

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Strategic Plan 2011 Public Review Draft

June 23, 2011

Contents

ABOUT THE SNC	3
Our Vision	3
Our Service Area.....	3
Governance.....	4
Program Description.....	5
Program Areas	5
Current Funding Sources	5
OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES.....	6
How We Operate.....	6
Our Key Objectives	6
Implementing Our Programs	6
Working with Others	7
OUR FIRST FIVE YEARS.....	7
Climate Change Symposium.....	8
Connecting the Dots.....	9
Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)	9
Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project.....	9
Federal Land Managers Meetings.....	9
Integrated Regional Water Management Planning.....	10
Sierra Day in the Capitol	10
Current Funding Opportunities	10
Supporting our Partners in Building Sierra Awareness	10
Sierra Water Group	11
DEVELOPMENT OF THIS NEW STRATEGIC PLAN	11
HEALTHY FORESTS.....	15
PRESERVATION OF RANCHES AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS.....	18
WATERSHED PROTECTION AND RESTORATION.....	21
PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND RECREATION	24
LONG TERM EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SNC	26

ABOUT THE SNC

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is a state agency created by bi-partisan legislation co-authored by Assembly members John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) and Tim Leslie (R-Tahoe City). Assembly Bill 2600, the Laird-Leslie Sierra Nevada Conservancy Act, was signed into law by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in September 2004. The SNC has a broad mission based on the understanding that the environmental, economic and social well-being of the Region and its rural communities are closely linked and that the Region would benefit from an organization providing strategic direction and bringing attention and resources to the Region to better understand and meet its needs.

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.

Our Vision

The SNC's vision for the future is that the magnificent Sierra Nevada Region enjoys outstanding environmental, economic and social health with vibrant communities and landscapes sustained for future generations.

Features:

- Rich and diverse natural, physical and living resources are protected and conserved.
- Healthy, diverse and economically sustainable local communities thrive, prepared for and protected from natural disasters.
- Californians value and invest in healthy watersheds that provide high quality water, spectacular scenery and important wildlife habitat.
- Sustainable working landscapes provide environmental, economic and social benefits to the Region.
- The Region's cultural, archeological and historical resources are preserved, visited and treasured.
- Healthy and sustainable tourism, recreation and commercial activities are valued and encouraged.

Our Service Area

The SNC's service area – stretching from Modoc County in the north to Kern County in the south – covers 25 million acres and all or part of 22 counties. Comprising 25 percent

of California's total land area, it is the largest conservancy region in the State. The jurisdiction includes the mountains and foothills of the Sierra Nevada range, the Mono Basin, Owens Valley, the Modoc Plateau and a part of the southern Cascade Range, including the Pit River Watershed. The statute establishing the SNC divides the Region into six smaller Subregions.

The Sierra Nevada Region is an extraordinary resource of regional, statewide, national and even global significance. It is the state's principal watershed, supplying up to two-thirds of California's developed water supply. The Sierra sustains 60 percent of California's animal species and almost half of its plant species, including the world's largest living thing: General Sherman, a Giant Sequoia. In addition to providing water for the State, the Sierra supplies up to half of California's annual timber yield and 15 percent of the state's power needs, holding an untapped potential to increase its contribution to California's green energy portfolio. Its forests and agricultural lands are also uniquely suited to help reduce the warming impact of a changing climate by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in tree trunks, branches, foliage, roots and soils. The Sierra also hosts more than 50 million recreational visits per year and is home to more than 600,000 residents in 200+ local communities – communities that depend in large part on natural resources for economic sustainability, job creation, recreation, and to preserve the community character that is unique to the Sierra Nevada Region.

Governance

The SNC is governed by a 16-member Board with voting members divided almost evenly between State-level appointments and local seats filled by members of County Boards of Supervisors in each of the SNC's six Subregions.

The members include:

- State Secretary for Natural Resources (or his/her designee)
- State Director of Finance (or his/her designee)
- Three members of the public appointed by the Governor
- Two members of the public, one each appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Rules Committee, and
- Six county supervisors whose districts are within the Region, each representing one of the six Subregions.
- Three non-voting liaison advisers: one each from the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

Program Description

In accordance with the statute establishing the SNC, all of our activities are based on the principles of balance, cooperation and equity. The statute requires that the SNC:

- Support efforts that advance environmental preservation and the economic and social well-being of Sierra residents in a complementary manner;
- Work in collaboration and cooperation with local governments and interested parties in carrying out the SNC's mission;
- Make every effort to ensure that, over time, Conservancy funding and other efforts are spread equitably across each of the various Subregions and among the program areas, with adequate allowance for the variability of costs associated with individual regions and types of projects; and
- Inform and educate all Californians as to the substantial benefits they enjoy from the Region and the importance of the environmental and economic well-being of the Region.

