

SNC Strategic Plan: Regional Goal Strategies

*“When we try to pick out anything by itself,
we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.”*

John Muir

Muir’s observation decades ago aptly describes California’s continued connection to the Sierra Nevada. Our state’s past, present, and future are inextricably linked to the benefits provided by the Sierra Nevada Region. The rush for gold in the Sierra foothills lured people from all over the world to California, and the outstanding recreational opportunities offered by the Sierra Nevada Region draw millions of visitors today. California’s reservoir and aqueduct system, fed by Sierra rain and snow, fuel the world’s sixth largest economy by providing more than 60 percent of the drinking and irrigation water Californians use. In addition, the forests of the Sierra Nevada can be one of California’s most productive climate regulators and are a key player in California’s cutting-edge efforts to combat climate change.

It is with this understanding that the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) was created 13 years ago. In that time, we have accomplished a great deal and have learned even more.

The mission of the SNC is to initiate, encourage, and support efforts that improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region, its communities, and the citizens of California. This mission is predicated on the specific activities identified in the statute creating the SNC:

- Provide increased opportunities for tourism and recreation.
- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources.
- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes.
- Reduce the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfires.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.
- Assist the Regional economy through the operation of the conservancy's program.
- Undertake efforts to enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

Since our creation, we have undertaken a broad range of activities to fulfill the charge given to us by the legislation that created us, heeding Muir’s wise counsel. From the beginning it was clear that the SNC’s success would be dependent on the hard work of numerous partners throughout the Region and beyond. This has been proven and confirmed as the SNC has awarded more than \$60 million in Proposition 84 and Proposition 1 grants to dozens of entities for projects in all 22 of our counties; helped in the formation, participated in, and supported numerous collaborative efforts throughout the Region in an effort to restore our watersheds and communities; worked to

communicate the benefits provided to Californians by our Region and the serious threats to those benefits that have emerged; and advocated for investment and policy that to address the range of challenges faced.

Even with the progress that has been made, our watersheds and communities are experiencing unprecedented impacts. This decade sets the new record for wildfire acres burned on the western slope of the Sierra, with two fire seasons remaining. These fires are not only burning larger areas, but are burning at far higher severity than in previous times. As if this isn't bad enough, much of our Region has suffered unprecedented tree mortality as a result of unhealthy overgrown forests, the drought, and the resulting insect epidemic. We are certainly aware of many of the immediate implications of these events, but we are learning more as time goes by as to the true long-term costs of unhealthy watersheds into the future.

At the same time, many Sierra Nevada meadows and streams are degraded and in need of restoration and protection. Healthy aquatic systems are essential to long-term stable supply of high-quality water and to the timing of Sierra origin waters reaching the reservoirs below. From there, this essential water travels to and serves homes, businesses, and farms throughout California.

Many Sierra communities continue to face severe economic challenges, with numerous communities meeting the standard of "disadvantaged." The inextricable link between Sierra communities and the natural resources that surround them is obvious. As economic drivers such as timber production have lessened in recent decades, new economic opportunities have been difficult to realize in many communities. While recreation and tourism and agricultural/ranching operations remain important economic contributors for much of the Region, diversifying local economies remains a generally shared objective.

To make matters a bit more urgent, we are facing a steadily changing climate that will exacerbate current threats and create new ones. Changing precipitation patterns and increasing temperatures will have a profound impact on the Sierra landscape, affecting our environmental, economic, and social well-being and that of all of California.

However, with the challenges come opportunities. Numerous state studies and plans now explicitly call out the need to address the issues that the SNC and our partners have been working on this past decade plus. The state's Forest Carbon Plan, the Little Hoover Commission's Fire on the Mountain: Rethinking Forest Management in the Sierra Nevada report, the Legislative Analyst's Office's report on Improving California's Forest and Watershed Management, and the Governor's 2018-19 May Budget Review all call out the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) as a model for addressing forest and watershed health. The Public Policy Institute of California aligned with these reports in identifying restoring forest health as a key water policy objective in their report, Improving the Health of California's Headwater Forests.

