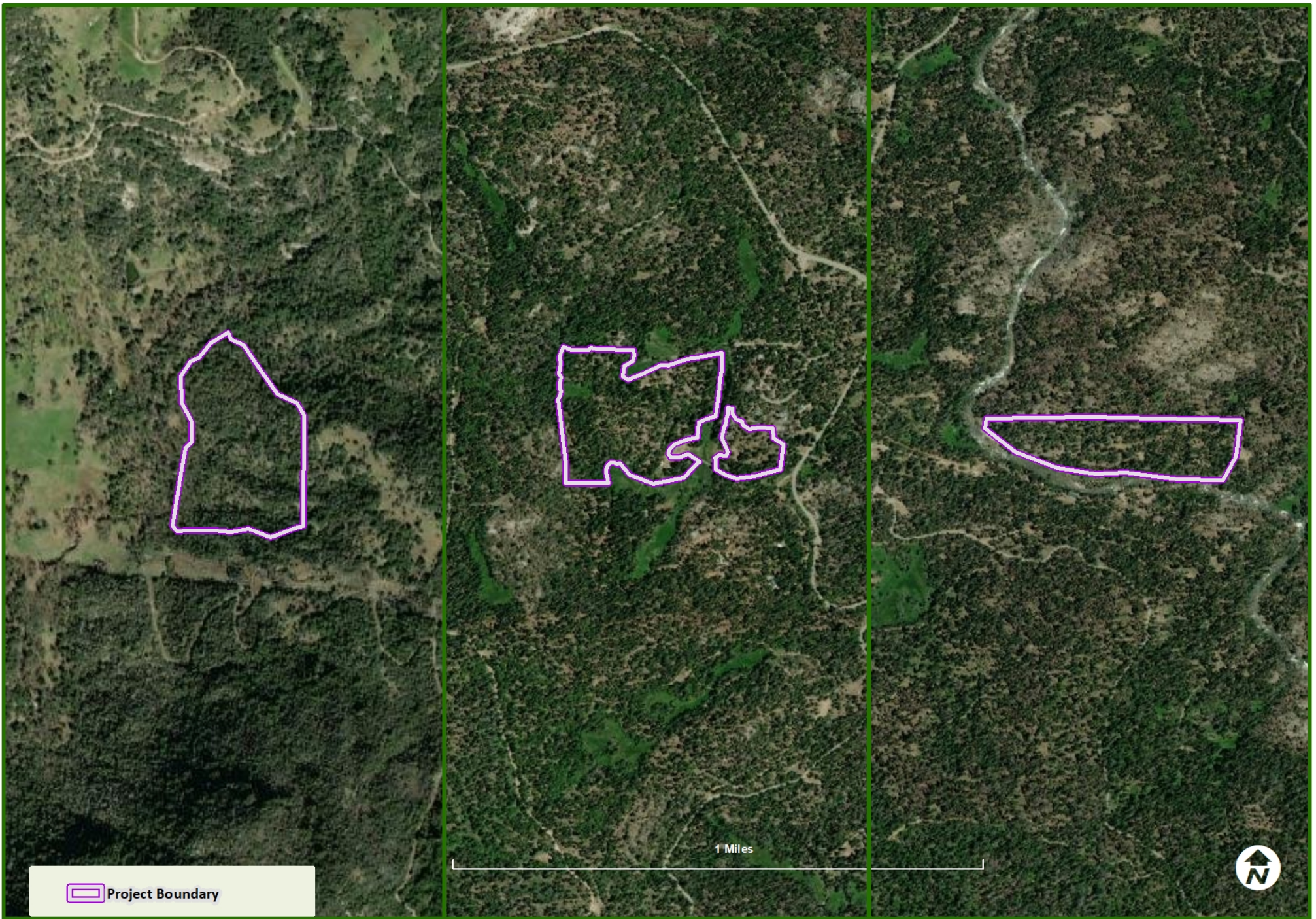


-  Project Boundary (Primary Map)
-  Other Projects (Primary Map)
-  Project Location (Regional Map)
-  1 North Subregion
-  2 North Central Subregion
-  3 Central Subregion
-  4 East Subregion
-  5 South Central Subregion
-  6 South Subregion

1278 Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange
 Huntington - University of Southern California Institute on California and the West



