

Background

In June 2013, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Governing Board (Board) approved Grant Guidelines for the 2013-14 Grant Round. This grant round will be SNC's final awards using funding from Proposition 84, The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006. Staff released public notification of the SNC 2013-14 Grant Round on June 27, 2013. Since that time, staff continues working with potential applicants to determine the eligibility and readiness of their projects. At this point only one project requesting \$250,000 has made it through final scoring and is discussed in detail below. A number of other proposals are in process, and it is anticipated that a number of them will be ready for consideration at the March 2014 Board meeting. Estimated funding available for this grant round is approximately \$2.9 million¹.

As a reminder, this round has no final application due date. Applicants may contact SNC Staff at any time while funding remains and projects will be presented for Board approval dependent on project readiness, eligibility, and completion of required grant application elements. Staff expects that all funds will likely be awarded by the June 2014 Board meeting.

Current Status

Staff have completed review of SNC Project 783, and have found that it exceeds the threshold scoring level of 85, and recommends it for Board approval. The project is summarized below.

Raintree Forest Health Project – Score 92 of 100

Grantee Organization: El Dorado County Resource Conservation District

Funding Request to the SNC: \$250,000

Full Project Cost: \$1,392,288

Other Funders: USDA – Eldorado National Forest; El Dorado Union High School District; sale of biomass

Link to Full Project Description: [Project 783](#) (Note: This is a large PDF file and may take a significant amount of time to download. If you have difficulty seeing this information electronically, contact the SNC and we will make alternative arrangements for you to view the material.)

Project Summary: The Raintree Forest Health Project is located in the Central Sierra Subregion on the Eldorado National Forest in the Placerville Ranger District. The project area covers approximately 9,144-acres of National Forest Land (a portion of which will be covered by SNC funds). This project lies south of Highway 50 and the Mormon Emigrant Trail Road, including the general area between Capps Crossing and Leek Springs Lookout in El Dorado County, California.

¹ In addition, project 165 to the City of Chico, Bidwell Park for the Iron Canyon Fish Passage Project for \$1,000,000 is expected to close incomplete, without funding. Those funds will be released for other use. The staff proposal for expenditures of these funds will be discussed separately during this meeting.

The project will improve forest health and the restoration of watershed function in the Raintree area. It will decrease the threat of wild fire and reduce fuel loading while enhancing the existing old growth conifers, aspens and oaks. Hazardous fuels will be treated through a combination of grapple and machine piling, mastication of brush and small trees. Prescribed understory burning will enhance Strategically Placed Area Fuels Treatments (SPLATS) designed to slow the spread of wildfire. The commercial and pre-commercial understory thinning of mixed conifer stands and plantations will reduce tree density and fulfill the role the U.S. Forest Service has in providing a wood supply to local manufacturers. Revenue derived from commercial products will be used to perform essential and costly biomass removal and surface fuel treatments. In addition, the project will enhance recreational opportunities by providing a maintainable level of forest access, including the reconstruction and repair of system roads, while also closing unneeded roads and motorized trails. The reduction in the road network will improve long-term scenic sustainability while simultaneously enhancing wildlife habitat and riparian conservation areas. The project also includes the removal of hazard trees adjacent to system roads and dispersed camping areas. Finally, the project will enhance soil productivity within plantations by increasing soil cover.

The Raintree Restoration Project employed a robust community outreach and collaborative approach to building the proposed action, which is consistent with the SNC's Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI). Collaboration resulted in the formulation of new ideas and capturing the issues, concerns and opportunities provided during the collaborative process. Collaborators included the Sierra Forest Legacy, El Dorado Fire Safe Council, California Forestry Association, Resource Conservation Districts, Trout Unlimited (El Dorado Chapter), El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and the Pacific Southwest Research Station. Project principles employ a Best Science approach to ecological restoration. The recommendations and guidance described in the recent General Technical Reports 220/237, "An Ecosystem Management Strategy for Sierran Mixed Conifer Forests" are being applied to this project.

Organizations in Support:

- Duane Nelson, Eldorado National Forest, U.S. Forest Service, USDA
- Steven Brink, California Forestry Association
- Stan Iverson, Oak Ridge High School
- Malcolm North, Pacific Southwest Research Station, U.S. Forest Service, USDA
- David C. Harcus, Sierra Pacific Industries
- Richard Krek, El Dorado County Fire Safe Council
- Diane Dealey Neill, California Forestry Challenge
- Craig Thomas, Sierra Forest Legacy

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board adopt (a) the necessary California Environmental Quality Act findings; (b) authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination for SNC Project 783, Raintree Forest Health Project; (c) authorize staff to enter into the necessary agreements for this project; and (d) direct staff to file the appropriate California Environmental Quality Act documentation with the State Clearinghouse.