

An update on the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resilience Project's Wildfire Resilience Action Financial Team and its proposed MOU

Mono County Board of Supervisors

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First, what is the purpose of this agenda item?

The purpose of this agenda item is to have a discussion to see if the Board has questions or concerns about the attached MOU and to find out what information might still be needed for the Board to consider signing the MOU.

Second, what is the objective of this agenda item?

The group of local entities and agencies, including Mono County officials, that wrote the MOU is called the Wildfire Resilience Action Finance Team, or WRAFT.

WRAFT is a part of the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Project (ESSCRP), which is a large-scale wildfire mitigation and forest fuels thinning project on Inyo National Forest lands surrounding local Eastern Sierra communities.

The objective of this agenda item is this: WRAFT is hoping Mono County will sign the MOU, which WRAFT wrote in order to provide a framework for the long term and sustainable funding of the ESSCRP.

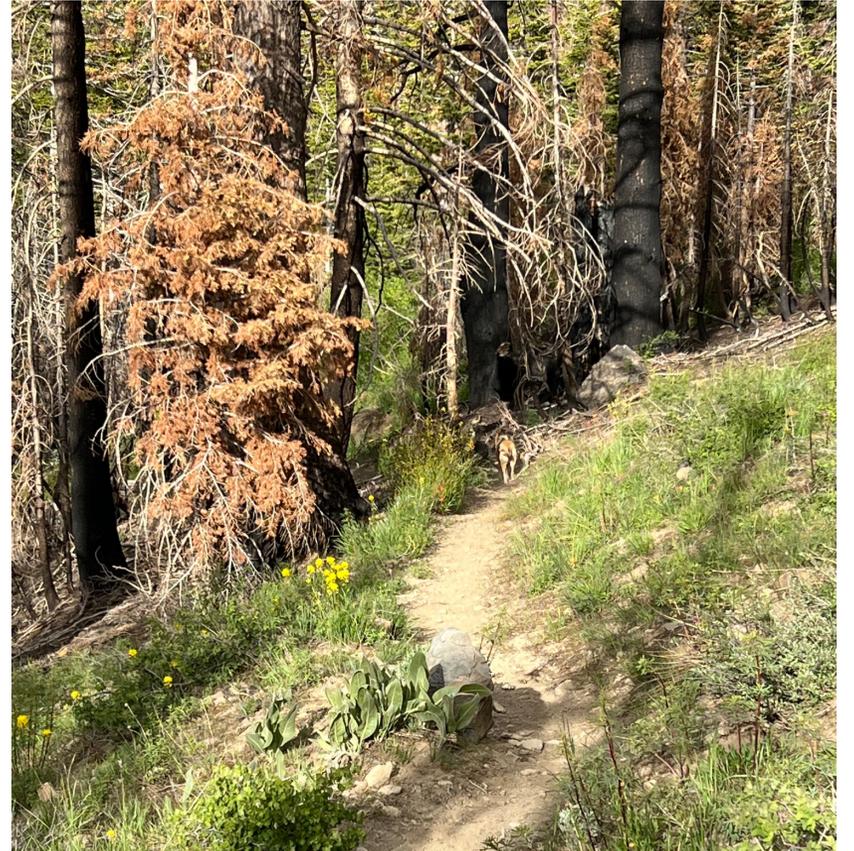
Now, let's go
back in time
briefly...



How was WRAFT formed?

WRAFT, which some of you may know by its previous name, the Finance Action Team (FAT), is a group of local agencies and entities with an interest in the success of the ESCCRP. They formed FAT about two years ago and recently changed the name to WRAFT.

WRAFT has been meeting once a month.



Who serves on WRAFT?

WRAFT includes two members of the Mono County Board of Supervisors who are serving as representatives of the Board but were not formally appointed by the Board to WRAFT: Supervisor Bob Gardner and Supervisor Lynda Salcido.

The other members of WRAFT are the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the U.S. Forest Service Inyo National Forest, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Whitebark Institute, the Mammoth Community Water District, and Alterra Mountain Company.



Why did the ESCCRP decide WRAFT was needed?

The sheer scale of the ESCCRP fuels thinning and forest restoration projects, in terms of the amount of local acres the projects will affect, ranks as one of the largest on-the-ground, landscape-altering projects in the Eastern Sierra since the Los Angeles Aqueduct was built.