Program Areas

The SNC serves the Sierra Nevada Region by providing a focal point for action and helping to develop and promote a regional identity for the Sierra as a whole. The SNC does that, in part, by providing funding for local and regional projects and offering technical and other assistance for collaborative efforts in cooperation with nonprofit, tribal, and government partners at all levels. The SNC's activities fall under seven non-prioritized, legislatively mandated program areas, including:

- Increasing the opportunity for tourism and recreation in the Region;
- Protecting, conserving and restoring the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical and living resources;
- Aiding in the preservation of working landscapes;
- Reducing the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfire;
- Protecting and improving water and air quality;
- Assisting the regional economy; and,
- Enhancing public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

Current Funding Sources

The SNC's budget is made up of funds from the California Environmental License Plate Fund and Proposition 84, The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coast Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Prop 84). Prop 84 allocated \$54 million in bond funds to the SNC. The SNC may also receive funds and interests in real

or personal property by gifts, bequests or grants. Our operations do not directly impact the General Fund.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We are guided in our operations by a number of principles developed as part of the SNC's initial strategic planning process in 2006:

How We Operate

- The SNC conducts operations openly. Decision making will be transparent, and we always strive to improve communications throughout the Region.
- The SNC strives to maintain neutrality so all interested parties are provided an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the SNC's activities.

Our Key Objectives

- The SNC seeks to “add value” and build upon existing community and Regional efforts.
- The SNC brings a Regional focus to the issues of the Sierra Nevada, collecting and sharing information across the Region and communicating the benefits and contributions of the Region.
- The SNC encourages community-based solutions and will assist communities with technical expertise, information and resources necessary to achieve local solutions.
- The SNC uses the best available information and science in making decisions, identifying opportunities to fill information and technical gaps and building on and expanding community information.
- The SNC informs and educates the public throughout the Region and the State about the substantial benefits the Sierra Nevada provides to all Californians, including providing clean water for many uses outside the Sierra, and the importance of protecting and enhancing the environmental wellbeing of the Region.
- The SNC strives to identify and implement activities that result in integrated environmental, economic and social benefits rather than “either or” outcomes.

Implementing Our Programs

- The SNC develops program priorities considering the input received through community outreach efforts and seeks to meet community needs.
- The SNC is flexible in implementing its programs, recognizing the need to act based on opportunity, available funding, local and regional differences and statewide interest.
- The SNC gives priority to multi-benefit projects and integrated activities (those that address more than one of the SNC's program objectives).
- The SNC encourages projects and activities that leverage other organizations' (government, private and nonprofit) competencies and funding.

- The SNC evaluates projects considering what is occurring on surrounding lands, cognizant of potential impacts to those landscapes.
- The SNC purchases and/or creates incentives for the purchase, where practical, of resources for goods and services within the Sierra Nevada Region. We diligently seek opportunities to improve the economic well-being of communities in the Region.
- The SNC makes every effort to ensure that, over time, Conservancy funding and other efforts are spread equitably across Subregions and program areas, with adequate allowance for the variability of costs associated with individual regions and types of projects.

Working with Others

- The SNC emphasizes cooperation with local governments and other governmental, tribal and non-governmental partners in providing information, technical assistance and financial support to assist in meeting mutual goals.
- The SNC coordinates and collaborates with all partners to achieve research, project funding and program goals.
- The SNC convenes and facilitates interested parties to seek solutions for difficult problems to achieve environmental, economic and social benefits.
- The SNC respects the mission, responsibilities and obligations of other agencies and organizations.

OUR FIRST FIVE YEARS

Despite the Sierra's considerable size and significant contributions to the State's economic, environmental and social well-being, the Region historically received relatively little state or federal investment or coordination of activities to protect and steward its natural and community resources. This was due, in part, to the lack of a coordinating entity at a broader (state) level that could involve local government and other stakeholders to represent the Region as a whole. With the creation of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, that institutional gap has been bridged. Due to our extensive outreach program over the past five years, the SNC now serves as a focal point and vehicle for partnering with local, state, and federal stakeholders, advocating for the Region and attracting additional investment to the Sierra.

The SNC has been hard at work during its first five years to meet this charge. The activities undertaken by the SNC in accordance with its first five-year Strategic Plan have established the organization as an effective partner, adding value to the Region and have led to the launch of a number of key programs and initiatives including:

Grants Program

The SNC's Grants Program, funded through the voter-approved *Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coast Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84)*, is one of the primary tools used by the SNC to support the work of its partners across the Region. Since its first year of grant making in 2007, the SNC has authorized more than 221 individual grants to nonprofit, tribal and governmental partners. These grants, totaling almost \$40 million, have been used to improve water quality, reduce the risk of wildfire and other natural disasters, protect important natural resources and habitat, promote sustainable recreational use (when tied to resource conservation), improve resource management practices, protect working farms and ranches and address climate change impacts across the 22 counties comprising the Sierra Nevada.

Climate Change Symposium

The effects of climate change on the Sierra are expected to be significant and could have far-reaching consequences. The forests and communities of the Sierra have the potential to contribute positively by reducing emissions, sequestering carbon, protecting the State's primary source of water, generating renewable energy and proactively adapting to changing conditions. In recognition of the role the Sierra could play, the SNC convened its first symposium, attended by more than 300 participants, to discuss potential impacts and Sierra-specific tools and strategies. This effort led to the development of the first of its kind "Climate Action Plan of the Sierra Nevada: A Regional Approach to Address Climate Change" in 2009.