The State has also begun increasing financial investment for restoring and conserving the critical assets of the Sierra Nevada for all Californians including increased expenditures from the California Climate Initiative and funding in measures such as SB 5 (Proposition 68 on the June 2018 ballot).

This Strategic Plan (Plan) is designed to position the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to use our experience and understanding to more effectively address the current conditions, challenges and opportunities that exist in the Region. While the Plan is specific to the SNC, it is our hope that it can also serve to coalesce partner efforts and leverage funding opportunities, providing the basis for a more holistic approach to restoring watershed and community health and resilience.

The Plan will also serve as the SNC's approach to increasing resilience to climate change in our watersheds and communities. Watershed restoration efforts that result in more resilient landscapes produce both mitigation and adaptation effects, for example, reducing future Greenhouse Gas emissions by making the forests less susceptible to large, severe wildfires.

The Goals in this Plan represent broad, aspirational outcomes for the SNC and the Region. We fully recognize that achievement of these goals will take far more than the efforts and resources of the SNC and we are committed to working with, and on behalf of, our partners to make significant progress under each of the goals. We anticipate that many partners will see the links to their projects and priorities throughout the Plan. Where unclear, we commit to working proactively with them to identify ways to improve coordination to achieve our shared objectives. This includes our fellow state and federal agencies, local government, tribal organizations, and the various private and nonprofit partners working in these areas.

The Strategies in this Plan represent the specific approaches the SNC will undertake itself in contributing to achieving the Goals. They have been developed with an understanding of the SNC's available resources, expertise, and experience and with substantial input from dozens of partners and stakeholders. They also represent the SNC's assessment of where we can best add value, understanding the role that a variety of other agencies and organizations play in these subject matters. The Strategies are intended to best position SNC to leverage our work with that of a wide range of partners to magnify the impact of our cumulative efforts. In some cases, this means the SNC will be directly taking actions to achieve an outcome, in other instances our role will be supporting and assisting partners.

With this Strategic Plan, the SNC is also expanding the organization's keystone initiative, the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP). The WIP was launched in 2015 as a collaborative effort to restore the health and resilience of the Region's watersheds and communities. Upon its launch, among many other activities, the WIP placed sharper focus on educating SNC's primary audiences about the importance of healthy watersheds and forests. These efforts to educate decision-

makers about the funding, policy, and infrastructure needs in the Sierra Nevada, as well as the urgency of the wildfire and tree mortality impacts, have helped heighten awareness on the consequences of unhealthy Sierra watersheds.

Initial efforts by the SNC under the WIP have generally been more narrowly focused on forest health due to limited resources and programmatic prioritization. While some progress has been made, the SNC will continue to have a strong focus on increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration. At the same time, we must also ensure that our efforts and those of our partners holistically include the restoration of meadows, streams, rivers, and lakes that play such critical roles in the benefits offered by healthy watersheds.

By using WIP as the “umbrella” program for the goals of Healthy Watersheds and Forests, Vibrant Recreation and Tourism, Strategic Land Conserved, and Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities, the SNC provides a more holistic approach consistent with the SNC mission and recognizes the inherent interrelationships between the Regional Goals.

Incumbent in this Plan is SNC’s commitment to serve to our strengths as a leader in bringing other agencies and partners onboard and a catalyst to create a more coordinated and holistic approach to restoring the health and resilience of our watershed and communities. In many ways the SNC is uniquely positioned to play this role given our Regional focus, broad mission, and established relationships.

We are under no illusion that breaking down the silo walls and well-intentioned impediments will be a simple task, but our watersheds and communities deserve no less. The old way of doing business is simply failing us and the monumental task we all face requires a bold new approach. To paraphrase Muir, *the mountains are calling, and we must help!*

REGIONAL GOAL: HEALTHY WATERSHEDS AND FORESTS

Restore the ecological health and resilience of watersheds and forests within the Sierra Nevada Region.

