

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS FOR PROJECT 760**  
**Sequoia Riverlands Trust Application to Sierra Nevada Conservancy**  
**Proposition 84 Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands Grant Program**  
**October 2012**

Notes on where to find content related to the Evaluation Criteria:

- A. Proposition 84 Land and Water Benefits, and SNC Program Goals and Mission – see Project Description
- B. Project Quality & Readiness – see Project Description, Work Plan and Schedule; Budget; Restrictions, Technical/Environmental Documents and Agreements; Cooperation and Community Support; Long Term Management and Sustainability
- C. Cooperation & Community Support – see narrative section with same name
- D. Long-term Management & Sustainability – see narrative section with same name
- E. Project Category Prioritization – see Project Description

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**Project Summary**

Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT) seeks a \$48,750 Category One grant to implement rangeland and habitat enhancement recommendations from the SNC-funded Blue Oak Ranch Visitor Use and Education Plan completed in October 2011. The project will include three components:

- 1) Constructing 1.75 miles of fence at the north end of the preserve (*Physical Improvement #9 in the Visitor Use and Education Plan*). SRT acquired a portion of the Golden Sierra Ranch in 2005 to create the Blue Oak Ranch Preserve. There is no fencing along the new boundary between the two properties, making it difficult for SRT to control grazing practices on about 200 acres of the Preserve. The proposed fencing will enable SRT and its grazing lessee to manage the north 200 acres as part of the overall rest-rotation grazing system at Blue Oak Ranch. SRT has done other pasture-division and riparian fencing under

two Natural Resources Conservation Service cost-share agreements, but NRCS programs will not pay for perimeter fencing.

- 2) Restoring riparian habitat along Sycamore Creek, Dennison Creek and around the West Pond (*Physical Improvements #19 and #20 in the Visitor Use and Education Plan*). SRT has already controlled Himalayan blackberry, planted native species and installed fencing along the Dennison Creek corridor and around the West Pond under previous NRCS cost-share agreements. Now SRT has a new Environmental Quality Incentives Program contract to continue invasive plant control and native plantings along Dennison Creek, and restore riparian habitat along Sycamore Creek. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant will match this funding, enabling SRT to stabilize stream banks, establish multi-story riparian cover, and regulate future livestock grazing along about 1,300 feet of wooded riparian corridor, and around the edges of the large West Pond.
  
- 3) Stabilizing a 2,000-foot section of ranch road and converting it to a hiking and riding trail (*Physical Improvement #5 in the Visitor Use and Education Plan*). The ranch road between the West Pond area and the ridgeline to the east is extremely steep and is eroding badly in some sections. SRT will grade the steepest sections of the road; install water bars, rolling dips and other appropriate drainage structures; and seed the road bed with native species. The stabilized road bed will be more suitable as a hiking and horseback riding trail, and will be easier to maintain in the future. The road proposed for rehabilitation includes about a 700-foot section across the Miller Conservation Easement held by SRT. SRT has a road easement and the conservation easement allows for road maintenance with prior approval by SRT.

SRT will also engage high school students in service learning projects to remove invasive plants and install the native plantings. SRT also intends to implement some of the recreational and educational recommendations of the Visitor Use and Education Plan during the SNC grant period through in-kind contributions and volunteer labor. This will likely include improvements to access and parking at the preserve's east entrance, trail

construction, and new trail signage.

The SNC grant will leverage \$6,796 from an approved NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost-share agreement.

Other contributions related to the project include:

- Estimated \$3,000 worth of volunteer time for service learning projects conducted through SRT's education program. The service learning projects will in turn implement one of the recommendations in the SNC-funded Blue Oak Ranch Visitor Use and Education Plan.
- The grazing-lessee initiated project to improve livestock watering facilities on the ranch, providing livestock with an alternative to drinking from and trampling the banks of Sycamore Creek in the proposed restoration area. SRT can now fence a sensitive part of the riparian corridor and regulate the timing and intensity of future grazing in part in that area. The water developments, including two new wells, buried pipelines and several storage tanks and troughs are funded by an NRCS cost share agreement with the grazing lessee.
- Concurrent recreational enhancements – primarily cooperation with a local archery club to install a “roving archery range.” The group has pledged in-kind work on visitor parking and other trail construction.

### **Environmental Setting**

The 928-acre Blue Oak Ranch preserve lies east of the North Fork Tule River and Balch Park Road about five miles north of Springville, California. Main access points are via Harris Road on the west, and Bear Creek Road on the east. The terrain consists of a broad ridge blanketed with blue oak woodlands and annual grassland, flanked by Dennison Creek and Harris Road on the west, and by Sycamore Creek and Bear Creek Road on the east.

