



REQUEST FOR Proposals (RFP) NEPA/ CEQA SERVICES

The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), on behalf of the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) seeks a consultant to provide leadership and planning services to guide the NYFP's restoration initiative through the preparation of required environmental analysis to a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision signed by the US Forest Service and a proposed Negative Declaration by Sierra County. The Partnership is working to plan and implement a condition-based landscape-scale 210,000-acre forest restoration project on Tahoe National Forest Lands in the 275,000-acre North Yuba River watershed. Through ecologically based vegetation management including thinning and controlled burning and other ecological restoration objectives (i.e., watershed, meadow, aspen), the Partnership seeks to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire to North Yuba communities and restore the watershed to a healthier and more resilient state. The analytical work of developing the restoration plan is already in progress and the role of the consultant will be to guide the planning through the formal NEPA/CEQA process to result in a shovel-ready project.

SYRCL will enter a contract with the selected consultant based on their response to this RFP. The contract shall have a term of two years with the option to extend for an additional year based on the project status and the consultant's continued ability to meet the expectations agreed upon for schedule, budget, and deliverables.

SYRCL's intent is to establish a contract with a single consultant, rather than teams of vendors. Therefore, we are most interested in receiving qualification packages that illustrate the capabilities of individual consulting firms, with the understanding that a subset of services may necessitate the inclusion of sub-contractors.

1. Background

The North Yuba Forest Partnership (Partnership) is working on an unprecedented scale to collaboratively plan, analyze, finance, and implement forest restoration across the 275,000-acre watershed. The Partnership includes the Tahoe National Forest, which manages 210,000 acres in the project area; Sierra County; Yuba Water Agency; South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL); Nevada City Rancheria Nisenan Tribe; Blue Forest Conservation; National Forest Foundation; The Nature Conservancy; and the Camptonville Community Partnership.

The partners have developed a memorandum of understanding to advance forest restoration at the watershed scale. The nine signatories committed to: 1) improving and restoring forest health and resilience; 2) reducing the risk of high-severity wildfire; 3) protecting and securing water supplies; and 4) protecting communities from the effects of high-severity wildfire and climate change. More information about the Partnership is available online at yubaforests.org.

North Yuba forests once characterized by large, widely-spaced trees and beneficial, low-to-moderate severity fire are now dominated by non-fire resilient stands of vegetation ranging from dense thickets of small trees and brush to overstocked forests with significant ladder fuels. This greatly increases the likelihood of destructive wildfire causing significant damage to communities and watershed health. In addition, many homes and communities have been built within and near the forests, making it challenging in some locations to protect lives and property from high-severity wildfire and to allow the use of prescribed fire or managed wildfire as a management tool. The Partnership will work together to promote ecologically-based forest management that increases diversity of forest stand structure on a site-specific biophysical basis with an emphasis on the key ecological role that low-to-moderate intensity, beneficial fire provides in many conifer forests of the Sierra Nevada.

The Partnership has engaged two science efforts already underway to serve as the foundation of the project design, Purpose and Need, as well as to inform the Proposed Action. The Historic Range of Variability study led by the Forest Service and the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative Science Foundation co-led by the Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy are collaborating to ensure that proposed restoration work is based on the latest fire risk, forest structure, biodiversity, and drought stress science.

The proposal for the watershed will describe site-specific management activities using a condition-based approach. A condition-based approach prescribes actions to be taken under specific conditions to achieve particular outcomes. Condition-based proposals typically include a set of management prescriptions/treatments, mitigation measures, and constraints that instruct forest managers where to apply different treatments depending on the conditions they find on the ground. This differs from traditional site-specific NEPA planning analyses, where the particular conditions of each site are identified before NEPA analyses are completed. NEPA analysis for a proposed action using condition-based management must be specific enough to address issues associated with the proposal and satisfy NEPA's site-specificity requirements.

The Forest Service is envisioning a staged decision-making approach, meaning that the environmental planning process for the entire watershed would be completed in one Environmental Impacts Statement (EIS); however, separate Records of Decisions would be prepared for sub-projects within the watershed in a staged manner. This decision-making structure is intended to allow surveys to be completed prior to

each decision with allowance for review of potential new information/changed circumstances that could have a bearing on the proposed action and its impacts. In addition, ongoing monitoring of the outcomes of each sub-project, combined with adaptive management, allows for adjusting future sub-projects accordingly.

2. Scope of Work

In coordination with the USFS Tahoe National Forest, Sierra County, SYRCL, and other partners, the Consultant will undertake the following work related to the NEPA/CEQA process and related reports for the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) restoration initiative, set to begin late April 2021. We are seeking a Consultant to lead the project from the scoping process to a proposed final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision signed by the Forest Service and a proposed Negative Declaration by Sierra County.