The Sierra Nevada is at a critical crossroads of crisis and opportunity, and the many benefits that its watersheds and forests provide California hang in the balance. Overgrown forests, an extended drought and a changing climate, has resulted in larger and more severe wildfire and catastrophic bark beetle damage and tree mortality exceeding 112 million dead trees throughout the Region in the past four years. These things combined result in unhealthy watersheds that are burning unnaturally and catastrophic impacts on California’s air and water resources. But with these challenges come political interest and attention, which can, if appropriately harnessed, lead to increased funding, policy changes, and support that will improve the ecological resilience and social, physical, financial, and cultural well-being of the residents and communities that call upon the Sierra Nevada for shelter, sustenance, and recreation.

SNC has been actively addressing these issues through funding, policy advocacy, and communications, promoting the need for a dramatic increase in the pace and scale of ecologically sound restoration. SNC has initiated, funded, and participated in a wide range of collaborative groups working together to reach this goal, and has provided millions of dollars to watershed and forest health projects through the Prop 84 and Prop 1 grant programs. In March 2015, SNC established the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) as an ambitious, visionary, and collaborative program to restore the health of California's primary watershed through increased investment, needed policy changes, and increased infrastructure to support restoration activities and communities.

While many positive developments have occurred in recent years, including increased funding and policy changes, we remain far short of our goal of healthy, resilient watersheds. As efforts continue to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration, we must also ensure that our efforts include the restoration of meadows, streams, rivers, and lakes that play such critical roles in the benefits offered by healthy watersheds. The Healthy Watersheds and Forests Regional Goal broadens SNC efforts to better integrate these watershed elements into our programs and reinforces SNC's commitment to preserve, protect, and restore the health of our watersheds regardless of the threats they face.

While all the goals in this Strategic Plan are interconnected, this goal has the greatest potential impact on the others. Healthy resilient watersheds are essential for resilient communities and vibrant recreation and tourism. Land conservation efforts must be considered in the context of watershed health and conserved lands must contribute to the desired outcome. It is also true that California's environmental and economic vitality are dependent on healthy Sierra Nevada watersheds.

The SNC is uniquely situated to assist all the interests (be they federal, state, local, private, or nonprofit) in the protection and restoration of these watersheds. SNC will continue its leadership in this area, challenging conventional "siloes" approaches, bringing partners together, identifying and implementing new ways of doing business and looking for opportunities to link small efforts to create larger, landscape scale impacts.

It should be noted that increasing wood and biomass processing infrastructure, as well as workforce, equipment, and contractor capacity, are critical components of forest and watershed health. Activities addressing these issues are included in some of the strategies below as well in the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Regional Goal.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Healthy Watersheds and Forests Regional Goal:

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Building and improving upon the WIP assessment work already completed, continue to assess opportunities and needs for restoration of Sierra

Nevada forests, meadows, streams, rivers, and lakes throughout the Region and identify highest priority SNC activities.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 2: Increase pace and scale of forest restoration activities by providing leadership in promoting strategic alignment of projects, funding, and timing to capitalize on and provide opportunities for landscape-scale treatment. Coordinate with state and federal agencies, local governments, and private and nonprofit organizations to link project efforts for more rapid restoration focused on the highest priority (greatest risk) areas.

Strategy 3: Actively support the development and continued implementation of collaborative approaches at the Regional, watershed, and local level that address forest and watershed health and bring jurisdictions together to address impediments and proactively support increasing the pace and scale of restoration on public and private lands.

Strategy 4: Continuously adapt and respond to changing conditions/needs; new science and research; and new opportunities for funding, partnerships, and projects. Seek out and apply unique approaches to solving intractable problems that block progress in providing healthy watersheds and forests with an eye to the unique role SNC can/should play in relation to the work of partners.

Policy

Strategy 5: Educate key decision-makers and funders on the value of the use of prescribed and managed fire, and other forest and watershed management tools, to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration.