Climate Action Plan

In 2009, the SNC Board adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP). This was an effort to better understand all relevant effects associated with a changing climate and determine what additional actions can be taken and what resources and information need to be generated to best serve the Sierra in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. The SNC CAP was written and intended to be a dynamic document. This plan was a starting point – a stake in the ground – from which to begin to determine how climate change can best be addressed in such a diverse and complex Region. Two years later, the SNC has developed an array of projects such as the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) and the Mokelumne Ecosystems Services Project which fulfill many of the actions listed in the CAP. Many other actions have been completed or are currently being carried out either by the SNC staff or by others in the Region. Other actions that still need to be completed are included in this new Strategic Plan as actions under individual Areas of Focus.

Connecting the Dots

The SNC hosted a Sierra-wide web symposium, or “webposium,” on forest health and rural economies that attracted 150 participants across nine local meeting locations and the web. The event gathered local, state and national experts; policy-makers; and environmental, tribal, industry and community representatives to discuss improving watershed/forest resiliency and health by reducing the threat of wildfire while sustainably using forest “fuels” to create local jobs and economic resilience. The webposium served as the precursor to the SNFCI.

Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)

The SNFCI is an effort to foster collaboration locally and regionally to support a cohesive, economically viable and sustainable approach to reducing fire risk, creating jobs, and restoring and protecting watershed health. A key component of the SNFCI is supporting locally based collaboratives that are taking action to actively manage the forests, create local jobs and improve the social well being of residents. With SNC’s assistance, these collaboratives have received federal, state and private funds as seed money to establish skills training programs, create fuel treatment and biomass utilization jobs for displaced timber workers and rural youth, and develop infrastructure for turning forest materials into value-added commercial products or renewable energy. In addition to receiving the endorsement of all 22 Sierra counties; Boards of Supervisors, the SNC has formed a Regional Coordinating Council consisting of diverse stakeholders engaged in forestry and community development issues. The Council supports local collaboratives by addressing policy issues, research and science and funding to support on-the-ground work.

Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project

Recognizing that tourism remains one of the Sierra’s strongest economic contributors, the SNC entered into a partnership with the Sierra Business Council (SBC) and the National Geographic Society to develop the web-based Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project, one of only four Geotourism projects in the United States. The project involves a Region-wide effort to engage local residents of the Sierra to identify and describe places to go or things to do that are unique and characteristic of the Region. This information is included in a website (www.sierranevadageotourism.org) to advertise the unique assets of the Sierra and to assist prospective tourists in selecting and planning for visits in the Region.

Federal Land Managers Meetings

In 2007 the SNC began hosting annual gatherings of federal land managers from agencies active in the Sierra, including National Park Service, US Forest Service,

Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The goal of these ongoing meetings is to discuss Sierra-wide issues and establish or strengthen partnerships to address regional issues.

Integrated Regional Water Management Planning

The SNC played a key role in addressing the need for Integrated Regional Water Management Planning (IRWMP) in parts of the Region where planning efforts were not already underway or completed. Completion of an IRWMP is needed to qualify for the hundreds of millions of dollars to be disbursed by the Department of Water Resources over the next five years. As a result of SNC's efforts to participate with existing IRWMP projects, and to convene and facilitate stakeholders in areas where planning was not yet occurring, most of the Region will reap the benefits of being part of an IRWMP.

Sierra Day in the Capitol

Sierra Day in the Capitol is an ongoing annual event dedicated to raising awareness among State legislators, their staff and members of the administration about the importance of the Sierra and the benefits the Region provides to the entire state of California. The 2011 Sierra Day involved 47 participants from 26 sponsoring organizations representing a broad array of interests from within and outside the Sierra.

Current Funding Opportunities

The Funding Team continues to disseminate a monthly update with information on state, federal and private funding sources relevant to nonprofit, government and tribal partners in the Sierra. The update is sent to more than 1,100 individuals and organizations throughout the Region and is then posted on the SNC Web site. By the end of 2009–10 the team had publicized more than 200 different funding-related opportunities, from actual grant and loan programs to grant writing and other educational workshops and trainings to improve partners' fund development capabilities.

Supporting our Partners in Building Sierra Awareness

The SNC has developed a sponsorship program to help organizations in their efforts to inform people and communities within the Region and across the State about issues important to the Sierra. Supporting our partners in this way helps us to achieve our mutual goals of raising awareness and encouraging ongoing discussions of Region-wide issues. In 2010, this program supported more than a dozen partner organizations in their activities, engaging thousands of people in Sierra issues. Events sponsored include the California Tribal Water Summit, the California Trails and Greenways Conference and the Rediscovering Rangelands 5th Annual Summit.

