



**California Special
Districts Association**
Districts Stronger Together

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Placer County Water Agency Honored at Statewide Conference

Auburn, CA — The Placer County Water Agency received the Innovative Project of the Year Award for a large district by the California Special Districts Association (CSDA) during the association's 50th anniversary Annual Conference and Exhibitor Showcase, which was held in Anaheim from September 25-28, 2019.

The Placer County Water Agency (PCWA) was awarded for their "French Meadows Forest Restoration Project," a 28,000-acre, all-lands approach to restore forest health and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire in the headwaters of the Middle Fork American River, a critical municipal watershed located on the Tahoe National Forest in California's Sierra Nevada. Following the King Fire of 2014, which burned 93,000 acres in the American River watershed with unprecedented speed and intensity, causing hundreds of thousands of tons of topsoil to erode into the river system clogging infrastructure and degrading wildlife habitat, water quality, and watershed health, PCWA knew it had to act to protect its water resources and initiated this project.

The French Meadows Forest Restoration Project (Project) began in 2016 with the diverse partnership including the U.S. Forest Service, PCWA, The Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Placer County, the American River Conservancy, and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute at UC Merced. The overall budget for implementing the French Meadows Project is \$14 million. The partners raised over \$9 million for implementation and another \$1.5 million for environmental analyses.

In 2018, the Forest Service signed a Decision Notice approving the French Meadows Restoration Project; on-the-ground implementation of the Forest Service lands began in June 2019 and will continue for several years. Specifically, the Project will treat over 12,000 acres with mechanical- thinning, mastication, hand thinning, reforestation, and aspen and meadow restoration under a Master Stewardship Agreement between Placer County and the Tahoe National Forest.

The French Meadows Forest Restoration Project is the first of its kind private-public partnership in California, if not the western United States. It is also the first instance in which private and public entities conducted the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for federal lands; an analysis which received zero objections. Through partnership and innovation, a landscape-scale, ecologically-based forest thinning project, from planning to implementation, it took two years. Considering the overgrown condition of forests in California, and the environmental requirements to thin forests, the Project is an extraordinary accomplishment.

The Project will not only reduce the threat of high-intensity wildfire around one of PCWA's municipal water sources but improve overall forest health in the American River watershed, improving water quality. The scientific aspects of the Project will add to research about forest thinning effects on water quantity and fire modeling. Additionally, by protecting the headwaters of PCWA's water source, PCWA is protecting their customers' investments in their water system. PCWA and project partners believe the French Meadows Forest Restoration Project can act as model to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration throughout the western United States.

The criteria for this CSDA annual award included originality of project, tangible and positive results produced and a documented decrease in district costs or a demonstrated improvement in the district's quality of service without significantly increasing costs.

The California Special Districts Association is a 501c(6), not-for-profit association that was formed in 1969 to promote good governance and improved core local services through professional development, advocacy and other services for all types of independent special districts.

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