



CALIFORNIA LAND RECYCLING CONFERENCE

Imagine | Innovate | Implement
September 29 – October 1, 2026 | Foster City

Rural Brownfields Redevelopment

Strategies and Best Practices



OFFICE OF BROWNFIELDS
Department of Toxic Substances Control | Cleanup In Vulnerable Communities Initiative



CENTER FOR CREATIVE
LAND RECYCLING
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Introducing our Speakers



Laurel Hicke

**Wood Utilization Project
Specialist**

Sierra Institute for
Community and
Environment

lhicke@sierrainstitute.us



Sarah Hoffman

**Rural Brownfields
Specialist**

Sierra Institute for
Community and
Environment

hoffmansarah574@gmail.com



Paul Saldaña

**Economic
Development Manager**

City of McFarland
psaldana@cityofmcfar
and.ca.gov



Brooklyn James

**Project Officer -
NorCal & SJV**

U.S. EPA R9
Brownfields
james.brooklyn@epa
.gov

Agenda Breakdown

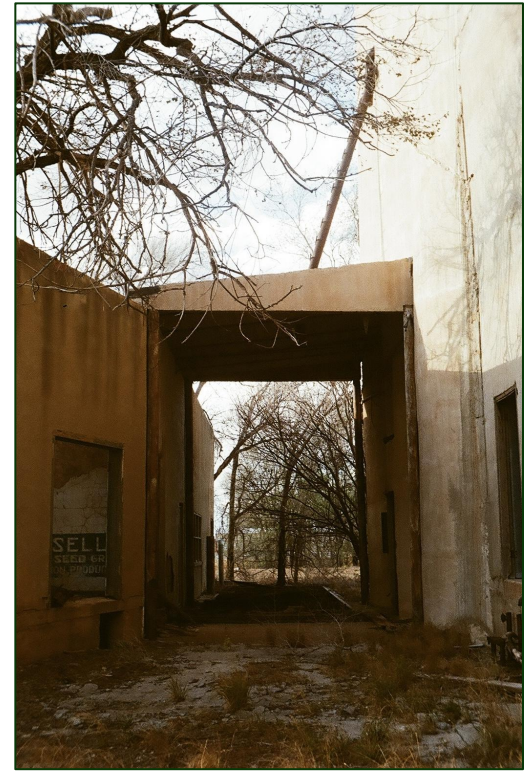


Common Rural Brownfields	One
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Case Study - The Sierra Institute	Three
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Common Rural Brownfields

- Lumber Mills
- Mining Facilities
- Farms & Pesticide Storage
- Factories
- Railyards
- Gas Stations
- Silos & Grain Elevators
- Roadside Diners
- More!

Grain Elevator in Stanislaus County



Purina Chow factory in Rural Texas

Unique Challenges of Land Reuse in Rural Communities

Small Populations

Difficulty accessing funding opportunities, **small budgets**

Less population and environmental **data** available for grant applications

Limited **capacity** for city staff (too many hats!)

Difficult to identify a **champion**

Remote Locations

Travel & transportation costs are higher

Weather constraints (snow storms, extreme heat)

Strained **resources** - wifi, grocery stores, technical expertise, grant writers

Differing priorities within the community

Site Complications

Mixed contamination - agriculture, mills, mining, fuel storage

Larger distances between sites and infrastructure, **sites are scattered**

Higher risk for **extreme weather events** - wildfires, flooding, drought, etc.

