



confluence west

## Watersheds *for* Firesheds

### Case study - Paying for the NEPA Process

- ***How did they do it?***

Getting NEPA funded and completed is one of the biggest obstacles local forest and watershed advocates face. The US Forest Service has limited capacity (funding and staffing) to do the EIS. Using the collective power of their coalitions, some groups are funding the NEPA process themselves and engaging and overseeing consultants, with the District Supervisor signing off on the final product.

A recent successful example of this approach is the coalition formed around French Meadows in California's Sierra Nevada. French Meadows is located in the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the American River on the Tahoe National Forest and includes 27,623 acres, of which 22,152 acres is National Forest land. The Project improves the health and resilience of an important municipal watershed and protects critical hydropower facilities.

#### French Meadows Project

**Acres:** 27,623

**NEPA Cost:** \$285,000

**Overall Project Planning Costs:** \$1.3M (about \$46/acre)

**Partners:** Placer County Water Authority, Placer County, The Nature Conservancy, American Rivers Conservancy, Sierra Nevada Research Institute, University of California/Merced, Sierra Nevada Conservancy (State of CA agency); US Forest Service (Tahoe NF)

**Funding Sources:** NFS federal funds, USF&W, CA Department of Forestry, CA State Water Resources Board, PCWA, Placer County, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Northern Sierra Partnership, American Rivers Conservancy, Long Foundation, Bella Vista Foundation, Keurig Dr. Pepper, Miller Coors, individual donors. (Note: Pre-Biden Administration federal funding sources.)

**Process:**

1. Created a steering committee (coalition) with members with decision-making authority and who agreed to actively participate in the coalition. Signed MOU.
2. Hired a Registered Professional Forester to develop a preliminary proposed action plan.
3. Hired consultants to complete the surveys and analyses required by NEPA. (The Forest Service conducted the archeological surveys.)
4. Completed the NEPA analysis with a combination of consultants, the Tahoe NF, and partners. The NF retained final authority for all content.

**Landscape:** French Meadows, located in the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the American River on the Tahoe National Forest in California's northern Sierra Nevada, the Project includes 27,623 acres, of which 22,152 acres is National Forest land. The Project improves the health and resilience of an important municipal watershed and protects critical hydropower facilities.

**Catalyst:** In 2014, a high-severity wildfire (King Fire) resulted in major, ongoing damage to reservoirs, watersheds, and hydro facilities in this region, costing the Placer County Water Authority and local government millions of dollars.

**Bottom Line:** Two essential factors:

1. Leadership - local, NGO, and USFS.
2. Because of the engaged, active coalition, many funding sources could be approached (e.g., everything from state funding to private donors.) Each coalition member could bring some source of funding and/or in-kind donations to the table.

**More information:**

[ARGIS Story Map March 2023](#)

[Restoring Forests through Partnership: Lessons Learned from the French Meadows Project](#)

[French Meadows Project Year 3 Operations Report](#)