

Background

Over the past year, SNC staff has had numerous discussions with a wide range of partners and stakeholders on how best to address issues related to forest health, wildfire and sustainable communities. It has been clear that the relationship between these issues presents a unique opportunity for the SNC to assist the Region in addressing these matters in an integrated manner, affecting a number of our program areas.

SNC staff has been actively supporting a number of efforts at the community level, including the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group and the Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative (Mariposa and Madera counties). The groups involve diverse stakeholders with the common vision of creating communities that no longer live in fear of fire and instead participate in the management of forests to improve ecological health, reduce wildfire risk and create jobs and other economic benefits. Staff is also engaging groups in a number of other communities to assist in identifying opportunities and actions to address these issues.

At the same time, through interaction with the federal land management agencies, it has become apparent that there is interest in the SNC playing a role in advancing efforts to improve forest health and community vitality. The US Forest Service (USFS), Regional Forester Randy Moore recently released a memo to all Region 5 (includes California) employees stating the Region's "Leadership Intent." This direction calls for a focus on ecological restoration and according to Moore, "The goal is to pick up the pace and scale of our restoration work." The SNC appears to be well positioned to assist in ensuring success in the USFS's efforts to restore national forest health in the Sierra. At the March Board meeting the Board reviewed a draft description of a proposed initiative and resolution and directed staff to solicit public comment, make appropriate changes and bring the matter back to the Board at this meeting. In addition to ongoing conversations with a variety of stakeholders, during the month of April the SNC received 63 comments addressing the initiative and resolution.

Current Status

Staff has revised the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) description (Attachment A) and the proposed resolution (Attachment B) in response to the public comments received (Attachment C).

Generally speaking, the vast majority of comments received were supportive of the basic intent of the Resolution, although most that communicated support also suggested changes to the language of the resolution.

For the most part, the comments fell into the following categories:

- Support for the Resolution with suggestions of no or minor changes.
- General support with suggested changes to the resolution.

- Acknowledgement of the general intent of the resolution and/or the current conditions, but did not offer specific comments relating to the resolution.
- Suggestions that primarily address the implementation of the Initiative.
- Opposition to the direction and objectives of the Initiative.

A number of key issues were raised in the public comments that have been addressed in the revised proposed resolution:

- The role of existing wood products infrastructure in achieving the objectives of the initiative;
- Clarifications that reinforce the focus on ecological and economic sustainability;
- Inclusion of local government in the process;
- The role of fire in the ecosystem, including the use of prescribed fire;
- The importance of the work conducted by Fire Safe Councils in the Sierra; and
- The importance of watershed restoration efforts, including activities that increase the natural storage of water.

Next Steps

The Initiative is not intended to supplant or compete with other efforts, but is meant to identify and take action on: (1) opportunities for investment of public and private resources, (2) necessary policies to achieve desired outcomes and (3) identification of processes and actions consistent with the following linked objectives:

- Creating ecologically healthy forests and watersheds, thereby protecting and enhancing habitat and water quality and quantity while reducing the risk of large damaging fires; and
- Creating sustainable local economic activity in the region through increasing the sustainable production of renewable biomass energy and a variety of wood products.

The Initiative focuses on public lands; however it is clearly understood that activities on private lands will have an effect on the effort and must be considered. Given that more than two-thirds of Sierra forests are owned by the public and managed by the federal government, substantial federal involvement and investment is needed and appropriate. At the same time, coordination among the various State of California agencies with an interest in the Sierra is essential to ensure a strategic approach. Local governments can contribute through local leadership, economic development efforts, supportive policies and land use planning efforts that are consistent with the Initiative objectives. Many non-governmental organizations and private landowners are currently contributing positively to these objectives and are well positioned to provide greater assistance. In order to successfully implement this initiative, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy will provide leadership, coordination, monitoring and reporting on its success. The SNC is prepared to provide convening, facilitation, information gathering and analysis, grant writing and technical assistance as well.

