



Photo of Merced Wild and Scenic River an Briceburg Bridge, courtesy of David and Tracy Greenwood

**Heeding the Call to Action:
Launching the Upper Merced River Watershed Council
Watershed Work Plan**

Submitted by:

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WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grants
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I. TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

Executive Summary

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, is based in Mariposa, CA, will engage in community endorsed watershed development activities, leveraging previous Bureau of Reclamation investments to relaunch what had previously been a defunct organization that struggled to recover from a catastrophic fire that destroyed the group's offices in 2012. In 2023, the Council developed a four-year *Watershed Work Plan*, laying out the objectives, strategies, and priorities that will protect the river and alleviate adverse watershed conditions. Central to the *Work Plan* are the consensus voices of federal public lands agency partners (upon which the vast majority of the watershed is located, including the National Park Service in Yosemite, Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, and Bureau of Land Management), along with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, and a host of local, regional, and national groups along with concerned community members. The Watershed Council is now shifting from planning into action and seeks a 3-year \$299,544 investment to begin executing the *Watershed Work Plan* which prioritizes the following objectives:

- Hire a dedicated director to oversee partnership collaboration and implementation of specific projects,
- Expand efforts to protect water quality and biodiversity,
- Launch a comprehensive education and awareness campaign,
- Build a strong volunteer base of support, and
- Restore the organization's capacity to become a sustainable powerhouse for the river and watershed.

A second investment of WaterSMART funding is immediately needed and essential to set the Upper Merced River Watershed Council on a path toward action and self-sufficiency. Despite the success of the initial group development activities, the organization lacks the capacity to ensure that the voices expressed during the 2-year planning process are not just heard, but are put into action. Immediate funding will harness the momentum of the previous engagement and group development activities and enable the Watershed Council implement the community-stated priorities identified in the previous phase. The award of a new 3-year WaterSMART grant would directly enable the work accomplished in the 2021 grant to be set in motion. To be clear, this grant request is not seeking to continue the planning process outlined in the 2021 award. Rather, this application will enable the Watershed Council to hire a project director that will implement projects outlined in this proposal as called for in the *Watershed Work Plan*.

Project Location

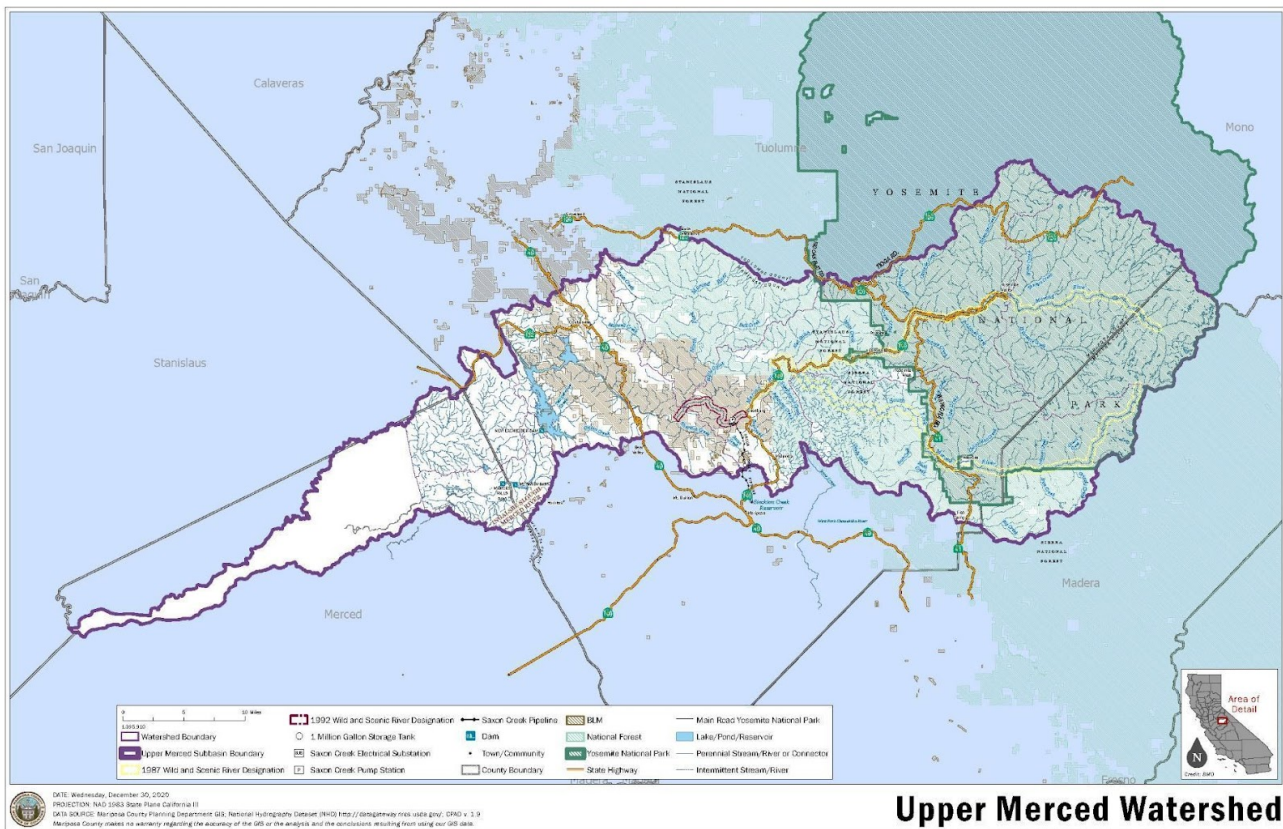
The Upper Merced River Watershed area is located in Mariposa County, CA. The area is defined by HUC 18040008 which includes the South and North Forks of the Merced River, as well as the river's main stem from its headwaters to the New Exchequer Dam that creates Lake McClure. The river is designated Wild and Scenic "[f]rom its source

(including Red Peak Fork, Merced Peak Fork, Triple Peak Fork, and Lyell Fork) in Yosemite National Park to a the normal maximum operating pool (water surface level) of Lake McClure (elevation 867 feet mean sea level),” which is approximately .25 miles downstream of Bagby. Nearly 40% of the watershed area is within the jurisdiction of Yosemite National Park, with the bulk of the remainder within USFS or BLM jurisdiction.

These public lands represent some of the most recognizable and breathtaking landscapes in the United States, and include the rugged peaks and domes of the High Sierra and sheer granite walls of Yosemite Valley. Outside of Yosemite National Park, the river and its tributaries occupy the Merced River canyon, before the dramatic topography and seasonal wildflower superblooms give way to the gentler landscapes of the Sierra foothills and Central Valley in the lower reaches of the river.

The center of the watershed area is located approximately 12 miles northeast of Mariposa and 40 miles northeast of Merced. A map of the watershed area—with the extent of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council’s area of focus circled in green—is below.

Map of Watershed Area



Technical Project Description

Background. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council (UMRWC) was established in 2001 as an ad hoc committee affiliated with the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD). This partnership was in response to a State of California initiative to better protect water resources by improving the health of the State's watersheds. The California Department of Conservation (DOC) provided funding for "watershed coordinators," which the group's first members received and leveraged to recruit private and public stakeholders, identify watershed needs, and formulate a work plan for the Merced River watershed. In 2008, the UMRWC was formalized as a distinct entity by creating a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.

At that time, the UMRWC had paid staff, along with over 50 committed volunteers and over 300 supporters, engaged in a variety of watershed improvement, management, and stewardship activities including:

- implementing cooperative invasive species control and eradication efforts with the Bureau of Land Management and Sierra Foothill Conservancy;
- partnering with Yosemite National Park and NatureBridge (formerly Yosemite Institute), a local environmental education non-profit, to develop and implement a volunteer-led water quality testing program;
- supporting volunteer-led trail work along the South Fork of the Merced River in partnership with the Sierra National Forest;
- organizing a wildflower docent program led by botanical experts in the community;
- working with the Mariposa County Unified School district to conduct a watershed education program for the county's 5th graders;
- collaborating with the Lower Merced River Watershed group to foster a whole River approach as well as with other private and public partners including the Sierra Nevada Alliance, State Water Resources Control Board, and other state agencies.

However, in 2012, the DOC halted public funding for watershed coordinators, which eliminated an essential funding stream for the organization. Then in May of that same year, a fire began in an adjacent restaurant that quickly turned into a structure fire that consumed an entire block in downtown Mariposa—including the offices of the UMRWC. The group lost everything it had built over the preceding decade, including all of its records, equipment, and its extensive contact lists of project partners, local stakeholders, and community supporters.

This dual blow—changes in state policy that de-emphasized funding local watershed groups and a fire that devastated the group's headquarters—effectively shuttered the UMRWC. Though the group was able to maintain its status as a 501c3 non-profit and continue with its water quality monitoring and testing program, it was unable to regain its direction, role as a regional leader in watershed issues, and capacity for implementing impactful watershed management and restoration projects. Moreover, the group's tragic

demise has stressed the morale of its original leadership, further crippling the UMRWC's ability to serve as stewards and managers of the watershed.

A New Beginning. This grim vision turned around in 2021 upon the Watershed Council's award of a WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 grant. After a two-year rebranding and outreach effort, the Watershed Council has reinvigorated former federal agency partnerships, initiated exciting discussions with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, and elicited the encouragement of the entire community to continue growing the capacity and sustainability of the organization. With a new look, a new website, a social media presence, a growing list of supporters, and paid consultants to shepherd the effort, the Watershed Council regained some of its original footing and began to reposition itself as a critical watershed advocate in the Upper Merced. .

Early in the grant period members of the public would often respond at community events, "I remember you guys; where have you been?" or "I'm just hearing about you; where do I sign up?" The two-year collaboration and outreach effort resulted in hundreds of hours of interviews and meetings with federal agency, tribal, and local organizations staff. The UMRWC was a regular presence at Mariposa Trails Day, Butterfly Days, the El Portal Spring Fling, and celebrated the 35th anniversary of the designation of the Merced as a Wild & Scenic River with a gala public showing of the Wild and Scenic Film Festival. Working with CalTrans, a three-mile segment of State Route 140 was "adopted" through the Merced River canyon as part of the Adopt-A-Highway cleanup program. These efforts inspired volunteers to join in a series of river and roadside clean-ups. All of this resulted in the building of not only a solid community coalition of river and watershed supporters, but re-cemented the UMRWC's role in the community as a convener, a source of trusted information, and a voice for stewardship in the Merced River watershed.

What was learned from stakeholders was:

What's needed? Water quality monitoring, increasing public education on leave no trace principles, clean up days...community engaging events, increased presence with inter-agency collaboration with a goal of building and supporting new conservation projects within the watershed.

The watershed council can provide local leadership in protecting this watershed from pollution, erosion, and loss of habitat through participating in outreach in schools, community events, and bringing any issues to the awareness of the community, agencies, and county supervisors.

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council should promote education and awareness in climate issues and responsible use of the river, as well as cleanup projects.

I think the river and the canyon need an oversight organization. In the past there have been ad hoc conservation movements and organizations in the canyon; it is now time to move beyond that to a permanent river watchdog organization.

Next Level. These voices—along with hundreds of other comments—inform the objectives and actions called for in the *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan* (attached). The outcomes and recommendations from the previous planning process established the foundation for a four-year strategy that will reignite the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's efforts within the community. As a result, the following seven primary objectives emerged. These represent the CALL TO ACTION that the Watershed Council will pursue for the next four years, several of which comprise action steps captured in this funding proposal:

- Revitalize and implement a community-based water quality monitoring program in the watershed
- Increase awareness of climate resilience in the watershed
- Collaborate with federal partners on issues related to ecological health and biodiversity in the watershed
- Convene agency partners and stakeholders in discussions related to visitor use management in the river corridor and watershed
- Establish an education and awareness campaign of issues facing the river and its watershed
- Establish a strong volunteer base of river/watershed stewards
- Grow the capacity and sustainability of the organization

New Request. The momentum built by the past WaterSMART program is likely to be short-lived without continued support. Just as the organization's engine in the early days was fueled with staff support, so too, the new *Watershed Work Plan* requires staff support to implement its actions. The successes associated with the capacity-building activities described earlier could only be possible with paid consultants. Working in collaboration with the Watershed Council's board of directors, the primary consultant was able to work daily to not just complete tasks associated with the planning effort, but to activate on the organization's mission by moving initiatives forward. Early on in the process, it became clear that in order to continue this level of collaboration and execution, a second infusion of funding would be required to take the successes of this initial effort to the next level. To show the community that the UMRWC is ready and able to activate on so many of the concerns and hopes that they voiced, additional funding NOW is essential.