Sequoia Riverlands Trust, and its Springville-area predecessor the Tule Oaks Land Trust, have conserved more than 2,900 acres of blue oak woodland and 4.5 miles of riparian corridor in the North Fork Tule drainage by acquiring the Blue Oak Ranch and eight conservation easements in the area. There are considerable other conserved lands in the area. The Blue Ridge National Wildlife Refuge lies to the northwest. To the east are the Clemmie Gill School of Science and Conservation (SCICON) operated by the Tulare County Office of Education; the USDA Forest Service's Giant Sequoia National Monument (including the Golden Trout Wilderness); Mountain Home State Forest; and a small state ecological reserve administered by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Blue Oak Ranch contributes to an important corridor for wildlife movement along the North Fork Tule drainage between the grasslands of the low foothills to the conifer forests of Giant Sequoia National Monument. The Blue Ridge National Wildlife Refuge protects historic foraging and roosting habitat for the federally endangered California condor. Mule deer spend their summers in the mountains and move down into the foothills to breed in the winter and spring. Black bear, mountain lions, bobcats and the Pacific fisher also rely on the area's oak woodlands, as do a wide variety of resident and migratory birds (see species list in Resource Inventory appendix).

Balch Park Road is a popular thoroughfare for visitors to public lands in Giant Sequoia National Monument and Mountain Home State Forest. Cyclists and motorists also come into the area on Yokohl Drive as part of a scenic trip from State Highway 198, through Yokohl Valley to a dramatic vista point at the saddle between Yokohl Valley and the North Fork Tule River valley. The Blue Oak Ranch preserve is visible from a turnout just east of this saddle, and from parts of Balch Park Road. The preserve is an important part of the natural scenery in an area under pressure from low density residential development, especially along the river bottom. Most foothill land is private property that is posted "No Trespassing." Springville-area residents contacted during outreach for this plan complained of the lack of publicly accessible foothill recreation areas. Many recreate on part of the nearby Borrer Ranch without formal permission. Blue Oak Ranch could help meet the demand for publicly accessible natural settings in

the foothills, which are especially desirable during the winter and spring when higher elevation public lands are snowed in.

## **WORK PLAN AND SCHEDULE**

SRT intends to complete the Blue Oak Ranch rangeland and habitat enhancements according to the following schedule

### Prior to SNC grant period:

Receive notice of SNC grant approval	March 2013
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Execute grant agreement between SNC and SRT	May 2013
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### During SNC grant period:

Construct north fence	Fall 2013
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Install water bars in road	Fall 2013
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Remove Himalayan blackberry from riparian areas	Fall 2013
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Seed stabilized road	Winter 2013-14
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Construct riparian fence	Winter 2013-14
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Plant natives in riparian areas	Winter 2013-14
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Repeat invasive plant control measures as needed	Spring 2014
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**PROJECT BUDGET**  
(also see Detailed Budget Form)

<u>Summary of SNC Funding Request</u>	<b>SNC Funding</b>
Project-related staff/personnel expense	\$4,102
Project-related travel	\$333
Project-related contracts/consultants	\$39,410
Project-related materials & supplies	\$1,290
Project administration	\$3,618
<b>SNC GRANT TOTAL</b>	<b><u>\$48,752</u></b>
(rounded to \$48,750 for proposal)	

**Description of Budget Assumptions and Matching Contributions**

The grant will leverage other contributions as follows:

\$6,796      Approved NRCS EQIP cost share agreement for restoration work along Sycamore Creek and Dennison Creek

The NRCS grant covers field activities and associated supplies only. Project coordination / administration costs for both the SNC grant and the NRCS cost-share agreement are requested as part of the SNC grant.

Other contributions related to the project include:

- Estimated \$3,000 worth of volunteer time for service learning projects conducted through SRT's education program. The service learning projects will in turn implement one of the recommendations in the SNC-funded Blue Oak Ranch Visitor Use and Education Plan.
- The grazing-lessee initiated project to improve livestock watering facilities on the ranch, providing livestock with an alternative to drinking from and trampling the

banks of Sycamore Creek in the proposed restoration area. SRT can now fence a sensitive part of the riparian corridor and regulate the timing and intensity of future grazing in part in that area. The water developments, including two new wells, buried pipelines and several storage tanks and troughs are funded by an NRCS cost share agreement with the grazing lessee.

- Concurrent recreational enhancements – primarily cooperation with a local archery club to install a “roving archery range.” The group has pledged in-kind work on visitor parking and other trail construction.

The proposed project will also leverage SNC’s prior investment in the Blue Oak Ranch Visitor Use & Education Plan by implementing recommendations from that plan.

## **RESTRICTIONS, TECHNICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS & AGREEMENTS**

The following restrictions, technical/environmental documents or agreements may apply to this conservation easement acquisition:

*CEQA/NEPA* – the project meets the test for Categorical Exemption from CEQA. NEPA does not apply.

*Army Corps of Engineers 404 Permit* – the riparian restoration work is part of an NRCS approved project. No 404 permit is required.

DFG 1600 permit for stream modification - the riparian restoration work is part of an NRCS approved project. No 1600 permit is required.

