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LANDSCAPE
GRANT PROGRAM
GUIDELINES

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Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) created the [Watershed Improvement Program \(WIP\)](#) in 2015 to advance investment and policy support for large-scale, holistic forest-resilience efforts across the Sierra-Cascade region. The SNC has supported partners through every stage of project development, from convening collaborations and identifying landscape needs through project implementation and maintenance. The success of the WIP led to legislative codification within SNC's governing statute in 2018 and multiple rounds of watershed improvement funding. In 2021, California's [Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force](#) was established and set a vision for an integrated, statewide approach to forest health and community resilience and the state rapidly increased the scale of investment to safeguard and improve forest conditions. In response, the SNC developed the [Landscape Investment Strategy](#) in 2022 to improve our ability to deploy funds effectively at scale and leverage SNC's core strengths, including trusted local relationships, deep regional knowledge, and technical expertise.

Although significant progress has been made to restore the health of Sierra-Cascade forests and watersheds, several challenges continue to limit the implementation of restoration and resilience projects at scale:

- **Scale mismatch:** High-severity wildfire, tree mortality, and other major forest disturbances regularly impact tens to hundreds of thousands of acres, while most funding is constrained to project-level efforts, typically limited to a few thousand acres.
- **Fragmented funding:** State and federal restoration and resilience dollars are spread across multiple agencies, departments, and programs with overlapping objectives. Collaborative groups must spend considerable time and resources navigating multiple funding streams, diverting effort from on-the-ground work.
- **Timeline discrepancy:** Grant cycles rarely align with the long-term nature of ecological restoration, which often requires decades of sustained effort and multiple treatments to achieve resilience.

Recognizing the need for organizations to collaborate and plan across large, multi-jurisdictional landscapes, the [Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program \(RFFCP\)](#) was created to build the capacity of subregional collaborative groups¹ to develop, prioritize,

¹ Forest Collaborative: a functioning collaborative group that includes multiple persons or entities representing diverse interests, that is transparent and inclusive, and that has sufficient expertise, capacity, and scientific support to effectively plan, implement, and monitor landscape-level, ecological-based forest restoration activities. (CA Pub Res Code § 4810, 2024)

and implement landscape-scale programs of work. Since its launch in 2021 by the California Department of Conservation, the RFFCP and other capacity investments have substantially strengthened the ability of collaborative groups to work at scale across the Sierra-Cascade region. The SNC Landscape Investment Strategy built on this readiness by creating a vehicle for sustained, flexible, multi-agency investment for collaboratives to work across large landscapes. The Landscape Investment Strategy offers a coordinated framework through which local, state, and federal agencies, funders and partners, can align resources, leverage one another's funding, and pursue shared forest health and wildfire-resilience outcomes.

In 2022, in conjunction with the SNC Landscape Investment Strategy, SNC launched a Landscape Grant Pilot Program (LGPP) as a proof-of-concept, combining SNC and U.S. Forest Service funding under a single agreement and coordinating investment with CAL FIRE. The LGPP generated administrative efficiencies, strengthened interagency coordination, and achieved economies of scale. Lessons from the LGPP, coupled with a growing number of collaboratives with landscape-scale programs of work, have resulted in a Sierra-Cascade region ready for landscape-scale investment.

The SNC is well positioned to lead landscape-scale investment and to work with state, federal, and foundation funders to align resources effectively. Deeply connected to collaboratives across the Sierra-Cascade region, the SNC is a trusted partner with efficient, proven, and flexible grant programs, as well as the administrative capacity and relationships needed to support successful implementation in an environment shaped by climate change, wildfires, and other unexpected challenges. The SNC staff is embedded in local communities, providing firsthand understanding of workforce, wildfire, and operational constraints, with knowledge and experience that enables SNC to navigate bureaucratic and logistical hurdles in close partnership with grantees. We also collaborate with other agencies within the California Natural Resources Agency umbrella, as well as the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force and the RFFCP, ensuring investments are strategic, coordinated, and capable of delivering multiple measurable outcomes. Funders can draw on SNC's regional knowledge, strong partner relationships, and grantmaking expertise, to direct investment to collaboratives with the capacity to implement landscape-scale programs of work or crosscutting regional initiatives that meet specific resilience objectives across multiple landscapes. This coordination will enable funders to streamline administrative processes and create efficiencies for funders and partners alike.

