

Background

In September 2011, the Board adopted a Strategic Plan which established objectives for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) within five areas of focus and laid out the strategies the organization would employ in meeting those objectives. The areas of focus included:

- Healthy Forests
- Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands
- Watershed Protection and Restoration
- Promotion of Sustainable Tourism and Recreation
- Long-term Effectiveness of the SNC

Annual Action Plans have been used to identify the specific initiatives and activities planned for the year, based on available resources and existing opportunities and conditions. The Board approved the most recent Action Plan in June 2014.

Also in June 2014, the Board directed staff to refocus and increase efforts related to healthy forests in recognition of the dire conditions and urgent need for action in many of the forests in the Sierra Nevada. Per that direction, staff developed the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) Action Plan which was approved by the Board in September 2014. In addition, the Board approved the Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) at the March 2015 meeting, building upon the SNFCI Action Plan.

In June 2015, staff obtained approval from the Board for SNC to continue to operate under the 2014-15 Action Plan through the end of calendar year 2015. Staff also solicited Board and public comment on a draft proposal for revising the Strategic Plan and developing a new Action Plan.

Current Status

Since the June 2015 Board meeting, staff has developed a Draft 2016-19 Strategic Action Plan (SAP), [Attachment A](#). The draft was reviewed with the Board committee, which is comprised of Boardmember John Brissenden and Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery, appointed at the last Board meeting.

The complete SAP to be presented to the Board in December will have two components, a 2016-19 Strategic Plan and an Action Plan comprised of specific actions to be implemented from January 2016 to June 2017. The current draft SAP contains the Strategic Plan component and reflects the prioritization of the Sierra Nevada WIP and the new Proposition 1 Grant Program. The 2016-17 Action Plan will be developed following Board review and input on the draft Strategic Plan component.

Four programs are proposed as the focus of SNC efforts from January 2016–June 2019:

- Watershed Improvement Program
- Grant Program
- Abandoned Mine Lands
- Regional Recreation and Tourism

Notable changes from the SNC's 2011 Strategic Plan include:

- While four programs are proposed, the WIP and the Proposition 1 Grant Program are clearly identified as the top priorities. Abandoned Mine Lands, and Regional Recreation and Tourism will continue to have some level of resources dedicated to them, but are not viewed in the same way as WIP and Proposition 1.
- The Strategic Plan component identifies certain activities that are ongoing, and as such, are important to call out, but do not rise to the level of the programs. These activities are addressed in a new section entitled "Ongoing Activities."

For each of the four programs, draft strategies have been developed. Each strategy reflects an approach taken to achieve a [statutory goal](#) associated with one of the proposed programs. Following is an overview of the proposed strategies for each program; see [Attachment A](#) for additional details.

- **Watershed Improvement Program (WIP)**
 - **Policy**
 - Utilize current, relevant science to inform and engage partners and key policy decision makers, and to impact policy and investment decisions at the state and federal levels in multiple arenas.
 - Work with partners to identify and complete necessary, relevant scientific research to inform activities under the WIP and to effect necessary policy modifications.
 - Develop and maintain relationships with legislators, key decision-makers, state agencies, local governments, and partners in support of sound, science-based policy decisions that benefit the WIP and the Sierra Nevada Region.
 - Actively participate in the development and implementation of state policy, and administrative and planning processes that generate policy. Ensure that the WIP is a strategic component of the resulting plans.
 - Utilize the results of the WIP watershed-by-watershed analyses to identify policy opportunities that address local needs and issues.
 - Identify and pursue policy opportunities that result in funding to benefit the WIP and the Sierra Nevada Region.

