

Background

The East Subregion of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) includes three counties- Alpine, Mono and Inyo counties. The Subregion is currently served by one SNC representative from a satellite office in Bishop, with support from Mt. Whitney Area staff in Mariposa and Auburn.

The East Subregion is primarily rural, with the sparse population of approximately 32,000 residents spread over just less than 7,300 square miles within the SNC boundary. Ninety-six (96) percent of the land in this Subregion is under public ownership and management primarily by the U.S. Forest Service (Humboldt-Toiyabe and Inyo National Forests), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP). The Subregion contains many iconic national treasures including Mt. Whitney, the Ancient Bristlecone Pines, Mono Lake and Devils Postpile National Monument, as well as a multitude of soaring peaks and vast open spaces all offering diverse experiences for residents and visitors alike.

The Region's economic sustainability centers on tourism and agricultural exports. The diversity of recreation activities drives over 4 million annual visitors into this Subregion to experience fishing, hiking, camping, skiing, biking and motorized excursions. Ranching on lands leased from the public land management agencies allows for cattle and alfalfa to lead the area's agriculture production. The East Subregion has close ties with Southern California due to being a main water supply source and recreation playground for its residents.

There is a need to maintain and, in some cases, restore watersheds to ensure healthy landscapes that provide clean water, well-functioning ecosystems and attractive places for the multitude of recreation activities accessible throughout the area. At the same time, preserving and supporting working landscapes is critical for the economic and societal well-being of the area. The Subregion is remote with limited resources and there is a strong need for a high level of collaboration and shared resources among the private and public sector. Partnerships are a must in the Subregion.

Current Status

To date, the East Subregion has received 24 SNC Grants, for a total of just over \$2,200,000. Some of those projects are highlighted below.

The Eastern Sierra Land Tenure project was a joint project developed by Inyo and Mono Counties and the Sierra Business Council. This project was completed in March of this year and presented to the respective Board of Supervisors in each county. The report provided a detailed description of current land tenure status within the Subregion and outlined the steps required by each land management agency for potentially changing land tenure status. This report will become a significant resource tool for a multitude of planning efforts in the region relating to affordable housing and development opportunities.

Inyo County was funded to develop the Lower Owens River Recreational Use Plan (LORP) to address recreational and environmental issues on that 62 mile portion of the river which LADWP began rewatering in 2006. A draft was presented by the County to the Inyo/LA Standing Committee in February of this year. The Standing Committee, established under the Inyo/Los Angeles Long Term Water Agreement is comprised of representatives from Inyo County and Los Angeles (LADWP and City Council). The draft provided three levels of recreation use alternatives that will be used to develop a final plan for future approval and adoption by Inyo County and LADWP. The LORP is viewed as a significant project for the economic sustainability of Inyo County's southern region while protecting the natural resources.

The Town of Mammoth Lakes, in partnership with Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access (MLTPA), the Inyo National Forest and Friends of the Inyo completed the Lakes Basin Special Study (LABSS). This study included potential management alternatives relating to the Mammoth Lakes Basin which were developed through data collection, analysis, and public input. The Lakes Basin is a significant draw for visitors to Mammoth Lakes and the ability to enhance the visitor experience through alternative transportation, efficient parking, improved signage and wayfinding, fully utilized trails and campgrounds will help grow the region's recreation-based economy while protecting the natural resources.

The Town of Mammoth Lakes also completed the CEQA process for their Trail System Master Plan, which allowed the plan to be adopted by the Town last fall. The adoption of the plan triggered several actions in the community including the formation of the Mammoth Lakes Trail System Coordinating Council (MLTSCC) which is pursuing a formal relationship with the Inyo National Forest for the further implementation and management of the trail system. This summer there will be over 100 wayfinding signs installed throughout the trail system as part of the implementation of the adopted master plan.

The Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District (MLFPD) and the Inyo National Forest are continuing to provide fuel reduction treatments to high risk forested parcels in the Mammoth Lakes Basin. This effort has resulted in protection of critical wildlife habitat and a vital watershed and has spurred the ongoing discussion in this region to explore the feasibility of developing biomass products and energy from future fuel reduction programs.

The Alpine Watershed Group received funding in Category Two FY 2010-11 to re-establish the natural form of the Markleeville Creek by restoring the streambed configuration. This will improve the geomorphic function of the creek and restore the flood plain. The funding for this project will cover the completion of the final planning, design and the necessary environmental review and permitting process.

Next Steps

Staff has been meeting with interested parties to begin identifying specific projects for possible grant applications for the FY 2012-13 Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands Grant Program. There are several potential projects in the East Subregion that may align well with the upcoming grant round. Staff is working with Inyo County, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and the Friends of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery on discussions relating to the future use and management of the facility. DFG has indicated its interest in transferring ownership of the property and the County is interested in utilizing it for potential economic activity while preserving the historical, cultural and biological resources (additional information is included with Agenda Item XI of this Board packet).

SNC staff will continue to follow local issues and engage as needed in key Regional initiatives while assisting in the development of strategies to better assist local efforts.

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.