

### **Background**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) staff continues tracking and engaging in a variety of legislative/policy, outreach/ communications, and scientific research activities with an end goal of educating California decision makers about the value of the Sierra Nevada Region to the state. As wildfire season heats up, staff continues to look for new, innovative ways to share broader Regional messages about current Sierra conditions; the long-term impacts that large, damaging wildfires have on the state's air, water, wildlife, climate, and economy; and the dire need for California to increase the amount of funding available to protect these valuable resources.

### **Current Status**

#### **Legislation**

The two-year legislative session ended on August 31, 2016. Staff has been tracking numerous bills, which at the time of this writing were still making their way through the legislative process. Of particular interest to the Sierra Nevada Region and the SNC are the following:

#### *Park Bond:*

- AB 2444 (Garcia) would expend \$3.12 billion for natural resources and parks throughout California. Should the current version of the bill (as of this writing) and a subsequent bond pass, the SNC would receive \$52.5 million - \$22.5 million from a pot of money identified for Conservancies and \$30 million from a pot of money identified for forest health and fuels reduction work. It is likely that there will be additional changes to the bill and its fate remains uncertain. The Governor's office continues to express serious concerns over the potential of additional state indebtedness via public bonds. Based on the most recent information, should the bill make it through the legislature, it is likely to be on the 2018 ballot rather than this year's.

#### *Source Watersheds:*

- AB 2480 (Bloom) would identify the importance of maintaining the reliability of California's water supply by financing the maintenance and repair of watersheds on the same basis as other water collection and treatment infrastructure as well as, to the extent feasible, ensure that the maintenance and repair activities eligible are limited to certain forest ecosystem management activities. Unfortunately, the bill in its current form includes only the source watersheds that supply the major watersheds supplying the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project. A number of SNC partners have been advocating for the bill to be expanded to include all California source watersheds.

#### *Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund:*

- SB 1386 (Wolk) would protect and manage natural and working lands as a key strategy in meeting the state's greenhouse gas reduction goals. The bill would require all state agencies, departments, boards, and commissions to consider this policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations,

expenditures, or grant criteria relating to the protection and management of natural and working lands.

### **UC Berkeley Distinguished Visitors Program**

The UC Berkeley Distinguished Visitors Program (DVP) provides support to bring a diverse portfolio of distinguished statesmen, scientists, and other leaders to the Berkeley community. This year, program directors have opted to include the SNC in the planning process, incorporating more “real world” issues in the program, aimed at identifying, and possibly implementing, innovative policy responses to some of the major issues being dealt with in the Region.

The DVP will pay for visits with leaders who have exemplified a “pivot” type effort on a high-stakes problem: from a conventional approach to a more innovative – and perhaps not initially intuitive – approach. This innovation might include approaches such as new partnerships, reapplication of otherwise conventional legal tools, implementing a challenging financing mechanism, or refocusing the problem.

Staff is working with the DVP Coordinator, Robert Ewing, to use this opportunity to further the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP).

### **California Headwaters Partnership**

The SNC staff has continued to work with U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Region 5 to provide information to the federal Resilient Lands and Waters (RLW) Initiative team. The highlight of this effort was presenting at an August meeting with Jonathan Steele, the new RLW lead from the Department of Interior (DOI). Steele, who is based in Washington, D.C., traveled to Sacramento to learn about Regional RLW efforts, so the meeting offered an overview of the CA Headwaters Partnership as well as a discussion of challenges, lessons learned, and best practices regarding our large landscape restoration efforts in the Region. The meeting also included a number of public and nonprofit agency stakeholders.

Other activities since the last Board meeting included presenting information during a June conference call with other partners and coordinating with the USFS to update materials for distribution at the recent World Conservation Congress (hosted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature), where Forest Service staff highlighted the CA Headwaters Partnership during an RLW panel discussion. The next action item for the CA Headwaters Partnership will be to submit a brief final report to the DOI by early October.

### **California Adaptation Forum**

The California Adaptation Forum is scheduled in Long Beach, CA, on September 7-8. The SNC will participate in one of the panels emphasizing rural areas, and the importance of upper watersheds and forests for the adaptive capacity of the entire state. SNC’s participation is a result of our active participation in the Sierra Climate Adaptation

and Mitigation Partnership (Sierra CAMP) and its umbrella group, the Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation (ARCCA).

### **Tours and Meetings**

SNC co-sponsored a tour with the California Forestry Foundation for legislators and their staff in the Truckee and Plumas County area. The focus of the tour was on the benefits of forest thinning and biomass utilization and the role forests play in storing carbon. A total of fourteen legislative staff members attended, representing both houses and both parties, as well as an urban-rural mix.

SNC hosted a couple of field tours over the summer to help educate decision makers about the importance of the Sierra Nevada Region. Those tours are described in more detail in the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Update ([Agenda Item IX](#)). During the tours, staff captured video and interviews that will be utilized to develop future outreach and communications products focused on forest health and carbon storage, wildfire risk, and the importance of incorporating Sierra forests in the state's long-term climate policies.

### **Outreach and Communications**

Following the USFS's aerial tree mortality survey in late May, the Communications Team produced a new tree mortality fact sheet (see [Attachment A](#)) for the Sierra, as well as a short [voice-over video](#), and a tree mortality web presence on the SNC website. The fact sheet highlights tree mortality numbers specific to the Sierra Nevada Region, provides information about the larger greenhouse gas implications of these dying forests, and promotes the need for increased restoration.

The SNC has been quoted in, or has provided background information for, several news stories on tree mortality including the July issue of the [Ag Alert](#), an online water blog called [Water Deeply](#), the [Reno News & Review](#), and the Mountain Democrat (August/September publication).

Staff has also been working with the video production crew from the Department of Water Resources to develop a short video on the effectiveness of forest thinning treatments. This video will feature fuels treatments in Calaveras County that helped to protect communities during the 2015 Butte Fire, and forest thinning work supported by SNC that has reduced tree mortality on Bureau of Land Management Lands. We anticipate releasing this video during Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week during the third week of September.

Staff also worked with the USFS communications team to release a new paper on greenhouse gas emissions from wildfires on National Forest Lands (see [Attachment B](#)). To support the release of the paper, SNC (Jim Branham) co-authored an op-ed with Regional Forester Randy Moore that was submitted to the Sacramento Bee for publication. At the time of this writing, staff is uncertain when the paper will actually be

published. A verbal update and copy of the op-ed will be provided if it is published before this meeting.

### **Great Sierra River Cleanup**

This year's Great Sierra River Cleanup will be held on Saturday, September 17, and will kick off the week-long [Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week](#). Last year, Assembly Member Brian Dahle authored Assembly Concurrent Resolution 22 which established the third week of September as "Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week." Staff is developing communications products that will highlight the importance of Sierra watersheds and the need for the WIP, and is organizing a tour which will be co-hosted by Placer County Water Agency. The tour will bring high-level state agency administrators, legislators, and legislative staff into the forest near Placer County to learn about restoring forests to protect water supply.

### **Social Media**

The SNC staff has been primarily utilizing social media to carry messages focused on current Sierra forest conditions and the long-term impacts large, damaging wildfires in those forests can have on state resources, focusing on telling these stories visually through videos, graphics, and photos. Social media continues to be an effective method for sharing these messages in these ways. The Forest Carbon Story Map that staff shared at the June Board meeting has received over 2,000 views, and our SNC Facebook page has reached over 1,000 page likes.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will continue to identify and track legislation of importance to the SNC as well as to implement outreach and communications activities in support of SNC programs and activities.

### **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.**