

2016-19

# Strategic Action Plan



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# About the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is a California state agency created by bipartisan legislation ([AB 2600](#)) and signed into law in 2004. The SNC has a broad mission based on the understanding that the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region (Region) and its rural communities are closely linked, and that the Region would benefit from an organization providing strategic direction and bringing attention and resources to the Region to better understand and meet its needs.

## Introduction

### Document Overview

This Strategic Action Plan (Plan) contains descriptions of the four programs the SNC will focus on from January 2016 through June 2019. The Plan identifies strategies to implement each program and address the statutory goals associated with each program. The Plan also identifies specific actions to implement the strategies associated with each of the four programs, based on available resources and existing opportunities and conditions.

Over the life of the Plan, there will be three separate sets of actions. The set of actions included in this document covers the 18-month period from January 2016 through June 2017. Each subsequent set of actions will cover a 12-month period, with the final set covering July 2018 through June 2019.

### Context

The scope of the Plan has been determined in response to SNC Governing Board direction to narrow the focus of SNC activities, as well as an environment of new budgetary restrictions that has constrained SNC resources.

### Consideration of Other State Plans

This Plan builds upon and integrates a number of state efforts, including:

- [California Water Action Plan](#) and its [Implementation Report](#)
- [Safeguarding California Climate Adaptation Plan](#) and [Assembly Bill 32 Scoping Plan Updates](#)
- [Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan Updates](#) and [Funding Guidelines](#)
- [California State Wildlife Action Plan](#)
- [California Water Plan](#)
- [California Fire Plan](#)
- [Forest and Rangelands Assessment](#)
- [Forest Carbon Plan](#) (under development)
- [Bioenergy Action Plan](#)

## **Background**

### **SNC Vision**

The SNC's vision for the future is that the magnificent Sierra Nevada Region enjoys outstanding environmental, economic, and social health, with vibrant communities and landscapes sustained for future generations. In this vision:

- Rich and diverse natural, physical, and living resources are protected and conserved.
- Healthy, diverse, and economically sustainable local communities thrive, prepared for and protected from natural disasters.
- Californians value and invest in healthy watersheds that provide high-quality water, spectacular scenery, and important wildlife habitat.
- Sustainable working landscapes provide environmental, economic, and social benefits to the Region.
- The Region's cultural, archeological, and historical resources are preserved, visited, and treasured.
- Healthy and sustainable tourism, recreation, and commercial activities are valued and encouraged.
- The role of the forest in sequestering and storing carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is recognized and enhanced.

### **SNC Mission**

The mission of the SNC is to initiate, encourage, and support efforts that improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region, its communities, and the citizens of California.

### **Service Area**

The SNC's service area – stretching from Modoc County in the north to Kern County in the south – covers 25 million acres and all or part of 22 counties. Comprising 25 percent of California's total land area, it is the largest conservancy region in the state. The jurisdiction includes the mountains and foothills of the Sierra Nevada range, the Mono Basin, Owens Valley, the Modoc Plateau, and a part of the southern Cascade Range, including the Pit River Watershed. The statute establishing the SNC divides the Region into six smaller Subregions.

The Sierra Nevada is an extraordinary resource of Regional, statewide, national, and even global significance. It is the state's principal watershed, supplying more than 60 percent of California's developed water supply. The Sierra also sustains 60 percent of California's animal species and almost half of its plant species, including the world's largest living thing: General Sherman, a Giant Sequoia. In addition to providing water for the state, the Sierra supplies up to half of California's annual timber yield and 15 percent of the state's power needs, holding an untapped potential to increase its contribution to California's green energy portfolio. Its forests and agricultural lands are uniquely suited to help reduce the warming impact of a changing climate by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in tree trunks, branches, foliage,

roots, and soils. The Sierra hosts more than 50 million recreational visits per year and is home to more than 600,000 residents in 200+ local communities – communities that depend in large part on natural resources for economic sustainability, job creation, recreation, and preservation of the community character and viewsheds that are unique to the Sierra Nevada Region.

### **Governance**

The SNC is governed by a 16-member Board, with 13 voting members divided almost evenly between seven state-level appointments and six local seats filled by members of county Boards of Supervisors in each of the SNC's six Subregions.