Applicant Category. Led by both long-term and new Board Members, the UMRWC is re-applying to the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant program as an existing organization, with the intention of expanding the momentum built under the 2021 grant. As a 501(c)3 non-profit based in California with a rich history of promoting the sustainable use of water resources in our watershed, the UMRWC is eligible to apply for funding under this grant program.

We seek to catapult the organization forward by hiring a watershed director who will shepherd implementation of the priorities, objectives, and actions established in the *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan*. With a new round of funding over a three-year timeline, the UMRWC will reinforce existing partnerships, and forge new ones with a variety of federal, state, regional, and local partners to re-establish the UMRWC as a force for grappling with the issues that affect our watershed. Broadly, the Council's leadership—along with federal partners—recognize the value of having the Council serve as the coordinator of and clearinghouse for stewardship, education, and management activities that are identified in the federal Comprehensive River Management Plans (CRMPs) that guide research and restoration actions in the Merced Wild and Scenic River watershed. While the National Park Service, US Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management are ultimately responsible for carrying out the actions specified in their respective CRMPs, as was determined during the 2021-2023 WaterSMART planning process, there is a critical need to both support interagency coordination, and enhance federal, state, and local understanding of the desired future conditions that were established in the CRMPs.

Project Description. With this funding request, we seek to promote and articulate our identity, communicating our organization's internal priorities and implementing the *Watershed Work Plan* strategy for engaging with the most pressing issues facing the watershed. Our primary goal is to implement the top priorities identified in the *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan* which grew out of the efforts conducted under the 2021-2023 WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant.

Actions to be implemented under this funding request include:

1. Growing the capacity and sustainability of the organization by hiring a watershed director to shepherd implementation of the *Watershed Work Plan*
2. Reinvigorating the community-based water quality monitoring program
3. Establishing an education and awareness campaign of issues facing the river and watershed
4. Build an active and engaged volunteer base
5. Maintaining a robust community presence

After a two-year rebranding and engagement process, these goals represent the voices of our federal agency partners and the wider community. The approach involves five iterative work elements that enable us to make sizable strides over the next three years towards implementing the *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan* and allowing the UMRWC to map out a sustainable staffing and funding future. These priorities are described in more detail below.

Ultimately, the adopted *Watershed Work Plan* will facilitate rapid and effective implementation of the actions necessary to revive and reactivate the UMRWC as a leader in the Upper Merced River Watershed, and to regain its capacity to convene, coordinate, and empower the watershed's stakeholders long into the future. The work elements in this funding request represent the expression of some of the most profound and pressing needs in the watershed raised by stakeholders. Many of these needs have

been articulated in federal agency Comprehensive River Management Plans, county plans like the Mariposa County Merced River Trail Vision Plan and the Creative Placemaking Strategy (both adopted by the board of supervisors), and NGO-led needs assessments like CalWild's the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor Signage & Community Needs Report*. These documents—combined with a robust stakeholder engagement and planning effort—informed and underscored the priority needs of the Merced River and its watershed. Rather than remain pages sitting on a shelf, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council will activate on recommendations that are in alignment with the organization's mission and the desires of federal partners and community stakeholders.

Work Element #1: Grow the capacity and sustainability of the organization

In the early 1980s when the Merced River was under threat of being diverted for a hydropower project, a grass roots group of community members rallied around a call to action to SAVE THE MERCED. This group—the Merced Canyon Committee—became a powerful force that ultimately led to the designation of the Merced as a federally protected Wild and Scenic River. However, after that event, the group disbanded in hopes that a stewardship group would emerge to carry on the work of the river's day-to-day protection. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council grew from the seeds of this idea. However, during its 20 years of operation, the organization became the model for the tenuous nature of maintaining a watershed cooperative. The UMRWC today seeks to “crack the code” once and for all and determine the path for long-term sustainability. While volunteers are critical, maintaining even ONE paid staff person will enable the organization to get on the path toward a sustainable future.

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council is a valuable asset to the community. To become the powerhouse that it once was in advocating for the watershed, additional capacity building is needed. Ten years of functioning only by way of limited volunteer time has proven not enough to sustain the organization. The efforts under the 2021-2023 WaterSMART grant proved that with a modest amount of funding, the organization can activate its mission, engage the community in stewardship of the river and watershed, and achieve results.

This work element will include establishing the staffing structure needed to implement Watershed Council activities called for in this grant and the *Watershed Work Plan*. This will involve:

- Establishing a part time, executive level Watershed Director position, including defining roles and responsibilities
- Seeking support from an intern by way of our partnership with the Sierra Nevada Alliance as part of the Sierra Nevada Americorps Partnership (SNAP) program
- Establishing organization chart that lays out structure for staffing and board of directors
- Determining the annual work plan and resources needed, including future funding targets

- Engaging in board development to grow the capabilities and diversity of the Board of Directors
- Completing an Annual Report to the public and collaborators on *Watershed Work Plan* progress

Work Element #2: Revitalizing and implementing a community-based water quality monitoring program in the watershed.

Throughout some of the Watershed Council's most difficult times, water quality monitoring has been a consistent effort. Even after the 2012 fire destroyed the Watershed Council's equipment, water quality monitoring was able to continue—albeit at a smaller scale—until the pandemic halted progress. As a program with a nearly 20-year history of continuous data and contribution to understanding of the watershed, water quality monitoring is a pillar of the Watershed Council's success and a source of pride embraced by both agency partners and the larger community. Throughout the public engagement process of 2021-2023, federal partners and stakeholders recalled the success of the UMRWC's previous efforts to monitor water quality. Resuming this effort emerged as a top priority in the Watershed Work Plan.

Under this work element, in consultation with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, federal agencies, and community partners like NatureBridge and Mariposa Trails, the UMRWC will reinvigorate and expand its water quality monitoring program along the Merced River. Thanks to a River Network/US Forest Service grant, work to begin framing this effort is underway. The UMRWC will consider incorporating new protocols in response to new threats. With increasingly repeated intervals of catastrophic wildland fire within the Merced River watershed (over 25 events since 2000 and over 250,000 acres), understanding the run-off constituents in the river is critical. With the increasing presence of harmful algal blooms due to repeated years of drought and low water temperatures, working with federal agency partners will be essential to monitor and provide information to the community. Lastly, presence and absence of benthic macroinvertebrates in the river is a vital indicator of river and watershed health: some are more sensitive to pollution than others, and if the more pollution sensitive organisms are missing, a pollution problem is likely. As an integral part of this work element, consideration will be given to expanding protocols to include monitoring of post fire events, harmful algal blooms, and benthic macroinvertebrates.

Specific actions include:

- Implementing the River Network/USFS grant by 2025
- Re-evaluating and determining monitoring sites
- Working with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into monitoring practices
- Collaborating with tribes, school district, and other NGOs (like NatureBridge and Mariposa Trails) to secure volunteers
- Establishing a quarterly monitoring calendar
- Ensuring annual reporting is completed to state and national database
- Reporting out on findings to public via social media, e-newsletters, and website

Work Element #3: Establish an education and awareness campaign of issues facing the river and watershed.

In order to cultivate a constituency that cares about the river enough to engage as a steward, opportunities need to exist to educate and connect people to the river and watershed. As a pillar of the Watershed Council's mission, the organization will seek opportunities to educate the public and increase awareness of the unique values of the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed—as well as its connectivity to the lower portions of the watershed (downstream of the Wild and Scenic River corridor). Issues such as climate resilience, resource protection, responsible recreation, and how to engage in stewardship emerged as key educational themes within the *Watershed Work Plan*. The goal of the Upper Merced River and watershed education campaign will be to provide the community with a trusted source of information about the river and watershed. This will allow all who visit to be instilled with a sense of place and a sense of welcome, where all can understand the interconnections between natural and human systems, and appreciate the unique stewardship role each person can take in protecting and preserving this important landscape.

One key action within this work element is to implement the *CalWild Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor Signage & Community Needs Report*, a blueprint to improve interpretive signage in the Highway 140 corridor and toolkit for community stakeholders. The report finds that interpretive and informational signage in the river segments outside of Yosemite National Park are desperately needed. Messages in multiple languages that help ALL visitors to the river feel welcome and enjoy appropriate recreation that inspires stewardship will be a priority. Helping people learn how to recreate responsibly and act as champions and stewards of the river and watershed will be a central theme to messaging, as well as:

- Water conservation and water quality stewardship
- LEAVE NO TRACE principles
- Fire prevention awareness and climate resilience strategies
- Heritage stories
- Wildlife and ecosystem information

A second action under this work element is to create an educational collateral for use at public events, on the UMRWC website, and through social media that will engage and inspire stewardship. This will include developing a portfolio of interpretive materials to promote the importance of climate resilience and stewardship in the river and watershed, as well as to support recruitment of prospective partners, board members, and community volunteers. Specific products will include:

- Educational brochure(s)
- Detailed map of the river and watershed
- Interactive tools, such as an online Merced River storymap

A third action is to re-establish the former avenues for educating members of the public regarding issues facing the river and watershed, including:

- a community speaker series

- collaborating with like minded organizations to provide river walks/talks
- re-engaging the Mariposa County Unified School District on opportunities to engage school children in watershed science and stewardship

Work Element #4: Build a strong volunteer base of river/watershed stewards

When asked during past stakeholder engagement activities if the Watershed Council was still needed in the community, members of the public—along with federal partners—responded with a resounding YES. The community voiced a strong interest in maintaining healthy ecosystems and a trash-free watershed. When asked how the UMRWC could assist federal partners, all three agencies expressed a desire for the Watershed Council to grow its volunteer base in order to create a ready stewardship force to support them in caring for the river and watershed.

The tasks in this work element build off of the partnerships and relationships that were reestablished, initiated, and strengthened in the *Watershed Work Plan* process. The ability to implement actions in support of federal partners, a strong volunteer base is needed. Building on past successes, the UMRWC will reinvigorate its volunteer base and engage volunteers in diverse activities to promote stewardship of the river and watershed. Efforts to reach into underserved communities to promote volunteer opportunities within the watershed will be prioritized. The UMRWC will collaborate and engage with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation to support their stewardship efforts within the river corridor and watershed. To further promote watershed steward leadership among students, an annual scholarship will be given to a Mariposa County High School outgoing senior who is pursuing a field of study related to environmental science, resource management, or furthering understanding of the natural world through creative pursuits.

Through a variety of community engagement events, email and social media outreach, and continued coalition building, volunteers will be rallied to support:

- the community-based water quality monitoring program as citizen science volunteer
- river and roadside cleanup efforts
- river restoration support within Yosemite National Park, including riverbank replanting
- expansion of the Watershed Council board of directors

Work Element #5: Maintain a robust community presence

Considerable effort was invested in the previous WaterSMART grant to rebrand, reintroduce ourselves to the community, and connect with stakeholders. Crucial to the implementation of the Watershed Work Plan is maintaining a strong presence in the community and within the coalitions already built. This work element includes

- participating in in-person meetings with coalition members, tabling at local events, and attending conferences and symposia
- promoting the UMRWC on social media and through digital newsletters
- conducting an annual fundraiser (Wild and Scenic Film Festival) to promote Watershed Council activities and inspire stewardship

Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criterion A— Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

Sub Criterion No. A1: Watershed Group Diversity

Historically, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council has collaborated with a broad swath of stakeholders active in and passionate about the Merced River watershed, including federal, tribal, state, and local governmental agencies and regional and local non-governmental agencies representing interests ranging from conservation, environmental education, and the outdoor recreation and tourism industries.

