

Sierra Nevada Conservancy-Progress Report

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2008 (Proposition 84)**

Grantee Name: Inyo National Forest, Mammoth Ranger District

Project title: Mill City Fuels Reduction Project

SNC Reference Number: SNC 070358

Submittal Date: January 22, 2013

Report Preparer: Dale Johnson

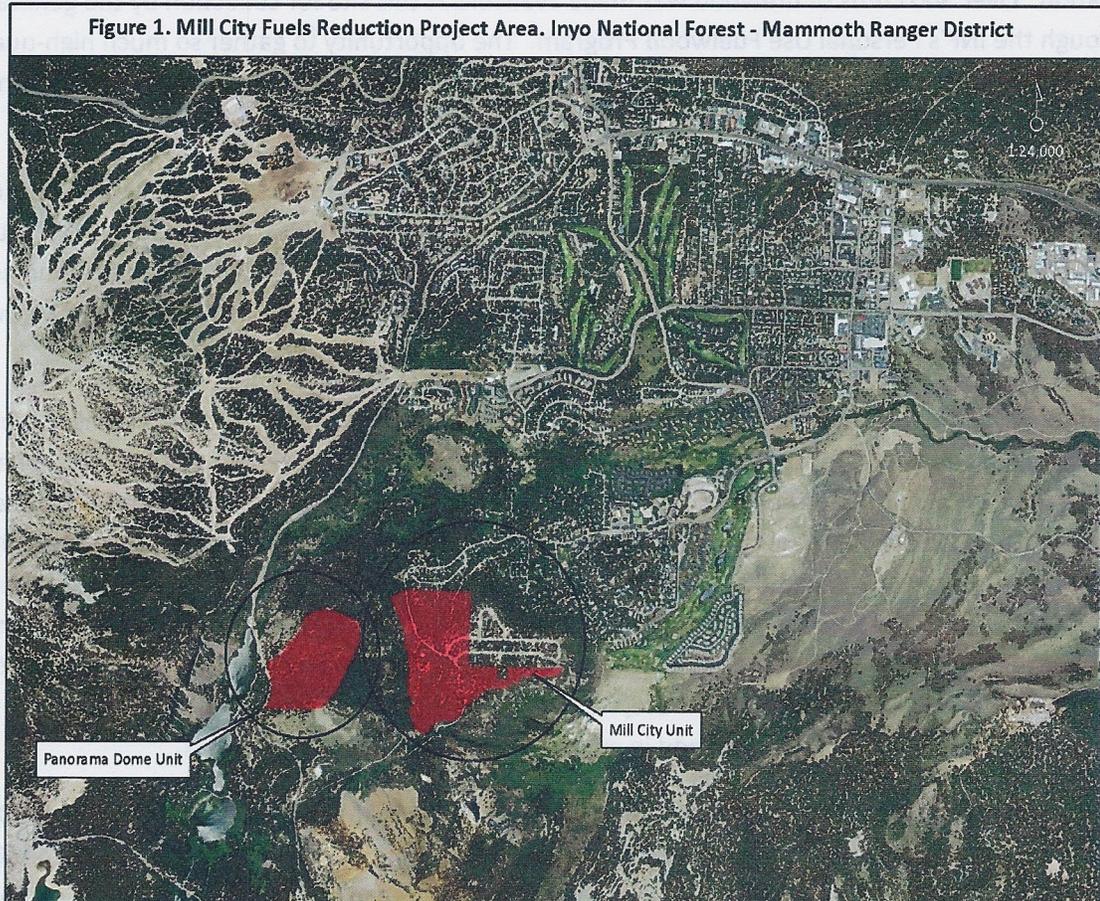
Phone #: 760-872-5055

Check one:

Final Report

6-Month Progress Reports should reflect the previous six months. **Final Reports** should reflect the entire grant period.

