

**Board Meeting Minutes**  
**December 7-8, 2011**  
**Hugh M. Burns Fresno State Building**  
**2550 Mariposa Mall, Room #1036**  
**Fresno, CA 93704**



**I. Call to Order**

Board Vice-Chair Bill Nunes called the meeting to order at 9:36 AM.

**II. Roll Call**

**Present:** Bill Nunes, Daniel Jiron, Linda Arcularius, Todd Ferrara, Bob Kirkwood, John Brissenden, Brian Dahle, Dick Pland, David Graber, and Tom Wheeler

**Absent:** BJ Kirwan, Ted Owens, Bob Johnston and Pedro Reyes

**III. Approval of September 8, 2011 Meeting Minutes (ACTION)**

There were no changes to the meeting minutes.

**Action:** Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Dahle seconded a motion to approve the September 8, 2011 Meeting Minutes. Boardmember Pland abstained from voting. The motion passed unanimously.

**IV. Public Comments**

Cindy Whelan, with the Sierra National Forest, thanked the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) for its work in the forest, and said she appreciates the efforts of SNC staff Mandy Vance and Elissa Brown for their collaborative work. Whelan said the Sierra National Forest is working very hard to provide sustainable national forests, and has worked with the SNC on 11 different grants. The SNC staff has assisted in securing \$65,000 in meadow restoration funds with the Coarsegold Resource Conservation District, which would not have been possible without the SNC staff. Whelan said she looks forward to continued work with the SNC staff and hope that the Board continues to support their efforts and support efforts together to increase capacity, include the community and to move forward with forest restoration.

**V. Board Chair's Report**

Vice-Chair Nunes announced that Board Chair Kirwan is in New York for the birth of her grandson, which is why she is not in attendance.

**VI. Election of Vice-Chair (Action)**

Vice-Chair Nunes said it had been his pleasure to serve as the Vice-Chair for the past year. Noting that his term is up, he asked for nominations for the next Vice-Chair.

**Action:** Boardmember Dahle moved and Boardmember Kirkwood seconded a motion to approve the nomination of Boardmember Linda Arcularius as Vice-Chair for 2012. The motion passed unanimously.

## **VII. Board Meeting Calendar**

SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham said the plan was to continue with the quarterly meeting format for the Governing Board meetings. If the schedule is approved, Branham said, next year the Board will have convened in every county within the Region. He added the Regional Council of Rural Counties meeting calendar was taken into consideration and that there were no conflicts.

**Action: Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Dahle seconded a motion to approve staff recommendation for the 2012 Board meeting schedule. The motion passed unanimously.**

## **VIII. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

### **A. Administrative Issues**

Administrative Services Chief Theresa Parsley said the state travel and hiring freeze has been lifted.

With respect to the Proposition 84 Grant program, Parsley reported that staff is very busy with the Healthy Forests grant application development phase; while at the same time area staff are conducting site visits. Combined with project close out site visits, staff will be doing a lot of travelling over the next few months. She said status reports on the 2011-12 grant round would be coming to the Board shortly, as well as a planning report on the upcoming Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands grant round.

Parsley said she is looking forward to closing out the contract for the "Easy Grants" software program. Additionally, more detail has been added to the Board's staff report as to appropriations, expenditures and balances for Proposition 84 grant funding.

Funding: The SNC was successful in gaining re-appropriation unspent Proposition 84 grant funds from previous years, according to Parsley. As of the end of October, the SNC expects to have approximately \$12 million available for award in the final two grant rounds. Parsley said the Board will be kept informed as those figures become more firm.

The Environmental License Plate Fund, the source of the SNC's operational funding, appears to remain stable at this time, according to Parsley. Facilities: The SNC has identified a great location for its Mariposa Office, one block off Main Street. Parsley said she is working with the Department of General Services to complete work on the lease and hope to be moved into the new site by Spring of 2012.

