

Background

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) launched the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) over two years ago. This Initiative fosters local and Regional collaboration to support a cohesive, economically viable, and sustainable approach to reducing fire risk, creating jobs, and protecting our valuable forest and watershed resources. SNC Staff work closely with the diverse participants of regional, statewide, and local collaboratives, including local governments, environmentalists, community and economic development representatives, industry, and Tribal entities to help achieve these goals.

The SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council focuses on regional and statewide issues that can influence the achievement of the objectives of the Initiative. The Coordinating Council also serves as a forum for issues arising in local forest collaborative efforts to be discussed and addressed. Members include representatives from the woods products industry, local government, environmental and conservation organizations, community groups, and water interests. The primary federal land managers, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) participate in an advisory role.

Current Status

SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council meets quarterly. The primary focus of the most recent meetings have been identifying major barriers to forest treatment project implementation and addressing these as a group. The Coordinating Council has also been coordinating with the USFS to develop information to support the forest plan updates which recently began on the three most southern forests in the Sierra Nevada and supporting USFS to draft the implementation plan for the Region's "Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration" and starting to outline projects that can demonstrate the implementation plan on-the-ground.

More recently, the Coordinating Council reviewed a list of issues and impediments to forest projects and prioritized them by identifying specific actions to further evaluate addressing the issues. The issue that surfaced to the top is the lack of funding for forest treatment projects. A solution is identifying new investors and funding sources similar to the objective of the SNC lead Mokelumne Watershed Avoided Cost Analysis. Another approach is accounting for all costs associated with the forests such as fire suppression and liability costs incurred by igniting fires. Another approach is continuing to track the increasing costs of fire suppression in comparison to fuel reduction costs.

The triple bottom line approach is high priority; however local forest collaborative groups have tended to focus on economics and the environment, less so on social issues, in part because it's more difficult to define actions that will have social benefits. Coordinating Council members are drafting a white paper on how to measure the social benefits, developing recommendations for collaborative groups, and specific practical ideas for creating social benefits or attracting investment from social sources. Some of this information will also be used to support the USFS forest plan updates.

The SNC continues to be involved with a number of collaborative efforts throughout the Region. The Department of Agriculture has now awarded three federal Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) grants in the Sierra Nevada. The Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG) and the Burney-Hat Creek Basins Project in Lassen County were awarded this year and the Dinkey Creek Collaborative on the Sierra National Forest was awarded last year. The purpose of the grants are to support collaborative efforts to develop landscape scale restoration projects that will improve forest health, reduce the risk of catastrophic fire and provide significant economic and social benefits for the local communities. The SNC is working with the collaborative and the USFS Region 5 to assist in successful implementation of these efforts.

The Healthy Forests Grant award cycle supported a number of the collaborative with grant awards, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and woody biomass utilization product planning related to the ACCG and meadow restoration for the Burney- Hat Creek collaborative, as well as a number of other projects in the Region.

SNC Staff is also engaged in efforts with the USFS and various stakeholders to assist in addressing issues relating to the Pacific Fisher, a southern Sierra species that is proposed for listing under the federal Endangered Species Act. The SNC is facilitating discussions between interested parties and discussing a role in assisting with the development of a conservation plan for the Fisher.

In addition, the SNC continues to be involved in discussions about playing a role in a proposed Master Stewardship Agreement with the USFS and the ACCG. There have been numerous meetings and research conducted to determine the best way to establish this relationship. In the case an appropriate role for SNC is identified, staff will bring the issue back to the Board for necessary authorizations.

Next Steps

The Coordinating Council will continue to work with the USFS to identify ways to increase the pace and scale of forest treatment within the Region, including providing input on the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration Implementation Plan. SNC Staff will continue to work with a number of local collaborative efforts, focusing on the CFLR projects and efforts supported by SNC grants.

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.