

Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Board has directed staff to conduct a variety of outreach and communication activities to ensure that the upper watersheds of the Sierra Nevada are appropriately considered in State funding discussions such as a new 2014 Water Bond or an updated Cap and Trade Auction Revenue spending plan. SNC staff continues to follow previous Board direction by taking steps to increase awareness of the Region and to communicate the value of the Region to the State's overall environmental and economic health and well-being.

Current Status

The Great Sierra River Cleanup took place on September 21st and was a successful event despite unusually rainy weather at many clean up locations. Outreach efforts resulted in 13 state legislators signing on to be co-chairs, nearly 3,900 volunteers turning out to collect more than 37 tons of trash and recyclables and clean more than 200 miles of shoreline, and event sponsors contributing \$13,000 in cash and more than \$7,000 in in-kind sponsorships. Media coverage included 11 news clips, including an article from the Fresno Bee (<http://www.fresnobee.com/2013/09/21/3510820/volunteers-pick-up-river-trash.html>).

On September 24th, the Senate Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Environmental Quality Committee held a joint informational hearing to discuss two proposed bills (SB42 and AB1331), and get public input on where the water bond discussion should go next. Several SNC partners including Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy and Sierra Business Council commented publicly on the importance of source watersheds and the Sierra Nevada and a number of people mentioned the proven track record that state conservancies have for watershed protection and investment. A brief summary of the two water bills under consideration can be found on the [Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee web site](#). The SNC submitted a comment letter to the Committee members which emphasized the value of the Sierra Nevada Region to the State and supported direct allocation of investment in the Region through the SNC ([Attachment A](#)). Staff continues to work with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that any water bond going forward contains appropriate investment in the State's primary watershed.

Staff worked with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Cal Fire in developing a proposal for expenditure of Cap and Trade Auction Revenue in the forest sector. The SNC proposal recommends funds being expended for three activities: 1) development of forest biomass energy infrastructure; 2) a short-term transportation incentive to move biomass from piles to existing facilities; and 3) forest restoration treatments on USFS lands. The proposal is currently being considered by various entities within the administration.

On October 31, 2013, SNC and The Nature Conservancy co-hosted a Legislative Briefing designed to educate decision-makers about the long-term impacts events like the Rim Fire can have on California's water, habitat, carbon storage, air quality, and

communities. The event was designed to help legislative staff understand the actions and specific investments necessary to reduce the risks of fire and their impacts in the future. Staff developed a Rim Fire packet for the event ([Attachment B](#)).

Staff organized a meeting between SNC, Izzy Martin of The Sierra Fund and staff from the California State Assembly Committee on Natural Resources to begin discussing the details for a January, 2014 joint legislative oversight hearing on the topic of abandoned mine lands (AML). The goal of the hearing will be to educate members of the Senate and the Assembly about the legacy issues associated with AMLs and the need to invest in the upper watersheds to mitigate those issues and protect public health. During the meeting, Committee staff requested a tour of AML sites and the SNC is working with The Sierra Fund to fulfill this request.

The Governor's Office of Planning and Research is coordinating a series of five Water Conversations with water leaders and visionaries throughout the State. SNC staff attended the Sierra Nevada meeting in South Lake Tahoe and a verbal update will be provided at this Board meeting.

Since 2011, the SNC has been working with the Department of Water Resources (DWR) on the California Water Plan (CWP) Update 2013. The CWP, also known as Bulletin 160, is a statewide blueprint for water management. It provides information for decision-makers, water managers and other interested stakeholders for use in administering the State's considerable water-related resources. The SNC has been serving as the coordinator and lead author for the Mountain Counties Overlay (MCO) regional report, one of 12 region-specific reports that provide more detailed information on the major hydrologic regions of the state (The SNC Region is larger than the MCO area. It includes seven additional counties: Modoc, Shasta, Tehama, Mono, Inyo, Tulare, and Kern Counties). Our goal in this initiative has been to shape the MCO to help decision-makers more fully understand the complexities and value of the natural and cultural resources that come from the Sierra Nevada and to better justify the need for additional investment to protect and enhance those resources, which are critical to the Region and the rest of the state. On October 23rd, DWR released Volume 2 of the CWP for public comment. The public comment period for this volume will run through December 9th. The report is available online at:

http://www.waterplan.water.ca.gov/docs/cwpu2013/2013-prd/Vol2_Mountain-Counties-RR_PRD_Edited_Final_JW_wo.pdf.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to identify opportunities to get legislators and others out into the Region to educate them about the value and benefits that come from investment in the Sierra Nevada and to illustrate on-the-ground projects of value to the state.

Due to efforts by Assemblymember Brian Dahle, the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife committee is holding a water bond hearing in Redding on December 4, 2013.

Staff will provide a verbal update at this Board meeting and at the time of preparation of this report is working with partners to ensure that a coalition of Sierra Nevada partners is in attendance to provide comments on the need for and value of investment in the Region to ensure water reliability and supply for the state.

SNC will continue to schedule meetings with legislators in early 2014. Specifically, we are working to identify legislators from districts that are direct recipients of Sierra Nevada water. Additionally we will continue to work with partners to organize meetings with key water bond legislators.

The Regional Policy and Program team is developing an educational display to be hosted on the Governor's Annex Wall for the month of January, 2014. The display will identify upper watershed issues that pose threats to California's long-term water supply and reliability by highlighting the impacts of events such as the Rim Fire and identifying opportunities for upper watershed investments that minimize the associated risks and promote statewide water security.

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.