Strategy 6: Identify and share science that will compel action and influence policy to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration.

Strategy 7: Identify and advocate for improvements to state and federal environmental processes for forest and watershed restoration projects designed to protect and improve watershed health and resilience.

Strategy 8: Identify and engage in state- and Regional-level planning efforts that support forest and watershed health-related activities.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 9: Advocate for and secure increased funding for watershed restoration work in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations.

Strategy 10: Distribute new bond funds for watershed restoration in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact, coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies.

Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business

Strategy 11: Establish pilot projects across land ownerships that test new governance, finance, and implementation tools to increase the pace and scale of watershed restoration.

Strategy 12: Implement more efficient landscape planning and environmental impact review processes to get work done in watersheds on public and private lands.

Strategy 13: Increase the use of Master Stewardship Agreements and Good Neighbor Agreements, Cost Share Agreements, Joint Powers Agreements, and other administrative agreements as appropriate, to increase the pace and scale of ecological watershed restoration.

Communications/Telling the Story

Strategy 14: Promote and/or amplify partner efforts such as the Sierra Meadow Strategy, the Fire MOU Partnership, the Southern Sierra Leadership Forum, the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative, and local collaborative efforts.

Strategy 15: Utilize the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN) to capture data in a spatial way and/or showcase relevant data that demonstrates how watershed restoration in the Sierra Nevada benefits the rest of the state.

REGIONAL GOAL: VIBRANT RECREATION AND TOURISM

Enhance, promote, and develop sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities within the Sierra Nevada Region.

The Sierra Nevada Region offers tremendous outdoor recreation opportunities that both rely on healthy watersheds and forests and support tourism and economic growth in California's rural communities. For many of the communities in the Region, revenue from recreation and tourism represents the largest portions of their economies, and jobs from recreation provide residents with the opportunity to work and thrive in their communities. Consistent with a surging national interest in outdoor recreation's role in the U.S. Economy, the Sierra Nevada's outdoor recreation spectrum runs the full gamut, from highly developed ski resorts, to backcountry wilderness; thousands of miles of trails for OHV, OSV, mountain biking, equestrian, and hiking; golf courses, marinas, wineries, and public parks; wildlife refuges, caves, and wild rivers. There is also a rich collection of cultural, historic, heritage, and tribal tourism attractions, which are tied to both California's and the nation's history. Information clipped from recent travel and tourism research conducted for the California Travel and Tourism Commission indicates that the Sierra Nevada Region generates billions of dollars in revenue annually. Visit California, the state's tourism marketing agency, spends more than \$100 million per year marketing California to travelers around the world, and relies heavily on the images and experiences produced in the Sierra Nevada Region. The collection of experiences

available to Californians and visitors from around the world make the Sierra Nevada a critical component of the California Experience.

Today however, many of these benefits are at risk. If we continue to see the size and scope of severe fire and tree mortality grow due to climate change and drought, these resources and economic contributors may go away completely and take centuries, if ever, to return. Furthermore, recent policy objectives on both the federal and state level actively reinforce the timeliness of SNC's investment in recreation and tourism and encourage action to take advantage of rising opportunities.

Providing for vibrant recreation and tourism across the Region is fundamentally linked with the outcomes of the other Regional Goals. Sustainable recreation and tourism is an important economic driver that contributes to the health and resilience of Sierra Nevada's communities and the ecological health of California's watersheds and forests. Working with partners to thoughtfully implement the strategies supporting this goal will protect these benefits and the resources that are unique to the Sierra Nevada Region.

Additionally, this goal specifically addresses the SNC statutory program requirements to provide increased opportunities for recreation and tourism and increased access to public lands in a more significant way than previous efforts, and may contribute to fulfilling existing state, federal and local recreation plans for the Region.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Regional Goal:

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Assess conditions, existing resources, needs, and opportunities to support or promote recreation and tourism throughout the Region and identify highest priority activities for the organization.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 2: Identify, create, and enhance tools and partnerships to support the development of vibrant recreation and tourism throughout the Region.

