

# North Coast Resource Partnership

## Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines



2015



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## Background

The North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP) is committed to transparency, stakeholder inclusion and process improvement. At the July 21, 2011 NCRP meeting, the Policy Review Panel (PRP) directed the formation of an ad hoc committee comprised of PRP and Technical Peer Review Committee (TPRC) members and staff to evaluate the existing approach to project evaluation and ranking and to develop a draft approach for consideration at future NCRP PRP meetings. An on-line survey and interviews were conducted of ad hoc committee members, TPRC members, and project proponents to gather information about the existing process and to make recommendations for improvement of the process. With this information as the basis, the ad hoc committee developed the NCRP Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines. The Guidelines have been used during Proposition 84 Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) project solicitations. The NCRP project application, review and selection process is an ongoing, multi-step progression that involves the participation of the NCRP PRP, TPRC, project proponents and other regional stakeholders. The process and Guidelines are continually revised as needed and as opportunities for input are presented.

- On March 1, 2012 the TPRC conducted a NCRP project review and selection process debriefing meeting and developed a listing of suggested process improvements. These were presented to the PRP during the April 2013 NCRP quarterly meeting. The TPRC project review and selection process debriefing meeting summary and presentation can be found at: [http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app\\_folders/view/6985](http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app_folders/view/6985)
- In March 2014, the ad hoc committee reviewed and refined sections of the Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines based on input from the TPRC project review de-brief meeting and the Draft 2014 IRWM Guidelines and Draft 2014 Drought Proposal Solicitation Package. The draft NCRP 2014 Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines and draft NCRP 2014 Drought Solicitation Project Application were approved by the PRP during the April 17, 2014 meeting. Additionally, the PRP directed that the NCRP 2014 Drought Solicitation grant would be considered phase one of two funding phases. Their intention in creating two linked funding phases was to ensure regional representation in project selection for the remaining Proposition 84 Implementation funding. During the final 2015 Proposition 84 Implementation Funding round, project selection will take into account the location of the NCRP 2014 Drought Projects. The meeting materials and summary can be found at: [http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app\\_folders/view/8473](http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app_folders/view/8473)
- During the NCRP Meeting in October 2014, the PRP directed staff to work with the TPRC and Executive Committee to develop improvements to the project review and selection process as an update to the NCRP Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines. A list of NCRP project review and selection process improvement recommendations was compiled from NCRP meetings, project proponents, a Tribal representatives meeting held on November 14 and from the TPRC Project Review de-brief meeting held on June 10, 2014 in Eureka. Updated Guidelines were provided to the TPRC for review in December 2014 and to the PRP during the NCRP meeting in January 2015. The meeting materials and summary can be found at [http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app\\_folders/view/8541](http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app_folders/view/8541)
- In response to the release of the draft IRWM Program Guidelines and Draft 2015 Proposal Solicitation Package, staff worked with the TPRC to update the NCRP Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines which were reviewed and approved by the PRP during the April 16, 2015 meeting.

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## **Schedule for NCRP 2015 Project Solicitation, Project Proposal Review and Selection Process**

This schedule is subject to change based on new information and the final 2015 IRWM Guidelines and final Proposition 84 2015 Proposal Solicitation Package expected to be released by California Department of Water Resources (DWR) in May.

- March – April 2015: The TPRC and staff refine the NCRP Project Review and Selection Process based on TPRC input and develop application materials based on the draft IRWM 2015 Guidelines and draft Proposition 84 Project Proposal Solicitation Package (PSP) released by Department of Water Resources (DWR) on March 13, 2015.
- April 16, 2015 NCRP meeting: PRP review, consider, provide direction, edit and approve NCRP Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines, 2015 and NCRP 2015 Project Application
- April 2015: Staff refine the final NCRP 2015 Project Application materials and NCRP Project Review and Selection Process Guidelines
- April 20 – May 29: NCRP project solicitation for IRWM Proposition 84 Implementation Project grant funding
- May 4 - 8: Informational & Assistance Workshops held throughout the North Coast Region. Project proponents are invited to bring project concepts and preliminary proposals to the meeting for review and discussion by TPRC members and NCRP staff.
- May 29: NCRP 2015 Project Proposals due
- June 1 – June 21: TPRC project review period; a TPRC project evaluation conference call or meeting will be held prior to the TPRC project review period.
- June 25 & 26: TPRC Project Review meeting to select a portfolio of priority projects as a TPRC recommendation to be presented to the PRP for final approval. As a public meeting, project proponents and the public are welcome to attend all TPRC Project Review Meetings and provide public comment where noted on the published agenda.
- July 2: PRP consider/approve TPRC recommended suite of Priority North Coast Projects for IRWM Proposition 84 Implementation Project funding at an in-person meeting held within the North Coast boundary
- August 7: regional application due to DWR for IRWM Proposition 84 Implementation Project grant funding

