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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: Placer County Department of Facility Services
Project title: Squaw Valley Park Fuels Reduction and Related Fire Safe Activities
SNC Reference Number: SNC070225 **Submittal Date:** 03/30/2012
Report Preparer: Valarie Bayne / Andy Fisher **Phone #:** 530-889-6819

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.

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

During this project performance period all dead standing vegetation, standing material likely to die within 3 to 4 years, standing vegetation that has structural defects, or infested by disease has been marked and removed. Within 50' of the northern property line limbs of trees were pruned up so that no portion of the trees are less than 6' above ground level. During construction of Squaw Valley Park in 2004, many trees were planted. Several trees broke because of heavy snow, and these trees were removed. Down, dead woody material at least 1" in diameter and 3' long was chipped and chips were spread on the forest floor to reduce erosion and enhance aesthetics.

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.)

During the course of this project, public notices and various means of notification were sent to community groups and individuals inviting them to participate in project planning meetings and volunteer work days for the fuel load reduction project. Meetings and/or phone calls were held with the following groups: the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, the Friends of Squaw Creek, the Truckee River Watershed Council, the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council Park Subcommittee, the Squaw

Valley Property Owners Association, the Squaw Valley Academy, the North Lake Tahoe Fire Protection District and the Squaw Valley Fire Protection District.

Over 400 hrs of volunteer service was donated by the community.

Two tree trimming contractors were hired to help complete the project professionally and in a timely manner. All fourteen acres of open space at Squaw Valley Park received some level of fuel load reduction work. The only areas of the 28 acre park that were not treated were the active park facilities and wetland areas.

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 last portion of the project was completed in 2011. The major challenge faced was working around the weather in the high Sierra and the popularity of the park. When the park had huge snowfalls during late fall and winter, tree reduction work was not possible. When the weather was nice, the park was heavily used. Work was completed because of the ability of an outstanding tree services contractors who were well organized and performed work quickly. Also, community volunteers allowed cleanup work to be done in an economical and expedient manner. County Park Planners designed the project so that areas of the park could remain open and safe for the public while the project was being performed. The project has been completed on schedule.

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

The partnership between the County and community became excellent as a result of working together on this project. There is now a sense of pride in the community about their park and trails. The community now offers to help with many park improvement projects. The Squaw Valley Academy has many students who now help clean up the park on a regular basis.

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 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Fuel Break Labor Construction | \$227,000.00 | \$193,560.49 |
| Oversight by Registered Forester | 3,500.00 | 3,500.00 |
| Masticator Unit | 15,000.00 | 10,161.43 |
| | | |
| | | |
| GRAND TOTAL | \$245,500.00 | \$207,221.92 |

Explanation: (if needed)

All items in grant scope have been completed within the amount of actual dollars shown.

F. Do you have information to report on the project-specific Performance Measures for your project? (If so, please list the Performance Measures below and describe your progress.)

See detail of performance measures below.

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

There were no additional materials produced.

H. Next Steps: (Work anticipated in the next 6 months, including location and timing of any scheduled events related to the project.)

Follow-up work will consist of inspections of the fuel load reduction areas. Should any trees die in the future, they will be identified and removed at the County's expense, prior to becoming a safety hazard for community businesses, residents and watersheds.

Please Complete this Section for FINAL Report ONLY

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?)

Fuel load reduction work was performed with the input and support of the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada & California, the Friends of Squaw Creek, the Truckee River Watershed Council, the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council Park Subcommittee, the Squaw Valley Property Owners Association, the Squaw Valley Academy, the North Tahoe Fire Protection District and the Squaw Valley Fire Protection District. People from several of these groups actively participated in the Fuel Load Reduction work, allowing for the project to be completed on schedule and within budget. Placer County gained a valuable community partner in the Squaw Valley Academy. They have embraced the park with a new found vigor and have stated they feel the park is an extension of their campus. The Squaw Valley Academy now routinely volunteers to help with park upkeep.

Representatives of several groups listed above are now in regular contact with the County Parks Division communicating on various matters related to parks and recreation in the community.

Description of Project Accomplishments:

1. Most Significant Accomplishment

Describe in one concise, well-written paragraph, the most significant accomplishment that resulted from this grant.

