



Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) Joint Powers Authority Agenda

STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From: Elaine Kabala, Executive Director
Subject: Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget
Meeting date: August 27, 2025
Prepared on: August 19, 2025
Attachments: None

BACKGROUND:

The ESCOG Board adopted the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget on June 25, 2025. During discussion, the Board requested additional analysis be provided to better understand the distribution of revenues and expenditures at the August 27, 2025 meeting.

BUDGET ANALYSIS:

Revenues

The Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget totals \$1,988,500, supported through a combination of competitive grants, project-specific funds, and member agency contributions. Revenue funds include the CDFW Prop 1 Grant (\$930,000), Sierra Nevada Conservancy “Towns to Trails” (\$15,000), the Inyo National Forest Liaison Grant (\$100,000), and allocations from the Sierra Jobs First program, including the Sierra Jobs First ESCOG Convening Partner Grant (\$200,000), the Recreation Collaborative Capacity Incubator Grant (\$253,000), the Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions Analysis Grant (\$188,650), and the Business Resource Catalyst Grant (\$201,850). Member contributions provide an additional \$100,000 in flexible support.

Expenditures

Expenditures in the FY 2025–26 budget include staffing support for the Executive Director, Recreation Coordinator, Wildfire Coordinator, and the Project Management Office, as well as consultant services for strategic planning, recreation planning, agricultural diversification, and seed funding for the Eastern Sierra Business Resource Center. Additional costs cover contracts with member agencies for administrative services such as legal, fiscal, and clerking support. Additional expenditures include core operational needs including website maintenance, publications, training, and travel.

Alta Planning + Design is funded at \$15,000 to complete work on the Towns-to-Trails initiative (completed June 2025 but invoiced in FY 2025-2026). The Whitebark Institute is contracted for \$650,000 and the U.S. Forest Service for \$250,000 under the CDFW Prop 1 Grant to advance watershed and restoration priorities. The Sierra Jobs First program supports regional economic development initiatives, including \$100,000 for the Inyo-Mono Agricultural Activation Plan, \$130,000 for a strategic consultant to support the Sierra Jobs First Recreation Collaborative Initiative, \$171,150 for the Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions project consultant, and \$183,500 for the programming support for the Eastern Sierra Business Resource Center.

ESCOG Administrative Staff Costs

The ESCOG Executive Director position is supported by both local member contributions and multiple Sierra Jobs First revenue streams. The Wildfire Coordinator is funded through wildfire-related grants, aligning resources with the ESCOG's resilience and fuels management goals. The Recreation Coordinator is funded through diverse project-based revenues to support regional sustainable outdoor recreation planning. The PMO is embedded within project budgets to provide essential administrative and fiscal support services.

Funding for staffing is drawn from these various revenue streams as follows:

Executive Director

Executive Director services are provided through a contract between Inyo County and the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments Joint Powers Authority. The contract includes a not-to-exceed amount of \$150,000, plus a fixed administration fee of 15%. The actual cost to ESCOG for Executive Director staff is approximately \$132,200.

The FY 2025-2026 Budget includes anticipated expenditures of \$141,000 for the Executive Director, which is budgeted to be paid for through a blend of grant revenues and member agency contributions in the following amounts:

- CDFW Prop 1 Grant: \$10,000
- Sierra Jobs First (SJF) ESCOG Convening Partner Grant: \$85,000
- SJF Recreation Collaborative Capacity Incubator Capacity Incubator administrative fees: \$7,000
- SJF Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions Analysis administrative fees: \$5,000
- SJF Business Resource Center Catalyst administrative fees: \$10,000
- Member Agency Contributions: \$24,000

The difference between actual and budgeted amounts reflects contingency to allow flexibility between multiple revenue sources.

The budget includes \$21,000 for Inyo County Administrative fees paid for through Member Agency contributions.

Regional Wildfire Coordinator

Inyo County and Mono County currently each employ a Calfire-funded Wildfire Coordinator position with expertise in regional wildfire resiliency agencies and programs. ESCOG contracted with Inyo County to leverage County Wildfire Coordinator expertise to support ESCOG wildfire mitigate programs, specifically administration of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Proposition 1 Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator grant and regional capacity building under the Inyo National Forest Liaison Grant. The Board approved the contract to leverage member agency staff on February 26, 2025.