The members include:

- Secretary for Natural Resources Agency (or his or her designee)
- Director of Finance (or his or her designee)
- Three members of the public appointed by the governor
- Two members of the public, one each appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Senate Rules Committee
- Six county supervisors whose districts are within the Region, each representing one of the six Subregions
- Three non-voting liaison advisers: one each from the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management

### **Program Description**

In accordance with the statute establishing the SNC, all agency activities are based on the principles of balance, cooperation, and equity. The statute requires that the SNC:

- Support efforts that advance environmental preservation and the economic and social well-being of Sierra residents in a complementary manner.
- Work in collaboration and cooperation with local governments and interested parties in carrying out the SNC's mission.
- Make every effort to ensure that, over time, SNC funding and other efforts are spread equitably across each of the various Subregions and among the program areas, with adequate allowance for the variability of costs associated with individual Subregions and types of projects.

### **Program Areas**

The SNC serves the Sierra Nevada Region by providing a focal point for action and helping to develop and promote a Regional identity for the Sierra as a whole. The SNC does that, in part, by providing funding for local and Regional projects, and offering technical and other assistance for collaborative efforts in cooperation with nonprofit, tribal, and government partners at all levels. The SNC's activities fall under seven legislatively mandated program areas, including:

- Increasing the opportunity for tourism and recreation in the Region
- Protecting, conserving, and restoring the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources

- Aiding in the preservation of working landscapes
- Reducing the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfire
- Protecting and improving water and air quality
- Assisting the Regional economy through the operation of the SNC's program
- Enhancing public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public

### **Current Funding Sources**

The SNC's budget is made up of funds from three sources:

- The California Environmental License Plate Fund, which serves as the primary source for staff and operations funding
- Proposition 84, The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coast Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84). Proposition 84 allocated \$54 million in bond funds to the SNC. (Note: most of these funds have been expended.)
- Proposition 1, The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Bond Act of 2014 (Proposition 1). Proposition 1 allocated \$25 million in bond funds to the SNC.

### **SNC Guiding Principles**

The SNC is guided in its operations by a number of principles developed as part of its initial strategic planning process:

#### **Operations**

- The SNC conducts operations openly. Decision-making is transparent, and the SNC always strives to improve communications throughout the Region.
- The SNC strives to maintain neutrality so all interested parties are provided an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the SNC's activities.

#### **Key Objectives**

- The SNC seeks to "add value" and build upon existing community and Regional efforts.
- The SNC brings a Regional focus to the issues of the Sierra Nevada, collecting and sharing information across the Region and communicating the benefits and contributions of the Region.
- The SNC encourages community-based solutions and assists communities with technical expertise, information, and resources necessary to achieve local solutions.
- The SNC uses the best available information and science in making decisions, identifying opportunities to fill information and technical gaps, and building on and expanding community information.
- The SNC informs and educates the public throughout the Region and the state about the substantial benefits the Sierra Nevada provides to all Californians, including providing clean water for many uses outside the Sierra, and the importance of protecting and enhancing the environmental well-being of the Region.

- The SNC strives to identify and implement activities that result in integrated environmental, economic, and social benefits rather than “either or” outcomes.

### **Implementing Programs**

- The SNC develops program priorities considering the input received through community outreach efforts, and seeks to meet community needs.
- The SNC is flexible in implementing its programs, recognizing the need to act based on opportunity, available funding, local and Regional differences, and statewide interest.
- The SNC gives priority to multi-benefit projects and integrated activities (those that address more than one of the SNC’s program objectives).
- The SNC encourages projects and activities that leverage other organizations’ (government, private, and nonprofit) competencies and funding.
- The SNC evaluates projects considering what is occurring on surrounding lands, cognizant of potential impacts to those landscapes.
- The SNC purchases and/or creates incentives for the purchase, where practical, of resources for goods and services within the Sierra Nevada Region. The SNC diligently seeks opportunities to improve the economic well-being of communities in the Region.
- The SNC makes every effort to ensure that, over time, SNC funding and other efforts are spread equitably across Subregions and program areas, with adequate allowance for the variability of costs associated with individual Subregions and types of projects.

### **Working with Others**

- The SNC emphasizes cooperation with local governments and other governmental, tribal, and non-governmental partners in providing information, technical assistance, and financial support to assist in meeting mutual goals.
- The SNC coordinates and collaborates with all partners to achieve research, project funding, and program goals.
- The SNC convenes and facilitates interested parties to seek solutions for difficult problems to achieve environmental, economic, and social benefits.
- The SNC respects the mission, responsibilities, and obligations of other agencies and organizations.