Sierra Water Group

From 2007-2009, the SNC helped to coordinate the Sierra Water Group, which consists of representatives from all of the Sierra IRWMP groups. These representatives include local, state and federal government agencies, non-profits, water purveyors and other stakeholders. A primary goal of the group has been to develop a common vision and voice for Sierra water by developing actions to be implemented collaboratively.

California Natural Diversity Database and Vegetation Mapping

In 2008–09 the SNC also provided funding to the California Department of Fish and Game to support improving the biological resource information base for the Region including updating records of rare, threatened and endangered species in the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) and vegetation mapping of the foothills of the western Sierra. The CNDDDB is a spatial database that contains records of sensitive and rare species as well as state- and federal-listed threatened and endangered species (listed species). The CNDDDB is the most commonly used database by biologists and land managers to evaluate potential impacts to biological resources resulting from proposed projects that will alter the landscape, such as development and restoration activities.

As a result of these and other activities, virtually all of the actions contained in the SNC's original Strategic Plan have been or are being accomplished or have been deemed to be ongoing activities of the SNC and have been built into our day-to-day operations. The few exceptions as well as those activities listed above that have yet to be completed, have been incorporated into this new draft Strategic Plan.

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

Development of this Strategic Plan was specifically intended to focus planning efforts on measurable and attainable actions over the next three years and to set priorities for the SNC within the context of its broad mission and statutorily established program areas. This document will be implemented in ongoing collaboration with multiple partners throughout the Region. It will be carried out through specific actions identified in an annual work plan, which will set forth a realistic set of actions for the SNC to accomplish each year in support of the priorities we've established through this planning process.

While the SNC's original Strategic Plan has a goal associated with each of the SNC's seven statutorily established program areas, for this Plan, the Board established five Areas of Focus that cut across program areas, as follows:

- Healthy Forests
- Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands
- Watershed Protection and Restoration
- Promotion of Sustainable Tourism and Recreation
- Long-term Effectiveness of the SNC

Although this Plan aligns specific objectives and strategies with these five Areas of Focus, the boundaries that had to be drawn around each Area of Focus for planning purposes are sometimes artificial. In reality, all of the Areas of Focus are interconnected and the objectives and strategies that are laid out in support of one Area of Focus will often help the SNC make progress in other Areas of Focus. Activities that address multiple Areas of Focus will be given priority and actions will need to be integrated across Areas of Focus to be most effective.

Following the adoption of the five Areas of Focus by the Board, staff held six workshops throughout the Region to gather input from stakeholders regarding the objectives and actions the SNC should pursue within the first four areas of focus. The workshops were held in Auburn, Susanville, Visalia, Bishop, Oroville, and Sonora and were attended by over 140 individuals representing a wide variety of interests. Stakeholders were also provided the opportunity to provide additional input via our Web site. In addition, meetings were held with staff and key stakeholders, including conservation organizations, fire safe councils, Resource Conservation Districts, landowner organizations, and others.

In addition, staff reviewed the Climate Action Plan and the Education and Communication Plan, which were both previously adopted by the Board and incorporated their contents wherever appropriate. In some instances, elements of these two previously adopted plans were deemed to be no longer relevant due to actions already taken, actions taken by other organizations, or a shift in focus by our partners. Only currently relevant activities were included in this Plan.

Although it was challenging to assimilate the large amount of input received from our stakeholders and staff, the job was made easier by the fact that consistent themes emerged regarding desired roles for the SNC within each Area of Focus and across all of the Areas of Focus. Additionally, the statute governing the SNC identifies the activities in which the SNC may engage, as the following:

- a) The conservancy may expend funds and award grants and loans to facilitate collaborative planning efforts and to develop projects and programs that are designed to further the purposes of this division.
- b) The conservancy may provide and make available technical information, expertise, and other nonfinancial assistance to public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and tribal organizations, to support program and project development and implementation.

This plan proposes that the SNC engage in these two activities identified above in carrying out the following roles:

- Advocate for the Sierra Nevada—Whether it be with decision-makers in Sacramento, the public, other state government entities, those who benefit from the Region’s resources, or others, the need for advocacy and education was strongly urged throughout all of the Areas of Focus. In some instances, this is also tied to the need to develop more compelling or quantifiable information and research about the benefits the Region provides to the State and may also involve leading Region-wide projects that build regional identity.
- Fund Projects —Funding from bond measures and other sources will be utilized to support projects that are consistent with the focus areas identified in the plan. While the types of projects funded may be constrained by specific requirements of the funding source, the SNC will strive to fund a variety of high benefit projects throughout the Region.
- Bring additional funds into the Region—Related to advocating for the Region, is the need for additional funding to address regional and local issues. In addition to SNC’s Grants Program, this may mean working with existing federal and state programs to help them better understand and address Sierra issues. In others, it may require efforts to raise private funds or explore new funding sources for the SNC, such as a fee-for-service model.
- Support local collaboration and capacity building—Many parts of the Region and many organizations within the Region may not have the information, technical expertise, or other resources they need to be more effective in addressing local concerns and issues. The SNC can help address these needs by providing technical assistance and more opportunities for collaboration at the local level.