Figure 1. Mill City Fuels Reduction Project Area. Inyo National Forest - Mammoth Ranger District



A. Progress Report Summary

The *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* agreement between the Inyo National Forest (INF) and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) has been completed. Through the support of this grant and additional funding appropriated to the Forest Service by the U.S. Congress, the INF was able to reduce hazardous fuels conditions on 113 acres of forested land adjacent to the community of Mammoth Lakes, in Mono County, California. The project consisted of the 61-acre "Mill City Unit" and the 52-acre "Panorama Dome Unit." See map shown above.

Initial vegetation treatments began on the Mill City Unit in 2008 with the award of a contract to Patty's Forestry Service, Inc. from Lindsay, California for tree thinning & pruning, brush mastication, chipping, and hauling services. The contractor was also required to perform rehabilitation and restoration work to minimize equipment and operations impacts to hiking trails, drainage crossings, and to prevent unauthorized road or trail proliferation. In 2009 a second contract was awarded to Patty's Forestry Service, Inc. for the completion of work on the Mill City Unit. Because of an early snowfall, all operations were not completed until 2010.

As operations at the Mill City Unit progressed under the 2008 service contract, it became apparent that far more firewood-sized material was being generated than was anticipated. To remedy this situation, the Forest Service modified the 2009 contract to include hauling the material to an accessible, nearby location. Over 300 cords of firewood was made available at this site for collection by the general public through the INF's Personal Use Fuelwood Program. The opportunity to gather so much high-quality firewood close to the Mammoth Lakes community proved to be extremely popular with the general public and all material was quickly removed from the site.

During this same time period, the INF partnered with the Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District (MLFPD), California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE), and California Department of Corrections – Owens Valley Conservation Camp to conduct fuels treatments on three acres adjacent to the Mill City Unit and six acres adjacent to the Panorama Dome Unit. The work conducted by these entities was similar in scope to that being completed by the contractor on the larger units.

Additionally, Forest Service personnel conducted field layout work and an associated timber cruise on the remaining 46-acre Panorama Dome Unit. The geographic location, timber volume, and other natural resource protection requirements allowed for the use of the Integrated Resource Service Contract (or "Stewardship Contract"), rather than a straight service contract as was used on the Mill City Unit. The Stewardship Contract allowed the Forest Service to offset the cost of some of the required fuels reduction work by the value of the timber product, in this case 966 cords of lodgepole and fir firewood. In November 2010 the Inyo National Forest awarded the *Panorama Dome Stewardship Contract* to Smith Crane & Rigging from Mound House, Nevada in the amount of \$111,286.00, reduced to \$83,613.62 by the value of the firewood in exchange for fuels reduction services.

Operations on the *Panorama Dome Stewardship Contract* were anticipated to start on July 1, 2011, but due to record snowfall during the 2010-2011 winter, operations were delayed until September 8, 2011 to allow wet soils to dry adequately. Smith Crane & Rigging began tree cutting & pruning, chipping,

piling, hauling, and restoration and rehabilitation operations, but due to the late start was unable to complete all contract requirements before winter shutdown occurred. In a November 29, 2011 letter to the SNC, the INF requested a one-year extension to complete the work on the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* agreement due to unanticipated record snowfall in the area. SNC granted the request. In July 2012 operations re-started on the Panorama Dome Unit and by November 2012 all contracted work was completed.

B. Deliverables or Outcomes Completed During this Reporting Period or Milestones Achieved

- This project helped foster a spirit of collaboration and unity of purpose between the INF, MLFPD, CALFIRE, and the other entities involved toward the meaningful reduction of hazardous fuels in and around the community of Mammoth Lakes. INF staff also worked closely with numerous adjoining private property owners and recreational residence permittees in the Mill City Tract to increase their understanding of the important role fuels reduction plays in increasing firefighter and community safety in the event of a wildfire.
- Awarded two service contracts to Patty's Forestry Service Inc. and one Stewardship Contract to Smith Crane & Rigging. All contracts were successfully completed by the contractors.
- A total of 113 acres were treated for hazardous fuels reduction between the Mill City (61 acres) and Panorama Dome (52 acres) units. Photos 1 thru 4 provide a sample of the visual results from each unit.
- Over 300 cords of firewood collected by the general public through the INF's Personal Use Fuelwood Program.
- Over \$27,000 saved through use of a Stewardship Contract at the Panorama Dome Unit, essentially off-setting the cost of fuels reduction work by the value of 966 cords of firewood.



