

Revive+ Redefine:

Developing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and Facilitating a Restoration Plan for the Upper Merced Wild and Scenic River

Submitted by:

Upper Merced River Watershed Council // PO Box 5008-201, Mariposa CA 95338

Co-Project Managers:

**Mikey Goralnik // 5100 Bullion Street, Mariposa CA 95338; mgoralnik@mariposacounty.org,
209.742.1222**

**Jessica Thompson // PO Box 691, 5065 Highway 140, Suite G
Mariposa, CA 95338; jessica.t@sierrafoothill.org; 209.628.4505**

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I: Technical Summary

Executive Summary

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council, based in Mariposa, CA, will engage in watershed group development activities to rejuvenate and reconfigure the largely defunct organization, which has struggled to recover from a catastrophic fire that destroyed the group's offices in 2012. Through extensive dialogue and collaboration with a wide variety of diverse stakeholders, the Council seeks to position itself as a convener and coordinator of restoration activities in support of the Wild and Scenic Merced River. The Council will conduct outreach with a wide variety of engaged stakeholders, including Yosemite National Park, Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, Bureau of Land Management, local groups like the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Mariposa Trails, UC-Merced, and Mariposa Biomass, and state agencies like CalFire, to articulate a cohesive vision, identify common goals, and specify restoration and management actions that address strategic watershed issues specified in the Merced River's Comprehensive River Management Plans (CRMPs). These issues include poor forest health exacerbated by pine bark beetle infestation and the negative effects of repeated catastrophic wildfire, such as erosion, and sedimentation. These conditions have stressed habitat for several key species, including chinook salmon, American beaver, and endemic limestone salamander. The development of a shared mission will enable the Council to produce a Strategic Work Plan to facilitate the implementation of discrete projects that respond to these watershed issues. The Strategic Work Plan will prioritize actions for alleviating adverse watershed conditions identified by the collaborative, and serve as a road map for future Council action.

Project Location

The Upper Merced River Watershed area is located in Mariposa County, CA. The area is defined by HUC 18040008 which includes the South and North Forks of the Merced River, as well as the river's main stem from its headwaters to the New Exchequer Dam that creates Lake McClure. The river is designated Wild and Scenic "[f]rom its source (including Red Peak Fork, Merced Peak Fork, Triple Peak Fork, and Lyle Fork) in Yosemite National Park to a the normal maximum operating pool (water surface level) of Lake McClure (elevation 867 feet mean sea level)," which is approximately .25 miles downstream of Bagby. Nearly 40% of the watershed area is within the jurisdiction of Yosemite National Park, with the bulk of the remainder within USFS or BLM jurisdiction.

These public lands represent some of the most recognizable and breathtaking landscapes in the US, and include the rugged crags of the High Sierra and sheer granite walls of Yosemite Valley. Outside of Yosemite National Park, the river and its tributaries occupy the Merced River canyon, before the dramatic topography and seasonal wildflower superblooms give way to the gentler landscapes of the Sierra foothills and central valley in the lower reaches of the river.

The center of the watershed area is located approximately 12 miles northeast of Mariposa and 40 miles northeast of Merced. A map of the watershed area is on the following page of the application.

Technical Project Description

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council (UMRWC) was established in 2001 as an ad hoc committee affiliated with the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD). This partnership was in response to a State of California initiative to better protect water resources by improving the health of the State's watersheds. The California Department of Conservation (DOC) provided funding for "watershed coordinators," which the group's first members received and leveraged to recruit private and public stakeholders, identify watershed needs, and formulate a work plan for the Merced River watershed. In 2008, it was decided to formalize the UMRWC as a distinct entity by creating a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.

At that time, the UMRWC had over 50 committed volunteers and over 300 supporters, engaged in a variety of watershed improvement, management, and stewardship activities including:

- cooperative invasive species control and eradication efforts with the Bureau of Land Management and Sierra Foothill Conservancy;
- partnering with Yosemite National Park and NatureBridge (formerly Yosemite Institute), a local environmental education non-profit, to develop and implement a volunteer-led water quality testing program;
- supporting volunteer-led trail work along the South Fork of the Merced River in partnership with the Sierra National Forest;
- organizing a wildflower docent program led by botanical experts in the community;
- working with the Mariposa County Unified School district to conduct a watershed education program for the county's 5th graders;
- collaborating with the Lower Merced River Watershed group to foster a whole River approach; and
- various collaboration with other private and public partners
- including the Sierra Nevada Alliance, State Water Resources Control Board, and other state agencies.

However, in 2012, the DOC halted public funding for watershed coordinators, which eliminated an essential funding stream for the organization. Then in May of that same year, a fire began in an adjacent restaurant that quickly turned into a structure fire that consumed an entire block in downtown Mariposa—including the offices of the UMRWC. The group lost everything it had built over the preceding decade, including all of its records, equipment, and its extensive contact lists of project partners, local stakeholders, and community supporters.

This dual blow—changes in state policy that de-emphasized funding local watershed groups and a fire that devastated the group's headquarters—effectively shuttered the UMRWC. Though the group has been able to maintain its status as a 501c3 non-profit and continue with its water quality monitoring and testing program, it has since the events of 2012 been unable to regain its direction, role as a regional leader in watershed issues, and capacity for implementing impactful watershed management and restoration projects. Moreover, the group's tragic demise has stressed the morale of its original leadership, further crippling the UMRWC's ability to serve as stewards and managers of the watershed.

However, several recent events (highlighted by catastrophic wildfires in the watershed in each of the past three years) and new watershed opportunities (including the Merced River Trail initiative) have resulted in renewed interest in the UMRWC—and highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach to making decisions in the watershed area. Led by both long-term and new Board Members, the UMRWC is applying to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant program as a new organization, with the intention of redefining and reviving the group that was effectively made defunct in 2012. As a 501(c)3 non-profit comprised based in California with a rich history of promoting the sustainable use of water resources in our watershed, the Council is eligible to apply for funding under this grant program.

We seek to renew old partnerships and forge new ones with a variety of federal, state, regional, and local partners to re-establish the UMRWC as a force for grappling with the issues that affect our watershed. Broadly, the Council's leadership sees an opportunity for the Council to serve as a coordinator of and clearinghouse for restoration and management activities that are identified in the federal Comprehensive River Management Plans (CRMPs) that guide research and restoration actions in the Merced River watershed. While the National Park Service, US Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management are ultimately responsible for carrying out the actions specified in their respective CRMPs, there is a critical need to both support interagency coordination, and enhance federal, state, and local understanding of the desired future conditions that are established in the CRMPs.

With elements of both a new group and an existing group, we seek to establish and articulate our identity, which involves building a representative and equitable coalition to identify our organization's internal priorities and build a strategy for engaging with the most pressing issues facing the watershed. Our first goal is regain our former organizational capacity, highlighted by strong and diverse relationships with a shared sense of purpose, which is needed to implement the actions that are necessary to restore and manage the Merced River watershed. Our next goal is to establish a shared understanding of the management and restoration goals and responsibilities established in the CRMPs, and specify federal, state, and local roles in implementing and bringing public awareness to those efforts. Our final goal is to implement and maintain projects that result in a healthy, resilient watershed that balances the needs of a variety of human and non-human users, and serves as a regional role model for collaborative management and decision-making.

Our approach involves four sequential and iterative work elements that enable us to build towards our goals.

Work Element #1: Coalition Building

The first work element is geared towards building an equitable partnership that represents a variety of perspectives and stakeholders from multiple levels of governance. By conducting effective outreach activities, the tasks in this work element will reinvigorate many of the partnerships that formerly made the UMRWC a regional watershed management and restoration powerhouse, and build bridges with new and emergent organizations and agencies who have become significant stakeholders in issues within our watershed. This will result in a broad-based and diverse

membership. While a detailed description of affected stakeholders is provided in the response to Criterion A.1, anticipated outreach and engagement activities include:

- facilitating informal preliminary meetings with representatives from affected stakeholder organizations to collaboratively define the planning and direction-setting work, including a draft outreach and stakeholder engagement plan, to be completed in future work elements;
- developing compelling process graphics and other informational materials to convey the proposed watershed group development and planning activities to support recruitment of prospective partners;
- enhancing the UMRWC website to provide clear information to affected stakeholders about the proposed process;
- establishing a robust public presence, including on social media and through digital newsletters, to engage stakeholders in initial group development activities and lay the foundation for an effective planning effort.

