

2013-14

Action Plan



SIERRA NEVADA  
CONSERVANCY

As approved by the Governing Board  
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# Table of Contents

Grant Program .....	4
Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) .....	4
Biomass Utilization .....	5
Abandoned Mine Lands .....	5
Regional Agriculture and Ranching .....	6
Regional Tourism and Recreation .....	6
Ecosystem Services .....	7
Education and Communications .....	7
Great Sierra River Cleanup .....	8
Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (Stewardship Council) .....	8
Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery .....	8
Sierra Nevada System Indicators .....	9
Internal Operations .....	10

The following represent the major initiatives and activities to be undertaken by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) between July 2013 and June 2014, consistent with the SNC's Strategic Plan (Plan). Upon approval by the SNC Governing Board, staff will use this Plan to guide activities for the period. In the event that circumstances lead to other initiatives or activities being undertaken, staff will provide the Board with updated information at a subsequent Board meeting.

### **Grant Program**

The SNC Grant Program will complete the following actions through June 2014:

- Implement the 2013-14 Proposition 84 grant round including reaching out to stakeholders and responding to inquiries to the request for proposal, project identification, evaluation and approval, agreement development and project implementation.
- Close out 35 current grant projects.
- Provide timely and accurate response to any bond reporting and audit requests received and update the California Strategic Growth Plan Bond Accountability website and the State Conservation Easement Database as required in Executive Order S-02-07.
- In the event new funding comes forward, planning efforts will be undertaken to implement a new grant round during this fiscal year.

### **Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI)**

The SNC will continue to coordinate implementation of the SNFCI, working closely with a wide range of stakeholders and agencies. Specific actions to be accomplished under SNFCI include:

- Providing funding for projects that meet SNC criteria for healthy forests in the 2013-14 grant round.
- Continuing to support local collaborative efforts to develop projects consistent with SNFCI objectives. In the case of collaboratives initiated or heavily supported by the SNC, this will include building in measures to ensure long-term sustainability of the group as SNC's support lessens.
- Working with the SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council, the US Forest Service, Tribal Entities, other state agencies, and key stakeholders in embracing opportunities and reducing barriers to increased ecological restoration in forested areas, with a focus on strong collaboration and improving the local economies and social well-being.
- Working with the Coordinating Council and the Forest Service to develop the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration Implementation Plan, as well as continuing to identify and implement ideas, actions and opportunities to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration on our forests.
- Providing facilitation and participation in the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy development effort.
- Participating in various efforts to promote policy changes and investment in support of SNFCI objectives, including but not limited to the Biomass Working Group, Sierra Cascade Dialogue and the US Forest Plan Revision process.

## **Biomass Utilization**

The SNC will continue to work with a broad range of community, agency, and industry stakeholders to find economic uses for the excess biomass removed in forest restoration activities. SNC is identified in the California 2012 Bioenergy Action Plan as the state agency responsible to pursue funding for forest Bioenergy research and implementation and to assist communities with the development of community scale projects. To fulfill these goals and responsibilities SNC will take the following actions:

- Providing funding for projects that meet SNC criteria for healthy forests in the 2013-14 grant round.
- Continuing to provide technical assistance and funding support, as well as identify additional funding sources, for projects in various stages of development within the Region. Under the Bioenergy Action Plan, the SNC will provide a limited level of assistance to projects outside the Region.
- Continuing to work with other agencies (such as the US Forest Service, CalFIRE, the California Public Utilities Commission, and the California Energy Commission) to help craft policies and programs to assist forest biomass infrastructure.
- Continuing to provide outreach to help educate policy makers and the public on the issues associated with woody biomass utilization.
- Helping to compile information and tools to help diverse interests resolve issues and concerns.

## **Abandoned Mine Lands**

The SNC will venture into this new initiative focusing on three primary goals: 1) funding projects that meet SNC criteria for Abandoned Mine Land (AML) remediation in the 2013-14 grant round, 2) identifying and carrying out appropriate roles for the SNC in the development of programs, policies, and efforts that will address AML issues in the Region; and, 3) securing long-term funding and resources for the SNC and the Region to address AML issues. Specific actions will include:

- Working with partners to develop projects that will meet the funding criteria in the 2013-14 grant round.
- Continuing to work with the Natural Resources Agency, other State agencies and partners to determine how best to address due diligence issues associated with the potential for AML to exist on properties that may be acquired using State funds.
- Assessing existing programs working to address AML issues and seeking opportunities to leverage these efforts on behalf of the Sierra; investigating the potential for new collaborative efforts; and, encouraging inclusion of Tribal Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Resource and Environmental Management systems.
- Exploring the availability of federal, state, and private funding sources and considering SNC's capacity to provide assistance to local governments and others in securing funds.
- Sponsoring and/or partnering in AML symposia and other events.