Photo 1. Pre-treatment at Mill City Unit



Photo 2. Post-treatment at Mill City Unit

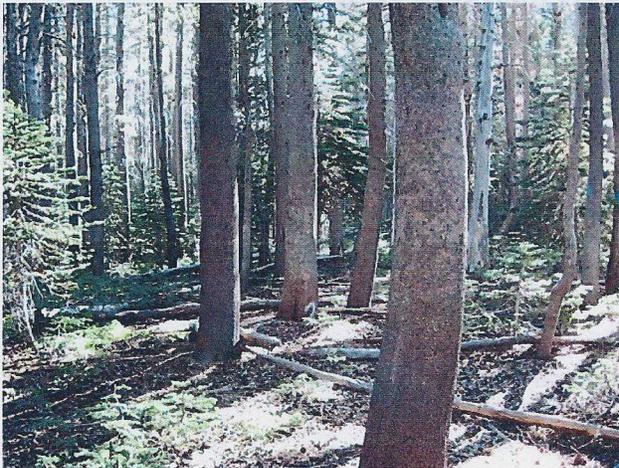


Photo 3. Pre-treatment at Panorama Dome Unit



Photo 4. Post-treatment at Panorama Dome Unit

C. Challenges or Opportunities Encountered

Many challenges were encountered and overcome throughout the life of the project. First, conducting fuels treatments adjacent to private lands was a delicate balance in creating an effective defense zone while working with individual homeowners on a variety of issues from maintaining screening to not cutting their favorite tree.

Second, the project area had numerous historic and prehistoric cultural resource sites requiring special protection measures during project implementation. To overcome these challenges, Forest Service personnel included site-specific contract requirements designed to prevent accidental damage to these important resources. Machinery was excluded from the most sensitive sites, while in other areas a bed of wood chips was required to protect sensitive areas from ground disturbance. Additionally, the Forest

Service had an archaeologist on-site directing work at all the most critical times. These efforts resulted in full protection of all cultural resources in close proximity to the project area. See Photos 5 and 6.



Photo 5. Handwork conducted near historic stamp mill site



Photo 6. Protective chip bed in a cultural resource site

Lastly, balancing resource mitigations stated in the environmental analysis along with the unpredictable weather in the eastern Sierra proved to be the ultimate challenge and what eventually led to a delay in the completion of the project. The units were located between 8,000 to 9,000 feet just below Mammoth Pass in densely covered forest which did not allow soils to dry quickly and typically not allowing work to commence until late summer/early fall. Additionally, during the project time period Mammoth Lakes experienced above average winters (400+ inches of snow) and a record year during the 2010-2011 winter in which the area saw 669 inches of snowfall with storms lasting well into June.

The INF had the opportunity to implement and successfully complete the Forest's first stewardship contract on the Panorama Dome Unit. The location, access, and merchantability of the timber product on this unit allowed the Forest Service to offset the cost of extensive fuels reduction service work by the

value of the firewood. This resulted in interest from contractors who had not previously been active in past service contracting solicitations on the INF. As a result, the INF was able to complete the project more efficiently and at a savings over what would have been expected using the traditional service contracting instrument.

