

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) over two years ago. The SNFCI fosters local and Regional collaboration to support a cohesive, economically viable, and sustainable approach to reducing fire risk, creating jobs, and protecting our valuable forest and watershed resources. SNC Staff work closely with the diverse participants of regional, statewide, and local collaboratives, including local governments, environmentalists, communities, and economic development representatives, industry, and Tribal entities to help achieve these goals.

### **Current Status**

The SNC recently celebrated an important event in the life of one of its local forest collaborative efforts, the Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative (SFCC). This group is comprised of a diverse range of stakeholders from throughout Madera, Mariposa, Fresno, and Tulare Counties with a common interest in the ecological, economic, and cultural health of the Sierra Nevada. Up to this point, the SNC has played the lead coordination role for this group. In the interest of ensuring long-term sustainability for the group, the SNC has transferred its organizational responsibilities to an SFCC member organization through an inter-agency agreement with the Sierra Resource Conservation District (RCD). SNC is providing financial support during this transition, building on our support which has been integral to building the foundation for this group, and now we are building a bridge into the future, ensuring the SFCC will be serving this region for many years to come. This leadership transition will inform the SNC's approach to ensuring the long-term viability of other SNC-initiated efforts.

Achievements to date for the SFCC include a year-long leadership training program for a dozen core SFCC leaders, as well as, a watershed-specific collaboration effort on the Sierra National Forest which has resulted in an update to the Willow Creek Watershed Analysis and two highly attended scoping field trips for the Whiskey Ridge Project within that watershed, which at 18,000-acres is the largest project proposed in this particular forest region. The first phase of implementation for this project is due to start this summer. The strong reputation of the SFCC for representing community interests prompted the Dinkey Collaborative to request SFCC assistance with the planning of upcoming field trips designed to better engage and inform the public, which underlines the success of the SFCC in fulfilling this objective. Additionally, the SFCC has played a critical role in building support for the bioenergy plant currently in development on the North Fork mill site, as this project has been supported by the SFCC since the inception of the group. The project area is located on the old North Fork mill site and within the Bass Lake Ranger District, in which the SFCC efforts in Willow Creek and Whiskey Ridge will play an important role in assuring supply to the plant as this project moves forward.

In the realm of biomass utilization, the SNC provided letters of support and technical assistance for three communities seeking funding from the USDA Rural Development's Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG) to pursue feasibility studies for biomass

utilization projects. These communities include Burney (Fall River RCD), Bieber (Pit River RCD) and Auberry (Yosemite-Sequoia RC&D). In addition to the letters of support, each of these communities has also received an average of \$5,000 of in-kind services and technical support from SNC Staff to support their biomass utilization efforts. In Nevada County, the SNC also submitted a letter of support to the Nevada County Board of Supervisors, who unanimously decided to include a biomass feasibility study for the Northern Sierra Biomass Task Force to be included into their 2013 Community Development Block Grant application, as well as, providing five thousand dollars to serve as a match for the block grant or to meet other technical support needs of the group. SNC Staff has also lent technical support to representatives from Camptonville and Foresthill to help them explore the potential for bringing biomass utilization projects into their communities.

On a regional level, the SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council Policy Workgroup is identifying ideas, tools and Coordinating Council actions that could increase pace and scale while keeping benefit in local communities, as well as, opportunities to redirect resources more effectively to increase pace and scale. They will be presenting these to the Regional Coordinating Council at their July meeting, which will be coupled with a field trip in the northern Sierra hosted by the Collins Pine Company. The April meeting was cancelled due to numerous scheduling conflicts.

In another issue of regional significance, SNC recently assumed an active role in an effort to produce an "all lands" conservation strategy for the Pacific Fisher in the southern Sierra Nevada. In April, Mandy Vance facilitated the first meeting of the Fisher Inter-Agency Leadership Team (FIALT), which consists of representatives from the US Forest Service (USFS), the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and the National Park Service. The FIALT directs the overall process and provides guidance for the development of the conservation strategy. In this kick-off meeting, the FIALT came to agreement on the geographic focus, general process and timeline, and structure and members of the Fisher Technical Team (FTT), which will provide the foundation for the effort moving forward. FTT work is underway and the first of several public meetings relating to this effort is anticipated this summer.

### **Next Steps**

The Regional Coordinating Council will continue to work with the USFS to identify ways to increase the pace and scale of forest treatment within the Region, including providing input on the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration Implementation Plan. SNC Staff will continue to work with ongoing collaborative efforts, including the SFCC, biomass utilization efforts and the development of the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy. They will also continue to focus on the development of tools to increase the efficacy of external communications about SNFCI, including new Web site content and formatting.

**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.**