

Background

The SNC is currently involved in two statewide initiatives focused on water, the Department of Water Resources' (DWR) California Water Plan Update 2013 (CWP) and the Delta Stewardship Council's Delta Plan. Our goal for participating in these initiatives is to help decision-makers more fully understand the complexities and value of the natural and cultural resources that come from the Sierra Nevada and better justify the need for additional investment to protect and enhance those resources, which are critical to the Region and the rest of the state.

- The California Water Plan, also known as Bulletin 160, is a statewide blueprint for water management. It provides information for decision-makers, water managers and other interested stakeholders for use in administering the state's considerable water-related resources. The SNC has been serving as the coordinator and lead author for the Mountain Counties Overlay (MCO) regional report, one of 12 region-specific reports that provide more detailed information on the major hydrologic regions of the state (The SNC Region is larger than the Mountain County Overlay area. It includes 7 additional counties: Modoc, Shasta, Tehama, Mono, Inyo, Tulare, and Kern Counties). We also sit on the 29-member State Agency Steering Committee charged with overseeing development of the California Water Plan Update.
- The Delta Plan is a legislatively mandated, legally enforceable plan designed to achieve the State's coequal goals of protecting and restoring the ailing Delta ecosystem and providing a more reliable water supply for California. While the focus of that plan is primarily on the Delta – as the distribution hub for much of the state's water – the SNC's involvement is a reminder that most of the water coming through the Delta originates in the Sierra.

Current Status

For the California Water Plan Update 2013, the SNC continues pulling together content for the Mountain Counties Overlay regional report which, along with the rest of the Water Plan Update, should be available for public review and comment in Spring 2013. Staff also worked with DWR to host a regional outreach forum for 40+ participants in different locations around the Mountain Counties area, where facilitated discussions highlighted issues and potential content for the regional report as well as other topics related to integrated water management in the Region.

The SNC also had its own Strategic Plan chosen from among a group of 183 other state agency plans to be featured in the main body (Volume 1) of Update 2013. Selection as a "Featured Plan" is significant because the policy perspectives and goals presented in featured plans are used to help shape the content and focus of the Update 2013 document. Some of the other agencies with featured plans include Caltrans, California Energy Commission, Delta Stewardship Council, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department of Water Resources, to name a few.

In terms of the Delta Plan, a final staff draft was presented to the Delta Stewardship Council in May. This final staff draft was the last in a series of six (SNC reviewed and provided comments on 3 of the 5 early drafts) presented to the Council over 14 months and reflects public comments from the five previous drafts as well as analysis from initial environmental review.

In addition to this effort, of particular concern to the Sierra is the legislative requirement that the State Water Board develop flow criteria for the Delta, including tributaries that feed it, which could have negative impacts on upstream water supplies, fish habitat, wildlife, energy production, recreation and more.

Next Steps

The SNC will continue working with DWR, stakeholders and reviewers to complete the draft Mountain Counties Overlay regional report and ensure that goals and objectives from our own Strategic Plan are reflected in the main body of the Water Plan Update. When the draft is released for public comment next year, we will also partner with DWR to host regional public forums to solicit comments and feedback.

Regarding the Delta flow criteria, SNC staff members are consulting with key stakeholders in the Region to determine the best strategy for articulating upstream needs and helping to shape the process used to determine flow criteria.

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.