

## **Background**

The effects of climate change on the Sierra Nevada Region are expected to be significant and could have far-reaching consequences. Based on the climate change symposium convened by the SNC in December, 2007, the SNC Board in June 2008 endorsed staff's recommendation to launch a Climate Change Initiative effort based on the following general principles:

- target efforts to add value and address “gaps” in knowledge or activity;
- collaborate and coordinate widely;
- avoid duplication of efforts;
- adopt a bias for action—avoid over-analysis and process gridlock;
- focus on both mitigation and adaptation.

Since the December meeting, SNC staff has worked closely with the Resources Agency, the California Tahoe Conservancy and the U. S. Forest Service in identifying potential activities consistent with the principles above. The SNC has been assisted in this effort by Steve Eubanks, former Forest Supervisor on the Tahoe National Forest (thanks to the generous support of the Resources Legacy Foundation). The SNC has conducted a number of outreach meetings and surveyed 261<sup>£</sup> stakeholders to identify the key elements of a useful Climate Change Initiative and to determine the most appropriate role for the SNC.

Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman on behalf of Governor Schwarzenegger, called for the development of a Sierra-based Climate Change Action Plan within one year at the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Lake Tahoe Forum on August 16, 2008. The announcement identified the SNC as the entity responsible for coordination with the effort, which is consistent with the SNC's efforts to date. The SNC will coordinate with the Tahoe Conservancy, the Forest Service, and other federal, state and local agencies and stakeholder groups in the development of such a plan.

## **Current Status**

Based on input received through the outreach efforts described above and ongoing discussions with a variety of agencies and organizations, four primary actions have been identified for consideration:

1. Identify, encourage and support projects, including demonstration projects, designed to address climate change in the Sierra Nevada.
2. Establish a web-based information center for attracting and sharing information specific to the Sierra Nevada climate change issues among broad-based networks.

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<sup>£</sup> The survey was sent to 947 people, with responses received from 261 (a 26% response rate). Such a response rate is considered by web survey professionals to be quite good and seems to further indicate the level of interest and concern that exists for issues surrounding climate change.

3. Provide education and “unbiased advocacy” for actions within the Sierra Nevada Region and the importance of investment in the Region.
4. Serve as a convener to bring together researchers, practitioners, educators, government representatives and the public to discuss and learn more about climate change and how people and resources in the Sierra can contribute to mitigation and adaption efforts.

*A more detailed discussion is included in Attachment A of this agenda item..*

### **Next Steps**

In order to develop and implement such a plan, the SNC will work with communities and stakeholders with a particular focus on the following Sierra Nevada regional issues:

- Water
- Forests
- Fire
- Renewable Energy.

While the SNC will provide overall coordination, in consultation with other partners, additional resources will be necessary to successfully complete this endeavor. The SNC is exploring both public and private funding sources to support additional contract staffing, including a full-time Climate Change Coordinator, a part-time information specialist and project-specific assistance. Assuming Board approval, the SNC will begin convening key partners, potential funders and other interested parties as part of developing and implementing an action plan.

### **Recommendation**

**Staff recommends that the Board direct the Executive Officer and staff to begin implementing actions that are consistent with the climate change initiative and action planning goals described above, using and leveraging available resources where possible and seeking additional funding to support the increased level of activity called for in the Governor’s directive. The Chair may also wish to appoint a Board committee to provide guidance to staff on this issue.**

## Attachment A

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### Potential Sierra Nevada Climate Change Actions

The long-term potential effects of climate change in the Sierra Nevada include adverse impacts to the state's water supply, forest health, wildlife habitat and local economies. At the same time, the Sierra Nevada holds the potential to contribute positively in the efforts to reduce the effects of climate change through sequestering of carbon in its forests, reducing its own emissions and testing new methods for alternative energy production, transportation, etc., to help adapt to changing conditions. To realize the benefit of these important contributions, the Region needs a cohesive, strategic approach supported by key stakeholders.

With that in mind, the following actions should be considered as part of a Sierra Nevada Climate Change Action Plan:

1. Identify, encourage and support projects, including demonstration projects, designed to address climate change in the Sierra.
  - Develop a strategic approach with funding partners to support demonstration and pilot projects aimed at mitigation and adaptation of climate change effects.
  - Consider opportunities to reduce the effects of climate change and/or adaptation to such changes through the SNC grant program.
  - Distribute information about such projects to others in the region.
2. Establish a web-based information center for attracting and sharing information specific to the Sierra Nevada climate change issues among broad-based networks.
  - Become a portal for credible, Sierra-specific information on climate change, such as:
    - a. Climate change-related research/science, particularly as it relates to the Sierra Nevada region;
    - b. Information on current mitigation and adaptation activities occurring in and applicable to the Sierra Nevada region;
    - c. Climate change educational information and sources of such information;
    - d. Information on climate change and "cumulative effects" related to climate change that agencies are incorporating in Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Statements to ensure consistency and thoroughness in these kinds of environmental documents.
  - Provide some level of oversight or organization for data accessed through the portal. The information site needs to be more than just a "dumping ground" for data or general information. Information must be catalogued so it is more readily accessible and retrievable by those who seek it.

3. Provide education and “unbiased advocacy” for actions within the Sierra Nevada Region and the importance of investment in the Region.
  - Provide information to policy makers to increase understanding about the effects of climate change in the Sierra, the potential for mitigation and adaptation and the need for investment in this region. Serve as a primary voice for the Sierra in the statewide climate change arena and beyond.
  - Provide information to the general public to increase understanding and to encourage support for addressing climate change issues. This may include helping to develop “Climate Change Best Management Practices” and simple “how-to” guides for people who want to know what they can do as individuals, businesses or organizations to change behavior and reduce or mitigate impacts.
  - Provide information to educators to increase understanding and to encourage development of curricula that builds understanding among young people.
  - Provide information to organizations and communities to increase understanding and encourage actions to address climate change issues.
  - Help distill research and technical information into information products useful to broad audiences.
  
4. Serve as a convener to bring together researchers, practitioners, educators, government representatives and the public to discuss and learn more about climate change and how people and resources in the Sierra can contribute to mitigation and adaption efforts.
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  - Organize teams of experts to develop strategies for addressing climate change effects in the Sierra.
  - Develop a “sabbatical” program where individual experts can spend time in the Sierra developing strategies for addressing climate change effects.
  - All of the above would include development of strategies that would encourage Sierra Nevada communities and organizations to work together to implement cooperative programs to address climate change.

The SNC will convene a broad array of stakeholders to discuss these and other possible actions with the objective of developing and implementing a Sierra Nevada Climate Change Action Plan.