1278 Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange
 Huntington - University of Southern California Institute on California and the West



1278 Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange
Huntington - University of Southern California Institute on California and the West

Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 212
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

From: Sierra Nevada Conservancy
11521 Blocker Drive, Suite 205
Auburn, CA 95603

County Clerk
County of: Fresno
2220 Tulare Street, 1st Floor
Fresno, CA 93721

Project Title: Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (SNC 1278)

Project Location – Specific: Three private properties surrounded by the Sierra National Forest near Dinkey Creek and Nutmeg Creek

Project Location - City: Dinkey Creek, Shaver Lake, Tollhouse, and Trimmer Springs

Project Location - County: Fresno

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) would provide funding to the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West (ICW) to conduct fuel reduction activities on at least 115 acres within Fresno County. This project would reduce wildfire risk and restore historical fire stewardship by implementing at least three 20- to 50-acre prescribed burns to reduce fuel loads and remove ladder fuels in collaboration with regional Native American Tribes on three privately-owned parcels surrounded by the Sierra National Forest. The three private properties are referred to as the Forked Meadow/Van Bossuyt property, the Camp El-O-Win property, and the Haslett Basin Preserve property. Two of the properties are located near or on Dinkey Creek, and the third is located along Nutmeg Creek. Both watersheds are tributaries to the Kings River and Pine Flat Lake. Prescribed burning would be implemented between late fall and early winter, dependent on burn windows and resource availability, and is expected to be completed by early 2024. The project would also involve the establishment of fire containment lines and low-limbing of trees.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West

Exempt Status:

Categorical Exemption. CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4

Reasons why project is exempt:

Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Project is categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, Class 4, which consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of mature, scenic trees except for forestry and agricultural purposes. The minor land alterations proposed by the project consist of forestry treatments to improve forest health and resilience. The project would not result in significant adverse effects on the environment or any exceptions to the exemption.

Lead Agency

Contact Person: Shannon Ciotti

Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (530) 906-7345

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project: Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Title: _____

Signed by Lead Agency: Yes

Signed by Applicant: No

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.

Date received for filing at OPR: _____

Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Agenda Item 8: Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program Update

Background

The Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP) was launched in 2019 and is a \$20 million California Natural Resources Agency grant program administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Modeled in part after the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program, the program aims to increase Regional capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement landscape-level forest health and wildfire resilience projects. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) received a \$1.9 million block grant to support forest health by increasing Regional capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement landscape-level forest health and wildfire resiliency throughout the Sierra Nevada Region.

Because the SNC received limited funding in the initial RFFCP round for such a large area, staff had to be very strategic in identifying where investments would be most effective. The SNC worked hard to develop strategies to maximize its impact. Staff interviewed numerous agencies, organizations, and tribes throughout the Region (about 80 overall) to identify capacity needs and opportunities specific to their area. Through this process, certain strategies emerged for each geography, based on the assets and needs identified by the interviewees, as well as the identification of primary subgrantees in each geography who had the ability and bandwidth to engage partners and tribes in their areas for this critical work.

Current Status

The SNC's RFFCP funding has been distributed to primary subgrantees in each of seven geographic focus areas in the Sierra Nevada. These organizations in turn interviewed local stakeholders and tribes to identify the most critical needs for planning, project development, and organizational capacity building. Each geography has developed its own strategy, using RFFCP funding to overcome barriers and move forward with forest restoration and fire mitigation projects. Where needed, technical assistance provider subgrants were deployed to provide additional capacity or technical assistance.

This process resulted in eleven subgrants:

North West: Pit River Resource Conservation District (\$201,300) – This investment is allowing the North West geography to develop a complete list of projects and priorities in the area. It is also allowing capacity building in Shasta County by establishing a Fire Safe Council and creating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

North East: Modoc Resource Conservation District (\$228,800) – This investment is strengthening locally developed collaborative planning efforts in Modoc and Lassen counties and helping move their priority projects into the pipeline for California Environmental Quality Act / National Environmental Policy Act and implementation.

Sacramento-Feather: Feather River Resource Conservation District (\$170,225) – The activities in this geography include investment to support project planning and development, improved coordination between various collaborative activities taking place on the landscape through a facilitated stakeholders exchange, and capacity-building for the Feather River Resource Conservation District.