- Building on the continuing efforts of The Sierra Fund to educate policy makers and the public about the importance of remediation work to the reliability and sustainability of the State's water supply

### **Regional Agriculture and Ranching**

In the second year of this initiative, the SNC will continue to reach out to the agricultural and ranching communities to learn more about the needs of farmers and ranchers in the Sierra and how the SNC can help to address those needs. In addition, the SNC will continue to identify opportunities to increase the presence of the SNC and Sierra stakeholders in policy and funding discussions. Specific actions will include:

- Increasing agritourism on the Sierra Nevada Geotourism website and companion materials as a way of marketing these opportunities on behalf of farmers and ranchers in the Region.
- Capitalizing on opportunities to increase understanding and work towards building a consensus about grazing on public lands in the Sierra, including managing and participating in grant projects to foster a collaborative approach in Alpine and Tuolumne Counties and continuing to provide assistance to increase public participation in discussions regarding grazing on the Inyo National Forest.
- Staying abreast of and supporting relevant research and monitoring activities, including projects to quantify the ecosystem services provided by preservation and stewardship of ranches and agricultural lands in the Sierra.
- Coordinating with partner organizations and sponsoring efforts to educate members of the Legislature, their staff, and other decision-makers regarding the importance of ranches and agricultural lands in the Region.
- Publishing a system indicators report on agricultural lands in the Sierra Nevada.

### **Regional Tourism and Recreation**

The SNC will focus on three primary elements to make substantial progress in promoting and developing regional tourism and recreation. These elements include: 1) continuing build-out for the Sierra Nevada Geotourism (SNGT) MapGuide Project, 2) assisting in the development of tourism and recreation attractions that have, or are part of a larger project that has, regional significance, and 3) exploring the value of and opportunities to partner in the development of a Sierra Nevada "brand". SNC staff will implement the following actions by June 2014:

- Soliciting and developing new content and destinations for display on the SNGT website.
- Distributing 60,000 printed MapGuides (second printing).
- Implementing a marketing plan aimed at increasing downloads of mobile phone applications and the amount of web traffic visiting the SNGT site on a monthly basis.
- Assisting in the development of a water trail in the Lower Owens River as a step toward a potential region-wide water trail; developing criteria to evaluate and prioritize similar potential future projects as well as defining the types of support the SNC could provide.

- Initiating dialogue with partners to “frame the opportunity” and assess interest in developing a regional brand
- Convening and formalizing a regional partner working group

## **Ecosystem Services**

The SNC will work with partners to continue actions under this initiative which help to quantify environmental benefits in the upper watershed and initiate new investment strategies and identify new investors. The primary action in 2013-14 will be:

- Leading the completion of the Mokelumne Watershed Avoided Cost Analysis, which analyzes how upper watershed restoration treatments, primarily fuel hazard reduction and forest health management could benefit downstream beneficiaries by reducing their operational costs.
- Working with project partners to evaluate new opportunities to implement actions based on the outcomes of the avoided cost analysis.
- Collaborating on the Demand Analysis effort to identify and reach out to corporations that are high water volume users in the East Bay Municipal Utilities District service area. Purpose is to help these downstream beneficiaries understand the importance of secure supply and high water quality for their bottom line and discuss opportunities for them to invest resources in headwaters protection and restoration.
- Partnering on the Mokelumne Environmental Benefits Program to develop the protocol and tools to support an investment framework for potential funders to support restoration efforts throughout the Mokelumne Watershed.
- Evaluating the initial findings and future potential of two previously funded projects to quantify any potential water yield increase and change to the hydrograph that may result from forest and meadow restoration activities: 1) the Sagehen water yield study and 2) the meadow hydrology assessment by the University of Nevada, Reno.

## **Education and Communications**

The SNC will educate policy-makers, key decision-makers, and stakeholders about the value of the Sierra to the state’s long-term health and well-being. Outreach will focus primarily on the links between clean and reliable water, healthy forests, and sustainable rural communities and will leverage the work being done under other projects and initiatives, as well as the results of SNC grant projects. The overall goal is to gain long-term financial support and steady investment in projects in the Region. Actions will include:

- Elevating the profile of the SNC as an accepted, trusted resource for information regarding the link between upper watersheds, forest health, climate change, clean water, clean air, and sustainable communities.
- Continuing relationship-building activities and conducting regular meetings with local/state/federal agencies, legislators and other decision-makers to establish the SNC’s role in protecting and enhancing the Region where more than 60% of the State’s developed water supply originates.

