

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Board has directed staff to carry out outreach and communication activities to ensure that the Sierra Nevada Region is appropriately considered in State funding opportunities such as a new 2014 Water Bond. SNC staff continues to identify and act upon opportunities to increase awareness of the Sierra Nevada Region's important role in ensuring water quality and supply which are critical components of the states' overall environmental and economic health and well-being.

### **Current Status**

The new calendar year has brought some significant developments on efforts undertaken by the SNC. While the results are somewhat mixed, we believe the SNC and partner outreach efforts to communicate the value of Sierra Nevada watersheds to the rest of the state is having an impact.

In October 2013, the SNC and many of our partners in the Region provided comments on the [California Water Action Plan](#) (Plan), a document authored by the California Natural Resources Agency, Cal EPA and the California Department of Food and Agriculture to "identify key actions for the next one to five years that address urgent needs and provide the foundation for sustainable management of California's water resources." The final Plan was released in January and we are pleased to report that revisions include a new effort focused on better management of Sierra Nevada headwaters to help water storage, water quality and ecosystems.

In 2013, SNC Staff worked with the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) and Cal Fire in developing a proposal for expenditure of Cap and Trade (C&T) Auction Revenue in the forest sector. The SNC proposal recommended funding 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 Governor's proposed budget did not propose any Cap and Trade Auction Revenue funding for the SNC. However, the Governor's budget proposal did include an allocation of \$50 million to Cal Fire for a variety of forest sector activities, including fire prevention and urban forestry projects. SNC Staff is working with Cal Fire to assist in identifying opportunities for promoting projects in the Sierra Nevada that help achieve the goal of reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions.

Staff has been working with partners such as The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, Pacific Forest Trust and other Conservancies to inform the discussion around a series of water bond measures making their way through the Legislature. There are currently four bills pending that would place a new version of the water bond on the November 2014 ballot.

Of those, the most recent version of Senator Wolk's bill (SB 848) directly allocates \$65M to the SNC, while Assembly Member Rendon's bill (AB 1331) is not specific in terms of a dollar figure for the SNC (or any other Conservancy, but does contain a placeholder for allocation by region. The other two bills, SB 927 by Senator Cannella

and AB 1445 by Assembly Member Logue are primarily focused on issues such as surface storage and the availability of safe drinking water, and do not include funding for the SNC or any other Conservancy.

Staff will continue efforts to share facts and data, educate policy-makers on opportunities and challenges facing the region, and serve as a primary source of on-the-ground perspective relative to the State's primary water supply. The SNC is emerging as a known source for useful information on the range of Sierra issues, and we will continue to reinforce and build upon that perception in the months ahead while working with partners to advocate for a "fairer share" for the Region.

With California facing water shortfalls as a result of 2013 being the driest year in recorded state history, Governor Brown proclaimed a State of Emergency in January. The SNC responded by updating our outreach materials and efforts to include information about how drought affects California's water source and how investment in the upper watersheds of the Sierra Nevada can make our State's water system more drought resilient. In addition to creating a Drought Fact Sheet ([Attachment A](#)) to educate legislators considering solutions to the issue, the SNC has updated its [web page](#) and begun a [Facebook](#) campaign to provide current information about Sierra Nevada snowpack conditions, statewide reservoir conditions, and links to other useful information to keep Sierra Nevada residents and others informed.

### **Legislative Outreach**

In January, the legislature returned from winter recess and picked up discussion on a number of bills of interest to the SNC. Staff worked with partners to ensure that Sierra Nevada voices were heard at the following Water Bond and Cap and Trade hearings:

- January 14<sup>th</sup>: Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee hearing regarding the water bond.
- February 11<sup>th</sup>: Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee hearing on SB 848, Senator Wolk's water bond proposal.
- February 13<sup>th</sup>: Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee hearing on regarding the Governor's Proposed 2014-15 Expenditures for Cap and Trade Auction Revenues

SNC and partners have also been meeting with legislators to reiterate the importance of investing in California's watersheds to restore forest health and protect upper watersheds from large-damaging fires such as the Rim Fire and the associated impacts. At the time of writing this report, SNC had met with 14 legislators and/or their staff including:

- Assembly Member Mariko Yamada
- Senator Lois Wolk
- Senator Jean Fuller
- Senator Fran Pavley

- Senator Ricardo Lara
- Assembly Member Talamantes-Eggman
- Senator Ted Gaines
- Senator Tom Berryhill
- Assembly Member Rich Gordon
- Assembly Member Henry Perea
- Assembly Member Jim Patterson
- Assembly Member Frank Bigelow
- Assembly Member Anthony Rendon
- Assembly Member Brian Dahle

SNC is working with partners to organize a number of tours in the coming months. In particular, Assembly Member Dahle has been actively engaged in arranging for legislators to visit the Region, and SNC is coordinating closely with him and his staff. Current plans include a trip to the Oroville dam to stress the importance of watersheds in the state water policy debate, a trip to the Truckee area to view land conservation efforts and discuss drought effects and a tour of the Rim Fire burn area to show the scope and impacts of the fire.

### **Unifying Sierra Voices**

SNC Staff is coordinating with the Sierra Business Council (SBC) in its efforts to organize a Sierra Coalition. SBC hopes to create a broad based coalition similar to the one that came together in efforts to create the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. This coalition will work to ensure that the Sierra Nevada is included in policy and funding discussions by positioning “Sierra needs” – such as watershed health and forest management – as solutions to larger statewide problems, and communicating that message with a unified voice to Sierra and urban legislators and other key decision-makers. SNC Staff will assist the effort, consistent with rules governing state agencies, by providing information and participating in various outreach efforts.

Sierra Coalition goals include:

1. Inclusion of the Sierra Nevada and the SNC in the water bond;
2. Better positioning of the Sierra in the current budget and ongoing C&T investment planning; and,
3. Identification and exploration of longer-term financing mechanisms for Sierra projects.

### **Outreach and Education Materials and Efforts**

The Sierra Drought Fact Sheet referenced above is the latest in a series of materials the SNC has developed to support efforts to educate legislators and other decision-makers about the need for investment in the upper watersheds of our Region. Other materials include the Rim Fire Fact Sheet ([Attachment B](#)), the Water Fact Sheet ([Attachment C](#)), and the Fire and California’s Water Supply map ([Attachment D](#)). Staff is also working to develop an Abandoned Mine Lands and a Tourism and Recreation fact sheet as well.

**Next Steps**

SNC will continue to schedule meetings with legislators in 2014 with renewed focus on identifying legislators actively involved in Water Bond decisions and with legislators from districts that are direct recipients of Sierra Nevada water

Staff will also continue to develop outreach materials and messages and to establish new methods for sharing those materials and messages. The Rim Fire, the Mokelumne River Watershed Avoided Cost Analysis and the issue of the effects of catastrophic fire on reservoir storage capacity will continue to be focus areas.

To that end, staff will be considering ways to better share outreach and communication messages, tools and materials with Boardmembers, County Liaisons and stakeholders to facilitate effortless communication of Sierra needs in your local areas.

**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.**