

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) was allocated \$54 million in Proposition 84, passed by the voters in 2006. Approximately \$50 million of this amount was available for grant awards to eligible nonprofit organizations, public agencies and federally recognized tribal organizations. To date approximately \$40 million has been awarded to a variety of projects consistent with Proposition 84's requirements and SNC's governing statute.

At its June 2011 meeting, the SNC Board directed staff to develop draft grant guidelines for the FY 2011-12 grant cycle to support Healthy Forests as identified in the Conservancy's Strategic Plan. The Board also decided that half (approximately \$5 million) of the remaining dollars available to the SNC through Proposition 84 would be used to support this area of focus, and the remainder to be allocated in the grant cycle for FY 2012-13 to support the Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands area of focus.

The Board approved a number of changes from previous SNC Grant Guidelines, discussed further below, to be included the draft guidelines. A public review draft reflecting this direction was available for public comment from July 20 to August 15, 2011.

### **Current Status**

SNC staff is recommending approval of Final DRAFT Grant Guidelines for Proposition 84 Healthy Forests for FY 2011-12 ([Attachment A](#)). These draft grant guidelines include all revisions made as the result of considering comments received during the public comment period, as well additional staff analysis. If approved, the final guidelines will be made available to potential applicants in late September, 2011. A companion Grant Application Packet (GAP) with necessary forms and instructions will also be available to assist applicants.

Pursuant to Board direction and input from stakeholders and the public, the Final Draft Grant Guidelines include significant changes compared to previous Proposition 84 guidelines prepared by SNC. Following is a list of the substantive changes included in this year's Draft Grant Guidelines:

- Submission of a pre-application is required, with eligible projects receiving an invitation to submit a full application.
- Eligible Projects have been more narrowly defined to support the Healthy Forests focus area.
- Fee title Acquisitions or pre-project work supporting fee title acquisitions are not eligible.
- A prioritization of project categories with an associated weighting rubric has been introduced to favor "on-the-ground" projects (pending Board decision at this meeting).

- Category One grants will be limited to either \$250,000 or \$350,000 (pending Board decision at this meeting).
- Category Two grants will be limited to \$75,000.
- Evaluation process and criteria have been modified to ensure fairness and transparency.
- Grant awards will be made without specific or guaranteed allocation by Subregion, although geographic distribution of projects will be considered.

In addition, based on Board discussion and direction, staff has solicited input from Firesafe Councils and others on ways to ensure that the SNC grant application process encourages high quality fuel reduction projects. Based on that input, the guidelines allow the submission of a completed Firesafe Council application as part of the pre-application, thereby reducing the time and effort needed to prepare a pre-application. The information in the pre-application will be carried forward into the full application as well.

Staff has compiled all of the comments received during the public review period into an attachment ([Attachment B](#)) showing all changes incorporated into the Final Grant Guidelines.

### **Next Steps**

While the Board may have comments or suggestions on various aspects of the guidelines, there are two specific decisions for the Board to make at this meeting regarding items identified with alternatives in the Draft Grant Guidelines:

1. The first of these decisions is to choose one of the suggested weighting criteria point values to be assigned for Project Category Types (the total points possible is 100, including the points listed below).

#### Alternative One

Give priority to grant awards in this order:

- Site improvement projects (5 points).
- Pre-project activities that ready on-the-ground site improvement projects (2 points).
- Acquisition of conservation easements (1 point).
- Pre-project due-diligence projects that ready the acquisition of conservation easements (0 points).

#### Alternative Two

Give priority to grant awards in this order:

- Site improvement projects (5 points).
- Pre-project due diligence projects that ready on-the-ground site improvements or the acquisition of conservation easements (2 points).
- Acquisition of conservation easements (0 points).

**Staff recommends Alternative One be included in the final guidelines to provide continued priority to on-the-ground projects.**

2. The second decision is to choose a maximum grant amount for Category One grants.

- Alternative One \$5,000 to \$250,000, or
- Alternative Two \$5,000 to \$350,000

**Staff recommends Alternative Two to accommodate the broadest range of viable projects.**

Additional next steps include making any final revisions to the guidelines based on Board direction received at this meeting, completing the GAP, and posting the guidelines on the SNC Web site for release. The proposed schedule for this grant cycle is as follows:

<b>GRANT PROGRAM ELEMENTS</b>	<b>Target Date or Duration</b>
<b>RELEASE HEALTHY FOREST GUIDELINES AND GAPS - OPEN RFP</b>	9/26/2011
<b>PRE-APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:</b> SNC staff will be available to work with applicants on preparation of pre-applications to be submitted during this period.	9/26/2011 to 10/21/2011
<b>PRE-APPLICATION SUBMISSION DEADLINE:</b> If an applicant wishes to receive SNC grant funding, they <u>must</u> submit a pre-application and the associated attachments no later than COB on this date.	10/21/2011
<b>PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW PERIOD:</b> SNC will review pre-applications for eligibility (including focus area alignment) and completeness. Invitations to submit a full application may occur any time after the pre-application has been reviewed, but no later than COB 11/16/11.	10/24/2011 to 11/16/2011
<b>FULL APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT PERIOD:</b> Applicants who receive an invitation to submit a full application should work with SNC staff to develop and refine their full application during this period.	11/16/2011 to 1/23/2012
<b>FULL APPLICATION SUBMISSION DEADLINE - CLOSE RFP:</b> All elements of a full application must be complete and submitted by COB on this date.	1/23/2012
<b>FULL APPLICATION REVIEW:</b> SNC staff and technical evaluators will evaluate all complete applications, resulting in a score up to 100 points. Consultation with the Board Subregional subcommittees, as well as communication with affected local agencies will occur during this period.	1/23/2012 to 4/27/2012
<b>FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO SNC BOARD:</b> Staff will provide recommendations based on the evaluation, including consideration of geographic distribution of projects.	6/7/2012

**Recommendation**

**Staff recommends the Board approve the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 84 Healthy Forests Grant Guidelines, Fiscal Year 2011-12, including changes based on Board direction to take the necessary actions to implement the 2011-12 Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program.**