- Lead efforts to address issues at the regional and local levels—The SNC has established itself as a neutral convener that has been successful in bringing a variety of interests together to find common ground and in leading the development and implementation of steps to move forward on issues at both the regional and local levels.

No matter what roles the SNC plays within the various Areas of Focus, this Plan emphasizes the need for the SNC to continue its practice of strong collaboration and partnership with other organizations working in the Region. Not only does the SNC plan to continue to partner with other organizations on specific actions in support of this Plan, but will also continue to seek ongoing input from stakeholders regarding what we should be doing and how we should be doing it. In addition, the SNC will carry out these roles consistent with the statutory direction to allocate funding and other efforts equitably across each of the Subregions and program areas.

We recognize that the objectives and strategies laid out in this Plan will not accomplish everything that needs to be done within each of the Areas of Focus for the Region. There are many important activities that will continue to be undertaken by other organizations throughout the Region to make our forest healthier, protect and restore watersheds, etc. Rather, this Plan lays out those objectives and strategies that are consistent with the roles stakeholders and staff articulated as being appropriate *for the SNC* and where we can add the most value.

Finally, it is worth noting that this plan addresses both the financial, i.e., grants, and nonfinancial assistance the SNC provides to the Region. Therefore, this Plan will remain relevant for the organization, whether or not the SNC has funds in the future to continue its Grants Program. The Grants Program is a key reason for our effectiveness in the Region and has played an extremely important role in allowing us to fulfill our mission. However, we have written this Strategic Plan so that, even without a Grants Program, we will still have a considerable role to play in the vitality and health of the Sierra Nevada.

The following sections describe the five Areas of Focus with specific objectives and strategies identified as priorities by the SNC Governing Board:

HEALTHY FORESTS

Discussion

The Sierra Nevada Region is facing a number of adverse impacts as a result of unhealthy forests throughout much of region. The risk and consequence of large damaging fire is significant, with serious threats to communities, habitat, water quality carbon storage and air quality are serious and impacts unavoidable without appropriate action. The issue of forest management has long been a contentious and divisive one for the Sierra Nevada. However the consequences of “more of the same” are unacceptable. It is vital that the Region find collaborative solutions to ensure that the ecological health of the Sierra forests is restored and that the rural communities surrounding these forests benefit from these restoration efforts.

The overabundance of small trees and undergrowth in many Sierra forests can weaken mature trees and lead to uncharacteristically fast-moving, high-intensity wildfires that threaten human life, degrade air and water quality and impact plant and animal habitat. Forest resiliency needs to be restored to reduce fire risk, minimize climate change impacts, and support biodiversity. Increasing the pace and scale of forest treatment to restore forest health, prevent large damaging fires and protect communities is essential.

Equally important is the need to ensure that management activities needed to restore forest health are conducted in a sustainable manner that improve the economic and social well being of Sierra communities over the long-term. As a result of the work occurring in the forest, a variety of forest products can be produced. Not only the traditional lumber products, but the biomass that is removed from forests to improve ecological health can be used to produce value-added products or to produce renewable, clean energy. These activities will create jobs and other economic activity in nearby communities important in a Region that has been hit hard by the loss of resource-related jobs and serves to create a new set of green jobs for the Region and additional green energy for California.

One approach under way is the SNC’s Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) seeks to meet these challenges on our public lands by bringing diverse stakeholders together in a collaborative, consensus based approach to identify and act upon areas of common agreement. A significant milestone in the implementation of SNFCI was reached with the adoption of a SNFCI resolution by more than 120 stakeholder organizations from around the Region, including unanimous adoption by all twenty-two county Boards of Supervisors. A key component of SNFCI is the

maintenance of existing facilities such as sawmills and biomass energy plants, as well as the development of additional infrastructure.

Many Sierra communities are actively working to reduce the risk of large damaging fires. Fire Safe Councils, Resource Conservation Districts and others are working with local, state and federal agencies to protect communities and their watersheds. These efforts illustrate the symbiotic relationship between communities and the forests and are an important contribution to restoring forest health in the Region.

Working to return the forests to ecological health within the Region helps us meet all of our statutorily established program goals as listed below:

Primary

- Protecting, conserving and restoring the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical and living resources;
- Reducing the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfire;
- Protecting and improving water and air quality;
- Assisting the regional economy; and
- Aiding in the preservation of working landscapes (i.e., working forests).