- **Restoration Implementation**
 - Phase 1
 - ❖ In close partnership with federal, state, and local agencies, and diverse stakeholders, identify and consolidate information in the WIP Regional Strategy describing the background conditions and recommendations for overarching regional needs in the issue areas of water reliability and quality, fire/forest health, greenhouse gas emissions reduction and long-term carbon sequestration/storage, and habitat/biodiversity. The Regional Strategy will help to engage a wide range of partners and serve as a basis for more localized efforts.
 - ❖ Utilize local knowledge and partnerships to identify key data, stakeholders, plans, initiatives, collaborative efforts, restoration needs, and barriers to restoration that cover a range of watershed health issues.
 - ❖ Maximize efficiency of project planning and implementation through a coordinated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) environmental review process.
 - ❖ Work with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and other federal, state, and private landowners to assess restoration needs and costs required at the watershed level to achieve a state of resilience.
 - Phase 2
 - ❖ Engage key partners in the WIP at the watershed level, including doing watershed-level and specific project planning needed for restoration on all lands. This strategy includes estimating project costs, with the goal of matching existing funding and identifying new project funding sources.
 - ❖ Cultivate new funding streams for restoration projects in the Sierra Nevada.
 - ❖ Identify and act upon the policy areas impacting the increase of pace and scale of restoration in the watersheds of the Sierra Nevada for which we have a wider window of opportunity for influence.
 - ❖ Work with partners to identify and develop an information hub where the most current regional and watershed-level information can be found regarding key policy issues affecting the pace and scale of restoration of our watersheds, funding opportunities and existing investments in watershed health, partners and collaborative opportunities, and specific restoration projects in need of funding.
- **Funding**
 - Coordinate with other agencies to strategically fund projects under the WIP.
 - Work with other agencies on grant guidelines to ensure regional resource needs and issues are addressed.

- Increase effectiveness of funding programs by addressing prerequisites such as CEQA/NEPA compliance.
 - Provide user-friendly information about grant opportunities to WIP partners.
 - Provide technical assistance to increase capacity of regional partners to apply for and administer grant funds.
 - Track funding coming to the Region by types of funders, types of projects funded, and amounts leveraged or matched.
 - Expand and secure funding from new sources to support the SNC and the programs of the WIP.
- **Communication**
 - Develop messaging and materials that:
 - ❖ Increase awareness among policymakers and the public about the important role the Sierra Nevada Region plays in California's overall economic, social, and environmental health and well-being.
 - ❖ Convey the risks the Sierra Nevada Region is currently facing, and explain the consequences of not restoring the Region 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 our message, including both traditional and new media, to engage our 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 policymakers 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 our target audience.
 - **Grant Program**
 - **Proposition 84 Wrap-Up**
 - Allocate remaining Proposition 84 funding to Rim Fire restoration projects.
 - Close out remaining projects.
 - Implement grant process improvements as identified by the California Department of Finance during its regular agency audit.
 - Evaluate the overall effect of the Proposition 84 Grant Program, quantifying the cumulative impact on the SNC Region.

- **Proposition 1 Implementation**
 - Support the WIP and state plans such as the California Water Action Plan by funding:
 - ❖ 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 Proposition 1 funding by coordinating with other Proposition 1 funding agencies and leveraging other sources of funds in order to implement landscape-scale projects.
- **Abandoned Mine Lands (AML)**
 - Facilitate protection of the Region's resources by assisting in the development of a California Natural Resources Agency 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 policymakers 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.
- **Regional Recreation and Tourism**
 - 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.
 - Build upon efforts like those of the Eastern Sierra Recreation Collaborative to facilitate collaborative processes that develop sustainable recreation strategies among gateway communities and land management agencies in order to meet the recreation demands in the Region.
 - Continue a level of 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.

In addition to the four programs described above, the SNC proposes to continue work on a number of activities that were initiated under previous Strategic Plans, and engage in the following activities related to the long-term effectiveness of the organization:

- 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.
- Investigate potential fee-for-service opportunities with other organizations, or other potential new sources of income.
- Improve the SNC's visibility, and publicize our work with decision-makers and the public to improve knowledge of our program successes and our mission.

The draft SAP is being presented to the Board and public for review and comment. To facilitate today's discussion of the document, staff have prepared a few questions for consideration (see attached [Presentation](#)).

Next Steps

Staff will review input from the Board and the public with the Board committee, and incorporate appropriate changes into the Draft SAP. Staff will solicit input from stakeholders, partners, and the public on the Strategic Plan component and will make the Action Plan component available for a two-week public comment period prior to the December Board meeting. Staff will bring the complete Draft SAP to the Board in December 2015 for possible approval.

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.