



NORTH COAST RESOURCE PARTNERSHIP & WATERSHED CENTER WOODY FEEDSTOCK AGGREGATION PILOT PROJECT

Request for Proposals

Proposal Due Date: August 15, 2023

Awards Announced: September 15, 2023

BACKGROUND

The North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP) and the Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC) are partnering on a multi-faceted initiative to increase the collection, aggregation, and utilization of the woody biomass produced from hazardous fuel management projects across the North Coast Region. The [North Coast Forest Biomass Strategy](#) (the Strategy) will help drive community and landscape-scale fire hazard reduction, watershed health, and resilience. This phase of the Strategy, the Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilot Project, is funded by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR).

This Strategy is part of the broader regional forest and fire capacity plan that NCRP has developed with funding from the California Department of Conservation and in collaboration with a wide range of regional partners and experts. The [Vision for North Coast Resilience](#) lays out comprehensive and holistic priorities for enhancing watershed, firehed, forest, and community resilience. Providing community-led, environmentally sensitive solutions for hazardous fuel reduction and the utilization of the resulting biomass through direct funding, local coordination, and resource-sharing is intended to enable more treatments to restore fire resilient forests and lead to lower wildfire risk around our communities, a key objective for the NCRP.

A core goal of the Vision for North Coast Resilience, increasing the pace, scope, and scale of forest health projects and community-led vegetation management, will result in substantial increases in woody biomass disposal needs. The Strategy is committed to reducing open pile burning of woody debris by enhancing the environmentally sensitive, efficient, productive, and sustainable collection and utilization of those materials, thereby optimizing social, economic, and ecological outcomes for the North Coast region. A vibrant, locally led wood product market can help make use of the vegetation management byproduct to turn it into beneficial uses, reducing carbon emissions and wildfire risk while enhancing and maintaining local jobs and revenue. For this reason, the Strategy is intended to support economic vitality for existing commercial operations and new business opportunities and innovative products that use material that is often considered low-value waste material – all through the lens of ecosystem health and climate resilience.

The North Coast Forest Biomass Strategy will include multiple projects over the coming months and years, pooling funding resources, regional expertise, and collaboration to achieve meaningful improvements in the removal and utilization of hazardous fuels across our region's diverse communities and landscapes. The Woody

Feedstock Aggregation Pilot Project is an important first step in implementing this Strategy. Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilots funded through this Request for Proposals (RFP) will develop plans designed to aggregate underutilized feedstock and match it to climate resilient, environmentally beneficial, location-appropriate wood product market opportunities.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS - OVERVIEW

This initiative targets feedstock aggregation and biomass utilization, particularly as a tool to drive forest health, community fire resilience, and rural economic opportunity. The pilot project is part of NCRP's and WRTC's overall goal to balance and optimize the health and resilience of human and natural communities, including community safety, economic development, watershed and ecosystem health, and climate action. The Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilot Project is designed to explore the potential to integrate low-value feedstock from a diversity of procurement sources - including private, non-commercial parcels, as well as supply from commercial and public lands. However, successful applicants should focus on how to catalyze community fire resilience by using feedstocks derived from private, non-commercial lands.

For the Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilot Project, NCRP/WRTC is seeking proposals from project sponsors and partnerships to develop a preliminary business plan. This initial phase will outline foundational elements of a successful organizational model for feedstock aggregation that is intended to be further developed and implemented in subsequent phases. Applicants will investigate and propose an organizational structure and evaluate and recommend specific feedstock aggregation, processing and product opportunities, functional legal and governance structures and financing mechanisms that can be implemented, expanded and/or scaled out to other parts of the North Coast region and other similar areas in California. This business plan will include a description of organizational arrangements (i.e., Joint Powers Authority, Community Services Districts, etc.) that have the legal, financial, and operational capacity on the local level to aggregate woody biomass across private and public lands, and to act as a broker for long-term feedstock contracts (5, 10, and 20 years).

