

Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy's (SNC) Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Initiative was officially instated through the adoption of the 2013-14 Action Plan and accompanying amendment to the Strategic Plan at the June 2013 Board meeting. Although AML issues were not a focus area prior to the June Board action, the SNC had been engaged in remediation efforts by awarding three grants for projects addressing legacy mercury impacts under the Proposition 84 Grant Program and participating in collaborative working groups.

The 2013-14 Action Plan identified three primary goals to focus on as the SNC further defines the potential actions under the AML Initiative: 1) funding projects that meet SNC criteria for AML remediation in the 2013-14 grant cycle; 2) identifying and carrying out appropriate roles for the SNC in the development of programs, policies, and efforts that will address AML issues in the Region; and 3) securing long-term funding and resources for the SNC and the Region to address AML issues. Six bulleted actions were provided as a means to obtain the goals.

Current Status

Many activities in accordance with the bulleted actions identified have been pursued to enhance the SNC's undertakings in support of the AML Initiative's goals over the last six months. As our activities have intensified and our conversations have expanded, it has become more apparent that finding remedies for the ongoing impacts necessarily includes raising awareness and educating the public and legislators. To this end, our activities have also included efforts that have that dual purpose in mind.

The 2013-14 Proposition 84 Grant Program includes AML, and legacy contamination issues in particular, as one of two focus areas. SNC Staff are working with our partners to develop AML project proposals. Two proposals have been invited to submit full applications for evaluation. The two proposals, Providence Mine Remediation Project located in Nevada City and Oro de Amador Remedial Action Workplan located in Jackson, directly address the abatement of arsenic contamination within the Deer Creek and Jackson Creek watersheds, respectively.

Two out of the three previously funded AML projects are still active. The Nevada Irrigation District's project, Environmental Review Assessing the Impacts of Removing Mercury Laden Sediment from Combie Reservoir, was awarded funding in October from the Department of Water Resources Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) program to complete the on-the-ground work, which underwent California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review with SNC dollars. Another SNC funded project, the Humbug Creek Watershed Assessment and Management Plan, has been completed and recommendations have been provided to California State Parks for the remediation of AML features impacting Malakoff State Park and tributaries to the Yuba River. State Parks is now in a position to choose a preferred alternative for remediation, after which, the data and research being developed under the Humbug Creek project

will be compiled in preparation for the completion of appropriate environmental documentation in compliance with CEQA.

SNC Staff is working with the Natural Resources Agency, other State agencies and partners to develop a due diligence process for identifying AML related problems on lands that may be acquired using State funds. We are working towards a uniform procedure for departments under the Natural Resources Agency with granting authority to use when evaluating project proposals that include the acquisition of land that may have been impacted by legacy mining.

A legislative tour was conducted on June 20, 2013 focusing largely on AML issues. Assembly members Brian Dahle and Rich Gordon hosted the tour, with support from the SNC and The Sierra Fund, which was attended by other legislators as well as other legislative staff. The tour was publicized and covered by local and regional news outlets. Currently, SNC Staff is working with The Sierra Fund and the Senate Natural Resources Committee to schedule a special legislative hearing in January where speakers will present the problems associated with AML and residual mercury contamination, State agency programs that deal with AML issues, and potential solutions, including the need for investment in the Sierra Nevada to address these issues at the source.

SNC Staff is also participating in the government agency AML working group, California Abandoned Mine Lands Agency Group (CAMLAG). CAMLAG is in the process of developing a new Charter which will define the purpose, practices, and roles and responsibilities of the group. This effort provides a real opportunity to facilitate a process to align and collaborate interdepartmental and Agency efforts to improve AML impact oversight, management, and solutions.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to explore, support and help develop AML project proposals eligible for funding under the SNC 2013-14 Proposition 84 Grant program and work with The Sierra Fund and other partners to continue to educate decision-makers on the impacts of AML and the need for investment in the Sierra. Staff will also continue to work with all partners to identify funding mechanisms for AML remediation work.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Board members are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.