The ESCOG FY 2025-2026 budget includes \$70,000 for this position, funded by CDFW Proposition 1 funds (\$20,000) and Inyo National Forest Liaison funds (\$50,000). A portion of the Inyo County Wildfire Coordinator position is paid by the Inyo County Calfire Coordinator Grant. Additional information regarding the allocations of Inyo and Mono County Wildfire Coordinator Program is included below.

Regional Recreation Coordinator

The ESCOG Regional Recreation Coordinator will serve as the project coordinator for management of the SJF Eastern Sierra Regional Capacity Incubator planning process and the Sierra Jobs First Chipmunk Canyon Trails Planning effort. This is a grant funded position aimed at building capacity for recreation support based on financial support from the Inyo National Forest and through the Sierra Jobs First Catalyst Initiative. This is a contract position rather than an agreement with a member agency. The FY 2025-2026 budget includes \$117,500 funded by the following revenues:

- Inyo National Forest Service Liaison Grant: \$50,000

- SJF ESCOG Convening Partner Grant: \$50,000
- SJF Recreation Collaborative Capacity Incubator Capacity Incubator administrative fees: \$10,000
- SJF Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions Analysis administrative fees: \$7,500

Inyo County Project Management Office (PMO)

Per the Board's direction given at the September 2024 Strategic Retreat, staff identified opportunities to leverage existing member agency staff to support ESCOG capacity needs. Specifically, Inyo County has established a Project Management Office, to provide strategic project oversight for Inyo County Projects. On April 30, 2025 the ESCOG Board approved an agreement with Inyo County for the PMO to provide project management, GIS and grant administration services to the ESCOG. The agreement leverages member agency staff to support the ESCOG with preparation and review of documents, data analysis and reporting, project management and coordination, grant writing, grant review, and grant reporting, and fiscal analysis services. The agreement also allows ESCOG to leverage GIS staff to support GIS-based project deliverables. The contract includes a not-to-exceed amount of \$50,000. The ESCOG budget allocates \$49,350 towards this contract, paid for through a blend of revenues:

- SJF Recreation Collaborative Capacity Incubator Capacity Incubator administrative fees: \$30,000
- SJF Recreation Collaborative Capacity Incubator Capacity Incubator administrative fees: \$6,000
- SJF Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions Analysis administrative fees: \$5,000
- SJF Business Resource Center Catalyst administrative fees: \$8,350

Member Agency Contributions

Member agency contributions in the amount of \$100,000 are allocated to cover core operational expenditures that ensure the effective administration of ESCOG. These include liability insurance, legal services, fiscal agent support, Board clerk services, publications and legal notices, website maintenance, and travel and training. In addition, member contributions provide funding support for the Executive Director's position (\$24,000), ensuring consistent leadership and oversight of ESCOG's regional initiatives. The budget also includes \$10,000 for an external audit. Collectively, these expenditures represent the foundational administrative costs required to sustain the organization.

REVENUES		FY 2024-2025		FY 2025-2026	
Grant Revenues					
CDFW Prop 1 Grant	\$	2,000,000.00	\$	930,000.00	
Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant (Towns to Trails)	\$	200,000.00	\$	15,000.00	
Inyo National Forest Liaison	\$	50,000.00	\$	100,000.00	
Sierra Jobs First ESCOG Capacity (Phase 1)	\$	247,300.00	\$	-	
Sierra Jobs First ESCOG Capacity (Phase 2)	\$	-	\$	200,000.00	
Sierra Jobs First Recreation Capacity Incubator	\$	-	\$	253,000.00	
Sierra Jobs First Chipmunk Canyon	\$	-	\$	188,650.00	
Sierra Jobs First Business Catalyst	\$	-	\$	201,850.00	
Member contributions	\$	100,000.00	\$	100,000.00	
TOTAL REVENUES		\$	2,597,300.00	\$	1,988,500.00
EXPENDITURES					
Grant Contractors					
Alta Planning + Design (Towns to Trails)	\$	370,443.00	\$	15,000.00	
Whitebark	\$	1,900,000.00	\$	650,000.00	
USFS	\$	50,000.00	\$	250,000.00	
Inyo Mono Ag Study	\$	-	\$	100,000.00	
Recreation Incubator Strategic Consultant	\$	-	\$	130,000.00	
Chipmunk Canyon Consultant	\$	-	\$	171,150.00	
SJF Business Catalyst Services	\$	-	\$	183,500.00	
Other Contract Services					
Executive Director	\$	150,000.00	\$	147,000.00	
Inyo County Admin Fee (15%)			\$	21,000.00	
Assistant: Celeste Berg	\$	50,000.00	\$	-	
Assistant: Kate Morley	\$	50,000.00	\$	-	
Wildfire Coordinator	\$	-	\$	70,000.00	
Recreation Coordinator	\$	-	\$	117,500.00	
Inyo County PMO	\$	-	\$	49,350.00	
Part-time Contract Assist	\$	-	\$	20,000.00	
Legal	\$	10,000.00	\$	10,000.00	
Town Clerk	\$	20,000.00	\$	10,000.00	
Fiscal Agent	\$	5,000.00	\$	5,000.00	
External audit	\$	10,000.00	\$	10,000.00	
Website	\$	10,000.00	\$	4,000.00	
ESCOG Strategic Plan	\$	10,000.00	\$	-	
Econ Dev District Application			\$	15,000.00	
Publications & Legal Notices	\$	250.00	\$	2,000.00	
Travel & training	\$	-	\$	4,000.00	
Liability Insurance	\$	3,500.00	\$	4,000.00	
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		\$	2,639,193.00	\$	1,988,500.00