A SNFCI Coordinating Council will be created consisting of federal and state agencies, local governments, tribal entities, environmental/conservation organizations, Fire Safe and watershed organizations and private sector representatives who have signed onto the Resolution. SNC staff is proposing to work with a committee of the Board and key stakeholders to determine the appropriate size and representation for the Council. The Council will provide overall guidance for the implementation of the Initiative. The first charge of the Council will be the creation of a Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative Implementation Plan for the purpose of identifying actions necessary for successful implementation of the Initiative. The Plan will establish measurable outcomes for the Initiative and identify a process for monitoring success. By identifying needs and opportunities, the Plan will assist in strategic investment in the Region. In addition, the Council will apply their expertise to provide assistance with policy analysis, legislation review, current research and science and technical issues such as emerging technologies.

At the same time, SNC staff will continue to work with local communities to assist in efforts to address these issues. These efforts will continue to inform us as to the needs and opportunities that exist throughout the Sierra Nevada. The overall Initiative effort is intended to provide support for these local efforts and in no way intended to prescribe or dictate to these efforts.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board approve the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Resolution and direct staff to take the necessary steps for the successful implementation of it. Staff further recommends that the Chair consider appointing a two member Board committee as liaisons to the effort.

Attachment A

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May 19, 2010*

Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative

An effort to create healthy forests, watersheds and communities

Overview: The **Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative** (SNFCI) is a coordinated effort among federal and state agencies, local governments, tribal entities, environmental/conservation organizations and the private sector, to improve the long-term environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. The Initiative is not intended to supplant or compete with other efforts, but is meant to identify and act upon: (1) opportunities for investment of public and private resources, (2) necessary policies to achieve desired outcomes and (3) processes and actions consistent with the following linked objectives:

- Creating ecologically healthy forests and watersheds, thereby protecting and enhancing habitat and water quality and quantity while reducing the risk of large damaging fires;
- Creating sustainable local economic activity in the Region through increasing the sustainable production of renewable biomass energy, and a variety of wood products.

Successfully achieving these objectives will result in a number of key outcomes for the region and state:

- Protecting water quality and increasing natural water storage in the Sierra, the origin of 65 percent of the state's developed water supply;
- Protecting and enhancing key habitats for a variety of threatened and endangered species;
- Preserving and creating long-term, family wage jobs in Sierra communities;
- Reducing air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions from large damaging fires; and
- Maximizing the sequestration of carbon in Sierra Forests.

The SNFCI will also promote, support and assist local efforts aimed at meeting the intent of the Initiative. Specific land management prescriptions, economic development opportunities and other activities are best determined through a collaborative process that develops outcomes consistent with the needs of the local forests and communities. The SNC will work to assist in local efforts designed to address these issues.

Background:

The Sierra Nevada Region is critical to the well-being of California and its residents. The Region is the origin of approximately 65 percent of the state's developed water supply, serving municipal, agricultural and industrial needs throughout the state. Nearly

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three-quarters of all the hydropower produced in California comes from the Sierra high-elevation hydropower system, generating roughly 12 percent of all energy produced in the state. The Region also produces from up to one-half of the state's annual timber supply. The Sierra Nevada serves as one of the state's leading areas to recreate and visit, with more than 50 million recreation visit days each year.

Nonetheless, the potential for even greater contributions exists. Sierra forests store large amounts of carbon, with these forests providing more carbon sequestration acre for acre than the Amazon rainforests. Through sustainable management, large damaging wildfire can be reduced and carbon sequestration can be increased and protected into the future. Without the appropriate management this carbon "plus" could literally go up in smoke, turning the benefit into a huge liability.

California policy currently calls for 33 percent of its energy to be produced from renewable sources by 2020, with 20 percent of all renewable energy to be generated from biomass resources by 2010. Energy produced from biomass currently provides only 3 percent of the overall in-state energy produced. Estimates indicate that the greatest abundance of potential biomass feedstock in California, up to 41percent, could come from forestry biomass. Clearly the opportunity for a significant contribution of renewable biomass energy - and the creation of jobs for local citizens - exists in the Region, consistent with sustainable forest management.

At the same time, maintaining existing facilities that process traditional "dimensional" wood products is likewise critical to the long-term sustainability of the Region. Opportunities also exist for production of a variety of wood products from the biomass removed from the forests, including wood pellets (used for heating), post/poles and other specialty wood products. Developing appropriately scaled infrastructure to process the materials removed to restore forest health is essential for the Region to achieve a sustainable economy in forest communities.