In all Work Elements of the proposed project, the Council would work to expand these partnerships to quickly and comprehensively engage the coalition needed for a successful project. This begins with the federal agencies who are primarily responsible for implementing the river protection actions detailed in the Merced Wild and Scenic River CRMPs: the National Park Service (Yosemite National Park), US Forest Service (Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests), and Bureau of Land Management (Mother Lode Field Office). The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation—the river and watershed’s first stewards—have much to teach us about the importance of the river in traditional cultural practices, stories, and educational efforts for their young people. The Watershed Council will engage with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, who have historically been marginalized from watershed planning and management activities and whose ancestral lands include the entirety of the project area. The UMRWC will continue its partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the study and potential restoration of salmonids to the upper Merced River. At the state level, the Council will work with CalTrans to further its volunteer engagement activities associated with the Adopt-a-Highway program along Highway 140. Locally, the Council will re-engage with the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors and staff from key county departments, including Planning and Environmental Health, as well as the Merced Irrigation District, who manages the New Exchequer Dam in the lower reaches of the river. The Council will also grow relationships with newly re-engaged partnerships with venerable affected NGO stakeholders, including:

- Regional conservation groups like the Friends of the River, Mariposa Trails, Mariposa County Resource Conservation District, the Merced River Conservation Committee, Sierra Nevada Alliance, and Keep it Wild—Merced River
- Environmental science education nonprofits partners like NatureBridge
- Organizations that reach marginalized and underserved communities in the Central Valley like CalWild, Outdoors Empowered, and River Network
- Expanding understanding of issues facing the Merced Wild and Scenic River with national organizations such as the Wild and Scenic Rivers Coalition and the River Management Society

- Sustainable economic development advocates like the Mariposa County Economic Development department and Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau

By engaging with these longstanding watershed planning and management partners early in the project, the Council can move quickly to energize the *Watershed Work Plan* implementation process.

Significantly, in addition to expanding and reaffirming previous partnerships, the Council sees the WaterSMART program as a unique and ideal opportunity to increase the reach of new audiences and project partners to support a more holistic and inclusive implementation of the Work Elements.

At the federal level, this includes the Environmental Protection Agency, who is providing technical support to the Mariposa County Planning Department regarding the remediation of a strategic former mine site adjacent to the river. At the state level, this includes the California Department of Forestry and Fire, a key collaborator in wildfire risk reduction and vegetation management issues. Regionally, the Council is eager to engage with UC-Merced's Sierra Nevada Research Institute to expand knowledge of and volunteer engagement efforts within the watershed. As well, the Council will formalize and deepen partnerships with the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, who collaborates with landowners and agricultural operators throughout the region to sustainably conserve and manage critical landscapes in the watershed. The Council also plans to reach out to re-establish its partnership with the East Merced Resource Conservation District as well as the County of Merced, who has jurisdiction of the lowest reaches of the river within the watershed. These partnerships will complement the Council's continuing relationships with affected stakeholders at the state, federal, and local levels, resulting in project implementation that reflects the diverse interests, perspectives, and skill sets within our watershed.

As described in the Technical Project Description, the Council will apply a range of techniques to ensure project success. Outreach efforts will include facilitating informal preliminary meetings with representatives from affected stakeholder organizations to collaboratively implement the *Watershed Work Plan* and grant work elements. The UMRWC will participate in a slate of regular community events as well as represent Watershed Council efforts at conferences and symposia. The Council will expand use of digital tools—including its newly enhanced web, social media presence, and e-newsletter platform—to publicize events and market the volunteer recruitment work elements, promote educational efforts and work products, and grow the Council's reputation as a trusted clearinghouse of information related to the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed.

Sub Criterion No. A2: Geographic Scope

The map on page 4 of this application packet illustrates the geographic boundaries of the watershed group's work area, and delineates the relevant jurisdictional boundaries.

This includes those of the National Park Service, US Forest Service (Sierra and Stanislaus national forests), and Bureau of Land Management, and the boundary between Mariposa County (where the bulk of the watershed is located) and Merced County. Though the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District's (RCD) jurisdiction is technically limited to the county boundaries, it is important to note that RCD's conservation, restoration, and management activities and priorities extend to the downstream portions of the watershed in Merced County.

Each of the remaining affected stakeholders identified in the previous response—including both those that were previously involved in the group and those that will be targeted through continued outreach—are actively engaged in the entire project area. For example, both current and planned governmental partners like the California Department of Conservation and Environmental Protection Agency, as well as non-governmental partners like the Merced River Conservation Committee and Sierra Foothill Conservancy are active in watershed projects in multiple federal and county jurisdictions within the project area. In total, our partnership of federal, tribal, state, and local agencies and non-governmental organizations represent the full geographic scope of HUC 18040008, where the Council has and continues to focus its watershed restoration, conservation, and management.

The Upper Merced River watershed is known for its iconic beauty and world-class appeal largely due to its origin in Yosemite National Park, a World Heritage Site. As a result, the reach to those who care about the Merced River and its watershed is vast. While the geographic locus of the project is within the watershed itself, outreach beyond the boundaries will be essential to draw volunteers and rally supporters, not just within Mariposa County but across the state and the country. As an existing organization that is relatively new to expanding its outreach efforts, the UMRWC will continue to employ a variety of means of stakeholder engagement to reach the greatest swath of representation, including but not limited to the following:

- In-person meetings and interviews with new and existing stakeholders
- Video conferences with key stakeholder groups
- Contributing news releases and articles to local media, regional newsletters, as well as national journals
- Participation in the events sponsored by key stakeholders, including representation at national conferences and symposia
- Regular email communication, including e-newsletter distribution to stakeholders
- Enhanced social media presence and engagement with that of stakeholders to amplify messaging
- Participation in community events, particularly events hosted by stakeholders
- Expanding outreach with organizations representing marginalized or traditionally underrepresented communities

As previously noted, the upper Merced River watershed—characterized by its free-flowing nature and wild and scenic status—is iconic and representative of the vestiges of a wild California landscape. While much is within the protection of federal public lands, watershed groups such as ours are critical for continued stewardship and protection. While our organization focuses on the upper river watershed, the

collaboration efforts of our organization seek to expand outreach to the lower watershed as well, where no such watershed groups exist. In segments of the lower watershed, particularly at the river's confluence with the San Joaquin River—a 4.5 mile stretch of the river was de-watered for several months in 2022. There are portions of the river where fish passage is not possible. The threats to native fisheries and overall river and watershed health have been elevated to us through new collaborations with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This WaterSMART grant will help our organization deepen the understanding of the health of the watershed as a whole and allow us to educate and draw awareness of issues facing the connectivity of the upper and lower watersheds.

Evaluation Criterion B — Addressing Critical Watershed Needs

Sub Criterion No. B1: Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The Upper Merced River Watershed is vast, encompassing approximately 700,000 acres ridge to ridge, ranging from 443 in the Central Valley feet to 13,310 feet in elevation in Yosemite National Park. Public agencies manage roughly 600,000 of those acres, and about 100,000 acres are owned privately. Much of the land in the watershed is public and managed by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, the Sierra National Forest, or the Stanislaus National Forest. The management objectives of the agencies are delineated in voluminous comprehensive river management plans (CRMPs), and the status of the Merced as a federally designated Wild and Scenic River in 1987 has resulted in additional planning documents. Each agency's plan identifies critical watershed needs and/or issues within the watershed. The CRMP for the Merced River and South Fork Merced River (Bureau of Land Management & Forest Service, November 1991) identifies 21 issue subjects that include recreation, land ownership and use, cultural resources and archaeology, fire/fuels management, fisheries, public involvement, and interpretation, and threatened and endangered species, vegetation management, water quality & quantity, and wildlife. This comprehensive management plan incorporates management direction for the Sierra and Stanislaus National Forest, and the Bureau of Land Management Merced River Management Plan.

The Merced Wild and Scenic River CRPM, Yosemite National Park 2014, addresses issues related to resource protection, development of land and facilities, user capacities, a monitoring plan, and other management practices necessary or desirable to achieve the purposes of the Wild and Scenic River Act and address the critical issues within the watershed. This CRMP identifies historic issues that have, and in many cases still are, critical issues affecting the health of the watershed. Critical issues, both current and historic, identified in this CRNP include declines in meadow acreage, increase in conifer encroachment, presence of non-native and invasive plant species, visitor use management challenges, and changes to hydrology that impact water quality due to current and historic anthropogenic use such as recreation, development, grazing, agriculture, draining of wetlands for agriculture, etc.

In addition to issues raised in federal CRMPs, the work of the UMRWC is in alignment with numerous strategic initiatives and plans adopted by the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, including the *Merced River Trail Vision Plan*, the *Mariposa County Creative Placemaking Strategy*, *Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan*, the *Agriculture and Working Landscape Conservation Plan*, and projects such as the Mariposa Biomass Project and Mariposa Creek Parkway Project. As part of the *Creative Placemaking Strategy*, the recently completed *This Must Be the Place* initiative asked Mariposa County residents to identify their most treasured places within the community. Most of the favorite places identified involved the Merced River and locations within the watershed.

The concerns regarding the radiating impacts of visitor use beyond Yosemite National Park and within the Highway 140 corridor of the river are well documented by collaborating partner, CalWild. In its *Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor Signage and Community Needs Report*, which incorporates a vital component of the education initiative contained in this grant, they capture the following critical watershed needs and issues:

“Well before the pandemic, many users of the corridor were unaware of the proper restrictions or regulations regarding daytime use, campgrounds, trash disposal, available restrooms, and use of campfires/backcountry stoves in the nearby Stanislaus and Sierra National Forests. Historically it is also an area besieged with wildfires dating as far back as records have been kept. More recently the corridor was plagued by algae blooms due to low water flow and high temperatures during the summer and fall months. These are issues that all visitors to the corridor need to be aware of. YNP visitor statistics show that Latinx and Asian community members are the largest demographic users of YNP outside of Caucasians, making Spanish and Asian languages (likely Mandarin or Hmong) signs potentially very helpful for improved visitor services, recreation, and public education in the greater Yosemite area. With California’s ethnic diversity growing, there is considerable potential for more outdoor enthusiasts – non-white residents of California currently make up ~40% of the state’s population, totaling over 15 million residents. Without proper attempts to communicate to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) users in their preferred languages – and respecting their cultural perspectives – we miss an opportunity to cultivate responsible, equitable advocacy for California’s public lands, which make up 44% of the state. Proper education on how to utilize public lands is essential to their stewardship. Access to open space for BIPOC communities is a key goal of environmental justice. The results of future development of the corridor’s public spaces furthers that goal. CalWild and our partners see a clear need for improved signage along the corridor that reflects these needs. Further, sign improvements should convey basic interpretative and safety information that is currently lacking.”

The Yosemite-Mariposa Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP, Revised June 2016) is intended to address the many major water-related needs/challenges and conflicts within the region, identifying the Upper Merced River Watershed as the largest

and most productive watershed, comprising almost two-thirds of the entire region area. The critical issues faced by our watershed are identified in this plan as water quality conditions, local water supply reliability/shortages, fuel management for wildfire prevention, flood and stormwater management, and resource stewardship and ecosystem protection to address declining ecological processes and environmental resources.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance, in the State of Sierra Waters; A Sierra Nevada Watersheds Index 2006, cites that the upper section of the Merced River has been listed for mercury and as impaired for pathogens, sediment siltation and wetlands impacts by the US EPA. The US EPA and the California State Water Resource Control Board have listed the beneficial uses of swimming, drinking and recreational day use as threatened along with the habitat and freshwater.

Although the Yosemite Mariposa region does not have a large population, the Merced River Watershed comprises 64% of the region and is a major tributary to the San Joaquin River, which combines with other Delta tributaries to provide water for millions of people in the San Joaquin Valley and Bay Area, and water for irrigating hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland. The continued and coordinated management of the multitude of critical issues faced by our watershed, as delineated in the many federal, state, and local stakeholder plans, will be essential to both preserving and enhancing natural systems and human health. Most recently, prolonged periods of drought have dramatically impacted the entire Merced River and its watershed—with beetle kill of pines, increased risk of catastrophic wildland fire, and the complete de-watering of the river for over 4 miles at its confluence with the San Joaquin. These issues cannot be parsed out based on jurisdictional boundaries which begs for a consolidated and coordinated response to solving the river's most pressing problems.

Sub Criterion No. B2: Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council (UMRWC) will expand upon previous partnership building efforts through this grant. The work elements in this funding request represent the expression of some of the most profound and pressing needs in the watershed raised by stakeholders. Many of these needs have been articulated in federal agency Comprehensive River Management Plans, county plans like the Mariposa County Merced River Trail Vision Plan adopted by the board of supervisors, and NGO-led needs assessments like CalWild's the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Corridor Signage & Community Needs Report*. These documents—combined with a robust stakeholder engagement and planning effort conducted in 2021-2023—informed and underscored the priority needs of the Merced River and its watershed. Rather than remain pages sitting on a shelf, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council will activate on recommendations that are in alignment with the organization's mission and the desires of federal partners and community stakeholders.

This grant will serve to implement the top priorities identified in its 2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan.