Figure 1 Adopted ESCOG FY 2025-2026 Budget

Inyo / Mono County Wildfire Coordinator Scope

The ESCOG Wildfire Coordinator position is funded through a blend of the Inyo County Coordinator Grant, the CDFW Pace & Scale Accelerator Grant, and the INF Interagency Liaison funding. Together, these resources sustain regional wildfire coordination capacity, with the Inyo and Mono County Coordinator grants functioning as a single program. Mono's grant covers their coordinator's salary to lead Firewise USA and Fire Safe Council outreach and education, while Inyo's grant builds the shared communications infrastructure, technical tools, and backend support systems that allow these community programs to operate more effectively across both counties.

The CDFW Pace & Scale Accelerator funding is intended to reduce barriers to wildfire project implementation. This fund supports regional wildfire mitigation capacity building, with key deliverables being the NEPA decision for the Eastern Sierra Climate and Communities Resiliency Project in Mono County and the Phase II environmental permitting work in the West Mono Basin. This funding also supports continuation of Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance (ESWA) development, community-scale capacity building, and other activities aligned with regional wildfire mitigation priorities. Other regional project support includes biomass utilization planning to address the lack of biomass processing capacity, and workforce development in partnership with Cerro Coso Community College to address the shortage of skilled local labor.

Rather than building two separate, duplicative programs, the Inyo/ Mono County Wildfire Coordinators are using CAL FIRE County Coordinator funds to operate as two halves of one integrated regional program. While their day-to-day tasks differ, they are intentionally designed to integrate into the larger regional efforts. Inyo County provides much of the regional backbone and infrastructure development, creating systems such as an updated and interactive project pipeline, GIS mapping for project implementation, updating the ESWA website update for collaboration and grant alignment, and project execution through the Inyo County Project Management Office (PMO). Mono County delivers the front-line engagement, leading Firewise USA and Fire Safe Council organizing, volunteer mobilization, and community communications across both counties. This collaborative structure loop ensures that wildfire resilience efforts across the Eastern Sierra are connected and regionally scaled. The Coordinators ensure that the community needs integrate and inform the collaborative efforts of the regional ESWA and that the ESWA provides support and capacity for increased community action and risk reduction.

Financial Allocations

The 2025 CAL FIRE County Coordinator Grants provide \$151,500 each to Inyo and Mono Counties for the period of May 2025 - July 2026. While administered separately, the two grants function as a single, integrated program that spans the full range of wildfire resilience needs from community action to agency coordination to project funding. Mono County's Coordinator leads the community-facing work: organizing Firewise USA sites, supporting Fire Safe Councils, mobilizing volunteers, and helping

residents carry out home-hardening and defensible space projects. Inyo County's Coordinator provides the technical and organizational backbone: developing the regional project pipeline, coordinating implementation with agencies, managing GIS and planning tools, and aligning projects with funding opportunities. Together, these complementary roles form one comprehensive coordinator function, ensuring that grassroots action connects seamlessly with agency planning and regional investment.

The Mono County Coordinator Grant is concentrated on personnel and direct community engagement. Nearly all the award supports salary and benefits for the Mono County Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator, who leads Firewise USA and Fire Safe Council outreach, organizes residents and volunteer fire departments, and develops education campaigns. The Mono Coordinator is responsible for traveling throughout the Eastern Sierra, ensuring that community voices are represented in the Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance and that resident leaders have the support they need to launch and sustain preparedness efforts. The grant also provides modest resources for travel and field supplies, along with support for creation of outreach materials such as a Firewise USA How-to Guide, a Zone 0 and vent replacement campaign, and short videos to refresh the Citizen's Wildfire Academy. Through this structure, Mono County is positioned to expand the reach of Firewise and Fire Safe Councils while delivering consistent, accessible education across both counties.