Work Element #2: Outreach + Engagement

The tasks in the next work element build off of the partnerships and relationships that were reestablished, initiated, and strengthened in the first work element. To build trust, elicit buy-in, and ensure effectiveness, the specific parameters of the outreach and engagement plan will be collaboratively formulated among affected stakeholders in the previous work element.

During this work element, the Council would apply a variety of stakeholder engagement and facilitation techniques to conduct meetings needed to establish a vision, identify goals, and specify actions that can be expressed in and pursued through the Strategic Work Plan. The outreach and engagement plan will be designed to be flexible and responsive to the pandemic, which may continue to undermine efforts for in-person meetings and activities.

Work will focus on facilitating dialogues necessary to express a clear identity and sense of organizational direction. It is anticipated that tasks and activities will be modeled after several effective ongoing communitywide outreach and engagement efforts currently taking place in the watershed, and under the direction of current UMRWC board members. Tasks in this work element will likely include:

- online surveys and polls to quantify stakeholder preferences;
- a community speaker series paired with interactive workshops to simultaneously collect input and build stakeholder capacity to understand critical watershed issues outside of their realms of expertise; and
- guided tours, such as hikes and paddling trips, with affected stakeholders to facilitate conversations about the watershed while out in the field.

Work Element #3: Research + Investigation

Having come together to formally adopt organizational vision, goals, and priority actions for the Council and its partners to pursue, the project scope shifts from watershed group development to watershed planning. The next work element initiates that effort by synthesizing, organizing, and making accessible existing research on the watershed's baseline conditions to both inform and evaluate future actions. In this work element, the Council will also study precedent organizations

and their strategic plans to lay the groundwork for the development of our own strategic work plan in the next work element. Activities in this work element are anticipated to include:

- precedent research to inform the development of our own Strategic Work Plan;
- interviews with project partners to understand gaps in their understanding of regional watershed restoration and enhancement projects and the CRMPs;
- review of current and relevant scientific research to quantify the watershed's existing conditions in a variety of key metrics; and
- engagement with federal partners to identify opportunities for the Council to support implementation of restoration projects identified in their respective CRMPs.

Work Element #4: Strategic Work Plan Production and Adoption

In the final work element of Phase I of this project, the Council and its partners will produce and adopt a Strategic Work Plan consisting of discrete implementation actions to take over 2-, 5-, and 10-year time frames that have been identified as most effective for supporting federal agencies in implementing their CRMPs. In addition to convening affected partners, bolstering interagency coordination, and synthesizing and disseminating ongoing research activities, it is anticipated that the plan will also identify specific restoration projects for the Council to assume responsibility of. The plan will distill the coalition building, goal setting, and fact finding from the previous work elements, serving as a road map for growing our organization through effective, meaningful, resonant action on behalf of the watershed. In addition to specific actions (programs, policies, and discrete projects) that have been prioritized by stakeholders, the plan will also include an implementation guide with:

- implementation roles and responsibilities for affected stakeholders,
- relevant precedent for recommended actions;
- technical cost estimates and potential funding sources for each action; and
- mechanisms for reviewing and updating the work plan at regular intervals.

Ultimately, the adopted Strategic Work Plan will facilitate rapid and effective implementation of the actions necessary to revive and reactivate the UMRWC as a leader in the Upper Merced River Watershed, and to regain its capacity to convene, coordinate, and empower the watershed's stakeholders long into the future.

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criterion A— Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

Sub Criterion No. A1: Watershed Group Diversity

Historically, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council has collaborated with a broad swath of stakeholders active in and passionate about the Merced River watershed, including federal, state, and local governmental agencies and regional and local non-governmental agencies representing interests ranging from conservation, environmental education, and the outdoor recreation and tourism industries.

In Work Element #1 of the proposed project, the Council would work to restore and reaffirm these past partnerships to quickly and comprehensively build the coalition needed for a successful project. This begins with the federal agencies who are primarily responsible for implementing the restoration actions detailed in the Merced Wild and Scenic River CRMPs: the National Park Service (Yosemite National Park), US Forest Service (Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests), and Bureau of Land Management (Mother Lode Field Office). At the state level, the Council will work to re-establish its partnership with the California Department of Conservation. Locally, the Council will re-engage with the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors and staff from key county departments, including Planning and Environmental Health, as well as the Merced Irrigation District, who manages the New Exchequer Dam in the lower reaches of the river. The Council will also revisit previous partnerships with venerable affected NGO stakeholders, especially conservation groups like the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District and the Merced River Conservation Committee, environmental education groups like Nature Bridge (formerly Yosemite Institute), and sustainable economic development advocates like the Mariposa County Economic Development department and Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau. By reengaging with these longstanding watershed planning and management partners early in the project, the Council can move quickly to energize the group development process, ensuring adequate time to produce a thorough and consensus-based Strategic Work Plan.

Significantly, in addition to reaffirming previous partnerships, the Council sees the WaterSmart grant program as a unique and ideal opportunity to bring new project partners into the coalition to support a more holistic and inclusive planning effort and deliverable. This is particularly appropriate given that, in the nearly 10 years since the Council's heyday, new organizations have emerged as critical players in the management and conservation of the Merced River, as have new partnerships with the potential to enhance the partnerships capacity to promote positive restoration and sustainable use outcomes.

At the federal level, this includes the Environmental Protection Agency, who is providing technical support to the Mariposa County Planning Department regarding the remediation of a strategic former mine site adjacent to the river. At the state level, this includes the California Department of Forestry and Fire, a key collaborator in wildfire risk reduction and vegetation management issues. Regionally, the Council is eager to engage with UC-Merced's Sierra Nevada Research Institute to expand knowledge of and engagement efforts within the watershed. As well, the Council will

formalize and deepen partnerships with the Sierra Foothills Conservancy, who collaborates with landowners and agricultural operators throughout the region to sustainably conserve and manage critical landscapes in the watershed. The Council also plans to reach out to re-establish its partnership with the East Merced Resource Conservation District as well as the County of Merced, who has jurisdiction of the lowest reaches of the river within the watershed. Finally, at the local level, the Council will build on personal connections at the burgeoning outdoor recreation advocacy group Mariposa Trails, and engage with the Southern Sierra Miwuk nation, who have historically been marginalized from watershed planning and management activities and whose ancestral lands include the entirety of the project area. These new partnerships will complement the Council's previous relationships with affected stakeholders at the state, federal, and local levels, resulting in a collaborative that reflects the diverse interests, perspectives, and skillsets within our watershed.

As described in the Technical Project Description, the Council will apply a range of techniques to reestablish old partnerships and cultivate new ones to ensure project success. Outreach efforts will include facilitating informal preliminary meetings with representatives from affected stakeholder organizations to collaboratively define the final Strategic Work Plan, developing digital tools—including an enhanced web and social media presence—to publicize and market the group development work elements and recruit targeted stakeholders to the process. Later, these same tools and platforms will be used to seek input on and promote the draft and adopted Strategic Work Plan.

Sub Criterion No. A2: Geographic Scope

The map on Pg. 3 of this application packet illustrates the geographic boundaries of the watershed group's work area, and delineates the relevant jurisdictional boundaries. This includes those of the National Park Service, US Forest Service (Sierra and Stanislaus NFs), and Bureau of Land Management, and the boundary between Mariposa County (where the bulk of the watershed is located) and Merced County, the latter of which will be targeted for participation in the group development and strategic planning process. Though the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District's (RCD) jurisdiction is technically limited to the county boundaries, it is important to note that RCD's conservation, restoration, and management activities and priorities extend to the downstream portions of the watershed in Merced County.