For example, the ESCCRP will impact about 56,000 square acres, or about 87 square miles, of Inyo National Forest land surrounding the Town of Mammoth Lakes. There are also several other projects in the ESCCRP pipeline, including plans for a Mono Basin forest fuels treatment project on Inyo National Forest land near local communities.

There are also plans to expand the fuels treatment over time to cover the rest of the Inyo National Forest's forested landscape adjacent to local communities up to the northern border of the Inyo National Forest, which ends at roughly the Conway Summit area.

What has happened since WRAFT was formed?

Through the efforts of WRAFT, new financing opportunities have been identified, including a partnership with two different organizations: **Blue Forest Finance Inc.**, a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, and **World Resources Institute (WRI)**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

Blue Forest is an organization focused on supporting ecological restoration work and identifying the associated benefits of this work to local communities.

WRI works to deploy private capital to make landscapes more resilient to environmental risks using a mechanism called **Forest Resilience Bonds (FRB)**, which allow investors create a bond for forest thinning projects that local organizations/agencies cannot pay for all at once, which in turn allows local agencies to get the work done in an accelerated manner.

But wait! Why can't the Inyo National Forest take care of its own backyard?

Why is the ESSCRP and WRAFT talking about needing an MOU with Blue Forest and WRI in the first place?

According to Nathan Sills, the Inyo National Forest Resources/Planning Staff Officer, who is a member of WRAFT and has been working on fuels thinning projects since he arrived on the Inyo in 2018, the answer is twofold: One, a steady and continuing decline in the relative amount of funding allocated to all USFS National Forests across the country by Congress since the 1980s, and, two, a steady decline in the ability of the USFS to staff the agency at an efficient and effective degree.

The Inyo can no longer do projects at this scale internally, he said.

What success has Blue Forest had with FRBs?

Blue Forest's 2018 pilot project using FRBs was a success, according to the Yuba Water Agency, which used the bonds to complete a forest fuels treatment project on 15,000 acres of the Yuba River watershed.

The Agency was able to complete the work quickly, using \$1M in funds to leverage \$3M worth of work, as seen in this slide from a presentation by the Agency to the Mammoth Community Water District on March 21, 2024. The MCWD is a member of WRAFT.