Transforming challenging sites into community assets



Affordable Housing

Transit, EV Chargers

Mixed-use Development

Renewable Energy

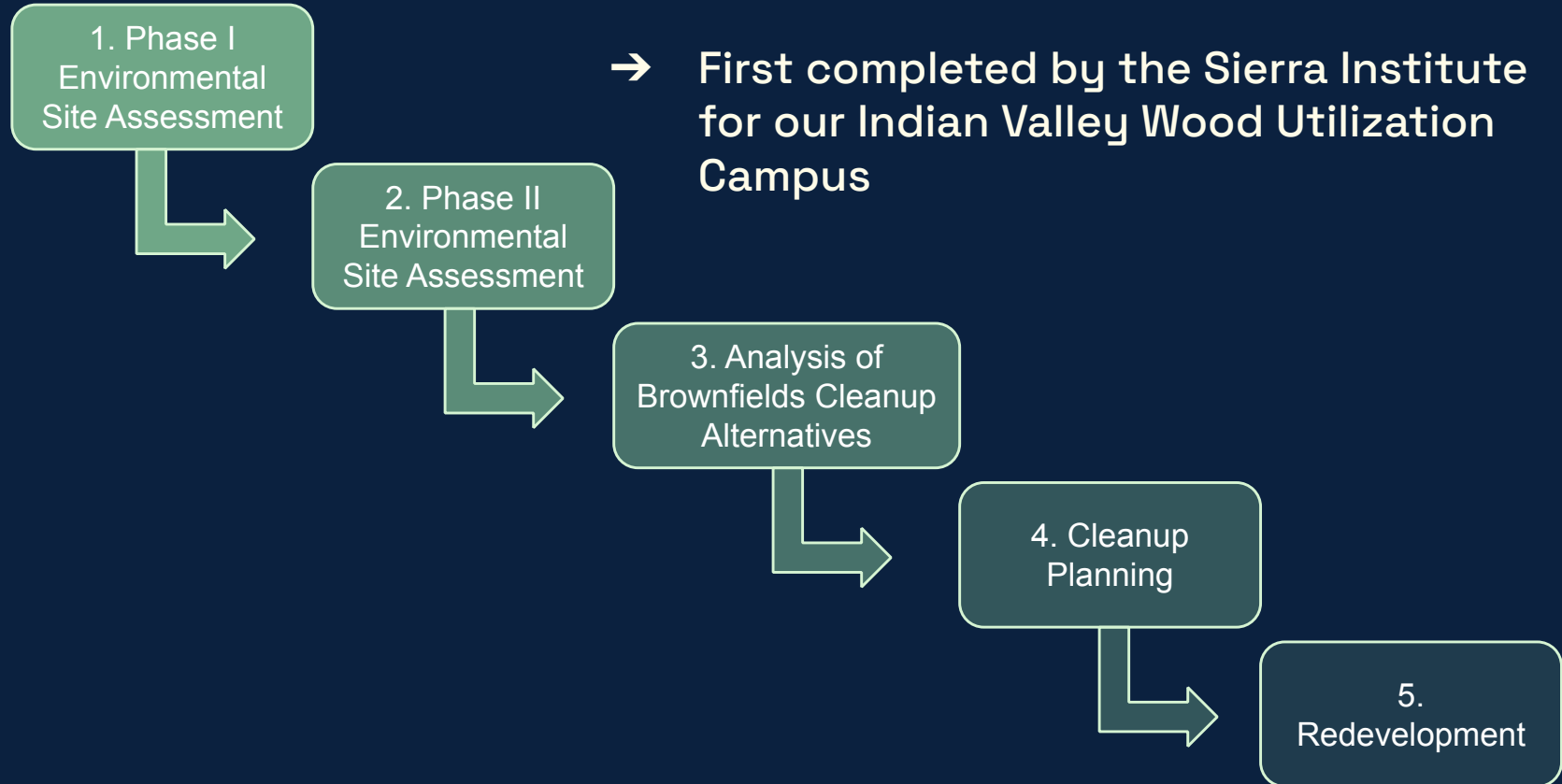
Recreation, Greenspace, Parks

Medical Facilities, Community Centers



Creating Local Brownfields Expertise Through Community-Wide Assessment Grant

Community-Wide Assessment Process





Crescent Mills, CA:
Louisiana-Pacific sawmill in
rural Plumas County
abandoned in the 1980s
when the timber boom
collapsed

2014 - 2025: Built partnerships and organizational expertise to complete assessment and remediation

See CCLR's panel "The Storytelling Advantage" tomorrow!



