

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: Nevada County Resource Conservation District

Project title: Nevada County Community Shaded Fuelbreak and
Riparian Forest Restoration Project

SNC Reference Number: SNC #070133 **Submittal Date:** 09-30-2011

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Check one:

6-Month Progress Report
 Final Report

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

**** Period covered in this report: January 1, 2008 – September 30, 2011 *Final Report***

A. Progress Report Summary: (Please provide a general description of work completed during this reporting period.)

This grant was awarded in May of 2008 to the Nevada County Resource Conservation District (NCRCD) to complete the remaining 30% of the Nevada County Community Shaded Fuelbreak. This was a collaboration of local organizations, communities, government, and fire agency partners. Begun in 2004 to add additional fire protection to the communities of Cascade Shores, Scotts Flat Lake area and the cities of Grass Valley and Nevada City, the fuelbreak encompasses 3,000 + acres and over 15 miles of strategic ridge-top property.

GIS work was completed in this large area to define the parcels designated within the project, to determine the best routes accessible by heavy equipment and man-power for the project, as well as the most defensible routes in the event of a catastrophic fire event. CalFire, Nevada County Consolidated Fire, and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) were instrumental in their assistance and expertise with this survey. Much of the area had been surveyed in the past by different organizations under the USDA EQIP program, the USFS fuel load database, CalFIRE database and local fire agencies, but there was not a single database with all the information combined into one format. Once the database was complete, area maps were developed for all those agencies involved to use as a base for on-the-ground-work and other projects.

The NCRCD hired Applied Forest Management (AFM) as project managers to oversee the ground work in the fuelbreak, and to assist the NCRCD in preparing a Solicitation-Offer-Award for ground crews to bid the project. Firestorm W.F.S. and Donald Prairie were awarded the final contracts.

NCRCD received a Categorical Notice of Exemption from the State of California, Office of Planning and Research, under Article 19, Section 15304 “minor alteration to land”.

AFM began the process of contacting landowners in the designated area through letter writing and door-to-door contact. Contracts were developed and NCRCD and AFM began signing agreements with landowners in March of 2010. As the work progressed, more and more individuals were encouraged to sign contracts based on the positive results they saw and feedback received from their neighbors; those first few landowners.

After several starts and stops, the ground work on this project was completed on July 20, 2011.

B. Deliverables or Outcomes completed during this Reporting Period or Milestones Achieved: (Include specific information, such as public meetings held, agency participation, partnerships developed, or acres mapped, treated or restored.)

1. At least nine (9) meetings were held for those private landowners and public agencies that had property in the fuelbreak area. Nevada Irrigation District (NID) was instrumental in allowing access to their properties and adjoining parcels.
2. Several *Power Point* presentations were shown at home owners associations and various meetings with agency partners (see Appendix I).
3. Project maps were developed of the fuelbreak area and sections were created for easier planning and access for the contractors (these maps were continually updated to reflect the additional landowner agreements and any other changes to the fuelbreak-see Appendix II).
4. Multiple tours for partners were held; for information on the fuelbreak and agency input as well as one tour for potential contractors who would submit bids for the ground work.
5. Letters were developed to send to prospective participants and contracts were developed for landowners to sign on for the project (see Appendix III).
6. A project sign was designed by NCRCD and installed in the project area (see Appendix IV).
7. A Solicitation-Offer-Award was sent to prospective contractors (see Appendix V).
8. We received multiple commendations from the community within the fuelbreak, many of them as thank you letters (see AFM Final Report Appendix VI).

C. Challenges or Opportunities Encountered: (Please describe what has worked and what hasn't; include any solutions you initiated to resolve problems. If your project is not on schedule, please explain why here.)

The most significant challenge for this large project was in encouraging private landowners to allow access to their property. Many people did not understand the scope of the project and were very hesitant of anyone working on their land. Overcoming the 'fear' of clear-cutting, loss of privacy, perceived government involvement, and a general misconception of the fuelbreak was a slow process when we began on-the-ground work. Our initial contracts provided enough parcels to begin the work. As an individual property was completed and became visible to surrounding properties, and with AFM continuing to re-contact the area landowners, eventually 34 people contracted with the NCRCD, many with multiple properties (see Appendix VII). (Performance Measure 6)

D. Unanticipated Successes Achieved: (Please describe any additional successes beyond completing scheduled tasks or meeting scheduled milestones.)

