

<b>SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY</b>
<b>PROPOSITION 1 – Watershed Improvement Program Pre-Application Form</b>
<b>PROJECT NAME</b> Caples Creek Watershed Ecological Restoration Project
<b>APPLICANT NAME</b> ( <i>Legal name, address, and zip code</i> ) El Dorado Irrigation District 2890 Mosquito Road Placerville, CA 95667
<b>AMOUNT OF GRANT REQUEST</b> \$434,550
<b>ESTIMATED TOTAL PROJECT COST</b> \$825,050
<p><b>DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT (Limit 5,000 characters including spaces)</b></p> <p>This proposal is in support of the El Dorado Irrigation District (EID) implementing the Caples Creek Watershed Ecological Restoration Project (Restoration Project) in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The Caples Creek watershed, located within the Eldorado National Forest, is primarily managed by the USFS and is the primary water supply for more than 110,000 people and businesses that rely upon EID for water. The watershed has been identified by the USFS through a nation-wide effort called Watershed Condition Framework as a forest priority watershed. Heavy fuel loading is a concern, since most of the Caples Creek watershed fire return interval has been lengthened from approximately 12 years under natural conditions in the mixed conifer vegetation class to more than 100 years due to historical suppression efforts. The Restoration Project goal is to demonstrate how a water purveyor, such as EID, can develop partnerships with land use managers, such as the USFS, to guide and implement fuels treatment and watershed restoration activities that will reduce the potential for a catastrophic wildfire event in the watershed and ensure continued high water quality for the foreseeable future. The SNC is currently contributing toward the planning and NEPA environmental analysis for this Restoration Project through Proposition 84 funding. The planning effort has provided EID and the USFS with priority actions necessary for meeting the watershed restoration goal. The identified priority actions are the gradual reintroduction of fire, management of fire-adapted ecosystems, and meadow restoration. Implementation of the restoration project will improve forest health and fire resiliency, meadow and aspen ecosystems, and wildlife habitat.</p> <p>Due to fire suppression, the area has not experienced any active fire since 1916. The lengthening of fire return intervals has led to significant increases in fuel loading, tree density, canopy cover, and snag density; as well as, shifts in species composition and reduced regeneration particularly of desirable deciduous and hardwood trees, and reduced shrub cover. The recently completed analyses by the USFS have found these conditions have greatly increased the risk of high intensity wildfires that could have significant effects on water quality and EID drinking water customers during a post-fire recovery period.</p> <p>Meadows in the watershed are dominated with healthy riparian vegetation, but several have been heavily impacted by past and present activities such as grazing, fire exclusion, and unauthorized trails. The recent USFS analyses have identified multiple locations in the Caples Creek watershed where aspen are currently declining due to conifer encroachment, shading and competition. Aspen is shade intolerant, needs full sunlight for successful establishment and growth, and needs fire to stimulate regeneration through sprouting. This decline is observed in the Caples Creek watershed by overtopping of conifers, resulting in a lack of successful regeneration and declining aspen stand health.</p> <p>Restoration Project activities that would be covered under the SNC Proposition 1 grant fund include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of prescribed burning activities within approximately 8,675 acres of the Caples Creek watershed using manual and aerial ignition methods. Multiple burn entries would be necessary to meet multiple resource objectives and would be prescribed based on monitoring results.</li> <li>• Implementation of meadow restoration activities on approximately 25 acres within and surrounding existing meadows. Conifers from seedling size to pole size trees up to 9" dbh would be felled, while selected larger conifers would be girdled. Restoration activities would also include rerouting approximately a half mile of the existing hiking trail that crosses through Jake Schneider Meadow to the north side of the meadow along the tree line. The old trail would be blocked and disguised to discourage use and allowed to recover naturally.</li> <li>• Implementation of aspen restoration activities on approximately 25 acres within and surrounding existing aspen stands. Conifers less than 9" dbh would be felled, while selected larger conifers would be girdled to increase sunlight and reduce competition. Conifers selected for felling or girdling would be specific to those that are blocking the sunlight and limiting the recruitment of young sprouts to re-establish multi-layered stands. There would be no removal of timber from the Caples recommended wilderness area as part of this project.</li> </ul> <p>Best management practices would be implemented during project activities to protect aquatic, terrestrial, and botanical special-status species, waterways and riparian areas, cultural resources, and aesthetic/visual resources. Impacts from smoke emissions would be minimized by complying with a project specific smoke management plan that would be issued by the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District.</p>

## DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT WORKPLAN AND SCHEDULE

### Project Preparation:

- Layout and approximately 25 miles of fireline construction and improvement of existing trails for use as fire containment lines using USFS, California Conservation Corps, and Generation Green resources.
- Heavy accumulations of vegetation and downed material cut, piled, and burned to reduce the potential for damage to resource values during the initial burn activities.
- Raking thick accumulations of duff material from around the bases of select old growth trees to prevent prolonged heat residence time and minimize root damage during prescribed burn operations.
- Protection measures to safeguard 18 archaeological sites in partnership with Washoe tribal members as cultural resource advisors and site monitors.
- Protection measures to safeguard the Silver Fork Ranger Station historical cabin site.
- Protection measures to safeguard trail markers and bridges within the project area.
- Protection measures to safeguard EID Caples Creek streamflow gaging equipment within the project area.