- 1. Work Element 1.** Perhaps one of the most important elements in implementing the *Watershed Work Plan*—and protecting the Upper Merced River and its watershed—is hiring a paid watershed director position. This will be an executive-level position, with the ideal candidate possessing an extensive background in partnership development, collaborative decision making, education and communication, board governance, fundraising, and project management. A recruitment process will take place immediately upon award of the grant, with applications reviewed by a panel made up of the Board of Directors and key stakeholders. Given that the scope of work outlined in the newly adopted *Watershed Work Plan* is ambitious, aspirational, and informed by hundreds of agency, community, and organizational comments, the director will be essential to work plan implementation. Without a paid staff person to see the plan implemented, its actions will become moot, collecting dust on a shelf. We have seen how a lack of having even ONE dedicated staff person brought the organization to its knees for nearly a decade. Upon receiving a WaterSMART grant in 2021, new life was breathed into the UMRWC, resulting in the successful 2-year planning and stakeholder engagement process. The single greatest need facing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council—and many in the community would endorse—is getting the Watershed Council on a path toward sustainability. There are currently no other watershed groups within the community lining up to do this work; if the UMRWC ceases to exist, it is not likely that another organization will step into this role. Grant funding at this stage is essential to enable the organization to become truly viable and get on a path to sustainability. Through the 2021-2023 planning process, the community has underscored this point. The number one strategy to achieving the watershed protection objectives outlined in the *Watershed Work Plan* is hiring support staff to move initiatives forward.
- 2. Work Element 2.** Monitoring and maintaining water quality—a pillar of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act—emerged as a top issue of concern by both federal agency partners and members of the public. With the presence of harmful algal blooms during low water years, there is heightened awareness of water quality and the need for continued monitoring. In addition, in a river canyon prone to repeated wildland fire, developing protocols to assess post fire conditions in the river is critical. Through the actions identified in Work Element 2, the UMRWC will reactivate its previously successful water quality monitoring program in collaboration with federal agency partners, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, UC Merced, NOAA, organizations such as River Network and NatureBridge, along with local conservation groups.
- 3. Work Element 3.** What emerged as a topic of critical importance among all stakeholder groups informing the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's *Watershed Work Plan* is the need for a comprehensive education and awareness campaign. As noted in Jeff Marion and Scott Reid's paper *Minimizing Visitor*

Impacts to Protected Areas: The Efficacy of Low Impact Education Programs, “Visitor education programs recognize that most impacts are not from malicious acts, but result from insensitivity to the consequences of one’s actions or a lack of knowledge regarding appropriate low-impact behaviors (Bradley, 1979).

Education programs encourage visitors to consider the environmental and social consequences of their actions, promoting enhanced ethics and a self-directed modification of their personal behavior. Visitor education designed to persuade visitors to adopt low-impact practices is considered a more appropriate, light-handed and indirect management response to reduce resource impacts or improve visitor experiences (Manning, 1999; Roggenbuck, 1992). The objective of educational programs is not to “control” visitor behavior; rather, land managers seek to provide a cognitive basis to encourage appropriate low impact visitor behavior in recreation settings (Peterson & Lime, 1979).” Work Element 2 will establish a broad-reaching education and awareness campaign of issues facing the river and watershed and the low-impact steps to ensuring responsible and appropriate visitor use. The goal of the Upper Merced River and watershed education campaign will be to provide the community with a trusted source of information about the river and watershed and the role each person plays as a caretaker and steward of the land. This will allow all who visit to be instilled with a sense of place and a sense of welcome, where all can understand the interconnections between natural and human systems, and appreciate the unique stewardship role each person can take in protecting and preserving this important landscape. Topics will include climate resilience, wildlife and ecosystem information, plants and wildlife, heritage stories, water quality, and the “source to the sea” story of the Merced River. Methods will include preparation of written materials (detailed maps, informational brochures, on-site signage, exhibits), a speaker’s series with topics about the river and watershed, collaboration with other conservation organizations to host Merced River and Watershed Walks, etc.

4. **Work Element 4.** In order to implement many of the actions called for in the *Watershed Work Plan*, a robust volunteer network is needed. Work Element 4 will build a strong volunteer base of river/watershed stewards, leveraging the ongoing stakeholder engagement efforts. Critical to this effort will be reaching into marginalized and underrepresented communities to enable them to be welcomed and empowered stewards. By expanding our volunteer base, the UMRWC will be able to inspire community-based stewardship while growing its network of ambassadors.
5. **Work Element 5.** The management of water and related resources within the watershed is complex as it has many interdependencies, multiple stakeholder groups have both management authority and responsibilities. This complexity and the distributed network of shared responsibilities create the need for robust and effective coordination to address the critical needs within the watershed. The actions outlined in Work Element 5 are designed to effectively leverage and grow existing relationships in order to maintain a robust conservation and collaboration presence within the community.

An important deliverable for this project will be the incorporation of an Annual Report on the progress against *Watershed Work Plan* action items and objectives. This report will be shared with WaterSMART administrators, partnering agencies, as well as with collaborators and the general public.

Evaluation Criterion C— Readiness to Proceed

Given the scope of work defined in the *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan*, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council is poised to begin implementation as soon as possible, pending receipt of grant funding. Having already successfully navigated the requirements of a previous WaterSMART grant agreement, the UMRWC has the administrative processes and administration in place to proceed immediately.

As described in the Technical Proposal (pp. 3-11) the proposed scope of work is divided into five major tasks (or work elements), which are intended to be interdependent yet all flow from the central component—hiring a watershed director. All of these Work Elements constitute a continuity and catapulting of action stemming from the establishment of the *Watershed Work Plan* developed as the final deliverable for the Watershed Council’s 2021-2023 WaterSMART grant.

Under Work Element 1—GROW THE ORGANIZATION'S CAPACITY—the first step will be to establish the operational hub for the entire grant project: hiring a contracted watershed director. This person will serve for the term of the grant as the overall project manager and will conduct the day-to-day implementation of the other Work Elements. Working with the Board of Directors, this person will establish the operational model for not only implementing the other work elements, but will determine the long-term plan for securing the Watershed Council’s future beyond the WaterSMART grant period. Midway through the grant period, an Americorp intern will be secured for an 11-month assignment to further accelerate progress and help the UMRWC on its path toward self-sufficiency.

As the central hub for all of the other Work Elements, the director will lead all aspects of managing the scope, schedule, and budget for project implementation. The four remaining Work Elements will take place concurrently while each having an element of interdependence. For example, implementing Work Element 2: REINVIGORATING WATER QUALITY MONITORING PROGRAM will have dependency on GROWING A VOLUNTEER BASE as described in Work Element 4. Similarly, implementation of Work Element 3: LAUNCHING AN EDUCATION CAMPAIGN will require the continued public presence captured in Work Element 5: MAINTAINING A ROBUST COMMUNITY PRESENCE. All of the Work Elements are intended to be iterative and build off each other in order to create the strong foundation of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council as adopted in its *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan*.

See below for a schedule that specifies key tasks within each Work Element, as well as anticipated start and end dates and estimated costs for each task. The Budget Proposal (pg. 24) includes a breakdown of costs for each Work Element and key task, and also includes direct costs that are not specific to individual tasks (e.g., supplies and materials) and indirect costs.

Evaluation Criterion D—Presidential and Department of the Interior Priorities

While the actions contained in the Work Elements described within this proposal embrace issues related to combating climate change and expanding benefits to underserved communities and tribal groups, these values are at the heart of the core values of our organization. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council has embraced the following core guiding principles to guide its efforts in all of its work:

- Protect and enhance water quality in the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed tributaries
- Protect and enhance biological diversity of the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed
- Implement strategies to combat climate change and the threat of catastrophic fire in the watershed
- Promote equitable access and appropriate, responsible recreation in the watershed
- Convene and collaborate with all who care about the river to strengthen our collective watershed protection impact
- Create a sustainable future for the Upper Merced River Watershed Council

Activities that promote greater climate resilience and enact strategies to combat climate change are at the heart of what we do. Likewise, the UMRWC similarly stands for inclusivity of diverse voices and perspectives, particularly from those traditionally marginalized from engaging with their public lands. With the collaboration of our Department of Interior (NPS, BLM) and US Department of Agriculture (USFS) partners, the group development and strategic watershed implementation activities contained in the proposed scope of work advance the two identified Department of the Interior priorities—1) Climate Change, and 2) Benefits to Disadvantaged, Underserved, and Tribal Communities.

Climate Change.

The Upper Merced River watershed is a case study in understanding the impacts of climate change. The Lyell Glacier—which feeds not only the Merced but the Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River—continues to shrink. Wildlife and plant dispersal within Yosemite National Park continue to migrate as temperatures rise at lower elevations. According to the California Department of Water Resources, on average, the annual Sierra Nevada snowpack is responsible for 30% of the water supplied to the state. Yet, the Sierra snowpack is experiencing repeated years of drought. Repeated years of catastrophic wildland fires due to increased fuels made worse by beetle kill, make our watershed the perfect backdrop for expanding understanding of the impacts of a changing climate, particularly on water quality. In Mariposa County, where you would be hard pressed to find someone who has NOT been evacuated due to fire within the community, these impacts are real and are felt personally.

For these reasons, the UMRWC has planted a flag for expanding understanding of the importance of water quality, biodiversity, and the need to combat climate change as core

components of our mission. By convening scientists from throughout the watershed and representing a range of disciplines, the proposed project supports the use of science to identify best practices for managing land and water resources and supporting an adaptive management approach to the Upper Merced River watershed. Through intensive engagement and dialogue among ecologists, biologists, geologists, and other researchers from the National Park Service, US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), as well as UC Merced and local environments science contractors like Point Blue Conservation Science, the proposed work elements in this project will implement science-based strategies for achieving identified priority watershed management and education objectives.

The specific components of the project that advance understanding of climate change include:

- The water quality monitoring proposed in Work Element 1 provides valuable data to be used by federal agencies in taking management actions to address potential impacts of climate change. Monitoring for water temperature, Ph, conductivity, presence of macroinvertebrate are all important indicators of water quality and riparian health. In addition, protocols will be widened to monitor water constituents from post-fire events. The community-based water quality monitoring program expands this understanding while engaging citizen scientists (of all ages) in hands-on learning opportunities.
- At the front lines of combatting the climate crisis is EDUCATION. As part of Work Element 3, a comprehensive watershed education campaign will be conducted. Through printed materials, signage, social media posts, written articles, media releases, and a speaker series, educational messages will tell the story of the delicate balance of biodiversity in the watershed and unique threats posed by climate change. Messaging will include topics such as water quality and water conservation, forest health, how to promote fire-resilient landscapes in fire-prone Mariposa County, LEAVE NO TRACE ethics. Materials will be in multiple languages and be targeted from school-age children to adults.
- Second to education in combating climate change is ACTION. Work Element 4 involves growing a strong volunteer base. In fulfillment of our stewardship mission, these folks will be ambassadors for our messaging, inspiring community collaboration in helping increase awareness of the climate realities facing our watershed and the practices needed to combat them. In the past, the UMRWC has planted a water conservation demonstration garden incorporating native plants. With the loss of staff and funding, this project has languished, but could be revived through volunteer efforts spurred on with funding for this project.

Benefits to Disadvantaged, Underserved, and Tribal Communities

The Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed are located within Mariposa County, which is listed as among Justice40 Tracts of disadvantaged communities. Key to our core values and guiding principles is promoting equitable access and appropriate, responsible recreation in the watershed, as well as embracing inclusivity and diverse perspectives. One of our primary goals of this project is to engage those groups that

have historically had a lack of access to outdoor education or stewardship opportunities. Through the 2021 WaterSMART grant, we made positive connections with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, a group that has historic ties to Yosemite National Park and over 9,000 years of continued occupation along the Merced River. The tribe is vibrant, current, and a relevant cultural community with ancient integral bonds with the lands on which they live. The opportunity to consult and collaborate with those that have this deep localism presents an opportunity to enrich the outcomes of projects like those presented within this proposal.

Through recent consultation efforts, the tribes identified water quality as well as the health of traditional cultural plant resources as being of critical importance to their cultural practices and heritage. The implementation of the water quality monitoring program contained in Work Element 2 will have a direct beneficial impact on tribal and all marginalized communities that recreate along the river and for whom it is a sacred space. In addition, the UMRWC is partnering with NOAA and the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation to promote a Memorandum of Understanding toward studying the potential restoration of salmonids to the upper Merced River watershed. As components of the water quality monitoring program outlined in Work Element 2 as well as the education efforts (Work Element 3) and volunteerism expansion (Work Element 4), tribal and traditionally marginalized communities are a key element of this grant. In addition, through volunteer-raising efforts, we intend to reach out to not only disadvantaged members of the Mariposa County community as well as those in the Central Valley, particularly UC Merced students, 87% of which are students of color or from disadvantaged communities.

