

\$5 million available to assist Sierra ranchers, farmers with conservation projects

Submitted to The Union June 18, 2012

Approximately \$5 million in conservation grants is now available to organizations working with ranchers and farmers in the Sierra Nevada region, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) announced Monday.

The grants, funded by Proposition 84, are for projects on “working landscapes” and must provide a public benefit.

“Ranching and farming has a rich and important place in the heritage of the Sierra, so preserving that heritage is critical to our future,” said SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham. “Cattle graze the Sierra in the spring and summer, and farmers work their fields many months of the year. If ranchers and farmers need assistance with projects or plans that help conserve or restore land and water resources, we invite them to work with eligible organizations to apply.”

Eligible applicants include public agencies, qualifying nonprofit organizations whose charitable purposes are consistent with the purposes of the SNC, and eligible tribal organizations.

Titled the “Proposition 84 Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands Grant Program,” this offering from the SNC is more narrowly focused on ranches and agricultural lands. Examples of possible projects to be considered for funding must meet the following criteria:

- Reduce erosion, restore riparian integrity, restore meadows or provide for natural stream flow and stream structure;
- Manage grazing along riparian corridors or meadows, including fencing or new water storage, for the purpose of reducing erosion, improving habitat function, and/or improving water quality;
- Water conservation projects to reduce agriculturally induced surface water and groundwater contamination;

- Protect ranches and agricultural lands and associated watershed resources (streams, meadows, wetlands) through the use of conservation easements;
- Grazing management or agricultural management practices that improve overall habitat conditions for habitat or stream connectivity for fish and wildlife species across working landscapes; and
- Pre-project administrative work such as permits, and environmental protection documents.

Applications that are solely for the purpose of acquiring equipment or title to real property are not eligible for funding

SNC staff will be available to work with applicants during the first phase of the process, which ends July 16. An informational Webinar explaining the purpose of the grant and the process for applying will be available starting at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday.

To RSVP for the Webinar, e-mail ahutchings@sierranevada.ca.gov or call (209) 742-0840 by 9 a.m. Tuesday.

“Because this is a new focus for our grant program, we are eager to reach out to the ranchers and farmers in the Sierra to help them partner with eligible applicants and move through this process,” Branham said. “This is a great opportunity to work with our staff to create the best application possible.”

For complete information on eligible project types and the parameters of the program, look under Grants and Other Assistance on the SNC's Web page: www.sierranevada.ca.gov.