## Description of the NCRP Project Evaluation Roles

### Policy Review Panel

The [Policy Review Panel](#) (PRP) is the governing and decision-making body for the North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP). The composition of the PRP and decision-making process is defined in Section 5.4 of the NCIWMP [Memorandum of Mutual Understandings](#) (MoMU). The role of the PRP in the NCRP project review and selection process is to set the policy, decision making criteria and framework for the process and to ensure that the process is fair, open and transparent. As the decision-making body, the PRP provides direction about how the project evaluation and selection process aligns with the NCRP priorities by defining project review and selection guidelines (*see PRP Directed Guidelines for Project Scoring and Selection section*). Taking into account review and recommendations from the Technical Peer Review Committee, the PRP takes final action to approve all projects included in the NCRP and approves the region's highest priority projects for grant submittals. As defined in the MoMU, the PRP is subject to the Ralph M. Brown Act and is committed to transparency and inclusion, supporting input from stakeholders from throughout the region. All NCRP meetings are noticed in advance, open to the public, and all meeting summaries and information are posted on the NCRP website.

### Technical Peer Review Committee

The [Technical Peer Review Committee](#) (TPRC) is advisory to the PRP and evaluates and makes recommendations based on technical expertise and scientific data. The composition of the TPRC is defined in the NCRP [MoMU](#) and is subject to the Ralph M. Brown Act. The TPRC is comprised of technical and agency staff with expertise that includes fisheries, ecology, engineering, agriculture, geology, conservation, watershed planning and management, and water infrastructure. The role of the TPRC in the project review and selection process is to evaluate projects for technical merit based on their professional judgment and expertise, as well as on guidelines developed by the PRP and set by the funding solicitation. The TPRC prepares a draft suite of priority projects for review by the PRP. Scoring criteria and evaluation outcomes from the TPRC are available for public review.

### NCRP Staff

The role of NCRP staff during the project application, review and selection process is to facilitate and ensure the integrity of the process. Staff develops and coordinates project application materials; performs outreach and makes information available to the PRP, TPRC and stakeholders; clarifies outstanding issues; makes sure decisions are understood; maintains records; consolidates and summarizes TPRC review of project grant applications, and performs fact checking of state guidelines and criteria as necessary. Per the direction of the PRP (NCRP meeting, July 2013) staff will support project proponents in coordinating and potentially integrating projects in the same watershed or project area (e.g., informing project proponents of opportunities to partner or gain economies of scope and scale by combining projects) where timing allows and in accordance with the source funding proposal process and eligibility requirements.

# **NCRP Project Application, Review & Selection Process**

The NCRP project application, review and selection process is a multi-step process:

## **1. NCRP Projects, Preliminary Project Information**

Project proponents will upload Preliminary Project information to the NCRP website on an ongoing basis; project proponents will submit a signed MoMU; staff will publish eligible NCRP Projects (*see On-Going Project Inclusion Process below*).

## **2. NCRP Project Solicitation, Supplemental Project Information**

At the direction of the PRP and when there is a funding opportunity, a call for proposals will be announced to North Coast stakeholders. The PRP will review and refine the PRP directed guidelines and criteria for project scoring and selection based on NCRP goals and objectives, specific regional priorities and funding source requirements and preferences. Staff will develop and make available Project Solicitation application materials based on the NCRP priorities and the funding source solicitation and requirements. The project application materials will include an application, detailed instructions, a check list of elements that make up a competitive proposal and a clear description of scoring guidelines and evaluation criteria, all of which will be reviewed by the TPRC and PRP and approved by the PRP. Project applicants will provide application materials to NCRP staff via email. Microsoft Word and Excel files that make up the NCRP project application will be made available for reference, for application development and for submittal to NCRP staff. Staff will provide outreach, education and technical assistance via workshops and informal meetings by phone, internet and in person.

