



## STAFF REPORT

**To:** ESCOG Joint Powers Authority  
**From:** Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff  
**Subject:** Executive Director Report  
**Meeting date:** February 28, 2024  
**Prepared on:** February 22, 2024  
**Attachments:** None

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### Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator:

- The Whitebark Institute is working with the Inyo National Forest to revise the Environmental Assessment to reflect public input received as needed.
- Staff has met with stakeholders to discuss leveraging the Accelerator to address project development and environmental planning needs in the Mono Basin and Owens Valley dependent on successful grant opportunities and the recommendation of the Inyo County Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan.
- Staff continues to participate in bi-monthly Wildfire Resiliency Action Finance Team (WRAFT) to identify models to finance wildfire resiliency project implementation.
- Staff met with the Intertribal Stewardship Workforce Initiative, founded by Irvin Jim of the Washoe Tribe, to establish a Tribal workforce trained and certified in wildland fire prevention and fighting to discuss opportunities in the Eastern Sierra.
- Staff met with Peter Fulks, Cerro Coso Public Services Director, to discuss workforce training certifications being established in wildfire resiliency and fire-fighting, sustainable recreation, and Tribal cultural resources preservation in the context of both regional projects and California Jobs First synergies.

### Buttermilk Infrastructure and Recreation Planning Initiative:

- Document was completed in December 2023
- Staff has provided the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) all final invoices and reports required by the grant agreement, which expired December 31, 2024; however, staff is working with NFWF to reserve unspent implementation funds for future work pending the decision of the funding agency.
- Staff is working with Inyo County to transition the project from planning to implementation.

#### Towns-to-Trails:

- Alta Planning and Design has identified a draft trail alignment from Olancho to Markleeville based on public input provided in Fall 2023 and computer modeling. The draft alignment is currently being vetted by local area trail experts for appropriateness and feasibility.
- The next refined trails alignment will be provided to agencies and presented for wider public input in Spring 2024.

#### Community Economic Resilience Fund:

- Staff is convening a monthly regional economic development staff roundtable to discuss project and priorities to inform CEDS and California Jobs First plan development and implementation.
- Staff met with the Economic Development Administration to discuss steps to establish an Economic Development District (EDD) in the Eastern Sierra. The designation would provide annual operating funds to continue convening regional staff, ensuring the annual CEDS implementation report is prepared and the CEDS is updated every five years as required. Additional information on the application is needed.
- Staff continues regional convening work in support of the California Jobs First project at the direction of the Sierra Business Council.
- Staff attended the California Jobs First conference in Sacramento with the Sierra Business Council and Mother Lode Job Training Center to represent the Eastern Sierra.

#### ESCOG Administration:

- ESCOG has received two proposals to fill the part-time interagency liaison position. Staff will return to the Board to approve a contract, likely requiring a special meeting before the next regular meeting in April.
- ESCOG repaid its \$500,000 Golden State Finance Authority (GSFA) loan. The GSFA loan fund is completely encumbered, but if funding becomes available in the future, ESCOG staff recommends renewing the loan.
- Staff is coordinating with member agency leadership to provide regular Board updates as needed.
- There is no update from Caltrans on the Highways-to-Boulevards grant at this time.