Inyo County Coordinator Grant is designed to complement and enable this work by investing in shared tools and systems that serve both counties. Of the \$151,500 award, \$68,112 supports the Inyo County Wildfire Coordinator, who helps facilitate the Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance's governance and projects subcommittees, and ensures that local projects are aligned with state and federal frameworks. This role also provides direct support to Mono County by convening partners and assisting with project and grant development, ensuring these efforts are coordinated at a regional scale and capacity is leveraged across jurisdictions.

A \$15,000 parcel-level risk assessment software platform (250-home pilot) will be procured and housed in Inyo County, serving as a shared tool for both Inyo and Mono Counties. The Inyo County Coordinator will manage the platform, oversee data integration, and ensure alignment with CWPP updates and mitigation planning. The Mono County Coordinator, supported by trained volunteers from fire departments, Firewise Communities, and Fire Safe Councils who complete CAL FIRE's Qualified Entities Training, will lead the field assessments across both counties. Pilot communities under consideration include Starlite in Inyo County and Swall Meadows in Mono County.

This pilot is designed to establish a regional model for risk-informed, community-driven wildfire resilience. By capturing standardized defensible space and home-hardening data, the platform enables ongoing CWPP maintenance and reduces the need for costly contract-based updates. If successful, the program could be scaled regionally through

anticipated Community Wildfire Defense Grant funding. Both counties are partnering with Mammoth Lakes Fire Department to coordinate shared use and data integration, maximizing limited resources, standardizing data collection, and creating efficiencies in project delivery across the Eastern Sierra.

The \$7,360 for GIS services provides shared mapping and analysis capacity that directly benefits both counties. It has already supported projects like Mono County's Air Curtain Burner application to the CAL FIRE Prevention grant and will be critical for advancing Eastside Riparian Working Group priorities into shovel-ready status. By housing this capacity in Inyo, both counties access high-quality maps and risk data without duplicating staff or resources.

Project Management Office (PMO) support, budgeted at \$2,600, provides coordination assistance for regional project development and implementation. This includes organizing multi-agency meetings, aligning timelines, and assisting with proposal editing and submission. These functions are anticipated to be particularly important if the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments is awarded the Community Wildfire Defense Grant.

Finally, \$31,800 in contracted services is dedicated to the development of a regionally serving ESWA website and facilitation of ongoing strategic direction for the alliance. This investment creates a durable regional platform for partners, Fire Safe Councils, Firewise communities, and agencies to share information, submit project ideas, and access tools for planning and implementation.

Examples of Shared Impact Across Counties

ESWA Communication Infrastructure

Inyo's County Coordinator funding is providing the backend infrastructure and tools that allow Fire Safe Councils, Firewise communities, and agencies to coordinate more effectively. This includes building a shared collaboration platform, maintaining project tracking systems, and providing technical and GIS services to advance CWPP-prioritized projects. Mono's County Coordinator funding ensures that these tools are fully utilized by leading outreach, education, and organizing efforts within local community groups.

Parcel-level home assessment program

Inyo County intends to procure and sets up the software, co-host the Qualified Entities Training (QET), and establish pilot communities in both counties; Mono will manage and oversee assessment implementation in Mono County.

Grant Development

The Inyo County Coordinator grant played a key role in supporting the recent CAL FIRE Prevention and Sierra Nevada Conservancy grant proposals across the region. This

included convening project partners, refining proposals, securing letters of support, and providing GIS mapping. This capacity directly benefited Mono County's applications in addition to Inyo County's.

Eastside Riparian Resilience Working Group

Inyo County Coordinator funding is supporting planning, funding, and partner coordination for the Eastside Riparian Resilience Working Group in Inyo and Mono Counties. This effort targets fuels reduction in riparian corridors next to high-risk communities identified in the CWPP. Using Governor Newsom's March 1, 2025 Emergency Proclamation and the Statewide Environmental Protection Plan (EPP), the group is streamlining CEQA compliance so fuel reduction work can be implemented while meeting environmental protection standards.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

The Board adopted the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget on June 25, 2025.

LEGAL REVIEW:

ESCOG Counsel has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:

No action required.