Up to three pilot partnerships will be selected, representing Tribal lands or Tribal communities, counties, and/or sub-regions (i.e., multi-county areas, watersheds, or other applicant-defined geographic areas) within the North Coast Region in which to develop detailed, locally unique plans that reflect the diversity of North Coast landscapes, built and natural infrastructure, and economic development needs. The sub-regional pilots will evaluate and recommend specific feedstock aggregation models, linked to either existing or potential processing and product opportunities in their areas, with a focus on exploring the feasibility of potential legal and governance structures and financing mechanisms best suited to their local context. Leadership and/or participation in a pilot does not commit individuals or organizations to any subsequent implementation of feedstock aggregation. However, the intention is for these pilots to lay the groundwork for future implementation.

The local pilots will focus on achieving community and watershed resilience and ensuring that the proposed solutions reflect the needs and preferences of local communities in alignment with regional values. The initiative is structured to provide the information and strategic analysis that relevant organizations, entities, and businesses will need to act together at the culmination of this initiative in 2024. The optimal solutions for the North Coast will likely include a diverse array of aggregation approaches and processing facilities – matched to inventory – that are at a variety of scales and sizes. While the program is agnostic to which markets and products the feedstock aggregation pilots might supply, NCRP/WRTC anticipates that project teams will be investigating and/or servicing multiple wood product market opportunities.

PILOT PROJECT SUPPORT, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & NETWORKING

Please Note: This RFP process is expected to be highly competitive, given the size of the North Coast region, the number of innovative project opportunities, and the array of organizations interested in addressing this challenge. Given the timeframe for this funding opportunity via OPR, project sponsors should demonstrate project readiness and strong community and decision maker support to increase competitiveness for this round of funding. In the absence of current decision-maker support, applicants should describe how they will garner support through the course of their investigation and development work. WRTC, NCRP, and other partner agencies expect to have additional funding in the future to support the development and implementation of these feedstock aggregation and wood utilization projects, along with the development of additional projects. Project sponsors are strongly encouraged to identify and upload projects – even if they are at an early stage of development and readiness and may not be competitive for this round of funding – so that the WRTC, NCRP, and other agency partners can understand the level of interest and need in the North Coast region and can identify opportunities to support further development of such projects. Support for the development of future projects can also be provided via the [NCRP’s Technical Assistance Program](#).

For the Woody Feedstock Aggregation Pilot Project, NCRP/WRTC is seeking partners who want to investigate this aggregation entity concept and approach and propose feasible options for applying the concept in the region. The Watershed Center will serve as the technical lead for the project, sharing guidance and technical expertise to support pilots to investigate the needs and opportunities, and develop preliminary business plans. Direct assistance from the Watershed Center will include expert staff time to coordinate, advise, share technical resources, assist with networking, and interpreting resources coming from other pilots throughout the state. This may include some direct participation in each pilot project’s partnership meetings and planning work, upon pilot project sponsor request/invitation.

Successful pilots selected via this RFP will initially receive \$60,000 to develop preliminary business plans, as described above. In-kind consultant/expert resources will be made available by NCRP and WRTC across the three pilots to further investigate technical and/or legal questions that arise through the investigation and planning process to address issues that are collectively shared among project participants and/or specific to individual project needs. Other resources can be found in [Appendix A](#), which lists the reports and tools that have been completed or are actively being developed, all of which will be available to all applicants and successful pilot partnerships. [Appendix A](#) resources will be actively updated as other statewide pilots continue to publish technical reports, plans and useful resources.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK

Project awards will be used to develop a preliminary implementation or business plan which 1) describes a proposed organizational structure (identifying partners, functional legal structure, governance, etc.); 2) evaluates specific feedstock aggregation, processing, and market opportunities (existing and/or envisioned); 3) describes plans for operations (i.e., how the entity will function within the sector and interact/integrate with existing supply chains; and 4) explores financing mechanisms and financial performance for woody feedstock aggregation and processing. Different pilot partnerships will start in different places, and teams may focus on different dimensions of feedstock aggregation challenges, but successful applicants should address all the following categories. Please highlight and elaborate on the bullet points that warrant the most focus for your partnership and geography. You may add others that are relevant to your proposed project – this is not an exhaustive list.

