

**Background**

At previous meetings, the Board directed Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Staff to take appropriate actions to increase awareness about the importance of the Sierra Nevada Region to the State's environmental and economic health and well-being. Since that time, staff has been conducting a variety of outreach activities to ensure that the upper watersheds of the Sierra Nevada are considered appropriately in water bond funding and other activities and discussions relating to funding and policy.

**Current Status**

On Friday, June 20<sup>th</sup> SNC, The Sierra Fund, and Assembly Members Brain Dahle and Richard Gordon's office conducted a tour of forest and abandoned mine lands projects in Placer and Nevada Counties. Assembly Members Dahle and Gordon, were joined by their Assembly colleagues Wes Chesbro, and Mark Levine, as well as staff from Assembly Members Frank Bigelow and Steven Bradford's offices. Tour stops included the American River Shaded Fuelbreak in Auburn, the Combie Reservoir mercury removal project (both of these projects included funding from the SNC), and the Empire Mine in Grass Valley. As a result of the tour, Assembly Members Dahle and Gordon agreed to co-author an Op-Ed detailing the importance of the Sierra Nevada to the rest of California. The Op-Ed ran in the Grass Valley Union on August, 23, 2013 ([Attachment A](#)).

On Friday, July 26<sup>th</sup> SNC hosted a tour of the Mokelumne River Watershed for a group of six legislative staff members and a representative of the Department of Finance. These staff members represented the offices of Assembly Member Bigelow and Assembly Member Bloom, the Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee, the Assembly Republican Office of Policy, and the Assembly Natural Resources Committee. The purpose of this tour was to give staff members an on-the-ground look at the water source for 1.3 million East Bay residents, provide an opportunity to learn about the possible impacts that large catastrophic wildfires can have on a water source, and demonstrate the types of projects that can prevent or lessen those impacts. Tour stops included Pardee Reservoir where East Bay Municipal Utility District draws their water, Lower Bear Reservoir where water storage begins, and the Power Fire burn area where a large damaging fire has already set sedimentation in motion.

In July, Assembly Member Anthony Rendon, Chair of the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, and the Assembly Water Bond Working Group (Working Group), released a set of proposed Principles for Developing a Water Bond (Principles) ([Attachment B](#)). SNC provided comments to the Working Group encouraging them to consider modifications to the Principles to ensure that discussions about California's water future are more holistic. We encouraged the Working Group to add upper watershed work to promote water reliability and protect existing storage capacity and water quality for the entire state – including forest and meadow restoration, reduced sedimentation and water quality improvements such as mercury remediation. SNC also provided assistance to a Sierra coalition in drafting and sending comments on the Principles

([Attachment C](#)). The coalition, headed by Mountain Counties Water Resources Association, was composed of eight additional partner organizations including California

Forestry Association, California Rangeland Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Pacific Forest Trust, Sierra Business Council, Sierra Institute, Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council, and The Trust for Public Land.

Staff is also working with partners to schedule a series of meetings in August and September with legislators and their staff including: Assembly Member Rendon, Senators Wolk, Pavley, Berryhill, and others. These meetings will focus on the critical need to address source watersheds in any water bond or solutions to California's water future.

By the time of this meeting, the Great Sierra River Cleanup will be just over a week away. Legislative outreach efforts for the event yielded a total of thirteen legislative co-chairs including:

#### **Senators**

- Jean Fuller (R – Bakersfield)
- Ted Gaines (R – Rocklin)
- Fran Pavley (D – Agoura Hills)
- Lois Wolk (D – Davis)

#### **Assembly Members**

- Luis Alejo (D-Salinas)
- Connie Conway (R – Tulare)
- Beth Gaines (R – Roseville)
- Richard Gordon (D – Menlo Park)
- Adam Gray (D – Merced)
- Jim Patterson (R – Fresno)
- Henry Perea (D – Fresno)
- Ken Cooley (D – Rancho Cordova)
- Kristin Olsen (R – Modesto)

As co-chairs, these representatives agreed to assist with SNC outreach efforts by letting their constituents know about the event and agreed to be listed as Cleanup supporters in SNC promotional materials. Additionally, we opened an Instagram account to help promote the Cleanup. Staff is utilizing this social media tool to connect with potential volunteers by sharing photos of our beautiful Region, as well as photos of past cleanup efforts.

### Next Steps

Staff is working with partners to finalize plans for an informational event in late October. The purpose of the event is to inform legislators and their staff about the value of investing in forest restoration as opposed to dealing with the impacts to a water source

from a large intense fire. Details of the event are still being confirmed, but the intent is to focus on the forest/fire/water connection with the goal of sharing some of the results from the Mokelumne River Watershed Avoided Cost Analysis and research relating to forest conditions and water yield.

Staff is also coordinating with staff to the California State Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and The Sierra Fund to organize a January, 2014 legislative oversight hearing with the goal of educating legislators about abandoned mine lands and the need to address the associated legacy mine issues which pose a significant threat to public health.

Additionally, SNC is working to organize our first legislative tour in the eastern portion of the SNC Region in September. The goal of this tour is to bring Los Angeles legislators to the area that this is the source of a significant amount of Los Angeles' water supply, educating them about activities that are taking place to protect their watershed.

Additionally, we are working with Assembly Member Bigelow's office to arrange for the Assembly Member and his staff to visit SNC funded projects in his district.

SNC will continue to work with The Nature Conservancy to develop a detailed interactive map designed to connect Legislators to the watersheds that provide their water. This effort will kick off between now and the end of the year, which is a little bit later than originally reported. In the meantime, staff will continue to work with partners to identify new opportunities to meet with key decision makers and provide input into the efforts that will result in investment in the important work needed in our Region. And, we will continue to engage partners and sister agencies to create opportunities to communicate the value and benefits investment in the Region provide to the rest of the State.

### 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.**