Strategy 3: Continuously adapt and respond to changing conditions/needs; new science and research; and new opportunities for funding, partnerships, and projects. Seek out and apply unique approaches to solving intractable problems that block progress in providing for vibrant, sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities throughout the Sierra Nevada Region with an eye towards the unique role SNC can/should play as it relates to partner efforts.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 4: Advocate for and secure increased funding for sustainable recreation and tourism development in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations.

Strategy 5: Distribute new bond funds for development of sustainable recreation and tourism throughout the Region in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact, coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies and partners.

Policy

Strategy 6: Identify and develop recreation- and tourism-related research opportunities (e.g., impacts of climate change on recreation, impacts of large damaging wildfires on recreation and tourism, industry trends, public-private partnerships, etc.) specific to the Sierra Nevada Region and its importance to the state of California, for use in policy and communications activities.

Design and Field Tests New Ways of Doing Business

Strategy 7: Establish pilot projects or collaboratives that test innovative governance, finance, and implementation tools that can achieve recreation and tourism objectives across the Region.

Communications/Telling the Story

Strategy 8: Promote and/or amplify partner efforts to brand and advance recreation efforts emerging throughout the Region.

Strategy 9: Utilize recreation and tourism data in communications and on the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN) to inform policy decisions that enhance or protect recreation and tourism opportunities and support other Regional Goals.

REGIONAL GOAL: STRATEGIC LANDS CONSERVED

Permanently protect high-benefit lands that are at risk of conversion resulting from development, climate change, or major environmental disturbance.

Since its creation, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy has recognized land conservation as an important tool for achieving holistic watershed health. When the SNC was originally created and funded, land conservation in the form of fee-title and easement acquisition was a regular component of our activities.

Over time, as existing funding decreased and with no new bond funding on the horizon, the SNC Governing Board made increasingly limiting decisions regarding SNC's land conservation spending to focus precious resources on the most pressing issues in the Region. Additionally, during the period in which SNC was funding land conservation, there were concerns raised by some Boardmembers regarding the value of funding conservation easements on land where the perceived threat of development was not imminent, as well as about the potential for negative impacts of conservation easements on county property tax assessments. In 2016, the Board held a panel discussion on these issues, and the value of conservation easements generally, at which the Board generally expressed renewed support for land conservation activities. However, due to

continued limited funding, the Board opted to allow easement acquisitions only in support of biomass utilization facility development.

The Strategic Lands Conserved Regional Goal refocuses SNC efforts on strategic action to protect high-risk, high-priority lands that are at risk of conversion because of development, climate change or major environmental disturbance. These lands can provide a range of benefits including working landscapes, public access/recreation opportunities, and protection of unique cultural and natural areas and key wildlife habitat. Additionally, climate change is likely to have heretofore unseen impacts on the Region and conserving land to protect the wide range of benefits provided by the Region will become increasingly important as we adapt to further changes into the future.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Strategic Lands Conserved Regional Goal:

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Assess the identified conservation priorities of other agencies and partners and existing funding programs to assist in identification of highest priority SNC activities to support additional strategic land conservation.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 2: Continuously adapt and respond to changing conditions/needs; new science and research; and new opportunities for funding, partnerships, and projects. Seek out and apply unique approaches to solving intractable problems that block progress in conserving lands that provide significant public benefit with an eye to the unique role SNC can play in relation to partner efforts.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 3: Advocate for and secure increased funding for strategic land conservation in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations.

Strategy 4: Distribute new bond funds in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact, coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies to achieve the SNC's strategic land conservation goals.

Policy

Strategy 5: Use easements (public access and working lands) as a tool and an incentive to protect WIP restoration investments and to ensure that protected lands are being actively managed for forest health and resilience.

Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business

Strategy 6: Work with interested county representatives and land conservation partners to (1) explore the utilization of land use planning tools to achieve conservation objectives and (2) address tax net neutrality concerns.