## **3. Individual TPRC review of NCRP Project Applications**

Staff will compile and provide application materials to the TPRC for review and scoring along with scoring/evaluation forms. A TPRC project evaluation conference call meeting will be held prior to the TPRC project review period to discuss the general review process and go over scoring definitions to ensure calibration and clarity. When packaging the project application materials for each TPRC member, staff will randomize chronology of the project applications so that TPRC members are reviewing project applications in a different order. The TPRC members will strive to individually review and score the NCRP project applications for technical merit based on criteria as defined by the funding solicitation, NCRP PRP defined guidelines (*see PRP Directed Guidelines for Project Scoring and Selection section*) and their professional expertise and judgment. TPRC members will review all projects referred to them unless they recuse themselves due to a potential conflict of interest. TPRC members will provide individual scores to staff for compilation. Time allowance for the individual TPRC review of project applications will be at least 2 weeks depending on the proposal solicitation timeframe. If two weeks is not available, the Executive Committee will determine the suitable duration to meet grant solicitation needs.

## **4. Group TPRC review of NCRP Project Applications**

Staff will compile all individual scores submitted by TPRC members prior to the group TPRC review meeting, to determine an initial average project score; these scores are meant to facilitate discussion and will be presented at the TPRC meeting. Please note, the initial scores may not represent all TPRC

scores and thus should not be interpreted as an official preliminary score. Adhering to a high standard of professional conduct, TPRC members and staff will meet to discuss each project and may make adjustments to their individual scores based on the group discussion. To ensure a comprehensive project proposal review process, TPRC member in-person attendance is strongly encouraged at this meeting. Staff will compile all updated TPRC individual scores to determine an updated average project score. TPRC review meetings are open to project proponents and the public. The agenda at a formally noticed public meeting will include a thorough review of the NCRP Conflict of Interest Guidelines as well as time for comment from the public (*see Conflict of Interest and Public Input Guidelines sections below*). All meeting deliberations, project scores, applicant and public input and recusals will be recorded.

**5. TPRC Selection of Draft Suite of NCRP Priority Projects**

During the project review meeting, the TPRC will select a draft suite of NCRP Priority Projects and draft budget amounts for each project. The selection will be based on a number of factors including: technical project scores; project scalability and potential funding allowance; the overall balance of projects based on the PRP's defined guidelines for project selection (*see PRP Directed Guidelines for Project Scoring and Selection section*); and the collective ability of the projects to meet NCRP goals and be competitive for the funding opportunity. A contingency list of projects will also be developed for consideration in the event that a selected project could not move forward for inclusion into the regional application for any reason. All meeting deliberations, public input and Conflict of Interest recusals will be recorded in the meeting minutes.

**6. PRP Review, Consideration and Final Approval of the Suite of NCRP Priority Projects**

The NCRP PRP will convene a Brown Act compliant in-person meeting held within the North Coast boundary to present, review and approve the final list of NCRP Priority Projects. During a NCRP meeting, the TPRC will provide a summary of the project review process and present their recommended draft suite of NCRP Priority Projects and contingency project list. The PRP will review, may amend and will approve by majority vote a final suite of NCRP Priority Projects and contingency projects to forward to the funding entity. During the PRP's review of the draft suite of NCRP Priority Projects, the TPRC will answer questions and provide information as requested by the PRP. The PRP – comprised of elected public officials or their designees and elected Tribal representatives – will make their final decision based on TPRC recommendations, PRP guidelines and other factors that they believe represent the best interest of the North Coast region. For more information on the process by which PRP members are selected, refer to the NCRP Memorandum of Mutual Understanding (MOMU). The NCRP Priority Projects list will be posted to the website and made available to the public. Project review scores and review meeting materials will be made available to the project proponents and to the general public, upon request.