Secondary

- Increasing the opportunity for tourism and recreation in the Region; and
- Enhancing public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

Objectives

- ***Implement the SNFCI resolution to improve forest and community health through actions agreed upon in a collaborative, consensus-based process.***
 - **Use the SNFCI Coordinating Council as a forum for collaboration and a venue to address policy, attract investment, and support science and research in the area of forest health on public lands.**
 - **Act as a neutral party to facilitate increased collaboration between agencies and organizations involved in forestry issues on public lands.**

- **Work with partners to promote fuel reduction projects that reduce fire hazard and promote job growth when possible.**
- **Work with partners to establish and maintain existing forest products infrastructure (i.e., sawmills, biomass energy/co-generation plants, etc.) as well as new, integrated facilities at the appropriate locations and scale.**
- ***Increase the amount of scientifically sound information available to individuals and organizations working to improve the ecological health of the forests in the Sierra Nevada.***
 - **Monitor, coordinate and when appropriate, initiate research about forest management, fire and biomass utilization that will lead to successful project implementation.**
 - **Use GIS tools to foster understanding and collaboration across the Region.**
 - **Work with partners to provide access to new peer-reviewed scientific research findings to target audiences so that they are taking actions based on valid information.**
- ***Build greater understanding and quantification of the benefits provided by improving the health of Sierra forests.***
 - **Gain a greater understanding of the gaps in scientific research relevant to benefits of forest management and determine how to work collaboratively with others to address those gaps.**
 - **Support model projects to determine and quantify ecosystem services provided by healthy Sierra forests**
- ***Increase awareness among policy makers about the benefits provided by Sierra forests and the actions needed to maintain and enhance those benefits.***

- **Develop information and tools for educating policymakers about the importance of Sierra forests to the rest of the state so that they understand the need to support policies and increase investment directed at Sierra forests.**
- **Ensure the presence of the SNC and Sierra stakeholders in decision-making forums so that appropriate policies and funding streams are developed for Sierra forests.**
- ***Ensure funding for forest and watershed protection and restoration in order to maintain and enhance the beneficial uses and health of Sierra forests and watersheds.***
 - **Provide funding through the SNC's current and future Grants Programs and leverage SNC funding to act as matching funds from other programs.**
 - **Investigate and develop potential new funding streams**

PRESERVATION OF RANCHES AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Discussion

The ranching and agricultural lands of the Sierra are an integral part of the Region's and local communities' economy, history, cultural heritage and scenic beauty. In addition, these lands provide important contributions to habitat, biodiversity, water quality, air quality, carbon sequestration and open space that benefit everyone as well as preserve the rural character of many Sierra communities.

Those engaged in agriculture and ranching in the Sierra Nevada face a number of important challenges to their ongoing efforts. Regulation, transportation costs of delivering products to market and conflict with urban neighbors are just a few of the challenges. At the same time, despite the recent slowdown in the real estate market, Sierra agricultural and ranching lands remain under pressure for conversion to other uses, including residential development, especially in the fast-growing foothills Region and high-elevation meadows that adjoin urbanizing areas. The recent loss of funding for Williamson Act subvention payments put ranches and farms further at risk. Even for

those fully committed to keeping their lands “working”, these challenges make it very difficult.

The past transition of ranches, farms, and orchards to non-agricultural uses has resulted in fewer farm- and ranch-related jobs, a reduction in local food production, loss of open space and habitat, and loss of the skills, traditions and culture built around agriculture and the rural economy.

One of the factors that contribute to the conversion of agricultural and ranching lands to other uses is the lack of awareness of the many benefits agriculture and ranching provide. There is a lack of comprehensive and compelling data regarding how the protection and appropriate management of these lands positively impacts water quality, habitat and other issues. Telling the story of the true overall benefits of agricultural and ranching land in the Sierra will assist in positive policy and funding decisions at all levels.

Working to preserve ranches and agricultural lands will address a number of our statutorily established program goals as listed below:

Primary

- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes;
- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region’s physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources; and
- Assist the Regional economy.

Secondary

- Provide increased opportunities for tourism and recreation (through agritourism); and
- Protect and improve water and air quality.

Objectives

- ***Assist in maintaining the viability of agricultural lands and ranches in the Sierra***
 - **Learn more about the needs of farmers and ranchers in the Sierra and what the SNC can do to support them in preserving and restoring their lands.**

- **Create opportunities for and participate in discussions to foster agreement and advocacy for needed changes in policy.**
- **Work with partners and communities to encourage Sierra “buy local” and agritourism campaigns and to create markets to increase working lands profitability.**
- **Build on existing processes to discuss mechanisms and opportunities for developing and sustaining Sierra agricultural infrastructure (e.g. meat processing facilities, biomass utilization).**
- **Create mechanisms to discuss grazing on public lands leading to common understanding among stakeholders and potential to build consensus on policy.**
- ***Support greater understanding and quantification of the benefits provided by preservation and stewardship of ranches and agricultural lands in the Region.***
 - **Gain a greater understanding of the gaps in scientific research relevant to ranches and agricultural lands in the Region and determine how to work collaboratively with other organizations to address those gaps.**
 - **Support model projects and other research to determine and quantify the ecosystem services provided by preservation and stewardship of ranches and agricultural lands in the Sierra.**
 - **Support greater understanding of how management of ranches and agricultural lands in the Region lead to adaptations and mitigation to the impacts of climate change within the State.**
- ***Increase understanding among decision-makers and others about the environmental, economic, and social benefits of ranches and agricultural lands in the Sierra and the actions needed to maintain and enhance those benefits.***

