# Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG)

# Request for Project Support | Submission Form

(Link to [download word version of the submission form](https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ACCG-Project-Submission-Form_3-8-21.docx))

**Instructions:** Complete this form when seeking project development engagement or support from the ACCG. Before completing this form, please review the ACCG Project Development & Support Process (see [flowchart](https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/01-Process-for-requesting-support-from-ACCG_2-19-21.pdf)) and ACCG Project Endorsement Guidelines (see [guidelines](https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/04-ACCG-Project-Endorsement-Guidelines_1-8-20-1.pdf)). Contact the ACCG Administrator with questions: Megan Layhee, meganl.chips@gmail.com.

1. Submission Date: October 21, 2022
2. Project Name: Forest Projects Plan (Phase 1)
3. Organization/Entity Requesting Support: Upper Mokelumne River Watershed Authority
4. Project Proponent Contact (name, phone, and email address): Richard Sykes, Executive Officer, (510) 390-4035, rsykes@sbcglobal.net
5. Committed Project Partners: Amador Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest, UMRWA is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) comprised of six water agencies including Amador Water Agency, Calaveras County Water District, Calaveras Public Utility District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Jackson Valley Irrigation District, and Alpine County Water Agency and three counties including Alpine, Amador and Calaveras.
6. Grant Program (if applicable) or Prospective Funding Sources:
* CalFire Forest Health Grant Projects
* Sierra Nevada Conservancy Wildfire Recovery & Forest Resilience Grant Program
* Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program
* Department of Conservation, Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program
* CalFire Fire Prevention Grant Program
* USFS Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program
* WCB Forest Conservation Program
1. Name and address to whom the Letter of Support from the ACCG should be addressed:

Jim Bacon

Acting Forest Supervisor

Eldorado National Forest

100 Forni Road

Placerville, California

95667

1. Due Date for Letter of Support: November 16, 2022
2. Project Budget Total Amount: Estimated cost for NEPA, $544,000. Estimated cost for project implementation $40 million.
3. Project Dollar Amount Being Requested through Grant Program (if applicable): Not Applicable
4. Has this project been presented to the ACCG before? If so, describe prior engagement with the ACCG about this project.
* April 28, 2021 – Initial Presentation
* February 23, 2022 – Planning Work Group
* March 16, 2022 –General Meeting Project Presentation
* March 23, 2022 – Planning Work Group
* April 5, 2022 – Pre-Public Scoping Small Group Meeting
* August 17, 2022 – General Meeting Schedule Update
* August 24, 2022 – Planning Work Group
1. Project Details
2. Describe the specific location of the project, the existing condition of the landscape, the project’s purpose and need/ goals and objectives, the work that will be performed and the project acreage.

The Forest Projects Plan (Phase 1), (FPP or project) is a 25,671-acre landscape level forest stand and wildlife habitat improvement and protection project located on U.S. Forest Service (USFS or Forest Service) lands, primarily within the upper Mokelumne River watershed. The past decade has brought major environmental changes throughout the Sierra Nevada, including the project area. These changes include unprecedented drought, bark beetle and other insect outbreaks, large high-intensity wildfires, and associated tree mortality. While ecosystems of the Sierra Nevada have evolved to be well-adapted to fire, the recent increases in the size, frequency, and intensity of fires have resulted in ecosystem transitions, changes in hydrology, and associated effects to sediment and nutrient fate and transport. These dramatic shifts have reduced habitat quality and quantity for sensitive species and pose a significant risk to natural biodiversity (North et al. 2021).

The proposed restoration treatments will enhance forest health by reducing competition for resources (water, sunlight, nutrients) within stands that are ‘overly dense’ and in habitats that have been diminished due to conifer encroachment from lack of fire (aquatic systems, aspen stands).

## The project is designed to help prevent high-intensity, large-scale wildfires, improve forest conditions, and protect important wildlife habitat and other resources. The project encompasses Phase 1 of a two-phased approach to the Forest Projects Plan. Phase 1 consists of non-commercial actions to reduce forest ladder fuels and implement other forest management activities on the Amador Ranger District. Phase 2 will incorporate the Calaveras Ranger District into the project area and will include additional forest management actions such as commercial thinning. Phase 2 will require a more comprehensive planning document and is expected to take approximately two years to complete.