**7. NCRP Priority Project Application Materials for Regional Proposal**

Depending on the source funding solicitation, NCRP Priority Project proponents will be asked to provide additional project information to include in a competitive regional application. Additional information may include, but not be limited to, a detailed work plan, budget, schedule, economic cost/benefits

analysis, monitoring & performance measures and technical documentation that support the project. The timeframe to submit this additional information may be very short for expedited funding solicitations. In the event that sufficient additional information for a project cannot be provided within the requested timeframe, that project may not be able to be included in the regional application and another project may instead be selected from the contingency list. Where feasible, NCRP staff will provide technical assistance to project proponents who require it.

Once the regional application has been approved and selected for funding, individual project proponents will enter into an agreement, likely with the NCRP regional grant administrator, to implement each project. It is imperative that an agreement between a project proponent and the NCRP regional grant administrator be executed in a timely fashion, particularly with rounds of expedited funding. The NCRP Grants Manual and an example of a DWR grant agreement, is available online: [http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app\\_pages/view/7953](http://www.northcoastresourcepartnership.org/app_pages/view/7953). Also see the DWR's Proposition 84 contract templates ([http://www.water.ca.gov/irwm/grants/resources\\_contracttemp.cfm](http://www.water.ca.gov/irwm/grants/resources_contracttemp.cfm)).

Preliminary Project information for all eligible projects will be published to the NCRP website on an ongoing basis as described in "*On-Going Project Inclusion Process*" below and included in the NCIRWM Plan.

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## **Guidelines for Public Input and Project Proponent Input during the Project Review Process**

All TPRC project review meetings will be noticed at least 72 hours in advance and will be open and welcoming to the public. A conference call-in number will be provided for project proponents so that they may listen to the meeting and provide input during the public comment period if desired. The meeting agenda and background materials to be used in the TPRC's decision-making will be available at the meeting location, posted to the NCRP website 72 hours in advance of the meeting and mailed to any interested member of the public upon request.

All TPRC meeting agendas include time for public comment, which will typically be limited to 3 minutes for each speaker. Public Comment portions of the meeting are not meant to be interactive and TPRC members will not engage in discussion or debate an issue with any member of the public. Public comment and materials delivered to staff from the public will be published on the NCRP website. Project proponents, interested stakeholders and members of the public will be invited to provide comment:

- on items not on the agenda;
- after the TPRC discusses the projects amongst themselves, but before the TPRC members submit their final scores
- after the TPRC develops their draft recommended list, but before the TPRC submits their final recommendation to the PRP



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## **NCRP Conflict of Interest Policy**

The NCRP Conflict of Interest Policy will follow the [California Fair Political Practices Commission](#) (FPPC) guidelines and the intent of the guidelines to address obligations under the Political Reform Act's conflict of interest rules.

Under the FPPC rules, when a member has a conflict of interest with a specific project, that member must publicly disclose the specific nature of the conflict and recuse themselves (i.e. leave the room or remain silent) during discussion of that specific project. The FPPC guidelines seek to prevent conflicts of interest in two ways - disclosure and recusal.

"No public official at any level of state or local government shall make, participate in making or in any way attempt to use his official position to influence a governmental decision in which he knows or has reason to know he has a financial interest." (Political Reform Act; Gov. Code Section 87100)

"Assets and income of public officials which may be materially affected by their official actions should be disclosed and in appropriate circumstances the officials should be disqualified from acting in order that conflicts of interest may be avoided." (Gov. Code section 81002)

During the NCRP project review and selection process, TPRC and PRP members will disclose any potential financial interest in a project. If a TPRC or PRP member has a potential conflict of interest, they will be expected to recuse themselves (i.e. leave the room or remain silent) from making, participating in or in any way influencing a project scoring or selection decision.

In the interest of transparency, TPRC and PRP members will also disclose any history of contribution to the project including input in the grant development or project planning or other involvement that could potentially represent a real or perceived conflict of interest. Once disclosed, the TPRC and PRP member will determine whether these actions constitute a conflict of interest or will prevent an objective review of the NCRP implementation project(s) and will determine if recusal is necessary. The PRP or TPRC member may wish to request the advice of their colleagues on the PRP or TPRC to make their determination.