Each of the remaining affected stakeholders identified in the previous response—including both those that were previously involved in the group and those that will be targeted through outreach—are actively engaged in the entire project area. For example, both current and planned governmental partners like the California Department of Conservation and Environmental Protection Agency, as well as non-governmental partners like the Merced River Conservation Committee and Sierra Foothill Conservancy are active in watershed projects in multiple federal and county jurisdictions within the project area. In total, our partnership of federal, state, and local agencies and non-governmental organizations represent the full geographic scope of HUC 18040008, where the Council has and continue to focus its watershed restoration, conservation, and management

Evaluation Criterion B — Addressing Critical Watershed Needs

Sub Criterion No. B1: Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The Upper Merced River Watershed is large, encompassing approximately 700,000 acres ridge to ridge, ranging from 443 feet to 11,600 feet in elevation. Public agencies manage roughly 600,000 of those acres, and about 100,000 acres are owned privately. Much of the land in the Watershed is public and managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Sierra National Forest, or the Stanislaus National Forest. The management objectives of the agencies are delineated in voluminous plans, and the status of the Merced River as Wild and Scenic has resulted in additional planning documents. Each agency's plan identifies critical watershed needs and/or issues within the watershed. The Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRPM) for the Merced River and South Fork Merced River (Bureau of Land Management & Forest Service, November 1991) identifies 21 issue subjects that include recreation, land ownership and use, cultural resources and archaeology, fire/fuels management, fisheries, public involvement, and interpretation, and threatened and endangered species, vegetation management, water quality & quantity, and wildlife. This comprehensive management plan incorporates management direction for the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forest, and the Bureau of Land Management Merced River Management Plan.

The Merced Wild and Scenic River CRPM, Yosemite National Park 2012, addresses issues related to resource protection, development of land and facilities, user capacities, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purposes of the Wild and Scenic River Act and address the critical issues within the watershed. This CRMP identifies historic issues that have, and in many cases still are, critical issues affecting the health of the watershed. Critical issues, both current and historic, identified in this CRPM include, declines in meadow acreage, increase in conifer colonization, non-native and invasive plant species, development pressure, and changes to hydrology that impact water quality due to current and historic anthropogenic use such as recreation, development, grazing, agriculture, draining of wetlands for agriculture, etc.

The Yosemite- Mariposa Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP, Revised June 2016) is intended to address the many major water-related needs/challenges and conflicts within the region, identifying the Upper Merced River Watershed as the largest and most productive watershed, comprising almost two-thirds of the entire region area. The critical issues faced by our watershed are identified in this plan as water quality conditions, local water supply reliability/shortages, fuel management for wildfire prevention, flood and stormwater management, and resource stewardship and ecosystem protection to address declining ecological process and environmental resources.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance, in the State of Sierra Waters; A Sierra Nevada Watersheds Index 2006, cites that the upper section of the Merced River has been listed for mercury and as impaired for pathogens, sediment siltation and wetlands impacts by the US EPA. The US EPA and the California State Water Resource Control Board have listed the beneficial uses of swimming, drinking and recreational day use as threatened along with the habitat and freshwater.

Although the Yosemite Mariposa region does not have a large population, the Merced River Watershed comprises 64% of the region and is a major tributary to the San Joaquin River, which

combines with other Delta tributaries to provide water for millions of people in the San Joaquin Valley and Bay Area, and water for irrigating hundreds of thousands of acres of prime farmland. The continued and coordinated management of the multitude of critical issues faced by our watershed, as delineated in the many federal, state, and local stakeholder plans, will be essential to both preserving and enhancing natural systems and human health.

Sub Criterion No. B2: Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council (UMRWC) will build upon previous partnership building efforts through this grant. In 2006 the UMRWC created a formal Watershed Plan, A Collaborative Action Strategy for the Upper Merced River Watershed. This watershed plan was the result of five years collaborative work with individual stakeholders and governmental agencies in areas of common interest. During the Watershed Plan development process the UMRWC found that its stakeholders were eager to take on projects in the watershed. At that time, the UMRWC had over 50 committed volunteers and over 300 supporters, engaged in a variety of watershed improvement, management, and stewardship activities, as described in detail in the Technical Project Description portion of this application.

This grant will serve to revitalize and reengage the diverse stakeholder group of the UMRWC through actions identified in Work Element 2: Outreach & Engagement and Evaluation Criterion A. The Council plans to gather information regarding the critical issues and needs of the watershed by implementing the actions identified in Work Element 3: Research and investigation. The management of water and related resources within the watershed is complex as it has many interdependencies, multiple stakeholder groups have both management authority and responsibilities. This complexity and the distributed network of shared responsibilities create the need for robust and effective coordination, as well as provide an extensive body of knowledge and literature related to critical needs of the watershed. The actions outlined in work element 3 are designed to effectively gather the most relevant literature and recent issues and priorities from land managers and stakeholders.

Because our emphasis is on supporting federal agencies by diversifying the partnership of community partners and agencies involved in watershed restoration, management, and use issues, the final deliverable of the proposed project will be a strategic work plan based tied to existing CRMPs, rather than a new, standalone watershed restoration plan, that would be redundant to and could potentially conflict with existing CRMPs.

Evaluation Criterion C— Implementation and Results

Sub Criterion No. C1: Project Implementation

As described in the Technical Proposal (pp. 4-7) the proposed scope of work is divided into four major tasks (or work elements), which are intended to be sequential so that each task builds on and references the outcomes of the preceding task. In Work Element #1: Coalition Building, the Council will both re-establish longstanding partnerships and forge new ones to bring together a diverse and representative partnership of federal, state, and local agencies, community non-profits, and other affected stakeholders. Once a broad and strong partnership has been assembled and coordinated, the Council will lead engagement efforts with these partners to establish a vision, identify goals,

and specify actions that can be expressed in and pursued through the Strategic Work Plan in Work Element #2: Outreach Engagement. Then, the scope of work shifts to developing and adopting the Strategic Work Plan. In Work Element #3: Research Investigation, the Council will facilitate project partners in gathering the data, precedent, and planning framework for a Strategic Work Plan to guide future restoration and partnership coordination efforts. Finally, during Work Element #4: Strategic Work Plan Production and Adoption, the Council will lead the production of the Strategic Work Plan, including all supporting documents and materials, and facilitate adoption of the work plan to establish it as a guide for future actions and decisions.

See below for a schedule that specifies key tasks within each Work Element, as well as anticipated start and end dates and estimated costs for each task. The Budget Proposal (pg. 20) includes a breakdown of costs for each Work Element and key task, and also includes direct costs that are not specific to individual tasks (e.g., supplies and materials) and indirect costs.

Schedule + Costs

Work Element	Milestones + Deliverables	Estimated Costs	Schedule																								
			FY 2021/22												FY 2022/23												
			A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	
1 Coalition Building																											
1A	developing materials to support recruitment	graphics and narrative content to promote group development activities	\$3,500																								
1B	enhancing website and social media platform presence	revamped website/online presence	\$3,500																								
1C	preliminary meetings with affected stakeholder organizations	10-20 initial meetings	\$3,000																								
1D	travel	NA	\$18845																								
Total Task Costs			\$6,884.45																								
2 Outreach + Engagement																											
2A	interactive engagement exercises with affected stakeholders	4-8 meetings + workshops	\$20,000																								
2B	synthesis of engagement results into vision, goals, and actions	summary report of outcomes from engagement work	\$10,000																								
2C	travel	NA	\$376.9																								
Total Task Costs			\$30,376.99																								
3 Research + Investigation																											
3A	strategic work plan precedent research	summary/notes to inform strategic work plan deliverable	\$8,000																								
3B	interviews with targeted affected stakeholders	summary/notes to inform strategic work plan deliverable	\$5,000																								
3C	research + review of current scientific research	summary of relevant scientific considerations to grapple with in strategic work plan	\$13,000.0																								
3D	travel	NA	\$565.3																								
Total Task Costs			\$26,565.34																								
4 Strategic Work Plan Production + Adoption																											
4A	document production	draft strategic work plan	\$14,000																								
4B	document adoption	completed strategic work plan	\$0																								
4B	travel	NA	\$188																								
Total Task Costs			\$14,188.45																								

Sub Criterion No. C2: Building on Relevant Federal, State, or Regional Planning Efforts

The proposed activities both directly serve and align with critical needs as described in numerous federal state, regional, and local plans. Primarily, the proposed project explicitly supports implementation of the existing Merced River Comprehensive River Management Plans (CRMPs) for the portions of the river that are within the project area. This includes all of the portions that are designated Wild and Scenic. Each federal agency with jurisdiction of the Wild and Scenic portions of the Merced River—National Park Service (Yosemite National Park), US Forest Service (Sierra and Stanislaus National Forest), and Bureau of Land Management (Mother Lode Field Office)—has developed and adopted their own CRMP in accordance with their respective mandates and directives.