## **Programs, Strategies, and Actions**

### **Overview and Context**

As the SNC has implemented its programs and operations over the past ten years, it has gained significant knowledge and experience in identifying ways to make the greatest impact on the objectives set forth in its enabling legislation. For instance, it has become clear that the occurrence of an increasing number of uncharacteristically large, damaging fires presents the greatest threat to the Region’s environmental and economic well-being. In response, the SNC launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative

(SNFCI) in 2011 to focus attention on the need to take action on this issue. The SNC also made forest health a focus in the final rounds of its Proposition 84 grant program.

Concurrently, the U.S. Forest Service, Region 5, released its Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration, identifying the need to significantly increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration on the lands it manages. The SNFCI and the Leadership Intent are largely complementary, and the SNC has worked closely with the U.S. Forest Service and a wide range of stakeholders in implementing these efforts.

Additionally, the SNC has participated in numerous local collaborative efforts aimed at addressing forest, watershed, and community health. A number of these efforts have resulted in increased investment and project implementation. The SNFCI Coordinating Council has also identified key policy areas that need to be addressed at a Regional scale if the pace and scale of restoration is to be increased. Nonetheless, there has been little or no overall increase in the area being restored on U.S. Forest Service lands, while the amount being consumed by uncharacteristic wildfire continues to increase.

For example, the 2013 Rim Fire became the largest fire in the recorded history of the Sierra Nevada when it scorched more than 257,000 acres over the course of 69 days. It added a new term to the lexicon: “megafire.” Not only did it cover an area eight times the size of San Francisco, it burned at an extremely high intensity, leaving nearly 100,000 acres virtually without living vegetation. Worse yet, the Rim Fire heralded an era of increasing size and frequency of Sierra wildfires. The 2014 King Fire was smaller in acreage, but an even greater proportion of its area – nearly 50 percent – burned at high intensity.

In addition to these wildfires’ devastating effects on biological resources, experts have noted that recent Sierra wildfire trends may be detrimental to efforts being made throughout California to lessen the impacts of climate change. All of the public dollars spent on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in urban areas may be compromised if large portions of Sierra forests – the best buffer against climate change in California – are reduced to ash and smoke. These fires also produce massive amounts of pollutants that create significant health risks, particularly for people with existing respiratory issues.

Furthermore, high-intensity burn areas experience runoff and erosion rates five to ten times greater than low- or moderate-intensity burn areas. The sediment that is carried off burned hillsides not only degrades water quality and damages infrastructure, it fills reservoirs, reducing storage capacity. High-intensity fire destroys habitat for many species, including those listed under state and federal Endangered Species Acts, and adversely impacts local recreational opportunities, businesses, and communities.

In recognition of recent wildfire trends, in June 2014 the SNC Governing Board directed staff to increase efforts and provide bold leadership related to healthy forests and watersheds in the Sierra Nevada. Staff responded by developing the SNFCI Action Plan, which was approved by the Board in September 2014. Also in September 2014, the SNC released the [State of the Sierra Nevada Forests](#) report, which identifies the wide range of forest and watershed benefits that are at risk, impediments to expanding forest

restoration, potential solutions to these challenges, and a framework for addressing these issues.

At the same time, the SNC recognized that a holistic watershed restoration initiative was necessary to connect the wide range of agencies and interests that benefit from the Region. The SNC's work over the past decade positioned it as the appropriate entity to organize and coordinate such an effort. Given the SNC's close working relationship with the U.S. Forest Service, the primary land manager in the Region, it was determined that such an initiative should be led in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service.

In March 2015, the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) was launched as a state-federal partnership. A diverse group of agencies and stakeholders participated in the launch, recognizing the importance of the Region and the need for bold action. Recognizing the importance of this effort in meeting various state objectives, California Natural Resources Agency Secretary John Laird entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with U.S. Forest Service Regional Forester Randy Moore, pledging a cooperative relationship in implementing the WIP. The SNC is named as the lead state agency in this effort.

### **The Approach**

This Plan focuses planning efforts over the next three-and-a-half years and sets priorities for the SNC within the context of its broad mission, statutorily established program areas, Board direction, and a recent reduction in base funding. The plan will be implemented in ongoing collaboration with multiple partners throughout the Region, and its strategies will be carried out through specific actions identified in annual updates. Each update will set forth a realistic set of actions for the SNC to accomplish in support of the priorities established through this planning process, in the context of available resources.