- A. Identify concerns and provide feedback to the project's Purpose and Need and Proposed Action, which have been drafted by the USFS and partners.
- B. In collaboration with the US Forest Service and the NYFP Communications Committee, develop and implement a COVID-safe public involvement strategy.
- C. Assist with the scoping process in coordination with the Forest Service.
- D. Serve as the Project ID Team lead, with support from the Forest Service, Sierra County, and other partners, in identifying, coordinating, and managing staff and/or consultants to complete all required field work and related field reports required for NEPA/CEQA review by September 2022, consistent with the standards required by the Forest Service and Sierra County.

Responsible entities and dates for surveying will be conducted as described C.1-C.4 below.

Surveys for the sub-project areas will be completed by the initial decision and are unlikely to be prepared at the time of the DEIS or FEIS. Report and effects analysis for NEPA will be conducted as described C.5-C.6.

1. USFS Wildlife Biology staff will begin surveying in March 2021. Wildlife Survey, 2021-2023 field seasons. USFS will serve as lead author on the NEPA Aquatic Wildlife Biological Evaluation, Terrestrial Wildlife Biological Evaluation, Biological Assessment, Management Indicator Species Report, Migratory Bird Report. The Forest Service will conduct the requisite ESA consultation with USDI Fish and Wildlife Service.
2. USFS Botany staff will begin surveying in spring 2021. Botany surveys to be conducted 2021-2023 field seasons. In addition to federal requirements, state-listed threatened and listed botanical species will be surveyed. USFS will serve as lead author on the NEPA Sensitive Plant Biological Evaluation, Human Health Risk Assessment for Herbicide Use, Weed Risk Assessment. The Threatened and Endangered Plant Biological Assessment will be conducted by an outside vendor, hired by SYRCL. The consultant will work with SYRCL and the outside vendor to incorporate the assessment.
3. USFS Cultural Resources staff will begin surveying in spring 2021. An archeological sensitivity model is currently being developed to guide surveys. USFS Cultural Resources staff will conduct tribal consultation, surveys, and author NEPA required reporting. The Forest Service will conduct consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office.

4. USFS Hydrology and Soils staff will begin surveying in 2022. NEPA required hydrology and soils reports will be authored by USFS staff.
 5. USFS and The Nature Conservancy, contracted by SYRCL, will conduct and author the NEPA required fuels & vegetation management reports including Air Quality, Fire and Fuels Report, Fire Behavior Modeling, and Silviculture Reports.
 6. USFS will author and analyze for Inventoried Roadless Areas, W&S River, Environmental Justice, Roads/ Engineering assessments.
- E. The consultant will evaluate the necessity of additional reports and produce requested remaining NEPA reports for Recreation & Trails, Range, Economics, and Visual Resource assessments.
 - F. Evaluate scoping input from the public, identify issues raised by the public and share with the Forest Service to refine issues and how they will be addressed in the analysis. Document scoping issues and their disposition for the Project Record.
 - G. Work with the Forest Service and partners to develop the range of alternatives with associated management requirements consistent with the Forest Plan. The number of alternatives will be driven by the issues that come up during scoping.
 - H. Distribute the Draft EIS (including accompanying letters) and prepare requisite the legal notice. The Forest Service will coordinate publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register.
 - I. Participate in any public meetings during the comment period as needed.
 - J. Gather all submitted written comments on the DEIS. Conduct content analysis of the submitted comments and prepare responses to comments for Forest Service review and approval.
 - K. Organize and facilitate a monthly 1-hour meetings with Forest Service and select partners to provide updates on progress, unexpected problems, budget, schedule, and Scope of Work issues. Meetings will be held on both Zoom and in-person in either Auburn, CA or Nevada City, CA when determined necessary by the Partnership. Attend and participate in partner meetings/calls and other meetings/calls as necessary to advance the project.
 - L. Oversee the drafting of specialist reports, provide review and edits, and serve as the lead author and editor of the NEPA/CEQA documents and other work necessary to support the DEIS/DEIR, FEIS/FEIR, and a Record of Decision by the Forest Service and Negative Declaration by Sierra County.
 1. Meet the schedule of deliverables listed under Section 4 of this RFP.
 2. Develop and manage the schedule of report preparation, review, and finalization.
 3. It is critical that all work be technically and legally defensible and in full compliance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality; the Forest Service NEPA Compliance Regulations 36 CFR 218; the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended); the TNF Land and Resource Management Plan (1988) and the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (2001 and 2004); and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The

urgent need for restoration also cannot be overstated; therefore, it is critical that the Consultant and the team be fully engaged with this project to meet the deadlines.