The 2024 Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, and Protecting Communities and Natural Lands from Climate Risks Bond Act of 2024 (Climate Bond) designated \$170 million to "implement regional projects, including but not limited to, landscape-scale projects developed by forest collaboratives as defined in Section 4810, projects developed by regional entities as defined in Section 4208, and projects that implement strategies

developed by state conservancies².” Similarly, the federal Wildfire Crisis Strategy calls for investing at the scale of the problem rather than through fragmented, one-off efforts. The proven success of the LGPP, the expansion of forest collaboratives, and the availability of new landscape-scale funding have prompted the SNC to evolve the LGPP into a fully established initiative across the Sierra-Cascade region—the SNC Landscape Grant Program (LGP).

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² Pub. Resources Code (PRC), section (§) 91520, et seq.

Landscape Grant Program: Scaling up Success

The SNC's organizational structure—small enough to be nimble and responsive yet established and trusted—allows the agency to maintain strong relationships with the people who live in, steward, and manage Sierra-Cascade landscapes. SNC staff live and work in forested communities and engage directly with tribes, land managers, local governments, and collaborative groups advancing land stewardship, forest restoration, and community resilience. With a deep understanding of local conditions and needs, the SNC works closely with partners to align funding, support implementation, and ensure that projects deliver meaningful ecological and community outcomes.

The SNC has formalized insights gained through long-standing engagement with collaboratives working across the Sierra-Cascade in a Regional Priority Plan (RPP), part of a [statewide capacity-tracking effort](#) led by the Department of Conservation. The RPP is an interactive database and map that shows where collaborative groups are working and provides information on membership, governance, project portfolios, and readiness for landscape-scale work. Additional information about the RPP, its connection to SNC's Landscape Investment Strategy and the Landscape Grant Program, and how partners can be included in the database can be found on [SNC's website](#).

The LGP provides substantial funding to enable the advancement of landscape-scale project work. The LGP is also designed to attract and coordinate additional investments from multiple funders. By aligning and, when possible, combining funding streams into a single agreement, the LGP reduces administrative burden for both collaboratives and funders. Although the intent of the program is to reduce community wildfire risk and restore the health and resilience of Sierra-Cascade forests and landscapes, the program's funding is intentionally flexible, empowering local partners to direct resources where they are most needed for planning and implementation. The LGP is a directed grant program that does not issue an open request for proposals. Instead, the program leverages SNC's core strengths, including trusted local relationships, deep regional knowledge, and technical expertise to identify grantees.

Unlike typical project-specific grants, the LGP will primarily be directed towards high-capacity collaborative groups working across multi-jurisdictional landscapes, advancing portfolios of restoration and resilience projects that address ecological and community priorities at a landscape scale. The SNC will also consider funding proven, scalable approaches that address shared challenges across multiple landscapes, and which help advance state priorities related to wildfire resilience, forest health, and nature-based solutions. The SNC may also consider funding activities on specially designated public lands, such as national monuments, which might not otherwise be considered eligible, but which present a special opportunity for landscape-scale impact.

Eligible Funding Recipients

Landscape grants are intended to fund collaborative groups implementing a project portfolio. Collaborative groups will need to identify one or more funding recipients to manage the grant funds. Funding recipients acting to implement the project portfolio must be eligible to receive and manage SNC grant funds. The SNC recognizes that collaboratives are organized in many ways, and it is not the agency's intention to require the administration of a large collaborative grant be the responsibility of a single lead organization. Therefore, if the collaborative determines it is more effective to manage multiple smaller grants, rather than a single larger grant, the SNC may consider alternatives to a single, block grant.

Grant funds may only be awarded to:

- Public agencies: any city, county, special district, joint powers authority, state agency, or federal agency;
- Qualifying 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations: "Nonprofit Organization" means a private, nonprofit organization that qualifies for exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of Title 26 of the United States Code, and whose charitable purposes are consistent with the purposes of the SNC;
- Eligible tribal entities: an Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, or a tribal agency authorized by a tribe, which is one or both of the following: (1) Recognized by the United States and identified within the most current Federal Register; (2) Listed on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission as a California Native American tribe. Eligible tribal entities are encouraged to apply. On September 25, 2020, the Governor released a Statement of Administration Policy on Native American Ancestral Lands to encourage every state agency, department, board, and commission subject to his executive control to seek opportunities to support California tribes' co-management of and access to natural lands that are within a California tribe's ancestral land and under the ownership or control of the state of California. The SNC may give favorable consideration to projects that "assist California tribes with procurement, protection, or management of natural lands located within their ancestral territories, subject to available resources."

