

# Staff Report

for the Board of Directors' Meeting of April 28, 2021

**TO:** Board of Directors

**FROM:** Neysa King, Environmental Resources Administrator  
Greg Jones, Interim General Manager

**DATE:** April 20, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Application to the 2021 Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program

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## ***ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES***

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt Resolution 2021-13 (Approving the Application for Grant Funds for the Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program 2021 Sierra Nevada Conservancy Watershed Improvement Program), and authorize the Interim General Manager to execute the appropriate documents.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Mid-elevation, mixed conifer forests on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range are experiencing growing stressors associated with human encroachment, climate change, and ecological shifts (e.g. insect and disease intensification) that continue to threaten the long-term health and ecosystem services of these regions. Additionally, human encroachment into forested areas is increasing the extent of the WUI in Nevada and Placer Counties, which currently supports one of the densest regions of Communities at Risk from Wildfire in Northern California. The WUI creates an environment in which fire can move readily between structural and vegetative fuels, increasing the potential for wildfire ignition and the corresponding potential loss of life and property.

Fire fuels reduction and hazard tree removal is the highest priority strategy for forest management in the Sierra Nevada region due to current forest ecology and wildfire risk. This project will treat mixed-conifer forest lands owned by Nevada Irrigation District within the Bear River watershed, in portions of Nevada and Placer Counties. Staff has been working to prioritize and reduce wildfire risk on District-owned properties.

Downstream communities will benefit from improved watershed health and resilience that protects water supply and quality that originates in these forested areas, in addition to reduced wildfire risks and the associated potential for long-term impacts of a catastrophic fire. Immediate downstream beneficiaries of this project include the communities of Lake of the Pines and North Auburn. Lake of the Pines is home to approximately 4,000 residents (2,000 homes) and receives 5 million gallons of treated water per day that is sourced from the Bear River watershed via Rollins Reservoir. Additionally, the North Auburn Treatment Facility provides 6 million gallons of treated water per day from the Bear River system to 2,467 customers within North Auburn's population of 11,847 people.

This project will significantly reduce catastrophic wildfire risk and improve forest health on approximately 410 acres within the Bear River canyon. This region has abundant fuel accumulation, beetles, disease, and forest health issues associated with fire suppression, drought stress, and ongoing residential development. In combination, these treatment zones will safeguard and reduce wildfire risks to critical water and power systems that sustain thousands of residents and multiple communities within a priority high hazard zone that has been identified by CAL FIRE. The vast majority of this area, homes and other community resources occur in very hazardous areas where the effects of wildfire could be devastating.

#### Project Description

The Bear River Watershed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Project will be implemented on 3 parcels totaling 715 acres in the Bear River Canyon, south of Magnolia Road and east of the community of Lake of the Pines. The purpose of this project is to reduce the density of vegetation across the properties to achieve wildfire resilience goals and increase the overall health of the residual forest structure. In addition to landscape-scale forest health and wildfire resilience improvements, this project aims to expand upon previous efforts implemented by NID in 2019, to create a cross-canyon shaded fuel break.

NID will partner with a Registered Professional Forester to guide and implement this project, and we will work with local timber operators to treat 410 acres of mixed conifer forest. We will use mechanical treatment and hand crews to remove and process understory ladder fuels. Woodchips will remain on-site and the decomposition process will be accelerated, thereby adding needed organic material back into the soil in a shorter timeframe. The project areas have been mapped and the site has been reviewed to develop a treatment plan that maximizes mechanical mastication and uses hand crews where necessary to make the project as cost-effective as possible. These methods are appropriate given the steep terrain, sensitivity of the soils, and proximity to watercourses.

The project will be implemented on NID-owned property and site access is possible using existing county and NID-gated private roads. These roads will

support winter access, thereby allowing fuels treatment during the lowest fire-risk season. Winter operations will be possible based on weather and site conditions.