The vision and goals expressed in these CRMP's align with a range of relevant federal, state, regional, and local planning efforts. This includes California Natural Resources Agency's "Safeguarding California Action Plan," which identifies numerous goals which will be met by the proposed project, especially "L-1 Develop equitable public engagement strategies to engage residents, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, to be sustainable and resilient." The proposed project also serves the California Water Action Plan, which specifies the management of headwaters for multiple benefits and encouraging healthy soils—both anticipated outcomes of the proposed Strategic Work Plan—as critical to water conservation and management in our state.

Additionally, the proposed project would engage with issues that affect strategic wildlife and plant species, many of which are listed and/or protected by the state of California. These include the limestone salamander (CA state ESA listed species; proposed threatened for federal ESA) and the California newt (California species of concern).

At the regional level, the project aligns with several key goals in the Yosemite Mariposa Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plan, which outlines a vision for managing water resources in the Yosemite-Mariposa Region. Though the IRWM plan does not explicitly address the CRMPs impact on watershed issues, it does specify several discrete goals that would be supported and indeed greatly enhanced by improved coordination with federal agencies and a wide array of community stakeholders. These include:

- Goal #3: Maintain or Improve Water Quality in the Region
- Goal #4: Protect and Improve Wildlife Habitat
- Goal #5: Assess and Enhance Recreational Opportunities in the Region
- Goal #6: Develop Collaborative and Sustainable Partnerships both Within and in Adjacent Regions

At the local level, the proposed project directly implements key recommendations of the Mariposa County General Plan's Conservation and Open Space Element (since there are no incorporated cities in the county, the General Plan is the applicable local planning document). By providing a forum for Mariposa County agencies and county staff to collaborate with other local and regional stakeholders in the group development and planning efforts, the proposed project supports implementation of General Plan Policy 11-1B: Collaborate with other public and private agencies for conservation management plans and programs—especially the stated implementation measure: The County should participate in conservation management planning with Federal and State and other public and private agencies.

Additionally, the outcomes of the proposed project also support this General Plan Element's goal to "(p)rotect and manage the use of Mariposa County's limited water resources," which recommends various water conservation and water quality enhancement measures. Finally, the proposed project directly supports the Element's goal to "(c)onserve and enhance the ecosystems, plant communities, wildlife habitats, and the inherent diversity of both plant and animal species for the recreational, commercial, aesthetic, and basic ecosystems needs." This goal includes implementation actions geared towards conserving native ecosystems, plant communities, and wildlife habitat—all of which will be addressed through the group development and planning efforts in the proposed project.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the proposed project aligns with and directly supports the ongoing development of the Merced River Trail (MRT) Vision Plan, currently underway and led by the Mariposa County Planning Department. Through this community planning effort, the community is articulating a shared vision for a non-motorized multi-use trail along the historic Yosemite Valley Railroad route (located in the project area), which will balance the growing needs for education, access to recreation, and regional economic development with the imperative for conserving the canyon's many remarkable resources. Though not yet completed (likely fall 2021), the plan's direction and the decisions that have been made in the process to date are in lockstep with the approach of the proposed project.

Evaluation Criterion D— Department of the Interior and Bureau of Reclamation Priorities

The group development and strategic watershed planning activities contained in the proposed scope of work advance several key agency priorities, including the two identified Department of the Interior priorities that are applicable to the proposal.

First, the project is intrinsically connected to promoting Teddy Roosevelt’s conservation legacy, and addresses four of the key metrics in this Department priority. At its core, this project is concerned with fostering relationships with conservation organizations advocating for balanced stewardship and use of public lands. By convening scientists from throughout the watershed and representing a range of disciplines, the proposed project supports the use of science to identify best practices for managing land and water resources and supporting an adaptive management approach to the Upper Merced River watershed. Through intensive engagement and dialogue among ecologists, biologists, geologists, and other researchers from the National Parks Service, US Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management, as well as UC-Merced and local environments science contractors like Point Blue Conservation Science, the proposed project will develop a strategic work plan to support science-based strategies for achieving identified priority watershed management and restoration objectives. These include forest management, habitat restoration, water quality enhancements, and other outcomes that have become increasingly important as changes in the watershed’s environment have become more severe over time.

Significantly, and related to the Department’s priority of creating an exemplary conservation stewardship legacy, the Council and its partners are pursuing these ecological outcomes by promoting increased appropriate public access to the public lands within the proposed project area. Both the longstanding and targeted affected stakeholders included in the project’s partnership see appropriate, sustainable public access and enjoyment of public lands as a central component to achieving positive conservation and restoration outcomes. By promoting a connection to the landscapes and ecosystems that we advocate for, our partnership seeks to nurture a deeper understanding of and connection to the watershed, resulting in a greater capacity for the community to act as stewards for their public lands—both in our watershed and elsewhere.

Our partnership includes a range of affected stakeholders who explicitly promote appropriate use of and access to public lands including trail advocates (such as Mariposa Trails), rafting advocates (such as the Mariposa County Economic Development Department), and environmental education practitioners (such as Nature Bridge), and the proposed project’s inclusive outreach and engagement efforts will be effective at bringing additional access-minded stakeholders into the partnership. Notably, the longstanding partnership between the Council and fishing advocates (such as the Merced River Conservation Committee) will be instrumental in building new bridges with similar partners, especially Trout Unlimited, to identify and implement initiatives to expand access to BLM and USFS lands within the project area for fishing.

In addition to this Department priority, the proposed project is closely connected to the priority of “Restoring trust with local communities.” Indeed, the project’s essential premise--convening a wide range of local and regional affected stakeholders to collaborate with federal agencies in support of implementing adopted watershed management and restoration plans—is in perfect alignment with

this Department priority. Through the proposed project, the Council would take a leadership role in improving dialogue and relationships between federal land managers at three of the Department's agencies (National Parks Service, US Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management) and partners in the adjacent gateway community.

This includes both governmental partners, especially the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors and relevant departments in the local government, and non-governmental organizations with commitment to Department priorities. Additionally, by bringing targeted stakeholders from the California Department of Conservation into the Council-led partnership, the proposed project would facilitate connections between federal and state agencies working to support balanced conservation and use of the Upper Merced River watershed. By expanding the lines of communication between the Department of the Interior and the local community, the proposed project both increases the likelihood of successful implementation of the Department's Comprehensive River Management Plans for the Merced River, and also establishes the framework for a lasting federal-local partnership for a wide range of collaborative efforts long into the future.

Project Budget

Budget Proposal

The proposed project budget is below.

