



## **Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)**

**Q:** What is the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative?

**A:** It is a proposed new effort of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) designed to restore public forests to ecological health, reduce the threat and consequences of large damaging fires and contribute to sustainable local economies. The SNC believes that achieving broad consensus on the application of science-based forest management practices is a critical issue for the Sierra Nevada, and that the need for action is urgent.

SNFCI seeks to have the following impacts:

- protect and restore forests and habitats;
- reduce the risk and consequences of large, damaging fires;
- improve water quality and natural storage;
- create employment and economic vitality in the Sierra Nevada;
- promote biomass energy; and
- protect and enhance the production of a variety of wood products resulting from sustainable forest management.

SNFCI includes a Regional focus and locally-based efforts. The Regional effort will focus on policy, investment, and science and research issues that affect the success of the Initiative. Local collaborative efforts will focus on approaches and actions that best meet the local situation, including forest management and related economic development. In all cases SNC will work closely with the federal land management agencies who are ultimately responsible for making decisions affecting these issues.

**Q:** What is happening now, and what is proposed for the future?

**A:** A century of fire suppression and decades of conflict between multiple stakeholders regarding forest and habitat issues on public lands has resulted in lawsuits, limited forest management and larger, damaging fires in the Sierra Nevada. These conflicts, combined with other issues, have led to the closing of dozens of saw mills, mostly in the central and southern Sierra. Given that forest management projects have frequently been tied to lumber production, the loss of this wood production infrastructure has contributed to forest overgrowth and the suffering of local economies and ecosystems. The goal of SNFCI is to identify

ways to protect traditional infrastructure while developing new business opportunities created by ecologically sound forest management.

The SNC has been meeting with many stakeholders involved in these issues, learning from the experience of local efforts, and believes that there is significant interest in collaborating, and a real opportunity to reach consensus on essential actions to be taken. By focusing on actions that the various parties can agree on, the SNC sees an opportunity for significant progress and building a foundation for success.

**Q:** Why the focus on public forests? How will private forest lands be addressed?

**A:** The SNC believes it can be most effective in addressing issues facing public forests, based on its close working relationship with the federal land management agencies, the US Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service. While SNFCI does not focus on private lands, consideration will be given at all levels as to the role private lands play in achieving ecological health and improving local economic conditions.

**Q:** Who benefits from this process?

**A:** The beneficiaries are all Californians, as healthier forests contribute to the Sierra Nevada's most valuable natural asset: water (65 percent of California's developed water supply originates in the Sierra Nevada). The Sierra ecosystem would also benefit, including species whose habitats have been damaged by large fires. SNFCI would lead to more jobs related to forest management and restoration and production of biomass energy and wood products, critical in a Region where unemployment is nearly double the state average in some locations. Finally, a reduction in large damaging fires would reduce the threat to human life and property.

**Q:** Why now? Is the fire situation in the Sierra Nevada getting worse?

**A:** According to State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection's 2010 Strategic Fire Plan, the three largest fire years since 1950 have all occurred within the last 10 years. In the 2000s, forest fires significantly increased in annual acres burned, averaging nearly 200,000 acres per year, or four times the average from the previous four decades. As more Californians have settled in the "wildland-urban interface" of our forests, the threat to life and property—and to the forests themselves—has increased dramatically. The Regional Forester for the US Forest Service has indicated a desire to increase "treatment" of national forests in California from approximately 100,000 to 500,000 acres annually. Projections relative to a changing climate suggest the situation will only worsen, absent a different course of action.

**Q:** How do these large damaging fires impact water and air quality?

**A:** The negative impacts of large and damaging fires include the following: erosion and siltation, which impact water quality for fish, wildlife and humans;

sedimentation in waterways and reservoirs which reduces water storage capacity; and the loss of shade from the forest canopy, which impacts the timeframe for the melting of the Sierra Nevada snowpack (the anticipated consequences of a changing climate could make this issue more important).

The large, damaging fires that are occurring in the Sierra Nevada contribute a significant amount of pollutants that affect many Californians. Unlike prescription fires or managed fires outside of the wildland-urban interface that are used to achieve forest health and mimic historic conditions, many of today's fires start in or near the wildland-urban interface and burn hotter and larger, resulting in significant adverse impacts. These very large fires can more than double the amount of smoke going into the air from a given acre of forest, and concentrate all that smoke into a few days time instead of spreading the smoke emissions out over weeks. Air quality impacts are much more intense and widespread as a result. Recent studies have found that emergency room visits for asthma nearly double when the public is impacted by wildfire smoke. Furthermore, Sierra Nevada forests sequester more carbon per acre than the Amazon rainforest. Unmanaged forest fires not only release stored carbon into the atmosphere, they burn up the very forests that sequester carbon.

**Q:** Does this mean all fire is bad and should be eliminated from the Sierra Nevada?

**A:** No. Fire is a part of the ecosystem, however under current conditions throughout much of the Sierra Nevada, wildfire is having more negative consequences than positive. The use of prescribed and managed wildfire should be encouraged where appropriate, and one of the outcomes of ecologically healthy forests will be the increased opportunity for using fire as a management tool.

**Q:** What is the SNC's role?

**A:** The SNC will work with a Regional Coordinating Council to identify and address issues affecting forest health, fire and related economic development. Generally speaking, the Council will focus on policy, investment and science and research issues that affect the success of the SNFCI. The SNC will also work to catalyze stakeholders to address these important issues in the Sierra Nevada by helping local collaborative efforts to convene, identify issues, develop projects and secure funds to implement projects and processes in local areas in support of the Initiative's goals. SNC's role is not to determine specific forest management practices and principles or local economic development strategies, but rather to assist parties within the region in achieving collaboratively developed objectives.

**Q:** How do I learn more about this initiative?

**A:** Information about SNFCI, including the text of the SNFCI Resolution, can be found at [www.sierranevada.ca.gov/snfci.html](http://www.sierranevada.ca.gov/snfci.html).