As described further in the Decision Memo, the purpose of the Proposed Action is to improve the quality and resiliency of wildlife habitat quality by:

1. Protecting wildlife habitat, aspen stands, forest resources and developed communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and beyond from potential severe wildfire effects.
2. Strategically placing treatments which complement and extend continuity of existing forest and fuel treatments to create a fire resilient landscape.
3. Strategically placing treatments to prepare the landscape for prescribed burning and improve the safety and efficacy of wildfire suppression efforts.
4. Describe the local Environmental benefits of your project. Please reference the *ACCG Principles and Policies* in your response (See [Principles and Policies document](https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/03-ACCG-Principles-Policies_8-18-10.pdf)).

A critical benefit from project implementation will come from lowering the risk of high-severity fire effects within both treated and adjacent untreated areas. These non-commercial vegetation treatments and prescribed burning activities will enhance and protect a variety of habitats including three ecosystems that provide essential components of wildlife habitat: late seral/old forest ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems, and aspen stands.

These benefits are in line with the ACCG Guiding Principle which states:

* Design and implement activities that protect and restore forest ecosystem resiliency, structures, processes and functions within local watersheds.

The project treatments were designed to reduce ladder fuels to slow wildfire spread, and improve firefighter safety and effectiveness, thus protecting forested habitat from loss due to large stand-replacing, high- severity wildfires.

The project benefits are in line with the ACCG’s Policies to Guide Operations which states:

* Reduce the frequency and intensity of wildland fires that threaten life, property or important ecological resources.
* Protect watershed soil integrity and water quality and quantity.
* Reduce forest fuel loads to manageable, ecologically sustainable levels using site-appropriate methods: including but not limited to mechanical and/or prescribed burning methods.
1. Indicate with an X which of the following local Community and Economic benefits your project will provide ( See [Principles and Policies document](https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/03-ACCG-Principles-Policies_8-18-10.pdf)*).* The following checklist is intended to help ACCG members understand the community and economic benefits of individual projects and to provide opportunities for dialogue aimed at enhancing and promoting such benefits, when possible.  Please check all boxes that you believe apply to some extent.

[ ]  *Provides local, sustainable jobs with fair compensation.*

[ ]  *Supports and strengthens locally-owned businesses.*

[x]  *Includes bid preference for local contractors. Local refers to those areas within the ACCG planning area boundary which generally align with Amador and Calaveras counties and Alpine County. It also refers to those adjacent foothill counties of El Dorado and Tuolumne. Regional refers to the broader Sierra Nevada and foothills (only applies to UMRWA-implemented contracts).*

[ ]  *Supports local investment, purchasing and ownership of forest enterprises.*

[ ]  *Includes job training and/or certification opportunities.*

[ ]  *Provides local community education and engagement opportunities.*

[x]  *Reduces potential damage to life and property by promoting the creation and maintenance of fire-safe communities.*

[x]  *Protects critical infrastructure and uses such as water and power, roads, sewer, communications, etc.*

[x]  *Enhances or protects drinking water quality.*

[x]  *Enhances or protects healthy forest-based activities such as recreation, hunting, and fishing, etc.*

[ ]  *Creates or expands uses or local markets for “underutilized” forest products (i.e., biomass, firewood, mushroom foraging, etc.).*

[ ]  *Uses local and regional networks and markets to optimize local benefits (e.g., firewood sold locally in stores and distributed to those in need, Christmas trees, fiber board & wood-shaving facilities, etc.).*

[ ]  *Includes community engagement and education in planning and implementation.*

[x]  *If cultural resources present, engages tribal representatives early and consistently from conceptual planning through implementation and monitoring to ensure respect and sensitivity to Native American cultural sites, practices, resources.*

[ ]  *Protects historical or locally important sites.*

[x]  *Protects and/or enhances scenic beauty.*

[x]  *Incorporates cooperative partnerships that increase effectiveness and local competitiveness.*

[ ]  *Includes an assessment of community and economic benefits.*

1. Use this space to further describe and quantify the Community and Economic benefits of your project or to provide more information to help others understand its benefits.