At the headquarters office in Auburn, the building owner is installing solar panels on the roof of SNC headquarters at no cost to the SNC, but energy cost savings will be passed on to the SNC. An energy savings tracking link will be provided on the SNC Web site.

B. Board Receptions

Branham raised a concern of a perception issue related to finding support for sponsors for Board meeting receptions. He welcomed any thoughts from the Board.

Boardmember Graber said the receptions are valued and would like to see them continue in any form. Boardmember Brissenden said he agrees with the awkwardness of finding sponsors, but values the experience of the receptions. He suggested a format be developed and brought to the Board.

Boardmember Dahle said the Supervisors should be more engaged in setting up receptions and not rely as much on the SNC staff.

Boardmember Kirkwood encouraged more Boardmembers to attend the receptions and the Board tours. Kirkwood said the exchange with the people on the tours and those working on the projects is very valuable.

Vice-Chair Nunes said it is hard to attend all the functions without spending two nights. Boardmember Arcularius agreed it would be good to have a format, but would like to have some guidance on what is allowable.

Branham said a guidance document will be provided at the March 2012 Board meeting and welcomed input from the Board relative to attendance and a format for the receptions. Arcularius said the receptions do not have to be elaborate; the purpose is to get together for the exchange of information and conversation.

C. 2011-12 Healthy Forests Grant Program Update

Branham introduced the update by reporting that SNC staff had done a great job of soliciting projects for this year's program, consistent with previous discussions with the Board.

Mt. Lassen Area Manager Bob Kingman provided the update and said the SNC's outreach efforts were so successful that the number of applications received doubled in this grant round. The SNC received 196 pre-applications from 122 entities, requesting \$25.5 million against approximately \$5 million of available funding. Of the 196 applications, Kingman said all but 13 were invited to submit a full application. Given this large number, the SNC is looking at its internal capacity to review and visit the full number of projects it is likely to engage.

Kingman said the predominant number of pre-applications received were for the reduction of fuel and fire hazards, and the next largest group was for forest improvement. He added that there were also 23 meadow restoration project pre-applications submitted.

Branham said there were a few issues he wanted to bring to the Board's attention. The first was the need for a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) "crosswalk" for federal applicants. He noted that the SNC had received more than 30 pre-applications submitted by federal agencies. He said the SNC is willing to act as a lead agency for "categorically exempt" projects under CEQA, but will not be able to do so for any projects beyond that designation. Branham reported that some federal project applications will be able to move forward as categorically exempt, but a larger subset will not likely meet the categorical exemption requirements, and no other CEQA agency will have standing as a lead agency. Given this set of circumstances, SNC will not be able to consider as many of these projects as it would like. Branham added SNC is trying to address this issue for the future.

Branham said local smaller organizations such as Fire Safe Councils may face the same challenge in providing enough information to meet a categorical exemption status under CEQA. At least one such organization has determined that it may have to withdraw their four pre-applications because of this issue. Branham noted per SNC Grant Guidelines, the CEQA compliance must be demonstrated as part of the full application, and the deadline is coming up too quickly for this to be resolved.

Boardmember Dahle asked if the counties could help resolve these issues with legislation. Branham said on the CEQA issue, it is possible, but it would be a little more difficult for NEPA.

Boardmember Jiron said in his role with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) he is willing to work with the Board and SNC to find a solution. Branham suggested one approach may be for the USFS to include the analysis required under CEQA while it is completing NEPA requirements. He stated this could help create the crosswalk between the two so federal agencies may not need to go back and address CEQA requirements later.

Boardmember Arcularius said that this issue came up on the "Digital 395" project on the east side of the Sierra and she has asked the groups involved in the project to report back and document the ways that NEPA and CEQA could be done together. She said she would provide that data when it becomes available.

As for grant funding, Branham noted from Parsley's report that approximately \$2 million more is now available than was originally estimated. He said staff could

work with a Board committee to suggest how the final available amount may be divided, and present those suggestions to the full Board at its next quarterly meeting.