Forest Resilience Bonds and Blue Forest

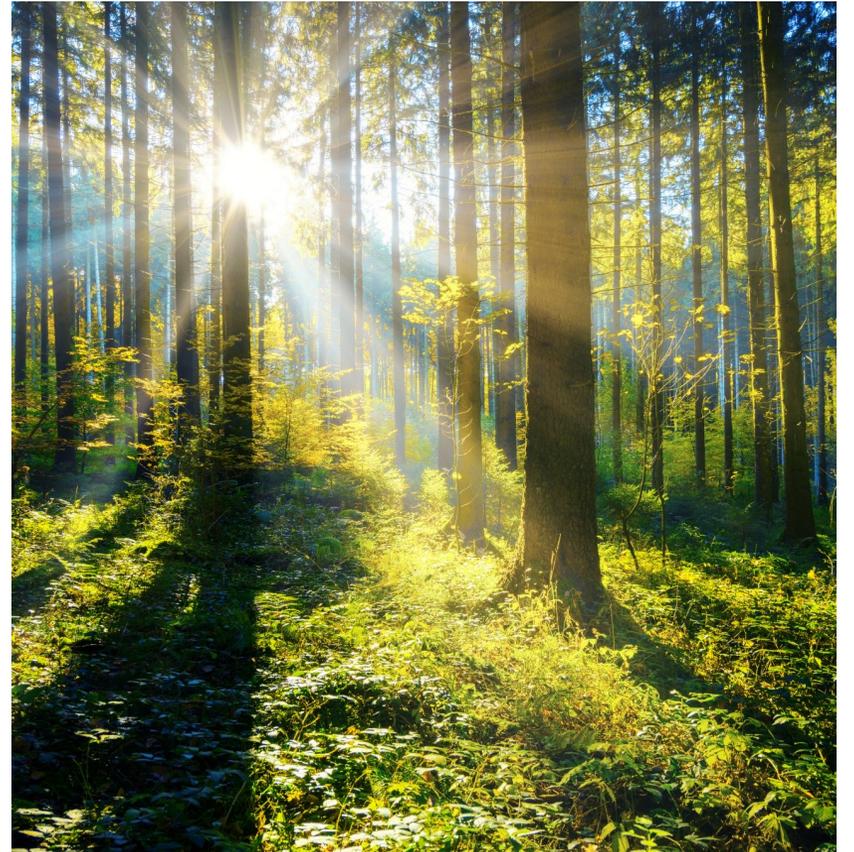


- First-ever Forest Resilience Bond piloted by Yuba Water and Blue Forest in 2018 with 15,000-acre Yuba 1 Project
 - Yuba Water contributed over 4 years \$1.5 M to leverage \$3 M
 - Project was completed in 2023
- Then in 2022 the 26,000-acre Yuba 2 Project was funded via second Forest Resilience Bond
 - Yuba Water contributes over 10-years \$6 M to leverage \$18 M
- Yuba Water's investments in these innovative FRBs led to the NYFP MOU
 - Pivotal to increasing pace and scale of this work,
 - attracts local implementation contractors and local workforce development
 - demonstrated NYFP's ability to get work done—which directly led to \$130 million in new Federal funding for our watershed in 2023

Blue Forest's success prompted WRAFT to investigate

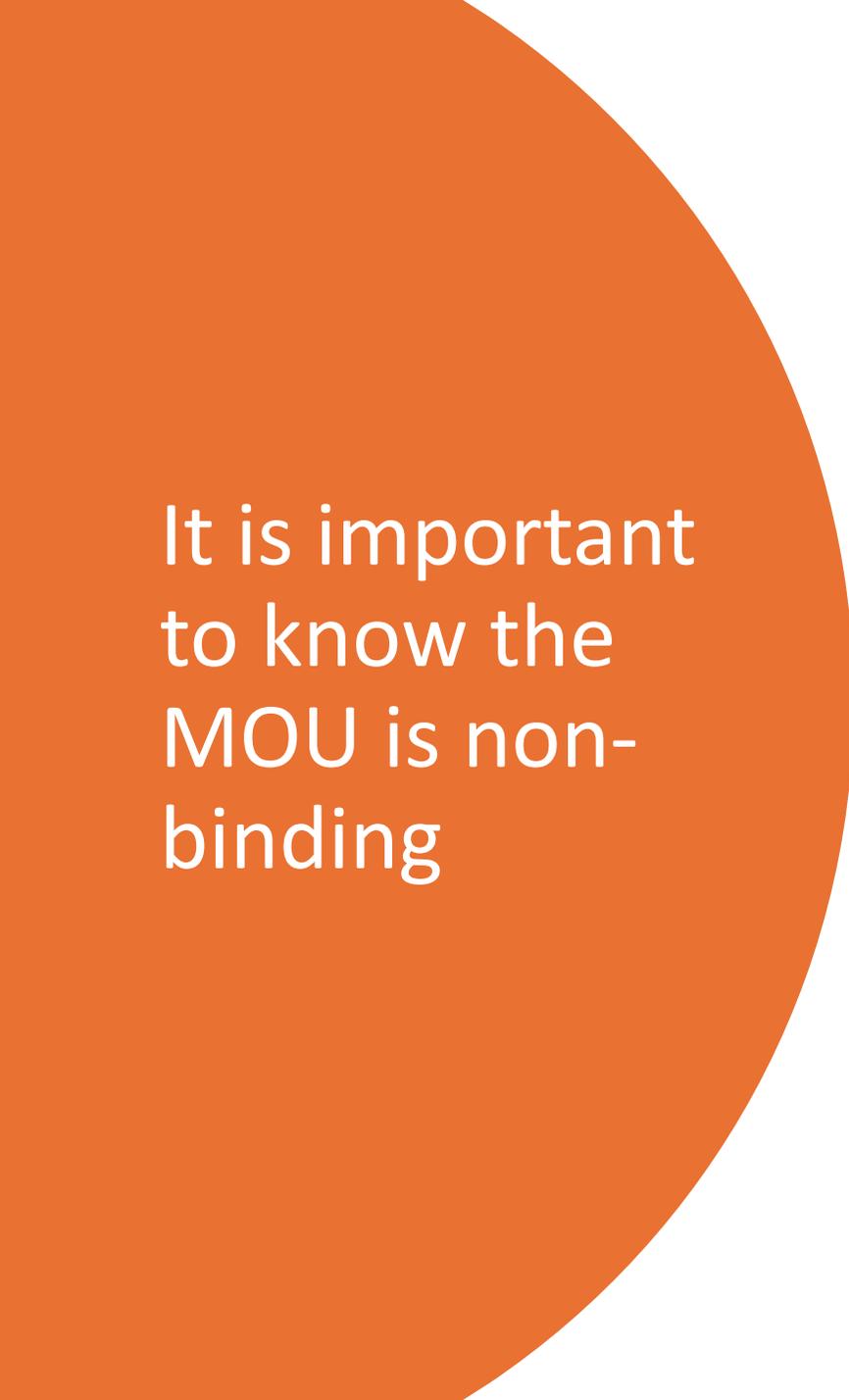
As noted earlier, Sills said the ESSCRP could not now be completed by the Inyo internally, due to the reasons addressed in previous slides.