Opportunities for disclosure and reporting will occur during the individual TPRC review of NCRP projects, during the group TPRC project review and during the TPRC and PRP selection meetings. The project score sheets will include a checklist and comment box for TPRC members to disclose potential conflict of interest. Project review score sheets and meeting notes will document any conflict of interest disclosures and recusals. In addition, the TPRC Chair(s), or his/her designee, will be selected to provide oversight during the project review meetings and act as a facilitator of TPRC discussion should conflict of interest issues arise. The TPRC Chair(s), or his/her designee, will be supported by staff to ensure the process adheres to the Conflict of Interest Policy established by the PRP.

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## On-Going Project Inclusion Process into the NCIRWM Plan

### Background

Increasingly, funding opportunities for project implementation require or give preference to projects that are included in an IRWM Plan. The following process will provide a mechanism for including projects on an on-going basis into the NCIRWM Plan.

1. Project proponents will complete preliminary on-line project information:
    - Project Name
    - Organization Name, Type & Contact information
    - Project location address (for mapping purposes)
    - Funding Program names
    - Total project cost & Funding request
    - Start/End dates (tentative)
    - Alignment with NCIRWMP Objectives (selection boxes)
    - Project Summary & Goals
    - Project partners
    - Description of benefits (including if/how the project will benefit DACs)
    - Project management strategies/ project elements (selection boxes)
  2. Project proponent will submit a signed [Memorandum of Mutual Understandings \(MoMU\)](#)
  3. Staff will review the project and follow-up with project proponents regarding any eligibility concerns (Urban Water Management Plan, Agricultural Water Management, Surface Water Diverter, Groundwater Management Plan, CASGEM compliance, proponent type)
  4. The TPRC will review and accept eligible projects
  5. Staff will 'Publish' eligible NCRP Projects; project summaries will be included on the website; project locations will be included on the interactive map; and staff will report to the PRP at a NCRP meeting
  6. Additional project information will be required when funding solicitations and calls for proposals occur; NCRP project proponents will be allowed to edit preliminary project upload information.
  7. NCRP Projects will be reviewed and scored by the TPRC if required by a respective funding solicitation; NCRP Priority Projects will be selected by the PRP. NCRP Priority Project proponents will need to adopt the NCIRWM Plan when completed as per the IRWM Guidelines.
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## **Project Budget Under-runs and Funding Reallocation Process**

**Background:** In some cases, a NCRP implementation project may complete under budget or otherwise not expend their entire grant allotment. Typically the funding agencies have allowed reallocation of funds to another project *within the suite* of projects included in the grant agreement for additional work toward the project. In previous instances where there has been funding to reallocate, the PRP has reallocated the funding to the projects within the county where the under-budget project occurred. The PRP members from that county have in turn determined how to reallocate the money to project(s) within that county.

It is expected that with current and future funding there will be projects that are completed under-budget and/or will have remaining funds to reallocate.

### **NCRP Project Funding Reallocation Process**

1. Consistent with funding requirements, project funding reallocation will occur, to the maximum extent feasible, within the County or Tribal region where the original project is located and is within the existing suite of projects in the grant agreement.
  2. PRP members from the County or Tribal region where the original project is located will determine which projects receive reallocation and the amount of funding
  3. If the County or Tribal region of origin option is not available (i.e., no projects from the County of origin within the project suite need additional funding):
    - a. Staff will announce the availability of funds to project proponents within the grant agreement suite of projects; staff will solicit project requests and description of need from eligible project proponents
    - b. Staff will determine eligible projects
    - c. TPRC ad hoc committee will be formed (at NCRP meeting if timing allows)
    - d. Ad hoc committee will develop criteria for project reallocation selection
    - e. Ad hoc committee will develop project reallocation option recommendations
    - f. TPRC will review ad hoc committee option recommendations
    - g. PRP will review and approve recommendations at the next PRP meeting
    - h. TPRC ad hoc committee will be disbanded
  4. Future grant applications: During the TPRC and PRP review process, projects will be identified to receive priority should additional funding become available; priority will be given to projects within the County where the original projects are located.
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# PRP Directed Guidelines for Project Scoring and Selection

