

Background

At its September 2010 meeting, the Board authorized the Executive Officer (EO) to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (Stewardship Council) and to establish a financial mechanism for the SNC to accept and manage reimbursement funds from the Stewardship Council for all costs associated with carrying-out the duties of the MOU and any subsequent agreements. The Board further authorized the EO to negotiate and enter into specific agreements, as needed, to perform the duties outlined in the MOU.

The MOU defines the roles and duties that may be performed by the SNC to monitor lands or easements donated to various organizations in the Sierra Nevada Region by the Stewardship Council and would guide the negotiation of specific contracts pertaining to: 1) the SNC serving as the covenant holder on watershed lands donated to the US Forest Service (USFS); and 2) the SNC carrying out certain other roles with respect to conservation easements on donated lands.

On September 16, 2010 the Stewardship Council board delegated authority to the Stewardship Council Executive Director to enter into the previously mentioned MOU with the SNC with the understanding that any subsequently negotiated contracts would be subject to Stewardship Council approval.

Current Status

In September 2011, SNC staff reported to the Board that negotiations with the Stewardship Council had stalled because of technical difficulties related to the process of transferring land to federal agencies. Since September, negotiations have progressed with two (2) donations of lands to the US Forest Service. The two units currently moving forward are the Deer Creek Unit (Tehama County) of 151 Acres to the Lassen National Forest; and the Kings River Unit (Fresno County) of 100 Acres to the Sequoia National Forest. It is anticipated that additional lands will be donated to the USFS in coming months. SNC staff is continuing discussions to prepare for the role as a permanent covenant holder. This role is dependent on assurances that the amount of lands donated will be adequate to justify the SNC's involvement and that all SNC efforts will be fully compensated.

SNC staff has confirmed its authority to accept reimbursement payments from the Stewardship Council as defined in the MOU and is formalizing the necessary financial mechanisms to complete transactions.

Next Steps

The SNC will continue to communicate with the Stewardship Council about progress on the pending USFS transfers and remains prepared to assist the process as outlined in the signed MOU. Any further actions will be reported to the SNC Board as they occur.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only; no formal action is needed by the Board at this time, although Board members are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.