TCSI Plus: CA Association of Resource Conservation Districts

(\$143,750) – The Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative partnership has strengthened relationships among its public land management agencies and non-governmental organization partners, and there are several well-organized and resourced landscape-scale collaborations doing innovative work in this geography. However, several resource conservation districts (RCDs) in this region have significant capacity needs. This investment is focused on capacity-building that will better enable them to participate in collaborative efforts on the landscape and strengthen their individual relationships with public land managers to build this geography's capacity to develop private lands components for their restoration projects, which is a prerequisite for many grant funding sources.

Eldorado South: Tuolumne River Trust (\$16,283) – The Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority (\$49,500): The activities in this geography include investment to assist project planning and prioritization in the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group and Yosemite-Stanislaus Solutions planning areas, as well as capacity-building support for the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District.

East: Eastern CA Water Association (\$179,300) – This investment is building the organizational capacity, collaborations, and partnership development for the East geography. It is also supporting the development of a plan, including project priorities for the area, and is funding the pipeline project development of three priority projects. This geography is receiving additional technical assistance through the RFFCP from the Great Basin Institute and American Forests. (See Technical Assistance Grants for East and South, below.)

Southern: Yosemite-Sequoia RC&D (\$68,200) – This investment is extending project planning and prioritization efforts already taking place within the geography (Yosemite National Park and Sierra National Forest) to the southern part of the geography. The capacity of the collaborative efforts will be increased by funding planning and pipeline of project development of their priority projects in the southern-most part of the geography. Additional capacity funding is supporting these collaborative efforts based on needs identified in their capacity building plan. This geography is receiving additional technical assistance through

the RFFCP from the Great Basin Institute and American Forests. (See Technical Assistance Subgrants for East and South, below.)

Technical Assistance Subgrants for East and South: Great Basin Institute (\$104,500); American Forests (\$82,000) – These two organizations are assisting with technical assistance for planning and capacity building activities in these two geographies.

Additional Technical Assistance and Capacity Building: Sierra Nevada Alliance (\$253,000) – Additional capacity building and technical assistance support is being offered to several RFFCP subgrantees through the Sierra Nevada Alliance's Sierra Corp program, which is designed to train recent graduates as forest management professionals by establishing paid fellowships to assist organizations throughout the SNC Region. Three fellows are being funded through the RFFCP in the East, South, and Sacramento-Feather geographies.

A few highlights so far include:

- The Feather River RCD kicked off their RFFCP work with a prescribed fire training and underburn on 700 acres in the Feather River Land Trust Property. This project was a Prescribed Fire Training Exchange in partnership with the Plumas Underburn Cooperative. A second training was held in Spring 2021 that comprised of field exercise training stations, including a station that focused on protecting tribal cultural sites during prescribed fire and burning for Traditional Ecological Knowledge benefits.
- Sierra Corps Fellows are assisting regional organizations with planning, capacity-building, and training programs while being trained as forest and fire professionals. One of their fellows, after less than a year, has been brought on by their host organization as a full-time employee as a result of their leveraging RFFCP funding to secure another grant to fund the position.
- Yosemite-Sequoia RCD is providing training and organizational development for organizations in their geography and also making them available for organizations in other geographies. Subjects covered so far have included financial management, grant writing, and change management.
- In the El Dorado South Geography, RFFCP funding is supporting two interesting projects, both of which include robust efforts to document and share lessons learned and replication opportunities:
 - The Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority has worked with a forest collaborative, the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG), to create a do-it-yourself GIS mapping platform. The ACCG stakeholders can submit their own project on the map and see how it relates to other projects in the area, as well as how it addresses forest conditions.
 - The Tuolumne River Trust is testing out the use of drone technology (Structure from Motion) which allows them to assess and analyze

real-time forest conditions for very low costs. This can be used for both forest health project planning and to monitor impacts from projects and other events, such as wildfires.

Next Steps

One of the reasons SNC's RFFCP program has been so successful is the close attention staff pays to the specific needs of every geography. The SNC has long been aware that certain geographies were very successful in obtaining funding and implementing projects, while others lacked the organizational capacity to compete as successfully for grants. In some cases, there are critical restoration needs that are going unmet because of this lack of capacity. The goal of the SNC's RFFCP program is to help even out the odds so that all areas in the Region have the capacity to plan, fund, and implement restoration projects. Toward this end, staff will continue to support SNC's subgrantees under the initial RFFCP block grant, which is well underway. These deliverables will all be completed by early 2025. The SNC is also currently in discussions with DOC regarding additional funding through their Early Action budget funding allocation to the RFFCP Program.

