

5. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

a. Detailed Project Description

Project Summary. The 2012 Western Sierra County Watershed Protection and Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project will improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk by removing hazardous fuels in the Right of Way and in three communities. The project will reduce adverse effects to water quality, carbon emissions and forest fragmentation, increase forest heterogeneity, secure safe emergency evacuation, and sustain continued tourism. Final deliverables include a monitoring report summarizing the acres of land improved.

Project Description. Fuels reduction in western Sierra County is essential given the forest condition, propensity of lightning strikes, lack of safe exit roads, and predominance of tourism. The project will improve mixed conifer forest health within the North Yuba River watershed by reducing hazardous fuels and the risk for catastrophic fire. Fuels will be thinned in the core of Sierra City, Downieville, and Goodyear's Bar and in the intervening Highway 49 Right of Way (ROW). Each community is bisected by Hwy 49, in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and surrounded by USFS land. Significant fuels are present, including scrub oak, manzanita, young growth conifers, and black oak, as are isolated rock outcrops. Parcels are <1/2 acre creating concentrated residences and a lack of defensible space.

This project meets Proposition 84 requirements by protecting and improving water quality, waterways and natural resources, and fish and wildlife habitat. The project will reduce wildfire risk and related erosion, sedimentation and water temperature increase within the North Yuba River watershed. The project will decrease carbon emissions and forest fragmentation, and ensure public safety in the event of an emergency evacuation. The project furthers the SNC Mission by improving the environmental health of the North Yuba River watershed and the communities within it. The project will reduce the risk of catastrophic fire thereby protecting and improving water and air quality, enhance public use of USFS lands by providing for recreation, and sustain economic benefits of regional tourism.

The project area comprises the majority of the western Sierra County population which increases four-fold in summer due to second homeowners and tourism. Each community meets the standard for Disadvantaged Community and is largely underserved. Isolation and lack of services have made this project incapable of meeting California Fire Safe Council match requirements.

Goals. Project goals are to: 1) Protect and improve watershed and forest health; 2) Decrease fire risk on >200 acres; 3) Provide outreach and education to 100% of landowners in project area, and; 4) Increase the capacity to provide community chipping service. Deliverables include signed Landowner Agreements, environmental compliance documents, participation records from outreach events, bi-annual monitoring reports, and a final monitoring report. The desired end result is a significant reduction in hazardous fuels within and between each community, and improvement in forest and watershed health in the upper North Yuba River watershed.

Scope of Work. Project scope includes fuels reduction and watershed protection from the Pacific Crest Trail head north of Sierra City through Downieville to south of Goodyear's Bar including each community core and the Hwy 49 ROW. The project area is >200 acres and 19

linear miles. The project complements two completed ROW clearing projects in Cal Ida and Camp Yuba.

Hand treatment methods will follow strategies outlined in the county wildfire plan. The minimum treatment prescription for areas beyond the PRC 4291 zone are: removal of surface fuels >1" diameter and/or 6' length, and <50% of ground covered with ¼" to 1" material; understory fuels >18" high removed to reduce fuel continuity; trees <12" diameter breast height removed to create residual tree spacing of <20'; and residual tree branches pruned to a height of 10' above the forest floor yet not reducing the live crown ratio to <1/3 tree height. A 50-100' stream setback will be established in treatment areas.

The SCFSWC will conduct comprehensive outreach and education comprising community meetings, distribution of PRC 4291 educational materials, and Defensible Space consultations with assistance from volunteer fire departments (VFD). Landowners will thin the 4291 areas and place material in driveways. The hired contractor will chip the material during the chipping days. A hired contractor(s) will perform all thinning, chipping, piling, and burning in the ROW. Burning will be conducted according to the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District Burn Permit.

Environmental Setting. The proposed project area is in the WUI. The canyon averages 1200' wide and slopes average 42%. Continuous horizontal and vertical fuels are present. The Cal Fire Hazard Severity maps rate the area "Very High". Current land uses are residential and USFS with no proposed changes.

b. Workplan and Schedule

Treatment Preparation. 8/2012-6/2013: SCFSWC secure Landowner Agreements, RPF finalize prescriptions, prepare/submit env. compliance docs, and prepare bid prospectus, SCFSWC solicit bids.

Community Outreach. 8/2012-6/2015: SCFSWC provide education materials and Defensible Space consultations, publicize chipping days. Landowners thin their 4291 areas, pile cut material.

Execute Treatment. Contractor will:

- 12/2012- 6/2015. Chip material cut by landowners
- 12/2012-10/2014. Implement treatment prescription in ROW
- 8/2013-5/2015. Burn piles according to Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District Permit requirements.

Monitoring. 8/2012-8/2015: SCFSWC/RPF photo-document before/after treatment, update maps of treated acreage.

Progress Reports. 12/2012 + every 6 mos. thereafter: SCFSWC submit progress reports, includes updated maps of treated areas.