Work Element 3 identifies educational signage as a critical need in the watershed, especially in areas along the Merced River directly downstream of Yosemite National Park. In partnership with CalWild, the UMRWC will implement the recommendations of CalWild's sign plan which elevates the need for messaging that will reach underserved and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and will benefit them as follows:

“Yosemite National Park visitor statistics show that Latinx and Asian community members are the largest demographic users of YNP outside of Caucasians, making Spanish and Asian languages (likely Mandarin or Hmong) signs potentially very helpful for improved visitor services, recreation, and public education in the greater Yosemite area. With California’s ethnic diversity growing, there is considerable potential for more outdoor enthusiasts – non-white residents of California currently make up ~40% of the state’s population, totaling over 15 million residents. Without proper attempts to communicate to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) users in their preferred languages – and respecting their cultural perspectives – we miss an opportunity to cultivate responsible, equitable advocacy for California’s public lands, which make up 44% of the state. Proper education on how to utilize public lands is essential to their stewardship. Access to open space for BIPOC communities is a key goal of environmental justice. The results of future development of the corridor’s public

spaces furthers that goal. CalWild and our partners see a clear need for improved signage along the corridor that reflects these needs. Further, sign improvements should convey basic interpretative and safety information that is currently lacking.”

II. BUDGET PROPOSAL

The proposed project budget is below.

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION		QUANTITY TYPE	TOTAL COST
	\$/UNIT	QUANTITY		
WORK ELEMENT 1: HIRE WATERSHED DIRECTOR				
Salaries and Wages				
Jim Evans (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Steve Smallcombe (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Other BOD members	\$32	19	Hour	\$604
Travel				
Gas/Mileage	\$0.66	1300	Mile	\$851.50
Contractual				
Contract Watershed Director	\$60	2500	Hour	\$150,000
Contract SNAP Intern Year 2			1 Contract Fee	\$23,500
WORK ELEMENT 1 SUBTOTAL				\$174,351.50
WORK ELEMENT 2: WATER QUALITY MONITORING PROGRAM				
Salaries and Wages				
Jim Evans (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Steve Smallcombe (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Other BOD members	\$32	19	Hour	\$604
Contractual				
Training video production contractor	\$4,000	1		\$4,000
Materials/Supplies				
Monitoring equipment and supplies	\$5,000	1		\$5,000
Printing - training guide	\$500	1		\$500
WORK ELEMENT 2 SUBTOTAL				\$9,500
WORK ELEMENT 3: EDUCATION CAMPAIGN				
Salaries and Wages				
Jim Evans (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Steve Smallcombe (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Other BOD members	\$32	19	Hour	\$604
Contractual/Construction				
Mapping, Data Contractor	\$10,000	1		\$10,000
Graphic Design Contractor	\$35,000	1		\$35,000
Foreign language translation	\$2,000	1		\$2,000
Venue rental (speaker series)	\$1,000	1		\$1,000
Construction contractor	\$13,000	1		\$13,000
Materials/Supplies				
Printing - Signage (5 large format signs)	\$1,000	5		\$5,000
Printing - Brochures (3-5)	\$1,000	5		\$5,000
WORK ELEMENT 3 SUBTOTAL				\$71,000
WORK ELEMENT 4: BUILD VOLUNTEER BASE				
Jim Evans (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Steve Smallcombe (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Other BOD members	\$32	19	Hour	\$604
Contractual/Construction				
Social Media Content Creator	\$5,000	1		\$5,000
Wild and Scenic Film Festival (volunteer-raiser events)	\$2,000	2		\$4,000
Supplies and Materials				
Promotional Materials (Printed)	\$3,000	1		\$ 3,000
WORK ELEMENT 4 SUBTOTAL				\$ 12,000
WORK ELEMENT 5: MAINTAIN COMMUNITY PRESENCE				
Jim Evans (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Steve Smallcombe (Board Member/Project Manager)	\$32	78	Hour	\$2,480
Other BOD members	\$32	19	Hour	\$604
Travel				
Gas/mileage	\$0.66	700	Mile	\$462
Conference, Symposia registration	\$2,000	1		\$2,000
Conference, Symposia airfare	\$1,500	1		\$1,500
WORK ELEMENT 5 SUBTOTAL				\$3,962
OTHER DIRECT COSTS				
Equipment				
Software subscriptions (project mgt., enewsletter)	\$ 500	\$ 1	Various	\$ 500
Supplies and Materials				
Office supplies (consumables)	\$ 1,000	\$ 1	Various	\$ 1,000
OTHER DIRECT COSTS SUBTOTAL				\$ 1,500
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS				\$ 272,313.50
Indirect Costs				
Administrative Overhead	Percentage=	\$base		
	0.1	\$272,313.50		\$27,231.35
TOTAL REQUESTED AMOUNT				\$299,544.85
THIRD PARTY MATCH (RIVER NETWORK GRANT)				\$15,000.00
TOTAL IN-KIND MATCH				\$37,260.00
TOTAL PROJECT COST (GRANT AMOUNT + IN-KIND MATCH)				\$351,804.85
LEVERAGE PERCENTAGE (IN-KIND MATCH/TOTAL REQUESTED AMOUNT)				12.4%

Budget Narrative

The Budget Proposal is structured so that costs are allocated to the specific work element to which they pertain. However, it should be understood that the majority of costs associated with each work element require staff administration, therefore the bulk of the funding request is in alignment with that need. In addition to the direct costs that are specific to individual work elements, the “Other Direct Costs” section of the proposal relates to equipment and supplies that will be used throughout the entire project, and are associated with every work element.

Salaries and Wages

Costs listed in the “Salaries and Wages” (and in red in the budget proposal) are unpaid volunteer hours from the Council’s board. The two Board members authorized by the Council’s board to serve as leaders of the proposed project—Jim Evans and Steve Smallcombe—will volunteer two hours/week throughout the two-year grant period to directing the project on behalf of the Board. These tasks will primarily involve consultant management, review of draft materials, and other direction and guidance activities as needed for each work element. The remaining board members will collectively volunteer an additional one hour/week for the entire grant period to provide complementary project management and oversight services.

Based on past projects and statewide best practices for grant reporting and non-profit management, the average value of volunteer time in California is \$31.80 per hour. At this rate and based on the committed volunteer hours described above, the Council Board is providing \$37,260 worth of non-federal in-kind support to the project. This represents 7.4% of the total amount requested from BRM.

Fringe Benefits

No fringe benefits are included in the cost proposal.

Travel

The cost proposal assumes that restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic allow travel and in-person meetings to support project implementation. The proposal assumes that travel will occur via automobile, and reimburses mileage based on the federal mileage rate. Federal mileage rate for 2023 is \$0.595 so \$0.60 is on par with non-profit operations in the state. Most travel is associated with personal vehicle use (gas and mileage) to and from local meetings and events conducted by the Watershed Director and Americorps intern under Work Element 1. Additional motor vehicle use is expected under Work Element 5 (Maintaining a Community Presence) which also includes the potential for annual travel within the United States to attend conferences or high level meetings. Work Element 5 contains a line item for the registration fees associated with conferences, symposia, and other related events (\$2,000).

Equipment

Equipment purchases focus primarily on the online tools necessary to manage and deliver the proposed group development and strategic work planning activities, as well as communication with volunteers and stakeholders. Purchases include (\$500):

- Software Subscriptions. Costs reflect annual subscriptions for the following cloud-based applications that will be used throughout the project:
 - AirTable - Project management and collaboration tool
 - MailChimp - Email/e-newsletter platform
 - SquareSpace - Website platform
- Software Contingency. This is necessary to cover costs of any additional software that proves necessary to successful project implementation, such as Adobe Acrobat Pro, Esri Arc GIS, and/or Microsoft Office. Price is based on a conservative estimate of potential software needs.

Materials and Supplies

Allowances for education materials and office supplies are based on past experience for similar efforts in Mariposa County, including both past Council projects and past projects implemented by project partners. “Education and Outreach Materials (printed)” refers to printing costs associated with flyers, posters, meeting packets, and other physical content used to promote and implement the group development activities, as well as to print and bind at least three copies of the Annual Report. “Office Supplies (consumable)” refers to standard office supplies, such as writing implements, postage, and other materials needed to conduct basic management and administration tasks.

Under Element 2 (Water Quality Monitoring Program) \$5,000 is budgeted to purchase all new water quality monitoring equipment and supplies. The budget assumes that there will be up to 10 monitoring locations, each requiring its own volunteer kit. Each site will require a grab sampler, Ph/water temperature meter, conductivity meter, and dissolved oxygen meter. Solutions and materials needed to calibrate monitoring equipment are also included. In addition, a printed training manual and data sheets will accompany each water quality monitoring kit in order to ensure protocol consistency.

Contractual

The project involves hiring consultants/contractors to assist with carrying out the work in the proposed project. Contracts are described below by general task type/purpose.

Work Element #1: Grow the capacity and sustainability of the organization

Watershed Director. This work element allows for a part time executive level watershed director to implement and oversee all aspects of the other four work elements. The work elements will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out aspects of the grant. The contracted amounts will be for the director salary (\$50,000 annually for a period of three

years) plus the allocated gas/mileage costs (\$480.48 for three years). As a contract position, no additional benefits are included.

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for effectively implementing the *Watershed Work Plan* objectives called for in this grant, will be the basis for contractor selection. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Americorp Volunteer. A volunteer will be brought on board as part of a Sierra Nevada Americorps Partnership (SNAP) program with the Sierra Nevada Alliance. This volunteer would be secured for an 11-month contract under the SNAP program and would support the watershed director in implementing all work elements under this grant. According to the SNAP website,

The Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership (SNAP) invites Sierra Nevada conservation organizations, agencies, and tribal governments in California and Nevada to apply to host an AmeriCorps member/s by becoming a SNAP Host Site for the upcoming program year. SNAP Host Sites gain full-time AmeriCorps Members who complete a national service term of 11 months serving at and for your organization/agency from November 1st–September 30th. SNAP members serve while increasing host site capacities in the following categories:

- 1. Watershed assessments, monitoring, and restoration*
- 2. Environmental education and outreach projects*
- 3. Volunteer recruitment and support*

Hosting a SNAP AmeriCorps member is also a rewarding opportunity to mentor the future environmental workforce, strengthen partnerships within the Sierra conservation community and inject enthusiasm with esprit de corps into the workplace.

According to the SNAP program costs for host sites, given that the UMRWC is a member group, the contract amount (\$23,500) will be for an 11-month volunteer plus allocated gas/mileage costs (\$377.52).

Work Element #2 Water Quality Monitoring Program

Training Video Production. Under this work element, a 10-15 minute training video will be produced to provide consistent instruction to volunteers on how to be safe on the river, how to collect samples, and how to care for their kits. In the past, this work had been performed by paid staff who were required to plan and conduct in-person training twice per year. This proved to be time-consuming and resource intensive. Since protocols do not change much (if at all) from year to year, a training video is a far more efficient means of educating volunteers, creating consistency, and ensuring quality control. The contractual

elements of the training video production tasks will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out the group development activities. The contract amount will be for the contract services costs (\$4,000) involved in the work element.

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for producing compelling and engaging educational materials. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Work Element #3: Education and Awareness Campaign

Graphic Design. Under this work element, a graphic design contractor will be secured to facilitate the design, review, and production of educational and promotional materials, including (but not limited to) brochures, signage, social media content, branded assets, etc. The contractual elements of the graphic design and production tasks will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out the group development activities. The contract amount will be for the contract services costs (\$40,000) involved in the work element.

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for producing compelling and engaging educational materials. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Mapping. Under this work element, a mapping contractor will be secured to facilitate the design, review, and production of detailed maps to be used in educational materials. The contractual elements of the graphic design and production tasks will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out the group development activities. The contract amount will be for the contract services costs (\$10,000).

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for producing compelling and engaging educational materials. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Construction. Under this work element, a contractor to construct framing or exhibit boards used in signage and/or posting of educational materials will be secured. The contractual elements of the construction tasks will be performed under a single fixed-price contract, which will be awarded through a proposal process and conducted in accordance with all applicable requirements for publicizing, noticing, evaluating, and otherwise carrying out the group development activities. The contract amount will be for the contract services costs (\$13,000).