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION		QUANTITY TYPE	TOTAL COST
	\$/UNIT	QUANTITY		
WORK ELEMENT 1: COALITION BUILDING				
Salaries and Wages				
Mikey Goralnik (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Jessica Thompson (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Other BOD members				
Travel				
Trip 1- Group Development	\$0.59	319.4	Mile	\$188.45
Contractual/Construction				
Group Development Facilitator	\$3,000	1	8 month contract	\$3,000
Group Development Manager	\$7,000	1	8 month contract	\$7,000
Other				
Other				\$-
Salaries and Wages				
Mikey Goralnik (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Jessica Thompson (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Other BOD members				
Travel				
Trip 2-Coalition E gement	\$0.59	638.8	Mile	\$376.89
Contractual/Construction				
Coalition Buildin Facilitator	10,000	2	8 month contract	\$20,000
Research and Planni Contractor	10,000	1	8 month contract	\$10,000
Other				
Other				\$-
WORK ELEMENT 3: RESEARCH + INVESTIGATION				
Salaries and Wages				
Mikey Goralnik (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Jessica Thompson (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Other BOD members				
Travel				
Trip 3- Project Management	\$0.59	319.4	Mile	\$188.45
Trip 4-Ma pin & Data collection Travel	\$0.59	638.8	Mile	\$376.89
Contractual/Construction				
Strat Work Plan Production Manager	\$5,000	1	12 month contract	\$5,000
Mapping, Data Contractor	\$5,000	1	8 month contract	\$5,000
Research and Planni Contractor	\$8,000	1	8 month contract	\$8,000
Technical Analysis Contractor	\$8,000	1	8 month contract	\$8,000
Other				
Other				\$-
WORK ELEMENT 4: STRATEGIC WORK PLAN PRODUCTION + ADOPTION				
Salaries and Wages				
Mikey Goralnik (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Jessica Thompson (Board Member/Project Manager)				
Other BOD members				
Travel				
Trip 5- Strategic Work Plan Presentation	\$0.59	319.4	Mile	\$188.45
Contractual/Construction				
Strat Work Plan Production Man er	\$6,000	1	12 month contract	\$6,000
Document Production/Graphic n Contractor	\$8,000	1	8 month contract	\$8,000
Other				
Other				\$-
OTHER DIRECT COSTS				
Equipment				
Computer	\$ 2,399.00	1	MacBook	\$ 2,399.00
Printer/Scanner	\$ 230.00	1	HP printer scanner	\$ 230.00
Project Management Software	\$ 235.20	3	2-year license	\$ 705.60
Software Contingency	\$ 500.00	1	Various	\$ 500.00
Supplies and Materials				
Outreach Materials (Printed)	\$ 1,000.00	1	Batch Printing	\$ 1,000.00
Office supplies (consumables)	\$ 1,000.00	1	Various	\$ 1,000.00
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS				\$ 87,153.72
Indirect Costs				
Administrative Overhead	Percentage= 5base			
	0.1	\$87,153.72		\$8,715.37
TOTAL REQUESTED AMOUNT				\$95,869.09

TOTAL PROJECT COST (GRANT AMOUNT + IN KIND MATCH)

\$ 95,869.09

Budget Narrative

The Budget Proposal is structured so that costs are allocated to the specific work element to which they pertain. In addition to the direct costs that are specific to individual work elements, the “Other Direct Costs” section of the proposal relates to equipment and supplies that will be used throughout the entire project, and are associated with every work element.

Salaries and Wages

Costs listed in the “Salaries and Wages” (and in red in the budget proposal) are unpaid volunteered hours from the Council’s board. The two Board members authorized by the Council’s board to serve as leaders of the proposed project— Jessica Thompson and Mikey Gorainik—will volunteer two hours/week throughout the two-year grant period to directing the project on behalf of the Board. These tasks will primarily involve consultant management, review of draft materials, and other direction and guidance activities as needed for each work element. The remaining board members will collectively volunteer an additional one hour/week for the entire grant period to provide complementary project management and oversight services.

Based on past projects and statewide best practices for grant reporting and non-profit management, the average value of volunteer time in California is \$29.95 per hour. At this rate and based on the committed volunteer hours described above, the Council Board is providing \$14,046.55 worth of non-federal in-kind support to the project. This is roughly 14% of the total amount requested from BRM.

Fringe Benefits

No fringe benefits are included in the cost proposal.

Travel

The cost proposal assumes that restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic allow travel and in-person meetings to support project implementation. The proposal assumes that travel will occur via automobile, and reimburses mileage based on the federal mileage rate. Federal mileage rate for 2020 is \$0.575 so \$0.59 is on par with non-profit operations in the state. Trip details are as follows:

- Trip 1-Group Development: The purpose of the trip is to meet with stakeholders at a variety of destinations throughout the watershed to facilitate preliminary discussions necessary to build a diverse and inclusive project partnership. Mileage allocated includes one round trip from Mariposa to each: Yosemite NP offices in both El Portal and Yosemite Valley, Sierra National Forest offices in North Fork, and Stanislaus National Forest offices in Groveland. Travel is authorized for one individual, with no lodging or miscellaneous travel expenses authorized.
- Trip 2-Coalition Engagement: The purpose of the trip is to meet with stakeholders at a variety of destinations throughout the watershed to conduct outreach and engagement activities necessary to support group development and strategic watershed planning activities. Mileage allocated includes one round trip from Mariposa to each: Yosemite NP

offices in both El Portal and Yosemite Valley, Sierra National Forest offices in North Fork, and Stanislaus National Forest offices in Groveland. Travel is authorized for four individuals, with no lodging or miscellaneous travel expenses authorized.

- Trip 3-Project Engagement: The purpose of the trip is to meet with Council board members and project leadership at various destinations in the watershed area to identify and discuss research topics needed to influence the development of the strategic work plan. Mileage allocated includes one round trip from Mariposa to each: Yosemite NP offices in both El Portal and Yosemite Valley, Sierra National Forest offices in North Fork, and Stanislaus National Forest offices in Groveland. Travel is authorized for one individual, with no lodging or miscellaneous travel expenses authorized.
- Trip 4-Mapping and Data Collection: The purpose of the trip is to collect qualitative and quantitative data necessary to fill minor gaps in support of a comprehensive and effective strategic work plan. Mileage allocated includes one round trip from Mariposa to each: Yosemite NP offices in both El Portal and Yosemite Valley, Sierra National Forest offices in North Fork, and Stanislaus National Forest offices in Groveland. Travel is authorized for two individuals, with no lodging or miscellaneous travel expenses authorized.
- Trip 5-Strategic Work Plan Presentation: The purpose of the trip is to share the completed work plan with affected stakeholders engaged throughout the project. Mileage allocated includes one round trip from Mariposa to each: Yosemite NP offices in both El Portal and Yosemite Valley, Sierra National Forest offices in North Fork, and Stanislaus National Forest offices in Groveland. Travel is authorized for one individual, with no lodging or miscellaneous travel expenses authorized.

Equipment

Equipment purchases are for tools necessary to manage and deliver the proposed group development and strategic work planning activities. Equipment purchases include:

- Laptop computer: necessary for Council board to complete every project task, including all project management activities, document review, and potential content creation needed to complete all work elements. Pricing is based on base MacBook Pro 16" model.
- Printer/Scanner: necessary for range of project tasks, including sharing hard copies of documents for review, sending physical correspondences, and digitizing archival or historic documents necessary for the strategic work plan. Pricing is based on HP ENVY Photo 7855 All-in-One Printer.
- Project Management Software: necessary to efficiently organize and coordinate project management activities and ensure compliance with DOI/BRM reporting and administration requirements. Price is based on three licenses for two years to Wrike project management software.
- Software Contingency: necessary to cover costs of any additional software that proves necessary to successful project implementation, such as Adobe Acrobat Pro, Esri Arc GIS, and/or Microsoft Office. Price is based on a conservative estimate of potential software needs.

Materials and Supplies

Allowances for outreach materials and office supplies are based on past experience for similar efforts in Mariposa County, including both past Council projects and past projects implemented by project partners. "Outreach Materials (printed)" refers to printing costs associated with flyers, posters, meeting packets, and other physical content used to promote and implement the group development activities, as well as to print and bind at least three copies of the final strategic work plan. "Office Supplies (consumable)" refers to standard office supplies, such as writing implements, postage, and other materials needed to conduct basic management and administration tasks.

Contractual

The project involves hiring consultants/contractors to assist with carrying out the work in the proposed project. Contracts are described below by general task type/purpose.

Work Element #1: Coalition Building and Work Element #2: Outreach Engagement

Together, the work in these two work elements pertain to the group development activities in the proposed project. The contractual elements of the group development task will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out the group development activities. The contract amount will be for the contract services costs (\$40,000) plus the allocated travel costs (\$565.34) involved in the two work elements.