1. The data collected during the initial phase of the project was determined to be of tremendous value to CalFIRE and other agencies that use GIS databases during fire incidents, fire emergencies, and other county scenarios. Until this project began, there wasn't one single database that would show previous clearing on private lands and public lands, fuelbreaks, previous contracts with NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and other areas that had clearing done, or none at all. This information is crucial to incident commanders of fire agencies in the event of a catastrophic fire event.

2. Renewed work on the heavy fuel loads in the project area re-kindled the interest of several homeowners associations to again address fire issues at their meetings. In 2008 Nevada County noted the twenty year old event of the devastating 49'er Fire of 1988 where 144 homes and 219 other structures were either destroyed or damaged, 35,300 acres burned, and \$7.5 million was spent to suppress a fire that had tremendous fuel loads in its path. This historic fire (the 13th worst fire on record at that time for California) was largely considered 'un-stoppable' due to the buildup of years of ground fuels. Most of Nevada County has either forgotten this tragedy or were not living here at the time. The education portion of this grant, the outreach to communities and home owner's groups, has made Nevada County residents again aware of our wildland urban interface.

Nevada County fire personnel continue to raise awareness regarding such fire incidents and use the completed fuelbreak as an example of what local residents can do to help protect their homes from wildfire.

E. Compare Actual Costs to Budgeted Costs: (Please refer to your grant agreement to list your deliverables/budget categories and budgeted costs compared to actual costs incurred during this reporting period in the table below.)

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	Budgeted SNC Dollars	Actual Dollars
Project Management	\$62,000	\$58,989.13
Contracted RPF	\$60,000	\$59,636.92
Permitting	\$7,500	\$1,200
Contracted Fuel Load Work	\$220,000	\$209,744.40
Riparian brochure	\$10,000	
Contracted Biologist	\$3,000	\$657.70
Administrative	\$43,500	\$39,705.88
GRAND TOTAL	\$406,000	\$369,934.56

Explanation: (if needed)

There was an additional budget category for a Riparian Brochure for \$10,000. A habitat assessment was conducted by Wildlife & Conservation Ecologist Brian Williams in 2010 and it was determined by AFM, NCRCD and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy that this item would be removed from the grant project. It was determined that “considering the project goals and limited funds, I am not sure the current site is appropriate.” (see Appendix VIII).

F. 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. (Include digital photos, maps, media coverage of project, or other work products.)

Applied Forest Management has prepared a final report for the NCRCD, a copy of which is included in this report. Their final assessment is complete with before and after photos, maps, surveys, etc. that were part of the fuelbreak.

The NCRCD reprinted the *Preparing for Wildfires in Western Nevada County* booklet for residents and agencies.

Please Complete this Section for FINAL Report ONLY

Resources Leveraged: (What kind and amount of resources – funding or in-kind – outside of the SNC were you able to leverage, and how?)

On September 1, 2008, the NCRCD entered into an agreement with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to deliver in-kind conservation technical assistance, outreach, and conservation programs of mutual interest; specifically to coordinate activities to accelerate the coordination, identification, and implementation of the Community Shaded Fuelbreak. The NRCS provided 50% of the cost of the services through in-kind contribution and 50% of the cost of the work not to exceed \$35,000 (approximately \$27,000).

The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County provided in-kind contributions for biomass chipping services and education (approximately \$5,000).

Nevada County provided in-kind assistance with GIS parcel information (approximately \$2,500).

(Performance Level 1)

Capacity-Building Results and Collaboration and Cooperation with Stakeholders:
(What partnerships did you initiate or strengthen as a result of this project? How did they affect the project outcome? If applicable, how did this grant increase your organization's capacity? What is your plan to sustain this increase?)

Partners:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service - NRCS
- Nevada County Board of Supervisors
- Nevada Irrigation District - NID
- Nevada County Consolidated Fire District - NCCFD
- Sierra Pacific Industries - SPI
- Nevada County Farm Bureau
- Yuba River Ranger District
- Tahoe National Forest Service - TNF
- Fire Safe Council of Nevada County - FSCNC
- Wolf Creek Community Alliance - WCCA
- Bear River Watershed Group - BRWG
- Yuba-Bear Watershed Council - YBWC
- South Yuba River Citizens League - SYRCL

-Cascade Shores Home Owners Association
-Public and private landowners
(Performance Measure 2 & 7)

Long-term residents living in an area of extremely high fuel loads, such as Nevada County, are aware of the possible effects from a catastrophic wildfire event. But those landowners, who have moved here from cities or areas of far less vegetation, do not understand the impact of failing to manage the vegetation on their properties.

Through this fuelbreak project, and with the collaboration of fire agencies, county agencies, and private organizations, the NCRCD has begun the ground work for other groups to build on.