This Plan provides greater focus to certain of SNC's statutory program areas. This is a product of a number of factors, including organizational priorities and funding source limitations. The SNC will continue to support multi-benefit projects and activities, while remaining cognizant of programmatic and geographic distribution.

### **Programs**

The SNC will focus on four programs during the life of this Plan, from January 2016 to June 2019. These programs are:

- Statutorily required and/or directed by the SNC Governing Board
- Associated with a workload that fits within current budgetary and staff resources

Two of the programs are designated as primary and two as secondary, with organizational resources allocated accordingly. The primary programs that will be the focus of SNC efforts under this Plan are the Watershed Improvement Program and the Grant Program. The secondary programs are the Abandoned Mine Lands Program and the Regional Recreation and Tourism Program.

Development of this Plan is specifically intended to reflect the SNC's top priorities of the implementation of the WIP and the important role the Proposition 1 Grant Program will

play in improving watershed health. The Plan further recognizes two other important areas of focus related to the WIP: Abandoned Mine Lands and Regional Recreation and Tourism. The SNC previously had a focus area of Agricultural and Range Lands, but anticipates that related issues will be addressed as part of the WIP.

The program strategies and the actions associated with implementing them are described below. Although the strategies will be in place from January 2016 to June 2019, the actions currently in this Plan are intended to be undertaken over the 18-month period from January 2016 to June 2017.

## **Watershed Improvement Program**

### ***Description***

Healthy forests. Healthy waters. These are at the center of the Sierra Nevada [Watershed Improvement Program](#) (WIP), a coordinated, integrated, collaborative program that will catalyze improvements to the health of California's primary watershed through increased investment and policy changes.

The WIP builds upon broad consensus that more must be done to restore Sierra Nevada forests and watersheds. Science-based ecological restoration must dramatically increase in order to stem the tide of large, uncharacteristic wildfires and further ecosystem degradation. Reducing the risks of and from fire creates a resilient landscape where fire can play its natural role within ecological processes and where the quality and quantity of water available for all of California in the face of ongoing drought and climate change is safeguarded. A strategic, multi-purpose, multi-agency approach to forests and all watershed lands in the Region is needed.

Because of its singular focus on the entire Sierra Nevada Region, the SNC is well-positioned to co-lead this comprehensive effort with the U.S. Forest Service, in close partnership with additional federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, and other diverse stakeholders (collectively referred to as WIP partners).

In addition to the overall coordination of the WIP, WIP activities are organized into four focus areas, which include Policy, Restoration Needs Identification and Implementation, Funding, and Communications. The overall success of the WIP is dependent upon the successful integration and execution of these individual focus areas.

### **Policy**

Work within this area focuses on identifying and addressing state, federal, and local policy opportunities to increase the pace and scale of restoration, and improving the socio-economic well-being of Sierra communities, as well as identifying and addressing impediments to achieving these objectives.

### **Restoration Needs Identification and Implementation**

Work within this area focuses on identifying and quantifying the level and cost of restoration activity needed to restore Sierra Nevada watersheds to a state of proper

function and resilience, providing the impetus for more restoration through the implementation of those activities on the ground.

### Funding

Work within this area focuses on increasing and tracking state, federal, and local governmental and non-governmental investment in restoration activities, as well as securing investment from those who benefit from the Region, such as the urban, business, and agricultural communities that receive water from the Region.

### Communication

Work within this area focuses on developing and utilizing a variety of communications tools and materials that support key WIP messages, and implementing outreach and communications strategies that engage key audiences, in order to support the goals of the WIP.

## ***Statutory Goals Addressed***

### Primary

- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources.
- Reduce the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfires.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.
- Assist the Regional economy through the operation of the SNC's program.
- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes.

### Secondary

- Provide increased opportunities for tourism and recreation.
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

## ***Strategies and Actions***

### Coordination

#### Strategy

- Coordinate broad and diverse partnerships to harness the power of collaboration among the WIP partners.

### Actions - January 2016 through June 2017

- Convene a WIP Steering Committee as needed and appropriate to guide progress of the WIP on an ongoing basis.
- Develop and utilize a communications network for regular engagement with WIP partners.
- Maximize efficiency of project planning and implementation through coordinated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance processes.