Funding Priorities

The Landscape Grant Program aims to connect and align multiple state and federal initiatives investing in collaboration, capacity, science and data, and project planning, permitting, and implementation in the Sierra-Cascade region. With forest health as the foundation, the LGP will support SNC's primary initiative – the Watershed Improvement

Program (WIP) – by funding multi-benefit projects. Projects funded by the LGP should advance SNC and state goals, and priorities as described in one or more of:

- [The Sierra Nevada Conservancy’s Strategic Plan](#)
- [California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan](#)
- [California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force 2025 Key Deliverables](#)
- [California’s Climate Adaptation Strategy](#)
- [2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality](#)
- [California’s Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy](#)
- [Nature Based Solutions Climate Targets](#)
- [30 x 30 California](#)
- [Outdoors for All](#)

Eligible Activities

Projects may include multi-benefit activities that improve forest and watershed health and resilience. Examples of eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

Fuels Reduction – Strategic vegetation treatments (e.g., mechanical treatments, hand treatments and/or beneficial fire) that will reduce wildfire risks, protect communities, critical infrastructure or other valued resources and assets, promote watershed health and forest resilience, improve habitat conditions, and/or protect biodiversity. Transportation costs of woody biomass are eligible for reimbursement.

Beneficial Fire – Expanding the use of beneficial fire and/or reintroducing fire to fire-adapted ecosystems, for example, broadcast burning, pile burning, cultural burning, and activities to prepare a site for fire.

Post-fire recovery – Post-fire restoration and recovery activities, for example, reforestation, hazard tree removal, projects that protect water resources by reducing post-fire sedimentation, and projects that leverage burn footprints to create, enhance, or maintain desired conditions.

Maintenance – Eligible activities that maintain the desired conditions of and/or improvements to previously established and completed projects.

Planning – A portion of the budget may be used for future planning associated with the project portfolio and increasing collaborative capacity.

Recreation, tourism, and public access – A small percentage of the budget may be used for projects or activities that enhance, promote, and develop sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities and increase public access in the Sierra-Cascade region.

Watershed Function– Eligible activities would include those that address water supply timing and quality, address flood risks, protect critical natural and built water infrastructure, restore hydrologic functioning of meadows and riparian corridors.

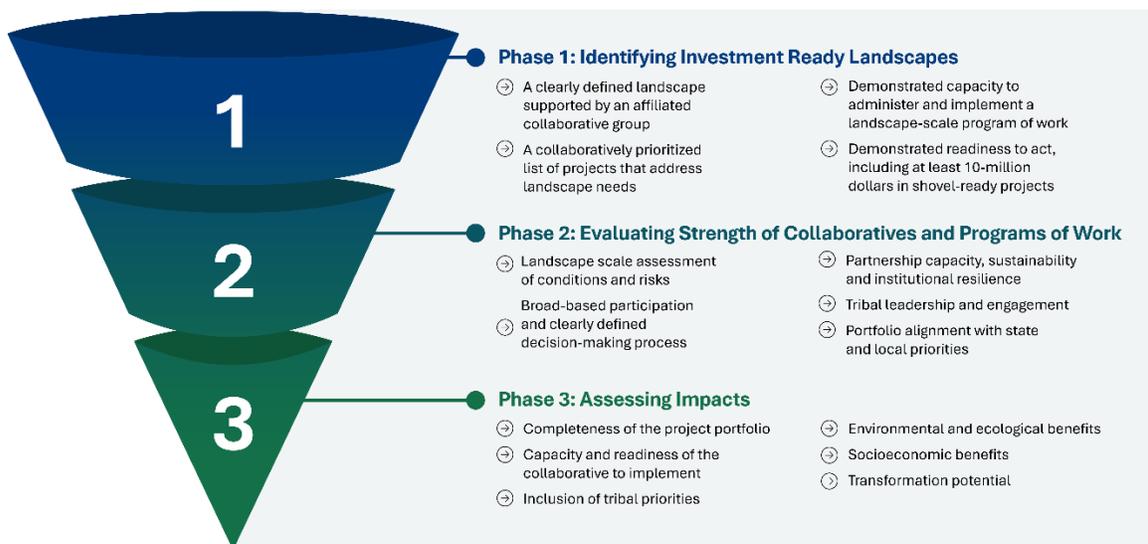
Workforce Education & Training – A component of the project’s scope and budget may include opportunities for workforce development, job training, and job opportunities for vulnerable populations.

