

Background

The Central Subregion encompasses substantial portions of Yuba, Placer, and El Dorado Counties, and the entirety of Nevada County. This Subregion encompasses the largest concentration of people in the Region, with a population of 375,000 within the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) boundary. It is also the fastest growing Subregion. West to East, the Subregion stretches from the highly populated 'gold country' foothills, into significant Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) slopes of mixed conifer, and up into higher elevation National Forest land. All the counties of the Subregion have a substantial balance of private and public lands.

The Subregion contains all the branches of the American River Watershed, as well as, the Bear and Middle and South fork of the Yuba Watersheds on the western slope, and the Truckee River Watershed on the east side. These are critical watersheds for millions of downstream users. It is widely acknowledged that what takes place in the upper watershed has very distinct implications in terms of water quality and supply for those whose lives depend on Sierra Nevada water on a daily basis.

Two major routes (U.S. Highway 50 and Interstate 80) and 3 major Union Pacific Rail lines cross the Subregion connecting the Central Valley and Sacramento to Lake Tahoe and Reno. These routes provide the main access for the majority of traffic crossing the Sierra Nevada and are major corridors for tourism and commerce.

Current Status

The SNC is actively engaged in numerous activities throughout the Central Subregion. First and foremost among those activities is the SNC's Proposition 84 Grant Program, which has had a measureable impact in terms of watershed protection, as well as, raising awareness of the enormous amount of conservation opportunities and needs throughout the four county area.

To date, the SNC has invested over \$9,200,000 in the Subregion, supporting a range of projects consisting of forest management activities aimed at decreasing the risk of high-severity wildfire, invasive species eradication, rangeland improvements and preservation, water infrastructure planning and development, land conservation, trail and recreational facility improvements, wildlife habitat protection and abandoned mine remediation. All of these activities are creating economic opportunities for Sierra communities who have a long and lasting legacy of working to manage the myriad natural, cultural, and economic resources of the Subregion.

The Central Subregion has an extremely high concentration of abandoned mines and is impacted in several ways by the legacy effects of the gold rush era. A more detailed presentation on this topic will be presented to the Board during this meeting.

The four counties in the Central Subregion rely heavily on tourism as an economic anchor. Year-round recreational opportunities and attractions, including several of the world's largest ski resorts, help form the foundation of a tourism economy that generates \$1.6 billion in annual travel spending and supports more than 21,000 jobs.

The SNC works to promote recreation and tourism in the entire Sierra Nevada by partnering with the Sierra Business Council and National Geographic on the Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide Project (SNGT). The SNGT provides visitors from around the world Web site access to recreational, historical, and cultural attractions and local events. The site has been visited by more than 1.6 million viewers since its start in 2009.

In El Dorado County, the SNC has been working with the El Dorado County RCD to complete the Fannon Lake Restoration and Habitat Improvement Project, which rebuilt a reservoir that will provide water in a critical location for wildfire protection needs, as well as, providing forest treatments and habitat for wildlife and aquatic species. SNC funding has also led to forest health and water quality improvement projects at Camp Sacramento- located on the banks of the American River, and Sly Park's Jenkinson Lake reservoir, which provides clean drinking water to El Dorado County users. Other completed projects include a Fish Friendly Farming certification program, and land acquisition assistance for the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony, a historic farm and ranch settled by Japanese immigrants. Upcoming SNC projects in El Dorado County include fuel reduction assistance in the Caples Creek Watershed and restoration design for the Van Vleck meadow complex, a critical upper water storage and wildlife habitat area.

Placer County has been a hub of activity for the SNC relative to the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI). Placer County recently closed the public comment period on their Draft Environmental Impact Report for the proposed two-megawatt wood-to-energy biomass facility located on Highway 89 between Tahoe and Truckee. If this facility were to be constructed it could use between 40 to 50 bone dry tons of local forest-sourced biomass wood waste per day and power up to 2,000 homes. SNC funding has also supported several forest thinning projects aimed at protecting recreational resources and water quality in Placer County. Shaded fuel breaks at Hidden Falls Regional Park, the Harvego Bear River Preserve, the Auburn State Recreation Area, the Canyon View Preserve, and Squaw Valley Park will protect popular trails and sports facilities, and the adjacent Coon Creek, Bear River, Truckee River, and American River Watersheds.

SNC activities in Nevada County include funding of abandoned mine remediation projects such as the Combie Lake Mercury Remediation and Humbug Creek Sediment/Mercury Assessment-Remediation. SNC also contributes to forest health and fuel reduction activities through projects on public lands that are closely situated to populated areas, as well as projects that will help to restore native vegetation and restore meadow functions in riparian habitats. On Nevada County's east side of the Sierra, SNC projects work with the U.S. Forest Service to remove isolated populations of invasive weeds. SNC Staff continues to monitor and assist with the Nevada County Biomass Task Force and the U.S.D.A. Biomass Steering Committee, to research and develop biomass plants in the Central Sierra Subregion.

In Yuba County SNC has been a part of regular Yuba County Fire Safe and Watershed Council meetings. Grant funds have been awarded to support pre-project planning work and fuels thinning in the foothills of Yuba County. During the Healthy Forest grant round an award was made to complete the remaining 190 acres of a 438 acre shaded fuel break established to protect both the Feather River Watershed and the Yuba River Watershed.

Next Steps

The SNC will continue its engagement in collaborative processes taking place throughout the Subregion and support partnerships that will have real and lasting impacts on forest health, economic prosperity, and community vitality.

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.