Communications/Telling the Story

Strategy 7: Promote and/or amplify partner efforts to integrate the benefits of land conservation activities (healthy forests, wildlife habitat, water quality and quantity, recreation, carbon storage/sequestration, and economic benefits including job creation) into general messaging to influence policy- and decision-makers.

Strategy 8: Utilize the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN) to capture data in a spatial way and/or showcase relevant data that demonstrates how strategically conserving lands in the Sierra Nevada benefits the rest of the state.

REGIONAL GOAL: RESILIENT SIERRA NEVADA COMMUNITIES

Increase the environmental, economic, and social resilience of Sierra Nevada communities.

The SNC recognizes the unique challenges that face rural resource-dependent communities in the Sierra Nevada. The challenges in the Region have escalated over the last several decades. Wildfires now occur on a larger scale and with increased regularity, affecting more people and more acres. Unhealthy watershed conditions surrounding these communities make them particularly susceptible to drought and resulting impacts such as pest infestations. In addition, a changing climate will likely exacerbate the situation with increasing temperatures and more extreme weather. Economically, many Sierra Nevada communities are experiencing a shrinking tax base, a scarcity of skilled workers, and changing demographics. Employment, a driving force behind economic growth, is also stagnant in many communities. Many communities now meet the definition of "disadvantaged" as they struggle to create new economic opportunities. Socially and politically, they are often disconnected from urban centers, with limited access to health care and social programs and limited political power to make needed changes.

Historically, SNC has expended considerable effort working to improve watershed and forest health with the goal of reducing natural-resource-based threats that put rural communities at such risk. Our thinking has been that managing forests to health and resilience creates jobs both on the ground in fuel loads reduction opportunities as well as in infrastructure/biomass utilization. Additionally, SNC has provided a variety of services that include a grant program, grant writing workshops, facilitation services, and limited CEQA assistance to communities in the Region. To bring the Sierra Nevada Region to holistic health, the communities within our Region need support that empowers their efforts to address urgent needs, plan for the future, develop capacity, and envision new tools and partnerships.

Clearly, the SNC isn't positioned to address all these needs and issues. And admittedly, focusing significant effort and potentially significant resources in bringing communities to resiliency is somewhat new territory for us. We fully recognize that, particularly in this goal area, our partners are critical collaborators with us. As we move forward and begin

to determine the needs of our communities, we will focus on direct action that is at the center of the nexus between watershed health and resilient communities, and we will carry out activities that connect and help strengthen partner efforts, linking them with the resources and leverage that they need.

We also recognize that there are many aspects to community resilience, including those that lie outside of the SNC's authority and focus. While our efforts will address those activities that are consistent with our authority, we will work to coordinate with communities and organizations to ensure that our efforts are contributing to overall community resilience.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Regional Goal:

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Work with partners to determine the role/s that SNC can play in helping communities deal with the challenges presented by the degraded natural systems they are surrounded by and the economic and social impacts that result. Use this information to guide SNC actions and funding decisions in this area.

Strategy 2: Work with workforce development organizations and local community colleges to create a workforce needs inventory to determine available and needed workforce with a particular focus on watershed restoration, forest products infrastructure, sustainable recreation and tourism, and working landscapes.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 3: Actively support the development and continued implementation of collaborative approaches that enhance community resiliency and bring entities together to solve problems and overcome obstacles.

Strategy 4: Provide support and assistance to local governments, communities, organizations, and tribes throughout the Region that build their capacity to create greater community resilience.

Strategy 5: Continuously adapt and respond to changing conditions/needs, new science and research and new opportunities for funding and projects. Seek out and apply unique approaches to solving intractable problems that block progress in providing resilience in the communities of the Sierra Nevada with an eye towards the unique role SNC can/should play as it relates to partner efforts with an eye toward the unique role the SNC can/should play in relation to partner efforts.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 6: Advocate for and secure increased funding to increase community resilience throughout the Region, including funding for SNC and other agencies and organizations.