- Continue to work through the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) Regional Council to address its five focus areas for overcoming obstacles to increasing the pace and scale of restoration:
  - Steep ground technology
  - Increasing the use of fire as a restoration tool
  - Support of wood-processing infrastructure
  - Promoting landscape-level treatments
  - Promoting local economies through local contracting tools

### Policy Strategies

- Identify and pursue legislative, policy, and state and federal planning and funding opportunities to benefit the WIP and the Region.
- Develop and maintain relationships with legislators, key decision-makers, state agencies, local governments, and partners to garner support for sound, science-based policy decisions that benefit California, the WIP, and the Region.
- Inform and engage partners and key decision-makers to ensure that the WIP and the Region are included in policy and investment decisions at the state and federal levels on issues including, but not limited to:
  - Air quality, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and carbon sequestration and storage
  - Forest restoration and management
  - Water quality and supply reliability
  - Habitat and biodiversity
  - Ranching and agricultural lands
- Include the WIP as a strategic component in the development and implementation of state administrative and planning processes, and in guidance documents that inform, generate, and affect policy, such as the California Water Action Plan.
- Utilize the results of WIP watershed-level assessments to identify and pursue policy and funding opportunities that address local needs and issues.
- Work with the WIP Steering Committee to identify, and where necessary assist, in conducting scientific research to inform activities under the WIP and to affect policy and funding decisions at the state and federal levels.

### Actions - January 2016 through June 2017

- Explore, track, and promote policy-related funding mechanisms that benefit the WIP and the Region, including securing funding in future Sierra-relevant bonds and the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.
- Identify and recruit SNC legislative liaisons to represent the WIP and the Region in important policy decisions, and facilitate, organize, and participate in meetings with local, state, and federal agencies; legislators; and other key decision-makers to garner support and emphasize the WIP's role in protecting and enhancing the Region and the state.

- Track and engage in state guidance document creation and update processes, work with partners to provide Regionally relevant feedback, and ensure that the WIP is included in applicable plans and high-profile case studies such as the Strategic Growth Council Integrated Regional Conservation and Development Program.
- As needed and appropriate, consider the development of an interagency, scientific advisory team to track and review new research, identify important findings, synthesize key insights, answer questions, and complete analyses to inform policy and funding decisions.
- Track, review, and utilize watershed-level assessment results to identify policy and funding needs and opportunities, and to meet federal [Resilient Lands and Waters Designation](#) reporting requirements. Work with the WIP Steering Committee and partners to determine which opportunities to pursue and how to engage.

### **Restoration Needs Identification and Implementation Strategies**

- Working closely with WIP partners, develop and implement the WIP Regional Strategy in order to engage a wide range of stakeholders and provide a basis for more localized efforts. The Regional Strategy will include key information, trends, plans, and data for major categories influencing watershed health, as well as the process and timeline for implementation of the WIP.
- Finalize watershed-level assessments and utilize the findings to implement on-the-ground projects to restore affected watersheds to a state of resilience.
- Work with WIP partners to establish additional wood and biomass processing infrastructure that can utilize the woody material removed from forests as part of restoration efforts.

### **Actions - January 2016 through June 2017**

- In order to facilitate watershed resilience, work with WIP partners to assess estimated restoration needs and costs of watershed-specific projects, and where possible, match specific projects to planning and implementation funding.
- Work with federal land management agencies, beginning with the U.S. Forest Service, to conduct restoration needs assessments across their ownership.
- In conjunction with other key WIP partners, assess and verify Sierra watershed-level, baseline data collected by the SNC and Sierra Coordinated Resources Management Council Joint Powers Authority (SCRMC JPA) staff for non-federally-managed lands.
- Identify metrics to successfully track implementation of the WIP.
- Work with partners to develop an online presence for the WIP that makes it the hub of a network connecting partners to data, funding, projects, and each other in order to better make the case for restoration in the Sierra Nevada, and focus and leverage resources to restore watershed health.
- Promote the need for establishment of wood and biomass processing infrastructure, and support related efforts.

## **Funding Strategies**

- Expand and secure funding from new sources, including private investment, to support the SNC and the programs of the WIP.
- Provide technical assistance to increase capacity of partners to apply for and administer grant funds.
- Coordinate with other agencies and private investors to strategically fund projects under the WIP.
- Work with other agencies on grant guidelines to ensure Regional resource needs and issues are addressed.
- Increase efficiency of funding programs by addressing prerequisites or other barriers to accessing grants.
- Provide user-friendly information about grant opportunities to WIP partners.
- Track funding coming to the Region by type of funder, type of project funded, and amount leveraged or matched.

