

Background

The Board launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) over one year 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 the local collaboratives, including local governments, environmentalists, community and economic development representatives, to help them achieve their goals. SNFCI also has strong coordination with federal agencies, including the US Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS) and resource-oriented state agencies.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council works on Regional and statewide issues that can influence the success of local forest collaborative efforts. SNC Board Vice Chair Bill Nunes and former Board Vice Chair Steve Wilensky are co-chairing the Regional Coordinating Council, and Boardmember Bob Kirkwood along with Boardmember Nunes are serving as the Board liaisons to the Initiative. Other members include representatives from the woods products industry, local government, environmental and conservation organizations, community groups and water interests. The primary federal land managers, USFS, BLM and NPS, participate in an advisory role.

The primary focus of the Coordinating Council is policy, investment, emerging technology, and science and research. The Coordinating Council has already suggested broadening the participation to include agricultural/ranching interest, Tribal entities and the Board of Forestry. SNC staff and the Coordinating Council are following up with these suggestions. The work of the SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council will help reduce barriers to the implementation of local, on-the-ground projects by providing support and feedback to local forest collaboratives based on their needs as communicated via effective two-way communication about Regional issues affecting local efforts.

Current Status

The third SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council meeting was held in June 2011. The primary highlights of this meeting were:

- A few Coordinating Council members provided brief overviews about the progress that is being made at the local level to address: an all-lands approach to forest management, integrating the triple bottom line into this work, and identifying long-term funding mechanisms to restore the forested watersheds. These presentations helped to support an extensive conversation about the implementation of the Forest Service's Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration and to identify specific ways in which the Council could support this implementation.

- During the previous meeting, the Coordinating Council agreed to support the Region 5 Leadership Intent. However, there has been continuing discussion about the need for a more specific implementation plan and accountability measures, particularly in the areas of increasing the pace and scale of treatment, prioritizing areas, and assuring community benefit. Coordinating Council members proposed to (1) form a working group from the Coordinating Council to work with Forest Service to support implementation of the Leadership Intent with a focus on increasing the pace and scale of forest treatment; and (2) the full Coordinating Council would act in an advisory role to develop a shared vision and help articulate the general concepts for implementation.
- Continuing Discussion on Reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools Funding –A bill proposing the Reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools is expected in the near future. There are several options for such a bill, which may impact the contracting period and the amount and uses of retained receipts. The Coordinating Council agreed to prepare policy positions on the major alternatives in preparation for the actual legislation.
- The next Coordinating Council quarterly meeting will be in October in Auburn.

Newsletter: The SNFCI newsletter is being distributed electronically on a quarterly basis to provide regular communications about the Initiative progress. The second electronic newsletter was published in August.

Regional Analyses: The SNC is assisting in the assessment of available data relating to the supply of woody biomass on public lands and developing an inventory of existing facilities and their volume capacities within the Sierra Nevada. This information will serve to begin development of a “regional blueprint” that can help ensure a balance of lumber mills, biomass to energy facilities, small wood and other value added products facilities, appropriately scaled and geographically distributed. This strategy will help target SNFCI efforts toward areas of greatest need. Staff continues to network with established groups with common goals to involve them in the initiative and evaluate specific support SNC may be able to offer them.

Mokelumne Watershed Ecosystem Services: A project funded by the SNC and the Forest Service will address how upper watershed restoration treatments, primarily fuel hazard reduction and forest health management, will benefit downstream beneficiaries and reduce utility operational costs in the Mokelumne Watershed. This is a part of long term effort to build an investment platform linking forest restoration and management to the beneficiaries of the ecosystem services that the watershed provides. This phase of the analysis will be done by modeling a range of wild fire scenarios occurring under current watershed conditions verses fully restored watershed conditions and evaluating associated post-fire recovery and restoration costs. Consideration will be given to other restoration needs including road decommissioning and restoration, meadow and riparian restoration and other measures that can protect water quality, quantity and help

maintain a normal hydrologic cycle. The project will also include a strategy to target restoration work in areas that provide the most benefit to the water resources and the greatest environmental gains.

New Sierra Cascade All-Lands Enhancement (SCALE) demonstration effort: Two local forest collaborative efforts have joined together to engage State and Federal agencies in new all-lands approaches for ecological restoration. The Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group and the Burney-Hat Creek Collaboratives are working together to develop solutions focusing on the triple bottom line (environment, economy, and community/equity). Representatives from these collaboratives are working with the SNC to develop multi-agency partnerships focused on demonstration projects that can promote healthy communities and a restoration economy.

Willow Creek Collaborative Forest Restoration Plan: The Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative (SFCC) is launching a collaborative forest planning process focusing on the Sierra National Forest Willow Creek Watershed with facilitation support from SNC staff. In addition to providing stakeholders guidance for the District Ranger on the 'desired conditions' for the forest, it will help build relationships between the community and Forest Service staff. SNC staff are also building capacity in collaboration building and facilitation under the guidance and mentoring of facilitators from the Center for Collaborative Policy, which will allow them to provide such assistance to other collaborative efforts in the future. The effort will have its kick-off meeting in early September and is expected to be completed by February, 2012.

Rural Business Enterprise Grant Update: The SNC in partnership with the Yosemite-Sequoia Resource Conservation District successfully obtained a Rural Business Enterprise Grant last year. Two feasibility studies were funded, supporting biomass sort yards in Wilseyville (Calaveras County) and North Fork (Madera County). The Madera County project has been finalized and the Calaveras County report is expected soon. Both studies were completed by TSS Consultants which worked with the Region 5 Forest Service biomass consultant, to produce a value-added biomass opportunity matrix. This matrix allows prospective entrepreneurs to evaluate various biomass processing options in terms of initial investment, site requirements, technological status, permitting, supply needs, markets, etc. This valuable tool will be available on websites for use by other communities interested in economic use of woody biomass materials.

Future Status

Staff will continue working with the Coordinating Council to support the Forest Service with implementation of the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration. SNC staff is continuing to establish more consistent and diverse communications to stakeholders. Electronic SNFCI newsletter continues to be distributed and the staff will upgrade the SNFCI webpage with more photos, graphics and general information.

Staff will continue to engage federal land management agencies with SNFCI through the Regional Coordinating Council as well as the local collaboratives, recognizing that these agencies are ultimately responsible for management decisions on these public lands. As appropriate, additional resources will be focused on such items as support for market analysis/biomass utilization, business plan development and support for the Coordinating Council. Additional opportunities will be actively sought to submit applications for funding to support both local and Regional SNFCI activities.

Through logistical support, facilitation and general guidance, SNC staff will continue to encourage local collaboratives to move continually towards on the ground projects with quantifiable results. Staff will also look for additional opportunities to support local efforts in new areas of the Sierra Nevada.

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.