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Tecuya Mountain Land Acquisition - Grant

Grant Name	Tecuya Mountain Land Acquisition - Grant	Today's Date	12/14/2023
Staff Size	7	Organization Name	Los Padres ForestWatch
Total Membership	30,000	Annual Operating Budget	\$1,210,207.00
BIPOC-led	No	Operating Budget Year	
C-Suite Staff		Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Notes			

Project Information

Project/Campaign Name	Tecuya Mountain Land Acquisition	Project Address	
Project Location (State or Territory)	CA	Amount Requested from Alliance	\$50,000.00

Proposal Questions

1. Purpose/History Of Organization	<p>Los Padres ForestWatch protects wildlife, wilderness, water, and sustainable access throughout the Los Padres National Forest and the Carrizo Plain National Monument. We achieve this through education, advocacy, and when necessary, legal action for the benefit of our communities, climate, and future generations.</p> <p>Since 2004, ForestWatch has served as the only group working solely for the protection of public lands on the central coast of California. To achieve protections, ForestWatch monitors activities on public lands to reduce or eliminate impacts; uses legal action to compel management agencies to comply with environmental laws; collaborates with other organizations and mobilizes them into action; educates the public on the important role that our region's public lands play in maintaining the health of our communities; and introduces underserved youth and families to the outdoors, creating lasting connections to nature and inspiring the next generation of conservationists.</p>	7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes	<p>Over the next year, ForestWatch expects to accomplish the following outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 68-acre private "inholding" along Tecuya Ridge has been successfully acquired and protected by Los Padres ForestWatch and the short-term loan by a family foundation given to purchase the property has been repaid. 2. A short and long-term management plan for the parcel has been drafted and implemented with input from scientists and tribes. 3. A long-term ecological monitoring project to identify and document use by wildlife—specifically large mammals; condors; migratory birds; and rare, threatened, or endangered plant and animal species—has been initiated and there is quantitative documentation of wildlife on the property. 4. A thorough survey of the property has been completed, identifying key landmarks and areas where recreational activities can occur. 5. A survey has documented cultural resources on the property and relevant agencies and tribal partners have been notified.
2. Final Success	<p>Los Padres ForestWatch will permanently protect 68 acres along Tecuya Ridge in the San Emigdio Mountains from logging and development, improve the area's</p>	8. Evaluate Your Progress	<p>ForestWatch will consider this project a success if we are able to permanently protect 68 acres along Tecuya Ridge in Kern County from logging, clearing, and development projects. Additionally,</p>

eligibility for formal protection as a designated Wilderness Area, and accomplish a direct and tangible conservation victory through the acquisition of a private inholding with high ecological value surrounded by the Los Padres National Forest (LPNF).

success will be evaluated upon the drafting and implementation of a management plan within the first year of the acquisition.

Specific measurables by which we will measure success include:

1. Trail cameras have been set up throughout the parcel and ecological monitoring is in effect.
2. Plant and animal species interacting with the environment are documented.
3. A survey of the property is completed, and a map has been created identifying key landmarks and geologic features.
4. An cultural resource survey has been completed and any cultural resources have been documented.
5. A detailed map of areas where recreational activities can occur has been created.
6. The process for the placement of a permanent conservation easement for the property has begun.

3. Location Details

The parcel we are working to protect is in the San Emigdio Mountains along Tecuya Ridge, part of the ancestral lands of the Chumash and Yokuts people who call the mountain Takuy[^]. The San Emigdio Mountains are one of seven mountain ranges in the southern LPNF, rising to nearly 7,500 feet and providing a critical link between the coastal mountain ranges and the southern tip of the Sierra Nevada. These mountains form the scenic backdrop of remote mountain communities like Frazier Park and Pine Mountain Club and are part of the ancestral homeland of the Chumash and Yokuts tribes.

Endangered California condors regularly use the ridgeline as a flyway and roost overnight in its tall trees, resting between long flights across the landscape. Given this exceptional amount of condor activity, the range is recognized as a Globally Important Bird Area—the only such area in the southern LPNF.

