

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) over two years ago. This Initiative fosters local and Regional collaboration to support a cohesive, economically viable, and sustainable approach to reducing fire risk, creating jobs, and protecting our valuable forest and watershed resources. SNC Staff work closely with the diverse participants of regional, statewide, and local collaborative, including local governments, environmentalists, community, and economic development representatives, industry, and Tribal entities to help achieve these goals.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council focuses on regional and statewide issues that can influence the achievement of the objectives of the Initiative. The Coordinating Council also serves as a forum for issues arising in local forest collaborative efforts to be discussed and addressed. Members include representatives from the wood products industry, local government, environmental and conservation organizations, community groups, and water interests. The primary federal land managers, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) participate in an advisory role.

### **Current Status**

In August, the State of California released the 2012 Bioenergy Action Plan, which outlines strategies, goals, objectives, and actions that state agencies will take to increase bioenergy development in California. This plan assigns SNC responsibility over several actions related to the expansion of forest bioenergy. The very involved scope of this project, along with the keen interest throughout the Sierra of exploring bioenergy opportunities, necessitated shifting Kim Carr from her general SNFCI coordination focus to more specific oversight of the Bioenergy Action Plan. Mandy Vance has assumed the role of overall SNFCI coordination, and is currently working to improve SNC's internal and external SNFCI communications; update the SNC Web site in order to better engage SNFCI stakeholders; and compile current information on all of SNC's current and potential SNFCI projects in order to promote stronger messaging and strategic planning for the initiative.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council continues to meet quarterly. The primary focus of recent meetings has been identifying major barriers to forest treatment project implementation and addressing these as a group. In their most recent meeting, the Coordinating Council discussed ways to support adaptive management across the range of issues considered by the Coordinating Council, and also reviewed the socioeconomic indicators section of the Leadership Intent Implementation Plan, which was developed in partnership with the USFS and a subcommittee of the Coordinating Council. They discussed how these indicators will be used in the forest plan updates moving forward, as well as possible applications for making them a practical tool that can be used on the ground throughout the Sierra. The Coordinating Council also devoted significant time to identifying additional ideas, tools and Coordinating Council actions that could increase pace and scale while keeping benefit in local communities, as well as opportunities to redirect resources more effectively to increase pace and scale.

SNC Staff is also playing an active role in an effort to aggregate key pieces of information in terms of biology and policy to create a conservation strategy for Pacific Fishers in the

southern Sierra Nevada. This is a southern Sierra species that is proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. While strong foundational pieces have been developed for the West Coast Fisher Distinct Population Segment, there is a critical need to specifically address the conservation of the Pacific Fisher in the southern Sierra Nevada. The goal of this effort is to produce a final, geographically specific, "all lands" conservation strategy by the end of 2013. It is anticipated that the conservation strategy will establish the foundation for a Candidate Conservation Agreement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the USFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, targeted for completion in early 2014. This process will include representation of agencies, organizations, and individuals with an interest in the Pacific Fisher. The Fisher Teams leading the effort will reach out to and communicate regularly with others with an interest in the Pacific Fisher in the southern Sierra, and provide different ways for them to get involved in the development of the strategy. The SNC is also establishing an inter-agency agreement with the USFS in order to support the development of the conservation strategy. Initial meetings began in February. More updates will be provided to the Board as this effort progresses.

SNC staff, in conjunction with the USFS, Bureau of Land Management and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, is also hard at work producing a Sierra Nevada fire season summary report that will tell the story of what happened in the Sierra Nevada in the 2012 fire season in order to better quantify and communicate the connection between upstream forest and watershed management and the local and statewide effects of catastrophic fire. The report will look at a number of fire impacts and consequences that often receive little attention, including green house gas (GHG) emissions, the loss of carbon storage, the loss of wildlife habitat, impacts to recreation use, and others. By identifying these impacts, along with the more traditional measures like acres burned and fire intensity, the report will help decision-makers better understand the up- and downstream implications and consequences of forest management (or lack thereof), water management, and climate change in the Region. The overall goal of the report is to communicate with key policy-makers, media and other target audiences about specific policy, research and funding needs related to forest and watershed health, biomass utilization and the need for upstream investment to protect the critical ecosystem services provided by the Sierra.

### **Next Steps**

The Coordinating Council will continue to work with the USFS to identify ways to increase the pace and scale of forest treatment within the Region, including providing input on the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration Implementation Plan, particularly in the area of the practical application of socioeconomic indicators and adaptive management. SNC Staff will continue to work with ongoing collaborative efforts, including the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy and the Fire Report. Staff will also continue to support local forest collaborative efforts, focusing on the CFLR projects and efforts supported by SNC grants.

### **Recommendation**

**This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Boardmembers are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.**