

Background

In June of this year, the Board approved Guidelines that established the criteria for the current grant cycle, with a focus on Healthy Forests and Abandoned Mine Lands. Since that time Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) staff has been actively working with a variety of stakeholders to develop high benefit projects to be funded during the current cycle. There is one grant being recommended for authorization at this Board meeting and a number of others in the process for future Board meetings. The estimated amount available is \$2,858,137.

In August of this year, the Rim Fire began on the Stanislaus National Forest, burning into Yosemite National Park, as it became the largest fire in the recorded history of the Sierra Nevada, burning more than 257,000 acres. In addition to the magnitude of this fire, it burnt with an uncharacteristically high degree of intensity wreaking havoc in these watersheds. Preliminary estimates suggest that nearly 100,000 acres burned at high intensity, larger than most Sierra fires in their entirety. As the fire has moved from a suppression phase to a rehabilitation and restoration phase, staff has been engaged in a number of activities aimed at assisting in these efforts.

Current Status

In October, the SNC was informed by one of our grantees that their project is unable to go forward based on the inability to secure the additional funding needed to successfully complete the project. The grant, the Iron Canyon Fish Passage project in Butte County, was in the amount of \$1 million that is now available for the SNC to re-award.

Staff is recommending that in lieu of moving the funds into the existing grant program, these funds be expended supporting various efforts in restoring the area affected by the Rim Fire. By authorizing expenditure of \$1 million for this purpose the SNC will be able to contribute directly to needed activities and leverage other funding.

Next Steps

Should the Board approve this recommendation staff will immediately begin discussions with the United States Forest Service and a variety of stakeholders to determine how the SNC's contribution can make the greatest impact. This would include active coordination with the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS) collaborative group that SNC has been a part of from its inception. The group had made significant progress building a consensus around forest management activities in their focus area when the Rim Fire occurred. Unfortunately, the entire area of focus for YSS was within the perimeter of the Rim Fire. As this group turns its attention to the issues currently facing this landscape, staff will work closely with the group to identify the best opportunities for SNC investment.

The staff recommendation includes providing additional authority for the Executive Officer (EO) to award grants where successful implementation would be hampered by waiting for Board action, primarily in allowing the EO authority to award grants in excess

of the current delegated authority of \$50,000. This authority may only be exercised in instances where the project is determined to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) or where it is deemed to not be a “project” under CEQA. In exercising this authority, staff is recommending that a committee of the Board consisting of the Chair and Vice Chair be consulted in the decision making process.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board authorize expenditure of up to \$1 million of Proposition 84 funds, consistent the criteria identified in the “Rim Fire Restoration Grant Guidance” document included with staff report ([Attachment A](#)). Staff further recommends that a Board committee consisting of the Chair and Vice Chair be created to consult and advise the Executive Officer in exercising the authority granted in this action.