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Grant Selection Process

The LGP is a directed program with an internal evaluation process that will occur in three phases: (1) Identification of Investment Ready Landscapes; (2) Evaluation of the administrative and implementation capacities and portfolio development processes of collaborative groups affiliated with those landscapes; (3) Interviews with top-ranking collaborative groups to assess proposed project activities, expected deliverables, and anticipated impacts. Based on these assessments, selected groups will be recommended to SNC’s Governing Board for funding consideration.

Landscape Grant Evaluation Process



Phase I: Identifying Investment Ready Landscapes

To evaluate the readiness of collaborative groups, the SNC draws on longstanding engagement with regional collaboratives, our capacity-building efforts through the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program, and grant management experience through the Local Assistance Program. This information informs SNC’s internal assessment of which collaboratives are ready for landscape-scale investment.

An Investment Ready Landscape is identified by four key attributes: 1) A clearly defined landscape supported by an affiliated collaborative group; 2) A collaboratively prioritized list of projects that address landscape needs; 3) Demonstrated capacity to administer and implement a landscape-scale program of work; 4) Demonstrated readiness to act, including at least \$10 million dollars in shovel-ready projects.

Investment Ready Landscapes are identified through a rigorous internal process, rather than a formal application process. Readiness status is tracked through SNC’s [Regional Priority Plan](#) database and updated annually. The [Investment Ready Landscapes](#) map is a snapshot of the RPP and a tool designed to help guide Landscape Grant Program decision making.



Attributes of an Investment Ready Landscape

A clearly defined landscape supported by an affiliated collaborative group

Investment-Ready Landscape collaboratives bring together partners with diverse perspectives and interests across the landscape. This breadth of expertise grounds priorities in real, on-the-ground needs and supports efficient project implementation. A strong planning process surfaces differing viewpoints early, allowing them to be addressed in project design and reducing the risk of delays or challenges later. Collaboratives may include tribes, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and other groups involved in land and water management and forest and community resilience.

The collaborative group must also be focused on a clear, well-defined landscape for project development and prioritization. Landscapes may be defined by jurisdictional boundaries (e.g. county, national forest, tribal lands), topography (e.g. watershed), ecological features (e.g. species habitat), community-centered considerations (e.g. population centers), or cultural relevance (e.g. Native American ancestral homelands). The landscape should be large enough to support meaningful outcomes, but not so large that projects are scattered and impacts are diluted. While there is no fixed minimum size,

landscapes are generally expected to be at least the size of Hydrologic Unit Code 10 watershed (~100,000 acres).

A collaboratively prioritized list of projects

The collaborative group must have a collaboratively developed, prioritized project portfolio with projects in various stages of readiness. If implemented, the portfolio is expected to deliver multiple, measurable benefits across a large landscape over a 5- to 7-year grant period

Demonstrated capacity to administer and implement a landscape-scale program of work

The collaborative group must demonstrate strong capacity for both administration and on-the-ground implementation. It must include a member organization eligible to receive and manage grant funds or be structured so the collaborative itself is an eligible entity (see Eligibility below). The SNC may consider past performance with similar grant programs when evaluating a partnership's capacity.

Demonstrated readiness to act, including at least \$10 million dollars in shovel-ready projects

The collaborative group's project portfolio must contain at least \$10 million dollars worth of shovel-ready projects with NEPA and CEQA complete and appropriate permits secured.

Phase II: Evaluating Strength of Collaboratives and Programs of Work

All Investment Ready Landscapes represent strong investment opportunities, maintaining robust portfolios of projects that reflect locally defined needs and collaboratively developed priorities. To identify Finalists, the SNC will further evaluate collaboratives to identify those that demonstrate exemplary collaborative structure and project development processes. Collaboratives must demonstrate organizational stability, a strategic and transparent approach to project identification and prioritization, effective project implementation, and strong alignment with state and SNC priorities. These include community protection, watershed and ecosystem health, rural economic development, sustainable recreation and tourism, conservation of natural and working lands, biodiversity, equity and inclusion, and climate adaptation.