Proposals will include descriptions of the time, rates, supplies, and materials that interested contractors expect to be required for each task. This information, along with prospective contractor's plan for producing compelling and engaging educational materials. Proposals will be evaluated by a sub-committee of the Council's board using criteria that will be determined and written upon receiving funding, and included in the noticing of the request for proposals.

Work Element #4: Build a Volunteer Base

Contractual tasks under this work element include developing social media content for volunteer-raising purposes. It is likely that the Graphic Designer contracted under Work Element 3 would be used to take on this task. The contract amount will be to create 4-5 social media posts and reels each week (\$5,000).

As a "volunteer-raising" event, the Council will conduct an annual showing of the Wild and Scenic Film Festival in collaboration with the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL). The contract amount will be to secure the films shown in the program (\$1,700 per event).

Third Party In-Kind Contributions

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council received a \$15,000 Stewardship Impact Award as part of the 2023 River Network/US Forest Service Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Partners program. This funding will be used in collaboration with Sierra National Forest as part of an 18-month program to kick-off the planning needed to reinstate the organization's once robust community-based water quality monitoring program. Given the actions outlined in Work Element 2 to expand and launch the water quality monitoring efforts, these funds are presented as in-kind contributions to that effort.

Environmental and Regulatory Compliance Costs

The project proposes no environmental and regulatory compliance costs.

Indirect Costs

The Council proposes a *de minimis* rate of 10% to address indirect costs.

III. Environmental and Cultural Resources Compliance

The proposed project exclusively involves watershed group development and *Watershed Work Plan* implementation. With the exception of potential installation of signage on federal lands, none of the issues associated with NEPA, ESA, and NHPA are applicable to the current scope of work. Should new sign locations require ground-disturbing activities, all actions will include consultation with NEPA, ESA, and NHPA consideration within the respective federal agency.

IV. Required Permits or Approvals

As a largely group development and watershed planning project, no permits or approvals are required. However, for the water quality monitoring component (Work Element 1) of the project, an annual research permit from the National Park Service (Yosemite National Park) is required. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council currently holds an active research permit in collaboration with nonprofit education partner, NatureBridge. The permit requires that any data collected be shared in the form of an annual report to Yosemite National Park's Division of Resources Management and Science. At the conclusion of each reporting cycle, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and NatureBridge apply for a permit for the coming monitoring year. A letter of support from the National Park Services is included in this application.

V. Overlap or Duplication of Effort Statement

As noted in the Budget Proposal section, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council received a \$15,000 Stewardship Impact Award as part of the 2023 River Network/US Forest Service Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Partners program. This funding is being used in collaboration with Sierra National Forest as part of an 18-month program (July, 2023-Dec. 2024) to kick-off the planning needed to reinstate the organization's once robust community-based water quality monitoring program. Given the actions outlined in Work Element 2 to expand and launch the water quality monitoring efforts, these funds are presented as in-kind contributions to that effort.

The River Network grant is intended to serve as a planning precursor to the work undertaken within Work Element 2. The River Network funds are allowing the Watershed Council to lay the foundation for the broader re-examination of protocols, re-establishment of partnerships, and assessment of needs to re-launch the Watershed Council's previous community-based water quality monitoring program. Work Element 2 will pick up where the River Network effort stops.

Under Work Element 2, in consultation with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, federal agencies, and community partners like NatureBridge and Mariposa Trails, the UMRWC will reinvigorate and expand its water quality monitoring program along the Merced River. Thanks to a River Network/US Forest Service grant, work to begin framing this effort is underway. The UMRWC will consider incorporating new protocols in response to new threats. With increasingly repeated intervals of catastrophic wildland fire within the Merced River watershed (over 25 events since 2000 and over 250,000 acres), understanding the run-off constituents in the river is critical. With the increasing presence of harmful algal blooms due to repeated years of drought and low water temperatures, working with federal agency partners will be essential to monitor and provide information to the community. Lastly, presence and absence of benthic macroinvertebrates in the river is a vital indicator of river and watershed health: some are more sensitive to pollution than others, and if the more pollution sensitive organisms are missing, a pollution problem is likely. As an integral part of this work element, consideration will be given to expanding protocols to include monitoring of post fire events, harmful algal blooms, and benthic macroinvertebrates.

Specific actions include:

- Implementing the River Network/USFS grant by 2025
- Re-evaluating and determining monitoring sites
- Working with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into monitoring practices
- Collaborating with tribes, school district, and other NGOs (like NatureBridge and Mariposa Trails) to secure volunteers
- Establishing a quarterly monitoring calendar
- Ensuring annual reporting is completed to state and national database
- Reporting out on findings to public via social media, e-newsletters, and website

VI. Conflict of Interest Statement

Per 2 CFR §1402.112, “Financial Assistance Interior Regulation” the Upper Merced River Watershed Council knows of no actual or potential conflict of interest at the time of the submission of this funding request. If awarded, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council project managers will establish internal controls that include, at a minimum, procedures to identify, disclose, and mitigate or eliminate identified conflicts of interest. If awarded, we understand that the Upper Merced River Watershed Council is responsible for notifying the Financial Assistance Officer in writing of any conflicts of interest that may arise during the life of the award, including those that have been reported by sub recipients.

Applicability. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council will take steps to ensure that any efforts completed by contractors or associates of the organization under the award of this funding proposal will avoid conflicts of interest in their responsibilities under or with respect to Federal financial assistance agreements. It is understood that in the procurement of supplies, equipment, construction, and services by recipients and by sub recipients, the conflict-of-interest provisions in 2 CFR§200.318 apply.

Restrictions on Lobbying. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council understands that non-Federal entities are strictly prohibited from using funds under a grant or cooperative agreement for lobbying activities and must provide the required certifications and disclosures pursuant to 43 CFR §18 and 31 USC §1352.

VII. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council is registered in the SAM system under the Unique Entity Identifier VXW8LPHE3M16.

Our organization's EIN/TIN is 26-2083214 and our DUNS is 945924806.

VIII. Letters of Support

The Council is pleased to include the following letters of support for this application.

Federal Agencies

- National Park Service, Yosemite National Park
- US Forest Service, Sierra National Forest
- US Forest Service, Stanislaus National Forest
- Bureau of Land Management, Mother Lode Field Office
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Tribal

- Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation

Local Agencies

- Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

Local and Regional Non-Governmental Agencies

- Merced River Conservation Committee
- NatureBridge, Yosemite National Park
- CalWild
- Mariposa Trails
- River Network
- American Rivers / Wild and Scenic Rivers Coalition
- Sierra Nevada Alliance



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Yosemite National Park
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite National Park, CA 95389

December 1, 2023

To whom it may concern:

The mission of the National Park Service (NPS) is to preserve and protect resources “for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” The NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world. On behalf of the NPS in Yosemite National Park, it is with great enthusiasm that I write to you in support of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council’s application for the Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management grant to launch water quality, education, and stewardship initiatives contained in its newly adopted Watershed Work Plan.

In 2014, the NPS finalized in a Record of Decision the Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan. This plan provides management guidance for the protection and enhancement of the 81 of the 122 miles of the Merced Wild and Scenic River that flow through Yosemite National Park. The Merced River Plan represented a rich collaboration with the public, including research scientists, park partners (like the Upper Merced River Watershed Council), traditionally-associated American Indian tribes, and park staff to explore the vision for the future of the river. The plan prescribes measures to protect and enhance the Merced River in Yosemite, including ongoing restoration, monitoring, and a commitment to public involvement.

As the plan moves forward, the NPS is pleased to continue its collaborative relationship with the Upper Merced River Watershed Council. The WaterSMART grant would enable the Council to re-establish its community-based water quality monitoring program, rally volunteers, and advance education efforts regarding the Upper Merced River. This effort would benefit and support the work of Yosemite National Park by promoting the active initiatives taking place within the Merced River corridor in Yosemite to enhance community understanding.

Thank you again for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Cicely Muldoon
Superintendent



File Code: 3500; 1500
Route To:

Date: November 29, 2023

Subject: Letter of support - Upper Merced River Watershed Council, Cooperative Watershed Mgmt Program Phase I grant

To: To whom it may concern

The Sierra National Forest strongly supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant to launch important water quality monitoring, education, and volunteer-raising initiatives along the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed.

The Sierra National Forest has had a very productive working relationship with the Upper Merced River Watershed Council since 2004 when we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant would provide much-needed funding to allow the Watershed Council to expand its educational reach and engage a diverse community in protecting water quality and Merced River watershed health.

The Council has been an important catalyst in work on Forest Service lands. As such, they are well aware of the critical issues facing both the watershed and the region and have been implementing important volunteer-based programs to safeguard the Upper Merced River and address forest health. The previously signed MOU governed our cooperative efforts on a number of projects on trails in and around the Merced River Canyon. Sierra National Forest personnel provided safety training to the many volunteers organized by the Council to work on these trails. Forest Service specialists were also involved in planning work for removal of invasive weeds on the trails. Most recently, we have partnered with them through a River Network Stewardship Award grant to kick off efforts to reinvigorate their community-based water quality monitoring program.

The Merced Wild and Scenic River is a vital link not only for the health of the area, but as an integral part of the beauty and majesty of Yosemite National Park. Visitors to Yosemite are critical to the economic health and stability of Mariposa County, and efforts to protect and enhance the Merced Wild and Scenic River bring more than environmental health. These efforts also ensure that the river plays a critical role in the tourism we depend on, allowing us to reach, educate, and welcome more diverse communities.

This application has the Forest's endorsement, as it will have broad-reaching benefits to the environment and the community of Mariposa.

Sincerely,

DEAN GOULD
Forest Supervisor

cc: Judi Tapia, John Polisar





File Code: 1580**Date:** November 28, 2023**Route To:****Subject:** WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Grant - Letter of Support for Upper Merced River Watershed Council 2023 Phase 1 Application**To:** To whom it may concern at the Bureau of Reclamation

The Stanislaus National Forest strongly supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's (UMRWC) application for the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant to launch water quality monitoring, education, and stewardship initiatives called for in its newly adopted Upper Merced River Watershed Work Plan.

A good portion of the Merced River Watershed is contained within the Stanislaus National Forest including a portion of the river canyon; however, the river canyon and activities in that area are administered by the Sierra National Forest under an agreement with our forest. For that reason, the UMRWC and the Sierra National Forest developed a Memorandum of Understanding under which volunteers have carried out a number of projects on Stanislaus National Forest lands.

Given the wildfires on our lands as well as other threats to the natural resources in the area the Merced River watershed, and the Merced River Canyon in particular needs attention. The UMRWC has a history of organizing volunteers for the types of projects that are so necessary. Multiple devastating wildfires in the last few years have swept through the River Canyon (El Portal, 2014, Detwiler 2017, Ferguson 2018, Briceburg 2019). The Forest lands which border the Canyon are in desperate need of work-prescribed fire and/or thinning as well as invasive weed removal. These events also pose threats to water quality, for which a comprehensive monitoring effort—like the one called for in their grant proposal—is desperately needed.

The initial grant was critical to reengaging stakeholders in the area including the Stanislaus National Forest, and the soon to be releases action plan the UMRWC has developed is a good start. The potential under this WaterSMART Grant to allow the Watershed Council to continue its engagement and transition into action on initiatives within the watershed is important to the Stanislaus National Forest's management efforts in this area. This grant opportunity would provide much-needed funding to allow the Watershed Council to expand its reach, broaden awareness of critical issues facing the river, and engage more of the community in launching projects that protect the watershed. It will also allow the organization to regain its footing as a stewardship powerhouse and move toward greater operational sustainability. The Upper Merced is a vital link not only for the health of the area, but as an integral part of the beauty and majesty of the area including Yosemite National Park. Visitors to Yosemite are critical to the economic health and stability of Mariposa County, and efforts to protect and enhance our forested lands bring more than environmental health, they also ensure that recreation and tourism opportunities continue.



Given staffing shortages and increasing demands on our National Forests, the Forest Service is increasingly reliant on partners such as the UMRWC to get needed work done. I support this grant application because I believe it has the potential to have broad-reaching benefits to the environment and the community of Mariposa and surrounding area.

JASON KUIKEN
Forest Supervisor

cc: Michael Jow, Jim Junette, Kirsten Rylands



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Mother Lode Field Office
5152 Hillside Circle
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
www.blm.gov/office/mother-lode-field-office

November 30, 2023

To whom it may concern:

The Mother Lode Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is pleased to support the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's (UMRWC) application for the BOR WaterSmart Grant. The BLM has partnered with the UMRWC beginning in 2003 with the controlling of "invasive" weeds along the Wild and Scenic Merced River. Funds obtained by the Watershed Council from a California Department of Conservation grant (and others) enabled the BLM to bring in crews from a nearby California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation Camp in Mt. Bullion (inmate crews).

