

Background

The SNC launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) over one year 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 collaboratives, including local governments, environmentalists, community and economic development representatives, 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 Council also serves as a forum for issues arising in local forest collaborative efforts to be discussed and addressed. SNC Board Vice Chair Bill Nunes and former Board Vice Chair Steve Wilensky co-chair the Coordinating Council, and Boardmember Bob Kirkwood along with Boardmember Nunes are serving as the Board liaisons to the Initiative. Other members include representatives from the woods products industry, local government, environmental and conservation organizations, community groups and water interests. The primary federal land managers, the US Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and National Park Service (NPS), participate in an advisory role.

Current Status

Coordinating Council

The fourth SNFCI Coordinating Council meeting was held in October 2011. The primary focus of the meeting was formalizing a relationship between the Coordinating Council and the US Forest Service as it relates to implementing the Region's "Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration" and the upcoming process for revising Forest Plans throughout the Sierra. The Coordinating Council provides an important opportunity for the USFS to develop successful strategies for these efforts. The Coordinating Council has expressed a strong interest in playing this role in order to assist in increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration efforts taking place "on the ground".

The Coordinating Council, given its diverse composition provides a unique viewpoint in that: 1) the majority of active members are engaged in local forest collaboratives and on-the-ground projects, and 2) many of the members represent organizations involved in policy issues at the state and federal level. The Coordinating Council is also interested in identifying long-term funding mechanisms to restore the forested watersheds, looking beyond the traditional federal budget cycles. In addition, investment strategies and policies are supported that can increase the value of biomass materials to help pay for the cost of removal and create jobs and generate new revenue sources for local economies. Finally, there is interest in continuing to evaluate payment systems that can quantify the benefits of healthy watersheds, such as high water quality, to incentivize investment in watershed restoration.

A working group was formed to work with the USFS's Regional staff to develop an implementation plan for the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration that includes specific actions for both the USFS and the Coordinating Council to support this implementation. The working group will develop an action plan and present this to the full Coordinating Council during the January meeting.

Collaborative Efforts

For the past several years, SNC staff has been engaged in local forest collaboratives across the Sierra Nevada range. It has been important to monitor the progress of the collaboratives' work to help focus SNFCI and staff will continue to do this. Staff has also been deeply involved with a few collaboratives that integrate a triple bottom line focus: Burney-Hat Creek (Lassen National Forest), Amador Calaveras Consensus Group (Stanislaus National Forest) and Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative (Sierra National Forest). These three groups are representative of the challenges we face across the range by including: an area with an under-utilized wood industry with idle capacity; an area with relatively new and diverse infrastructure including a small log mill and a biomass to energy facility but in need of more utilization outlets; and an area void of any infrastructure. The groups are working with the USFS, BLM and large, private land holders to secure wood supply and existing infrastructure, conducting feasibility studies and identifying businesses to locate to the area to utilize the wood in its highest valued use, and implementing strategies to keep the new revenues local. These efforts have the potential to establish long-term restoration and wood industry economies that support local economies by employing local people.

Next Steps

Staff will coordinate the working group's efforts in working with USFS to develop an implementation plan for the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration and to identify specific actions for both the USFS and the Coordinating Council to support this implementation. The Action Plan will be presented to the full Coordinating Council during the January meeting. The Coordinating Council will continue to meet quarterly in 2012 on the last Wednesday of the month, beginning in January.

Staff will also continue to be actively involved with various collaborative efforts around the Region with a priority given to the Burney-Hat Creek, Amador Calaveras Consensus Group and Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative. Staff will coordinate with the Coordinating Council and State and Federal agencies to identify resources to support these collaboratives as demonstration projects.

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.