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Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District
200 Litton Drive, Ste 320
Grass Valley, CA 95945

RE: Green Waste Removal Program to Reduce Smoke Impacts Resulting from Storm Related Green Waste Disposal

Problem:

On December 27th Nevada County proclaimed a local emergency in response to an intense winter snow-storm which brought excessive amounts of snow to areas that typically receive little to no snow. Higher than usual levels of snow caused an overabundance of downed trees and limbs throughout the County, as a result Nevada County is now extremely vulnerable to wildfire. Unfortunately, the high cost of removal of this vegetation remains a significant barrier for many property owners when it comes to fuels reduction. Property owners who need to clear their land and prepare for the fast approaching wildfire season are met with steep fees for disposal and an inability to cope with the sheer amount of downed vegetation on their properties. Alternatively, residents may choose to dispose of their green waste by burning their material. While burn piles may provide a cost-effective solution for processing this material, it is not an ideal means of disposal as COVID-19 continues to wreak respiratory havoc across the globe. As COVID-19 and its variants continue to be transmitted throughout the community it is imperative that the respiratory impacts of burning be considered. Also, given the extremely large amount of green waste produced by the recent severe winter storm event, burn piles may pose a significantly higher threat to air quality than in previous years. Providing property owners with an alternative to burn piles will be imperative to maintain clear and clean air within Nevada County.

Solution:

With funding from the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District, Nevada County, in partnership with local organizations and volunteer groups, is poised to provide alternatives to mitigate particulate emissions as the extremely high amount of green waste created this year by the late December storm is addressed before the threat of wildfire this summer.

Green Waste Disposal Program

Nevada County and it's community partners will provide residents access to free residential green waste disposal events this spring beginning in March. This program is a partnership with property owners. Residents invest sweat equity in their homes and along their roadways, and the County provides a free means of disposal, one that does not jeopardize air quality.

This year, green waste disposal will be available to property owners for three weekends throughout spring. The County of Nevada in partnership with contracting organizations and volunteer groups will provide community disposal collection points at central locations in Western Nevada County. In Eastern Nevada County, Nevada County is coordinating with the Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal and the Truckee Fire Protection District to offer similar programming.

Funding from the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District would provide resources to support the ongoing positive impact of this program. With more than 500 tons of green waste collected per year in Western Nevada County alone since the program began, we are confident that providing an alternative to burning and expensive transfer station fees will support our community as it grapples with reducing the extremely high amount of downed vegetation produced by the recent historic storm.

Access & Functional Needs Program

The Access and Functional Needs Program (AFN) assists low-income seniors and disabled persons with creating defensible space at no cost. These individuals are both physically and financially unable to clear their own properties or meet the requirements of the County's Hazardous Vegetation Ordinance and are considered at-risk. Individuals applying for service must qualify by documenting their age (>65) or physical disability, by medical doctor, and be under the established low-income criteria for Nevada County as determined annually. Individuals are served on a first-come, first-served basis. Licensed contractor crews are utilized to clear and create defensible space as prescribed by the County's Hazardous Vegetation Ordinance.

Additional funding would provide at-risk, low-income residents with access and functional needs to receive fuel reduction and defensible space clearing around their homes. With 26% of the Nevada County population being 65 years of age and over, we know the need to assist individuals with physical limitations far exceeds existing resources.

Defensible Space Chipping Program

The objective of the defensible space chipping program is to provide drive-by chipping service for residents to incentivize hazardous fuels reductions around homes and roadways. Roughly 75% of Nevada County's roadways are privately maintained and most are severely overgrown with hazardous fuel.

This program was previously supported by a grant which covered the cost of inmate crews who provided chipping services. The inmate labor crew rate was far below that of hired staff. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the inmate labor program has been paused, even on essential operations such as wildfire mitigation. This has put the chipping program entirely on hold, as there is not adequate funding to compensate staff at market value. Funding from the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District would provide weeks of free chipping to the community at a critical time this spring, before the arrival of fire season. The chipping crew would work 4 days per week, allocating 1 day per week in Eastern Nevada County.