

99C-115  
Panel A

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Upper Trinity River Watershed Stewardship Project

#### Project Description

This is a community-based watershed stewardship project with active local leadership located in the Upper Trinity River Watershed above Trinity Dam, which has a total drainage area of 692 square miles. The extremely high turbidity levels experienced in Trinity Lake in 1997 and 1998 has led to increasing concern among local residents, business owners, and various agencies. This proposal aims to discover the cause and possible solutions of this problem by developing an Upper Trinity River Watershed Coalition, conducting a sediment source inventory, preparing a strategic fuels reduction and thinning plan and demonstration project, and developing a comprehensive Watershed Action Plan with prioritized projects for implementation utilizing adaptive management techniques. This cooperative planning process is integral to our efforts to reduce sedimentation and turbidity levels in Trinity Lake, improve water quality and water supply reliability for its beneficial uses both downstream and for the CVP area.

This project addresses the Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan (ERRP) objective for upper watershed health and function by developing an Action Plan for restoring ecological processes in the upper watersheds in order to maintain and improve the quality and quantity of water flowing into the tributaries and rivers of the Sacramento Bay Delta. The Upper Trinity River is an important source watershed for the ERPP study area since nearly one million acre-feet of water per year is imported from the Upper Trinity River to the ERPP study area, as well as providing storage capacity of 2.5 million acre-feet for the Central Valley Project.

#### Primary Biological and Ecological Objectives:

- Minimize sedimentation and turbidity, as this reduces available storage capacity in the reservoir
- Reduce erosion of silts and sands that impair the quality of spawning gravels
- Improve water quality from Trinity to Bay-Delta
- Improve water supply reliability from Trinity to Bay-Delta
- Improve fisheries habitat, particularly salmon and steelhead in Trinity and Bay-Delta
- Reduce risk of catastrophic fire, as it is detrimental to upper watershed function and water quality

#### Tasks include:

- Organize stakeholders, including business owners, landowners, state and federal agencies, into a watershed coalition to address concerns and establish a stewardship vision
- Determine the cause(s) of high turbidity levels in Trinity Lake, and thus Whiskeytown Reservoir by conducting a sediment source inventory
- Develop a Watershed Action Plan for the Upper Trinity River watershed with implementation priorities
- Prepare a strategic fuels management plan to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire with

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the involvement of CDF and USFS and private landowners

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### **Budget Costs**

This proposal seeks funding in the amount of \$150,000 for a period of two years.

### **Third Party Impacts**

Third party impacts are expected to benefit the health and fisheries of Trinity River below Trinity and Lewiston Dams as well as recreation and tourism, which are vital to Trinity County's economy. This project has a secondary benefit for CALFED by reducing stressors to at risk salmonids in all of the Ecological Management Zones of the Bay-Delta, because a restored Trinity fishery could take some pressure off of the targeted at risk species. No adverse third party impacts are expected from this project.

### **Applicant Qualifications**

Trinity County Resource Conservation District (TCRCD) has an outstanding record of achievement with many projects in the Trinity River Basin, including development of cooperative efforts among landowners, timber interests, various government agencies and the general public. TCRCD has had extensive experience in watershed restoration projects as part of the Trinity River Fish and Wildlife Restoration Program.

### **Monitoring and Data Evaluation**

Monitoring and data evaluation will be a critical component of the Upper Trinity River Watershed Action Plan to determine effectiveness of project implementation. This project will develop a project-scale and watershed-scale monitoring plan to evaluate the long-term success of project objectives, utilizing adaptive management techniques. The Upper Trinity River Watershed Coalition will aim to foster volunteer/community monitoring.

### **Local Support/Coordination with other Programs and Compatibility with CALFED objectives**

This is a strong community-based project with active local leadership. The project promotes the CALFED goal of improving upper watershed health and ecological functions by reducing levels of stressors, including erosion and wildfire risk, in order to provide high quality water and water supply reliability. It will also address several ecosystem elements identified in the ERPP, including ecological processes and priority species including spring-run, fall-run, and late fall-run chinook salmon, and steelhead. The project will provide direct benefit to several endangered species, and to the ecological recovery of upper watershed processes. This restoration planning project will coordinate with other State and Federal programs, including Prop 204 projects and Trinity River Restoration Projects. It is in the interest of CALFED to keep reliable, high quality water from the Trinity River. CALFED's willingness to address the long-term maintenance of this upper "source" watershed has significant local support. As stated in the ERPP, "Watershed protection and comprehensive watershed management plans are needed in all the tributaries to reduce erosion of silts and sands that impair the quality of the spawning gravels" (Vol. 2, p. 160). This project will address this issue and several other CALFED objectives.

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