4. It is also important the work is done efficiently, and that energy expended is proportional to the significance of the resource or issue within the context of the project. The IDT Leader is tasked with managing this balancing act to ensure the time and expense spent on developing the environmental analysis is appropriately allocated.
- M. Organize, populate, and index the EIS Project Record.
- N. In the event objections are filed on the Draft Record of Decision under 36 CFR 218 and/or 36 CFR 219, participate in providing requisite records and transmittal documents to the Forest Service Regional Office. In addition, participate with the objection review team as needed.
- O. For CEQA, the consultant will work with Sierra County to develop a condition based CEQA approach or series of approaches (IS/MND, CE, MMRP, EIR, etc.). Once a decision has been made, the consultant will:
 1. Define the scope of work.
 2. Prepare analyses as needed. Where possible NEPA reports and analysis be converted to CEQA appropriate formats. All outstanding reports and analysis, including but not limited to greenhouse gases, aesthetics, and cumulative impacts will need to be conducted.
 3. Provide an administrative draft CEQA document for Sierra County to review, revise agency reviewed draft, provide second internal draft period, and release for public review.
 4. Where possible the consultant will jointly conduct NEPA/CEQA public comment periods and outreach.
 5. Identify issues raised by the public and share with Sierra County to refine issues and develop responses for how they will be addressed.
 6. Draft final document for Sierra County.

The Partnership expects timely responses to its requests; complete, concise, grammatically correct, and technically accurate work products; and work products that are responsive to project objectives and scheduling needs. Consultant will work with partners to meet these needs.

3. Forest Service Responsibilities

The USDA Forest Service will:

- Assist the NEPA/CEQA Consultant by outlining the types of information required and providing templates and sample documents. The Forest Service shall independently evaluate the information submitted and shall be responsible for its accuracy.
- Coordinate this proposed project with at least the following agencies: US Fish and Wildlife Service, Local Native American Tribes, State Department of Fish and Wildlife, State Historic Preservation Department, Central Valley Water Quality Control Board.
- Establish and maintain a team-oriented line of communication, led by the USFS primary project contact, with the NEPA/CEQA Consultant and the District interdisciplinary team. The Forest

Service, partners, and the NEPA/CEQA Consultant must work together to ensure that required work is accomplished in an efficient and proper manner. Virtual and telephone meetings will be held on a regular basis to resolve concerns or problems, on occasion in-person meetings will also be held. Concerns should be promptly identified, discussed, and resolved on an impromptu, as-needed basis.

- Recommend meetings at one or more checkpoints to allow the Forest Supervisor and Forest Service review team members to discuss their review findings, requirements, and suggestions with District Rangers and appropriate IDT members.
- Provide written feedback for every deliverable submitted via marked up copies for simple changes and/or a set of written comments, by page number, describing whether a change is required or suggested. The Forest Supervisor’s changes should be considered deliberative documents that are not part of the record for the project.
- Focus on keeping the analysis and documentation process on schedule and resolving problems as they arise.

4. Deliverables and Estimated Schedule

Required NEPA documents shall be based on the style and format of sample documents provided by the Forest Service. CEQA documents will be determined in collaboration with Sierra County once a CEQA approach (IS/MND, CE, EIR, etc.) is agreed upon. The timeline for CEQA completion should align with the NEPA process. The Consultant shall submit all documents to the Forest Service, Sierra County, and partners in draft form for review and concurrence and shall revise drafts as necessary to incorporate review comments.

| Deliverable | Responsibility | Due Date |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Purpose and Need and Proposed Action edits and feedback | Consultant | 5/7/2021 |
| Draft scoping letter and initiate Scoping | USFS | 6/1/2021 |
| Draft issue summary and proposed disposition from scoping comments. | Consultant | 9/15/2021 |
| Verify final issues | Consultant, USFS | 11/15/2021 |
| Develop Alternatives | Consultant, USFS, Partners | 12/15/2021 |
| Final Draft EIS Chapter 1. Purpose of and Need for Action | Consultant | 12/15/2021 |
| Final Draft EIS Chapter 2. Alternatives, including the Proposed Action | Consultant | 2/15/2022 |
| Final Draft EIS Chapter 3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences | Consultant | 5/15/2022 |
| Final Draft EIS Chapter 4. Administrative Material and Chapter 5. Glossary | Consultant | 5/15/2022 |
| Initiate 45-day comment period and coordinate distribution of DEIS. | Consultant | 6/1/2022 |

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| Participate in public meetings as needed | Consultant, USFS | 6/15-7/15/2022 |
| Gather comments. Conduct content analysis. Prepare comment responses for Forest Service review. | Consultant, USFS | 10/15/2022 |
| Revise and modify EIS analyses based on comments received. | Consultant | 11/15/2022 |
| Prepare the Final EIS | Consultant | 12/31/2022 |
| Complete and index the Project Record | Consultant | 1/15/2023 |
| Prepare the Draft ROD | Consultant | 1/15/2023 |
| Participate in the objections review process as needed and assist in reviewing Officer's instructions. | Consultant, USFS | 5/15/2023 |