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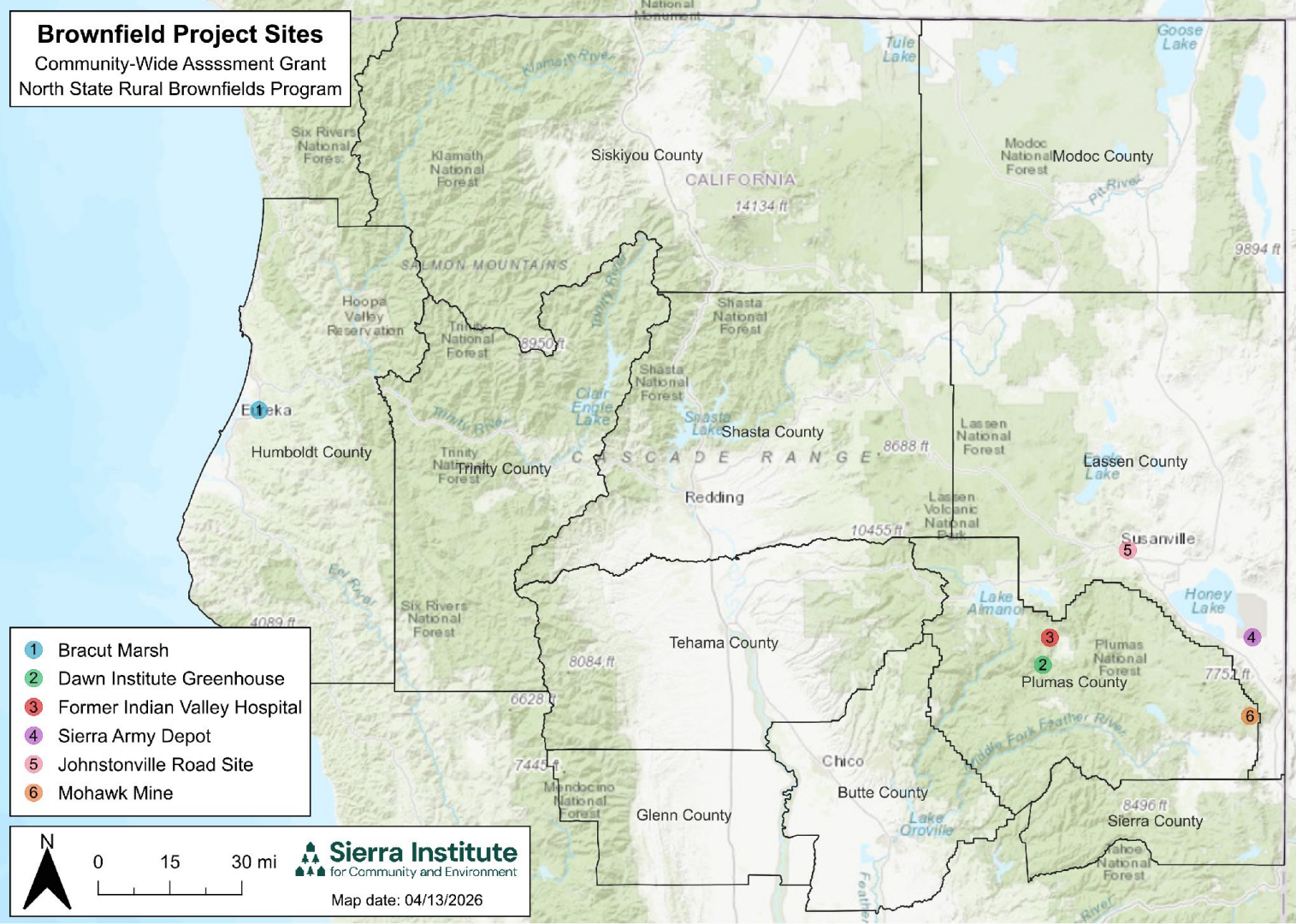
Applied for EPA Community-Wide Assessment Grant in 2023 - initially for Plumas County but expanded to North State