As the climate changes, it will become essential that we act to ensure that Sierra watersheds continue to serve as the state's primary source of clean water. The opportunity exists for restoration and management efforts that will assist water managers in meeting ongoing needs. This includes increasing "natural storage" (through meadow restoration as an example), implementing land management that results in maintaining snowpack into the spring and protecting important natural areas from conversion to other uses.

In order to protect existing resources, address potential threats and take advantage of the additional contributions the Sierra makes to the State's energy production and emission reduction goals, a coordinated initiative is needed to focus attention on this region, increase investment, guide policy and measure success. The SNFCI provides

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the opportunity for a successful effort.

The Initiative

By addressing the objectives described above in a coordinated and integrated approach, long-term environmental, economic and social well-being can be improved in the Sierra. Clearly this effort will require the support of federal and state agencies, local governments, and tribal entities, representatives from the environmental /conservation community, representatives of Fire Safe and watershed organizations and the private sector. Finding areas of agreement on which to focus actions will provide a foundation for ongoing efforts.

The Initiative will have two interrelated aspects: 1) a Region-wide focus that addresses, policy issues, investment needs and relevant science and research, and 2) local collaborative efforts that address actions needed to achieve the desired outcomes at a more local level.

The Initiative focuses on public lands; however it is clearly understood that activities on private lands will have an effect on the effort and must be considered. Given that the federal government is responsible for the management of approximately two-thirds of the Sierra Nevada landscape, substantial federal involvement and investment is needed and appropriate. At the same time, coordination among the various State of California agencies and tribal entities with an interest in the Sierra is essential. Local governments can contribute through local leadership and advocacy, supportive policies and land use planning efforts that are consistent with the Initiative objectives. Many non-governmental organizations and private landowners are currently contributing positively to these objectives and are well-positioned to provide greater assistance.

A number of activities are occurring in the Sierra Nevada Region that are consistent with the intent of this Initiative. The SNC hopes to support and strengthen those efforts including: (1) Fire Safe and related efforts designed to protect communities, watersheds and forests; (2) watershed restoration efforts aimed at improving riparian conditions, restoring habitat and increasing natural storage of water and, (3) ecological restoration of forests.

In order to successfully implement this initiative, the SNC will provide leadership, coordination, monitoring and reporting on its success. A SNFCI resolution has been developed for the purpose of allowing governmental entities, businesses and organizations that share these strategic objectives to participate. A SNFCI Coordinating Council will be created consisting of federal and state agencies, local governments, tribal entities, representatives from the environmental/conservation community and the private sector. The first charge of the Council will be the creation of an implementation

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plan for the purpose of guiding and monitoring progress over time. The Plan will establish measurable outcomes for the Initiative and identify a process for monitoring success. By identifying needs and opportunities, the Plan will assist in strategic investment in the Region.

Summary

The successful implementation of the Initiative will attract additional investment to the Sierra Nevada region, resulting in: protection of the state's primary watershed and its many ecological benefits; creation of thousands of sustainable new jobs and more diversified local economies; and a contribution to the state's efforts to increase production of renewable energy.

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The Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Resolution

Overview

Today, many Sierra Nevada communities face a number of important challenges, including ecologically unhealthy forests, the threat of large damaging fire and the need for sustainable local economies. Understanding the relationship between these issues, and acting to address them, holds the potential for an important and perhaps unprecedented opportunity. Through sound stewardship of our Sierra forests, a healthy ecological system can be restored and remain intact with the involvement of members of the Sierra communities. These stewardship activities can provide jobs and revenue to support diverse and robust communities, building upon the existing infrastructure and creating new opportunities.

The following resolution represents a commitment on the part of signatories to work together to identify, initiate and support actions necessary to achieve the long-term environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada region. The Initiative will primarily focus on issues relating to public lands in the region, while recognizing the importance of private lands in achieving the overall objectives.

