

Background

Under Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Governing Board guidance, SNC Policy and Outreach efforts focus on sharing important messaging and engaging in state planning and policy activities to address the needs of the Sierra Nevada Region. The goal in our endeavors is to identify and attain funding and policy decisions that ensure that the wide range of benefits that flow from a healthy Sierra continue to be valuable assets for all of California.

Current Status

Legislation

On Sunday, October 15, Governor Jerry Brown signed [Senate Bill \(SB\) 5, California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018](#), the so-called Parks Bond. This is great news for the SNC and the Sierra Nevada Region as the bill contains \$55 million in direct funding for the SNC, a \$60 million allocation for the Sierra Nevada and Cascade region in the Wildlife Conservation Board section, and many millions more for issues and resources important to the SNC's programming.

Two parks and water initiatives were filed with the Secretary of State in June and July of this year. Of these, the [Conservation Strategies Group initiative](#) filed by Joe Caves has been withdrawn, while the second, [the Natural Heritage Institute initiative](#) filed by Jerry Meral, remains active. Sponsors of Meral's initiative have indicated continued support for the initiative's presence on California's November ballot and they are currently in the signature gathering phase, with a deadline of March 19, 2018. This initiative contains a total of \$8.9 billion, with \$250 million allocated for the SNC. Staff will continue to track its progress.

As a state agency, the SNC and its employees are prohibited from utilizing state resources to support or oppose any ballot measure. The SNC may provide factual information about the substance of a ballot measure and neutrally describe the effect it may have on the organization or its activities.

Connecting with Downstream Beneficiaries

The American River Uplands-Lowlands Group, including a variety of public agencies from up and down the American River watershed, will meet again in November to discuss next steps in the discussion and in the relationship. Outcomes from the August meeting included a request by participants that a common statement of cause and intent be developed, and there appears to be support for converting this document into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or charter for action. Staff used the SNC's Policy Guidance document ([Attachment A](#)) as the foundation for the document, which is likely to expand with project investment strategies, quantification and allocation mechanisms for public investment, and other tools for collaboration.

One of the most interesting steps in the Uplands-Lowlands Group, at this point, is the incorporation of the Sacramento Area Council of Government's (SACOG's) Rural Urban Connection Strategies (RUCS) model into the discussion, and possible implementation. An unsuccessful grant application was submitted early this year to build out this model to

include planning strategies and valuation methodologies for upland rural landscapes, similar to how the model is built out for urban and lowland ones. This tool would help address one of the biggest impediments to moving the conversation forward as far as public investment in forest and watershed health, which is a demonstration of locally specific benefit. SNC staff, with Uplands-Lowlands participants and SACOG staff, continue to pursue funding for this tool. It is possible that SNC's participation in the California Water Action Collaborative could lead to increased investment potential in tool development.

Meetings and Tours Update

The SNC's Communications & Outreach Manager, Brittany Covich, participated in the Water Education Foundation's annual Headwaters Tour in mid-September as a resource speaker. This two-day tour followed Highway 50 through El Dorado County and into the Lake Tahoe Basin, and then returned to Sacramento via Interstate 80. The theme of the tour centered on managing California's headwaters, and primarily focused on forest management and meadow restoration. Participants included members from the Association of California Water Agencies, several urban and rural water districts, the insurance industry, the Legislative Analyst's Office, the California Department of Water Resources, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Public Policy Institute of California.

In October, SNC staff worked with French Meadows project partners – Tahoe National Forest, The Nature Conservancy, American River Conservancy, Placer County, and Placer County Water Agency – to bring state agency and legislative staff on a tour of the 29,000-acre forest restoration project in the headwaters of the American River. The tour provided a comprehensive overview of the project, which, among other goals, is exploring ways to increase the pace of planning and environmental review on Forest Service land by utilizing outside contractors to complete NEPA/CEQA more expediently.

Staff is working to organize a tour for the spring of 2018 focused on water resources and air quality connections within the San Joaquin Valley region. The concept has been proposed and discussed with Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula, who has expressed interest in hosting such an event.

Additionally, staff is working with Boardmember Danny Wan and talking with East Bay Municipal Utility District and Senator Bob Weickowski's office regarding the organization of an urban convening focused on East Bay representatives and stakeholders, to talk through connections, needs, and potential investment strategies. We are hoping to hold the event in early December or in the spring of 2018.

