

# Senate-Specific Questions for Earmark Request Submittals

## Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Extension

### 1. Project justification <sup>Required</sup>

(4 sentence, 150 word limit) A synopsis of the "Description" in order for the Senator to quickly understand the project – be concise but provide an adequate explanation. Summarize the necessary information about the project to make its case.

According to CAL FIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zone map, over 90% of Nevada County is living within the high or very high fire hazard severity zone. This Project leverages and extends millions of dollars in investment by state, federal, and local partners to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire by treating 2,420-acres in a high fire severity zone. At completion the project will provide protection to a thriving rural community of over 100,000 people in a County widely recognized for its historic Gold Rush significance and home to two of California's 14 Cultural Districts. The Project has been identified by CAL FIRE's Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit as a priority project in the 2021 Strategic Fire Plan, is the top priority project for Western Nevada County per the Community Wildfire Protection Plan and has broad-based community support - **but this work cannot be completed without federal support.**

### 2. Description of the project <sup>Required</sup>

Provide a detailed description of the project, its history, impact, etc. Helpful questions to consider are: How is this project important to California or the local community? Why does it deserve federal funding? Whom does it serve? How many people does it serve? What is the minimum level of federal funding to move it forward?

Despite increased investment in wildfire risk mitigation, 2021 marked the first time in recorded California history that a wildfire burned over the Sierra Crest – and this happened not once, but twice – with the Dixie and Caldor Fires. In total, the Dixie Fire burned for three months across five counties and nearly 1 million acres, destroying the entire rural town of Greenville and over 1,300 structures in the process. When the River Fire ignited in Nevada County on August 4, residents had been under the siege of smoke for an entire summer and catastrophe seemed inevitable. The River Fire incinerated 142 structures and 2,600 acres in nine days. This "close call" has been a brutal reminder that in the absence of aggressive wildfire risk mitigation actions it is not a question of "if" but rather "when" a megafire will strike Nevada County.

In 2019, Phase I of the Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone was identified by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) and California Governor Newsom as one of the State's **highest priority** fuel reduction projects. This 1,200-acre shaded fuel break project wrapped up on March 15, 2022. The County now aims to leverage and extend the protections afforded by this project by maintaining and doubling the current treatment area. The proposed Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Extension Project would conduct second pass implementation on 1,200 acres and expand the treatment area by an additional 1,220-acres, anchoring the original defense zone project. The project will reduce catastrophic wildfire risk and promote forest health while creating safer public evacuation and wildfire suppression routes.

Hwy-20 bisects the Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone area from east to west and in case of emergency would be a critical artery for evacuation from nearby communities including Grass Valley, Rough and Ready, Penn Valley, and Lake Wildwood. Within the 1.5 miles of the Project boundary there are more than 3,000 improved parcels in these communities and surrounding areas. Maintaining access

## Senate-Specific Questions for Earmark Request Submittals

### Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Extension

to critical roadways in the vicinity would ensure that people would be able to safely evacuate, and that fire suppression equipment and personnel would have access to safely combat wildfire in the vicinity or other nearby populated areas.

Nevada County's Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) classifies wildfire as having a HIGH probability of future occurrences in the County, which means there is a 100% chance of occurrence in next year, or it happens every year. The plan also designates the geographic extent of the threat of wildfire to be extensive; wildfire has the capacity to impact 50-100% of the planning area. The plan's Hazard Identification Assessment concludes wildfire has a magnitude severity of Catastrophic. In other words, wildfire has the potential to result in more than 50% of property severely damaged, facilities being shut down for more than 30 days, as well as multiple deaths and injuries. Action must be taken now to prevent future loss.

The minimum amount of FY23 federal funding that is necessary to move the Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Extension Project forward is \$500,000. However, each dollar reduced that could have been dedicated to mitigation increases the likelihood that funds will need to be expended ten-fold for recovery in the wake of catastrophic wildfire that could have been prevented with critical fuels reduction activities.

### 3. Budget breakdown <sup>Required</sup>

This should include the project's total cost, non-federal sources of funding, etc. A detailed budget for the project should also break out the activities for which the requested funding will be utilized – what specific elements will be paid for with federal funding. If the request includes personnel, detail the number and types of positions and sources of funding for the positions in future years. If the request is for construction, specify the sources of cost estimates. Break out local, state, federal, private funding for the full cost of the project. Include the amount of non-federal match (dollar amount and/or percentage).

The total budget for this three-year project (4/2022-9/2025) is \$7,314,032 which represents funding strategically leveraged across state, federal, and local partners. State funding accounts for 22% (\$1,612,806) of the Project budget, Federal funding accounts for 68% (\$4,951,226), and Local funding accounts for 10% (\$750,000). Specific to the FY23 request, this Project has a 1:1 non-federal match.

Details on funding sources and amounts are as follows:

1. County of Nevada currently has a proposal under review with FEMA (\$3,451,226; award timeline 6/2022-6/2025) which in combination with the required match provided by Cal OES PrepareCA Match (\$862,806) will provide the bulk of the funding for the Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Extension Project.
2. For Project Year 1 the County has been approved for \$750,000 in FY22 Federal Earmark funds, which will be stacked against \$750,000 in local matching funds (a combination of general funds and PG&E settlement funds).

## Senate-Specific Questions for Earmark Request Submittals

### **Ponderosa West Grass Valley Defense Zone Extension**

In combination, item 1 and item 2 will result in 1,200 acres of newly constructed shaded fuel break.

3. **This FY23 earmark request of \$750,000 is for Project Year 2**, which will be stacked against state matching funds in the amount of \$750,000 (proposed State funding from Sierra Nevada Conservancy Forest and Watershed Health Grant Program and/or CAL FIRE Wildfire Prevention Grant Program; should State funding not be secured, the County is prepared to identify local match). The FY23 federal funds will be used to support second-pass implementation on 1,200 acres of shaded fuel break initially treated in 2019/2020.

The breakdown for this budget is as follows:

**\*Salaries and Benefits:** \$511,982 of which \$52,500 will be provided by the FY23 earmark.

*\*Positions are for Project Manager and Grant Manager; additional grant funding external to this project supports these positions beyond the Project timeframe.*

#### **Contractual**

**Registered Professional Forester:** \$60,000 of which \$7,500 will be provided by the FY23 earmark.

**Hazardous Vegetation Removal:** \$5,644,946 of which \$615,000 will be provided by the FY23 earmark.

**CEQA/NEPA:** \$292,561 of which \$0 will be provided by the FY23 earmark.

**Wildlife Biologist/Botanist:** \$73,140 of which \$0 will be provided by the FY23 earmark.

**Indirect Costs 10% (de minimus rate):** \$731,403 of which \$75,000 will be provided by the FY23 earmark.