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Grant awarded to conservation group

The Yosemite Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council has been awarded a \$90,300 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture to provide technical assistance in promoting new and expanded biomass businesses in North Fork and Wilseyville in Calaveras County.

In addition to the federal commitment to this 18-month project, there is an additional \$100,700 in state and local in-kind contributions for a total project cost of \$191,000. A large portion of in-kind donations will be directly contributed by imperative partner, Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Conservancy grant writer Elissa Brown says the overall goal of the project is to promote the establishment of small biomass processing businesses in targeted low-income areas of the Sierra Nevada region, creating a diverse and stable market for the utilization of woody biomass, which will create jobs, stimulate rural economies in low-income areas and increase the economic feasibility of sustainable fuels reduction efforts, which are needed for fire safety and forest health.

When complete, the conservancy and development council and other supporting partners aspire to have established two biomass yards, three biomass processing businesses on these yards, and the creation of 25 jobs.

"We are excited to partner with such influential players in a new and upcoming idea that will promote economic growth and responsible stewardship of excessive fuels," said Madera County 5th District Supervisor Tom Wheeler. "We are doing anything and everything in our power to make sure that this project is more than successful. The outcome of this project directly affects our citizens, our forest, our watershed and our communities' future as a whole."