

Background

Under Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Governing Board direction, SNC policy and outreach efforts focus on identifying, tracking, and pursuing legislative and state and federal policy opportunities to implement the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP). SNC's policy and outreach work is geared towards educating legislators and other key decision makers about the importance of the Region to the health and well-being of the state; to ensure sound, science-based policy decisions are supported; and appropriate investment is made in the Sierra Nevada Region. This is done by understanding the latest scientific studies on forestry, watershed health, and other relevant issues, utilizing the recommendations and outcomes of that research to inform policy recommendations, and sharing those recommendations and outcomes through our outreach efforts. Developing and maintaining relationships with legislators and their staff, state and federal agencies, local governments, Regional partners, the research community, and traditional and non-traditional media contacts are also key to the success of the SNC's policy and outreach efforts.

Current Status

SNC Board Legislative Liaisons

Signed in 2015, AB 985 gave the SNC the statutory ability to seek appointment of two senators and two assembly members to serve as liaisons to the SNC, providing insight, guidance, and leadership on issues important to the Region and the people. In September 2018, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 2849 into law which expands on AB 985 by requiring that at least one of each house's legislative liaisons come from a district outside the Sierra Nevada Region. At the time of this report, staff is working through the appointment process to identify and confirm legislative liaisons.

Legislation Update

Staff continues to track legislation that could have an impact on the programs and activities of the SNC and, where appropriate, engage in discussions with proponents and partners to inform the development of legislation. Staff has identified the following bills of interest, with the caveat that specific bill language may change significantly as the legislative session unfolds:

- SB 45 "Wildfire, Drought, and Flood Protection Bond Act of 2020" (Allen, Los Angeles). This bill would authorize the issuance of bonds to finance projects to restore fire damaged areas; reduce wildfire risk; create healthy forest and watersheds; reduce climate impacts on urban areas and vulnerable populations; protect water supply and water quality; protect rivers, lakes, and streams; reduce flood risk; protect fish and wildlife from climate impacts; improve climate resilience of agricultural lands; and protect coastal lands and resources.
- SB 25 "California Environmental Quality Act: qualified opportunity zones" (Caballero, Merced/Madera/Fresno/etc.) This bill would allow for expedited review and appeal procedures under CEQA for projects located in qualified Opportunity Zones (OZ) that are funded, in whole or in part, by qualified opportunity funds, or by moneys from California Climate Investments and

allocated by the Strategic Growth Council. By expediting the environmental review process, this bill could incentivize investment in biomass and wood product infrastructure in the Sierra Nevada Region that are sited in OZs.

Engagement with the New Administration

On Tuesday, January 8, 2019, Governor Newsom hosted a press conference in Colfax, CA where he announced actions his administration would take around wildfires and emergency preparedness. Governor Gavin Newsom indicated that his administration would be focused primarily on public safety and emergency planning by providing more resources for communication technology and alert systems, supporting the health and wellness of first responders and their families, installing infrared cameras and remote sensing technology, and funding fuels reduction projects. Staff met with Newsom's newly appointed senior advisor on emergency preparedness and management in late January and continues to look for ways to help educate and support the Governor's staff and policy development.

Governor Newsom's budget proposes an investment of \$415 million to improve the health of the state's forestlands and enhance CAL FIRE's fire prevention capabilities including:

- \$213.6 million for increasing fire prevention (this includes \$200 million from the \$1B in GGRF funding allocated through SB 901), including completion of more fuel reduction projects through prescribed fire and implementing new SB 901 policies
- \$120.8 million for enhancing aviation resources
- \$64.4 million for expanding firefighting surcharge capacity
- \$6.6 million to support emergency responders
- \$9.7 million for improving use of technology to prevent and respond to wildfires

The budget also includes \$31.3 million from the General Fund to backfill wildfire-related property tax revenue losses for cities, counties, and special districts. This includes \$11.5 million to backfill wildfire-related property tax revenue losses for cities, counties, and special districts in Butte, Lake, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Shasta and Siskiyou counties for losses estimated to be incurred in 2019-20 as a result of the 2018 wildfires, and \$16.1 million to backfill wildfire-related property tax revenue losses for cities, counties, and special districts in Butte County for losses estimated to be incurred in 2020-21 and 2021-22 due to the 2018 Camp Fire. An additional backfill amount for Butte and Lake counties was included assuming that the magnitude of the fire damage these counties experienced will require additional time to reconstruct the impacted properties and restore them to the property tax rolls.

