

### **Background**

In December 2014 the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Board directed staff to develop and implement the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) to increase awareness of the Sierra Nevada Region and the urgent need for action to protect the services and values the Region provides to all of California.

In March, the SNC co-hosted with the US Forest Service the Save California: The Urgency to Restore Our Primary Watershed Summit (Summit) to launch the Sierra Nevada WIP. The Summit brought together key partners from within the Region and heads of state agencies including the California Natural Resources Agency, Cal EPA, Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Wildlife Conservation Board, CAL FIRE, the California Air Resources Board, and others to understand the urgent need for action and the importance of working together. The discussion included key policy issues and funding opportunities associated with restoring the health and resiliency of Sierra Nevada watersheds.

### **Current Status**

Leading up to the Summit, staff worked with Perry Communications Group (through the generous support of the Resources Legacy Fund) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Public Affairs team to generate media interest around the launch of the Sierra Nevada WIP. Those efforts resulted in significant media attention including coverage in a number of regional and national outlets, as well as a feature story in the April issue of The Forestry Source and a front page story in the Sacramento Bee (see news articles included with Board materials).

In addition to the traditional media campaign, SNC staff worked with the USFS Public Affairs staff to roll out a social media campaign that ran before, during, and after the Summit. The team developed hashtags – words or phrases preceded by a pound sign (#) that are attached to social media messages to identify communications on a specific topic – including #RestoretheSierra, #CASierraNevada, #cawater, #cadrought, and attached these identifiers to all social media messaging. Tweets utilizing these hashtags got nearly 19,000 views on Twitter and over 60 new followers across the two social media platforms utilized in support of the Summit: Facebook and Twitter. Staff is currently developing two new social media campaigns – one with USFS and one with CAL FIRE – to link the importance of and need for the WIP with Wildfire Awareness Week and the impending fire season. Both new campaigns will utilize the new hashtags.

The launch of the WIP resulted in a new communications partnership opportunity. The WIP closely aligned with policy recommendations incorporated in the Association of California Water Agencies' (ACWA) [headwaters framework](#), and tied closely with a [new study released by The Nature Conservancy](#) (TNC) on forest management and water yield. In late March, SNC, ACWA, and TNC joined together to distribute a press release around the three entities' focus on headwaters issues. Distribution of the press release followed Governor Brown's press conference on the emergency drought package

established to deal with a fourth year of drought, and the message focused on the need to address upper watershed health as a key part of managing the state's water resources.

Additionally, staff is working with California Natural Resources Agency and the USFS to have the Sierra-Cascade Region recognized as a flagship landscape under President Obama's Resilient Lands and Waters Initiative. No funding comes with inclusion, though the Sierra-Cascade Region could become an area in which Federal agencies showcase conservation and restoration efforts that make the Region more resilient to a changing climate.

### **Meetings and Legislative Actions**

At the time of this writing, staff is organizing meetings with many of the state department heads who participated in the Save CA: The Urgency to Restore Our Primary Watershed Summit panel discussion.

SNC staff has been working with Assembly Member Brian Dahle's office to advance legislation creating four Legislative Liaisons to work with the SNC. Assembly Bill (AB) 985 passed out of the Assembly Natural Resources Committee on April 13 with unanimous bipartisan support. The bill was amended by the committee to remove the requirement that two legislators be from within the Region, out of concern over limiting the appointment authority of legislative leadership. The amendment does not preclude leadership from appointing legislators who represent the Region and will result in a broader pool of legislators from which leadership can make appointments. The bill has met the policy and fiscal committee deadlines, and is now a consent item on the Assembly floor. It will move next to the Senate sometime before the June 5 house of origin deadline.

Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) 22, which would establish Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week, is still pending referral to policy committee. Staff is working with the author, Assembly Member Dahle, to request that referral. Unlike actual bills, resolutions are not subject to most legislative deadlines which affords some flexibility as to when the measure is advanced.

