

Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) four years ago. This Initiative 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 collaboration, including local governments, environmentalists, industry, community, and economic development representatives, and Tribal Entities to help achieve these goals.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council focuses on regional and statewide issues that can influence the achievement of the objectives of the Initiative. The Coordinating Council also serves as a forum for issues arising in local forest collaborative efforts to be discussed and addressed. Members include representatives from the wood products industry, local government, environmental and conservation organizations, community groups, and water interests. The primary federal land managers, the US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) participate in an advisory role.

Current Status

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council continues to meet quarterly. The primary focus of recent meetings has been identifying and addressing major barriers to increased pace and scale of forest treatment. In the most recent meeting, the Coordinating Council identified specific focus areas with which the Coordinating Council can collaborate with Forest Service staff that must be overcome to increase pace and scale while keeping benefit in local communities. Increased funding was not identified as a focus area, primarily because this is accepted as a given.

The focus areas identified in that meeting include:

- increase the use of fire on the landscape as a forest management tool and restoration method;
- encourage landscape level treatments/landscape size and scale processes;
- creation of new and protection of existing infrastructure to process more wood, including biomass, in a way that keeps benefits in local communities;
- identify and implement contracting tools to maximize local economic and social benefits from restoration activities; and
- increase the percentage of steep slope areas that can be mechanically treated on National Forest lands.

Coordinating Council members are coordinating with Region 5 USDA Forest Service to prioritize the recommendations and refine the strategies identified for moving these areas forward. Much progress has already been made in terms of increasing mechanical treatment potential in steep slope sections of our National Forests, including both policy and technology issues. The Council's Steep Ground Workgroup has been hard at work on this issue, having already hosted a very successful on-the-ground workshop on clay loam at Collins Pine, which included key Forest Service participants.

SNC Staff continue to work with a variety of community-based collaborative groups throughout the Region, including the Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative, which hosted a well-attended symposium in February focused on promoting volunteerism on our public lands, as well as Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions, with whom the SNC is working closely in regard to the distribution of SNC Proposition 84 funds for restoration on the Rim Fire landscape (described in more detail in Agenda Item VIIc).

Staff continues to play an active role in an effort to aggregate key pieces of information in terms of biology and policy to create a conservation strategy and decision support system for Pacific Fishers in the southern Sierra Nevada. This species is proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. SNC Staff is heading up public outreach and involvement as it relates to the development of the strategy and decision support system, including public meetings, web content development and periodic email updates to interested stakeholders. Jim Branham represents the SNC on the Steering Committee for this effort, as well Mandy Vance on the Core Support Team. A Technical Team has also been formed and is hard at work developing the strategy and decision support system. The SNC is also supporting this work through an inter-agency agreement with the USFS in order to support the development of the conservation strategy and decision support system.

Another effort that relates to the objectives of SNFCI is the SNC's support of a Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station study of illegal marijuana grow site impacts on water quality in the southern Sierra Nevada. This study will result in two deliverables – one focused on pesticide presence/quantity on USFS lands in association with grow sites, and a larger one merging that data with National Park Service and US Geological Survey efforts into a regional assessment of the problem. Combined, these deliverables are designed to give law enforcement the data they need to expand the environmental legal tools available to them. If they can document environmental violations, it allows them to freeze international financial assets, and move beyond mere deportation of offenders. Before they can utilize those tools, however, they need the science to prove the level of degradation occurring. Quantification of the impacts of illegal marijuana gardens on water quality will not only increase law enforcement's authority in dealing with the issue, but will also daylight and raise the profile of the issue with the public, making it relevant not just to wildlife, but also to them, which will bring more awareness and resources to bear on it

Next Steps

Staff will continue to support local forest collaborative efforts, focusing on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) projects and efforts supported by SNC grants. The Coordinating Council will continue to work with the USFS to identify the most strategic areas and strategies to focus their efforts to increase pace and scale while keeping benefit in local communities. The Council's Steep Ground Workgroup has scheduled an April field trip focused on steep slope work on granitic soil, with the end

goal of starting with implementing and monitoring some steep ground treatment in a small area of Forest Service lands, in the hopes of eventually developing a “how to” document for work on steep ground, and identifying how this fits into the bigger picture of forest plan revisions and other policy level decisions.

Staff will continue to support ongoing regional collaborative efforts, such as the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy and Decision Support System development and the Rim Fire Ecological technical workshops (described in more detail in Agenda Item VIIc).

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.