Branham noted the final complicating issue in this grant round is the large volume of pre-applications received, which might make it challenging to get all evaluations completed in time for approval at the June 2012 Board meeting. If that turns out to be the case, he suggested an alternative might be to process most of the Category 1 projects in June in time for the work season and bring back the additional projects at the following Board meeting. He suggested the proposed Board Committee could guide staff on these issues, as a decision would have to be made before the next Board meeting.

Boardmembers Wheeler and Ferrara volunteered to serve on the Subcommittee and Boardmember Jiron volunteered to assist.

Boardmember Kirkwood suggested that the additional anticipated \$2 million should go to the Healthy Forests projects (the current grant round) noting the high number of applications and the need for the work in the forest.

#### D. South Subregion Report

Mt. Whitney Area Manager Julie Bear acknowledged and thanked the Sierra Foothill Conservancy for all their work on the tour and the reception from the previous day. She then introduced SNC staff Mandy Vance and Bobby Kamansky to present the report.

Kamansky gave an overview of the Subregion's population, demographics, wildlife, vegetation, forests, and geographic features. He noted the snowpack tends to last late into the summer season in this Subregion, as the peaks are very high. He added that Kings Canyon is one of the deepest canyons in the country.

Vance touched on the work the SNC has been doing in the Subregion through its grant program. She said there is a strong interest in education and interpretative projects as well as planning and site improvements. She added at least 11 grant applications were submitted from Fresno County for the current grant round, which is an improvement. Vance said there are a number of innovative projects in the Subregion. She singled out in particular the Willow Creek and Sierra Forest and Communities Collaborative (SFCC) projects.

Boardmember Wheeler noted that Vance does a great job in Madera County.

Boardmember Graber asked if the Subregion's capacity for putting together strong application packages has improved. Vance said it is too soon to determine until

the grant evaluations process moves forward. Kamansky added that the new pre-application process has helped to bring in more groups to the process. Vance reported that the SFCC emerged out of willingness to collaborate and make projects sustainable. She noted that the cross-cultural communications have been very good. It serves the watershed that includes the communities of Oakhurst and North Fork.

SNC staff member Elissa Brown reported on the possible development of a small biomass power facility on the North Fork Mill site. She said when the mill closed in 1994 it devastated the community. However, the land was given to the North Fork Community Economic Development Council. The SNC helped write a grant to do a feasibility analysis on the cost/benefits of operating a biomass plant at North Fork, and the analysis could be used as guidance for other such efforts around the Sierra.

Based on this report, it was suggested the North Fork could benefit from a one-megawatt “heat-and-power” facility on the historic North Fork Mill site. Such a facility would provide economic value to the biomass taken off the forest, and the facility itself would provide an economic value to the community. It would also reduce current “pile-and-burn” practice, which causes air pollution.

Boardmember Wheeler thanked Bear, Brown, Vance and Kamansky for their support and guidance for the collaborative and for progress at the North Fork Mill site. He said it has been very positive to see people from all aspects of forest management come together to create a better relationship. He feels it is a great model for the Sierra Nevada and that he has been getting emails and phone calls in support of the project. Wheeler noted a recent report that indicated that when the forest is thinned and managed well, the water yield is 10-30 percent higher.

Branham said the SNC views the North Fork Mill site as an “anchor facility” for biomass, saw logs, and a kiln to dry the wood. He added his appreciation for the positive feedback he has received for the efforts of SNC staff.

**IX. Deputy Attorney General’s Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

Christine Sproul, Deputy Attorney General, reported that Governor Brown has signed Senate Bill 226. The bill changed Public Resources Code Section 21084, to protect projects, which are categorically exempt under CEQA from being affected later if someone has a concern about greenhouse gas emissions.