## **Actions - January 2016 through June 2017**

- Inform and encourage public and private funders, including ecosystem beneficiaries, to invest in the WIP as the appropriate mechanism for addressing Regional issues.
- Identify and implement projects suitable for multi-agency funding under the auspices of the WIP.
- Coordinate on a statewide and agency basis to maximize funding opportunities for Regional partners.
- Develop grant research memos, newsletters, social media announcements, web site content, grant calendars, and other documents to inform partners about funding opportunities.
- Provide funding strategy consultations and grant writing workshops to partner agencies and organizations as resources allow, and maintain a project tracking tool that specifically captures information to allow funders to search for projects by interests, funding needs, environmental planning status, and other criteria.
- Maintain an investment tracker identifying funding awarded to projects within the SNC Region, and analyze relative funding awarded to the Region by project type and category, as compared to the remainder of the state.

## **Communication Strategies**

- Develop messaging and materials that:
  - Increase awareness among policy-makers and the public about the important role the Region plays in California's overall economic, social, and environmental health and well-being.
  - Convey the risks the Region is currently facing, and explain the consequences of not restoring the Region's forests and watersheds to a state of resilience.

- Support the needs identified by the funding, policy, and implementation goals of the WIP.
- Utilize the most effective tools to deliver messages, including both traditional and new media, to engage target audiences.
- Engage key partners and establish a communications network that can maximize the communication efforts of the WIP through coordinated outreach.
- Utilize current events as opportunities to increase awareness among policy-makers about the benefits provided by healthy Sierra forests and watersheds, and the actions needed to improve, maintain, and enhance those benefits.
- Increase participation in events, such as field tours and conferences, which support the overall goals of the WIP and engage new members of target audiences.

#### Actions - January 2016 through June 2017

- Reach out to traditional media (such as newspaper, television, and radio) and new media (such as blogs and social media) to pitch stories and interviews that help communicate the goals and need for the WIP.
- Develop social media campaigns and content using new media tools to communicate WIP goals visually, including products such as iMovie, AdobeVoice presentations, ArcGIS Online story maps, infographics, and others.
- Produce fact sheets, reports, talking points, web content, and other products that support the communication needs of the WIP, including an annual report highlighting the progress of the WIP.
- Convene an annual Sierra Nevada WIP check-in event to provide updates on WIP progress for partners, legislators, and key decision-makers.
- Work with existing and new partners and networks to amplify WIP messaging by sharing products created for the WIP, collaborating on social media campaigns, or pitching story ideas to media outlets.
- Monitor current news and share relevant items with policy-makers, legislators, and partners to help demonstrate the need for the WIP. Information will be shared via social media, email, the Sierra Wildfire Wire blog, and by WIP team leads in face-to-face meetings.
- Identify opportunities for SNC staff and WIP partners to speak at or sponsor events and conferences that can introduce the WIP to new audiences, and work with WIP partners and interested organizations to host tours, briefings, and informational events that communicate the need for the WIP and highlight efforts to date.
- Identify opportunities to respond to misinformation or add WIP messaging information to reports, news articles, or positions.

### **Grant Program**

#### ***Description***

Through funding from Proposition 84 and Proposition 1, the SNC works directly with nonprofit, tribal, and governmental partners in the Region to grant funding for multi-benefit projects to further the SNC mission.

### Proposition 84 Wrap-Up

The SNC's Proposition 84 Grant Program has been one of the primary tools used by the SNC to support the work of its partners across the Region. Since its first year of grantmaking in 2007, the SNC has authorized more than 300 individual grants totaling more than \$51 million. The SNC is wrapping up the Proposition 84 Grant Program and anticipates awarding the remaining funds in Fiscal Year 2015-16.

### Proposition 1 Implementation

California voters recently passed Proposition 1, The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Bond Act of 2014. Proposition 1 authorized the state to issue bonds for multi-benefit water quality, water supply, and watershed protection and restoration projects for the watersheds of the state, and the SNC was allocated \$25 million for this purpose. The SNC will deliver the first \$10 million consistent with objectives of the WIP over Fiscal Years 2015-16 and 2016-17, with a focus on forest health projects that result in multiple watershed benefits.

### ***Statutory Goals Addressed***

#### Primary

- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.
- Assist the Regional economy through the operation of the SNC's program.
- Reduce the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfire.