Feedstock supply characteristics

- What is the intended “woodshed” (spatial boundary)?
- Who are the target non-commercial landowners?
- What is the quality and quantity of accessible feedstock (tree species, size classes, volume)?
- Which portion of the *accessible* feedstock is underutilized and why (i.e., market demand, logistical factors, physical factors, etc.)?
- What is the state of the existing transportation infrastructure to haul biomass to the processing facility?

Feedstock demand and market development

- What is the operational status of existing wood processing facilities, what feedstocks do they purchase, and what are the delivered prices for various specifications of feedstock?
- What is the state of secondary infrastructure to support wood utilization (i.e., utility infrastructure, kiln drying, finishing and prefabrication, etc.)?
- How do current and/or prospective wood utilization markets align with the biomass feedstock being produced from community-scale fire hazard reduction (i.e., volumes, specifications, etc.)?

Ecosystem and climate change impacts

- How does the project contribute to forest and ecosystem health and wildfire resilience?
- How does the project address potential climate impacts of proposed actions?
- What are opportunities to document ecosystem and forest health benefits, carbon emissions, or sequestration potential for different wood utilization pathways?

Administrative capacity and structure

- What are the existing and necessary local capacities (i.e., labor, expertise, skills, etc.)?
- What legal/administrative entities and structures can be leveraged to enable or participate in a feedstock aggregation initiative? Does a new legal structure or partnership need to be created?
- What services would/could a feedstock aggregation entity provide, and what factors will drive operational and administrative costs associated with those services?
- What are the environmental, regulatory, political, and social constraints to scaling wood collection, transport, and utilization?

Financing

- What federal/state subsidies are available for start-up and sustaining operations?
- If debt or additional startup capital is needed (bonds, equity, etc.), what are some viable sources the partnership could pursue?
- What will be the sources and projections of sustaining revenues to help achieve sustainable operations?
- What is the price sensitivity to various supply chain factors (e.g., diesel fuel, labor, delivered biomass value, etc.)

DELIVERABLES & DUE DATE

Preliminary Business Plan/Implementation Plan, which should address the most relevant elements listed in the “Description of Work” provided above, in order to demonstrate the overall feasibility, future actions and enabling conditions necessary to advance your project. **Deliverables submission due December 31, 2024.**

AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE

Pilot project sponsors can apply for up to \$60,000 in grant funds for direct financial assistance. Funds can be used for:

- Personnel costs for project management, technical writing, etc.
- Consultant costs for overall pilot development or providing targeted technical assistance for components of the business/implementation plan.
- Direct expenses such as travel, meeting rooms, materials etc. (state reimbursement rates apply).
- Administrative expenses up to 10% are allowed.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants include Federally and/or California State recognized Tribes, public agencies, counties, local or state agencies/special districts, Resource Conservation Districts, non-profit organizations, and public utilities.

DELIVERY OF PROPOSALS & DEADLINES

Proposals are due August 15, 2023. To apply, please submit a proposal via the [NCRP Project Tracker](#).

Please submit a complete proposal, which is made up of 2 elements:

1. **NCRP Project Tracker Project Proposal** (see [Project Tracker Instructions](#))
2. **[Project Application Form Document](#)** uploaded to the NCRP Project Tracker, which includes:
 - Proposal Cover Page
 - Certification of Authority
 - Organization Statement of Qualifications
 - Supplemental Application Questions (narrative and budget)
 - Supporting Technical Documents (optional)

