

A plan for the Yuba Watershed

Yuba Water Agency pledges to match \$235,000 grant if awarded to nonprofit

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An effort is underway to hire a full-time watershed coordinator focused on forest management projects in the Yuba River Watershed and a grant from the Yuba Water Agency could help.

The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), an environmental advocacy organization focused on the watershed, and Camptonville Community Partnership, a nonprofit organization, are jointly applying for a grant through the California Department of Conservation (DOC) to fund a watershed coordinator position.

The coordinator would work with public and private landowners to plan and coordinate projects within the watershed, including a biomass facility in Camptonville and a forest health project in the north Yuba Watershed.

Water agency directors approved a \$235,000 grant for matching funds to make the joint application a little more enticing for the state to buy in. The agency would award the grant only if the DOC grants funding.

“There’s a grant available through the state for the position. They are willing to pay \$235,000, so what the water agency is saying is that if you apply for that and get it, then we’ll match those funds to extend that out to \$470,000,” said Randy Fletcher, vice chairman of the water agency board and a Yuba County supervisor.

By doubling the funding, it would allow the two groups to either hire two coordinators or pay for one, but for a longer period of time.

“We need someone to oversee this whole operation, someone who is focused on the watershed and on finding other available grants,” Fletcher said. “All three groups are on the same page in terms of wanting a healthier forest because it affects us all.”

Melinda Booth, executive director of SYRCL, said with the agency's investment, the organization's projects will be more collaborative and move forward efficiently, having a greater impact and reach.

"It's exciting to think about the added capacity that Yuba Water Agency's matching contribution would bring to the Yuba Watershed and our ability to manage forest health for the benefit of the entire region," Booth said in a press release.

Officials with the water agency said they want to be at the forefront of improving how forests are managed around the state and are willing to expend resources to make that happen.

"The impacts of wildfire in the Yuba Watershed would be severe. We really are serious about being the first sustainably managed watershed in California, and this is a big step in that direction," said Brent Hastey, chairman of the water agency board, in a press release.

The DOC is expected to report the status of the funding by early summer.