#### Secondary

- Provide increased opportunities for recreation and tourism.
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.
- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes.

### ***Strategies and Actions***

#### **Proposition 84 Wrap-Up**

##### Strategies

- Successfully conclude the Proposition 84 program, including funding Rim Fire restoration projects, closing out remaining projects, and implementing a long-term monitoring program.
- Assess the overall effectiveness of the Proposition 84 Grant Program by quantifying impacts on the SNC Region.

##### Actions - January 2016 through June 2017

- Identify and award remaining funding for Rim Fire restoration projects.
- Work with grantees to close out remaining Proposition 84 projects.
- Implement a grant project monitoring program to ensure long-term benefits of bond-funded grants are being realized.
- Produce a performance measures summary and map for all Proposition 84 grants.

## **Proposition 1 Implementation**

### **Strategies**

- Support the WIP and state plans such as the California Water Action Plan by funding the following types of projects consistent with guidance in Proposition 1:
  - Fuel treatment projects that reduce wildfire risks, protect watersheds tributary to water storage facilities, and promote watershed health
  - Projects that protect and restore rural and urban watershed health in order to improve watershed storage capacity, forest health, safety of life and property, and greenhouse gas reductions
  - Watershed adaptation projects, in order to reduce the impacts of climate change on California's communities and ecosystems
- Maximize the impact of SNC Proposition 1 funding by coordinating with other Proposition 1 funding agencies and leveraging other sources of funds in order to implement multi-benefit, landscape-scale projects.
- Implement grant process improvements based on experience and as identified by the California Department of Finance during its regular agency audit.

### **Actions - January 2016 through June 2017**

- Work with applicants to develop high-quality, multi-benefit projects, utilizing technical experts and an application evaluation process to ensure that the highest-benefit projects are recommended for grants.
- Participate in a working group of Proposition 1 funding agencies to leverage other funding for high-benefit projects.
- Identify and actively solicit other funding to augment Proposition 1 funding, increasing the overall benefit of projects.
- Provide staff and grantee training to improve processes and procedures as determined through experience and audits.
- Develop and implement a grant project monitoring program to ensure long-term benefits of bond-funded grants are being realized.

## **Abandoned Mine Lands**

### ***Description***

The Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program area concerns legacy impacts from abandoned mines within the Region. AML features continue to contribute heavy sediment loads and toxins such as mercury to Sierra Nevada waterways, threatening fish, water quality, and the capacity of local water supplies and downstream storage facilities. In addition, sediment and toxins originating from AML features within the Region continue to spread with the flow of water into the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta and the San Francisco Bay.

SNC activities in this program area will support efforts to reduce the amount of sediments and toxins entering and moving through the Region's waterways, thereby reducing impacts to local and downstream fish populations, people, water supplies,

and storage facilities. Strategies undertaken within this program area to remediate AML legacy impacts support the goals of the WIP through restoration and protection of soils, waterways, meadows, and habitat within the Region, benefiting overall forest health.

### ***Statutory Goals Addressed***

#### Primary

- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

#### Secondary

- Provide increased opportunities for tourism and recreation.
- Assist the Regional economy through the operation of the SNC's program.

### ***Strategies and Actions***

#### Strategies

- Facilitate protection of the Region's resources by assisting in the development of a California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) policy reducing liability and monetary risks associated with acquisition of land impacted by AML.
- Contribute to the efforts of the California Abandoned Mine Land Agency Group, The Sierra Fund, the Delta Tributaries Mercury Council, and other partners to educate policy-makers and identify and pursue AML remediation work.
- Explore funding opportunities, and provide information and assistance regarding these opportunities to entities seeking to implement AML cleanup projects.

#### Actions - January 2016 through June 2017

- Participate on the advisory team created by the CNRA to establish an agency-wide due diligence policy.
- Continue to participate and provide input in partner efforts and activities focused on legacy AML issues.
- Identify opportunities and resources, including event sponsorships and relevant science, to support partners' efforts to educate decision-makers and others about legacy mining impacts.
- Continue to monitor current and past SNC grant project outcomes and developments in order to furnish policy-makers and partners with valuable information to use in the pursuit of AML remediation.
- Stay apprised of potential project funding needs through participation in AML-focused agency and other partners' organized efforts, and assist in identifying and compiling funding resources for specific projects.