INQUIRIES, PROPOSAL, OR PROJECT TRACKER SUPPORT

- **Optional consultation between applicants and Woody Feedstock Aggregation Project Team:** To help project sponsors determine if their proposed project is eligible for a sub-regional pilot and to develop a successful pilot proposal, the technical team at the Watershed Center is available for consultation. Applicants are highly encouraged to take advantage of this assistance. To set up a consultation, contact Clarke Stevenson at clarke@thewatershedcenter.com.
- For help with developing projects for future rounds of funding, you may wish to apply for consultant support from the NCRP Technical Assistance program, which emphasizes TA support to economically disadvantaged or historically underrepresented communities and entities. For more information, see the [Request for Technical Assistance Proposals](#) information on the NCRP Project Tracker or contact Rose Roberts at rroberts@northcoastresourcepartnership.org.
- For assistance with uploading a proposal to the NCRP Project Tracker, contact Rose Roberts at rroberts@northcoastresourcepartnership.org.

PROPOSAL SELECTION AND NEXT STEPS

- NCRP and Watershed Center staff and consultant team will review applications based on selection criteria consistent with OPR program and contract requirements and approved by the NCRP Leadership Council or its Regional Forest and Fire Ad Hoc Committee (see Proposal Scoring Criteria Table below).
- NCRP and Watershed Center staff and consultant team will forward a slate of eligible proposals to the NCRP Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Ad Hoc Committee.
- The NCRP Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Ad Hoc Committee will review the slate recommended by the NCRP staff and consultant team and make final selections based on the approved criteria described below. The meeting of the NCRP RFFC Ad Hoc Committee will be open to the public, with time for public comment, and all members of the Committee will abide by NCRP standards of transparency, equity, and fairness, including upholding the requirements of the Brown Act, as well as conflict-of-interest standards required by the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC).
- Project selection will be based on several factors: technical proposal scores, regional representation (the three sub-regional pilots selected will reflect the diversity of North Coast landscapes, built and natural infrastructure, and socioeconomic contexts) and the ability of the project team to complete the project within the required timeframe. Proposal scores will not be the sole determining factor, therefore proposals other than the highest scoring may be selected for funding.
- Applicants will be notified of funding decisions on September 15, 2023.
- Grant agreements will be developed and pilots will launch in early October.

PROPOSAL SCORING CRITERIA

Please note that all Criteria are scored on a 0 – 10 basis, where:

- A score of 9-10 points will be awarded where the criterion is fully addressed, achieves significant outcomes, and is supported by thorough and well-presented documentation and logical rationale.
- A score of 7-8 points will be awarded where the criterion is fully addressed, achieves significant outcomes, but is not supported by thorough documentation or sufficient rationale.
- A score of 5-6 points will be awarded where the criterion is addressed, achieves moderate outcomes, and is supported by thorough and well-presented documentation and logical rationale.
- A score of 3-4 points will be awarded where the criterion is marginally addressed, achieves moderate outcomes, but is not supported by thorough documentation or sufficient rationale.
- A score of 1-2 points will be awarded where the criterion is marginally addressed but achieves outcomes that are low in significance.
- A score of 0 points will be awarded where the criterion is not addressed.

NCRP PROJECT PROPOSAL SCORING CRITERIA	Weighting Factor	Range of Points
<p>ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA</p> <p>Is the project sponsor an eligible grant applicant?</p>	n/a	y/n
<p>PROJECT INFORMATION</p> <p>Is the proposal complete? Do responses address all the questions raised in the Application documents?</p> <p>Does the Project Description summarize the major components and the intended purpose of the project?</p> <p>Does the project describe an approach to investigating the key elements of a successful plan?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedstock supply characteristics • Feedstock demand and market development • Ecosystem and climate change benefits • Administrative capacity and structure • Financing 	2	0-20
<p>PROJECT TEAM CAPACITY</p> <p>Does the project team have sufficient capacity to develop a credible, data-informed, community supported, actionable business/ implementation plan for community scale, environmentally sensitive biomass utilization?</p>	2	0-20
<p>COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY</p> <p>Does the application reflect cross sector alignment of entities or organizations that would be needed to take successful action?</p> <p>Do these partners have clear roles in moving the project forward?</p> <p>Is there a match between how the community is defined and which organizations are at the table?</p> <p>Does the project team encompass and engage under-resourced communities and build capacity to support full participation?</p> <p>Does the project team have Tribal leadership and engagement?</p>	1	0-10
<p>SPATIAL ASSESSMENTS</p> <p>Are the site boundaries supported by assessment or other data that reflects on the following and support local qualitative and quantitative criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing and plausibly estimated/projected flow of material. • Existing or plausibly estimated/projected market opportunities. • Concentration/distribution of non-industrial parcels that could plausibly be managed at community scale. 	1	0-10