The most significant accomplishment of the Squaw Valley Park Fuel Load Reduction Project is that it brought together the Squaw Valley community and the County Parks Division to jointly complete a project and help protect or enhance air quality, wildlife habitat, archaeological sites, watersheds, and other natural resources. To date, this aggressive defensible space program and forest fuels reduction projects has been successful in eliminating catastrophic wildfires from Squaw Valley. Should a wildfire occur in Squaw Valley, this treated forest will now be able to be defended by Fire Districts by helping them to control the fire before it conflagrates.

2. WOW Factor

If applicable, please describe anything that happened as a result of the project or during the project that is particularly impressive.

In addition to protection of the park property and facilities, this project has reduced fire risk to 85 adjacent parcels totaling 89 acres (including a 2.4 acre Washoe Tribe archaeological preserve), with a land value of 9 million and improvement value of \$20 million.

3. Design and Implementation

When considering the design and implementation of this project, what lessons did you learn that might help other grantees implement similar work?

The most critical lesson we learned was that public outreach should be provided by various outlets early on. People reported they heard of the project from several different means. This allowed for the community to be active participants in planning the work and participating in the cleanup of the debris after the trees were knocked down.

4. Indirect Impact

Please describe any indirect benefits of the project such as information that has been developed as a result of the project is being used by several other organizations to improve decision-making, or a conservation easement funded by this grant that encouraged other landowners in the area to have conservation easements on their property.

An indirect benefit of this project and something we did not foresee when planning the work was that this fuel load reduction project became a

demonstration site for the local Fire District. The County Parks Division worked closely with the Squaw Valley Fire Protection Division's Fire Chief on this project. The Squaw Valley Fire Protection District undertook a major effort to have all parcel owners in Squaw Valley reduce fuel loads throughout the community. The Fire Chief stated the community could now look to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy/Placer County fuel load reduction project as an example of proper land stewardship and a demonstration of a successful wildfire hazard reduction project.

5. Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

If you worked in collaboration or cooperation with other organizations or institutions, describe those arrangements and their importance to the project. Also, describe if you encountered conflict in the project and how you dealt with it, or if there was conflict avoided as a result of the project.

Before the work began, a potential conflict arose when some questioned how the landscape would look with so many trees being removed. Squaw Valley is a gateway to world famous Lake Tahoe and Olympic Valley. Aesthetics of the area are very important to residents and tourists. The project was carefully designed and close oversight was provided by a Registered Forester in order to ensure the end product would result in a natural looking forest. Trees and brush that were dead; vegetation showing evidence of dying within the next 3-4 years; and trees that had structural or disease/insect caused defects that posed a potential public safety hazard were all removed. All material removed was chipped and spread over the forest floor. This improved the appearance of the forest because there was no longer dead and dying trees and brush visible and people could walk under trees that had been skirted up over 6' high. The Forester clearly marked tree that were to be removed so that this decision was not left to the contractor. The result was that the forest and the wood chips kept the forest looking natural and aesthetically pleasing.

6. Capacity-Building

SNC is interested in both the capacity of your organization, as well as local and regional capacity. Please describe the overall health of your organization including areas in need of assistance. SNC is interested in the strength and involvement of your board, significant changes to your staff, size and involvement of membership. In addition, describe how your project improved capabilities of partners, or the larger community.

The County Parks Division currently has 30 allocated positions. Due to budget concerns, only 25 of those positions are filled. Many parks are maintained through assessments paid by communities; therefore, this funding source is secure from year to year. However, those parks that are funded from General Fund revenues have had to have service levels reduced due to reduced funding. A great deal of the reduced staffing has been made up of community volunteers. By reaching out to communities, the Parks Division has been successful in securing both short term and long term volunteers. This project increased the

interaction of the County Parks Division with those that were interested in volunteering to improve and preserve Squaw Valley Park, its air quality, and its watersheds. This project also put us in touch with agencies we had little prior involvement with, such as the North Tahoe Fire Protection District. Being subject matter experts allowed the North Tahoe Fire Protection District to provide guidance to the Placer County Parks Division on fuel load reduction planning for this project.

7. Challenges

Did the project face internal or external challenges? How were they addressed? Describe each challenge and any actions that you took to address it. Was there something that SNC did or could have done to assist you? Did you have to change any of your key objectives in response to conditions “on the ground”?

There were no challenges faced that we could not plan for. The tree service contractors used were very efficient and able to accomplish the work in a timely manner. There was regular communication with SNC staff throughout the project and we do not feel SNC could have done anything differently to help improve the project. The key objectives of this project were satisfied in the manner planned and no changes had to be made to the objectives.