Tecuya Ridge, located within the San Emigdio Mountains, is home to Jeffrey, ponderosa, and singleleaf pinyon pines as well as white fir and bigcone Douglas-fir. This unique diversity of conifer forests and sagebrush supports dozens of species of threatened, endangered, sensitive, and rare wildlife including not just condors but also California spotted owls, northern goshawks, and San Emigdio blue butterflies. It's also home to healthy populations of mountain lion, bear, and deer, and is in the historic range of tule elk and pronghorn.

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

ForestWatch's goal for acquiring this special parcel of land is to permanently protect it from current and future logging and development, utilize it to promote

9. TCA Funding Plan

Funding from The Conservation Alliance would be used to help pay back a temporary, no interest, 10-year loan provided by a family foundation to purchase the parcel. The property was on the market, and we could not risk losing it to another seller. This loan allowed ForestWatch to purchase the property right away instead of potentially losing the opportunity should the parcel be sold to someone who brought a more competitive offer.

Funding from The Conservation Alliance would also be used to help fund the drafting of the management plan and initial biological and cultural resource surveys of the property. Additionally, funding would be used to help facilitate guided youth and public outings to the parcel.

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

ForestWatch is committed to incorporating diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice into our mission and values. Through this commitment, we've formed

environmental stewardship through guided recreational activities, use it as an ecological research and study area, and provide a gathering place for local native American traditions.

ForestWatch has worked for nearly two decades to protect the San Emigdio Mountains. In 2005, we urged the U.S. Forest Service to recognize the area's eligibility for protection under the Wilderness Act. The agency refused to do so, even though this area is adjacent to the Wind Wolves Preserve—the largest private nature reserve on the West Coast. After we challenged the agency's determination in court, a judge ordered the Forest Service to reconsider, but again, the agency refused to recommend the area for wilderness protection, citing in part the prevalence of "inholdings"—small chunks of private land surrounded by national forest land. ForestWatch became aware of one of the inholdings coming up for sale in early 2023 and began evaluating the feasibility of purchasing the property in order to permanently protect it.

Purchasing this parcel of land will protect it from the threat of current and future logging and development projects. The U.S. Forest Service approved the Tecuya Ridge logging project adjacent to the property in 2019, and ForestWatch is challenging the project in court. Kern County officials extended this work onto adjacent private land—including this property—but ForestWatch was able to temporarily halt the work by communicating with the landowner, who notified county officials to avoid the land pending sale. Acquiring this parcel will permanently protect it from logging and clearing and could provide a strategic advantage and leverage to prevent logging on adjacent national forest lands. A dirt road provides access to the property, increasing its development risk. There is historic mining in the area and the parcel is zoned for logging and some other development uses. Its ridgetop location and private land status also make the property attractive for communication and radio towers, which would mar the area's scenic views. Acquiring this parcel will also provide permanent protection from other developments such as mining and commercial uses.

Besides protecting the land from logging and development, ForestWatch intends to use the land for stewardship and recreational opportunities. ForestWatch's Outdoor Connections program provides monolingual Spanish speaking and underrepresented Latino youth and families with culturally relevant and transformative outdoor experiences to

meaningful and inclusive coalitions of supporters better able to protect local public lands for everyone—not just those who have historically had privileged access to them. This strengthens our collective voice as we speak out against environmental degradation and injustice.

ForestWatch's Board and staff regularly attend training sessions and follow a plan focusing on our DEI goals to ensure that our work is reflective of our commitment. Specific goals in the workplan include ensuring our advocacy campaigns empower a broad base of environmental/social justice allies and community members; ensuring that all external communications are relevant to, accessible to, and inclusive of all cultures within the region; diversifying our Board, staff, membership, and the constituents we serve; and making our events more welcoming and accessible.

foster the next generation of public lands advocates. The parcel would provide a reliable location for low-impact outings with underserved youth and families as part of our Outdoor Connections program. Acquiring the parcel would provide ForestWatch with year-round access to a remote section of the forest (which is seasonally closed to the public for half of the year), providing memorable experiences and fostering an appreciation of the outdoors with those who might not otherwise have the opportunity.