Recommendation

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

Sierra Nevada Conservancy
September 02, 2021

Agenda Item 9: Science Update

Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy tracks and analyzes the latest science and trends relevant to the Region with the goal of informing regional understanding, policy decisions, and communications efforts. It is undeniable that the Sierra Nevada Region is experiencing significant changes relative to the previous 100 years of recorded history. Adaptive management will be key to navigating these changes. A significant proportion of Sierra Nevada forests are considerably different from their historical conditions, creating conditions that favor some species and adversely impact others. These forests are being inundated by stressor events that are growing increasingly larger and more severe, such as drought and wildfire. Understanding the impacts of these events and the degree to which proactive management can restore forest health in the face of these stressors will be critical to protecting the Region's biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Current Status

Incredible biodiversity can be found across the Sierra Nevada. This is due, in part, to the physical features (e.g., topography) and forest structure diversity that was common across the Region throughout history. Sierra Nevada forests developed with frequent fire, both from natural ignitions and cultural burning, that was mostly of lower severity with smaller pockets of high severity. This natural process created a positive feedback loop which promoted forest structure patterns of individuals, clumps, and openings (ICOs), with many different seral stages peppered across each watershed. (A seral stage refers a phase of forest development following a major disturbance event – from early seral, immediately following disturbance where shrubs and grasses dominate – to late seral, or old forest). The proximity of diverse habitats allowed species to use different forest structure characteristics for different life stages (e.g., juvenile), or to feed in one forest type and nest in a different forest type.

Fire suppression, the halting of cultural fire practices, and the logging of the largest and most resilient trees has led to a loss of structural diversity across forests in the Sierra Nevada. This shift adversely affects species native to the Region, and these changes are also influencing fire behavior. Historically, fire as a process reinforced diversity across the landscape. However, without fire to maintain ICO patterns, forests have filled in and many fires are now burning through homogenous closed canopy forest, and with much higher frequency. This is resulting in homogenous early seral forests that may not regrow as forest – a possible outcome in the 2014 King and 2020 North Complex fires.

Early seral forest is a critical habitat element in the Region's mixed-conifer forests, but with the shift in pattern from many small patches to a few very large patches, there is a reduction in the amount of high severity burned area close to edge habitat. This may lead to longer travel distances for species that utilize more than one forest structure

type for feeding and nesting. The travel distance to a different forest structure type may also hold true for large homogenous forest conditions across a landscape, including closed-canopy forests. This highlights a key concern that in the Sierra Nevada, the value of any given forest type to a species may also depend on the proximity of different forest types or seral stages.

For example, it is well documented that California Spotted Owls in Yosemite will frequently use high-severity patches smaller than 100 acres in size (Eyes et al., 2017). However, in larger patches of high-severity fire, tracked owls were rarely observed foraging further than 500 feet into those patches. Additionally, owls with home territories more than 50 percent impacted by high-severity fire are likely to abandon that territory altogether (Jones et al., 2020). Similarly, Black-backed Woodpeckers with fledglings (one year old or younger) tended to stay close to the edge of high-severity burn patches, which allows their young to hide in the green forest edge while the parent is foraging in snags in the high-severity patch (Stillman et al., 2019). Deeper forays into large, high-severity patches were rare. Similar use trends were found for other forest bird species – high-severity burned forest in smaller patches tended to have more diversity of species than larger patches (Steel et al., 2021).

Recent fire activity in the Sierra Nevada has reinforced how critical proactive management is for protecting habitat that cannot be replaced within a decade or two. In the case of the King, North Complex, Castle, and other recent large Sierra fires, large high-severity patches of early seral forest are replacing closed-canopy, larger-tree forests, which are critical habitat for many species, including the California Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk, and Pacific Fisher. Based on current rates of loss to high severity fires, Dr. Scott Stephens estimates the Sierra will lose this habitat to megafires within 75 years (Stephens et al., 2016). In addition to reducing human ignition sources, the amount of fuel available to burn is a key element land managers can impact as SNC works to protect critical habitat, thus emphasizing the need for proactive forest health management to benefit species.