Resolution

Whereas, the Sierra Nevada Region is California's principal watershed and the origin of 65% of the state's developed water supply; serves as one of the state's premiere recreation and tourism destinations for more than 50 million visitor days each year; provides between one-third and one-half of the state's annual timber harvest; produces nearly three-quarters of the state's hydroelectric power; is home to two-thirds of the state's bird and mammal species, half of the state's plant species, and more than 600,000 humans;

Whereas, much of the Sierra Nevada forestlands are in an ecologically unhealthy condition, including public lands managed by the federal government;

Whereas, while fire is an important part of the ecosystem and can have a positive ecological impact, large damaging fires in the Sierra Nevada can result in a wide variety of negative impacts including loss of life and property, adverse human health impacts from poor air quality, reduced recreational and tourism opportunities and other significant economic impacts;

Whereas, large damaging fires result in degraded water and air quality, and altered wildlife habitat;

Whereas, many Sierra Nevada forests are showing signs of declining biodiversity;

Whereas, large damaging fires result in reduced amounts of carbon stored in the forests and cause significant emissions of greenhouse gases;

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Whereas, projected increases in temperatures due to a changing climate combined with the unhealthy condition of portions of the forest will likely result in larger, more frequent and more damaging fires in the future;

Whereas, land management agencies, Fire Safe Councils and other entities are engaged in ongoing efforts to reduce the risk of large damaging fires with many efforts focused on the urban wildland interface, the need for additional investment for these types of activity is evident;

Whereas, many Sierra communities continue to struggle with economic vitality and sustainability even beyond the current national economic conditions, with unemployment rates in many Sierra counties significantly higher than the national and state's average;

Whereas, traditional economic activity related to wood products has been in decline in recent decades signaling a need to diversify local economies by protecting existing infrastructure while promoting new economic opportunities at the appropriate scale;

Whereas the State of California has established aggressive goals to increase the amount of energy supplied from renewable sources, including biomass energy;

Whereas sustainable forest management can result in improved ecological health of forests, including sufficient habitat conditions, increased carbon storage, continued recreational use and high water quality;

Whereas sustainable forest management can result in a reliable supply of biomass that could be converted to renewable energy in a sustainable manner, as well as a variety of wood products, including dimensional lumber and "value added" products, creating an opportunity for locally based family wage jobs:

Therefore, we declare that it is our intent to work collaboratively, constructively and in a transparent manner, with state and federal agencies, local and tribal governments, the environmental/conservation community and, the private sector, to improve the environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada region by:

- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will reduce the risk of large damaging fires in our forests and wildlands and in our communities;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will result in ecologically healthy forests and watersheds, protecting habitat and species, water supply and water and air quality, and the long-term sequestration of carbon in plants and soil;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will create ecologically and economically sustainable local jobs and economic activity resulting directly and

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indirectly from sustainable forest management activities, including but not limited to, biomass energy, biofuels, "value added" wood products, dimensional wood products, other commercial wood products and the activities necessary to produce these products;

- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will result in protection and restoration of plant and wildlife habitat through increased resiliency, diversity and species composition post treatment;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing policies, investment and technical support that will assist in achieving these objectives;
- Identifying, supporting and applying current research and science to assist in achieving these objectives.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy will coordinate this initiative through the use of a collaborative, inclusive process. Progress will be measured and reported on an ongoing basis.

Signed,

~~The Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Resolution Sustainable Sierra Nevada Initiative~~

~~*An effort to create healthy forests, watersheds and communities*~~

Overview

Today, many Sierra Nevada communities face a number of important challenges, including ecologically unhealthy forests, ~~the, the~~ threat of large damaging catastrophic fire and the need for sustainable local economies. ~~Understanding economies.~~ Understanding the relationship between these issues, and acting to address them, holds the potential for an important and perhaps unprecedented opportunity. Through sound stewardship of our the Sierra forests resources, a healthy ecological system can be restored and remain intact withbythe involvement of members of the Sierra communities. These stewardship activities can provide jobs and revenue to support diverse and robust communities, building upon the existing infrastructure and creating new opportunities.

The following resolution represents a commitment on the part of signatories to work together to identify, initiate and support actions necessary to achieve the long-term environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada region. The Initiative will primarily focus on issues relating to public lands in the region, while recognizing the importance of private lands in achieving the overall objectives.

