

NPS Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program Application for Assistance

1. Project Description. Project Title: Ahwahnee Hills Park Project.
Lead Agency: Madera County Resource Management Agency.

This project involves creation of a 250 acre regional park in the Sierra Nevada foothills south of Yosemite National Park. This land is currently owned by the County and was the former site of a tuberculosis sanitarium, and then a boy's school. The land has been sought for development purposes, but is currently undeveloped. Madera County received a \$417,000 Sierra Nevada Cascade grant from the California Resources Agency to make this area into a regional park by improving necessary infrastructure and cleaning-up trash and hazards on the site. This grant will also rehabilitate two abandoned buildings into a Visitor's Center and an Interpretive Center for the areas' historic, natural and cultural resources. Additional funding has been obtained to "deconstruct" unwanted buildings on the site, recycle the building materials, and clean up environmental hazards.

This park area, which includes a riparian corridor, a small lake, meadows with specimen oaks and wooded hillsides, is an important recreation resource for Madera County. The County currently has only 15 acres of parkland, and many low-income residents lack the resources to travel to the other regional recreational activities, such as the expensive Yosemite Valley. It will also be an important resource for the region in general, which is in need of an area for hiking, picnicking and other recreational activities.

Madera County is one of California's poorer counties, and is experiencing further financial difficulties because of the State budget crisis. In order to accept the \$417,000 grant, the County must commit to providing operations and maintenance for a minimum of 20 years. Fiscal prudence makes it impossible for the Supervisors to commit County General Funds for that purpose. The surrounding community is very enthusiastic about this park opportunity, and has lobbied the County to accept the funding. Local residents indicate a willingness to take responsibility for some of the operations and maintenance tasks, however the process of organizing committees, engaging the public in a constructive way and comprehensively planning park uses and activities is challenging, and the County has little experience and resources in this area. It is hoped that with assistance from the RTCA program, a partnership can be developed between the community residents, local nonprofit organizations and the County to comprehensively plan for park activities, leverage the resources necessary to secure the property as parkland, and successfully implement the desired recreation programs.

2. Resource Importance. The following benefits will result from the development of this park:

- Increased public access to streams and lake: The property contains both a stream and a small lake that are accessible by a short hike from the park entrance.
- Recreational open space and trails: Trails for hiking and jogging are not otherwise available in the area, residents are known to run along the highway for exercise. This project will make five miles of improved hiking and jogging trails available for the public. In addition, the project is located along historic Route 49, and will provide picnic

areas, natural interpretive viewing and recreational opportunities for local, regional and visiting individuals.

- **Interpretive programs:** Buildings on the site will provide interpretive information on historic and natural resources of the area. In addition, a historic barn on the site will be renovated by volunteers to be used as an interpretive facility for local youth.
- **Preservation of ecosystems and watersheds:** The property includes an important tributary to the Fresno River, a watershed that is currently undergoing restoration efforts by the local Central Sierra Watershed Committee. Through this project, the stream and the lake on the property will be preserved from development which might otherwise occur in the nearby meadow area if the area is not maintained as open space, thus protecting and enhancing water quantity and quality for the area.
- **Cultural Benefits:** The area is significant for Native American history and culture. The area is the site of one of the last Indian battles in California. In addition, the property is right next to the Wasuma Round House, a Native American religious site that is still in use by local tribes, as well as being open to the public.
- **Historic Benefits:** This property is located on what used to be the main road to Yosemite. Mail and passenger horse drawn stages made regular trips to the valley. A traveler's hotel used to be located on the potential park site, which was visited by a number of distinguished persons. Information about this area's history will be presented in the Visitor's Center.

3. Anticipated Results.

This project will bring about the following results:

- Conservation and preservation of 250 acres of historic and culturally significant open space, including native oak woodland, a small lake and a riparian corridor;
- Development of 5-10 miles of multi-use trails;
- Creation of a vision for park uses and activities;
- Leveraging of resources necessary to implement this vision;
- Demonstration of a collaborative partnership between local government, nonprofit organizations and community residents that can be replicated in future projects.

4. Support for the Project.

This project already has a significant amount of financial and community resources. The \$417,000 grant can be supplemented by the State "Per Capita" park funds coming to the County. The Madera County Board of Supervisors has already indicated its support for the project and has directed County staff to be involved. The Ahwahnee Community Council and other local nonprofit organizations have held numerous meetings about this project, and residents throughout the County are being asked to participate on a Park Planning Committee. With the addition of skilled planners and facilitators from RTCA, a successful project is very likely.

Project Partners:

- CA Resources Agency – providing \$417,000 grant
- Madera County – lead agency for project, providing staffing for project implementation and grant writing services for resource development

- Madera Park Planning Committee – currently being formed, will help plan park uses and activities and try to determine how to cover maintenance and operations costs
- Ahwahnee Community Council – advocates for the park, will help coordinate volunteer assistance from community residents

5. RTCA Program Role

We hope that the RTCA team can offer the following assistance, which is critical for the project's success:

- Engage public participation and facilitate collaborative efforts to implement the project;
- Help define and realize a vision for park uses and activities;
- Help leverage resources as needed for implementation.

We expect that the main facilitation and planning assistance will take place over one-year's time, and hope that follow-up assistance will be available as necessary.

6. Contact Information

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Ahwahnee Community Council: Fern Facchino [REDACTED]

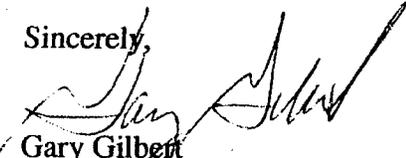
Madera Park Planning Committee: Sandra Brinley [REDACTED]

Local Landowners: [REDACTED]

Support letters will be sent under separate cover and will be received by July 15.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this project.

Sincerely,


Gary Gilbert
Madera County Supervisor

This duplicate of a previously funded application is intended for reference only.