Watershed groups use the fuelbreak in their discussions regarding fuels clearing near watercourses, erosion control, wildlife habitat, and preservation of healthy forests.

The local fire departments and CalFIRE have been provided the GIS data from this project to add to their existing layers, to be used by the incident commanders in the event of fires.

The Fire Safe Council of Nevada County has requested approval of their RAC grant to continue the work started in the fuelbreak, protecting communities and maintaining evacuation routes, and improve forest health and wildlife habitat. (Performance Level 3)

Description of Project Accomplishments:

1. How did the Project succeed in accomplishing its intent?

The project was developed to complete the remaining 30% of the Nevada County Community Shaded Fuelbreak by April 2010. Due to the California budget crises, unpredictable weather, and various other stops and starts, we received an extension from the SNC through July 2012 to complete the fuelbreak. Because we hired such a competent manager for the ground work, and because we chose a local masticator familiar with Nevada County terrain, we were able to complete the ground work for the project by June 2011. Additionally, in the project description, we agreed to clear 225 acres of net fuels and finished the fuelbreak by clearing over 252 acres of fuel loads. (Performance Measure 5)

2. Describe any follow-up or indirect benefits resulting from the Project.

Cooperation and community are always important to any organization such as the Nevada County Resource Conservation District. Established on January 4, 1944 our organization is always looking for ways to connect with the county and let residents know what technical assistance, education opportunities, and programs we offer.

This fuelbreak introduced us to new land managers, groups, county organizations, and contractors as well as home owner associations we had not previously worked with. In turn, each contact we made shared with their groups and residents about the fuelbreak and the NCRCD, who in turn told other groups and residents etc.

The fuelbreak is and will continue to be an educational tool for the NCRCD, to showcase high fire areas in Nevada County, and what can be done to lessen the fire threat to residents.

In addition, when we first began the on-the-ground-work off of Cooper Road, the Forest Service, who had previously cleared some that surrounding area, learned about the project, and where our route of treated parcels was taking us. They continued to clear large areas of their own property in the fuelbreak and initiated maintenance on any previously treated parcels.

3. Describe any significant experiences, unanticipated results or noteworthy events that create a “wow” factor.

For anyone touring the fuelbreak ‘wow’ was a constant comment. If you knew what a parcel looking like before clearing, such as Tony and Kathy Miller’s property (photos included in AFM final report), ‘wow’ would have been an understatement. We are so accustomed to looking at wooded areas in Nevada County and not really seeing the beauty behind the over-growth. Many of us move here for the ‘trees’ not realizing that you really cannot see a healthy forest behind 30-70 years of over-growth.

In addition, this project allowed a partnership with groups and individuals that we previously had not had the chance to know or work with. The fuelbreak gave us first-hand knowledge and experience that we can use us other areas, as well as increasing our database of individuals that we share with our customers.

4. Describe any Lessons Learned.

You cannot plan enough, and you cannot plan for everything. We knew we were well organized on paper when we decided to start contacting landowners to participate, but we were very disappointed at the first attempt to get them to sign a contract. It wasn't until we began treating parcels that the idea and concept of the grant was understood by landowners. Visual demonstrations work far better than conversation, especially when you are asking people to alter the landscape they moved here for.

We also knew we had designed the timeline for working on the ground to coincide with typical weather patterns, but fall 2010 and spring 2011 changed all our planning. Early cold, wet weather followed by summer-like weather in February had us all rearranging our schedules to work around the contracts.

We were fortunate in that our managers and contractors were very flexible and worked with us to fulfill our obligations.

5. How do you intend to share the results of your work on this project?

As previously stated, the Forest Service, CalFIRE, Nevada County Consolidated Fire, and other fire agency incident commanders will use the GIS data for future fire events. In addition, the work completed due to this grant has quite literally created a fuelbreak that can be used as a staging area for fire agencies to use. They will be able to strategically place themselves on these treated ridge tops when an event threatens local communities, Grass Valley, or Nevada City, and command their personnel from this previously unavailable vantage point.

We will continue to offer education through our many seminar series, and showcase the final results of the fuelbreak in our *Rural Property Management*, *Minimizing Wildlife Impacts of Brush Control*, *Tree Diseases and Forestry Health*, *Forest Raptors of Nevada County*, *Fire Ecology and Your Property* classes as well as technical assistance for residents who request it.

Following is a short list of literature made available to residents regarding the high fire danger in Nevada County, which is included in this report:

- Dangerous Development*
- Preparing for Wildfires in Western Nevada County*
- Protecting Communities and Saving Forests*

BEFORE

AFTER