NCRP PROJECT PROPOSAL SCORING CRITERIA	Weighting Factor	Range of Points
<p>PROPOSAL FEASIBILITY</p> <p>Does the project include feasible opportunities and pathways to mobilize community scale vegetation management, aggregate feedstock, and connect to existing or developing markets?</p> <p>Does the project team demonstrate an understanding of potential structures for project implementation (i.e., CSD, JPA, etc.)</p>	1	0-10
<p>POTENTIAL IMPACT</p> <p>Is the proposed subregional pilot at the right scale to achieve meaningful community wildfire resilience, forest health, and economic uplift?</p> <p>Does the project identify & optimize addressing needs of communities most at risk?</p> <p>Does the project act as a test bed/demonstration of new ideas that could be applied to other parts of the region and beyond?</p> <p>Does the project demonstrate potential impact on increasing fire resilience, improving ecosystem health, improving climate resilience?</p> <p>Does the project demonstrate potential for integration with existing wood product and biomass markets and/or catalyzing new market opportunities?</p>	2	0-20
<p>POLITICAL/COMMUNITY SUPPORT</p> <p>Is there demonstrated or likely support from decision makers, including agency directors, elected, or appointed Tribal and county officials?</p> <p>Is there a plan to address potential community concerns?</p>	1	0 – 10
<p>PROJECT BENEFITS TO ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES</p> <p>Does the project area contain economically disadvantaged and/or severely economically disadvantaged communities (DACs)?</p>	1	0 – 10
<p>PROJECT BUDGET</p> <p>Is the budget of adequate detail and completeness to demonstrate that the tasks and deliverables can be achieved?</p> <p>Are the task budget and the overall budget reasonable?</p>	1	0 – 10
<p>PROJECT READINESS</p> <p>Does the proposal include appropriate and reasonable tasks and timeframe for implementing the planning project?</p> <p>Is the description of the technical basis for the project adequate considering the due date of the final product? Can the project be completed by the due date?</p>	2	0 – 20
<p>TOTAL SCORE</p>		0 – 140

APPENDIX A

The following reports and tools have been completed or are actively being developed, all of which will be available to successful pilot partnerships:

	Description	Lead Pilot	Project Team	Timing
Legal Analysis				
Joint Power Authority (JPA)	Viability of JPAs to act as the aggregation entity. Potential JPA models are provided based on participating members, complexity, and scale	Fall River RCD	CLERE Inc	Complete
Community Service District (CSD)	Viability of CSDs to act as the aggregation entity	Mariposa RCD	CLERE Inc	Q4 2023
Climate Resilience Districts (CRFD)	Viability of CRFDs to act as the aggregation entity	Mariposa RCD	CLERE Inc	Q4 2023
Cooperative Model	Viability of Cooperative business model to act as the aggregation entity	none	none	–
Enabling Markets				
Digital Feedstock Aggregation Marketplace (“Resilient Sierra”)	Digital infrastructure for feedstock aggregators to assess quantity, carbon intensity of feedstock mobilization, basic economics of mobilization, and connect buyers and sellers of woody feedstock	Mariposa RCD	UC Davis CalPoly SLO CalPoly Humboldt Amazon Web Services Scale Capacity Inc	Ongoing
Regional market analyses	Methods on estimating various aspects of market capacity including existing biomass flow, potential pathways, and product feasibility studies for biomass utilization	all	all	Complete and ongoing