Over several years, the crews used weed eating and hand pulling to control and remove yellow star-thistle — first in a 2-mile section, and then working upstream for 7 miles. This was an enormous success that was only possible due to funds and partnership with the UMRWC! In addition, the BLM has participated with the Watershed Council in the Great Sierra Cleanup, water quality monitoring, and numerous other worthy projects.

The BLM has keenly felt the loss the active watershed group! After the end of the Watershed Coordinator funding and then a devastating fire that burned the Watershed Council's office and records, the group has existed primarily in name only. During the last two years, we've seen that turn around entirely. With the 2021-2023 WaterSMART planning grant, they re-established their visibility in our community and re-energized supporters. Now they are ready to tackle initiatives outlined in their newly adopted Watershed Work Plan. The possibility that under a second WaterSmart Grant, this group could be restored to its previous level of activity in service to the river and the watershed is critical. Please help them continue the momentum to ultimately return to sustainability.

And it comes at a time of crisis for the Watershed. Two devastating wildfires in the last 5 years have swept through this Merced River Canyon (Ferguson, 2018, and Detwiler 2019). The national forests which border are in desperate need of work — prescribed fire and / or thinning. But the federal agencies do not have the money or resources to undertake this work. Wildfires have an enormous negative impact on water supply. The Merced River, downstream, flows directly to homes and farms of the Central Valley.

So, the possibilities that this grant offers are enormous. We definitely support this application.

David Greenwood

Bureau of Land Management

Mother Lode Field Office

Merced Wild and Scenic River at Briceburg

Outdoor Recreation Planner/River Ranger

dgreenwo@blm.gov

INTERIOR REGION 10 • CALIFORNIA-GREAT BASIN

CALIFORNIA*, NEVADA*, OREGON*

* PARTIAL



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
West Coast Region
650 Capitol Mall, Suite 5-100
Sacramento, California 95814-4700

December 1, 2023

Ms. Robin Graber
Water Resources and Planning Office
US Bureau of Reclamation
PO 25007, 86-63000
Denver, Colorado, 80225

Re: Upper Merced River Watershed Council WaterSMART Grant, Letter of Support

Dear Ms. Graber:

This letter is in regard to the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) support of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's (UMRWC) grant proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) for a three-year WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase 1 grant. The UMRWC is a nonprofit organization that initiates, encourages, and supports projects to protect and enhance the Merced River watershed ecosystem located in the southern Sierra-Nevada Mountains, California. The UMRWC is proposing to continue building on their first WaterSMART grant that will aid in rebuilding capacity for the organization. As you are likely aware, the need to rebuild capacity is a result of a fire that destroyed the UMRWC's office in 2012.

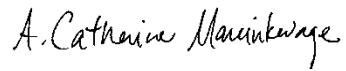
UMRWC has successfully collaborated with local, State, Federal, and tribal partners on issues in the upper Merced River Watershed. Through the original two-year WaterSMART grant, UMRWC developed a four-year Watershed Work Plan, which describes objectives, strategies, and priorities to aid in the conservation of habitats along the Wild and Scenic Merced River. Additionally, UMRWC is slated to be a signatory of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in May, 2024, that includes key State and Federal agencies. A focus of the MOU is to bring stakeholders together to evaluate the feasibility for reintroducing salmon and steelhead to the upper Merced River. Ensuring that UMRWC has adequate capacity to engage in these types of efforts will significantly contribute to the success of the MOU and thereby, the recovery of NMFS' listed species in the Merced River.

We encourage Reclamation to fully consider UMRWC's grant proposal because it will help provide significant advancement for collaboration among key stakeholders in the upper watershed, which in turn will aid in the protection of the upper Merced River ecosystem. NMFS appreciates Reclamation's consideration of this proposal.



If you have any questions or comments regarding this letter please contact Jonathan Ambrose at jonathan.ambrose@noaa.gov or at (916) 930-3717.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. Catharine Marcinkevage".

Cathy Marcinkevage
Assistant Regional Administrator
California Central Valley Office



**AMERICAN INDIAN COUNCIL
OF MARIPOSA COUNTY**

SOUTHERN SIERRA MIWUK NATION
P.O. Box 186 · Mariposa, California 95338
SouthernSierraMiwukNation.org

Chairperson
Sandra Chapman

Vice Chairperson
Waylon Coats

Secretary
Tara Fouch-Moore

Treasurer
Michelle Boswell

Director At Large
Acacia Coats

December 4, 2023

To Whom it May Concern at the Bureau of Reclamation,

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (also known as the American Indian Council of Mariposa County) supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant to implement important water quality monitoring, education, and volunteer-raising initiatives along the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed.

The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation are people indigenous to Mariposa County and Yosemite, CA. Today we live within the Mariposa region and surrounding communities within the Merced River watershed, though some have spread throughout the state and country. Our people continue to host ceremonies and events throughout the year which allow for family and extended families to come together to give thanks and pray for all our relations.

The collaborative work of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council is essential, and the work they intend to conduct through a WaterSMART grant is in alignment with our desires for a healthy river and watershed. We have engaged in conversations regarding the importance of water quality in the river and teaching people to be good stewards. Most recently, we have worked alongside each other in support of an effort to study restoring fall-run salmon to the upper Merced River. We applaud their efforts to protect water quality and biodiversity within the Merced Wild and Scenic River watershed through volunteer-led community action and in collaboration with the people of the Southern Sierra Miwuk nation.

Groups like the Upper Merced River Watershed Council are needed now more than ever. This WaterSMART application has our strongest endorsement, as it will have broad-reaching benefits to not only the immediate watershed, but to advance understanding and appreciation of the river for generations to come.

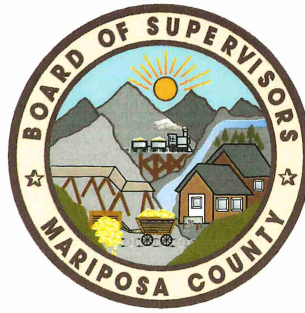
4630 Ben Hur Road · P.O. Box 186 · Mariposa, Ca. 95338
209-742-2244 · 209- 742-2233 FAX
Email: ssmiwuknation@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Tara Fouch-Moore
Tribal Secretary
Director of Landscape Stewardship
Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation
American Indian Council of Mariposa County

Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

District 1 ... ROSEMARIE SMALLCOMBE
District 2 SHANNON POE
District 3 DANETTE TOSO
District 4 WAYNE FORSYTHE
District 5 MILES MENETREY



DALLIN KIMBLE
County Administrative Officer

DANIELLE BONDSHU
Clerk of the Board

P. O. Box 784
Mariposa, CA 95338
(209) 966-3222
(800) 736-1252
www.mariposacounty.org/board

November 27th, 2023

The Upper Merced River Watershed Council
PO Box 5008-201
Mariposa, CA 95338

Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Grant

Dear Upper Merced River Watershed Council,

On behalf of the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, I urge you to approve the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for the WaterSmart Grant Program to implement the water quality, education, and stewardship initiatives contained in its newly adopted Watershed Work Plan. UMRWC's application would facilitate a collaboration of stakeholders interested in preserving natural resources, mitigating the effects of disasters, enhancing recreational opportunities, and ensuring the Wild and Scenic Merced River will be enjoyed by many generations to come.

The Merced River meanders more than 145 miles with most of those miles traveling through Mariposa County. 122.5 miles are protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Except for small sections of privately owned land in the Merced River Canyon, the waters of the Merced flow over federal lands managed by Yosemite National Park, the Stanislaus National Forest (contracted for management purposes to the Sierra National Forest), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

In addition to being a delightful resource for Mariposa, the Merced River is enjoyed by the nearly five million annual visitors that come to recreate on public lands. Those visitors are essential to Mariposa County's economy. Further downstream, the Merced River supplies water for the San Joaquin Valley, called "the food basket of the world," which produces two-thirds of the nation's fruit and ninety percent of nuts grown in the United States.

In the last five years, Mariposa County has experienced an increase in both the frequency and scale of natural disasters. More than 82,000 acres burned adjacent to the Merced River in the 2017 Detwiler Fire. The river canyon was the focus of the 2018 Ferguson Fire, which burned

more than 97,000 acres. Drought, tree mortality, floods, wildfires, rock falls and other disasters have impacted our landscape, our economy, and our quality of life. With disasters and related impacts far beyond the County's ability to mitigate, we continue to depend on nonprofit, state, and federal partners for our success.

UMRWC has, for most of the last twenty years, focused on maintaining collaborative relationships with the U.S. Forest Service and BLM to protect and restore trails in and around the Merced River Canyon. Now, in the face of escalating disasters, those relationships are increasingly important for preservation and restoration of watersheds, forested lands and native flora and fauna. All available resources are needed to engage stakeholders and facilitate the identification and achievement of shared goals and objects.

UMRWC led many such conversations for two decades, enlisting hundreds of volunteers to remove invasive weeds, clear and maintain trails and remove trash from along the Merced River. While UMRWC has suffered setbacks, including funding cuts and a fire that destroyed most of their records, its members created a framework for collaboration that continues today and is vital to our shared future.

WaterSmart grant funds would permit the UMRWC to not only solidify its role as convener of stakeholders focused on the health of the Merced River, but also to expand its reach to include other agencies, more community organizations and individual members and volunteers. The funding would support the development of a shared vision and a strategic work plan focused on remediation of damage caused by recent fires and floods.

The UMRWC and implementation of initiatives contained in its newly adopted Watershed Work Plan can facilitate the preservation of the natural resources in the Merced River watershed for generations to come, thereby providing continued support of our economy and the health of our community. For these reasons, and for the benefit of our residents and the millions of Americans that benefit from the recreational and agricultural opportunities afforded by the Merced River, I urge your approval of the UMRWC grant application.

Thank you for your favorable consideration,

Sincerely,



Miles Menetrey, Chair
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors



Merced River
Conservation Committee

November 20, 2023

United States Bureau of Reclamation
WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase I
Program Coordinator

Re: Letter of Support for Upper Merced River Watershed Council Application for BOR 3-Year WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase 1 Grant

Dear Program Coordinator:

I am writing on behalf of the Merced River Conservation Committee (MRCC), a local volunteer organization of members interested in the Merced River watershed and its future, based in Mariposa County. Our principal interests are fisheries and aquatic habitat, trail and boating recreation, and historic sites. Our members' fish, raft, and hike on the Merced River and are interested in its long-term protection and enhancement. The organization was founded in 2008 to participate in Merced River Hydropower Projects' FERC relicensing and State Water Resources Control Board review of the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Joaquin River and San Francisco Bay-Delta.

MRCC is pleased to support the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for the Bureau's 3-year WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase 1 grant.

Thanks to a successful 2021-2023 WaterSMART grant, the Watershed Council was able to rebrand and reintroduce itself to the community as an organization dedicated to "protecting and enhancing the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed through education, stewardship, and partnership-based projects." Over the course of the grant period, the Council engaged in extensive dialogue and collaboration with a diverse group of community stakeholders, positioning itself as a convener and coordinator of restoration activities in support of the Wild and Scenic Merced River and its watershed. As a product of the grant, the Council developed a four-year **Watershed Work Plan**, laying out the objectives, strategies, and priorities that will protect the river and alleviate adverse watershed conditions identified by the collaborative. Funding is essential if the Watershed Council is to be able to continue its work and begin taking action on objectives in the Work Plan.

Mariposa County is one of the hardest hit counties in the Sierra Nevada, suffering from the consequences of drought, tree mortality, flooding, and catastrophic wildfires since 2012. Implementation of the Merced River **Watershed Work Plan** will provide federal, state, local agencies and interested stakeholders an opportunity in focus on conservation restoration and enhancement efforts within the watershed. Central to the **Watershed Work Plan** are the consensus voices of federal agency partners (National Park Service in Yosemite, Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests, and Bureau of Land Management), along with the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, and a

host of local groups and concerned community members. The Council seeks a second WaterSMART grant that will build catapult their capacity to

- Launch the Watershed Work Plan which prioritizes interagency/local stakeholder collaboration
- Create a comprehensive watershed education and outreach campaign
- Expand efforts to protect water quality and biodiversity within the Merced Wild and Scenic River watershed through volunteer-led community action, and
- Restore the organization's capacity to drive its objectives by hiring a dedicated coordinator.