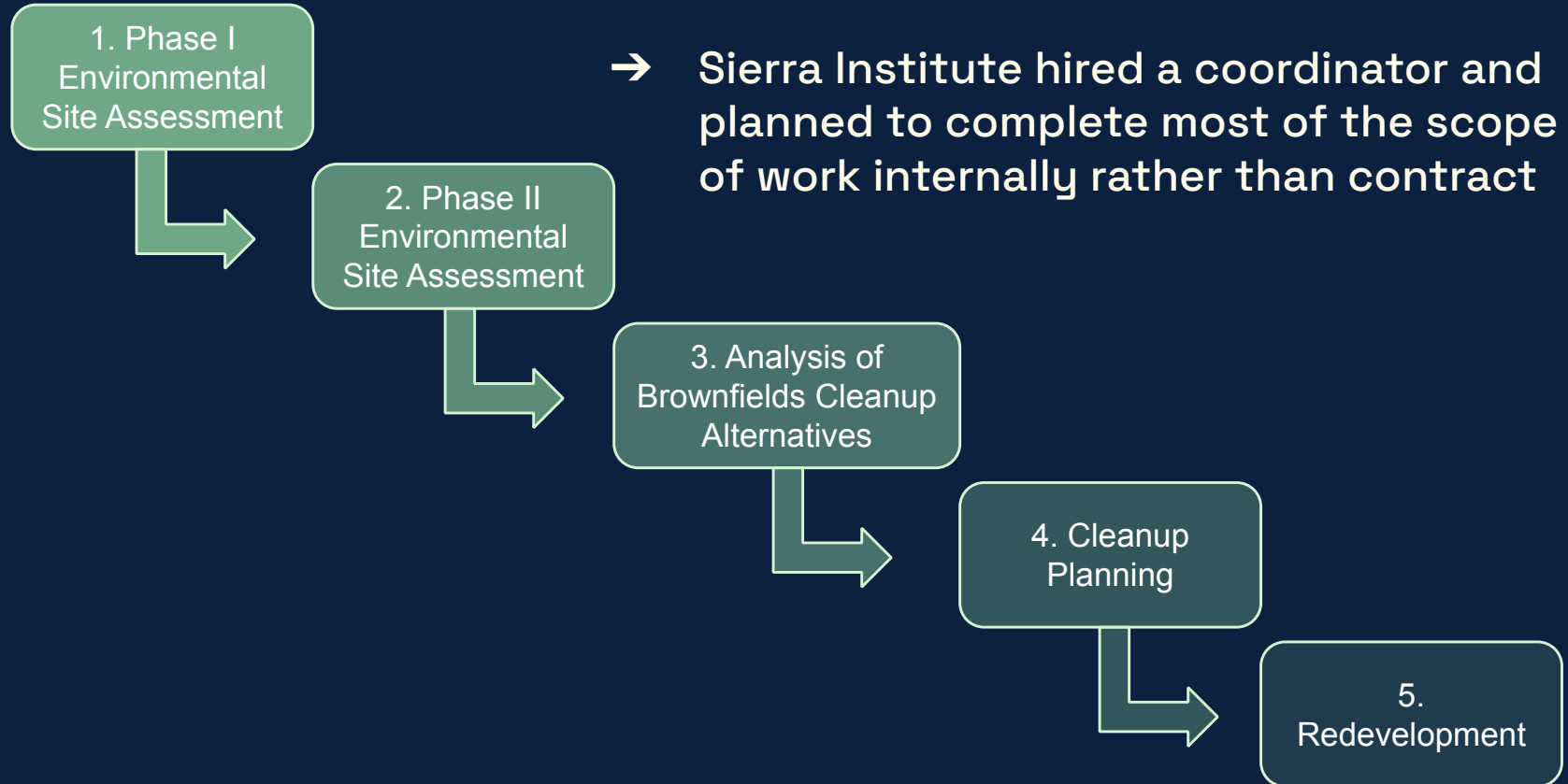
Brownfield Project Sites

Community-Wide Assessment Grant
North State Rural Brownfields Program

Over a year of outreach to partners and communities yielded six project sites...



Community-Wide Assessment Process





Phase I ESA:
Grantee doing the
research and writing
with oversight from
consultants
(Geocon, Inc.)



Phase I ESA:
Strong partnerships
and local interest
helped move sites
through the process

Phase II ESA:
Sampling and Analysis
Plans (SAP) developed
and internal HAZWOPER
training completed



Phase II ESA:
Site locations pose
access challenges
for SAP and
clean-up options





End-Goal Redevelopment:
A crucial consideration from the
beginning of the CWA grant



EPA Brownfields Job Training Grant

→ Sierra Institute's High Roads Training Partnership



Rural Lessons Learned:



- Uneven outreach, visibility, and interest for rural landowners
- Internal capacity building is key for CBOs with interest but no expertise in brownfields
- Fitting brownfields into other programs ensures ongoing work and knowledge

Contact:

Laurel Hicke - lhicke@sierrainstitute.us

Sarah Hoffman - hoffmansarah574@gmail.com

OR

Martha McAlister

Rural Brownfields Coordinator

mmcalister@sierrainstitute.us



Rural Brownfields in the Central Valley

Paul Saldana -
City of
McFarland



Best Practices

- Find your **local champions**
 - Trusted community members with shared visions
- Follow the **momentum**
- Form **Coalitions**
 - Councils of Government
 - Redevelopment Agencies
 - Metropolitan Planning Organizations
 - Residential Development Overlays

Best Practices

- **Tell the story** of the challenges
 - Economic burdens of brownfields work
 - Difficulty of getting local buy-in
 - Limited resources and staff capacity
 - Lack of access to data
- Connect with your **TAB providers** (CCLR)
 - Free application review
 - Implementation assistance
 - Assessment, Cleanup, and RLF planning
 - Training and capacity building
 - Community Outreach and Visioning

Takeaways

Imagine

Use your imagination to dream up the **place-based solutions** that can replace blighted, underutilized properties

Innovate

Rural communities have unique challenges that require **innovative strategies** to address effectively

Implement

Implementation can look different and have **different timelines**, approaches, and outcomes in rural areas



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THANK YOU!

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We appreciate your feedback, follow this QR code
to submit an evaluation form on Whova.

Join the conversation, use #CALRC2026 to share
your photos, insights and highlights!



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Appendix



What are brownfields?

potentially

MYTH: Brownfields are contaminated properties



... where the *perception* or actual presence of contaminants poses a barrier to redevelopment



1. Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA)

Are there indications of contaminants on-site?

- Dig into historical records
- Review past site activities
- Investigate physical setting of site
- Interview individuals with site knowledge
- Perform a site visit



2. Phase II ESA

Developed if Phase I ESA indicates that constituents may be present on-site.

2a. Sampling & Analysis Plan

- Environmental sample design
- Project action levels
- Quality control parameters

2b. Phase II ESA

- Sampling
- Lab analyses
- Analysis of results
- Classifies constituent levels & risk

3. Analysis of Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA)

Developed if Phase II ESA finds constituents present above thresholds.



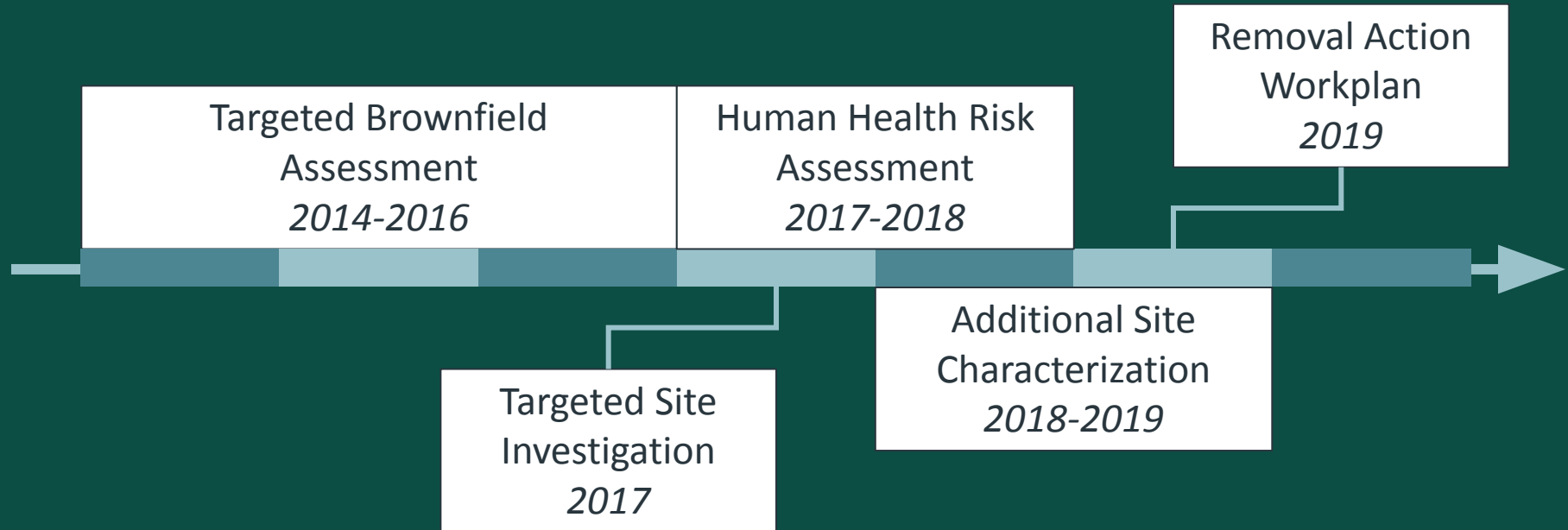
- Explores & compares cleanup alternatives
- Examples of cleanup alternatives:
 - Haul material off-site
 - Consolidate & cap material on-site
 - Leave material as is

