

## State grants funding for Yuba watershed coordinator positions

California Department of Conservation to award \$1.85 million in grants to eight organizations

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Efforts are underway in the Yuba River watershed to improve forest health and the state is buying in.

The California Department of Conservation announced last week it would award \$1.85 million in grants to eight different organizations around the state to hire watershed coordinators – including the South Yuba River Citizens League in Nevada City, which is partnering with the Tahoe National Forest, Camptonville Community Partnership and Yuba Water Agency on a forest health program.

Melinda Booth, executive director of SYRCL, said the \$234,995 grant from the state will help pay for the hiring of two watershed coordinators tasked with planning projects and developing a forest product industry to address ecosystem resiliency and watershed health concerns.

“It’s a big deal for SYRCL and our watershed. The work we will be doing on our forest is beneficial for the ecosystem, for the river, and from a fire-prevention perspective. We are really looking at the health of the watershed holistically, and in some ways, this is a new area of work for SYRCL, certainly on such a large scale,” Booth said.

The state grant will be matched by the Yuba Water Agency for a total of \$470,000 in funds, which will fund the two coordinator positions for up to four years.

“A healthy forest has a direct impact on the health of our water supply and quality,” said Willie Whittlesey, project manager for the Yuba Water Agency. “By matching this grant, we ensure that our watershed health gets the focus and attention it needs and deserves for twice as long, which could significantly reduce our fire risk.”

A study showed that every dollar spent to hire a coordinator leveraged more than seven times that investment in the development of watershed management plans and restoration projects, according to the Department of Conservation.

## **Plans moving forward**

Booth said the coordinators will focus on two projects already in the works, as well as working with community members and other stakeholders to identify two additional forest health projects to spearhead.

One of their tasks will be to support the expansion of the Forest Resilience Bond, which is a pilot program launched in the Tahoe National Forest in 2018 designed to increase the pace and scale of forest health treatments. Another task will be to work with the Camptonville Community Partnership to forward their plans to establish a biomass facility in the Yuba County foothills - a project that would create energy from the trees cut down in the region and provide an economic boost to the local economy.

"Our watershed is such a large area, so we want to identify two other large-scale projects that we could help advance. So, another area the coordinators will be responsible for will be to reach out and get the community and other stakeholders involved in the process," Booth said.

The creation of the coordinator positions is only the beginning, she said. The projects are meant to be long-term and will be implemented over the coming decades. Part of the job will require the coordinators to seek out funding opportunities for future projects.

The plan now is to advertise for the positions over the next couple weeks. Once Booth and her team find the perfect fit, the watershed coordinators will immediately begin working on the forest health program.

"We are excited to receive such significant funding to kick this off in the right way," Booth said. "To work with such diverse partners is such a privilege and will only benefit the community as a whole."