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for effectively engaging with diverse stakeholders, accurately distilling and synthesizing affected stakeholders' input and feedback, and facilitating unique and engaging outreach and engagement, will be the basis for contractor selection. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Work Element #3: Research and Investigation and #4: Strategic Work Plan Production and Adoption

These two work elements relate to the production of the development and production of the strategic work plan. The contractual elements of the document production task will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out the group development activities. The contract amount will be for the contract services costs (\$40,000) plus the allocated travel costs (\$753.78) involved in the two work elements.

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for producing a compelling and comprehensive strategic work plan document that captures all of the consensus, recommendations, and decisions from the previous phase of the

project, will be the basis for contractor selection. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Third Party In-Kind Contributions

The project proposes no third-party in-kind contributions

Environmental and Regulatory Compliance Costs

The project proposes no environmental and regulatory compliance costs

Indirect Costs

The Council proposes a *de minimis* rate of 10% to address indirect costs.

Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

The proposed project exclusively involves watershed group development and watershed restoration planning. As such, none of the issues associated with NEPA, ESA, and NHPA are applicable to the current scope of work. However, the Strategic Work Plan proposed to be produced through this effort will be considerate of these and other applicable compliance concerns, which will ensure that recommended projects anticipate compliance issues in the planning phase. This will ensure that, when NEPA, ESA, and NHPA considerations are applicable during future project implementation phases, the Council and its partners will be able to effectively ensure that actions comply with applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

Required Permits or Approvals

As a group development and watershed planning project, no permits or approvals are required.

Letters of Support

The Council is pleased to include the following letters of support at the end of this application.

Federal Agencies

- National Parks Service (Yosemite National Park)
- US Forest Service (both Sierra National Forest and Stanislaus National Forest)
- Bureau of Land Management (Mother Lode field office)
- Environmental Protection Agency

Local Agencies

- Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

Local and Regional Non-Governmental Agencies

- Mariposa Biomass Project
- Sierra Foothills Conservancy
- Mariposa County Resource Conservation District
- Merced River Conservation Committee
- Nature Bridge (formerly Yosemite Institute)

Board Resolution

A resolution from the Council's current board is attached to this application.

Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council is registered in the SAM system, but is having difficulty submitting its application through that platform. We have received notification of IRS TIN Match Validation Successful for in the U.S. Government's System for Award Management (SAM), but it is with the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Commercial and Government Entity (CAGE) Code System for assignment or validation of our CAGE code. Validation was pending at time of submittal.

Our organization's EIN/TIN is 26-2083214 and our DUNS is 945924806.



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Yosemite National Park
P. O. Box 577
Yosemite, California 95389

January 15, 2021

To whom it may concern:

The mission of the National Park Service (NPS) is to preserve and protect resources “for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” The NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world. On behalf of the NPS in Yosemite National Park, it is with great enthusiasm that I write to you in support of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council’s application for the Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management grant to build a coalition of supporters.

In 2014, the NPS finalized in a Record of Decision the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan. This plan provides management guidance for the protection and enhancement of the 81 of the 122 miles of the Merced Wild and Scenic River that flow through Yosemite National Park. The Merced River Plan represented a rich collaboration with the public, including research scientists, park partners (like the Upper Merced River Watershed Council), traditionally-associated American Indian tribes, and park staff to explore the vision for the future of the river. The plan prescribes measures to protect and enhance the Merced River in Yosemite, including ongoing restoration, monitoring, and a commitment to public involvement.

As the NPS moves forward with implementing the plan, the NPS is pleased to continue its collaborative relationship with the Upper Merced River Watershed Council. The WaterSMART grant would enable the Council to serve as a clearinghouse for information and a convener for matters pertaining to the Upper Merced River. This effort would benefit and support the work of Yosemite National Park by promoting the active initiatives taking place within the Merced River corridor in Yosemite to enhance community understanding.

Thank you again for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,
Cicely Muldoon
Superintendent, Yosemite National Park



File Code: 6000
Date: January 14, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

The Sierra National Forest strongly supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for the WaterSmart grant program titled: Revive + Redefine: Developing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and Facilitating a Restoration Plan for the Upper Merced Wild and Scenic River.

The Sierra National Forest has had a very productive working relationship with the Upper Merced River Watershed Council since 2004 when we signed a Memorandum of Understanding. The Council has been an important catalyst in work on Forest Service lands. As such, they are well aware of the critical issues facing both the watershed and the region; and have been implementing important volunteer-based programs to safeguard the Upper Merced River and address forest health. The MOU governed our cooperative efforts on a number of projects on trails in and around the Merced River Canyon. Sierra National Forest personnel provided safety training to the many volunteers organized by the Council to work on these trails. Forest Service specialist were also involved in planning work for removal of invasive weeds on the trails.

This grant opportunity would provide much-needed funding to allow the Watershed Council to expand its reach and engage more of the community in planning for and protecting the watershed. The Upper Merced is a vital link not only for the health of the area, but as an integral part of the beauty and majesty of Yosemite National Park. Visitors to Yosemite are critical to the economic health and stability of Mariposa County, and efforts to protect and enhance it bring more than environmental health, they also ensure that the tourism we depend on continues.

This application has my strongest personal endorsement, as it will have broad-reaching benefits to the environment and the community of Mariposa.

Sincerely,

DEAN GOULD
Forest Supervisor

cc: Rosemarie Smallcombe <rsmallcombe@mariposacounty.org>, Erin Potter, Aimee Cox, Judi Tapia





United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Pacific Southwest Region
Stanislaus National Forest

19777 Greenley Road
Sonora, CA 95370
209-532-3671
TDD: 209-533-0765
Fax: 209-533-1890

File Code: 2510
Date: January 14, 2021

Mr. Edmund Weakland
WaterSmart Grant Program Manager
Bureau of Reclamation
Financial Assistance Operations
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27815
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Mr. Weakland,

The Stanislaus National Forest strongly supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for the WaterSmart grant program titled: Revive+ Redefine: Developing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and Facilitating a Restoration Plan for the Upper Merced Wild and Scenic River.

A good portion of the Merced River Canyon is contained within the Stanislaus National Forest but activities in that area are administered by the Sierra National Forest under an agreement with us. For that reason, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and the Sierra National Forest developed a Memorandum of Understanding under which volunteers have carried out a number of projects on Stanislaus National Forest lands.

Given the wildfires on our lands as well as other threats to the natural resources in the area, the Merced River Canyon needs attention. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council has a history of organizing volunteers for the types of projects that are so necessary. Three devastating wildfires in the last few years have swept through the River Canyon (Detwiler 2017, Ferguson 2018, Briceburg 2019). The Forest lands which border the Canyon are in desperate need of work — prescribed fire and / or thinning as well as invasive weed removal.

The potential under the WaterSmart Grant to re-energize and restore the Council is important to the Stanislaus National Forest's management efforts. This grant opportunity would provide much-needed funding to allow the Watershed Council to expand its reach and engage more of the community in planning for and protecting the watershed. The Upper Merced is a vital link not only for the health of the area, but as an integral part of the beauty and majesty of Yosemite National Park. Visitors to Yosemite are critical to the economic health and stability of Mariposa County, and efforts to protect and enhance our forested lands bring more than environmental health, they also ensure that recreation and tourism opportunities continue.

Please fund this application. It will have broad-reaching benefits to the environment and the community of Mariposa.

Sincerely,


JASON KUIKEN
Forest Supervisor





United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mother Lode Field Office
5152 Hillside Circle
El Dorado Hills, CA 95672
www.ca.blm.gov/motherlode

January 11, 2021

To whom it may concern:

The Mother Lode Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is pleased to support the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's (UMRWC) application for the BOR WaterSmart Grant. The BLM has partnered with the UMRWC beginning in 2003 with the controlling of "invasive" weeds along the Wild and Scenic Merced River. Funds obtained by the Watershed Council from a California Department of Conservation grant (and others) enabled the BLM to bring in crews from a nearby California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation Camp in Mt. Bullion (inmate crews).