This phase evaluates the quality and rigor of the collaborative's structure, membership, planning process and analysis, and project portfolio based on the five criteria described below.

- 1. Landscape-scale assessment of conditions and risks*
The collaborative group has a complete and current assessment of landscape conditions based on best available data and science, local expertise, and/or traditional ecological knowledge, along with a plan and project portfolio that addresses risks and incorporates climate-change considerations.
- 2. Broad-based participation and clearly defined decision-making process*
The collaborative group includes diverse partners representing multiple interests and areas of expertise. The collaborative has a clearly defined project selection process that is transparent, inclusive, and aligned with shared goals.
- 3. Partnership capacity, sustainability, and institutional resilience*
The collaborative group has member organizations that have demonstrated the capacity to administer a large grant, with a proven track record of successful project delivery. The collaborative group demonstrates institutional redundancy, or “bench strength” to ensure continuity beyond any single organization or individual.
- 4. Tribal engagement*
The collaborative group advances tribal priorities and interested tribes are actively involved in project design and prioritization.
- 5. Portfolio alignment with state and local priorities*
The project portfolio addresses risks identified in the landscape assessment, aligns with collaborative goals, and helps meet state and local objectives. Collaborative groups are able to provide a detailed cost assessment and spatial data for priority projects within their portfolio.

Phase III: Assessing Impacts

The third phase of the selection process consists of an interview, during which each Finalist is evaluated on several criteria. These include the value proposition and public benefit of the proposed program of work, the ecological and socioeconomic outcomes, and the transformational potential of the initiative. Phase III evaluation criteria are detailed here:

- 1. Completeness of the project portfolio*
The collaborative group possesses a clear narrative, supported by maps or other visual tools, describing the project portfolio, including specific treatment types, location, timing, acres, and cost estimates for planning and implementation project activities.

2. *Capacity and readiness of the collaborative to implement*

The collaborative group has a clear timeline for advancing and implementing the project portfolio. Environmental compliance, permits, and agreements are in place for implementation activities. There is sufficient workforce capacity, funding (existing and anticipated), and a timeline for both implementation and future planning. The partnership may also identify challenges and potential solutions.

3. *Inclusion of tribal priorities*

Tribal priorities have been incorporated in the project portfolio and tribal projects, workforce, or other priorities are included in the project scope and budget.

4. *Environmental/ecological benefits*

The collaborative group is able to explain the environmental benefits of the project portfolio and the degree of alignment between expected outcomes and state environmental and ecological priorities.

5. *Socioeconomic benefits*

The collaborative group is able to explain the socioeconomic benefits of the project portfolio, including impacts on local economies, workforce development, use of local crews and contractors, use of residual biomass and other socioeconomic benefits expected to result from a Landscape Grant Program grant.

6. *Transformation potential*

The collaborative group can explain how a \$10 million investment would be transformational for the landscape and the collaborative, including how matching funds or other resources would amplify impact. It can explain why large-scale investment is needed now and how such an investment would have an impact on landscape resilience.

Funding Source and Requirements

The primary funding source for the program is [Climate Bond](#) funding appropriated to the SNC under SB 101, the Budget Act of 2025. Approximately \$45 million is available for award under the Landscape Grant Program.

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

Disadvantaged Communities, Severely Disadvantaged Communities, and Vulnerable Populations

The Climate Bond requires that at least 40 percent of the total funds available be allocated for projects that provide meaningful and direct benefits to vulnerable populations or disadvantaged communities. Of this 40 percent, at least 10 percent of the total funds available shall be allocated for projects that provide meaningful and direct benefits to severely disadvantaged communities. The Climate Bond identifies Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged on the [Disadvantaged Communities Map](#). The SNC will evaluate adherence with these requirements when considering awards under the program.

Environmental Compliance Documents

The SNC requires all projects comply with CEQA at the time the Board authorizes a grant. Since the complexity of CEQA compliance will vary depending on the proposed project activities and the type of applicant, it is important that applicants consult with SNC staff as early as possible to discuss which CEQA documents will be required.