

Watershed grant awards include Little Chico, Deer and Mill creeks

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PLACERVILLE — The Sierra Nevada Conservancy allocated approximately \$10 million to watershed protection during the governing board's quarterly meeting March 3 in Placerville.

The grants include \$20,000 for the Little Chico Creek watershed and \$125,000 along Mill and Deer creeks in Tehama County.

The money for Little Chico Creek will go toward appraisal of approximately 414 acres of private property the Northern California Regional Land Trust seeks to acquire, to be added to 176 acres already protected by the state Department of Fish and Game.

According to the trust's Jamison Watts, the four parcels are about 10 miles east of Chico. Two miles of riparian habitat will be protected.

The project fits within the larger Tuscan Headwaters Project, previously funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in collaboration with the trust and eight watershed conservation groups in Butte and Tehama counties.

The Deer Creek/Mill Creek grant to the Western Rivers Conservancy funds planning and coordination of the acquisition of 2,730 acres in those two watersheds.

The conservancy already purchased 599 acres around Lower Deer Creek Falls from Sierra Pacific Industries in 2009. SPI has agreed to sell an additional 2,730 acres of land.

It owns several miles of the south bank of Mill Creek upstream from Black Rock, and parcels that could connect separated Lassen National Forest land along Deer Creek and Mill Creek.

The acquisitions would complete the protection of approximately 30 miles of Deer Creek, as well as 35 miles of Mill Creek. These creeks are recommended by the U.S. Forest Service for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

"These projects will provide jobs and a variety of benefits to the Sierra Nevada Region," said conservancy Executive Officer Jim Branham, "including reducing the risk of large damaging fires, restoring meadows, protecting habitat, supporting working ranches, and improving water quality."

With the approval of these grants, the conservancy has now awarded approximately \$40 million in Proposition 84 bond funding to projects in the Sierra.