

Background

In September 2017, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) was awarded a \$5 million California Climate Investment (CCI) grant from CAL FIRE to implement seven separate forest health projects and one research effort in the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI) landscape. Project work will be performed by multiple partners including the Eldorado National Forest, Tahoe National Forest, Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), and the California Tahoe Conservancy (CTC). The research effort will be managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Southwest Research Station.

The grant agreement between CAL FIRE and the SNC requires that all California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) responsibilities be completed to their satisfaction before any project work can begin. All implementing partners are prepared to execute contracts and commence project work this field season pending completion of remaining CEQA requirements.

Current Status

The CEQA status and recommended action (if needed) for each of the seven forest health projects funded by the 2017 CAL FIRE CCI grant are described below. SNC CEQA compliance is complete for three of the seven projects, and CAL FIRE has authorized SNC to proceed with implementation of those projects. Staff is recommending the Board make findings concurrent with analyses in documentation for three remaining projects. CEQA will be completed for the last remaining project (Dollar Project) by the California Tahoe Conservancy.

West Shore Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project

This project is located in the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit. The USFS filed a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Decision Memo with a Categorical Exclusion. Based on a review of the NEPA analysis and Decision Memo and project characteristics, SNC determined that the project was eligible for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land. SNC filed a notice of exemption on April 25, 2018.

Status: SNC action complete.

Prosser Wildland Urban Intermix Project

This project is located in Tahoe National Forest. The USFS filed a NEPA Decision Memo with a Categorical Exclusion. Based on a review of the NEPA analysis and Decision Memo and project characteristics, SNC determined that the project was eligible for a Categorical Exemption under Section 15304, Minor Alterations to Land. SNC filed a notice of exemption on April 25, 2018.

Status: SNC action complete.

Western Nevada County Community Defense Project – Deer Creek

This project is located in Tahoe National Forest. The USFS filed a NEPA Decision Memo with a Finding of No Significant Impact. Nevada County developed and adopted, as Lead Agency, an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration. The SNC Board authorized funding for this project through the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Proposition 1 Grant Program and adopted CEQA documents in March 2018. SNC filed a Notice of Determination as a Responsible Agency on March 12, 2018.

Status: SNC action complete.

Tobacco Gulch Ecological Restoration Project

This project is located in Eldorado National Forest. The USFS filed a NEPA Decision Memo with a Finding of No Significant Impact. SNC, as Lead Agency, conducted CEQA analysis and prepared an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) with a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program. The IS/MND was circulated for public comment, and no comments requiring significant changes to the proposed project were received.

Status: SNC Board to consider the IS/MND with Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for potential adoption, as Lead Agency, on June 7, 2018.

- To access the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, [click here](#).
- To access the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, [click here](#).
- To access the Notice of Determination, [click here](#).

Biggie Vegetation Management and Fuels Reduction Project

This project is in Tahoe National Forest. The USFS filed a NEPA Decision Memo with a Finding of No Significant Impact. SNC, as Lead Agency, conducted CEQA analysis and prepared an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) with a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program. The IS/MND was circulated for public comment, and no comments requiring significant changes to the proposed project were received.

Status: SNC Board to consider the IS/MND with Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for potential adoption, as Lead Agency, on June 7, 2018.

- To access the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration, [click here](#).
- To access the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, [click here](#).
- To access the Notice of Determination, [click here](#).

Fuels Reduction and Understory Burning, Burton Creek Project

This project is in Burton Creek State Park. The California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) developed and adopted, as Lead Agency, an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration.

Status: SNC Board to consider the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for potential adoption, as a Responsible Agency, on June 7, 2018.

- To access the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration [click here](#).
- To access the Notice of Determination, [click here](#).

North Tahoe Interagency Forest Health and Biomass Project (Dollar Project)

This project is located on CTC land adjacent to Burton Creek State Park. CTC conducted a CEQA analysis and prepared an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration for consideration and potential adoption, as Lead Agency, at the CTC Board Meeting on June 21, 2018.

Status: If approved by the CTC Board, SNC will deliver the Notice of Determination filed by CTC to CAL FIRE for authorization to implement the project.

Planning and Implementation Framework (Research)

In addition to the projects listed above, the CCI grant will contribute to a Pacific Southwest Research Station (U.S. Forest Service) research effort to better identify linkages between forest conditions, fire dynamics, carbon storage, water availability, and species needs to assist in current and future forest restoration efforts. No CEQA action is required by SNC.

Next Steps

Upon approval by the Board, staff will file Notices of Determination for the adopted IS/MNDs with the State Clearinghouse and pay Department of Fish and Wildlife filing fees. Copies of completed notices will be transmitted to CAL FIRE for approval to implement the projects.

The CTC has prepared and circulated an IS/MND for the North Tahoe Interagency Forest Health and Biomass Project (Dollar Project) located on CTC land, and is expected to consider adoption by the end of June 2018. This will complete CAL FIRE CEQA requirements for all projects funded with the 2017 CCI Grant.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board:

- (a) approve findings concurring with the Mitigated Negative Declaration and authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination as a Responsible Agency for the Fuels Reduction and Understory Burning, Burton Creek Project; and**
- (b) make findings that there is no substantial evidence that the Tobacco Gulch Ecological Restoration Project and Biggie Vegetation Management and Fuels Reduction Project, with mitigation measures, may have a significant effect on the environment; adopt the Initial Study / Mitigated Negative Declarations and related Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Programs; authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Determination as a Lead Agency on these projects; and direct staff to maintain in the SNC office the record of proceedings upon which this decision is based.**