- **Join with others to develop information and tools for educating decision-makers about the importance of ranches and agricultural lands in the Sierra and the benefits they bring to the State.**
- **Increase the presence of the SNC and Sierra stakeholders in decision-making forums so that policies and other actions take the needs of Sierra ranches and agricultural lands into account.**
- ***Increase funding for preservation and stewardship of ranches and agricultural lands in the Sierra that are under the threat of conversion or where additional funds are needed to ensure the long-term viability of family farms***
 - **Provide funding through the SNC's current and future Grants Programs and leverage SNC funding to act as matching funds from other programs.**
 - **Work with federal, state and local agencies to increase the share of funding directed towards preservation and restoration of ranches and agricultural lands in the Sierra.**
 - **Investigate and develop potential new funding streams**
 - **Work with others to assist individual farmers and ranchers in learning about available programs and program requirements so that they are able to compete successfully for funding.**

WATERSHED PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

Discussion

The Sierra Nevada has hundreds of lakes, and thousands of miles of streams that together form the 31 major watersheds. These rivers and the watershed areas around them are the lifeblood of California, as they contribute over 60% of California's water needs (primarily to areas outside of the Sierra).

The importance of Sierra watersheds to the State's overall water picture cannot be overstated. The precipitation stored and captured in the upper elevations flows to fill rivers, reservoirs, and recharge groundwater basins, while natural upstream storage reduces spring flows and regulates summer flows to the valley. Approximately 23 million Californians have all or some of their drinking beginning its journey in the Sierra Nevada. The controlled release of snowmelt throughout the spring and summer helps to control winter flooding in the valleys and provides irrigation for food crops and water to keep recreation and other businesses and industries thriving throughout the summer. Sierra water also provides hydropower to light homes, and quality drinking water to meet the needs of residents throughout California, while the watersheds themselves serve as important habitat for all species of plants and animals. Investing in the Sierra – the state's primary watershed – is a long-term solution to challenges such as increasing water demands, threatened water quality, and for buffering anticipated climate change impacts over time.

One of the biggest challenges the SNC and other organizations face in working to protect and restore the watersheds of the Sierra Nevada is the lack of awareness of the importance of these watersheds to the entire State and a more comprehensive and quantifiable understanding of the benefits they provide to downstream users. In addition, these watersheds face significant threats including fire, poorly planned development, and unauthorized recreation. Helping decision makers outside the region understand the relationship of investing in the Sierra Nevada watersheds to reliable supplies of clean water is essential.

Protecting and restoring watersheds within the Region helps us meet a number of our statutorily established program goals as listed below:

Primary

- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources; and
- Protect and improve water and air quality.

Secondary

- Increase opportunities for tourism and recreation in the Region;
- Assisting the regional economy; and
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

Objectives

- ***Increase understanding among decision-makers and others about the services healthy Sierra watersheds provide to the entire State and the actions needed to maintain and enhance those benefits.***
 - Develop information and tools to educate decision-makers about the importance of Sierra watersheds so that they understand the need to support relevant policies and increase funding streams directed at upper watersheds.
 - Increase the presence of the SNC and Sierra stakeholders in decision-making forums so that Sierra interests are taken into account when policy and funding decisions are being made.
 - Educate targeted stakeholders both in the Sierra and downstream about the values and beneficial uses (e.g. natural upstream storage) of Sierra watersheds so that they understand that the Sierra is the source of their water and they become stewards of Sierra watersheds and advocate for SNC programs.
 - Expand the Great Sierra River Cleanup (GSRC) to improve overall health of Sierra watersheds and to encourage public stewardship and education.

- ***Increase funding for watershed protection and restoration in order to maintain and enhance the beneficial uses of Sierra watersheds, both within and outside the Region.***
 - Partner with federal and state agencies to increase the amount of funding directed towards watershed health in the Sierra.
 - Provide funding through SNC's future Grants Program and leverage SNC funding to act as matching funds from other programs.
 - Investigate and develop potential new funding streams in order to support upstream watershed protection and restoration.

- **Help to build bridges between available funding and local governments and organizations in the Sierra.**
- ***Build greater understanding and quantification of the benefits provided by Sierra Nevada Watersheds to generate long-term investment in watershed protection and restoration.***
 - **Support efforts to quantify the ecosystem services provided by healthy watersheds in the Region.**
 - **Monitor and participate in efforts throughout the United States to build the case for watershed ecosystem services.**

PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND RECREATION

Discussion

Recreation and tourism have a long history in the Sierra, dating back to the early State and National Parks and accelerating with the advent of the commercial ski industry and newer sporting activities like mountain biking, rock-climbing and snowboarding. In addition to the Region's natural wonders, its cultural and historic assets – such as Native American and early pioneer history, the California Gold Rush, a growing winery presence and vibrant arts communities – provide a rich backdrop for a growing heritage tourism market. The scenic lands and cultural/historic resources of the Sierra not only provide enjoyment to local residents, they support a multi-billion-dollar tourism industry, which is the single most important economic activity in a number of Sierra counties. While these economic activities are important to local economies, especially in light of significant areas of poverty in the Region, many of the jobs and associated spending is seasonal, presenting its own set of challenges.