Governor Newsom also signed two executive orders of interest:

- EO-N-05-19 directs CAL FIRE, within 45 days and in consultation with other state agencies, to come up with a prioritization strategy for regulatory, administrative, and policy changes or waivers to protect rural communities in high fire risk areas. In his press conference, Newsom directed CAL FIRE to use the best available science when identifying high-hazard communities and consider the mobility risks and socio-economic issues of towns located in high-risk areas. He also directed CAL FIRE to address CEQA constraints and provide recommendations for programmatic Environmental Impact Reports that could help increase the pace and scale of work on the ground.
- EO-N-04-19 calls for the development of a new procurement method for technology and innovation products that provide innovative solutions to the state's wildfire crisis.

Staff will continue to monitor and engage in the new administration's activities as appropriate.

Great Sierra River Cleanup (GSRC)

SNC gathers and shares data on the types and amounts of trash collected during each Great Sierra River Cleanup event. Last September, SNC was asked by El Dorado County Community Development Services to provide data reported for the county to help the department demonstrate their progress towards meeting new requirements under the State Water Resources Control Board's Storm Water [Trash Implementation Program](#). Theresa Burgess, GSRC Project Coordinator, is in the process of compiling county-specific data for all counties in the SNC Region and sharing that information with other county departments who may also want to utilize the data to demonstrate progress towards meeting the new program requirements.

This year, the Great Sierra River Cleanup will be held on Saturday, September 21, 2019.

Summary of SNC's 2018 Social Media Activity

In 2018, the SNC saw an increase in social media followers across all platforms. SNC's videos, animations, and live stream broadcasts and their captions played a key role in attracting attention and new followers to SNC accounts. In 2018, SNC increased page like on Facebook by 17 percent, followers on Twitter by 34 percent, and followers on Instagram by 190 percent. SNC's activity on Instagram had been very minimal prior to 2018 but staff noticed that SNC's target audience was beginning to use the platform more heavily. In an effort to connect more with our target audience, SNC became more active on Instagram. Staff continues to utilize SNC's social media platforms to share relevant science, promote and connect with current events, and amplify the reach of SNC's "voice."

Strategic Plan

Both the Strategic and Action plans have been approved and finalized. As of January 1, 2019, the electronic versions were posted on the SNC website. Printed versions of the Strategic Plan and the Annual Report were completed and ready for distribution mid-January. Staff also developed a distribution plan to make sure that all interested stakeholders and important decision makers receive a copy.

Staff is working to ensure that all stakeholders and partners who participated in the Regional Strategic Assessment conducted early last year are being notified of the availability of the plans and thanked for their participation.

Already this year, staff has begun or continued work on 31 of the 57 action items identified in the 18-month Action Plan. The management team and staff continue to work on plans for full implementation of the remaining 26 actions.

National Disaster Resiliency Competition (NDRC)

The SNC continues to play a coordinating role on the Forest and Watershed Health Program (FWHP) and the Biomass Utilization Facility (BUF) pillars of the National Disaster Resilience Competition Grant (NDRC) awarded to the state of California in January 2016.

At the direction of the SNC Board Chair, staff is preparing to host a tour of the Rim Fire area for SNC Board Members and the public, including visits to NDRC project locations, in late May 2019. More information on the tour will be posted on the SNC webpage once the details have been finalized.

In November and December 2018, the United States Forest Service (USFS) released requests for proposals for fuels reduction, biomass removal, and rangeland fence construction contracts to be funded by the grant. At the time of this writing, these contracts have not yet been awarded due to the federal government shutdown. In October and November 2018, USFS staff successfully implemented a 1,100-acre prescribed burn to eradicate invasive medusa head grass.

Phase 1 of the BUF pillar of the NDRC Grant is nearly complete. The Beck Group, a consultant hired by the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) and managed by SNC staff has completed an [economic feasibility study for the BUF project](#). At the time of this writing, SNC staff and the Beck Group are preparing to deliver the results of the feasibility study to the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors on February 5. In November 2018, SNC released a request for information to solicit information on potential projects to be funded under the BUF pillar. SNC received five responses from firms that are interested in developing a biomass utilization facility in Tuolumne County using NDRC funds. Staff is also working with HCD to finalize how projects will be funded under the program and expect the program to accept applications by summer 2019.

Forest Management Task Force Communications Workgroup

Staff attended the first meeting of the state Forest Management Task Force's communications workgroup. Participants included the California Natural Resources Agency, Caltrans, the California Air Resources Board, California Forestry Association, Sierra Pacific Industries, The Forest Foundation, American Forests, the University of California Cooperative Extension, Rural County Representatives of California, and The Nature Conservancy. Participants discussed shared messages and working together on a statewide forest health public outreach campaign.

Next Steps

The SNC staff will continue to identify opportunities to connect with incoming administration officials and explore partnership and policy opportunities that will support the implementation of the WIP. Staff will engage in discussions with partners and policy makers on legislative bills which could affect the SNC or its communities/partners from a planning, financial, and/or regulatory perspective, and will continue to identify opportunities to highlight Regional issues and needs to key policy and decision makers.

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.