

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Board has been consistent in their support and encouragement of SNC staff efforts to increase awareness of the Sierra Nevada Region and the need for urgent action to protect the services and values it provides. In December, the SNC Board emphasized that focus by directing staff to develop and implement the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP).

### **Current Status**

Staff is working closely with a key partner, Region 5 of the United States Forest Service (USFS), to define the WIP – a coordinated, integrated, collaborative program to restore the health of California's primary watershed through increased investment and needed policy changes. Staff is also working with other state departments and key partners to assist in development and implementation of the WIP.

The SNC Outreach and Communications team joined forces with the USFS Public Affairs team and Perry Communications Group (through the generous support of the Resources Legacy Fund) to create an education and communications campaign to launch the WIP and develop interest and support. In addition to planning and organizing the Save CA: The Urgency to Restore Our Primary Watershed Summit held in conjunction with this meeting, the three groups worked together to develop and refine key messages and associated materials in support of the WIP. These materials included a WIP Program description and a Statement of Support ([Attachment A](#)) offered for key partner endorsement. The SNC and USFS Region 5 leadership also began engaging partners critical to the success of the launch and will continue to reach out to additional state, federal, and local agencies, interest groups, and non-governmental organizations to garner support for the Program.

### **Meetings and legislative actions:**

In early January, SNC staff met with Assembly Members Brian Dahle (R-Bieber), Mark Stone (D-Santa Cruz), and Rich Gordon (D-Los Altos). The meeting centered on SNC priorities and legislative interests for the year ahead, including the following:

- Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program
- The Development of forest biomass utilization infrastructure
- Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week Declaration
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy Legislative Liaison proposal

Feedback from the legislators was supportive and staff plans to engage with the Legislative Environmental Caucus, of which Assembly Member Stone is chair, in the near future to share our State of the Sierra Nevada's Forests Report and discuss the Regional and Watershed elements of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

Assembly Member Dahle has agreed to carry an Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) declaring the third week of September as Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week. This resolution makes a number of assertions as to the myriad benefits the Sierra

provides to citizens and communities across the State, and also acknowledges the Great Sierra River Cleanup, which has quickly become widely known throughout the range.

We are also advancing an effort to add non-voting Legislative Liaisons to the SNC Board. This is in similar fashion to other large regional conservancies. At the time of this writing, the process is moving forward and we are seeking an author for the bill. A verbal update will be provided at this Board meeting.

January marked the beginning of a new legislative session, along with many new members of the Legislature taking office. Staff has been active in making contact with newly elected Sierra members, and will continue to cultivate those and many other relationships in the months ahead.

Other activities include multiple meetings with legislators and staff to discuss the WIP, the distribution of the State of the Sierra Nevada Forests Report, and SNC's 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to a broad cross-section of legislators and staff.

Media:

Staff has worked directly with grantees and local media outlets to publicize the success of both recently awarded and completed projects. Staff worked with Capitol Public Radio on a story about abandoned mine lands in the Sierra and a December award to the Tahoe National Forest, The Wood Chip Hydraulic Mine Restoration Project (Project #809). Staff worked with Mono County on an article in *Biomass Magazine* to promote the Mono County Thermal Biomass Project (Project #812). In addition, staff worked with the Placer Land Trust and Placer County to promote a dedication ceremony held to celebrate the completion of a conservation easement on the Side Hill Citrus Mandarin Ranch – the world's first protected mandarin orchard. SNC awarded funding for that easement through the Ranch and Ag Lands Grant Program in March of 2013. Copies of all of these news stories can be found in the news articles attached to the Board materials.

Current Sierra Nevada Research:

Staff continue to track and monitor research relevant to the Sierra Nevada Region. Summaries of and links to three research papers that discuss the ways Sierra Nevada forest management can impact carbon storage and release are provided in [Attachment B](#):

- Wildfire and Drought Dynamics Destabilize Carbon Stores of Fire-Suppressed Forests
- Fuel Treatment Effects on Tree-based Forest Carbon Storage and Emissions Under Modeled Wildfire Scenarios
- Fire Suppression and Fuels Treatment Effects on Mixed-Conifer Carbon Stocks and Emissions

**Next Steps**

Staff will continue to identify and act upon opportunities to promote and garner support for the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program with partners as well as key decision makers, and will focus next steps on the development of watershed level action plans. Additionally, staff will continue to track and participate in legislative and policy activities that provide opportunities for addressing key Sierra Nevada issues.

**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.**