

## SNC Grants Program Public Comment Survey Analysis

Overall, the Public Comment received about the proposed 2011-12 Grants Program expressed generally agreement with the staff recommendations. Below is information from the comments, including examples of the some of the comments that were received.

### GENERAL RESPONDENT INFO

- 57 individuals responded to the survey.
- Most respondents (75%) had applied for a grant from SNC. Eighty-on percent of those who applied had received grants from us.
- The majority of respondents (67%) were nonprofits, followed by local government (12%). The others were around 4% each (educational institution, federal government, state government, etc.)
- Almost half (46%) of the respondents identified their primary focus as natural resources. Working landscapes accounted for 12%, and the rest were below 10% each (education, community/economic development, cultural/historic, tourism, etc.).

### Q. 7: \$10m SPLIT OVER 2 YRS

- 75% generally supported splitting the remaining \$10 million over two years, although this question didn't specify limiting applications to one focus area per year. Support for the idea declined in the next question when the one-focus-area-per-year information was added.
- General concerns raised about splitting the funding over two years (not including concerns about the focus area limitation, which appear below under Q.8) included:
  - the risk of getting caught in another budget/bond freeze in year 2 (e.g. "spend it while you have it")
  - generally missing out on quality projects in year 1 due to limitations of only spending \$5 million of the \$10 million available
  - arbitrariness, e.g. if the need is there and there is \$10 million worth of quality projects in year 1, why not fund them all?
- Positive comments included:
  - some potential projects may not be ready for funding in the first year, so good to spread funding out to a second year given that new Prop 84 funds might not materialize anytime soon.
  - in tough economic times it is wise to extend our fiscal resources over a longer period.
  - to sustain efforts in the Sierra, it is better to give funds away slowly in smaller amounts over a longer time frame rather than spend funds on bigger grants all at once

**Q. 8: ONE FOCUS AREA PER YEAR**

When asked about limiting eligible projects to Healthy Forests in year 1 and ranching and agricultural lands in year 2, 51% agreed and 44% disagreed. There were many more negative write-in comments than the numerical results would indicate (22 negative comments and only 9 supportive comments).

Concerns included:

- The science doesn't adequately support the claimed environmental benefits of forest thinning.
- The risk of missing out on good ranching and agricultural land projects ready-to-go now that might not be available in year 2 and, conversely, missing out on good forest projects that won't be ready to apply until year 2.
- Eastern Sierra doesn't have much forest land; therefore they will have a hard time qualifying for any funding in year 2.
- One request to reverse order and do ranching and agricultural land projects in year 1.
- Positive comments included:
  - A tighter focus should allow for better competition, and maybe more truly innovative ideas being funded.
  - These two types of landscapes are the Region's most threatened and encompass the greatest variety of potential projects.
  - These two focus topics relate directly to the major land types and issues occurring in the region.

**Q. 9: NO GUARANTEED SUBREGIONAL POTS**

- 58% supported the idea of no Subregional pots; 29% opposed (13% had no opinion). Concerns by those opposed included:
  - Eastern Sierra lacks eligible applicants, so statistically speaking, fewer applications coming in from that area will mean less funding to that Subregion.
  - Southern Sierra is "consistently slighted" and should be assured of some of the funds.
  - Some subregions consistently get more funding than others.
  - It is more difficult for small communities to compete with the grantwriting resources, matching fund opportunities and power of the more populated areas.
- Positive comments included:
  - This allows projects to stand on their own merit, not location.
  - A well planned project should not be overlooked due to location and funding limits.
  - When funding is so short, SNC should maintain flexibility to make multiple investments in program areas with greater need and leverage. This will maximize the cumulative impact of its grants. Fairness is important, but having a positive impact on the resource is more important.

**Q. 10: \$250,000 CAP ON CATEGORY ONE's**

- 78% of respondents supported the idea of a \$250,000 cap on acquisition/site improvement (Category 1) projects. Concerns by those opposed included:
  - Potential for loss of monitoring within grant projects because grantees won't be able to ask for enough funding to cover monitoring – respondent suggested requiring a minimum of 20% of each project award be devoted to project monitoring.
  - SNC is the primary State agency that provides funding that can be used as a match for federal grants, so reducing the amount of SNC funding per project can negatively affect an applicant's ability to secure federal or other funding.
  - Meaningful acquisition is not possible at the \$250,000 level – at least two respondents suggested a \$500,000 cap instead.
  - Smaller cap makes it harder for SNC to play a significant role in funding large, high-profile projects – a couple of respondents requested some flexibility for unique opportunities that would require more than \$250,000.
- Positive comments included:
  - Given the limited funds this sounds good.
  - With the limited funding levels available lowering the cap for these projects makes sense and will allow the SNC to support a larger number of worthy projects.

**Q. 11: \$50,000 CAP ON CATEGORY TWO's**

- Fewer people (65%) supported the amount for this cap. Concerns about this amount included:
  - Too low of a dollar amount to complete CEQA/environmental compliance work, especially for projects involving water, riparian zones and meadows, given the complexity of hydrology and the number of permits required  
*NOTE: based on the nature of a few of the negative comments, we believe that some respondents were mistaking this for a cap on implementation work; but there were still quite a few who commented that \$50,000 is not enough for environmental compliance.*
  - Environmental compliance and permitting fees have gone up lately; \$50,000 is not enough.
  - At least four respondents requested the cap be raised to \$100,000-125,000.
  - Subregions that have been less active/successful in past grant rounds need more pre-project money to bring their projects up to the implementation level.
- Positive comments included:
  - This appears to be a good average to higher amount of expense for this category. While some pre-project plans may need more funds, again, creative thinking and matching funds should then help cover overall costs.

- If, based on your experience, the majority of Category Two projects can be successfully completed with \$50,000, then this makes sense.

**Q. 12: FUNDING PHASED PROJECTS**

- As expected, a lot of respondents (74%) liked this idea.
  - Supporters pointed to the ability to fund a project all the way through, start to finish, leading to more on-the-ground results, as well as efficiencies gained by knowing that implementation funds were in place as long as the environmental compliance checked out.
  - There were a couple of comments about the fact that SNC is unique in offering grant funding to complete pre-project due diligence, therefore our program is highly valued.
  - Concerns included risks due to the potential for changes to the permitting process between the pre-project and implementation phases, tying up all the funds in year 1 in these “phased” projects and then not having funding available in year 2, and inefficiencies of tying up implementation funding that would be better spent on ready-to-go on-the-ground projects in year 1.

**Q.13: REQUIRED PRE-APPLICATION**

- Overwhelmingly positive reaction to this proposal, with 92% in support and 6% no opinion. There was not a single vote in actual opposition. Comments included ideas for making the process more effective, but everyone who commented (with the exception of one respondent who wants us to reform our current process altogether and work instead through the California Fire Safe Council to use their grant application pool) was supportive of the idea, touting the time- and money-saving aspects especially.