

2014-15

Revised Action Plan



SIERRA NEVADA
CONSERVANCY

Approved: June 2014
Revised: December 2014

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The following represent the major initiatives and activities to be undertaken by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) between July 2014 and June 2015, consistent with the SNC's Strategic Plan (Plan). This Action Plan was originally approved by the SNC Governing Board in June 2014 and includes revisions approved by the Board in December 2014.

Grant Program

The SNC Grant Program will complete the following actions through June 2015:

- Awarding all of the funds currently available under the 2013-14 grant round, which is focused on Healthy Forest, Biomass Utilization and Abandoned Mine Land Projects. (Completed)
- Implementing the Rim Fire Restoration grant focus area, funding \$1 million of high quality projects in the effected Region.
- Closing out 34 current grant projects (allocating returned funds to the 2013-14 grant round); completing all required reporting including SNC's Success Tracker and Performance Measures Database as well as State documentation.
- Providing timely and accurate response to any bond reporting and audit requests received. Updating the Agency Bond Consolidated Reporting System web site and the California Strategic Growth Plan Bond Accountability web site as required in Executive Order S-02-07.
- Develop guidelines, including the holding of public workshops and submission to the Natural Resources Agency, for the 2015-16 Proposition 1 grant round.

Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)

The SNC will continue to coordinate implementation of the SNFCI, working closely with a wide range of stakeholders and agencies. Specific actions to be accomplished under SNFCI have been organized into three tiers in terms of priority levels, 1 indicating highest priority and 3 indicating lowest priority. They include:

- Developing a SNFCI Action Plan to guide the SNC's efforts in addressing the dire state of many forests in the Sierra Nevada. The plan will include actions to address regional issues and to facilitate collaborative processes for the identification of needs and priorities at the local level. (Tier 1)
- Launching an effort to develop a Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program in collaboration with other State, federal and local government entities, nonprofit and community organizations, and tribes. The purpose of the plan will be to address key policy issues and coordinate investment in the Sierra Nevada to reduce risks to the benefits the Region provides. (Tier 1)
- Providing Proposition 84 grant funding for projects which meet SNC criteria for Healthy Forests funding under the 2013-14 grant round and Rim Fire Restoration grant focus. (Tier 1)
- Continuing to work with the SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council and the US Forest Service in specific focus areas most likely to reduce barriers to increase pace and scale of ecological restoration in our forests. (Tier 1)

- Continuing to develop and support projects consistent with SNFCI objectives, with clear deliverables and quantifiable measures for success and a positive influence on increasing pace and scale of restoration. (Tier 2)
- Supporting forest and biomass collaboration efforts seeking long-term sustainability by assisting them in the search for capacity building funding through SNC partners and other opportunities. (Tier 2)
- Participating in various efforts to promote research, policy changes and investment in support of SNFCI objectives. (Tier 2)
- Monitoring various projects and efforts underway which may intersect with SNFCI, either through policy changes that may impact the initiative, or emerging needs which might be strong candidates for SNC support or technical assistance, as resources allow. (Tier 3)

Biomass Utilization

The SNC will continue to work with a broad range of community, agency, and industry stakeholders to find economic uses for the excess biomass removed in forest restoration activities. SNC is identified in the California 2012 Bioenergy Action Plan as the state agency responsible for pursuing funding for forest Bioenergy research and implementation and assisting communities with the development of community scale projects. To fulfill these goals and responsibilities SNC will take the following actions:

- Providing Proposition 84 grant funding for projects which meet SNC criteria for Biomass Utilization funding under the 2013-14 grant round (Completed).
- Continuing to strategically provide technical assistance and funding support, as well as identify additional funding sources, for projects in various stages of development within the Region. Under the Bioenergy Action Plan, the SNC will provide a limited level of assistance to projects outside the Region.
- Continuing to work with other agencies (such as the US Forest Service, CalFire, the California Public Utilities Commission, and the California Energy Commission) to help craft policies and programs to assist forest biomass infrastructure development and retention.
- Continuing to provide outreach to help educate policy makers and the public on the issues associated with woody biomass utilization to help diverse interests resolve issues and concerns.
- Helping to compile information and develop tools that assist in identifying the most appropriate locations for biomass utilization facilities.