ForestWatch also intends to use the parcel as an ecological study area. The land provides an excellent opportunity to study rare wildlife, conifer forests, and the effects of climate change. ForestWatch would conserve the land, with little to no alteration of the landscape. We will thoroughly survey the land for rare plants and animals, and place trail cameras strategically throughout the property to document the different plant animal species that frequent the area. Trail cameras and surveys of the property will allow us to study the impacts of climate change on this diverse landscape. This will also allow for educational opportunities. We would engage volunteers and participants in our Outdoor Connections program as citizen scientists to learn about the work we are doing.

ForestWatch will perform surveys of the property to document any cultural resources that may be present. We will also offer the land to members of local Native American groups such as the Chumash and Yokuts, who are the original stewards to the land, to use for ceremony, prayer, and traditional gathering of plants, which is not always possible in the adjoining national forest lands. ForestWatch has partnered with many local Indigenous groups on efforts to protect their ancestral lands in the LPNF from logging and development.

ForestWatch was fortunately able to secure a short-term loan to purchase the parcel allowing us to move forward with the acquisition and compose a diverse fundraising plan to pay the loan back. The sale should be completed by the end of 2023. In 2024, ForestWatch will build out a robust management plan of the property, consult with tribes, begin surveys and ecological research, and lead public recreational outings on the property.

5. Key Decision Makers

Since 2005, ForestWatch has urged the U.S. Forest Service to protect the areas of Tecuya Ridge, asking the agency to recommend Congress formally protect the area under the Wilderness Act.

11. Confidential Items n/a

Unfortunately, the agency refused to recognize the wilderness qualities of the land, claiming that this private parcel fragmented the landscape.

ForestWatch has been keeping a close eye on the area and has been developing strategies to permanently protect it. The U.S. Forest Service approved a logging and clearing project in the LPNF in 2019 and Kern County officials extended the project to include the privately owned inholdings in the area. When we learned that one of the private inholdings was on the market, we reached out to the property owner and worked with him to revoke his approval of the logging, just days before it was scheduled to begin on this property. ForestWatch then reached out to several local organizations who specialize in land acquisition to convince them to purchase the land to permanently protect it, but its remote location did not fall under any of their jurisdiction. Recognizing that purchasing this property was the only way it would be permanently protected from logging, ForestWatch then began to strategize on how to acquire the parcel.

We had to act quickly and decisively. ForestWatch consulted with land acquisition experts, worked with the property owner to appraise the property, and negotiated a purchase price for the appraised value. While we are not a land trust or nature preserve, we are determined to permanently protect the areas on Tecuya Ridge using all of the tools in the conservation toolbox. With the purchase now complete, we can begin taking steps to secure a permanent conservation easement for the parcel. Being a landowner on this ridge also allows conservation groups and tribes to have more leverage with the Forest Service regarding logging and clearing projects adjacent to the property.

6. Elevate Voices

Our campaign to protect Tecuya Ridge from logging has involved thousands of residents who have taken the time to submit comments and collectively urge the Forest Service to protect the land from logging. We have helped them better understand the complexities of the project, conducted field trips, and helped them write and submit letters to decision-makers.

Our advocacy work has time and time again been proven effective. The acquisition of land on Tecuya Ridge is part of ForestWatch's collective effort to protect the LPNF from logging and clearing that would cause harm to the vital and sensitive ecosystems. ForestWatch collaborates with local

organizations, partner groups, and the public and mobilizes them to take action to halt forest threats and restore damaged areas. By educating the public and bringing attention to the threats our local wilderness areas face, we are giving the community a voice and are enabling them to directly participate in environmental decisions that affect the areas where they live, work, and recreate.

Along with our efforts to protect the LPNF from logging and clearing, ForestWatch seeks to amplify the voices of communities that are underrepresented in the conservation movement. We work alongside several indigenous groups such as the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation and the Ventureno Barbareno Band of Mission Indians to protect critical ecosystems and sacred cultural sites in the LPNF from logging and clearing. Additionally, our Outdoor Connections program is building a stronger conservation and environmental movement by introducing youth and families with the most need to the life-changing effects of nature, while providing them with new tools to be leaders in their communities, stewards of our natural places, and future advocates of our public lands. The program addresses the inequities people of color in our region face in accessing natural places while building a stronger and more diverse conservation and environmental movement.

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