**X. Land Conservation and Wildlife Habitat System Indicators Report (ACTION)**

Assistant Executive Officer Joan Keegan reviewed with the Board their previous actions, adopting a set of 19 system indicators that help the SNC and others understand the conditions of the Sierra and better advocate for work throughout the Region. The first report on demographics was presented in September. Reports on

water and air quality, climate, agricultural land and the forest will be presented at future Board meetings.

Keegan introduced Elizabeth van Wagtendonk, Mt. Whitney Area Representative to present the work completed on Land Conservation and Wildlife Habitat indicators. Van Wagtendonk said the GIS data used to help map these lands came from three data sets: California Protected Area Database (CPAD), Green Info Network and the Department of Fish and Game. Van Wagtendonk summarized the report for the Board and answered various questions related to the limitations of the available data, ownership and fragmentation issues, and the challenges of obtaining conservation easement information. Van Wagtendonk said the next steps include posting information on the Web site and over time the SNC would bring in and share new sources of data and additional details.

Boardmember Kirkwood suggested that this report may want to emphasize the acres of lands conserved by ownership, noting that SNC is not interested in adding to the list of publicly owned lands for tax and other reasons, rather that SNC's target is the number of private lands under conservation easement.

Boardmember Arcularius said she wanted to be sure that if future parcel easement information is available, that the SNC would not post "red stars" on these private landowner's parcels of land.

Boardmember Brissenden suggested that the Assessor's Association of California may be a source of future information. Van Wagtendonk indicated that we had attempted to get information from each county's assessor, but that proved to be very expensive.

Boardmember Graber said that he feels the project is very valuable. He asked if there is an error level in the data. Van Wagtendonk responded that there is no error level specified for this data, but cautioned anyone using it to understand that it is coarse and represents a statewide/regional scale, so should not be applied on a smaller level.

Boardmember Dahle said he was concerned about the limits and potential for error with this data and would like that noted in the report.

Boardmember Graber asked if the data had been peer-reviewed; Van Wagtendonk responded that it had not, but reminded the Board that all of this data had come from other sources and was not original.

**Action: Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Brissenden seconded a motion to approve the second System Indicators Report. The motion passed unanimously.**

**XI. 2012-13 Action Plan (INFORMATIONAL)**

Keegan said the SNC is implementing actions from the 2012-13 Action Plan, but that due to current grants work-related workload, the specific Action Plan will not be ready for Board review until the March meeting.

Boardmember Brissenden asked for an update on the Statewide Conservancy Summit Keegan recently attended. Keegan reported the Delta Conservancy coordinated this Summit and Natural Resources Secretary John Laird attended, as did the Deputy Directors of the other organizations. Keegan said it was a worthwhile meeting, with open discussion. She added that there was some discussion about “life after bond money” and that it was good to realize that the SNC has a lot of other work it is involved in beyond bond fund distribution. This was an open forum where the Conservancies were able to share what was and was not working for them. Other Conservancies were very interested in what the SNC is doing, according to Keegan.

**XII. 2012-13 Preservation of Ranches and Agricultural Lands Grant Program Update (INFORMATIONAL)**

Mt. Whitney Area Manager Julie Bear said SNC is revising its Grant Guidelines for the next grant cycle and will be doing outreach to better understand needs in the Region. There is about \$5 million available for projects focused on maintaining the viability of agricultural lands and ranches in the Sierra. Projects will also need to directly benefit, or result in the protection of, watersheds and align with Proposition 84 funding requirements.

Preliminary examples include stream and meadow restoration, riparian fencing, conservation easements, and invasive weed removal. Bear said the SNC will seek input from different organizations and partners who are connected to ranch and agricultural lands. An upcoming opportunity of note is the Rangeland Coalition Conference, January 19-20 in Davis. The SNC will be hosting an information gathering opportunity at the Conference. Bear noted information on the conference will be put on the SNC Web site.

Boardmember Kirkwood asked if we had any indication of the preliminary interest level for this round of grants. Bear feels that this round will be more modest because this is an area that we have not been working in as actively or long. Boardmember Nunes feels SNC will be surprised by the number of applications received.