The creation of this fuel break will provide a strategic location between Lake of the Pines, Eden Valley, and Weimar where potential wildfire severity will be decreased, and where wildfire first responders will have a maintained area in which to prevent or slow the spread of wildfire. Reducing the density of understory vegetation across these properties will slow the spread of potential wildfire to these adjacent communities, and prevent potential water quality and supply impacts resulting from extreme wildfire in the Bear River watershed, as well as avoid the need for costly and time-consuming post-fire remediation. This work will be completed under a CAL FIRE Exemption and CAL FIRE's programmatic EIR. All projects under this program must be completed by Jan. 1, 2025.

**BUDGETARY IMPACT:**

This grant will be structured similarly to previous grants and projects that we have implemented where site preparation and implementation costs are covered by the grant funding, and District staff administer the grant and manage contracting via budgeted staff time.

We use the following calculations for grant budget preparation:

- \$2,800/acre for mastication
- \$3,200/acre for hand crew and chipping
- \$3,500/acre for Special Treatment areas (sensitive resource sites) are assumed to be treated with hand crew or avoided and protected. Total acres are yet to be determined
- \$400/acre Forester support by Registered Professional Forester

Estimate Project Cost: **\$1,380,000** including Forester support and site preparation

- 240 acres mastication x \$2,800 = \$672,000
- 170 acres Hand Crew x \$3,200 = \$544,000
- 410 acres total treated x \$400/ac = \$164,000

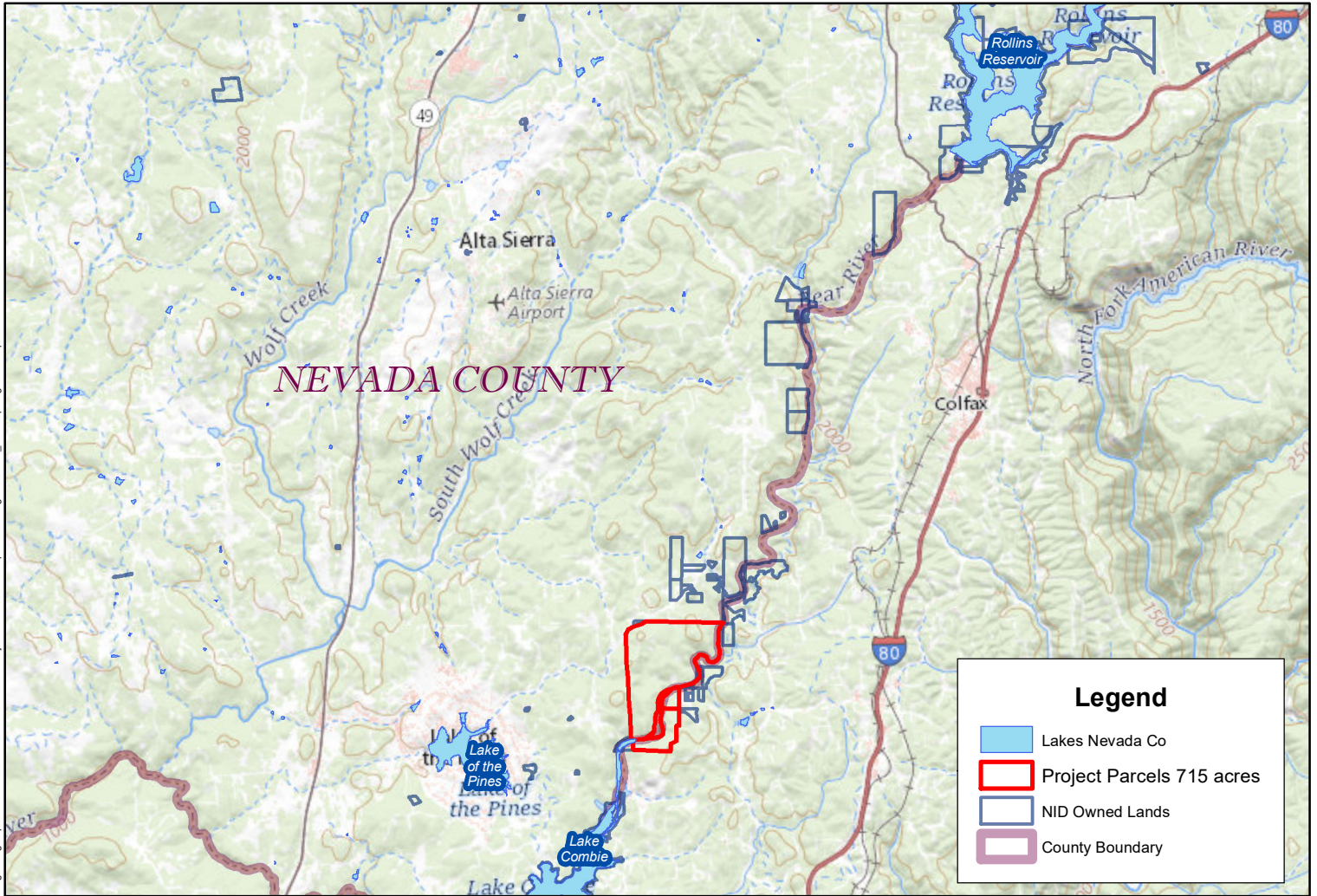
*Estimated Project In-Kind Cost Share Provided by NID: **\$200,000***

