



## JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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December 12, 2019

### **Success in the Sierra: French Meadows Partnership Completes its First Season of Work**

**FRENCH MEADOWS, Calif.** – After six months of strategic forest treatments near French Meadows Reservoir, partners of the French Meadows Forest Restoration Project (Project) are wrapping up their first season of implementation work. Located in the headwaters of the Middle Fork American River, in the Tahoe National Forest, the Project is one of the first instances of private and public interests coming together to fund and implement active forest management on public land. While completion of the Project is slated to take several more years, the conclusion of work this season is the culmination of years of planning, preparation, and partnership.

The catalyst of the Project was the 2014 King Fire, which burned over 97,000 acres in the American River watershed, much of it at high intensity. Eager to reduce the risk to hydroelectric assets, water quality, and biodiversity from future fires, Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) joined with Placer County, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the United States Forest Service (USFS), American River Conservancy (ARC), Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute at the University of California, Merced, to form the French Meadows Partnership. The Partnership is working to restore forest health to reduce the risk of high-severity fire, and to study the effects of forest treatments on watershed health. The Project spans over 22,000 acres of federal land and is a test case for the partnership's effectiveness in improving fire resilience.

By most any measure, 2019 was a success. Under a master stewardship agreement between Placer County and the Tahoe National Forest, over 1000 acres of federal land was treated, bringing more than 3 million board feet to a local mill and over 4000 tons of biomass to local renewable energy facilities to help offset restoration costs. The work employed over 80 local contractors. Strategically selected to start in the most fire prone areas, work will move its way out from heavily trafficked areas into the upper reaches of the watershed in succeeding years. On

the adjacent private land, the ARC funded its own treatment of 445 acres, as a collaborative aspect of the all-lands approach.

“I want to express my gratitude to work on such a monumental project,” said Amanda Godon of Volcano Creek Logging, one of the Project’s contractors. “This project is the leader and forerunner, I believe, in the way we do business. It’s a win for the entities involved, a win for the community, and a win for the forest.”

The success of this season’s work is based on a number of factors. First is the unique public-private partnership. As Tahoe National Forest Supervisor Eli Ilano noted when approving the Project, “The only way to accomplish this monumental task is through collaborative stewardship.” The second factor is innovative funding, also a first of its kind. With a total estimated price tag of \$17 million, funding has come from local, state, and federal entities, including PCWA, Placer County, CAL FIRE, SNC, the USFS, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and private entities such as MillerCoors, Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, and TNC. The final factor leading to the Project’s success is the implementation of ecological forest management. The goal of ecological management is to promote healthier, more resilient forest conditions utilizing a variety of treatments to remove unnecessary fuels, restore wildlife habitat, and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire. Once the desired conditions are achieved, the Project is designed to maintain a healthy forest through planned maintenance treatments including prescribed fire. This season, the USFS and TNC, the two entities managing the prescribed fire component, prepared 600 acres of forest for prescribed burning by clearing six miles of control line. The prescribed burning will progress next field season when weather conditions are favorable.

Through the tangible work of the French Meadows Forest Restoration Project, partners hope to not only moderate future wildfire behavior, but also create a new model for advancing forest and watershed restoration. In fact, since the Project’s inception, stakeholders are replicating this approach in other Sierra watersheds including the North Yuba River watershed. As the threat of intense wildfires grow each year in California, the French Meadows Forest Restoration Project demonstrates that important forest restoration work is possible through innovation, partnership, and shared stewardship.

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