

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY**

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program Safe Drinking Water,  
Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Act of  
2006 (Proposition 84)**

**Applicant:** SIERRA FOOTHILL CONSERVANCY

**Project Title:** TOPPING RANCH CONSERVATION ELEMENT

**Subregion:** SOUTH CENTRAL SIERRA

**County:** MADERA

**SNC Funding:** \$875,890.00

**Total Project Cost:** \$1,322,570.00

**Application Number:** 346

**Final Score:** 92.3

**PROJECT SCOPE**

The purpose of the project is to expand land conservation in the central Sierra foothills by placing a conservation easement on 1,362 acres of the historic Topping Ranch, which is located on Kennedy Table, approximately seven miles east of the intersection of Highway 41 and Road 200 in Madera County. The completion of the Topping project will protect 4,350 contiguous ranchland, important vernal pool habitat and blue oak woodland habitat. This large block of private land is also contiguous with over 25,000 acres of federal and state lands along the upper San Joaquin River Corridor, which connects with the Sierra National Forest. The project includes the following Assessor's Parcel Numbers: 051-130-023 (426 acres); 051-130-003 (456 acres); 051-130-008 (40 acres); 051-130-006 (320 acres); and 050-232-007 (120 acres).

The grantee has leveraged an estimated total of \$439,680 in funding and resources for this project. The project will protect the physical, cultural, and living resources of the Ranch; expand land conservation and connectivity within the Fine Gold Creek Drainage and the San Joaquin River Corridor; and preserve the viability of a working ranch and the local ranching infrastructure and economy. Long-term project benefits of the project include: protecting the water quality of one of California's largest rivers, preserving a scenic viewshed and diverse biological habitats, and maintaining a large historic ranch that demonstrates the compatibility of viable working landscapes with the protection of natural resources in the Sierra Nevada.

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Complete Baseline Document Report	July 2011
Complete Management Plan	July 2011
Close Escrow and Record Conservation Easement	July 2011
Erect Sign on Property Recognizing Project	August 2011
Celebration Event and Press Release	August 2011
Submit Final Report to SNC	August 2011
<b>FINAL PAYMENT/FINAL PAYMENT REQUEST</b>	<b>09/31/2011</b>

## PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Conservation Easement Purchase	\$ 820,000.00
Closing Costs (Escrow fees and title insurance)	3,500.00
Development of the baseline documentation report, Conservation Management Plan and Conservation Easement Drafting	6,320.00
Legal Review of Conservation Easement	1,800.00
Sign recognizing SNC and Prop 84 funds	1,000.00
Performance Measure evaluation & interim & final reports	1,320.00
<b>Administrative Costs:</b>	
Overhead: facilities, utilities, supplies, ins. etc.	25,228.00
Grant management & financial oversight	16,722.00
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 875,890.00</b>

## PROJECT SUPPORT LETTERS

- Audubon California, Director of Public Policy
- State of California Natural Resources Agency, Department of Fish and game, Central Region
- California Native Plant Society, Vegetative Program Director and Executive Director
- Fresno Audubon Society, President
- Marry Ann McCrary (Former Region 4 Botanist for Department of Fish & Game)
- The Nature Conservancy, San Joaquin Valley Project Director
- San Joaquin River Partnership
- Sierra Business Council
- Joanna Clines, Forest Botanist of the Sierra National Forest, Bass Lake Ranger District, of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Services

## **PROJECT PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

There are four Performance Measures common to all grants. In addition, grantees are required to include between one and three project-specific measures. Performance Measures listed here represent those proposed by applicants and may be modified through further discussion with SNC staff.

- Acres of Land Conserved
- Number of Special Significance Sites Protected and Preserved
- Linear Feet of Stream Bank Protected or Restored

## PROJECT SUMMARY

**County: Madera**

**Applicant: Sierra Foothill Conservancy**

**Project Title: Topping Ranch Conservation Easement**

### PROJECT GOAL

Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) has an incredible opportunity to expand land conservation in the central Sierra foothills by placing a conservation easement on 1,362 acres of the historic Topping Ranch. The major objectives for this project are to: 1) protect the physical, cultural, and living resources of the Ranch 2) expand land conservation and connectivity within the Fine Gold Creek Drainage and the San Joaquin River Corridor, and 3) preserve the viability of a working ranch and the local ranching infrastructure and economy.

