

Local News

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Striving for a healthy Forest

Sierra Nevada Conservancy looking out for the forests best interests

By Stacey Powells
Times Correspondent

Our forests need help and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is just one of many local agencies dedicated to healthy forests during both the good and the bad times. "Forest health is the main focus of our Proposition One Grant Program," said Danna Stroud, Mt. Whitney Representative for the SNC. "We just opened up the second cycle of grant funding where \$8 million will be split between organizations who apply with forest health projects in mind."

The California Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improve-

ment Act of 2014 or Proposition One, is a \$7.545 billion general obligation bond that provided funding to address water quality, supply, and infrastructure improvement issues in California. SNC received \$25 million dollars from Prop One. The first grant cycle was awarded by the SNC Board in the fall of 2015.

When awarding grants, the SNC looks at projects focused on fuels reduction and watershed protection. "When we remove trees to help reduce the threat of large, damaging fires, that also affects our watershed," said Stroud. "We also look to develop additional biomass utilization opportunities. As more biomass is taken off the forest, we need ways to utilize that biomass."

The projects range from response to tree mortality die-off, all the way to trying to get ahead of the curve in

treating green forests to help them better prepare to defend themselves against future infestation attacks.

The grant money SNC received from Prop One wasn't as much as they received from Prop 84, so their focus had to be narrowed down. "Our focus on forest health is in three key areas," continued Stroud. "One is funding through the Prop One grant program, the second is infrastructure, and the third one has to do with ensuring there aren't policies out there creating barriers which are preventing projects from getting done. These are the three main areas of focus for the SNC Watershed Improvement Program or 'WHIP.' We focus on healthy forests through our WHIP program."

Stroud stated that because the Prop One program is very specific,

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approval to the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)-sponsored Senate Bill 447 by Senator Jim Nielsen (R-Tehama). The bill now awaits the consideration of Governor Brown. SB 447 authorizes two or more counties to create Assessment Appeals Boards to hear taxpayer appeals. SB 447 will help low-population counties to maximize the use of assessment appeals boards given the complex nature of developing the county's property tax roll. Many low-population counties appeal through the local Board of Equalization (comprised of the Board of Supervisors) because there are not enough residents that can be eligible to serve on an assessment appeals board.

A.B. 1250 adds burden to rural counties

This week, the Senate Governance and Finance Committee approved the RCRC-opposed Assembly Bill 1250, authored by Assembly Member Reginald Jones-Sawyer (D-Los Angeles), related to county contracts for services. AB 1250 would establish requirements for counties before it may enter into a contract or renew/extend an existing contract after January 1, 2018 for

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it's tough for Eastside projects to get into the que. "We are working to bring other funding into the area for projects that may not qualify for Prop One," Stroud said. Presently, they are trying to find funding with a variety of partners for fuels reduction work that needs to be done in the June Lake Area.

A major concern for the SNC is the tree die-off issue happening all over the southern and central Sierra Nevada. Assistant Executive Officer for the SNC, Bob Klingman, said that most of what they can do is in response to a situation that is spreading throughout the Sierra Nevada region. "We're investing as much effort as we can in trying to

get ahead of tree mortality for the areas that haven't been as impacted with the die-off as the southern and central Sierra Nevada have been," said Klingman. "We are convening stakeholders in the region, hoping to organize folks around forest health issues in an attempt to help the Forest Service increase the 'Pace and Scale' of work that they do to maintain these forests."

'Pace and Scale' is the ability of the public land managers to actually get out and manage forest lands to restore forests to a more natural and resilient condition. Klingman said it will give the trees a better chance to do what they do normally: Fight off disease and insect infestations the natural way.

Stroud said that the SNC also collaborates with the California Tahoe Conservancy, their sister conservancy to the north. "We are partnering with them on the Tahoe Central Sierra Project which includes projects on the Stanislaus, Tahoe, and El Dorado National Forests, as well as the Tahoe Basin Management Unit."

SNC keeps their antennae up for other additional grant money that may be used in our area. For instance, CalFire had a recent Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Grant Program close to \$20 million dollars. "We wanted to make sure that interested parties in our area knew about that grant program and had the opportunity to think

about submitting an application," Klingman said. SNC has also steered potential applicants to the State Responsibility Area Program, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. All were recipients of Prop One grant money.

Beyond the grant program, SNC is providing a lot of information to the Sacramento legislatures around the challenges of tree mortality. "We are trying to educate and inform them about the impact," added Klingman.

For more information on the Sierra Nevada Conservancy including their grant programs, go to <http://www.sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov>.