



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 16-0123, **Version:** 1

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Community Development Agency recommending the Board adopt and authorize the Chair to sign Resolution **030-2016** in support of El Dorado Irrigation District's grant funding application to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for the Caples Creek Watershed Ecological Restoration Project.

**FUNDING:** N/A

### **DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION**

Community Development Agency (CDA) recommending the Board adopt Resolution 030-2016 in support of El Dorado Irrigation District's grant funding application to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for the Caples Creek Watershed Ecological Restoration Project.

### **DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND**

The El Dorado Irrigation District (EID) has requested that the Board consider adopting a Resolution (Attachment A) in support of its collaborative efforts with the Eldorado National Forest (ENF) to secure a Proposition 1 implementation grant from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) for the Caples Creek Watershed Ecological Restoration Project (Project) (see Attachments B and C). Proposition 1 funds would provide a matching funding source to ENF federal funds, which help prioritize completion of this Project to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildlife and restore overall watershed health in the Caples Creek Watershed. The Caples Creek watershed extends from Silver Fork Road south of Kyburz to the community of Kirkwood and also provides a significant portion of EID's Project 184 water supplies.

Recent catastrophic wildfires during the period of 2013 through 2015 (Rim, King, Valley, Butte) have demonstrated the risk to public health and safety, economics, and natural resources including water supplies. EID and its watershed partner ENF initiated efforts to proactively address conditions in the Caples Creek watershed in an effort to avoid unfortunate circumstances that occurred during these fires. In 2012, the SNC joined the partnership through funding a planning grant, and efforts under that grant are nearly complete. EID and ENF are now pursuing an implementation grant from SNC that would help expedite the restoration and mitigate against the risk of uncontrolled fire within the Caples Creek watershed.

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. 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 ENF 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.

Meadows in the watershed are dominated by healthy riparian vegetation, but several have been

heavily impacted by past and present activities such as grazing, fire exclusion, and unauthorized trails. The recent ENF 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.

To address these conditions, project activities that would be covered under the SNC Proposition 1 grant fund include:

- Prescribed burning within 8,675 acres of the Caples Creek watershed, using manual and aerial ignition methods. The burning activities would occur through several different events likely over several years and would be prescribed based on monitoring results.
- Meadow restoration activities on approximately 25 acres. Conifers from seedling size to pole size trees up to 9" diameter 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.
- Aspen restoration activities on approximately 25 acres. Conifers less than 9" diameter 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.

Staff has reviewed the proposed application and recommends that the Board adopt the Resolution in support of this effort to help improve forest and overall watershed health within the Caples Creek watershed. Staff has not identified any proposed activities that would conflict with current or long-term planning efforts for land use in or near the Project's location. EID's grant application is due March 1, 2016, and if awarded, activities could be initiated as soon as fall of 2016, depending on grant timelines and acquisition of all necessary Project approvals. Representatives from EID and ENF are scheduled to be present at the Board meeting to answer any questions regarding the Project.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

N/A

## **OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

The following CDA Divisions are involved:

- Long Range Planning Division
- Transportation Division
- Development Services Division
- Environmental Management Division

## **CAO RECOMMENDATION**

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There is no change to Net County Cost associated with this agenda item.

**CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS**

- 1) Clerk to obtain the Board Chair's signature on two (2) originals of the Resolution, and
- 2) Clerk to provide one (1) fully-executed copy of the Resolution to the CDA.

**STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT**

N/A

**CONTACT**

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