

### **Background**

Following Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Governing Board guidance, and in an attempt to identify and obtain additional funding for the SNC and our Region, staff continues to identify and monitor legislative opportunities for funding in support of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) and the variety of activities that promote watershed health and protect the benefits that flow from the Region for the good of all of California.

### **Current Status**

#### **Water Bond**

As reported at the last SNC Governing Board meeting, \$150 million in potential new funding for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) became a possibility with the October 16 filing of a new water bond initiative proposal – The Water Supply Reliability and Drought Protection Act of 2016 – submitted by Dr. Jerry Meral of the National Heritage Institute (NHI).

There were eight slightly different versions reviewed by the Attorney General. The total amount of the bond will either be \$4.92 billion or \$6.02 billion depending on which of the eight measures NHI decides to advance. Funding for SNC is identified in the Watershed improvement for Water Supply and Water Quality enhancement chapter. SNC is currently in all versions for \$150 million, and there is specific language relative to fuel reduction projects and expenditure of funds on federal lands, consistent with SNC's ongoing efforts under WIP.

However, despite being eligible for the 2016 general election ballot, contingent on gathering the required number of signatures, NHI has notified the SNC they will no longer be pursuing this measure in the current year. NHI is now planning to commence signature gathering in 2017. Also, it is not entirely clear at this point which of the eight possible measures will be advanced, if any.

#### **Park Bond**

At the onset of the current legislative session in early 2015, Senate President pro Tempore Kevin de León introduced SB 317. The measure proposed a park bond to fund a broad range of park and open space investments, as well as conservation and environmental enhancements throughout the State.

Senate Bill 317 is now effectively dead in the Senate, as it was not passed from its house of origin pursuant to a key deadline. While there is always the potential for rule waivers to revive the measure, there is no clear indication as to a timeframe for passage if at all. Unlike his earlier park bond measure, SB 1086 from the previous session, SB 317 did not explicitly include the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for direct funding, though it did propose funding for the Tahoe Conservancy and other conservancies. There is the possibility of a new bill being introduced to serve as a new park bond vehicle, but as of this writing nothing had been introduced to that effect.

It is unclear at this time whether the Governor would support such legislation, as he has made very clear over time his aversion to further bonded indebtedness. We are actively engaged with key partners to track the process and are optimistic the SNC will be included for funding allocation should that measure proceed to passage.

### **Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund**

Throughout 2015, the California Air Resources Board has been developing its second Cap and Trade Investment Plan, which will define allocations of cap and trade revenues for the ensuing three years. Public comment was solicited for the broad spectrum of stakeholders, and multiple commenters from within and outside of the Region expressed support for investments which would benefit the Sierra Nevada.

The second investment plan for the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) has been released and is reflected in the Governor's budget. Of particular relevance to our work and Region is the inclusion of \$150 million for CAL FIRE to conduct forest health projects, and \$60 million to the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for meadow and wetlands restoration. We are actively engaged with CAL FIRE and CDFW to support and encourage funding of projects consistent with the WIP.

Also of note is the formation of the Governor's Tree Mortality Task Force, of which SNC is an active member on six of eight working groups that range in focus from Forest Health and Resilience to Mapping and Monitoring to Public Outreach and Prescribed Fire. Through the task force, there is the potential for CAL FIRE GGRF funds to be largely focused on the removal of dead trees, particularly in the wildland urban interface and in proximity to key electrical and water delivery infrastructure.

### **Next Steps**

SNC staff will continue to monitor and engage where meaningful and appropriate on all of these issues, and will keep Boardmembers apprised of any notable actions or changes. If Boardmembers are interested in learning more about any of these matters and/or wish to be involved in ongoing deliberations, please feel free to communicate with SNC staff.

### **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.**