

March 15, 2016
Regular Meeting

Item #9a

CAO

Sierra Nevada
Conservancy (SNC)
Presentation

Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Watershed Improvement Program

Mono County Board of Supervisors
March 15, 2016



- Created in 2004
- Region and Governing Board
 - 22 counties and 25 million acres
 - 13-member Governing Board (6 county representatives & 7 state appointees) with 3 non-voting federal agency liaisons



Mission: To initiate, encourage and support efforts that improve the environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region, its communities and the citizens of California

Implemented a \$50 million Proposition 84 grant program in support of our mission

California's Primary Watershed

The Sierra Nevada Region is:

- The origin of more than 60% of California's developed water supply
- Headwaters of the State Water Project
- The primary source of fresh water flowing into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta
- A major urban water source:
 - San Francisco: 85% from Tuolumne Watershed
 - East Bay: 90% from Mokelumne Watershed

The Sierra Nevada Region is an area of great significance to the State of California.

In addition to being California's Primary Watershed, the Sierra Nevada also:

- Stores massive amounts of carbon, assisting in the state's efforts to combat climate change
- Provides crucial habitat to hundreds of species
- Provides world-class recreational opportunities enjoyed annually by millions from around the world
- Is a major producer of wood products and hydro-electric power

State of the Sierra Nevada's Forest – Fall 2014

Stated many Sierra Nevada watersheds are unhealthy, with forests susceptible to disease and intense fire:

- Larger, more intense megafires may have become the new normal
- Since 2010, fires on the west slopes of the Region have burned over one million acres
- USFS Region 5 estimates that 6 to 9 million acres of National Forests are in need of restoration
- The high cost of fighting fires has reduced funds available for critically needed federal lands restoration

Restoration needs include but aren't limited to:

- Meadow Restoration
- Road Sediment Reduction Treatments
- Aquatic Organism Passage
- Invasive Species Removal
- Hydraulic Mining Restoration
- Forest Health/Fuels Reduction Treatments

Wildfire is increasing

- With four years to go in this decade, more land has burned than in the entire past seven decades
- Fire severity is increasing from an average of 20% high severity to nearly 30%

Increased Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Rim Fire's GHG emissions were equal to what 2.3 million vehicles would release in a year
- High intensity fires such as Rim and King will continue to emit GHG's for decades, at a rate 4x greater than those during the event
- Stand replacing fires convert conifer forest to brush, which stores about 90% less carbon

The Time to Act is Now

USFS says, “Only an environmental restoration program of unprecedented scale can alter the direction of current trends.”

- High profile statewide plans and programs identify the importance of the Sierra to the state’s well-being and recognize critical state of the forests
- A wave of substantial new funding sources in California can be leveraged to support watershed restoration in the Sierra Nevada
- However, at a time when restoration is needed, the Forest Service is spending the majority of its budget on fire suppression, resulting in less funding for restoration efforts

The Need and Opportunities for Strong Partners

- There is broad support and engagement from a diverse set of agencies and stakeholders under the SNC's Watershed Improvement Program (WIP)
- The WIP is designed to:
 - Support and leverage our partners' programs and objectives to increase their impact and,
 - Amplify the message for the need for watershed restoration to the rest of the state and the country

MOU established between CA Natural Resources Agency Secretary Laird and USFS Region 5 Regional Forester Randy Moore that:

- Establishes commitment with State and Federal agencies to work cooperatively in the restoration of the watersheds of the Sierra Nevada
- Charges the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to spearhead the WIP



Primary Objectives of the WIP

- Identify watershed restoration needs across the Sierra, increase investment and address policy issues
- Move away from random acts of restoration and identify places to leverage collective resources and move the needle towards true watershed resilience

16 Watershed Assessment Areas

- Forest Level Assessment includes identification of watershed restoration needs and estimated costs by National Forests in the watersheds
- Pilot assessment underway on Bureau of Land Management lands
- Working with other public land managers such as National Park Service on assessments

Watershed Level Assessments

Sierra Coordinated Resources Management Council (SCRMC) is gathering information for each of our 16 watershed assessment areas:

- Restoration plans, assessments, initiatives
- Critical contacts for groups working in these watershed assessment areas
- Demographic information
- Infrastructure such as biomass, water, utility transportation
- Waterways
- Land Ownership
- Fire History/Fire Threat
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)
- Key Stakeholders
- In-watershed and Downstream Beneficiaries
- Model Projects

The WIP Network

Goal is to make the WIP the hub of a network connecting partners to:

- Data
- Funding
- Projects
- Policy Issues
- Science Research
- Partners

Policy

- Expanding the Use of Prescribed and Managed Fire (Air Quality regulatory process)
- Improving the efficiency of CEQA/NEPA processes
- Address barriers to developing more wood and biomass processing infrastructure
- Using state funding sources for forest restoration to promote GHG emissions reduction and carbon storage

Funding

Tracking existing investment, focusing existing funding sources and identifying new funding sources for investment in Sierra Nevada Watersheds. Opportunities include:

- State of California
 - Proposition 1
 - Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund
- Federal
 - Wildfire Disaster Funding
 - Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Act (CFLR)
- Cost Share Programs
- Beneficiaries

Communication

Communication goals for the WIP include:

- Establish the Sierra Nevada Region as a critical component of California's water and climate future
- Encourage partners, policy and decision makers to view the WIP as California's solution to address declining forest and watershed health in the Sierra
- Establish the WIP as the program for distributing state forest and watershed health-related funding in the Sierra
- Encourage new policies/legislation that helps improve forest and watershed health in the Sierra

Get Involved

- Endorse the WIP
- Contribute to the WIP Watershed Level Assessments
- Identify existing and new funding sources for projects that will restore Sierra Nevada watersheds to a state of resilience
- Help SNC identify and address policy barriers to large scale and ecologically sound watershed restoration
- Help SNC share messages that will positively impact barriers to large scale watershed restoration and bring more resources into the Region

California Headwaters Partnership

- One of seven regions in the country named Resilient Lands and Waters – White House
- Shines spotlight on existing collaboratives within California
- CHP is only RLW region with state/federal co-leads
- WIP used as foundational analysis to inform effort
- Map initial priority areas for conservation, restoration and other investments
- Develop landscape-scale strategies to assist in advance planning and management activities

www.restorethesierra.org

www.sierranevada.ca.gov