National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC)

The SNC staff continues to move forward with efforts to support and implement the Forest and Watershed Health Program (FWHP) and the Biomass Utilization Facility (BUF) pillars funded by the NDRC grant. On September 26, SNC executed two three-party grant agreements to implement the FWHP. The first is between SNC, the Stanislaus National Forest, and the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to

complete reforestation, fuel reduction, noxious weed treatments, rangeland infrastructure improvements, and fuel break expansion. The second agreement is between SNC, HCD, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to create and expand fuel breaks in Tuolumne County using NDRC funds.

On October 5, HCD finalized the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review required under the FWHP project by signing two Records of Decisions (RODs) relating to [reforestation](#) and [fuel reduction](#) work to be completed with funds from the grant. The same day, HCD also formally submitted a Request for the Release of Funds to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for these activities. This request is the final approval needed to move forward with implementation and, at the time of this writing, is in the 15-day public review period scheduled to end on October 23. Additionally, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance has been achieved through [two waivers issued by the Secretary of Natural Resources](#) based on Governor Brown's [Executive Order B-23-13](#). With all environmental reviews now complete, SNC staff is working with USFS and CAL FIRE to develop a work plan for 2018 and beyond in order to get work on the ground started as soon as is reasonable and possible.

The SNC staff has been working closely with HCD to develop and issue a request for proposals (RFP) to complete a biomass feedstock and feasibility study as part of Phase 1 of the BUF pillar. HCD will formally contract with the consultant, but SNC staff will oversee the study. SNC staff expects to award the contract in December 2018.

Finally, SNC communications staff has been assisting the NDRC Core Team in developing communications materials such as talking points, one page handouts, and consistent web messaging between partners. SNC is also in the process of developing our own NDRC webpage that will be updated as project progress continues.

Great Sierra River Cleanup and Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week

The Ninth Annual Great Sierra River Cleanup (GSRC) was held on Saturday, September 16, in conjunction with California Coastal Cleanup Day. More than 2,700 volunteers at over 110 locations, cleaned 241 miles of rivers and streams throughout the Region. Volunteers removed over thirty-three tons of trash and recyclables, including a handful of unusual items such as an old mining pump, a prom dress, and an unopened vinyl album of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Staff would like to offer special thanks to Boardmember Tom Wheeler for his participation and to Pacific Gas & Electric for sponsoring this year's event.

The GSRC also kicked off Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week. This year, staff worked with members of the legislature to develop a [series of short promotional videos](#) to show how the Sierra "connects us all." Final videos were created and approved by Assembly Members Bigelow, Stone, Chiu, Eggman, and Aguiar-Curry, and Senators Dodd, Gaines, Stern, Skinner, and Wieckowski. These legislators represented both rural and urban districts, and a mix of Sierra Nevada, Bay Area, Central Valley, and Southern

California regions. Assembly Member Dahle also participated, but due to scheduling conflicts, the final video was not approved in time to be shared during Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week. Ten videos were shared over the course of the week on SNC's social media platforms, generating nearly 9,000 impressions on Facebook and an additional 8,000 impressions on Twitter. Nine of the ten videos were shared by the legislator who was featured in them.

Measuring the Success of SNC's Policy and Outreach Efforts

Measuring the success of our policy and outreach efforts is not always easy, but over the past couple of months, SNC's message has been popping up in some interesting ways:

- The Sacramento Bee published [an editorial](#) on the challenges that the Sierra Nevada Region is facing in early October, and has communicated to SNC staff that they are interested in doing additional follow up on the issues.
- SNC's work was cited three times at the October 4 [U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy & Commerce hearing](#) on air quality impacts of wildfires. SNC's System Indicators Report was cited twice in the background memo, and the Mokelumne Avoided Cost Analysis was mentioned during the hearing.
- The Executive Summary for the State of the Sierra Nevada's Forests v2 was featured in the October edition of the [Family Water Alliance's](#) newsletter – a publication that reaches 2,500 water districts who primarily serve agricultural water users.
- The Legislative Analyst's Office has asked to use SNC's [Fire Threat & California's Water System map](#) in their upcoming report on forest management in California.
- And in late September, the Public Policy Institute released their report on [Improving the Health of California's Headwater Forests](#) which very closely aligns with many of the issues and messages that SNC has been tracking and sharing. SNC has since reached out and held a follow up meeting with the authors of the report to discuss near-term policy opportunities and next steps.

All of these events point to a growing awareness about the Sierra Nevada Region, its issues, and the work that SNC has been doing to educate policy and decision makers about those issues.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to identify opportunities to highlight Regional issues and needs to key policy and decision-makers and to engage in efforts to ensure those needs continue to be understood and addressed.

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.