

BOARD OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

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Date: August 21, 2014

To: Resource Protection
Committee (RPC)

From: Kevin Conway, Staff Forester

Subject: SRA Grant development, follow up to questions from June RPC meeting

Chair Saito and members of the Committee,

This document is to follow up on questions from committee members during discussion of the Board's SRA Grant program.

How does the Vegetation Management Program deal with the following jurisdictional issues?

SRA in Federal DPA – These contracts are for fire suppression activities only. The Unit retains the responsibility for fuel reduction projects on these lands. Landscape level fuel reduction projects require coordination with adjacent Federal Agencies.

Contract Counties – Each have the equivalent of a VMP Forester or Pre Fire Engineer responsible for performing fuel reduction work. Because Agency responsibilities extend to LRA, fuel reduction projects can overlap boundaries if not designed with funding source in mind.

Counties where Cal Fire also provides Local Municipal Firefighting Services – See comment above. Projects are generally broken into SRA/LRA components for convenience of tracking benefit to funding source.

Where does authority lie for grant approval (local vs. state)?

This is not addressed in the statute so it is left to the Board's discretion. The Department is currently proposing to coordinate the one time, \$10,000,000 grant through Sacramento Headquarters. Staff recommends that the Board also consider grant approval at the State level to control for proportional distribution of grant monies relative to the amount collected over the time and space defined by the Board. The Local Unit should evaluate and recommend grant projects for approval to make sure they are supported by local planning documents, but ultimate authority of grant approval at a higher level can better control the proportionality of benefit going back to fee paying communities.

What are the goals for the grant program and how will they be weighted?

See attached document titled "SRA Grant Program Evaluation Criteria".

What does compliance with 4290 mean?

Based on discussion at the last RPC meeting this reference has been removed from the proposed grant regulation.

When will legislature appropriate monies for the Board's SRA Grant program?

This could happen anytime there are funds available in the SRA Fire Prevention Fund. More generally it should occur during development of the state budget each year. PRC § 4214(c) states "It is the intent of the Legislature that the moneys in this fund be fully appropriated to the board and the department each year in order to fully effectuate the purposes of this chapter."

Public Comments Received by Board Staff

San Diego County expressed a desire for defensible space inspections to be included as an authorized activity under the SRA Fire Prevention Grant Program.

The Department includes these activities under education when reporting on use of the SRA fee. Maintaining defensible space is required under PRC 4291 but compliance is less than 100%. Educating homeowners about the risks posed to the greater community from noncompliance with this statute can bring benefits to the community through increased defensibility and moderated fire behavior.

The Nevada County Fire Safe Council (FSC) expressed concern that education campaigns are generally ranked lower than hazardous fuel treatments in many competitive grants. They also echoed Frank Stewart's comments to the Board in June about the loss of Title 2 funds to pay for the FSC executive director or coordinator position.

Staff has attempted to prepare the weighted "SRA Grant Program Evaluation Criteria" document with education campaigns in mind. Education is an important component to a comprehensive risk reduction strategy within SRA communities. It is not the intent to favor education, planning, or fuel reduction in these evaluation criteria. An alternative to address this issue could be to break the grant program into the three allowable activities: education, planning, and fuel treatment. A potential drawback to this strategy is diluting the funding available for larger projects. Also proposals for projects covering each category may not be present each grant cycle.

This grant program would not provide continuous ongoing funding to FSCs and is likely not the appropriate vehicle to replace Title 2 funding to communities. This program also requires the benefit to be returned to the owners of structures in the SRA. FSC's jurisdiction also generally includes LRA and it can be difficult to separate out the time and effort spent to benefit each geographic area.