D. Unanticipated Successes Achieved

The *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* was directly responsible for significant additional funding and fuels reduction work in the Mammoth Lakes area. The MLFPD applied for and received \$400,000 in additional federal funding for *fuels reduction on private lands adjoining Forest Service land where fuels reduction work is ongoing*. To date, 120 acres of private land have been treated on MLFPD’s *Lost Lane Fuels Reduction Project*, with an additional 60 acres scheduled for the upcoming season. The MLFPD was able to highlight the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* and the SNC funding support in their *Lost Lane* application package and as a result, the project ranked near the top of all projects submitted to the Forest Service within California for federal funding of fuels reduction work on private land.

E. Compare Actual Costs to Budgeted Costs

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	SNC Dollars	Forest Service Dollars	Actual Total Dollars
Mill City Unit (67 acres) Contract (C) & Admin. (A)	\$3,471.38 (A)	174,350.00 (C) \$3,500.00 (A)	\$181,321.38
Panorama Dome Unit (46 acres) Contract (C) & Admin. (A)	\$83,613.62 (C) \$12,914.00 (A)	\$3,500.00 (A)	\$127,700.00
GRAND TOTAL	\$99,999.00	\$181,350.00	\$309,021.38

Note: Due to the Proposition 84 bond freeze, much of the work completed on the Mill City Unit in 2008 and 2009 was funded and accomplished using annual appropriations from the U.S. Congress to the Forest Service, rather than a mix of SNC and Forest Service funds. Once the SNC grant funding became available in late 2010, it was used almost exclusively for the work at Panorama Dome.

F. Do you have information to report on the project-specific Performance Measures for your project?

The Performance Measure commitment for this agreement between the SNC and the INF was to conduct vegetation treatments on 55 acres at the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* which would reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect the community, water quality, and recreation values by improving fire resiliency.

- The actual accomplishment was 113 acres and the improved conditions are documented in the photographs provided earlier in this document and on the enclosed CD.

- Pre-treatment fuel loads were estimated at 13 - 15 tons per acre and post-treatment fuel loads are estimated 2 - 4 tons per acre, for an estimated overall fuel load reduction of 78% resulting from implementation of project.

G. Were there any other relevant materials produced under the terms of this Agreement that are not a part of the budgeted deliverables? If so, please attach copies.

A CD of pre- and post-treatment photographs is included with this final report.

H. Next Steps

Forest Service personnel will continue monitoring both units. It is anticipated that maintenance treatments will be needed in five to ten years to maintain fuels reduction treatment effectiveness.

Please Complete this Section for FINAL Report ONLY

Capacity-Building Results and Collaboration and Cooperation with Stakeholders

The INF was able to strengthen its partnerships with the MLFPD, the Mammoth Lakes FireSafe Council, and CALFIRE through collaboration and cooperation on this project. These entities provided letters of support, aided in determining treatment unit locations, and many uncounted hours helping to educate residents and visitors on the importance of hazardous fuels reduction in and around the community of Mammoth Lakes. Additionally, the MLFPD assisted with initial on-the-ground vegetation treatment efforts in and around the Mill City Recreational Residence Tract and administration of the Owens Valley Conservation Camp crews, who were also working on the project. This allowed Forest Service personnel to concentrate administration efforts on the larger, more complex service contract units.

This grant had a direct, significant impact on the INF's capacity to reduce hazardous fuels and increase forest and watershed resiliency to wildfire by augmenting funding to accomplish the difficult and expensive work associated with the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project*. The access and logistics of working near homes and other structures, steep terrain, riparian areas, and in and around archaeological sites can be especially slow and challenging. Implementation costs often reach their peak in these situations.

Perhaps most impressive (and as mentioned in Section D above), are the indirect impacts that have resulted from the SNC support for this project. Because of the SNC support, the MLFPD was able to submit a very strong proposal for federal funding of fuels reduction work on private lands adjoining an active fuels reduction project on federal lands. In 2010 the MLFPD's *Lost Lane Fuels Reduction Project* was approved and \$400,000 in federal funding was received. The partnership between the MLFPD and the INF, through the SNC grant for the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project*, made the the application one of the strongest proposals received from anywhere in California.