- Nevada Irrigation District will provide SNC grant administration, contracting, invoicing, and financial support as an in-kind contribution of 5-10 hours per week for 30 months with in-house contribution: Estimate \$125,000
- NID initiated this fuel break in 2019 and completed over 25-acres of ridgeline clearing and mastication – Cost \$75,000

Attached (2):

- Project Map
- Resolution 2021-13 - Approving the Application for Grant Funds for the Immediate Action Wildfire and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program 2021 Sierra Nevada Conservancy Watershed Improvement Program

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**NEVADA IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

NEVADA COUNTY -- PLACER COUNTY  
GRASS VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

**SNC Magnolia Wildfire and Forest Resilience Project**

Drawn By: C. TOWNSEND      Date: 4/20/2021      Scale: 1:123,447      Sheet: <X> of <X>



**RESOLUTION NO. 2021-13**  
**OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE NEVADA IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

**APPROVING THE APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FOR  
THE IMMEDIATE ACTION WILDFIRE and FOREST RESILIENCE  
DIRECTED GRANT PROGRAM 2021  
SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

**WHEREAS**, the Legislature and Governor of the State of California have provided funds for the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program; and

**WHEREAS**, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (the "SNC") has been delegated the responsibility for the administration of a portion of these funds through a local assistance grants program, establishing necessary procedures; and

**WHEREAS**, said procedures established by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy require a resolution certifying the approval of application(s) by the governing board of each applicant before submission of said application(s) to the SNC; and

**WHEREAS**, the Nevada Irrigation District (the "District") has identified the Bear River Watershed Wildfire and Forest Resilience Project (the "Project") as valuable toward meeting its mission and goals; and

**WHEREAS**, the District intends to submit an application to SNC for the Project; and

**WHEREAS**, the District, if selected, will enter into an agreement with the SNC to carry out the Project; and

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of Directors of the Nevada Irrigation District that it does find as follows:

1. The above recitals are true and correct.
2. Approves the submittal of an application for the Project.
3. Certifies that District understands the assurances and certification requirements in the application.
4. Certifies that District will have sufficient funds to operate and maintain the resource(s) consistent with the long-term benefits described in support of the application; or will secure the resources to do so.

5. Certifies that District will comply with all legal requirements as determined during the application process.
6. Appoints its General Manager, or designee, as agent to conduct all negotiations, execute and submit all documents, including but not limited to: applications, agreements, payment requests, and so on, which may be necessary for the completion of the aforementioned project(s).

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**PASSED AND ADOPTED** by the Board of Directors of the Nevada Irrigation District at a regular meeting held on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2021 by the following vote:

<b>AYES:</b>	Directors:
<b>NOES:</b>	Directors:
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Directors:
<b>ABSTAINS:</b>	Directors:

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President of the Board of Directors

**Attest:**

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Secretary to the Board of Directors