Working to diversify the recreational and tourism opportunities in the Sierra Nevada will help to provide a more sustainable future to our communities. So called “place based” tourism, exemplified by the Sierra Nevada Geotourism project provides a great example of this type of effort.

Promoting sustainable tourism and recreation within the Region helps us meet the following statutorily established program goals as listed below:

Primary

- Provide increased opportunities for tourism and recreation;
- Protecting, conserving and restoring the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical and living resources;
- Assisting the Regional economy; and
- Enhancing public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

Secondary

- Aiding in the preservation of working landscapes (through agritourism).

Objectives

- ***“Brand” the Sierra as a top destination for tourism and recreation to promote a greater understanding of the unique qualities of the Region.***
 - Implement the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project and link it to other geotourism projects around the country.
 - Support the development of iconic events or experiences to help brand the Region.
 - Partner with other government entities and other partners to raise the profile of the Sierra “brand.”
- ***Encourage responsible tourism in the Sierra in order to protect valuable Sierra resources and promote the character and economic vitality of the Region.***
 - Use on-line resources such as the Sierra Nevada Geotourism project to educate visitors about the unique values of the Sierra.
 - Collaborate with tourism and recreation providers to build programs that enhance and protect local resources and values.
 - Foster a sense of “Pride of Ownership” among people who live, work and recreate in the Sierra.

- ***Build local and regional capacity and increase funding to support sustainable recreation and tourism throughout the Sierra.***
 - **Explore opportunities to bring new sources of funding into the Region for the promotion of sustainable tourism and recreation.**
 - **Increase opportunities for collaboration and information-sharing among groups at the subregional and local levels.**
 - **Increase the presence of the SNC and Sierra stakeholders in decision-making forums regarding tourism so that Sierra interests are taken into account when marketing and funding decisions are being made.**

LONG TERM EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SNC

Discussion

In order to achieve the objectives of this Strategic Plan, it will be important for the SNC to keep an eye on the vibrancy and effectiveness of our internal organization and to ensure that we are maintaining and improving our work. While we have successfully established the SNC in our first five years, it is important that we continue to build the credibility of the organization and firmly establish ourselves as a trusted, effective partner and leader in the Region; the better the reputation of the SNC, the better we will be able to serve the interests of the Region with decision-makers, other government entities, and other partners. Additionally, the SNC must have the internal capacity necessary to focus and prioritize the implementation of this Strategic Plan and to carry out our mission. In an era of severe resource constraints for State government and for our partners, continued focus on ingenuity, collaboration, and maximum efficiency will help us to meet this challenge. While this Area of Focus is internally oriented, a strong organization will be better positioned to meet all of our statutorily established program goals.

Objectives

- ***Establish the SNC as a highly credible and effective agency in the minds of our partners, decision-makers and others within and***

outside the Region so that we can continue to successfully carry out our mission.

- Improve the SNC's visibility and publicize our work with decision-makers and the public to improve knowledge of our program successes and our mission.
 - Ensure that all staff, Boardmembers, and external partners fully understand our work and successes and can act as "ambassadors" for the SNC and promote the SNC and its work.
 - Continue to increase partnerships with other organizations that will lead to creative project ideas, greater investment in the Region overall and a leveraging of all efforts to achieve program goals.
 - Continue to build the knowledge and capacity of the SNC so that we are ever better at representing and serving the Region.
- ***Increase and diversify funding for SNC programs and initiatives to ensure long-term funding for the SNC and our work.***
 - Develop strategic alliances with better-funded State agencies to bring a higher proportion of state funding to our work.
 - Investigate potential fee-for-service opportunities with other organizations.
 - Diversify the SNC funding stream by strengthening the non-profit arm of the SNC.
 - Explore and pursue potential new sources of income (e.g. urban transportation planning dollars) to sustain and expand our work.
- ***Ensure that staff are fully engaged and have the information, knowledge and skills they need to be successful in carrying out our Strategic Plan.***

- Evaluate communication mechanisms within the organization and put additional processes and tools in place where needed.
 - Continue to solicit and respond to input from staff regarding how to make the SNC the best it can be.
 - Provide staff with the opportunities and training they need to do their jobs and continue to develop professionally.
 - Put mechanisms in place to ensure critical functions are not interrupted when staff members are out of the office.
- ***Ensure that our processes, systems, and tools are efficient and effective and enable the SNC to manage resources in accordance with our highest priorities.***
 - Continuously maintain and improve internal processes and systems to assure they are up to date and that their contribution continues to be as strong as possible.
 - Continue to implement actions to reduce our consumption of electricity, water and other resources consistent with the SNC Climate Action Plan.
 - Use information technology systems and tools to address information and collaboration needs across the Sierra.
 - Develop processes and tools to prioritize and manage projects and workloads on an ongoing basis.
 - Take necessary steps to ensure the SNC is prepared to continue operations in the event of a disaster or other unforeseen event.