That is why and how the Inyo turned to considering FRBs as a solution, he said, noting the Inyo Forest now must rely heavily on grants and other funding for most projects. The project is expected to take up to 20 years, depending on access to labor and funding, and cost more than \$100 M.



WRAFT has since created the MOU between the ESCCRP's WRAFT, Blue Forest Finance Inc., and World Resources Institute in order to...

“pursue the parties’ mutual interest in exploring possible future joint actions to accelerate landscape-scale environmental restoration on the Inyo National Forest as defined in the ESCCRP planning and project documentation,” according to the MOU.



It is important
to know the
MOU is non-
binding

“This MOU is not a commitment of funds by either party or any individual WRAFT member to the other party or any third party,” the MOU states.

“This MOU does not commit either party or any individual WRAFT member to fund any proposed project or any specific ESCCRP implementation work.

“This MOU is at-will and may be modified only by mutual written consent of all parties. This MOU may be terminated by either party at any time.”



However...

Even if the MOU is non-binding, WRAFT believes the MOU is a critical step toward formalizing collaborative relationships between the organizations and agencies that comprise WRAFT in order to accelerate local landscape-level fuels treatment projects which are critical to creating fire resilient communities and protecting the wild landscapes that are the basis of the County and the region's economy and lifestyle.

Because the County has long been supported the concepts and projects associated with the ESCCRP and WRAFT, WRAFT is hoping the County will become a formal partner in the ESCCRP and consider signing the MOU.

Before we finish and on a totally different topic, our Second Annual Wildfire Resilience Week is May 30-June 8.

The first outreach poster was just completed late last night, and you are the first to see it!

Stay tuned for much more information about these events.

Now, back to...

2nd Annual Eastern Sierra
WILDFIRE RESILIENCE WEEK
May 30 - June 8

INYO COUNTY **MONO COUNTY**

MAY 30
6:30-7:30pm **SCIENCE ON TAP SPEAKER SERIES**
Marc Meyer, USFS - Landscape Treatments
Mountain Rambler Brewery, Bishop

MAY 31
5:30-7:30pm **NORTH INYO COUNTY FIREWISE**
Beth Burnam, Firewise USA - Mustang Mesa

JUNE 4
5:30-7:30pm **COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS**
Yana Valachovic, UCCE - South Inyo County, Lone Pine

JUNE 7
12-1pm **THE FUTURE OF WILDFIRE INSURANCE**
Yana Valachovic, UCCE - Lunch & Learn Webinar

FIRE RESILIENCE & ESCCRP UPDATES
Mammoth Lakes Chamber of Commerce
Community Coffee, Online Presentation

EMBERS & ALES WILDFIRE TRIVIA NIGHT
Mammoth Brewing Company, Brewers' Hall

WILDFIRE MITIGATION DEMO HOME
Beth Burnam, Firewise USA - Long Valley Fire Dept

NORTH MONO COUNTY FIREWISE
Beth Burnam, Firewise USA - Bridgeport Fire Dept

FOREST HEALTH & FIREWISE E-BIKE TOUR
High Sierra Energy Foundation
Mammoth Lakes Library

EVENT DETAILS
WhitebarkInstitute.org/Events2024
For more information contact: Crystal Medhurst
crystal@whitebarkinstitute.org / 760-709-2263

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Logos: CAL FIRE, UAS, CALIFORNIA FIRE, LONE PINE, EDISON INTERNATIONAL, UCCE, MONO COUNTY, READY INYO, MAMMOTH LAKES CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, HIGH SIERRA ENERGY FOUNDATION, MAMMOTH BREWING COMPANY, FIREWISE COMMUNITIES.

Questions,
suggestions or
comments?