### Project Implementation:

- First prescribed fire entry on 8,675 acres planned to occur over an approximate 5 year period using hand and aerial ignition.
- Approximately 4,409 acres of understory burning in areas of mixed conifer, hardwood, and brush in the lower elevations of the project.
- Approximately 4,266 acres of aerial ignition in the higher elevations of the project within vegetative islands separated by barren rock and composed of red fir and subalpine vegetation types.
- Further re-entries of limited additional treatments over an additional 10 year time frame would be prescribed based on monitoring results.

### Post Project:

- Patrol of post burn areas to ensure fire is maintained within containment lines
- Monitoring of archaeological sites to include utilization of representatives from the Washoe tribe as cultural resource monitors.
- Project ecological effects monitoring would occur. In 2013, 60 common stand exam plots were installed in the Caples Creek watershed. Stand exam plots provide baseline data that can be compared to post treatment effects to fuel loading, trees and other vegetation. Additional plots proposed in 2016 would assure appropriate representation of vegetation types and allow for more accurate monitoring of project effects after each entry.

### Schedule:

- Project layout is planned to commence in the summer of 2016.
- Project preparation for prescribed burning planned to begin in summer of 2016.
- Implementation of prescribed burning could occur as early as fall of 2016 with first entry completion over the project area estimated for fall of 2020, and additional multiple entries over a 10 year period.
- Post project patrol would occur immediately after each entry.
- Archaeological site monitoring would occur with each prescribed fire entry and would continue over a 5-15 year period.
- Project effectiveness monitoring is in place and will occur after each entry and continue over a 5-15 year period.

## DESCRIPTION OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Forest Service will receive written letters expressing support for the project from the following organizations and agencies:

- Joint letter submitted by Sierra Forest Legacy, Defenders of Wildlife, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation
- The Nature Conservancy
- Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California
- El Dorado, Amador, and Alpine County Board of Supervisors
- Greenwood California Conservation Corps
- El Dorado County & Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation Districts
- El Dorado County Fire Safe Council
- El Dorado County Water Agency

## **STATUS OF TRIBAL INVOLVEMENT AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

The US Forest Service is planning to draft an agreement to collaborate with the Washoe Tribe for assistance as cultural resource advisors and archaeological site monitors both during implementation and post project entries.

Tribal Contact Info:  
Darrel Cruz, Director  
THPO/Cultural Resource Department  
Washoe Tribe of Nevada/California  
919 Highway 395 South  
Gardnerville, NV. 89410  
W. 775-782-0014  
C. 775-546-3421  
darrel.cruz@washoetribe.us  
dcruz@washoetanf.org

## **DESCRIPTION OF LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Long-term management would include the USFS continuing to reintroduce fire to the Caples Creek watershed over an additional 10 year period beyond the grant to meet the overall goal of recalibrating the fire return interval to correct the project site departures from pre-settlement conditions. First entry with prescribed fire is planned for completion in 5 years. Consecutive re-entries are planned to occur on an approximate 5 to 7 year cycle. The project will reduce hazardous fuels that threaten the sustainability and /or quality of the watershed and ecological, cultural, and recreational resource values contained within. The project will greatly benefit overall forest health, improve and secure wildlife and aquatic habitat, restore meadow hydrological function and capacity, and protect a key headwater that supplies water to 110,000 people and businesses.

## **DESCRIPTION OF REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS/PERMITS NEEDED**

The USFS has completed the NEPA analysis with supporting resource analyses/reports. CEQA analysis must still be completed for the proposed project activity. All project activities would avoid riparian corridors, watercourses and other waters of the state and U.S., and grading activities would not be required. Cultural resource investigations have been completed and Section 106 compliance has been met. Smoke permits would be acquired by the USFS from the local Air Quality Management Districts (AQMD).