**XIII. Updates on Various SNC Activities (INFORMATIONAL)**

**A. Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)**

Sustainable Initiatives Coordinator Kim Carr said a big part of the SNFCI program is working with the local collaboratives, gaining support from diverse stakeholders, so that work can be done out in the forest. She identified several local collaboratives in the Sierra including the following: Burney-Hat Creek, Yosemite-

Stanislaus Solutions in Tuolumne County, the Amador-Calaveras Consensus, and the Sierra Forest and Community Collaborative.

Carr pointed out that in the northern Sierra, some saw mill infrastructure exists, but much of it is idle. Further south, very little infrastructure remains.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council continues to target work being done by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), including the Forest Plan revisions. A Coordinating Council working group is meeting with the USFS on “intelligent design” ideas for projects in the forest to integrate a balanced revenue stream, work with NEPA barriers and stewardship contracts, and to continue building on the efforts of strong collaboratives.

In terms of funding, Carr noted that federal budgets are declining and the SNC is working with other to identify new revenue sources to conduct the work. Part of that work, she said, includes policies and new technologies to utilize the biomass in the forest, reduce the transportation costs, create local jobs, and meet the “triple bottom line” that is critical to the mission. The SNC is also looking at quantifying the environmental benefits, looking at the opportunities within the ecosystem services, determining benefits for the downstream users, and how could they engage by investing in some of the headwaters restoration efforts.

Boardmember Jiron said he enjoyed working with the SNFCI Coordinating Council. One of the tools USFS provides is long-term stewardship contract solutions, and Congress is working on that. He also said the new USFS “Planning Rule” document would be out “soon.”

Boardmember Wheeler said he appreciated Jiron’s remarks and added that stewardship contracting is very important.

**B. Great Sierra River Cleanup Final Report**

Branham said the event was a success again this year and applauded the efforts of Coordinator Brittany Juergenson and Student Assistant Candice Heinz. He said this has become a signature event for the SNC and that an East Bay area legislator participated as a sponsor this year. Next year’s event is September 15 and Branham urged the Board to participate.

**C. California State Water Plan Report Update**

Branham reported the SNC is represented by Program Manager Kerri Timmer, who will be working with key partners in developing the “Mountain Counties” portion of this report. This is a great opportunity to tell the story as it relates to the Sierra, including the need for investment. Timmer is also involved in some of the other issues that have been identified, including land use, sustainability and finance. This report may become a key document for decision makers around

legislation and funding. Branham said the SNC might need some support from Boardmembers on portions of the report.

The SNC is also tracking the Delta Plan, which has huge implications to the Delta and beyond. Staff is in a tracking mode on this plan. Kathy Mannion from RCRC is very involved with the water plan and will be a helpful source in assisting with tracking of the Plan.

D. Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council Update

Branham says it looks like PG&E's Stewardship Council is ready to donate a number of parcels to the USFS, which would involve the SNC as defined in an Memorandum Of Understanding adopted previously by the Board. Authority was delegated by the Board to the SNC to move forward with this process. The SNC is ready and willing to work on these as long as compensation is provided.

**XIV. Boardmember Comments**

Boardmember Dahle acknowledged and thanked outgoing Boardmembers Pland and Nunes for their contributions and service to the SNC and presented them with backpacks.

**XV. Public Comments**

Kent Smith, North Central Regional Manager with the Department of Fish and Game reported on a "success story" relative to the collaborative efforts in the Delta, which have lead to approximately 20,000 salmon returning to the Mokelumne River, downstream from the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group's (ACCG) forest initiatives. Smith said these kinds of efforts the SNC is supporting such as the ACCG are extremely valuable in forming collaboratives, not just in the Sierra, but elsewhere.

**XVI. Adjournment**

Vice-Chair Nunes adjourned the meeting at 12:10 PM, stating the next meeting will be held March 7-8, 2012, in Red Bluff.