Eighty-four percent of the FPP is within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), including the WUI defense zone (32 percent of the FPP area) and the WUI threat zone (52 percent). The FPP is within 5 miles of four U.S. Census defined populated areas (i.e., Buckhorn, Pioneer, Red Corral, and West Point). The project is designed to protect these rural communities and prevent the economic devastation and hardship that results from uncontrolled wildfire.

Implementation of FPP treatments by local forest contractors will result in local economic benefits. Under UMRWA procurement rules watershed operators are afforded a preference when proposing to perform treatment work contracted by the Authority. UMRWA’s procurement policy provides a 5 percent scoring advantage to local operators/contractors located in Alpine, Amador or Calaveras Counties. UMRWA hopes to expand the capacity of forest restoration in the local region and contribute to the local economy to while complying with State public contracting laws and regulations.

1. If your proposed project is primarily designed to achieve environmental goals, what are some ways your project has been adapted or could be adapted in the future to enhance Community and Economic benefits, if appropriate?

As stated above, UMRWA provides a scoring advantage to forest operators and contractors who are located in Amador, Alpine or Calaveras Counties. UMRWA’s hiring of local forestry contractors supports local job development which in turn contributes to the local economy.

1. Describe any actions that would benefit from additional discussion with ACCG members about the project design, indicating the topic(s) in the following document ([Forest Treatment Guidance](https://acconsensus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/05-ACCG-Project-Support-Evaluation-Tool_2-5-20.pdf)). Have you attempted to resolve any issues with ACCG members? What are some possible solutions you could employ to address ongoing issues?

This project was designed to focus on ACCG’s Category 1: Non-Controversial Project Activities. The project was discussed at the UMRWA board meetings on January 28, 2022, April 22, 2022, and July 22, 2022. The project benefited from feedback received as part of numerous discussions with the ACCG Planning Work Group on February 23, 2022, on March 23, 2022, April 5, 2022 and again on August 26, 2022. UMRWA also met with the larger ACCG on March 16, 2022. These collaborative efforts resulted in reducing the footprint of the initial project, emphasizing mechanical treatments over hand treatments where feasible due to concerns over effectiveness, and reducing prescribed fire acreage to high priority areas. Scoping was initiated April 15, 2022. Letters were sent to 31 individuals, groups, and government entities. Written responses to scoping were received from three individual members of ACCG (Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC), Foothill Conservancy, and the Amador Water Agency District 3 Director). In general, comments were supportive of the project and requests for clarification. Some concern was still expressed over the effectiveness of hand treatments. The Amador Ranger District Fuels Officer emphasized that in addition to reducing ladder fuel, hand treatment can be very effective in providing safe anchors for fire suppression action as well as prescribed burning. In addition, in some areas, hand treatment is the only feasible option due to steepness of slope and access.

UMRWA considers ACCG a critical partner in this effort and we intend to report to ACCG and receive feedback on FPP (Phase 1) throughout project implementation.

1. Describe desired outcomes/future conditions that the project achieves/supports.

The Project area incorporates late seral/old forest ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems, and aspen stands and areas in close proximity to private property, summer tract homes, recreational facilities, and important infrastructure which are at risk in the event of a large fire occurring in the area. Removing dense understory trees, shrubs, and surface vegetative debris will reduce fuel loading, fuel continuity, competition for limited resources (water, sunlight, nutrients), and will increase the ability for the public to evacuate unharmed and for fire-fighting assets to directly suppress fire in a safe and efficient manner.

The treatments will be implemented across the landscape including within Protected Activity Centers (PACs) for spotted owls and goshawks which have traditionally been excluded from these types of fuel treatments both inside and outside the WUI areas. The treatments within PACs will contribute toward meeting fuels objectives for PAC protection, maintain habitat structure and function (SNFPA Record of Decision (ROD) p. 60), and are expected to enhance old forest stand habitat by supporting the health and growth of larger trees.

1. Describe the status of environmental documentation (NEPA/CEQA/other).

The NEPA Decision Memo is scheduled for signature around the first week of December. This will not occur without the support of ACCG. The CEQA process is scheduled for consideration at the UMRWA board meeting on January 27, 2023. A statutory CEQA exemption using AB 211 is anticipated.

1. Attach project map and any other supporting documentation that would enhance the ACCG’s understanding of the project.

Please see NEPA Decision Memo and project area maps.