



M E M O R A N D U M
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING DIVISION
County of Placer

TO: Board of Supervisors DATE: June 23, 2020
FROM: Ken Grehm, Director of Public Works
By: Brett Storey, Principal Management Analyst
SUBJECT: Environmental Engineering / Authorize Grant Application and Resolution / California Wildlife Conservation Board Grant / French Meadows Meadow Restoration Project

ACTION REQUESTED

Adopt a Resolution approving a grant application for up to \$1,000,000 to the California Wildlife Conservation Board for the French Meadows Meadow Restoration Project; certifying the County will comply with all laws, regulations, and grant requirements; and authorizing the Director of Public Works, or designee, to sign the application and negotiate, execute, and submit all documents which may be necessary for the completion of the proposed project.

BACKGROUND

In 2016, a unique partnership was formed consisting of the Tahoe National Forest, Placer County, Placer County Water Agency, the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute (Partnership) to plan, raise funding, and implement the French Meadows Forest Restoration Project (Project), a landscape-scale project within the headwaters of the American River. The overall Project will treat over 12,000 acres using a variety of treatments within a broader 22,000-acre region to accomplish reforestation, improve forest health, reduce fuels, remove biomass, and implement prescribed burning.

On February 20, 2018, your Board approved a Master Stewardship Agreement (MSA) with the U.S. Forest Service Tahoe National Forest (TNF). The MSA was developed to facilitate projects that support forest health and potentially lower the risk of catastrophic fire in the TNF watersheds and which provides authority to perform operations.

The County of Placer has been implementing the Project, via the MSA. During implementation, a significant number of meadow restoration opportunities have been identified and the Partnership desires to augment treatments to allow for full restoration of these critical habitats. This particular meadow restoration project would occur across 551 acres upstream of French Meadows Reservoir in an area which historically contained a network of high elevation meadows and aspen stands intermixed with conifer forest. Staff is proposing to apply for a California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) grant to support the French Meadows Meadow Restoration Project.

The grant proposal is to fully restore 81 acres of meadows, thin the surrounding uplands on 470 acres, and to reduce erosion from four miles of road along the meadows. With WCB's grant funding support, we will complete all this work and allow the meadows to recover their full ecological function.

Pursuant to the grant requirements, your Board must adopt a Resolution approving submittal of the grant application, as well as certifying Placer County will comply with all legal requirements of the grant itself.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A Resolution authorizing a grant application does not constitute a "Project" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15378(a) and (b)(5) because it is an administrative action that does not result in any direct or physical change in the environment. However, for the French Meadows Project (which this work would be a part of), two

Notices of Exemption (NOEs) were filed for this Project: 1) The Project is consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Class 8 CEQA Categorical Exemption: Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment) because it is an action authorized by the Placer County Grading Ordinance that will help assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment, and the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment. This exemption was filed on December 21, 2018; and 2) The Project is consistent with Senate Bill (SB) 901. SB 901 provides that until January 1, 2023, CEQA would not apply to prescribed fire, thinning, or fuel reduction projects undertaken on federal lands to reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire that have been reviewed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This exemption was filed on January 24, 2019. The NEPA Decision Notice for the French Meadows Restoration Project was signed by the TNF Forest Supervisor on December 12, 2018.

FISCAL IMPACT

Submittal of the California Wildlife Conservation Board Grant application has no fiscal impact. If awarded, the Meadow Restoration Project would utilize the funding from the WCB grant and funding from the French Meadows main project, and there are no Placer County matching requirements. Should the grant be awarded, a corresponding agreement acceptance action including fiscal responsibilities will be brought back to the Board for approval.

ATTACHMENT

Resolution

Before the Board of Supervisors County of Placer, State of California

In the matter of: A Resolution of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Placer approving the application for grant funds from the Wildlife Conservation Board for the French Meadows Meadow Restoration project.

Resolution No.: _____

The following Resolution was duly adopted by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Placer at a regular meeting held June 23, 2020 by the following vote:

Ayes:

Noes:

Absent:

Signed and approved by me after its passage.

Chair, Board of Supervisors

Attest:

Clerk of said Board

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors hereby determines that the funds were made available to the Wildlife Conservation Board for the enhancement or restoration of fish and wildlife habitat and for the development of public access facilities for hunting, fishing or other wildlife-oriented recreational uses; and

WHEREAS, The County of Placer intends to implement this meadow restoration project which occurs across 551 acres upstream of French Meadows Reservoir. The project is in an area which historically contained a network of high elevation meadows and aspen stands intermixed with conifer forest. This area has been affected by fire suppression and erosion from legacy roads causing meadows to be encroached by conifers and erosional channels becoming established in the meadows from poor road drainage. Stands surrounding the historical meadows have become overcrowded and are at high risk of catastrophic wildfire. Most of the aspen in stands surrounding the meadows has been shaded out by conifers and only remnant

aspen trees remain. The project will fully restore 81 acres of meadows, thin the surrounding uplands on 470 acres, and reduce erosion from four miles of road along the meadows.

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Board of Supervisors, County of Placer, State of California, that the County of Placer hereby:

1. Approves the filing of an application for funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board; and
2. Certifies that said Applicant will comply with all federal, state and local environmental, public health, and other appropriate laws and regulations applicable to the project and will obtain or will ensure that the other project partners obtain all appropriate permits applicable to the project; and
3. Further commits to the terms and conditions specified in the grant agreement; and
4. Appoints Ken Grehm, the Director of Public Works, or designee, as a representative of the County of Placer to conduct negotiations, execute, submit and sign all documents including but not limited to applications, agreements, amendments, payment requests, and other documents which may be necessary for the completion of the proposed project.