As successful collaboration with SNC on the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* appeared imminent in 2012, the INF to submitted another fuels reduction and watershed protection grant proposal to SNC. Near the community of June Lake in Mono County, California, the *June Loop Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project* is highly similar in scope and complexity to the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project*. In September 2012 the INF was awarded \$327,500 from SNC for work on this project, beginning in 2013. Following MLFPD's example, the June Lake Fire Protection District (JLFPD) submitted a proposal for federal funding of fuels reduction on private lands adjoining an active project on federal lands. Once final 2013 federal budget allocations are made, it is highly anticipated that this work on private lands in the June Lake area will also receive full funding support.

Description of Project Accomplishments

1. Most Significant Accomplishment

One hundred-thirteen acres of Forest Service lands adjoining the community of Mammoth Lakes received significant fuels reduction treatments which have resulted in increased forest and watershed resiliency to wildfire and reduced risk of high-intensity wildfire to firefighters, residents, homes, businesses, and other infrastructure in the community of Mammoth Lakes.

2. WOW Factor

Implementation at the Panorama Dome Unit resulted in creation of over 1,000 cubic yards of wood chips from the chipping of sub-merchantable material, logging slash, and existing dead and down wood. These chips were then transported to Mammoth Mountain Ski Area for use around their facilities and to the Bridgeport Airport for erosion control use during runway reconstruction. See Photos 7 and 8.



Photo 7. Decked material ready for chipping

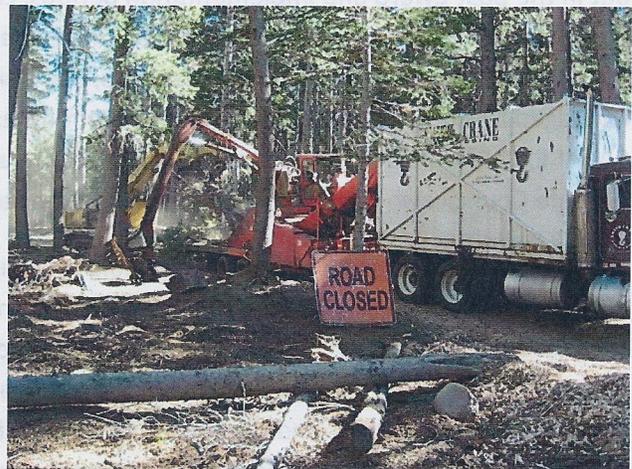


Photo 8. Chipping operations in progress

3. Design and Implementation

At the Mill City Unit the INF used a service contract with Patty's Forestry Service Inc. to accomplish the required fuels reduction work. Larger sized material was hauled to an accessible location for public gathering as firewood for home heating. While this method was very popular with the local wood-gathering public, significant cost savings were realized at the Panorama Dome Unit where a Stewardship Contract was awarded to Smith Crane & Rigging and the fuels reduction treatment costs were offset by the value of the merchantable firewood material which the contractor subsequently removed and re-sold. Service contracting and Stewardship contracting both have merits and careful consideration of factors such as wood products available, potential markets, public perceptions and expectations, unit terrain and accessibility,

equipment restrictions, required resource protection measures, etc. before deciding on a preferred contract type.

4. Indirect Impact

As previously stated, work on the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* allowed the MLFPD to apply for additional federal funds to conduct hazardous fuels reduction work on private land which adjoin Forest Service land where an active fuels reduction project exists. The MLFPD received \$400,000 toward their *Lost Lane Fuels Reduction Project* and the existence of the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* was directly responsible for this award. To date, 120 acres of private land adjoining Forest Service lands have been treated to reduce hazardous fuels, with an additional 60 acres planned for 2013.

5. Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

During the life of the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* the INF collaborated closely with the MLFPD. Initially this collaboration was intended simply to submit the strongest possible proposal to SNC for grant funding, but in the post-award and implementation periods, collaboration continued. Personnel from the MLFPD completed fuels reduction implementation on several smaller units, provided strong support for the project through local media venues, public meetings, and person-to-person communication, and successfully leveraged this project into a separate grant to fund fuels reduction work on adjoining private lands. CALFIRE, California Department of Corrections – Owens Valley Conservation Camp, and Mammoth Lakes FireSafe Council also made significant contributions toward the success of this project.

These various agencies and entities were able to avoid any serious conflict by maintaining a dedicated focus on providing meaningful fuels reduction to the community of Mammoth Lakes. Not unexpectedly, where occasional conflict did occur was at close proximity to private homes or recreational cabins during implementation. The vast majority of homeowners and cabin owners supported the project, but a few were reluctant to see any trees and shrubs cut from near their structures. Loss of natural screening, loss of wildlife habitat, increased noise, and simple opposition to any changes were some of the reasons given for their opposition. Forest Service and/or MLFPD personnel met with these individuals on a case-by-case basis, discussed project goals, implementation options, and in some instances had the individuals assist in deciding which trees were marked for cutting and which were to be retained. This approach did not win over everyone, but reduced the conflict to only one or two remained steadfastly opposed to the entire project.

6. Capacity-Building

The INF is one of 18 national forests in California and has traditionally ranked in the lower one-quarter in funding received for fuels reduction and other vegetation treatment programs. Funding allocations are made by the U.S. Congress on a year to year basis and there is very little ability to predict and plan future fuels reduction budgets for the INF. As such, INF personnel are always seeking opportunities to build

partnerships, leverage scarce funding, and submit project proposals for outside funding support. Single undertakings such as the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project* often take several years to fully implement because of limited agency funding and the need to reduce fuels in and around the numerous communities making up the eastern Sierra region. The INF continues to maintain an outstanding staff of environmental planners, resource specialists, and implementation professionals committed to the important work of fuels reduction, at whatever level budgets permit.

As has been covered elsewhere in this report, this grant had a direct, significant impact on the INF's capacity to reduce hazardous fuels and increase forest and watershed resiliency to wildfire by augmenting funding to accomplish the difficult and expensive work associated with the *Mill City Fuels Reduction Project*. Perhaps even more impressively, are the indirect impacts that have resulted from the SNC support for this project. In 2010 the MLFPD's *Lost Lane Fuels Reduction Project* was approved and \$400,000 in federal funding was received for fuels reduction on private lands. And in September 2012 the INF was awarded \$327,500 from SNC in support of implementation work on the *June Loop Fuels Reduction Project* project, beginning in 2013. Following MLFPD's example, the June Lake Fire Protection District (JLFPD) submitted a highly competitive proposal for federal funding of fuels reduction on private lands adjoining an active project on federal lands.

7. Challenges

- Adjoining Property Owners Opposed to Project – This challenge was reviewed in Section 5, above, is usually limited to a small minority of those who express interest in the project. Sizable majorities usually support fuels reduction in close proximity to homes, communities, and other infrastructure.
- Proposition 84 Bond Freeze – This challenge was unanticipated and completely out of any local control. INF personnel were poised to authorize the start of contractor operations on the Mill City Unit when grant funding was frozen due to the fiscal crisis in California's state budget. Since there was no estimate of when the funding might be unfrozen, INF and SNC personnel worked closely together to ensure timely progress on the project using INF contributed funds. Eventually Proposition 84 bond funding became available and was largely used on the Panorama Dome Unit.

8. Photographs

In addition to the photographs displayed in this final report, a CD has also been included.

9. Post Grant Plans

As previously stated in Section H above, Forest Service personnel will continue monitoring both the Mill City and Panorama Dome units. It is anticipated that maintenance treatments will be needed in five to ten years to maintain fuels reduction treatment effectiveness.

10. Post Grant Contact

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SNC-approved Performance Measures

Please refer to Section F of this report for the Performance Measure pertaining to this agreement.