Over several years, the crews used weed eating and hand pulling to control and remove yellow star-thistle — first in a 2-mile section, and then working upstream for 7 miles. This was an enormous success that was only possible due to funds and partnership with the UMRWC! In addition, the BLM has participated with the Watershed Council in the Great Sierra Cleanup and numerous other worthy projects.

The BLM has keenly felt the loss the active watershed group! After the end of the Watershed Coordinator funding and then a devastating fire that burned the Watershed Council's office and records, the group has existed primarily in name only. The possibility that under the WaterSmart Grant, this group could be re-energized and restored to its previous level of activity is critical.

And it comes at a time of crisis for the Watershed. Two devastating wildfires in the last 3 years have swept through this Merced River Canyon (Ferguson, 2018, and Detwiler 2019). The national forests which border are in desperate need of work — prescribed fire and / or thinning. But the federal agencies do not have the money or resources to undertake this work. Wildfires have an enormous negative impact on water supply. The Merced River, downstream, flows directly to homes and farms of the Central Valley.

So, the possibilities that this grant offers are enormous. We definitely support this application.

David Greenwood
Bureau of Land Management
Mother Lode Field Office
Merced Wild and Scenic River at Briceburg
Outdoor Recreation Planner/River Ranger
dgreenwo@blm.gov



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX**

75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

11 January 2021

Bureau of Reclamation
Financial Assistance Operations
Attn: Mr. Edmund Weakland
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27815
Denver, CO 80225

RE: Technical Assistance for Miller Gulch Property, 8871 Highway 140, Mariposa, Mariposa County, California

Dear Mr. Weakland:

This letter is to confirm that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is providing technical assistance to the Mariposa County Planning Department through a Targeted Brownfields Assessment. The assistance began in April 2020 and is anticipated to conclude in June 2021. The estimated value of the technical assistance is \$152,000 in EPA contractor support.

The technical assistance for the Miller Gulch project includes developing a Sampling Analysis Plan; conducting environmental sampling at the site; and preparing a Phase I/II Environmental Assessment Report and an Assessment of Brownfield Cleanup Alternatives.

Please call me at 415-972-3152 or email me at hanusiak.lisa@epa.gov if I may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Hanusiak", written over a horizontal line.

Lisa Hanusiak, Brownfields Project Manager
Toxics & Brownfields Section
Land, Chemicals and Redevelopment Division

Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

District 1 ... ROSEMARIE SMALLCOMBE
District 2e..... TOM SWEENEY
District 3 MARSHALL LONG
District 4 WAYNE FORSYTHE
District 5 MILES MENETREY



DALLIN KIMBLE
County Administrative Officer

RENÉ LAROCHE
Clerk of the Board

P. O. Box 784
Mariposa, CA 95338
(209) 966-3222
(800) 736-1252
Fax (209) 966-5147
www.mariposacounty.org/board

January 15, 2021

Bureau of Reclamation
Financial Assistance Operations
Attn: Mr. Edmund Weakland
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27815
Denver, CO 80225

Re: Upper Merced River Watershed Council's WaterSmart grant application

Dear Mr. Weakland,

On behalf of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, I urge you to approve the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for the WaterSmart grant program titled: "Revive& Redefine: Developing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council (UMRWC) and Facilitating a Restoration Plan for the Upper Merced Wild and Scenic River". UMRWC's application would facilitate a collaboration of stakeholders interested in preserving natural resources, mitigating the effects of disasters, enhancing recreational opportunities, and ensuring the Wild and Scenic Merced River will be enjoyed by many generations to come.

The Merced River meanders more than 145 miles with most of those miles traveling through Mariposa County. 122.5 miles are protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Except for small sections of privately owned land in the Merced River Canyon, the waters of the Merced flow over federal lands managed by Yosemite National Park, the Stanislaus National Forest (contracted for management purposes to the Sierra National Forest), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

In addition to being a delightful resource for Mariposans, the Merced River is enjoyed by the nearly five million annual visitors that come to recreate on public lands. Those visitors are essential to Mariposa County's economy. Further downstream, the Merced River supplies water for the San Joaquin Valley, called "the food basket of the world," which produces two-thirds of the nation's fruit and ninety percent of nuts grown in the United States.

In the last five years, Mariposa County has experienced an increase in both the frequency and scale of natural disasters. More than 82,000 acres burned adjacent to the Merced River in the 2017 Detwiler Fire. The river canyon was the focus of the 2018 Ferguson Fire, which burned more than 97,000 acres. Drought, tree mortality, floods, wildfires, rock falls and other disasters have impacted our landscape, our economy, and our quality of life. With disasters and related impacts far beyond the County's ability to mitigate, we continue to depend on nonprofit, state and federal partners for our success.

UMRWC has, for most of the last twenty years, focused on maintaining collaborative relationships with the U.S. Forest Service and BLM to protect and restore trails in and around the Merced River Canyon. Now, in the face of escalating disasters, those relationships are increasingly important for preservation and restoration of watersheds, forested lands and native flora and fauna. All available resources are needed to engage stakeholders and facilitate the identification and achievement of shared goals and objects.

UMRWC led many such conversations for two decades, enlisting hundreds of volunteers to remove invasive weeds, clear and maintain trails and remove trash from along the Merced River. While UMRWC has suffered setbacks, including funding cuts and a fire that destroyed most of their records, its members created a framework for collaboration that continues today and is vital to our shared future.

WaterSmart grant funds would permit the UMRWC to not only reestablish its role as convener of stakeholders focused on the health of the Merced River, but also to expand its reach to include other agencies, more community organizations and individual members and volunteers. The funding would support development of a shared vision and a strategic work plan focused on remediation of damages caused by recent fires and floods.

The UMRWC and the Strategic Work Plan can facilitate the preservation of the natural resources in the Merced River watershed for generations to come, thereby providing continued support of our economy and the health of our community. For these reasons, and for the benefit of our residents and the millions of Americans that benefit from the recreational and agricultural opportunities afforded by the Merced River, I urge your approval of the UMRWC grant application.

Thank you for your favorable consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marshall Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Marshall Long, Chair

MARIPOSA COUNTY

**MARIPOSA COUNTY
RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

RESOURCE

P.O. Box 2403, Mariposa, CA 95338
(209) 966-0970 MariposaCountyRCD@gmail.com

January 11, 2021

WaterSmart Grant Program Manager
Bureau of Reclamation

Dear Grant Program Manager,

The Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD) is pleased to support the Upper Merced River Watershed Council application for the WaterSmart grant program titled:

Revive+ Redefine: Developing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and Facilitating a Restoration Plan for the Upper Merced Wild and Scenic River.

The MCRCD was the original sponsor of the Upper Merced Watershed Council and have supported them in their many valuable efforts over the years. They are a valued member of the Yosemite-Mariposa Integrated Regional Water Management group and serve on the steering committee. As such, they are well aware of the critical issues facing both the watershed and the region, and have been implementing important volunteer-based programs to safeguard the Upper Merced River and address forest health.

This grant opportunity would provide much-needed funding to allow the Watershed Council to expand its reach and engage more of the community in planning for and protecting the watershed. The Upper Merced is a vital link not only for the health of the area, but as an integral part of the beauty and majesty of Yosemite National Park. Visitors to Yosemite are critical to the economic health and stability of Mariposa County, and efforts to protect and enhance it bring more than environmental health, they also ensure that the tourism we depend on continues.

Please fund this application. It will have broad-reaching benefits to the environment and the community of Mariposa.

Thank you,



David Mecchi
President of the Board

SIERRA·FOOTHILL



· CONSERVANCY ·

January 14, 2021

Sierra Foothill Conservancy

Saving natural lands, now and forever

Bureau of Reclamation
Financial Assistance Operations
Attn: Mr. Edmund Weakland
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27815
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Mr. Weakland,

Sierra Foothill Conservancy would like to express its support for the Upper Merced Watershed Council's application to the Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Funding Opportunity. As the region's local land trust, Sierra Foothill Conservancy works to bring a vision of scenic open spaces, clean air and water, a thriving local economy, and places where people can connect to the environment. Our work addresses community challenges in creative, land-based and programmatic ways that resonate with our population.