8. Photographs

Grantees are strongly encouraged to submit photos, slides or digital images whenever possible. These images will be used for SNC publications such as annual reports or on the website. Please make sure you clearly identify location, activity, and your project with each submitted image. Images will be credited to the submitting organization, unless specified otherwise.

See attached photos.

9. Post Grant Plans

What are the post-grant plans for the project if it does not conclude with the grant? Include a description of the following (if applicable): (1) Changes in operations or scope; (2) Replication or use of findings; (3) Names of other organizations you expect to involve; (4) Plans to support the project financially, and; (5) Communication plans?

Placer County's only post-grant plans are to inspect and monitor the forest for health and safety. This task will be performed along with routine park inspections, so there will be no additional impact to the County parks budget. A change in our operations will be that as future work is necessary, we now have several contacts in the community where we can secure the help of volunteers to help with work to keep the forest well maintained. Depending upon the type of assistance needed, we will involve the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council, the Friends of Squaw Creek, the Truckee River Watershed Council, the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council Park Subcommittee, the Squaw Valley Property Owners Association, the Squaw Valley Fire Protection District and the

North Tahoe Fire Protection District. The project will be maintained in the future by a combination of the park maintenance budget and community volunteers. There is no need to increase the annual park maintenance budget as a result of this project. Members of the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors in order to provide community input to the County of matters affecting all of Squaw Valley. Placer County has representatives that attend monthly meetings of the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council, so communication will continue with this community group on a regular basis. Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council meetings are regularly attended by representatives of many community groups and the general public.

Because of this project and the improved communications between Placer County staff and the Squaw Valley community, the public has taken ownership of Squaw Valley Park now takes pride in improving and protecting their regional park and surrounding areas.

10. Post Grant Contact

Who can be contacted a few years from now to follow up on the project? Please provide name and contact information.

Placer County Department of Facility Services
Attn: Andy Fisher, Park Planner
11476 'C' Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603
Office (530) 889-6819
Fax (530) 889-6819
afisher@placer.ca.gov

SNC-approved Performance Measures: (Please list each Performance Measure for your Project, as identified in your Grant Agreement, and the results/outcomes.)

- 1) Resources leveraged:
 - a. Placer County Air Pollution Control District awarded \$60,000 to Placer County in 2007 for purchase of a masticator unit. The machinery provided by this grant consists of an interchangeable chipper attachment for the masticator unit that expands the use of the entire unit.
- 2) Impact on collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders / Capacity building within region: The establishment and maintenance of shaded fuel breaks at Squaw Valley Park implements a specific wildfire mitigation action of the Placer County Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). The Plan is a collaborative document adopted by local agencies within Placer County as a County-wide master plan for pre-disaster avoidance and preparedness. A list of participating agencies and plan details may be found at:

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/CEO/Emergency/Final%20Hazard%20Mitigation%20Plan.aspx> .

The plan was adopted in April 2010. The Squaw Valley Vegetation Management Plan was prepared in consultation with a Registered Forester and officials from CalFire and the Squaw Valley Fire Protection District. Implementation of the plan provides a strategic fire fighting buffer between the communities of Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, and the Highway 89 corridor.

- 3) Number of acres treated for fire resistance, including number of acres treated in close proximity to water courses, and amount of tonnage of fuels material removed: Approximately 17 acres of vegetation have been treated as a result of this project. Most of the terrain is on a steep hillside and was heavily wooded. All of the treated acreage is within the Squaw Creek and Truckee River watersheds and within 1000 feet of the stream channels. Approximately 200 tons of material was removed as a result of the project.
- 4) Number of properties, including structures and types, now protected by fuel load reduction including number of people reached through education and outreach efforts related to this project: Adjacent land valued at \$8,776,673 and structures valued at \$19,964,823 (2006 Assessors' Records) have been protected as a result of this project. Through the Municipal Advisory Council, outreach was made to the approximate 1000 residents of Squaw Valley and seasonal guests. A standing volunteer group has resulted from the outreach and fire protection activities.



Fuels treatment adjacent to Squaw Valley Road



Thick, dead, and dying vegetation prior to treatment



The interchangeable chipper attachment purchased through the SNC grant program. The chipper fastens to the front of an existing tracked masticator unit and allows access to downed brush in steep and remote areas that cannot be reached with a tow-behind chipper unit.