~~The Sustainable Sierra Nevada Resolution~~

Resolution

Whereas, the Sierra Nevada region is California's principal watershed and the origin of 65% of the state's developed water supply; serves as one of the state's premiere recreation and tourism destinations for more than 50 million visitor days each year; provides between one-third and one-half of the state's annual timber harvest; produces nearly three-quarters of the state's hydroelectric power; is home to two-thirds^{2/3} of the state's bird and mammal species, half of the state's plant species, and more than 600,000 humans;

Whereas, much of the Sierra Nevada forestlands are in an ecologically unhealthy condition, including public lands managed by the federal government;

Whereas, while fire is an important part of the ecosystem and can have a positive ecological impact, large damaging fires in the Sierra Nevada can results in a wide variety of negative impacts including loss of life and property, adverse human health impacts fromsuch as poor air quality, reduced recreational and tourism opportunities and other significant economic impacts;

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Whereas, large damaging fires ~~-results~~ in degraded water and air quality, ~~adverse human health impacts,~~ and ~~altered the loss of~~ wildlife habitat;

Whereas, ~~many Sierra Nevada forests are showing signs of declining biodiversity~~~~declining biodiversity with fewer pockets of old growth remaining, fewer snags and downed logs and declining number of hardwoods is also a symptom of declining forest health;~~

Whereas, large damaging ~~fires~~~~results~~~~fires result~~ in ~~reduced amounts of the loss of~~ carbon stored in the forests and causes significant emissions of greenhouse gases; ~~therefore adversely affecting efforts to reduce the impacts of climate change;~~

Whereas, projected increases in temperatures due to a changing climate combined with the unhealthy condition of ~~a significant~~ portions of the forest will ~~likely~~ result in larger, more frequent and more damaging fires in the future, ~~further exacerbating these impacts;~~

~~Whereas, land management agencies, Fire Safe Councils and other entities are engaged in ongoing efforts to reduce the risk of large damaging fires with many efforts focused on the urban wildland interface, the need for additional investment for these types of activity is evident;~~

Whereas, ~~many Sierra communities continue to struggle with~~ economic ~~vitality and sustainability~~~~conditions in the Sierra continue to show negative trends,~~ even beyond the current national economic conditions, with unemployment rates in many Sierra counties ~~that are~~ significantly higher than the national and state's average;

Whereas, traditional economic activity related to wood products ~~and ranching has been in decline in recent decades signaling a need to~~ ~~are expected to continue to decline,~~ ~~underscoring the need to~~ diversify local economies ~~by protecting existing infrastructure while promoting new economic opportunities at the appropriate scale while protecting recreation and tourism and other existing activities;~~

Whereas, the State of California has established aggressive goals to increase the amount of energy supplied from renewable sources, including biomass energy;

Whereas sustainable forest management can result in improved ecological health of forests, including ~~sufficient improved~~ habitat conditions, ~~increased carbon storage,~~ ~~continued recreational use~~ and ~~high improved~~ water quality;

Whereas sustainable forest management can result in a reliable supply of biomass that could be converted to renewable energy ~~in a sustainable manner,~~ as well as a variety of wood products, including ~~dimensional lumber and~~ "value added" products, creating an opportunity for locally based ~~family wage jobs~~~~sustainable economic activity:~~

Therefore, we declare that it is our intent to work collaboratively, constructively and in a transparent manner, with ~~state and federal agencies, local and tribal governments, the environmental/conservation community and, the private sector~~ ~~a wide range of~~

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~~governmental and non-governmental entities~~, to improve the environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada region by:

- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will reduce the risk of large damaging fires in our forests and wildlands and in our communities;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will result in ecologically healthy forests and watersheds, protecting habitat and species, water supply and water and air quality, and the long-term sequestration of carbon in plants and soil;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will create ecologically and economically sustainable local jobs and economic activity resulting directly and indirectly from sustainable forest management activities, including but not limited to, biomass energy, biofuels, “value added” wood products, dimensional wood products, other commercial wood products and the activities necessary to produce these products;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing actions that will result in protection and restoration of plant and wildlife habitat ~~throughstemming from~~ increased resiliency, diversity and species composition post treatment;
- Identifying, supporting and implementing policies, investment and technical support that will assist in achieving these objectives;
- Identifying, supporting and applying current research and science to assist in achieving these objectives.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy will coordinate this initiative through the use of a collaborative, inclusive process. Progress will be measured and reported on an ongoing basis.

Signed,

Sierra Nevada Conservancy
June 3, 2010

Agenda Item VIII
Sustainable Sierra Nevada Initiative
Attachment C

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