Abandoned Mine Lands

The SNC, working with multiple government and non-government partners, will continue to assist in the identification and implementation of approaches for Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) remediation that may be widely applied to improve the quality and reliability of the water and waterways and water storage facilities within and outside the Region. Specific actions will include:

- Continuing to identify and develop AML project proposals eligible for funding in the 2013-14 grant round until the funding allocations are fully spent.

(Completed)Continuing to pursue the goal of a blanket due diligence process for properties that may be acquired using State funds.

- Facilitating increased collaboration among State agencies participating in AML remediation in the Sierra and other parts of the State by providing support to the California Abandoned Mine Lands Agency Group (CAMLAG) and helping to identify and fill gaps in research, data, and knowledge that could be addressed in order to facilitate a more collaborative approach.
- Continuing to work with partners to educate decision makers and others about legacy mining impacts; Sponsoring and/or partnering in AML symposia and other events.
- Continuing to explore various funding opportunities for AML cleanup.

Regional Agriculture and Ranching

The SNC will continue to participate and support partners' efforts and learn more about the needs of farmers and ranchers in the Sierra and how the SNC can help to address those needs. In addition, the SNC will continue to identify opportunities to increase the presence of the SNC and Sierra stakeholders in policy and funding discussions. Specific actions will include:

- Working closely with the Recreation and Tourism Initiative, support efforts to develop a Sierra Agritourism Network and increase the presence of agritourism on the Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide website and companion materials.
- Continuing to participate in discussions, workshops and meetings to understand relevant issues, policies and actions and build relationships within the farming and ranching communities.
- Supporting partner efforts to engage and reach out to policy makers and legislators regarding the benefits of agriculture and ranching and include these messages in SNC outreach and communication efforts as appropriate.
- Working with partners to support their efforts, including potentially funding and implementing workshops addressing specific needs; utilize grant writer to find funds to support these efforts.
- Supporting and participating in on-going conversations regarding grazing on public lands.

Regional Tourism and Recreation

The SNC will focus on four primary elements to make substantial progress in promoting and developing regional tourism and recreation, including: 1) continuing support and growth of the Sierra Nevada Geotourism (SNGT) MapGuide Project, 2) assisting in the development of tourism and recreation attractions and products with regional significance, 3) promoting the development of programs and opportunities that strengthen the Sierra Nevada "brand", and 4) building and maintaining recreation and tourism industry relationships. Specific actions will include:

- Soliciting and developing new content and destinations for display on the SNGT website, with an emphasis on agritourism, and under-represented regions.
- Implementing the first of a two-year distribution plan for half of 71,000 printed MapGuides (third printing).

- Implementing a marketing plan aimed at increasing downloads of mobile phone applications and the amount of web traffic visiting the SNGT site on a monthly basis.
- Assisting in the development of up to three water trail projects with local organizations, including seeking outside resources to support this effort.
- Continue working with state and local partners promoting existing agritourism opportunities, and supporting efforts to establish new agritourism opportunities by organizing a series of agritourism training workshops in targeted areas and linking agritourism projects in the Region to create and market a region wide network of agritourism products and experiences.
- Engaging with industry professionals and organizations to increase exposure of the Region and tourism issues in the Region.

Ecosystem Services

The SNC will work with partners to continue actions under this initiative which help to quantify environmental benefits in the upper watershed and initiate new investment strategies and identify new investors. The primary actions will be:

- Continuing to communicate the key findings of the Mokelumne Watershed Avoided Cost Analysis (MACA), to make the case that new and additional investment in fuel treatments is a cost savings measure and needed for long-term forest health.
- Working with project partners to evaluate new opportunities to implement actions based on the outcomes of the MACA.
- Coordinating with key partners including US Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy and University of California Merced to identify and implement research and monitoring projects to better understand the relationship between forest management and water yield.
- Evaluating the initial findings and future potential of a previously funded project to quantify any potential water yield increase and change to the hydrograph that may result from meadow restoration activities. Work with US Geological Survey (USGS) and other partners to better understand the connection of forests, fires, and sediment on existing reservoirs within the state. Evaluate potential problem areas and begin to quantify the extent of the problem, if any.