## Background

The intent of the following PRP-directed project scoring and selection guidelines is to promote the implementation of NCRP goals while allowing the flexibility to address specific regional priorities and funding source requirements. These guidelines are in addition to those defined by the NCRP goals & objectives and IRWM Program or other funding source guidelines and scoring criteria. The PRP includes the following preferences and priority considerations in its decision-making process:

## Regional Representation

The PRP will make every effort to ensure geographic representation by including projects from each of the seven counties and from the north, central and southern tribal areas of the North Coast Region. This guideline will apply only to those projects which are eligible for funding under the NCRP and other state and federal requirements, and which have met the technical criteria established by the PRP and evaluated by the Technical Peer Review Committee.

## Economically Disadvantaged Community (DAC) <sup>1</sup>

In an effort to build capacity and extend services to communities that are under-served and/or limited by economic barriers, the TPRC will include screening criteria that will confer additional weight to projects that, in addition to meeting other NCRP criteria, will benefit North Coast DACs. The PRP reserves the right to prioritize DAC projects, based on a project's ability to mitigate threats to public health, watershed health, and the economic and public health benefits that project implementation would bring to these communities.

## Jurisdictional Notification & Coordination

Project applicants are required to demonstrate that they have notified counties and Tribes re: proposed projects in the proposed project impact area of a particular watershed or relevant area of County or Tribal interest. Project applicants are required to demonstrate coordination and outreach to potentially interested stakeholders in the relevant watershed, sub-watershed or project impact area.

## Programmatic Integration and Balance of Project Type to effectively implement NCRP goals

NCRP goals: To support local autonomy and encourage cooperation; enhance public health & economic vitality in disadvantaged communities; restore salmon populations; enhance beneficial uses of water; and promote energy independence, emissions reductions and climate change adaptation.

- a) All project types should address grant requirements and NCRP goals and priorities
- b) Programmatic integration and project type diversity will be achieved at the portfolio level - (e.g. small /individual projects not required to demonstrate integration of all priorities, yet they must contribute to a comprehensive suite of projects that achieve a multi-benefit, integrated program)
- c) Programmatic integration and project type diversity will be achieved over time and through multiple rounds of funding

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<sup>1</sup> *Definition for Economically Disadvantaged Community (DAC)\*: Department of Water Resources defines "disadvantaged community" as a community with an annual household income that is less than 80% of the statewide annual median household income*

- d) Projects that provide multi-benefits will be prioritized (where all else is equal)
- e) Projects that address specific targets as identified by the PRP, including specific North Coast objectives, challenges and opportunities (e.g., promote biomass-related projects, effective in-stream flow approaches, energy retrofits, drought or flood preparedness, effective instream flow approaches or specific funding opportunities) may be prioritized by the PRP.

**Special Consideration for NCRP 2015 Project Solicitation**

During the April 17, 2014 meeting the PRP directed that the NCRP 2014 Drought Solicitation grant would be considered phase one of two funding phases. Their intention in creating two linked funding phases was to ensure regional representation in project selection for the remaining Proposition 84 Implementation funding. During the final 2015 Proposition 84 Implementation Funding round, project selection will take into account the location of the NCRP 2014 Drought Projects. This PRP direction was reviewed and reconfirmed by the PRP during the NCRP meeting on April 16, 2015. Following is a table depicting the NCRP 2014 Drought Projects and funding amounts per county and Tribal region.

<b>County / Tribal Region</b>	<b>Funding Amount</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Del Norte County	\$438,060	5.30%
Humboldt County	\$1,531,700	18.53%
Mendocino County	\$4,558,293	55.15%
Modoc County	\$0	0.00%
Sonoma County	\$1,310,573	15.86%
Siskiyou County	\$0	0.00%
Tribal - Northern Region	\$201,770	2.44%
Tribal - Central Region	\$0	0.00%
Tribal - Southern Region	\$0	0.00%
Trinity	\$224,604	2.72%
	<b>\$8,265,000</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Please note that 3 NCRP 2014 Drought Projects crossed county lines; these project proponents were contacted to determine the proportion of funding to be spent in each county to determine the full funding amount per county.*