

Agenda Item XII

Attachment B

Watershed Protection, ~~and~~ Restoration, and Water Supply

Discussion

The Sierra Nevada has hundreds of lakes and reservoirs, and thousands of miles of streams that together form the 31 major watersheds. These rivers, ~~and~~ lakes and reservoirs, 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, lakes and reservoirs, and recharge groundwater basins, while natural and man-made upstream storage reduces spring flows and regulates summer flows to the valley.

Approximately 23 million Californians have all or some of their drinking water 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, impacts from Abandoned Mine Lands, and a reduction in water storage capacity. 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 and improving water storage capacity 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 through the operation of the Conservancy's program; and
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

Objectives

A. Increase understanding among decision-makers, downstream users 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 other tools to educate decision-makers, downstream users, and others about the importance of Sierra watersheds and the risks they face 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.

B. Increase funding and provide targeted support for watershed protection and restoration and abandoned mine land remediation in order to maintain and enhance the beneficial uses of Sierra watersheds and water storage facilities, both within and outside the Region.

- Partner with federal and state agencies to increase the amount of existing funding directed towards watershed health in the Sierra.
- Ensure funding in future bond issues for watershed protection, restoration and abandoned mine lands remediation in the Sierra.
- Investigate and develop potential new funding streams in order to support upstream watershed protection, and restoration, and Abandoned Mine Lands remediation.
- Help to build bridges between available funding and local governments and organizations in the Sierra.

C. Better quantify the benefits provided by Sierra Nevada ~~W~~watersheds and improve understanding of those benefits by staff and key stakeholders to generate long-term investment in watershed protection and restoration.

- Gain a greater understanding of the gaps in scientific research relevant to benefits of watershed management and determine how to work collaboratively with others to address those gaps.
- Monitor and support efforts to determine and quantify the ecosystem services provided by healthy watersheds in the Region.

D. Assist in the identification and implementation of approaches for Abandoned Mine Lands 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.

- Assess existing programs and policies addressing remediation of Abandoned Mine Lands and work with partners to strengthen potential areas of shortcomings.
- Work with partners to identify projects that address abandoned mine lands issues and may be replicated throughout the Region.