

Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) continues to play an active role working with the United States Forest Service (USFS), the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS) collaborative, and other partners in ongoing efforts to restore portions of the Stanislaus National Forest that were burned in the 2013 Rim Fire. At the December 2013 SNC Board meeting, the Board authorized up to \$1 million of remaining Proposition 84 funds to be directed to this restoration effort.

The SNC awarded a grant of \$62,463 to Tuolumne River Preservation Trust (TRT), acting as the fiscal agent for YSS, and coordinating with the Stanislaus National Forest, for a Rim Fire Springs Assessment in July 2014 utilizing Executive Officer authority as previously approved by the Board. The assessment was contracted to the Museum of Northern Arizona's Springs Stewardship Institute (SSI) which is expert in this area and able to mobilize more quickly and perform the work more cost effectively than USFS could have done with their own resources. An extensive assessment of known and discovered springs (80 total) was completed in fall of 2014 and the grant has been successfully completed. This assessment provides a valuable data set for Forest Service restoration efforts across the Rim Fire area.

Current Status

In April of this year, the Executive Officer approved a Rim Fire Restoration Planning grant for \$88,035, as it was important that the design work commence as soon as possible in order to meet subsequent timing goals for implementation. The grant provides design and permitting for the restoration of the four meadows and ten springs, and preliminary design for the replacement of the two culverts, all within the Lower Cherry Creek watershed. It is anticipated that SNC will fund a follow-on implementation grant for the meadow and springs restoration and culvert replacement.

As with the Springs Assessment grant, this grant was also awarded to TRT as the fiscal agent for YSS, with the work itself carried out by the Stanislaus National Forest through a combination of their own staff and contractors. The design component of this grant is expected to be completed by September 2015 so that the implementation grant application can be developed as expeditiously as possible.

The SNC also is currently working with the Stanislaus National Forest to develop a forest biomass removal grant application for approximately 200 acres in the Lower Cherry Creek watershed that complements the other SNC-funded work. This area is covered under the USFS's August 2014 Rim Fire Recovery Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for salvage harvest. However, because of the nature of forest density, tree size, and terrain, the Forest was not able to obtain a salvage contract for thinning and biomass removal in this area. SNC funding will allow tailored biomass removal for optimal forest restoration and watershed health. A preliminary estimate for this work is \$200,000+. If California Environmental Quality Act can be completed quickly enough, depending on the necessary determination, it may be possible to bring a grant

recommendation to the September Board meeting for award so that work can commence in late 2015, but 2016 implementation may be more likely.

Next Steps

Efforts will continue to develop the forest biomass removal project. As soon as the design portion of the Planning grant is completed, SNC will work with Stanislaus National Forest and TRT to develop a grant application for the implementation of the meadow, springs, and culvert work. A rough estimate for the cost of the work is in the range of \$500,000. If a grant proposal could be developed quickly enough to bring a recommendation to the December 2015 Board meeting for award, work can presumably be completed in 2016. Otherwise, if it is more likely to go to the March 2016 Board meeting for consideration, it will be more challenging to complete the project in the 2016 calendar year.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Boardmembers are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.