



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

STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff
Subject: Executive Director Report
Meeting date: December 11, 2025
Prepared on: December 4, 2025
Attachments: None

Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program:

Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator:

- Staff participated in the West Mono Basin public engagement meetings held in late October and early November. Approximately 70 members of the public attended the meetings.
 - The Whitebark Institute completed the following:
 - 17 virtual survey submissions
 - 9 one-on-one interviews (23 in total) with key community members and stakeholders. Participants have included elected officials, NGOs, tribal members, residents, fire fighters, land and wildlife managers and public utilities (CA State Parks, Cal Trans, BLM, Southern California Edison, LADWP, Mono County).
 - Attended field trips throughout the West Mono Basin planning area with Paul McFarland and Rick Napoles to learn more about concerns, needs, priorities and ideas.
 - Began compiling and summarizing input from meetings, interviews, and survey submissions to understand priorities, concerns, and needs of the community. This will help guide the development of projects in the West Mono Basin area.
- Staff assisted Corless Consulting and CLERE, Inc with documenting and developing recommendations for Eastern Sierra biomass utilization.
- Staff is participating in the Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance meetings and Governance subcommittee. You can learn more about the ESWA here:
<https://www.eswildfirealliance.org/>
 - Importantly, the current funding for the ESWA will be expiring at the end of 2025. Staff will continue to support quarterly convenings of the ESWA leveraging Calfire and CDFW funding. Stacy Corless Consulting will be providing a summary report with recommendations for ongoing ESWA governance,

communications, and project prioritization that will be available in early 2026.

Sustainable Recreation:

- Staff met with the Inyo National Forest, The Access Fund, and Bishop Area Climbers Coalition (BACC) regarding the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant for toilet installations. The USFS can not provide an agreement for maintenance of the proposed toilets. The Access Fund indicated they are willing to submit the grant and provide the upfront funding for the toilets if awarded. ESCOG staff determined that the ongoing maintenance would be organized by the BACC and therefore The Access Fund would be a more appropriate grant partner to submit the grant.
- Staff has participated in the Eastern Sierra Golden Mussel Prevention Collective, which has formed subcommittees around policy, funding and outreach/communications. Three grants have been identified to procure decontamination units, provide training, and conduct education campaigns. Ongoing conversations between regional partners have identified a need for a fiscal agent for mutual contributions and ESCOG has been discussed as a potential partner for this regional effort. ESCOG would require dedicated staff to administer a regional Golden Mussel prevention program.

Economic Development / Sierra Jobs First:

- The RFP for the Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions Analysis was published on November 21, 2025 and closes on January 7, 2026. The RFP can be found here: <https://stories.opengov.com/countyofinyoca/published/Kp9T24aZA>
- Staff has entered into contract with Farmer D / Plena Planning + Design, based in Mammoth Lakes, to conduct the Inyo Mono County Agriculture Activation Study. The project kicked-off December 3, 2025.
- Staff held working group meetings with key regional stakeholders to solicit input on the scope for a strategic plan to form collaboratives around key economic industries in recreation, ecosystem management, and agriculture to prepare an RFP for a strategic consultant. An RFP is being prepared by the Recreation Coordinator.
- Staff has been working with the Business Resource Center to develop program to implement the Sierra Jobs First Catalyst Award. The Business Resource Center will be offering virtual Customer Service Training for businesses in Mono and Inyo Counties February 18-19th. These workshops will be held virtually. ESCOG / BRC staff have also been researching partnerships to offer entrepreneurial ideation workshops in 2026. Staff is working with SBC to develop scope for establishing an Angel Investment Network and a series of entrepreneurial “pitch camps”.
- Staff has been coordinating with regional Sierra Jobs First project awardees regarding project development and collaboration.
- Staff has participated in the working groups for Natural and Working Lands, Tourism and Sustainable Recreation and Sustainable Agriculture.
- Staff has been participating in the Sierra Jobs First Transition Process Technical Advisory Committee. The Sierra Business Council has decided to modify the process in two key ways: 1) They will not be updating the Sierra Jobs First Strategic Plan and 2) They are dissolving the Sierra Jobs First Governance Committee after a final meeting in December. The transition planning process will provide recommendations to the region on future regional governance and collaboration models, but is not a requirement of the State and therefore should have no binding obligations after September 2026.

- Staff has been working with UC ANR to investigate the eligibility of forming an Eastern Sierra Economic Development District based on unemployment and per capita income. Additional follow-up with the Economic Development Administration confirmed Inyo and Mono Counties do not meet the minimum legislative thresholds to establish an EDD; however, the EDA encouraged the ESCOG and partners to develop a qualitative case demonstrating the unique geography of the Eastern Sierra and how that reinforces a holistic regional economy. The EDA requested an application be deferred to Q1 2026.
- Staff continues to host a regional economic development roundtable for information sharing and collaboration, including Inyo County, Mono County, the City of Bishop, the Town of Mammoth Lakes, Alpine County, the Bishop Paiute Tribe, the Sierra Business Council, the Eastern Sierra Business Resource Center, Chambers of Commerce (Mammoth, Bishop, Lone Pine), the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (Go Biz), and RCRC.

ESCOG Administration:

- Staff is enrolled in the California State Association of Counties Leadership Training Course, courtesy of Inyo County. The course is conducted one or two days monthly through November.
- Staff met with Regional Managers to discuss ESCOG direction and programs of work, including aligning future programs around the strategic plans of each jurisdiction and ongoing coordination with regional management.
- Staff has been participating the Regional Housing Needs Assessment planning process.
- Staff is coordinating with the Inyo County PMO office to integrate ESCOG projects into Quickbase project management software.
- Ongoing grant administration and reporting for the CDFW Proposition 1 grant, Inyo National Forest Liaison Grant, and four California Jobs First Initiative grants.