4. Cleanup Planning

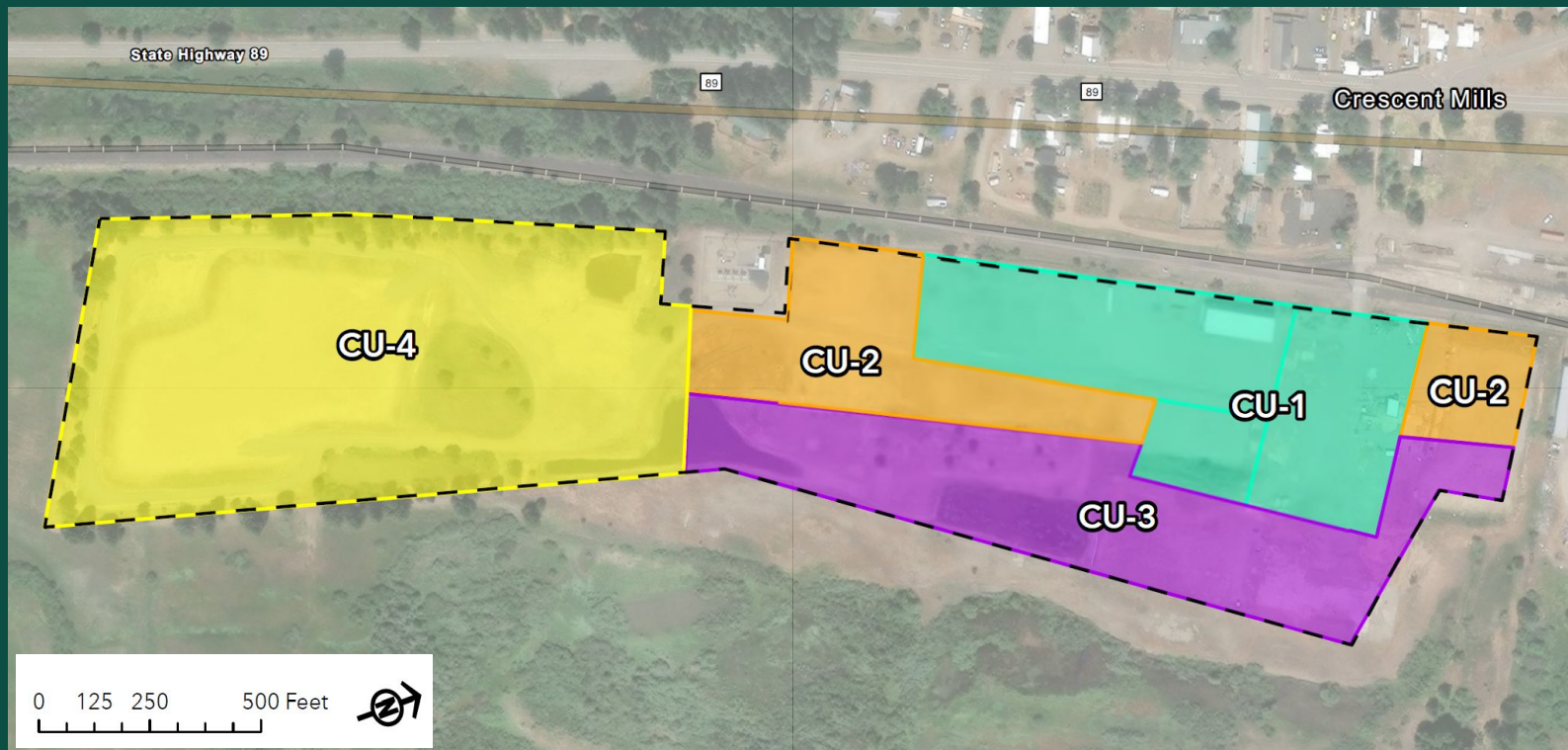
- Prepare Remedial Action Workplan (RAW)
 - Selects & outlines a cleanup alternative