5. Work Product Quality Assurance Review

NEPA/CEQA Project Consultant shall review all work products and deliverables to ensure technical and editorial quality. Ensure interdisciplinary review of management requirements for areas of resource conflict. Work products must be clearly written in a professional style and must be consistent in level of analysis, tone, format, and terminology (e.g. abbreviations and names of site features, facilities, geographic features, technologies, units of measure, etc.). All work products from the other consultants/staff shall undergo a final review by the NEPA/CEQA Project Consultant before delivery. Delivery will be MS Word, MS Excel, pdf or compatible.

Information for Consultants

1. Desired Qualifications

The project requires knowledge and experience in leading Forest Service teams and, in particular, NEPA and CEQA processes. SYRCL seeks vendors that have a strong understanding of the underlying principles of forest management and restoration, and at least five years of experience demonstrating these capabilities.

2. RFP Questions

SYRCL staff will not respond to telephone questions about the RFP. Questions concerning this RFP must be submitted via email to andrew@yubariver.org. Questions must be submitted by March 5, 2021 and must have the Subject Line: "NEPA/CEQA Services RFP Question." If you have a question, please follow this procedure to ensure consistency of answers. Any information obtained by speaking one-on-one with a staff person is not considered an official response for the purposes of this process.

A digest version of all questions and answers will be emailed to all applicants. Please email as detailed above to receive the Q&A Digest. SYRCL shall distribute the Q&A Digest via email by March 12, 2021.

3. Proposal Requirements

- a. Cover Letter indicating a primary contact for the proposal and that person’s title, address, phone number and email address. The letter should contain a brief statement of the applicant’s understanding of the work to be done, a commitment to perform the work within the time period, and the signature of the individual authorized to legally bind the applicant.
- b. Approach Description of the respondent’s general approach and process that will be used to accomplish the work. SYRCL seeks a consultant with experience in navigating complex NEPA processes and who can demonstrate their ability to add value not only with their expertise but also by identifying options that will add efficiency to this process. With a condition-based approach in mind, provide a brief description, no more than 2-pages, with a recommendation for how Sierra County approach CEQA.
- c. Budget and Payment Terms: The overall budget must be broken down into the specific work tasks and deliverables outlined in the abovementioned Scope of Work. Furthermore, the tasks should include cost categorization by personnel, travel, equipment/supplies, contractual, and any other relevant categories. A brief description of staffing capabilities and payment terms throughout the project timeline should also be included.
- d. References including names, titles, addresses and phone numbers, brief description of services rendered, preferably clients for whom similar work has been performed within the past three (3) years. Not to exceed one (1) page.
- e. Resumes for primary personnel expected to participate in contracts. Not to exceed one (1) page per team member, and eight (8) team members in total.
- f. Work Samples

4. Instructions for Submittals

Respondents must submit proposals in digital (i.e., PDF) format. Hard copy submittals will not be accepted. Proposals must be submitted to: andrew@yubariver.org with the Subject Line: “NEPA/CEQA Services RFP Proposal.”

Proposals must be received by April 2, 2021 12pm PST. A response will be provided for all proposals received successfully. Interviews on Zoom, if appropriate, will be held April 12 and 13, 2021. Final selection and notification will be made by April 15, 2021 5pm PST.

5. Application Timeline

| Description | Date |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| RFP Released | 2/22/2021 |
| Deadline for submittal of questions on RFP | 3/5/2021 |
| Q & A Digest emailed by SYRCL | 3/12/2021 |
| Deadline for receipt of proposals to RFP by noon PST | 4/2/2021 |
| Zoom Interviews for outstanding candidates. | 4/12 and 4/13, 2021 |

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| Final selection. Begin development of contract. | 4/14/2021 |
| Initiate Scope of Work | 4/26/2021 |

6. Selection Process

SYRCL will evaluate submittals based on the following criteria:

- Demonstration of significant and effective experience implementing the skills listed in this RFP.
- Demonstration of innovative and successful solutions to ecosystem restoration planning issues;
- Demonstration of successful cooperation, communication, and partnership with non-profits, tribes, local, state and federal agencies and private partners and a commitment to accountability;
- Demonstration of past project experience and success;
- Demonstration of project management effectiveness and experience of primary personnel;
- Demonstration of commitment to workforce equity as reflected in internal policies and selection of sub-contractors;
- Quality of work evaluated against cost for services; and,
- Clarity, quality of writing and presentation of proposal.

Disclaimer

This RFP does not commit SYRCL to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred during the preparation of the proposal. SYRCL reserves the right to reject any or all of the proposals for completing this work.