Education and Communications

The SNC will continue to educate policy and decision-makers regarding the importance of the Sierra and the SNC to the state's long-term health and well-being. Outreach will focus on increasing awareness of the Sierra Nevada Region's important role in ensuring water quality and supply, storing carbon in our forests and the many other benefits that come from our Region. A key message for this effort will be the dire condition of many forests in the Region and the urgent need for action. The overall goals of the Education and Communications program are to encourage key target audiences to support appropriate Sierra investment and sound policy that protects Sierra resources for the benefit of the entire State; establish secure funding for project work in the Region; and support the SNC as a critical funding delivery mechanism for the Region and the State. Actions will include:

- Elevating the profile of the SNC as an accepted, trusted resource for information regarding the link between upper watersheds, forest health, climate change, clean water, clean air, and sustainable communities through increased involvement and communications on such issues.
- Continuing relationship-building activities and conducting regular meetings with local/state/federal agencies, legislators and other decision-makers to ensure investment in the Region where more than 60 percent of the State's developed water supply originates.
- Utilizing events, newsletters, media stories, press releases, social media postings, the SNC Web site, interactive/story maps and other related activities to communicate the value of the Sierra Nevada Region to the rest of the State.
- Tracking and analyzing current Sierra Nevada scientific research to inform the development of sound science-based policy that protects and restores the Sierra Nevada Region.
- Partnering with allies to complete Regional tours that demonstrate the value of SNC Initiatives and the importance of investment in watershed and forest health projects.
- Creating and distributing the fiscal year 2013-14 Annual Report.

Great Sierra River Cleanup

The SNC will coordinate the 6th Annual Great Sierra River Cleanup on September 20, 2014. In 2013, more than 4,200 volunteers joined together to remove nearly 39 tons of trash and recyclables from rivers throughout the Sierra Nevada. Specific actions will include:

- Continuing to work with existing river cleanups throughout the Sierra to unite and expand them.
- Recruiting organizations in areas with no river cleanup programs to host cleanups in their areas.

Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council

The SNC will continue to work with the Stewardship Council to implement a number of activities identified in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two organizations. In 2014-15, the SNC anticipates completing the following actions:

- Executing agreements to serve as covenant holder on lands donated to the US Forest Service (up to 10 properties).
- Finalizing agreements for SNC to carry out certain duties upon the dissolution of the Stewardship Council.
- Initiating the funding mechanism to compensate the SNC for all tasks performed.
- Building a web-based document library for PG&E lands that have been donated and approved through the California Public Utilities Commission.

Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery

The SNC will continue to facilitate and participate in a discussion with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), Inyo County, Friends of Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery, and the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) in order to determine under what conditions the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery (MWFH) can be transferred to a

third party. Actions to be undertaken in 2014-15 include:

- Pursue a decision by DFW and WCB about completing a Phase 2 environmental site assessment report. The Phase 2 report will provide information on the environmental condition of the facility – results may have an impact on the completion of a transfer if significant environmental issues are identified.
- Pursue a decision by DFW and WCB about completing the future-use document, which would limit the types of uses that could occur on the property if it were transferred to a third party.
- A decision by SNC whether to proceed with a potential transfer based on 1) the results of a Phase 2 report, 2) a finalized future use document and, 3) a credible plan in place for completing a potential transfer that has been agreed to by participating parties.
- Confirmation by Inyo County of a third party in place for a potential transfer and a plan completed for future use.

Internal Operations

The SNC will improve its internal operations in a number of areas, including taking the following actions:

- Developing new processes and evaluation tools to ensure SNC's training program is preparing staff to implement the SNC mission.
- Ensuring continuity of essential functions and operations following a catastrophic event by implementing SNC's Business Continuity Plan. Providing training for management as well as performing table-top exercises and drills to test SNC's technology recovery plan.
- Improving SNC network and information technology tools and services including continuous hardware assessment and modifications. Upgrading to SharePoint 2013 including development and implementation of a migration plan. Analyzing telecommunication and video conferencing systems to enhance communication mechanisms ensuring collaboration, efficiency and productivity across the organization.
- Developing Project Management tools to ensure that the SNC's processes, systems and tools are efficient and effective. This will include training staff to use the tools developed internally, as well as training and support for SNC users of Microsoft Project.
- Converting our current accounting and budget systems over to the statewide FISCAL system to maximize efficiency and effectively manage our resources.
- Improving SNC's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) storage procedures ensuring that critical data can be accessed and recovered from any location.