The Upper Merced Watershed Council is an outstanding organization with a proven record of success in providing leadership and community focus in the watershed through its education, stewardship, and partnership-based projects. When people in Mariposa County think about protection of the Merced River, they think about the Upper Merced Watershed Council. Thank you for considering my recommendations for funding this project in our community.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Martin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue background behind the text.

Michael Martin, Ph.D.
Director
PO Box 2216
Mariposa, CA 95338

Email: mmartin@sti.net
Telephone: 209 -966-6406



YOSEMITE
GOLDEN GATE
OLYMPIC
PRINCE WILLIAM
FOREST

naturebridge.org

December 1, 2023

To whom it may concern at the Bureau of Reclamation:

On behalf of NatureBridge in Yosemite National Park, it is with great pleasure that I write to you in support of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's WaterSMART Grant application to implement its *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan*, which includes reinvigorating its community-based water quality monitoring program.

NatureBridge in Yosemite (formed as Yosemite Institute in 1971) reaches roughly 15,000 students per year—from elementary school to college—and teaches them to be stewards of our public lands and the planet. School groups and organizations come from as nearby as our local Yosemite gateway communities, with most coming from areas throughout California, as well as the U.S. and internationally. Students also come from all backgrounds and socioeconomic ranges, and we provide nearly \$500,000 each year in scholarship support. NatureBridge has a professional education staff of 43 individuals that lead student groups as part of our residential science programs for up to 5 days at a time. Our education team collaborates with the National Park Service and partners like the Upper Merced River Watershed Council on the coordination of stewardship projects as well as helping to communicate scientific research and environmental outcomes to diverse youth.

For over a decade, NatureBridge has partnered with the Upper Merced River Watershed Council on implementation of a community-based water quality monitoring program. Data collected by Watershed Council volunteers and NatureBridge students is used by the National Park Service in Yosemite to inform management decisions regarding the protection and enhancement of the Merced Wild and Scenic River's unique values. Under this grant application, the Watershed Council will expand its water quality program to include indicators of post-fire conditions and monitoring of macroinvertebrates as key indicators of river health. We believe that this project will inspire more informed and active community stewardship of our public lands, especially in the Merced River watershed.

As an environmental education organization, this project will aid us in helping Yosemite National Park reach its educational goals while playing a role in support of the entire Merced River watershed. NatureBridge is in full support of the Watershed Council's objectives of establishing strong community partnerships, expanding educational opportunities, and communicating broadly to help enhance understanding of the watershed. We view our partnership with the Watershed Council via the WaterSmart Grant to have long reaching positive outcomes for not only our work with students, but the larger watershed community as well. For these reasons, NatureBridge gives this application its strongest endorsement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Corinne M. Dedini".

Corinne Dedini
Yosemite Director
NatureBridge

MARIPOSA TRAILS

BUILDING TRAILS AND COMMUNITY

December 1, 2023

To whom it may concern at the Bureau of Reclamation,

Thank-you for this opportunity to support the effort of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council (UMRWC) to seek a *WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Grant*. Mariposa Trails looks forward to the day when the UMRWC becomes a sustainable powerhouse for the river and watershed. Through past programs, the UMRWC has been recognized as a caretaker of the watershed; this is its legacy, and is the reason we lend our support for your application to resume this position.

The identity of Mariposa County is grounded in its natural landscapes; the health of the upper Merced River watershed is essential to the county's way of life. Therefore, it's critical to support proponents of the watershed. Over the last several years, the efforts of the UMRWC to define its path forward via the *Watershed Work Plan* is commendable, and a testament to the vitality of the organization, and of the community's support for the UMRWC's mission.

Your application to enable the rebirth of the UMRWC is timely. The implementation of Yosemite National Park's reservation system, which caps visitor access to the park, will result in greater public demand to recreate on adjacent lands. The need for interagency collaboration, education, protection, stewardship and signage is imminent. We hope you are successful in your pursuit of funds to do so.

Bill King

Executive Director of Mariposa Trails

OUR MISSION

We provide trail access and promote its use for adventure, health, stewardship, education and community prosperity.



CONNECT WITH US

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mariposatrails@sti.net

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Mariposa CA 95338

www.mariposatrails.org

501(c)(3) Tax ID No. 85-1241296



Nov 30, 2023

Christina Munoz
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program

RE: Support for Upper Merced River Watershed Council WaterSMART grant project

To whom it may concern at the Bureau of Reclamation:

On behalf of CalWild, I am pleased to write a letter in support of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's (Watershed Council) proposal for a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 grant for watershed group development. As an organization whose mission is to advocate for, protect, and restore public lands on behalf of all throughout the beautiful state of California, CalWild strongly supports this grant application and its focus on implementing actions called for in the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's new 2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan, a direct product of a 2021-2023 Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 grant.

Our work is strongly aligned with the Watershed Council's mission "to protect and enhance the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed through education, stewardship, and partnership-based projects". We support the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's efforts to engage community volunteers, promote greater understanding of the unique needs of the watershed, and advance stewardship of an iconic resource. Also, we were encouraged that the Watershed Council embraced the report findings outlined in the Merced River Wild & Scenic River Corridor Signage & Community Needs Report which CalWild developed in 2022. Securing a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 grant will enable much of the report's recommendations to be implemented. Far from allowing the report to sit on a shelf, we envisioned an organization like the Watershed Council taking the blueprint we created for improving interpretive signage in the Highway 140 corridor and using it as a toolkit for community stakeholders. Securing this grant will enable the Watershed Council to activate this vision, sharing important educational messaging--in multiple languages--regarding LEAVE NO TRACE principles, fire prevention, heritage stories, and wildlife and ecosystem information to the visitors of the Merced Wild and Scenic River corridor along Highway 140.

With the help of a 2021-2023 Cooperative Watershed Management Program grant, the Watershed Council was able to not only connect with CalWild and provide input towards our work on the Merced River, but they revived their presence in the community and re-emerged as



CALWILD

an important voice for the river. We're proud to collaborate with the Upper Merced River Watershed Council and look forward to engaging with them to continue the critical work of educating the community, growing a volunteer base, and achieving greater organizational sustainability. This application has CalWild's strongest endorsement, as it will have broad-reaching benefits to the environment, the community of Mariposa and other nearby communities, and all who visit the Merced Wild and Scenic River.

Sincerely,

André Sanchez

André Sanchez
Community Engagement & Conservation Policy Manager
CalWild (previously going by California Wilderness Coalition)
asanchez@calwild.org
559-975-5097



November 30, 2023

To Whom it May Concern,

River Network strongly supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant to implement important water quality monitoring, education, and volunteer-raising initiatives along the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed. Their work is essential, and a WaterSMART grant will allow them to continue the positive momentum they have built in a relatively short period of time by hiring a watershed coordinator to continue the momentum they have built.

River Network strengthens organizations and leaders to improve and protect their waterways, create climate-resilient communities, and ensure equitable access to safe, affordable drinking water. We accomplish this locally and nationally by responding to the capacity and training needs of organizations and communities, and by synthesizing, elevating, and activating proven and promising practices from the field. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council has proven to be an excellent partner in our collective work.

The Council has been an important catalyst in work on the Merced Wild and Scenic River. In collaboration with River Network, the organization received a \$15,000 US Forest Service Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Impact Award in 2023 to begin revitalizing their community-based water quality monitoring program. A WaterSMART grant would enable this program to not only grow but thrive through volunteer-raising efforts, education, and expanding messages of inclusivity and welcome to some of the most underserved communities in Central California.

As a backbone to the national network of water, justice, and river advocates, we have a unique role to play to influence water leaders to become more equitable, our organizations more diverse, and our practices more inclusive. This WaterSMART application has River Network's strongest endorsement, as it will have broad-reaching benefits to the environment, the community of Mariposa, and throughout greater California.

Sincerely,

Katherine Baer
Vice President, River Programs



Christina Munoz
Bureau of Reclamation
WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225

American Rivers strongly supports the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's application for a Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I grant to implement important water quality monitoring, education, and volunteer-raising initiatives along the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed. Their work is essential, and a WaterSMART grant will allow them to continue participation in expanding the knowledge of Wild and Scenic Rivers within our nationwide coalition of river stewards and managers.

American Rivers protects wild rivers, restores damaged rivers, and conserves clean water for people and nature. As part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Coalition, more than 60 large and small river organizations across the country, like American Rivers and the Council, protect and defend existing and potential Wild and Scenic Rivers and broaden the movement for their conservation by raising awareness about their value. The Upper Merced River Watershed Council has proven to be an excellent partner, voice, and supporter in our collective work.

The Council has been an important catalyst in work on the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed. A WaterSMART grant would enable the Council not only to grow its capacity but to thrive in its representation of the 122 miles of the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its vast watershed within our work.

Just because a river has been designated as Wild and Scenic doesn't mean it doesn't face threats. Today more than ever, river management agency budgets are being cut, river management positions are being eliminated, duties have largely become collateral, and capacity is limited for everything from completing River Management Plans to managing volunteers to conducting water quality monitoring. Groups like the Upper Merced River Watershed Council are needed now more than ever. This WaterSMART application has American Rivers endorsement, as it will have broad-reaching benefits not only to the immediate watershed, but to advance protection of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System nationally.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Moryc".

David Moryc
Senior Director River Protection Program



Protecting the Sierra Nevada since 1993

To whom it may concern,

This letter is submitted to demonstrate the Sierra Nevada Alliance's (Alliance) support for the Upper Merced River Watershed Council, a nonprofit organization based in Mariposa, CA, application to the Bureau of Reclamation for a 3-year WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase 1 grant. The Alliance's mission is to unite people and organizations to protect Sierra Nevada ecosystems and communities. We do this by supporting the capacity of small organizations and watershed groups like the Upper Merced Watershed Council.

Thanks to a successful 2021-2023 WaterSMART grant, the Council was able to rebrand and reintroduce itself to the community as an organization dedicated to "protecting and enhancing the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed through education, stewardship, and partnership-based projects." Over the course of the grant period, the Council engaged in extensive dialogue and collaboration with a diverse group of community stakeholders, positioning itself as a convener and coordinator of restoration activities in support of the Wild and Scenic Merced River and its watershed. As a product of the grant, the Council developed a four-year Watershed Work Plan, laying out the objectives, strategies, and priorities that will protect the river and alleviate adverse watershed conditions identified by the collaborative. Funding is essential if the Watershed Council is to be able to continue its work and begin taking action on objectives in the Work Plan.

We hope that you will fund the Upper Merced Watershed Council's proposal to continue their important work in this crucial Sierra headwater watershed.

Sincerely,

Jenny Hatch

Executive Director

Sierra Nevada Alliance

jenny@sierranevadaalliance.org

**BOARD RESOLUTION
2023-1**

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE SUBMISSION OF A GRANT APPLICATION

WHEREAS, the United States Bureau of Land Management is soliciting applications for the 2024 WaterSMART Cooperative Management Program Phase One; and,

WHEREAS, the Mission of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council is to protect and enhance the Merced Wild and Scenic River and its watershed through education, stewardship, and partnership-based projects; and,

WHEREAS, the Upper Merced River Watershed Council's *2024-2028 Watershed Work Plan* represents the results of a two-year planning process involving federal agency and community stakeholder input regarding the watershed's most immediate and pressing needs; and,

WHEREAS, to implement the *Watershed Work Plan*, a watershed coordinator is required to enhance stakeholder collaboration and accomplish organizational objectives, including advancing the water quality monitoring program, launching a comprehensive education campaign, raising the support of volunteers to achieve stewardship objectives, and maintaining the organization's profile within the community.

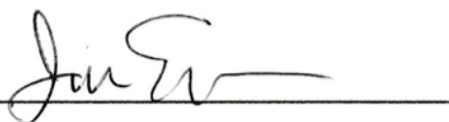
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council authorizes:

- 1) the submission of an application to the above-referenced grant program in an amount not to exceed \$300,000;
- 2) Jim Evans to sign and attest to this Resolution; and,
- 3) Jim Evans and/or Steve Smallcombe to sign and submit said application and any related reports, certifications, etc.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Directors of the Upper Merced River Watershed Council this 3rd of December, 2023 by the following vote:

AYES: Jim Evans, Mikey Goralnick, Margarita King, Kristina Rylands, Rosemarie Smallcombe, Steve Smallcombe, Molly Stephens

NOES: NONE



ATTEST