*NRCS EQIP Cost Share Agreement* – copy provided with pre-proposal.

*Road Use Agreement with adjoining landowner* – copy provided with pre-proposal

*Conservation Easement with adjoining landowner* – copy provided with pre-proposal

*Memorandum of Unrecorded Grant Agreement* – will be completed as required.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**

Sequoia Riverlands Trust activity manages six fee title properties as permanent nature preserves, totaling 4,069 acres, Five of these preserves are leased out for livestock grazing, including the Blue Oak Ranch Preserve. SRT's conservation staff have implemented numerous restoration and rangeland enhancement projects, including a state-certified gravel mine reclamation (the first in Tulare County), riparian corridor restoration (including fencing, invasive plant control and native plantings), wetland and vernal pool rehabilitation, and improvements to ranch infrastructure that facilitate improved grazing management. SRT has collaborated extensively with private and government funders, grazing lessees, land management and permitting agencies, and volunteers to complete these projects.

SRT's Conservation Director has a master's degree in range management, and has been a practicing range conservationist in the southern Sierra Nevada. She will oversee best management practices and resource monitoring for the rangeland and habitat enhancement work, and for livestock grazing and other land uses.

SRT will documents before and after conditions, and monitor future preserve conditions according to Land Trust Alliance Standards & Practices. SRT has been accepted into the 2013 "class" for LTA accreditation. SRT also plans to enroll in the new Terra Firma insurance program for defense of conservation properties

## **COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

SRT has entered into an Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost-share agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service for the proposed habitat restoration work along Sycamore and Dennison Creeks, providing a match to the SNC grant for this project component. Copies of the NRCS cost-share agreement and conservation plan were submitted with the July 2012 pre-proposal. NRCS has been a steadfast partner in SRT's rangeland and habitat enhancement work, providing cost-share funding on numerous occasions through its Farm Bill incentive programs.

Letters of support are provided from the Southern Sierra Partnership (signed by the SSP Coordinator on behalf of the six member organizations), and the Tulare Basin Wildlife Partners.

The road proposed for rehabilitation includes about a 700-foot section across the Miller Conservation Easement held by SRT. SRT has a road easement through that area, and the conservation easement allows for road maintenance by the landowner with prior approval by SRT. Mr. Miller wishes to limit vehicular travel on the road, as documented in a memorandum of understanding with SRT, so we expect him to support the proposal to convert the road to a hiking and riding trail. SRT will clear the planned road/trail work with Mr. Miller prior to commencing work.

## **LONG TERM MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The proposed rangeland and habitat enhancements help implement recommendations in the October 2011 management plan for the property (Blue Oak Ranch Visitor Use & Education Plan). SRT intends to pursue funding from other grants, combined with grazing lease revenues and in-kind contributions, to continue implementation in the future. SRT has been successful in the past with garnering grant funds and in-kind contributions for these kinds of projects. For example, SRT has achieved an 11:1 match of a \$100,000 NRCS cost share agreement for the gravel mine restoration at the Dry Creek Preserve.

## **PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

### **A. MEASURES COMMON TO ALL CATEGORIES**

#### ***Number of People Reached***

Sequoia Riverlands Trust maintains an active outreach program via its education program, media outlets, regional conservation partnerships, publications and web-based communications. Information on the benefits of the SNC grant program and this project will be widely disseminated through these venues.

We also expect to involve about 30 students in the service learning projects.

***Dollar Value of Resources Leveraged for the Sierra Nevada***

SRT and its partners expect to match the SNC grant with \$6,796 specifically related to the current proposal, along with the in-kind contributions described in the Budget section of this narrative. Also leverages SNC's prior \$22,468 investment in the Blue Oak Ranch Visitor Use & Education Plan by implementing recommendations from that plan.

***Number and Type of Jobs Created***

The SNC grant is expected to create about 1.0 full time equivalents of employment for SRT staff and contractors.

***Number of New, Improved or Preserved Economic Activities***

The SNC grant will improve the economic viability of the livestock grazing operation at Blue Oak Ranch by effectively adding 200 acres to the grazing lease. SRT will also benefit from the ability to charge grazing rent on that north pasture land, which currently is used at no cost by the grazing lessee of the adjoining property since there is no existing fence line.

**B. MEASURES SPECIFIC TO THE PROJECT**

***Linear Feet of Stream Bank and Acres of Riparian Habitat Protected***

The proposed habitat restoration will protect the banks along 1,300 feet of intermittent stream corridor and pond edge.

***Acres of Land Improved or Restored*** -- The proposed project will –

- enhance 3 acres of riparian habitat along Sycamore and Dennison Creeks and around the West Pond
- enable improved grazing management on 200 acres of blue oak woodland
- reduce soil loss from 0.5 acres of eroding road bed

***Feet of Trail Length Improved***

SRT will stabilize 2,000 feet of eroding dirt road and convert the entire 3,000 foot section of road to a riding and hiking trail.