Staff is closely tracking Senate Bill 317, which is Senator Kevin de León's park bond vehicle. Unfortunately, the Sierra Nevada Region is not included in the current iteration. This is especially disappointing because the last version of a park bond, also brought forward by Senator de León, included the SNC and would have provided funding directly for implementation of forest and watershed health projects. The SNC partners including Sierra Business Council, TNC, and Trust for Public Land are currently working to ensure Sierra Nevada Region inclusion in this measure and staff will continue to track its progress.

Another item of interest is Assembly Member Dahle's AB 590, which would establish a funding stream for biomass infrastructure investment within the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. The bill passed from Assembly Natural Resources with bipartisan support, despite extensive commentary in opposition from Center for Biological Diversity. This bill will be taken up again in the second year of the current legislative session, allowing Assembly Member Dahle to build support and continue negotiations on the measure's details.

Late last fall, SNC agreed to participate as an advisory committee member on a documentary film of the Rim Fire produced by the Filmmakers Collaborative of San Francisco called The Fire Next Time. The USFS and the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions collaborative group were also key advisors in the development of this film which illustrates the broader issues and impacts that result from large, damaging fires like the Rim Fire. A short introductory version of the film was released just after the launch of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program, and SNC staff has been working with the filmmakers to identify opportunities to screen the film with decision-makers.

SNC staff, the USFS, and Filmmakers Collaborative of San Francisco worked with Senator Tom Berryhill and Assembly Member Frank Bigelow to host a screening of the movie at the State Capitol on May 5. The program brought Legislators and staff together for a one-hour event, consisting of the movie screening, discussion on the Watershed Improvement Program, and a question and answer session with SNC, Forest Service, and the film producers.

### **Outreach Materials**

Staff developed an update to the State of the Sierra Nevada's Forests Report (Report). The Report update highlights scientific research that adds to the case made in the original Report and supports the value and benefit of the Sierra Nevada WIP. See [Attachment A](#).

Staff has also updated the Drought Fact Sheet originally developed and released last year. Updates this year highlight current drought figures as California moves into a fourth year of drought. Updates also highlight the impacts of drought on Sierra forests such as the increased susceptibility of drought-stressed trees to the bark beetle and the resulting rampant tree-mortality currently seen throughout the Region. See [Attachment B](#).

### **Great Sierra River Cleanup**

This year's Great Sierra River Cleanup will be on September 19, and preparations are going strong. We've developed our artwork, promotional materials, and coordinator resources, and are already publicizing the Cleanup on our website and through social media. We've continued outreach efforts to new and returning cleanup groups, and have hosted in-person training for nearly 30 Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership members. Nearly 20 coordinators also signed up for our one-hour training webinar. We have initiated sponsor recruitment efforts and will continue them until late June.

### **Current Sierra Nevada Research**

In an on-going effort to identify and share science relevant to the Sierra Nevada Region and the WIP, SNC staff continues to track and monitor research. [Attachment C](#) includes summaries of and links to two research papers that discuss the different roles forests play relative to carbon storage, sequestration, and emissions.

- Aboveground Live Carbon Stock Changes of California Wildland Ecosystems, 2001–2010
- Recovery of Ponderosa Pine Ecosystem Carbon and Water Fluxes from Thinning and Stand-Replacing Fire

### **Next Steps**

In an effort to impart the urgent need for action in the Sierra Nevada Region and the value and importance of the Sierra Nevada WIP, staff will continue to identify and pursue opportunities for meetings with key partners and decision-makers. As California enters the 2015 fire season, the risk of extreme fires is compounded by the on-going drought. Staff will utilize current events to underscore the urgent need for action in the Sierra Nevada Region using both traditional and social media and the SNC website. We will also continue to identify and share relevant scientific research to support legislative and policy discussions and to obtain the funding necessary to protect the Region and the values and benefits it provides.

### **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.**