

### **Background**

The South Central Subregion encompasses the counties of Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa in their entirety. This expansive area is predominantly rural, with broad distribution of 166,000 residents across a widely variable landscape encompassing 5,300 square miles of the broader Sierra Nevada Region.

The majority of land ownership is private in Amador and Calaveras Counties, while public lands dominate the landscape in Mariposa and Tuolumne Counties. Yosemite National Park comprises more than 50 percent of the land area in Mariposa County alone.

The Subregion contains the upper watersheds of the Mokelumne, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Merced Rivers. 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.

The entire Subregion, from south to north, is connected by Highway 49. This historic roadway, coupled with numerous connections to major roadways leading from the Central Valley and Bay Area, empowers the tourist economy in the Subregion. Recreational opportunities abound in the South Central Subregion, and the economic benefit from tourism is paramount.

### **Current Status**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is actively engaged in numerous activities throughout the South Central Subregion. First and foremost among those activities is the SNC's Proposition 84 Grants 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 \$4,000,000 dollars in the Subregion, supporting a range of projects consisting of invasive species eradication, rangeland improvements and preservation, water infrastructure planning and development, and forest management activities aimed at decreasing the risk of high-severity wildfire. All of these activities are creating economic opportunities for Sierran communities who have a long and lasting legacy of working to manage the myriad natural, cultural and economic resources of the Subregion.

The SNC is also engaged in a variety of endeavors which meet its mission and advance its program goals. In Mariposa County, SNC has actively supported the development of an Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, which will be absolutely critical in future years in order to access funding from the CA Department of Water Resources.

Through the Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide Project, of which SNC is a sponsor, visitors from around the world are now able to access recreational, historical, and

cultural gems that may have previously been overshadowed by the Crown Jewel of the National Park System, Yosemite.

In Tuolumne County, the SNC has supported efforts to conduct restoration activities at Phoenix Lake and its associated watersheds, which are critical drinking water resources for the City of Sonora and adjacent communities. The Board of the Tuolumne Utilities District recently adopted the Phoenix Lake Preservation and Restoration Plan, funded in part by SNC, which provides a clear path toward on the ground improvements to that key resource. In partnership with the Stanislaus National Forest, the SNC helped to establish the Yosemite-Stanislaus Solutions collaborative group, which is fostering a positive and productive dialog on forest management in the Tuolumne and Mariposa County portions of the Stanislaus National Forest.

Calaveras County has been a hub of activity for the SNC relative to the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative. Through the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group, SNC has advanced the goals of the Initiative through work with a high-functioning collaborative process. That support coupled with strong community involvement has ultimately resulted in a long-term funding commitment from the Forest Service under the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) Act. Work has begun on restoration work in the CFLR Cornerstone Project area which is directly benefitting local contractors and facilitating the restoration of a diversified forest economy in the counties and Subregion.

SNC activities in Amador County also entail participation in the ACCG. In addition, the SNC is actively supporting many other worthwhile efforts, including funding support for Stewardship, Through Education where local elementary and high school students are conducting on the ground restoration projects in watersheds throughout the county. This builds a stewardship ethic among the youth here in the Subregion, as well as achieving SNC goals relative to watershed protection and restoration. Other activities include funding support for the development of a recycled water system in partnership with Amador Water Agency, and the Mokelumne Environmental Benefits Initiative and Cost Avoidance Study, which will be presented today under a later agenda item.

### **Next Steps**

The SNC maintains a visible presence in the South Central Subregion. Having an office in Mariposa, as well as strong support from the Auburn headquarters to the north, the SNC is able to grow its relationships with key policymakers, land managers, and stakeholders.

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

The SNC is committed to this Subregion in furtherance of its mission to initiate, encourage, and support efforts that improve the environmental, economic and social

well-being of the Sierra Nevada, its communities, and the citizens of the State of California.

**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.**