When planning forest health management activities in a watershed, there are a wide range of factors that are considered. Native species, existing range of habitat in the area, migration corridors, refugia (either current or future), and risk potential are key elements to designing a restoration strategy. Impact to local species can depend, among other factors, on the season the implementation occurs, the equipment used, whether material is left on site (e.g., mastication), degree of understory and overstory impacted, acres of activity, and proportion of watershed actively being treated. For each species, impacts can be different across their different life cycle stages and strong coordination between managers and researchers is necessary to inform adaptive management.

One challenge to this research is the scale of treatment actions relative to untreated forested area in most watersheds. For example, work exploring the impact of treatments on California Spotted Owl found that treatments in high canopy closure areas reduced territory occupancy (Tempel et al., 2014). But recent research on other species opens

the possibility that the owls did not use the treatment areas because there was plenty of undisturbed habitat nearby that could be used instead, not because the treated areas were unsuitable. Studies on Pacific Fisher indicate that small levels of treatments per year in their territory may be sustainable to their survival (Truex et al, 2013). This research suggests treating approximately 10-15 percent of their habitat per year will have negligible impacts on their survival. Being mindful of the species residing in the area to be treated when designing treatment strategies can make the difference – *“fishers would use recently thinned habitat as long as sufficient overhead cover (≥50%) and high-valued resources (e.g., den sites) were retained within their home range (Smith, 2021).”*

Sierra Nevada forests are diverse and are home to a wide range of uses, species, and ecosystem services. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy to manage these systems and the path to protecting these values will need to be strategically planned and carefully implemented. The drought and recent fire seasons make it clear that the no-action alternative is not sustainable to these systems and species. Protectively managing the forests to restore ecosystem health will be critical to continued survival. Recent research has begun to help staff understand which events result in high value conditions and how SNC can work to add to the existing diversity while avoiding events that result in lower value habitat. Continued research, coordination between managers and scientists, and collaboration and good-faith efforts are all critical to meeting the challenges facing the Region today and that loom ahead.

Next Steps

The SNC staff will continue to monitor ongoing research on this topic, engage in policy and process discussions, and report back to the Board on any developments.

Recommendation

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

Literature Cited

Eyes, S. A., Roberts, S. L., & Johnson, M. D. (2017). California Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*) habitat use patterns in a burned landscape. *The Condor: Ornithological Applications*, 119(3), 375-388.

Jones, G. M., Kramer, H. A., Whitmore, S. A., Berigan, W. J., Tempel, D. J., Wood, C. M., ... & Peery, M. Z. (2020). Habitat selection by spotted owls after a megafire reflects their adaptation to historical frequent-fire regimes. *Landscape Ecology*, 35(5), 1199-1213.

Smith, T. R. (2021). *Responses of Pacific Fishers to Habitat Changes as a Result of Forestry Practices in Southwestern Oregon* (Doctoral dissertation, Utah State University).

Steel, Z. L., Fogg, A. M., Burnett, R., Roberts, L. J., & Safford, H. D. (2021). When bigger isn't better—Implications of large high-severity wildfire patches for avian diversity and community composition. *Diversity and Distributions*.

Stephens, S. L., Miller, J. D., Collins, B. M., North, M. P., Keane, J. J., & Roberts, S. L. (2016). Wildfire impacts on California spotted owl nesting habitat in the Sierra Nevada. *Ecosphere*, 7(11), e01478.

Stillman, A. N., Siegel, R. B., Wilkerson, R. L., Johnson, M., & Tingley, M. W. (2019). Age-dependent habitat relationships of a burned forest specialist emphasise the role of pyrodiversity in fire management. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 56(4), 880-890.

Tempel, D. J., R. J. Gutiérrez, S. A. Whitmore, M. J. Reetz, R. E. Stoelting, W. J. Berigan, M. E. Seamans, and M. Z. Peery. 2014. Effects of forest management on California spotted owls: implications for reducing wildfire risk in fire-prone forests. *Ecological Applications* 24:2089–2106.