Strategy 7: Distribute new bond funds in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact, coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies to improve community resiliency throughout the Region.

Policy

Strategy 8: Working with partners, identify policy changes that will assist in increased community resilience.

Communications/Telling the Story

Strategy 9: Promote and/or amplify partner efforts to protect at-risk communities.

Strategy 10: Utilize the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN) to capture data in a spatial way and/or showcase relevant data that helps to define the risks that communities throughout the Region face and demonstrates how strengthened Sierra Nevada communities benefit the rest of the state.

REGIONAL GOAL: IMPACTFUL REGIONAL IDENTITY

Elevated statewide recognition of the value and benefits the Sierra Nevada provides and increased integration of the importance of the Sierra Nevada into state policy and funding decisions.

The Sierra Nevada Region provides irreplaceable ecosystem services to the state of California, which are often taken for granted in policy and funding decisions. Since the SNC was created in 2004, elevating the profile of the Sierra Nevada Region and all the benefits the Region provides to the state has been a priority, and in recent years staff resources have been dedicated to making progress towards this objective. SNC has placed a focus on establishing ourselves as a credible source of information by interpreting and sharing relevant research, creating messaging that supports science-based policy and funding decisions, and developing materials that clearly illustrate the holistic connection between a healthy Sierra Nevada Region and a strong, vibrant future for California. The SNC's primary focus has been on educating key policy makers, and advocating for state and federal funding decisions that support the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region.

Over the past couple of years, significant progress has been made. The Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) has been recognized in various state plans and reports as a key component in achieving state natural resources and climate goals. Increased funding for forest health activities has occurred, a primary objective of the WIP. The SNC has also become a regular source of information for media and decision makers on the issues of watershed health.

As the climate changes in the Sierra Nevada, the need to recognize resilient watersheds and forests and their value will become even more critical, and connecting the health of

the natural landscapes of the Sierra Nevada to the recreation and tourism experiences they provide, and the communities they sustain, will be important. The SNC also recognizes that engaging partners who share our vision for the Region is essential in making further progress. Ultimately, this goal can be accomplished only with the active involvement of beneficiaries from a healthy Sierra Nevada in delivering this message to policy makers. Focus in this area will ensure that Sierra Nevada values and benefits are appropriately recognized and integrated into statewide policy and funding discussions.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Regional Goal:

Needs Assessment

Strategy 1: Assess the effectiveness of SNC's traditional and social media efforts in communicating information about needs and challenges in the Sierra Nevada to policy-makers and develop a more effective approach to sharing information.

Developing Partnerships and Resources

Strategy 2: Develop strategic partnerships within the Region and use and develop tools to share messaging, amplify imaging and branding efforts, and communicate lessons learned across the Region.

Strategy 3: Seek out and engage partners and beneficiaries who share the SNC's vision for the Region. Work with them to actively communicate with policy makers on the urgent need to provide for resilient watersheds and forests, connecting the health of the natural landscape of the Sierra Nevada to the recreation and tourism experiences they provide and the communities they sustain.

Strategy 4: Actively reach out and engage leaders in urban communities that benefit from the Sierra Nevada.

Funding and Investments

Strategy 5: Seek funding to bolster and support communications efforts that elevate the image of the Sierra Nevada and educate Californians on the benefits of healthy California watersheds and forests.

Policy

Strategy 6: Utilize an elevated Regional identity and sound science to educate and influence decision- and policy-makers to benefit the Sierra Nevada Region.

Communications/Telling the Story

Strategy 7: Create outreach and education campaigns that effectively connect Sierra benefits with beneficiaries, and share a holistic story of the needs in the Sierra Nevada and the benefits that the Region provides.

Strategy 8: Establish and maintain relationships with targeted media outlets and reporters; utilize sound science and data to become the 'go-to' place for stats and stories about the Sierra.

Strategy 9: Develop a communications and educational campaign focused on encouraging decision makers to get to know their watersheds through experiential learning activities throughout the Sierra Nevada Region.