We view this proposal as an ideal opportunity to facilitate much-needed conversations with diverse stakeholders about the state of our watershed, and how groups like ours can contribute to its care, management, and use. Despite—or perhaps due to—the wide range of interests and organizations passionate about the upper Merced River watershed, stakeholders in our region have lacked a central convener or clearinghouse for restoration activities in recent years. For too long, we have needed an entity capable of coordinating the government agencies (federal, state, and local) and non-profits, institutions, and other partners who have roles to play in balancing the needs of a wide range of users and interests throughout the region.

This grant, and the process it would support, fill this sizable gap in watershed management and coordination in our area. This effort is integral to building consensus and supporting actions that achieve ecological, cultural, and economic benefits in Mariposa County and elsewhere, and we are eager to participate in the group development activities and strategic planning efforts. We hope to see them funded.

Sincerely,

Bridget Fithian
Executive Director



Merced River
Conservation Committee

January 11, 2021

Bureau of Reclamation
Financial Assistance Operations
Attn: Mr. Edmund Weakland
P.O. Box 25007, MS 84-27815
Denver, CO 80225

SUBJECT: WaterSmart Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grants// Upper Merced River Watershed Council

Dear Mr. Weakland:

The Merced River Conservation Committee (MRCC) is a local volunteer organization of members interested in the Merced River watershed and its future, based in Mariposa County. Their principal interests are fisheries and aquatic habitat, trail and boating recreation, and historic sites. MRCC members enjoy fishing, rafting, and hiking on the Merced River and are interested in the long-term restoration and protection of the Merced River and its watershed. Their involvement has been and is with projects that protect and enhance the Merced River Watershed, from its headwaters to the Bay-Delta.

MRCC was established in 2006 in preparation and response to the Merced River Hydroelectric Projects' Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing process, initiated in 2008 by Merced Irrigation District and Pacific Gas and Electric projects. The Committee, and its members, have participated and intervened in the License proceedings on behalf of natural, recreational, and historical resources of the Merced River. It has collaborated in the FERC process with a large number of Relicensing Participants, with co-joining interests in Merced River resources, and other San Joaquin and Sacramento River watersheds, affected by hydropower facilities and operations.

We strongly endorse this application and are confident that the Upper Merced River Watershed Council will succeed in its critical role of convener and coordinator of watershed restoration and management activities throughout the region. MRCC is committed to continued participation in the public activities associated with the group development and strategic planning work as proposed in this project. We hope that the Bureau of Reclamation can help our Mariposa Community by funding this important grant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Martin". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Martin, Ph.D., Director
PO Box 2216
Mariposa, CA 95338
Email: mmartin@sti.net

Cc: Supervisor Rosemarie Smallcombe, Board of Supervisors
Mikey Goralink, Mariposa County Planning Department
Holly Warner, Upper Merced River Watershed Council



YOSEMITE
GOLDEN GATE
OLYMPIC
SANTA MONICA
MOUNTAINS
CHANNEL ISLANDS

naturebridge.org

January 15, 2021

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of NatureBridge in Yosemite National Park, it is with great pleasure that I write to you in support of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's WaterSmart Grant. As an environmental education organization, this project will aid us in helping Yosemite National Park reach its educational goals while playing a role in support of the entire Merced River watershed. As the leading non-profit environmental education organization in our national parks, NatureBridge is in full support of establishing strong community partnerships, expanding educational opportunities, and communicating broadly to help enhance understanding of the watershed. We believe that this project, in particular, will inspire more informed and active community stewardship of our public lands, especially in the Merced River watershed.

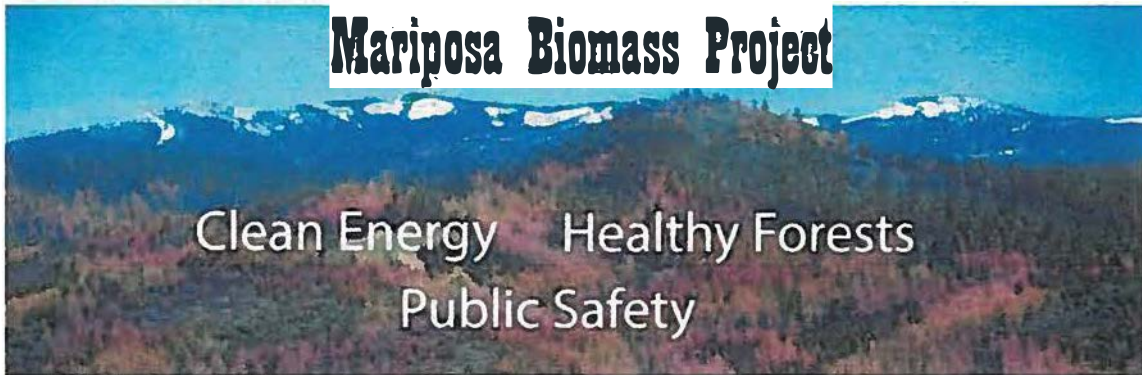
NatureBridge in Yosemite (formed as Yosemite Institute in 1971) reaches roughly 15,000 students per year—from elementary school to college and reaches them to be stewards of our public lands and the planet. School groups and organizations come from as nearby as our local Yosemite gateway communities, with most coming from areas throughout California, as well as the U.S. and internationally. Students also come from all backgrounds and socioeconomic ranges, and we provide nearly \$500,000 each year in scholarship support. NatureBridge has a professional education staff of 43 individuals that lead student groups as part of our residential science programs for up to 5 days at a time. Our education team collaborates with the National Park Service on the coordination of stewardship projects as well as helping to communicate scientific research and environmental outcomes to diverse youth.

For 50 years, NatureBridge has been operating as a partner to the National Park Service in Yosemite National Park. Through this partnership, we work closely with river managers and staff scientists within Yosemite's Division of Resources Management and Science, as well as the Division of Interpretation and Education. With the support of a national communications team, NatureBridge has the outreach capacity for far reaching media efforts to publicize our involvement via our website and social media. We view our partnership with the Watershed Council via the WaterSmart Grant to have long reaching positive outcomes for not only our work with students, but the larger watershed community as well.

Thank you again for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Kristina Rylands
Yosemite Director
NatureBridge



The Mariposa Biomass Project is pleased to support the Merced River Upper Watershed Council's grant application to coordinate watershed related activities in the Merced River Watershed/ Merced River Canyon.

Wildfires have had a devastating effect on our community and on the watersheds that provide water to our community as well as the rest of the state. The Mariposa Biomass Project is committed to mitigating the risks caused by wildfires. Our project supports responsible fuel reduction efforts by providing an environmentally sensitive means of disposing of this excess fuel. Fuel reduction projects must consider any impacts they might have on the watersheds.

This grant will make possible the funding needed to allow the council to coordinate community efforts to plan and protect the watershed.



Jay Johnson

CEO, Mariposa Biomass Project



RESOLUTION 2021-1

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE SUBMISSION OF A GRANT APPLICATION

WHEREAS, the United States Bureau of Land Management is soliciting applications for the WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase One; and,

WHEREAS, the Mission of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council is to protect and enhance the Merced River Watershed through education, stewardship, and community-based projects; and,

WHEREAS, the Restoration Action Plan for the Upper Merced Wild and Scenic River involves many public and private entities and there is a need to improve collaboration to accomplish restoration; and,

WHEREAS, there is a need to outreach to the local community to articulate a cohesive vision, identify common goals, and specify restoration actions that address strategic watershed issues.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council authorizes:

- 1) the submission of an application to the above-referenced grant program in an amount not to exceed \$120,000;
- 2) Jim Evans to sign and attest to this Resolution; and,
- 3) Jim Evans and/or Mikey Goralnik and/or Jessica Thompson to sign and submit said application and any related reports, certifications, etc.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Directors of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council this 12th of January, 2021 by the following vote:

AYES: Jim Evans, Mikey Goralnik, Kristina Rylands, Rosemarie Smallcomb, Steve Smallcomb, Molly Stephens, Jessica Thompson, and Holly Warner.

NOES: none.

ATTEST: Jim Evans