Truex, R. L., & Zielinski, W. J. (2013). Short-term effects of fuel treatments on fisher habitat in the Sierra Nevada, California. *Forest Ecology and Management*, 293, 85-91.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy
September 2, 2021

Key Meetings and Presentations

June 2021 – August 2021

June 30, 2021 – Shared Stewardship panel of USFS Partners: Executive Officer Angela Avery will attend this virtual event which includes people from the CNRA, the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Topics of discussion include proposed state budget investments in fire and forestry, the revamped Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, and shared collaborative opportunities.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy
September 2, 2021

June 2021
through
August 2021

Letters of Support



AUBURN OFFICE
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June 4, 2021

FH Raymond Nominations Committee
Board of Forestry and Fire Protection
P.O. Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Dear FH Raymond Nomination Committee Member:

**RE: NOMINATION OF PACIFIC FOREST TRUST AS A RECIPIENT OF THE 2021
FH RAYMOND AWARD**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is writing in support of the nomination and selection of the Pacific Forest Trust (PFT) as the recipient of the 2021 FH Raymond Award. The PFT is well deserving of this recognition for their 28-year history and contributions to the sustainable management of California's natural resources.

The PFT has fostered and promoted policy and legislation that has facilitated bringing their vision for conservation and stewardship of large working forested landscapes to reality. Their efforts to develop and promote the use of conservation easements as a tool to support sustainable management for the public benefits of privately held forest land have resulted in permanent conservation of over 280,000 acres in California and Oregon.

Development of these projects requires the ability to work with a variety of stakeholders and finding working solutions to often complex issues. Their projects are partnerships with every kind of forest owner, large and small, industrial and non-industrial, tribes and ranchers.

From its inception, PFT has been a leader in ensuring that forest conservation and management are recognized as an essential means to reduce the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide through increasing durable and resilient carbon sequestration. The PFT was instrumental in developing California's rigorous approach to forest carbon offsets, creating a powerful market-based incentive for forest owners who commit to increasing carbon storage on their lands.

WWW.SIERRANEVADA.CA.GOV
TOLL FREE (877)257-1212

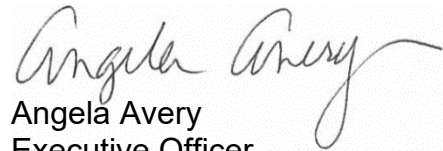


The PFT leads the drive to recognize in law that forested headwaters are essential green infrastructure for California's water systems so that investments can be more effectively made in forest and watershed health at the scale needed due to the challenges of climate change.

The energy and dedication needed to bring these projects together reflects the commitment not only of PFT co-founders Connie Best and Laurie Wayburn, but their impressive organization, Board and staff. Results matter and PFT has consistently achieved results to the benefit of the public, landowners, and our forested landscapes.

These efforts have long term benefits to the forests of California. The PFT is deserving of the FH Raymond Award and they have the full support of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Sincerely,



Angela Avery
Executive Officer





AUBURN OFFICE
11521 Blocker Drive, Ste. 205
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June 15, 2021

Dr. Crystal Kolden
UC Merced
5200 Lake Road
Merced, CA 95343

Dear Dr. Kolden:

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT – NIFA APPLICATION A1451

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) supports UC Merced and the Sierra Sequoia Burn Cooperative (SSBC) in the project entitled: *“Can Fire TEK save western forests and rangelands? Co-producing a framework for collaborative partnerships with tribal fire stewards”*. The proposal will be submitted to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Agricultural and Food Research Initiative Foundational and Applied Research Program, under Sustainable Agroecosystems: Health, Functions, Processes, and Management (A1451).

The SNC is a California state agency with a mission to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region and its rural communities. The SNC’s primary initiative is the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP), a coordinated, collaborative program to restore resilience to the forested landscapes and communities of the Sierra Nevada. The SNC is a leader working with local communities, partners, and tribes to advance the goals of the WIP, and is committed to supporting tribal involvement and empowerment in land management.

In the past several years, interacting abiotic and biotic stressors have disproportionately impacted the southern Sierra Nevada in the form of unprecedented tree mortality and wildfires of extreme scale and intensity. These events have serious implications for the future of these forested ecosystems and the ecological good and services they provide. The SNC recognizes that reestablishing fire in these systems is a critical part of restoring ecological function, reducing fuels, and managing wildfire. Cultural burning and the incorporation of tribal ecological knowledge into prescribed fire projects is a cornerstone of these restoration efforts.