The Topping Ranch Project is a good fit for SNC Proposition 84 funding because it protects the water quality of one of California's largest rivers, preserves a scenic view shed and diverse biological habitats, and maintains a large historic ranch that demonstrates the compatibility of viable working landscapes with the protection of natural resources in the Sierra Nevada.

### PROJECT SCOPE

Topping Ranch is located on Kennedy Table, approximately seven miles east of the intersection of Highway 41 and Road 200 in Madera County. The Ranch encompasses the southern half of the top of Kennedy Table and its southern and western slopes. Kennedy Table is a key property within the Fine Gold Creek drainage and the San Joaquin River corridor.

The Ranch totals 1,962 stunning acres, which includes 600 acres of prime northern basalt-flow vernal pool habitat already protected under conservation easement. This portion of the Ranch is now a vernal pool mitigation bank permitted by the U. S Fish and Wildlife Service. The remaining 1,362 acres of Topping Ranch consists of blue oak woodland and annual grassland habitat.

In 2007, California Rangeland Trust purchased a conservation easement on the adjacent 2,400 acre Van Allen Ranch which borders Topping Ranch to the north. The completion of the Topping project will protect 4,350 contiguous ranchland, important vernal pool habitat and blue oak woodland habitat. This large block of private land is also contiguous with over 25,000 acres of federal and state lands along the upper San Joaquin River Corridor, which connects with the Sierra National Forest upriver.

The proposed project is the continuation of a twenty year long collaborative effort that has resulted in protected lands within the upper San Joaquin River Corridor and the Fine Gold Creek Drainage. Partners in this process include local landowners, the California Department of Fish and Game, the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and the California Rangeland Trust. As shown by the map included in Section 12, the Topping Ranch is centrally located between other protected properties. The Kennedy Table Area has also been identified by the California Department of Fish and Game as an important area for land conservation in the Millerton Watershed Conceptual Area Protection Plan (CAPP).

By ensuring that Topping Ranch remains undeveloped, the water quality of the 2.4 miles of seasonal creeks (22,176 ft) which drain into Fine Gold Creek, and the San Joaquin River will be protected from added sediment and hazardous material runoff associated with development. Furthermore, the property will preserve an important working landscape by increasing the viability of the cattle operation far into the future.

### LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Audubon California  
 CA Department of Fish and Game  
 California Native Plant Society  
 Fresno Audubon  
 Mary Ann McCrary, Former DFG Botanist

The Nature Conservancy  
 The San Joaquin River Partnership  
 Sierra Business Council  
 Sierra National Forest

### SNC PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Complete Baseline Document Report	May 2011
Complete Management Plan	May 2011
Close Escrow and Record Conservation Easement	June 2011
Erect Sign on Property Recognizing Project	June 2011
Celebration Event and Press Release	June 2011
<b>Submit Final Report to SNC</b>	<b>July 2011</b>

### SNC PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
<b>Direct Costs:</b>	
Fair Market Value Purchase of Conservation Easement	\$820,000.00
Escrow Fees, Title Insurance, Closing Costs	\$3,500.00
Staff Time, Personnel Expense	\$6,320.00
Contracts/Consultants	\$1,800.00
Materials/Supplies (project related)	\$1,000.00
Appraisal	\$7,000.00
<b>Indirect Costs:</b>	
Performance Measure Reporting	\$1,320.00
<b>Total Project Budget</b>	<b>\$840,940.00</b>
<b>Administrative Costs:</b>	
Overhead (facilities, utilities, program supplies, insurance, etc.)	\$25,228.00
Grant management and financial oversight	\$16,722.00
<b>SNC GRANT TOTAL</b>	<b>\$882,890</b>