## **DESCRIPTION OF RESTRICTIONS/AGREEMENTS NEEDED/IN PLACE**

THE USFS is planning to enter into agreements for assistance from the following entities:

- Greenwood California Conservation Corps
- Washoe Tribe
- Generation Green
- El Dorado Irrigation District (EID)

## DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

EID's mission includes providing high quality water services in an environmentally and fiscally responsible manner. EID will provide project management over site and administrative support to the Restoration Project. EID will utilize senior staff with professional experience in biological/natural resources and project management. In addition, EID has a Finance Department with the full capability to manage the grant project accounting needs.

The USFS is a multi-faceted agency that manages and protects 154 national forests and 20 grasslands in 44 states and Puerto Rico. The agency's mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The USFS has an elite wildland firefighting team and the world's largest forestry research organizations whose experts provide technical and financial help to state and local government agencies, businesses, private landowners and work government-to-government with tribes to help protect and manage non-federal forest and associated range and watershed lands.

The USFS augments work through partnerships with public and private agencies that help the agency plant trees, improve trails, educate the public, and improve conditions in wildland/urban interfaces and rural areas, just to name a few. Our team also promotes sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation internationally. Gifford Pinchot, first Chief of the Forest Service, summed up the mission of the Forest Service: "to provide the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people in the long run."

The Eldorado National Forest has extensive resource specialists and a fire and fuels management team capable of sustaining multiple simultaneous projects now and into the foreseeable future. The Alder, Iron Trap, and Marshall Mine fuels reduction and forest health projects are a sampling of many examples of successful projects implemented by the Placerville Ranger District of the Eldorado National Forest to protect the public and sustain resource values from catastrophic fire events. The Placerville District currently has nine projects in planning or at various stages of implementation.

## PROJECT LOCATION (*County with approx. lat/long, center of project area*)

Caples Creek Watershed - 38°40'N, 120°07'W. The project is located in El Dorado and Alpine counties within the Caples Creek watershed, which is generally bounded by the Mokelumne Wilderness to the south, Upper Truckee River watershed to the east, and Silver Fork American River watershed to the west. Zip codes within the watershed include 95646 and 95666. Highway 88 transects the watershed in an east-west direction.

### SENATE DISTRICT NUMBER

1st Senate District

### ASSEMBLY DISTRICT NUMBER

5th Assembly District

## PERSON WITH MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR GRANT CONTRACT

*Name and title*

*Phone*

*Email Address*

Mr. Dan Corcoran

530-642-0482

dcorcoran@eid.org

Ms.

## COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR PLANNING DIRECTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

*Name:* Roger Trout

*Phone Number:* 530-621-5369

*Email address:* roger.trout@edcgov.us

## NEAREST PUBLIC WATER AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

*Name:* El Dorado Irrigation District

*Phone Number:* 530-642-0482

*Email address:* dcorcoran@eid.org

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE CEQA STATUS OF THE PROJECT

The CEQA documentation must still be completed for this proposed project activity. The NEPA analysis was partially funded with a current SNC grant, as well as the supporting analyses/reports for the project resource areas. All completed reports are provided in the attached CD. EID understands CEQA compliance will likely require completion of a Mitigated Negative Declaration, and would like the SNC to consider acting as Lead Agency for completion of the CEQA documentation for this proposed project activity.

<p align="center"><b>BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NEPA STATUS OF THE PROJECT (IF APPLICABLE)</b></p> <p>The Caples Ecological Restoration Project NEPA document (Decision Memo) is awaiting decision pending the biological assessment for aquatic wildlife. The USFS plans to have NEPA complete by mid-January 2016. The project Decision Memo, fuels, hydrology, terrestrial wildlife, and botany reports have been completed and are included in the attached CD.</p>	
<p><b>Please identify the appropriate project category below and provide the associated details (Choose One)</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Category One Site Improvement                      <input type="checkbox"/> Category Two Pre-Project Activities</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Category One Acquisition</p>	
<p><b>Site Improvement/ Acquisition Project Area</b></p> <p>Project Area: 8,675 acres</p> <p>Total Acres: 20,300 acres of Watershed</p> <p>SNC Portion (if different): N/A</p> <p><b>Acquisition Projects Only For Acquisitions Only</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Appraisal Included</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Will submit appraisal by</p>	<p><b>Select one primary Pre-Project deliverable</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Permit</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> CEQA/NEPA Compliance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Appraisal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Condition Assessment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Biological Survey</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Site Assessment</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Plan</p>
<p><b>ITEMS TO BE SUBMITTED WITH PRE-APPLICATION FORM:</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Location Map</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parcel Map</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Topo Map</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photos of Project Site</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site Plan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Long-Term Management Plan</p>	

To be completed by the applicant:

December 16, 2015

Date of Application 

Daniel Corcoran, Env Mgr

530-642-4082

Name and Title of Authorized Representative

Contact Phone Number