

Background

The North Subregion of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) includes all or portions of Lassen, Modoc, and Shasta Counties. Total population of the Subregion area is approximately 63,000 residents, most residing in Lassen County. It is one of the least densely populated Subregions in the Sierra Nevada.

This Subregion is primarily rural, with no large towns or communities. Small communities are distributed throughout the counties of the Subregion. Susanville, the largest of the communities in the Subregion with a population of 17,500, lies at the base of the slope where the northernmost point of the Sierra Nevada and the Southern Cascade Ranges meet. It is the portal to the Modoc Plateau to the north and east, and the Great Basin to the east.

Ranching, farming and small homesteads still dominate the landscape. Visitors to the North Subregion will find world class recreational opportunities such as mountaineering, mountain biking, kayaking, hunting, fishing, agritourism, popular historic attractions and National Parks, Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands.

The main transportation corridors are US Highway 395 (north/south) and Highway 299 (east/west). These transportation corridors effectively keep traffic flowing from southern Oregon and northeastern California to Reno, Nevada and the Central Valley of California.

The Subregion contains all or portions of the major watersheds of the Pit, Fall, and Susan Rivers. The Pit River and Fall River flow to the west into Shasta Lake. The Susan River Watershed and its tributaries flow to the east and south, ending primarily in the Honey Lake Valley and Smoke Creek.

One of the most diverse in geologic features, the North Subregion contains ecoregions of alpine, sub-alpine, lakes and wet meadows, plateaus and valley floors, and great basin ecosystems. Elevations range from roughly 4,000 feet in the valley floors to over 10,400 feet at the top of Mt. Lassen in Lassen National Park.

Native American tribes including the Pit River, Maidu, Mountain Paiute and the Washoe Tribes called this region home. The Modoc people, who lived at the Klamath River headwaters, were a prominent tribe that broke away from the Klamath tribes to the north in Oregon. Modoc County was named for this tribe.

William Nobles led the first wagon trains on the Nobles Emigrant Trail (Nationally Designated Trail) passing through the Honey Lake Valley and crossing the Sierra. In 1854 Isaac Roop opened a small trading post in what was formerly known as Roopville, renamed Susanville in honor of his daughter some years later. Isaac Roop became the first territorial governor in 1861. Roop's Fort, as it is now known, still stands in the community of Susanville the oldest building in Lassen County and is featured on the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Website.

After Statehood and the gold rush, the railroads and the timber mills contributed to development in the northern counties. The Red River Lumber Company in Westwood was home to the world's largest electric sawmill of the day (it no longer functions as a mill). The Subregion now has three active wood processing facilities and two biomass energy facilities. Gold mining was active in Lassen County until late into the 1990's.

The SNC maintains an office in Susanville and staff in the Susanville and Auburn offices serves the Subregion. The SNC has developed many effective relationships with organizations in the Subregion and will continue to build more partnerships in the future.

Current Status

The SNC has funded 24 Proposition 84 grants in the North Subregion reflecting a variety of watershed and landscape needs.

North Subregion Grants	Type of Grant/ Number	Amount
Acquisition Projects	1	\$1,000,000
Education/Interpretation	2	71,500
Monitoring/Research	2	90,000
Planning	1	48,400
Pre-Project Due Diligence	9	597,425
Site Improvement and Restoration	9	1,828,159
Total	24	\$3,635,484

The risk of catastrophic fire, the need for fuels management and the loss of significant portions of the natural resource industry (timber and mining) are key issues being addressed by stakeholders in the subregion. Overly dense forests on both public and private lands are extremely vulnerable to catastrophic wildfire and the proximity of these high danger fire areas to population centers creates enormous concern for residents and local agencies, as well as threatening water quality and habitat throughout the watersheds. As wood related infrastructure decreases, the ability to actively treat these lands becomes all the more difficult.

The Sage Steppe Ecosystem Restoration Strategy, a collaborative effort by the USDA Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Modoc County began as a discussion on how to treat and restore the sage-steppe ecosystem and its related species habitat. The strategy covers over 6 million acres of land within Modoc and

Lassen Counties. The Strategy focuses on the restoration of sage steppe ecosystems that have become dominated by western juniper over the past century.

Through mechanical treatment and removal of juniper, as well as fire use, the Modoc National Forest and the Alturas Field Office of BLM has focused on treating up to 30,000 acres per year to restore the ecosystem habitat. Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grants to the Lassen County Fire Safe Council, the BLM and the local Resource Conservation Districts have helped to meet this goal over the past three years.

The Board also recently authorized a grant to the Pit RCD for the construction of the Lower Ash Creek Wildlife Area Restoration Project which is currently under construction and is being recommended for matching grants by the California Waterfowl Association and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act funding program. The project aims to restore approximately 2,400 acres of degraded wetland habitat in a critical area of the Pacific Flyway migratory corridor.

Tourism is a mainstay element of the North Subregion's economy. Outdoor recreation opportunities are a trademark of the Region, and the Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide Project highlights many of the unique attractions and events in the area. Included in these attractions is a project partially funded by the SNC, the recently acquired Modoc Line, an 85 mile rail corridor managed as a multi-use trail linking Lassen and Modoc Counties.

During their last visit to the North Subregion, the Board was given a presentation about the development of the Hatchet Ridge Wind Energy Project. Since that time, Pattern Energy has constructed a \$200 million wind farm on the top of Hatchet Ridge above the town of Burney, stretching in a line 6 ½ miles long on land leased from Sierra Pacific Industries and Fruit Growers Supply Company. Construction began in October of 2009 and the facility began commercial operation in December 2010. The 44 wind turbines, with blade tips reaching up to 410 feet above the ground, have a combined production capacity of 101.2 megawatts – equal to the annual electricity usage of 44,000 homes, and will offset 134,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year. The power is purchased by Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) under a 15 year contract.

The counties in the North Subregion have traditionally supported Williamson Act contracts for conservation of agricultural lands and are having to make very difficult decisions about the future viability of existing or new Williamson Act contracts. The SNC is monitoring legislative activity related to this issue and anticipates possible opportunities to complement Williamson Act efforts by assisting agricultural producers and land managers through the FY2012-13 grant program which will focus on "Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands."

Next Steps

SNC staff is participating and supportive of the newly emerging Lassen Gateways Coalition. The Coalition brings together recreation and tourism providers from the

Region to collaborate on improving opportunities for visitors, businesses, and communities. The Gateways Coalition has been instrumental in securing nominations for the Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide Project.

The Subregion also has many local collaborative efforts underway that are related to or are supportive of the Sierra Nevada Forest and Communities Initiative (SNFCI). SNC staff remains involved at various levels with these collaboratives. The SNC has established many partnerships and working relationships in the North Subregion. Outreach has been ongoing since the SNC's creation and will continue into the future.

SNC staff will be interacting closely with partners in the North Subregion to help develop projects supportive of the SNC's Preservation of Ranching and Agricultural Lands and Healthy Forests areas of focus during the next two years.

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.