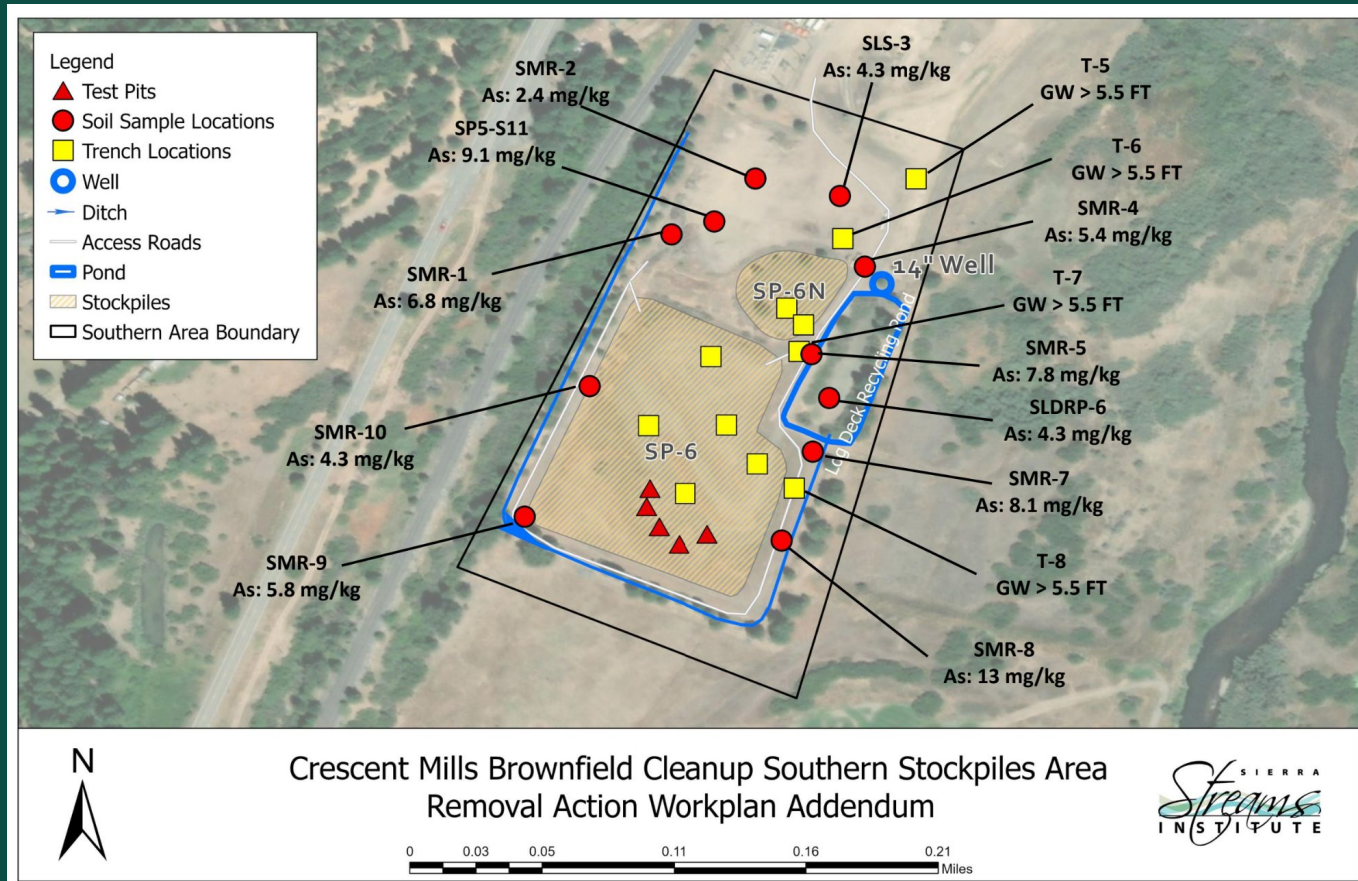
Lengthy assessment and cleanup planning process:



Cleanup achieved in phases by delineating cleanup areas



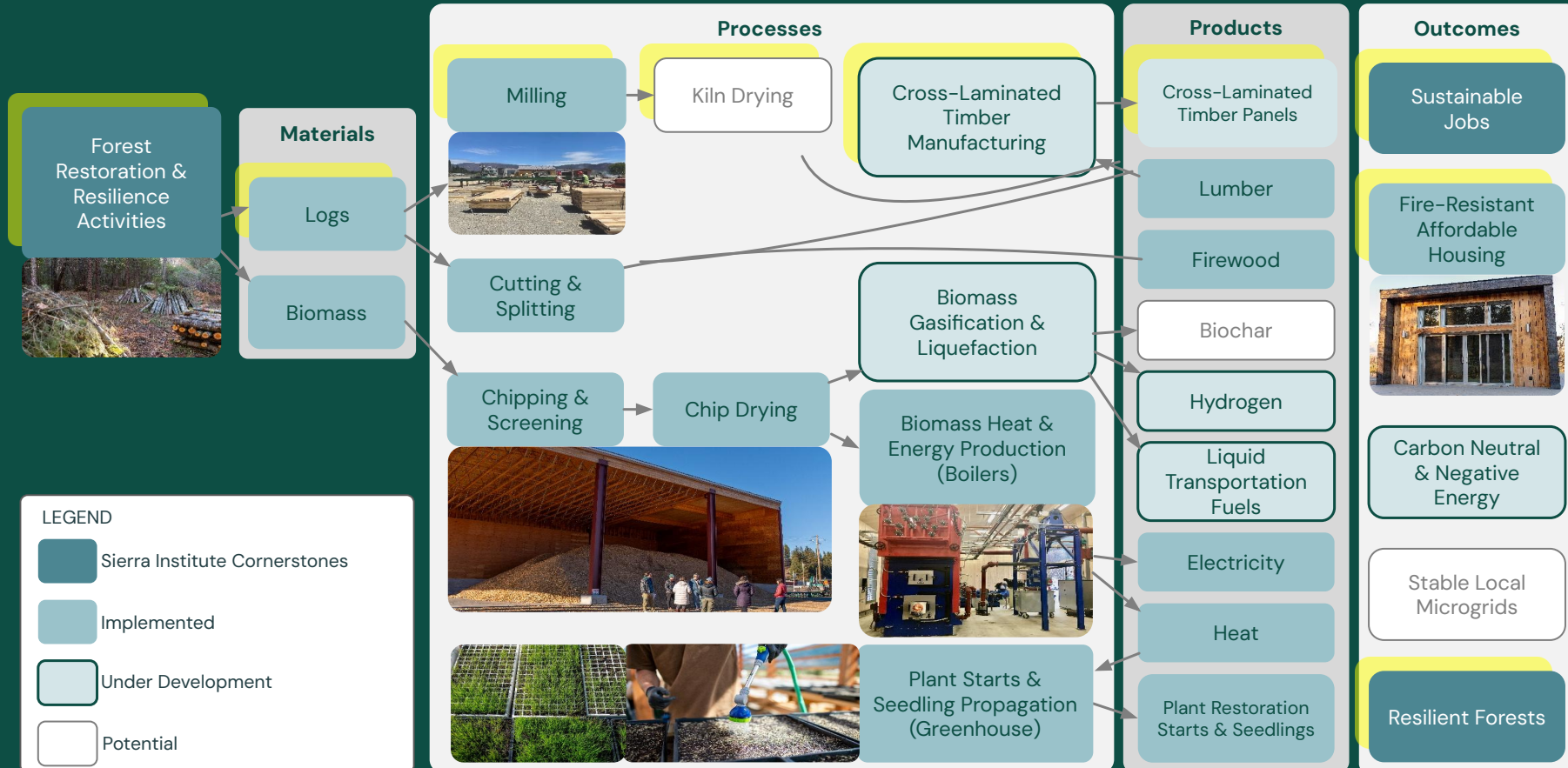
Cleanup achieved in phases by delineating cleanup areas



Creating a holistic program includes incorporating other work at the nonprofit



Building a Regenerative Forest Economy





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