

Background

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Staff has been working to increase awareness among decision-makers (legislators, legislative staff, sister agencies and other partners with statewide influence) about the importance of the Sierra Nevada to the State's long-term health and well-being. Our intent is to gain support for the watershed, forest health and community sustainability work being conducted by the SNC and our partners throughout the Region, which is especially important in light of the imminent conclusion of the local assistance SNC Proposition 84 grant program.

Current outreach efforts build on immediate opportunities presented by the convergence of a number of statewide funding and policy initiatives, including, but not limited to:

- 2014 water bond and/or other water bonds being introduced;
- AB 32 (Nunes, Chapter 488 Stats. 2006) and greenhouse gas (GHG) cap-and-trade auction revenue discussions;
- SB 1122 (Rubio, Chapter 612 Stats. 2012), requiring purchase of power from forest sector biomass facilities;
- U.S. Forest Service Leadership Intent to increase the pace and scale of forest management treatments;
- California Bioenergy Action Plan and the role identified for the SNC;
- Delta water supply reliability and ecosystem restoration called for in the Delta Plan;
- Department of Water Resources (DWR) Integrated Regional Watershed Management (IRWM) strategic planning; and,
- California Water Plan Update, 2013.

Initial goals for our outreach efforts include the following:

- Water Bond – retention of at least existing levels of Sierra and SNC funding in the 2014 water bond or other statewide funding vehicle;
- Cap & Trade – application of revenues generated by greenhouse gas cap-and-trade auction program to forest sector projects in the Sierra;
- DWR IRWMP Program – provision of financial and technical support to IRWMP groups in the Sierra to assist in project identification, planning and implementation and work with DWR to ensure that upper watershed projects in the Sierra Nevada are considered appropriately in the process;
- Water Quality/Public Health – improvement of water quality and public health by addressing legacy issues of mercury in Sierra watersheds;
- Delta – dedication of funding for upper watershed water quality/supply/reliability work from the various Delta efforts in recognition of the importance of the Sierra as a major water source for the Delta.

Current Status

Staff is developing outreach and communications materials to advance understanding of the Sierra-Delta connection – identifying the Sierra as the primary source of California's water; explaining forest and Bioenergy benefits; strengthening the link between healthy forests and communities; and beginning discussions about the need to remediate legacy mining impacts. Staff identified legislators, state agencies and

departments, local elected officials, and a variety of allies as key audiences to work with or help us communicate the following messages:

- The Sierra Nevada Region plays a critical role in California's water supply and hydrological system. Over 60 percent of California's water supply originates in the Sierra Nevada.
- The Sierra Nevada provides 40 to 50 percent of total water flowing into the Delta.
- Restoring Sierra forests to ecological health decreases California's risk for catastrophic wildfires that can result in serious statewide consequences, including impacts to water reliability, utility infrastructure and habitat, as well as greenhouse gas emissions and loss of stored carbon.
- Production of energy from biomass removed from the forest as part of restoration activities provides an opportunity to assist in meeting California's renewable energy goals and to create economic activity in communities throughout the Region.
- Efforts to remove and stabilize mercury and other contaminants that are a result of historic mining in the Sierra will directly benefit the Delta and other downstream beneficiaries.

By the time of the March 7 Board meeting, we expect to have met with up to 30 legislators (freshmen and veteran legislators from key committees), the California Natural Resources Agency, the Department of Water Resources, CALFIRE, the Department of Conservation and a number of non-governmental allies and partners with the goal of deepening their understanding of the Sierra's importance to the state, building or strengthening relationships, and exploring the best pathways to achieving the goals identified above.

Next Steps

Next steps will include continued meetings with primary audiences and continued engagement with sister agencies and allies who can speak to the importance of the Region in their own outreach efforts. We will conduct tours with legislative staff to showcase actual projects and talk about their impact on forest and watershed health and local community development. We will continue to participate in working groups, such as the Forest Sector Cap-and-Trade working group and the Bioenergy working group, and to staff interagency efforts, such as updating the California Water Plan and sitting on the Integrated Regional Watershed Management Strategic Plan Focus Group, as a means of raising awareness about the Sierra's role in these critical issues. We will also continue to develop materials, such as the SNC Annual Report, a Fire Season Report, and a Proposition 84 Investment Report, and other outreach vehicles with the goal of clearly communicating the value and importance of the Sierra to the rest of the State and with the aim of championing and obtaining support for further watershed, forest health and community sustainability work within our Region.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board direct staff to take appropriate actions to achieve the desired goals and outcomes described above and report back to the Board on an ongoing basis.