## **Regional Recreation and Tourism**

### ***Description***

The tourism industry is one of the top two economic sectors for the majority of the Sierra Nevada's 22 counties. Outdoor recreation is a key driver of visitation, and contributes to the overall quality of life for residents of the Region. SNC's Regional Recreation and Tourism Program will focus on positioning the Region as a top tourism destination by helping to develop sustainable outdoor recreation activities and authentic visitor experiences. This program will develop tools to help visitors and residents alike enjoy and protect the Region's natural and cultural resources while growing the economic vitality of the Region.

### ***Statutory Goals Addressed***

#### **Primary**

- Provide increased opportunities for tourism and recreation.
- Protect, conserve, and restore the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources.
- Aid in the preservation of working landscapes.
- Assist the Regional economy through the operation of the SNC's program.
- Enhance public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public.

#### **Secondary**

- Reduce the risk of natural disasters, such as wildfires.
- Protect and improve water and air quality.

### ***Strategies and Actions***

#### **Strategies**

- Forge strategic partnerships among Regional recreation interest groups and communities to identify opportunities for the development and implementation of sustainable recreation infrastructure and experiences such as trails, facilities, and enhanced interpretive and educational projects.
- Where feasible, support collaborative processes that develop sustainable recreation strategies in order to meet the recreation demands in the Region.
- In compliance with the existing Memorandum of Understanding, continue support for the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project to help promote the Region's cultural and heritage resources.
- Build local and Regional capacity through researching and identifying increased funding opportunities to support sustainable recreation and tourism development throughout the Sierra Nevada.
- Support ongoing training, education, and promotion efforts to develop additional agritourism producers in the Region.

#### **Actions - January 2016 through June 2017**

- Compile a list of relevant funding resources for sustainable recreation and tourism

development projects, and work with partners to identify and select projects to connect with potential implementation funding sources.

- Continue to participate in key stakeholder discussions, strategy sessions, and activities in the Region in order to identify opportunities to integrate sustainable recreation efforts into the WIP.
- Work with the National Forest Foundation to develop further its sustainable recreation initiative through collaboration with key stakeholders in the Region.
- Identify best practice models for sustainable recreation development and stewardship projects to share throughout the Region.
- Work with Visit California and other agencies and organizations in support of further developing rural tourism, sustainable recreation programs, and marketing opportunities throughout the Region.
- Collaborate with the UC Davis Small Farm Center and other sources to develop training sessions with potential agritourism and geotourism producers in the Region as a follow-up to the 2015 Agritourism Summit.

## **Related Program Activities and Rapid-Response Projects**

In the course of implementing the four programs described above, SNC staff will carry out activities in the following areas. In addition, staff may sometimes implement actions in these areas that are considered important for SNC effectiveness, but that are not covered within the four program areas:

- Science and Research
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Tribal Relations
- Funding Development

Furthermore, the SNC periodically undertakes quick-turnaround projects in response to opportunities to further its mission. Examples of these might be compiling research, or developing story maps or fact sheets that are especially timely. Due to the nature of these opportunities, the SNC has termed them rapid-response projects and anticipates doing more of them as the need arises. Any such projects would be consistent with adopted programs and strategies, and would likely involve work in the areas of science, GIS, tribal relations, or funding development.

## **Other Activities**

Under the previous Strategic Plan, the SNC initiated a number of activities that are still underway. Work will continue on these activities under this Strategic Plan as well, and limited resources are allocated to carry out these functions:

- Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative Coordinating Council
- Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council
- Great Sierra River Cleanup

The SNC is also involved in a few new activities that it anticipates allocating minor resources to:

- Sierra Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Partnership – Sierra Business Council
- Resilient Lands and Waters: California Headwaters Program
- National Disaster Resilience Competition

## **Long-Term Effectiveness of the SNC**

The SNC plans to continue the following activities related to enhancing its long-term effectiveness:

- Actively pursue new and enhanced funding streams in support of the SNC, including existing and potential opportunities.
- Work with better-funded state agencies to bring a higher proportion of State funding to support projects in the Sierra.
- Investigate potential fee-for-service opportunities with other organizations, or other potential new sources of income.
- Improve the SNC's visibility and publicize its work with decision-makers and the public to improve knowledge of its program successes and mission.
- Execute agency operations related to policy, education, and communications; legislative activity; and administrative projects.

## **Unforeseen Circumstances**

The SNC will continue to consider new developments and changing circumstances. If necessary, staff will draft changes to this Plan, and bring them to the Governing Board for consideration.