Project Completion. 8/2015: SCFSWC to submit final monitoring report, includes required performance measures and photos.

TASKS/DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Treatment Preparation -Submit signed Landowner Agreements -Submit required environmental compliance documents	8/2012-6/2013
Community Outreach -Submit participation records from outreach events	8/2012-6/2015
Execute 4291 Treatment	12/2012-6/2015
Execute ROW Treatment	12/2012-10/2014
Execute Burn Treatment	8/2013-5/2015
Monitoring	8/2012-8/2015
Progress Reports -Submit bi-annual progress reports	12/2012 6/2013 12/2013 6/2014 12/2014 6/2015
Project Completion -Submit final monitoring report	8/2015

c. Restrictions, Technical/Environmental Documents and Agreements.

There are no known encumbrances that will impact project completion. The SCFSWC's Landowner Agreement addresses all legal issues pertaining to participating landowners. This project proposes fuels reduction of all hazardous fuels. The material will be cut, chipped, and either piled and burned or broadcast back onto the site. As no forest product will be removed for commercial purposes, the project does not trigger the CA. Forest Practices Act and does not meet the definition of "timber operation". The SCFSWC is allowed minor alteration of vegetation including fuel management activities. By checking the California Natural Diversity Database, and Native Plant Society Rare Plant Inventory, no presence of any listed plant or animal species is likely to be impacted by project. This project qualifies as Categorically Exempt from CEQA. Prior to project implementation, a Notice of Exemption with the SNC as lead agency will be filed with the Office of Planning and Research.

d. Organizational Capacity

The SCFSWC is the only local applicant that could administer and complete a fuels reduction project of this size. The SCFSWC is composed of a 7-member Board of Directors, an Executive Director, an Operations Director and a DOC-funded Watershed Coordinator. A contracted Registered Professional Forester manages each fuels project, from inception to completion. Project tasks include preparation of treatment areas, regulatory compliance, monitoring, and project implementation. The SCFSWC utilizes a certified public accountant to provide fiscal management and retains a bookkeeper to assist in day to day grant administration. Since 2008, the SCFSWC has managed more than \$581,000 for fuels reduction and watershed protection projects. SCFSWC manages multiple Title II projects whose funds are designated for treatment in county ROWs and for the development of an Aquatic Invasive Species education and

outreach program.

e. **Cooperation and Community Support**

The SCFSWC has overwhelming support from Sierra County. Supervisors Lee Adams and Peter Huebner represent the region and agree the project is essential. The USFS Yuba River Ranger District supports the project and issued a Categorical Exclusion that will make fuels reduction on federal lands within the ROW possible. Sierra County Building and Planning Director Tim Beals strongly supports the SCFSWC in its fuels reduction and watershed protection efforts. Downieville and Sierra City VFD Chiefs Lee Brown and Bryan Davey actively support the project and have agreed to partner on the project's outreach and education efforts. Cal Trans Supervisor Steve Folsom and Sierra County Roads Department Supervisor Mark Daigle collaborated with SCFSWC on two recently completed ROW thinning projects and agreed to contribute personnel and equipment toward the proposed project. The SCFSWC has completed a full suite of GIS maps and committed the cost to secure project permits for non-federal land and \$82,000 in cash match from Title III and RAC funds.

f. **Long-term Management and Sustainability**

The SCFSWC is committed to sustaining post-project conditions. As outlined in the Landowner Agreement, landowners assume maintenance of their treated areas. Each landowner will be counseled by SCFSWC and/or the RPF on the methods most appropriate for maintaining defensible space on their parcel and on the required for 10-year minimum maintenance period stipulated by Proposition 84. Thorough counsel will enhance landowner awareness on the extensive nature of the project, how the project aligns with their 4291 responsibilities, and the importance of maintaining the treated condition for continued personal and community protection.

The proposed ROW treatments are a central priority for the SCFSWC, Cal Trans, and Sierra County Road Department. The post-project ROW conditions will be maintained for no less than ten years following implementation through ongoing cooperative efforts between the SCFSWC, Cal Trans, and Sierra County within their jurisdictional and financial limits.

g. **Performance Measures**

The SCFSWC will measure the following to track project success:

- **Number of people reached** as the number of people contacted through outreach and education efforts including community meetings, dispersal of educational materials, consultations, and chipping days.
- **Dollar value of resources leveraged for the Sierra Nevada** as cash and in-kind contributions for the project including SCFSWC Title II and RAC Grant matches, volunteer hours, and shared equipment/personnel.
- **Number and types of jobs created** as the number of Full Time Equivalent jobs and the occupational groups affected.
- **Acres of land improved** as the total acres of land where the risk of wildfires was reduced and improvement purposes documented. Measurements will be categorized according to CAL FIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zoning Map ratings and to the Sierra County WUI map.