- Partnering with allies to complete Regional tours that demonstrate the value of SNC Initiatives and investment in watershed and forest health projects.
- Exploring opportunities and coordinating efforts to retain regional funding in the 2014 water bond, regional investment from Cap-and-Trade auction revenue, and researching opportunities for other funding mechanisms to benefit the Region.
- Developing compelling messages, outreach materials, and appropriate distribution channels and making more effective use of communication vehicles including the SNC Web site, social media outlets, and other tools.
- Creating and distributing the FY 2013-14 Annual Report.
- Partnering with Sierra-based Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) groups via the Sierra Water Work Group to stay abreast of developments in regional funding and to support them in competing more successfully for funding.
- Completing activities related to the Mountain Counties Overlay Regional Report piece of the California Water Plan 2013 Update and staying abreast of developments for Water Plan Update 2018 and the Delta Plan.

### **Great Sierra River Cleanup**

The SNC will coordinate the 5th Annual Great Sierra River Cleanup on September 21, 2013. In 2012, more than 3,400 volunteers joined together to remove over 63,000 pounds of trash and recyclables from rivers throughout the Sierra Nevada. Specific actions will include:

- Continuing to work with existing river cleanups throughout the Sierra to unite and expand them.
- Recruiting organizations in areas with no river cleanup programs to host cleanups in their areas.

### **Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (Stewardship Council)**

The SNC will work with the Stewardship Council to take the actions necessary to carry out duties outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (including amendments mutually agreed upon). Specific actions will include the following:

- Executing agreements to accept covenants on lands donated to the US Forest Service.
- Finalizing agreements for SNC to carry out certain duties upon the dissolution of the Stewardship Council, including selection of replacement conservation easement holders, and performing monitoring activities.
- Establishing a funding mechanism to compensate the SNC for tasks performed as described in MOU and subsequent agreements.

### **Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery**

The SNC will continue to coordinate and facilitate discussions and planning with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Inyo County, the Friends of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery and other stakeholders to develop a long term master plan for the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery and surrounding property. Several specific actions will be undertaken under the project, including:

- Participating in a workgroup to develop a process for exploring potential uses, ownership, and management of the property.
- Participating in development a master plan for the property to guide decision-making.
- Identifying additional stakeholders to engage in the process.
- Effectuating the transfer of property, if deemed necessary and appropriate, from CDFW to the SNC and the SNC to another appropriate entity.
- Determining what, if any, role is appropriate for the SNC in the ultimate disposition of the property and ongoing management.

### **Sierra Nevada System Indicators**

The SNC will continue the development of indicators that will be used by the SNC Staff and Board and externally by SNC partners and other interested parties to promote regional understanding, make sound investments, guide strategic decision-making, and help us to gauge the results of our efforts. Specific actions under the project will involve:

- Publishing, following Board approval, the last two in the series of six reports that present the data and analysis associated with nineteen Sierra Nevada System Indicators.
- Coordinating System Indicator data and analysis with other internal reports and program efforts to help ensure accurate and consistent assessment of the Region's conditions.
- Increasing website presence of System Indicators and supporting data, with outreach efforts to identify agencies, stakeholders, and other partners who might utilize and benefit from the reports.
- Developing specific strategies and timing for future periodic updating of indicator data to enable assessment of changes over time within the SNC Region.

## **Internal Operations**

The SNC will improve its internal operations in a number of areas, including taking the following actions:

- Identifying and providing additional training opportunities to ensure staff continue to hone skills and are prepared to effectively implement the SNC mission.
- Implementing SNC's safety program, including the development of a department-wide safety committee.
- Implementing SNC's Equal Employment Opportunity Program, including the development of a department-wide Disability Advisory Committee.
- Improving SNC network and information technology tools and services including continuous hardware assessment and modifications, continuation of web content management (Plone) training, tracking and reporting on service call frequency and trends, and upgrading SharePoint including development and implementation of a migration plan.
- Improving the SNC Web site navigability, regularly refreshing content and ensuring that content reflects organizational priorities and Region-wide accomplishments.
- Improving emergency preparedness and safety through regular staff training and the implementation of table-top exercises and drills. Completing and distributing of SNC's Facility Emergency Evacuation Plan for each SNC facility.