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Dr. Crystal Kolden

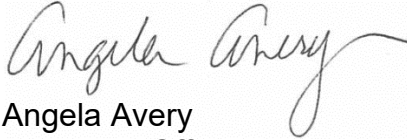
June 15, 2021

Page 2 of 2

To this end, the SNC has been working with the SSBC to fund a series of prescribed and cultural burning training events, aimed at improving the capacity of southern Sierra tribes to implement prescribed burns, while reintroducing fire to culturally important sites in the southern Sierra. The USDA NIFA proposal complements SNC's partnership with the SSBC. It will enable SNC and other agencies interested in forest restoration to better understand and measure the role that collaboratives like the SSBC can have in restoring forest health, as well as the impact of cultural burning in protecting valued assets and mitigating impacts from future wildfires. The implications extend beyond the southern Sierra to the rest of the Sierra Nevada.

The SNC therefore strongly encourages the USDA NIFA to support this proposal.

Sincerely,



Angela Avery
Executive Officer

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June 28, 2021

USDA Forest Service National Partnership Office
U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities
National Forest Foundation

To Whom It May Concern:

**RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR SPURRING COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR
RESILIENT WATERSHED INVESTMENTS: A BLENDED FINANCE STRATEGY TO
UNLOCK CORPORATE, UTILITY, AND PUBLIC FUNDS**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) supports the World Resources Institute's proposal to the Innovative Finance for National Forests grant program titled "Spurring Collective Action for Resilient Watershed Investments: A Blended Finance Strategy to Unlock Corporate, Utility, and Public Funds." This project will be led by a partnership that includes the World Resources Institute, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Blue Forest Conservation, American Water Works Association and is supported by interdisciplinary experts.

This project will help facilitate much needed work on the ground to promote watershed protection and landscape resilience in and near National Forests. The growing threats of wildfire, ecosystem degradation, and overuse of limited water resources will require collective action at a landscape-scale to meet the challenge and protect communities and future generations. The SNC supports this effort that aims to enhance watershed scale collaboration and unlock new sources of funding for on-the-ground projects. The partners have deep experience engaging with corporations providing guidance to meeting their science-based water footprint targets, utilities supporting green bond issuances, and public funders leveraging these funding streams as match.

The SNC believes this project will deliver significant community benefits such as job creation, improved health, wildfire resilience, water security, and more.

Sincerely,

Angela Avery
Executive Officer

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TOLL FREE (877)257-1212





AUBURN OFFICE
11521 Blocker Drive, Ste. 205
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July 26, 2021

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Grants Review Team
1133 Fifteenth St. N.W. Suite 1000
Washington DC 20005

Dear Grants Review Team:

RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE MOONLIGHT FIRE RESTORATION PILE BURN PROJECT

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is strongly supportive of the Moonlight Fire Restoration Pile Burn Project (Project). The SNC works closely with the Feather River Resource Conservation District (District) to implement large scale wildfire and forest restoration activities in the Northern Sierra Nevada. This collaborative Project strategically builds on federal and state funded activities to enhance fire recovery efforts. Collaboration between organizations has demonstrated an increase in project pace and scale, reducing the timeline of post-fire forest succession by restoring mid- to late-seral forest vegetation. This is important for post fire landscape diversity. Restoring this forest type replaces lost habitat, recreates high carbon storage capacity on the landscape, and creates a seed source for natural forest succession.

The Moonlight Fire Restoration Pile Burn Project is the result of concerted efforts from multiple partners to meet collective goals. The District has proven to be an effective partner.

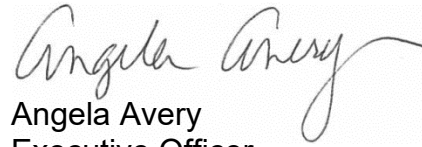
The Project addresses the needs of wildfire recovery in areas affected by high severity wildfire. Pile burning is a costly process, yet one that is necessary in order to complete restoration and recovery in this heavily impacted landscape. The SNC is committed to assisting with these activities and intends to continue supporting the District in this Project.

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The health of forests and watersheds across the Plumas National Forest is of critical importance to the SNC. The activities proposed in this project are part of a larger effort to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire and support forest restoration on the Plumas National Forest. The SNC encourages the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to consider supporting this project.

Sincerely,



Angela Avery
Executive Officer

