

### **Background**

At the June 2010 meeting the Board unanimously approved the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Resolution. Through the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI), the SNC is fostering local and Regional collaboration to support a cohesive, economically viable, and sustainable approach to reducing fire risk, creating jobs, and protecting our valuable forest and watershed resources. SNFCI has strong coordination with federal agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS) and resource-oriented state agencies.

The SNC has formed a Regional Coordinating Council to work on Regional and statewide issues that will influence the success of local forest efforts. SNC Board Vice Chair Nunes and former Board Vice Chair Wilensky are co-chairing the Regional Coordinating Council, and Boardmember Kirkwood along with Boardmember Nunes are serving as the Board liaisons to the Initiative. Other members include representatives from the woods products industry, local government, environmental and conservation organizations, community groups and water interests.

The primary federal land managers will participate in an advisory role including: USFS, BLM and NPS. The primary focus of the council is policy, investment, emerging technology, and science and research. The Coordinating Council has already suggested broadening the participation to include agricultural/ranching interest, tribal entities and the Board of Forestry. SNC staff and the Coordinating Council are following up with these suggestions.

One critical SNFCI element is SNC support for local efforts aimed at convening diverse stakeholders to identify common visions and strategies that result in ecologically healthy forests, fire-safe communities, local job creation, and retaining existing industrial and commercial infrastructure, while fostering new infrastructure as needed. On-the-ground manifestations of the SNFCI include local collaborative groups such as the Amador-Calaveras Consensus Group (ACCG) and the Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative (SFCC), and groups formed to address more specific projects such as fuels reduction project design. Some of these groups are largely supported by SNC staff in terms of meeting logistics, facilitation, drafting funding proposals and project development efforts. The work of the SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council will do a great deal to reduce barriers to the implementation of local, on-the-ground projects by providing support and feedback to local forest collaboratives based on their needs as communicated via effective two-way communication about Regional issues affecting local efforts.

### **Current Status**

The inaugural SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council meeting was held in December 2010. The primary outcomes of the meeting include:

- The Coordinating Council deciding to operate on a consensus basis with the option for a member of the Coordinating Council to abstain.

- The Coordinating Council decided to meet on a quarterly basis and initially in Auburn for the March and June meetings, after which Coordinating Council members will re-assess. Site visits and project tours may be incorporated into future meetings as well.
- The Coordinating Council deciding that they will agree to use specific documents as “reference documents,” understanding that the groups represented do not necessarily subscribe to every aspect of the documents. Members were asked to submit other documents that could be useful to SNC staff for consideration by the full Coordinating Council. A workgroup to review and consolidate critical portions of relevant documents was proposed, with Bob Kirkwood volunteering to serve on this committee.
- A working group consisting of Mike DeBonis, Eric Holst, and Steve Wilensky was formed to develop position papers supporting the reauthorization of stewardship contracting authority and the Secure Rural Schools Act. SNC staff is drafting these papers with the working groups support and will circulate these to the Council in advance of the March meeting to be considered for adoption at this time.
- Another working group is addressing local forest collaboratives working group will evaluate existing forest collaborative efforts around the Sierra Nevada, identify the current stage of the groups’ development and identify their needs and primary concerns to identify specific actions the Coordinating Council and SNFCI partners can take to address these needs and issues. The group members consist of Craig Thomas, Bill Nunes, Mike Chapel, Frank Stewart, Steve Wilensky, Jonathon Kusel, and Jim Branham and will be facilitated by Kim Carr. The group intends to report out at the March meeting with an overview of need expressed and potential actions the council can take in support of these efforts.

The primary topics to be addressed during the March meeting include: a presentation highlighting the most creative elements and implementation-oriented activities within our local collaborative efforts and reports from the local forest collaborative working group on progress and potential actions for the Coordinating Council. The Coordinating Council will review and potentially adopt policy positions on reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools Act and the stewardship contracting authority. In addition, the Coordinating Council will consider a proposal to establish a documents library to guide the Coordinating Council’s work. The group plans to discuss long-term funding and resources to actively manage the Sierra Nevada forests and restore the watersheds.

At this point, more than 140 organizations and individuals have signed on to endorse the resolution. This group includes Boards of Supervisors representing the twenty-two counties making up the SNC’s jurisdictional area. Since the December Board meeting, several key stakeholders have added their endorsements, including the:

- American River Conservancy
- Sierra Economic Development Corporation

- CA State Fire Safe Council
- The Sierra Fund
- Mountain Counties Water Resources Association
- Association of California Water Agencies
- (Expect) CA RC&D Association

SNC staff will develop electronic newsletters quarterly in order to provide regular communications about the most recent updates on the Initiative progress to the resolution signatories, local forest collaborative participants, SNFCI Regional Coordinating Council members, SNC Boardmembers and other interested groups. There will also be communications more frequently than quarterly to share major updates to these interested groups. SNC staff produced and distributed the first electronic newsletter this past month.

In addition, a specific outreach plan has been developed for Tribal Nations and organizations through SNC staff collaboration with key partners with strong ties to the Tribal Entities in the Sierra Nevada. This plan includes communications specially crafted to address Tribal needs and concerns, as well as one-on-one local relationship building between local SNC staff and Tribal leadership designed to help the SNC better serve Tribes locally and Regionally through SNFCI.

The SNC is assessing available data relating to the supply of woody biomass on public lands and developing an inventory of existing facilities and their volume capacities within the Sierra Nevada. This information will serve to begin development of a “regional blueprint” that can help ensure a balance of lumber mills, biomass to energy facilities, small wood and other value added products facilities, appropriately scaled and geographically distributed. This strategy will help target SNFCI efforts toward areas of greatest need. Staff continues to network with established groups with common goals to involve them in the initiative and evaluate specific support SNC may be able to offer them.

Through the efforts of a development consultant hired by SNC to support the local collaboratives, a USDA Rural Development grant has been awarded to promote the establishment of small biomass processing businesses in targeted low-income areas of the Sierra Nevada Region, creating a diverse and stable market for the utilization of woody biomass which will create jobs, stimulate rural economies, and increase the economic feasibility of sustainable fuels reduction efforts which are needed for fire safety and forest health. In addition, two local collaboratives, the SFCC and ACCG, have each been awarded grants from the National Forest Foundation to provide capacity building support to sustain the organizations for the long term. As a result of one of these grants, the SFCC has established a Core Leadership Group that is working with highly qualified facilitation and program development trainers to develop a skilled, well-balanced leadership team to build greater capacity and independence in the SFCC over the long-term.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will continue working with the Regional Coordinating Council, which will establish short and long-term goals as well as draft an implementation plan and consider measureable outcomes. SNC staff is continuing to establish more consistent and diverse communications to stakeholders. The first electronic SNFCI newsletter was distributed in last month to endorsers of the resolution and other key stakeholders. Newsletters will be developed and circulated about 3 – 4 times per year. Staff will also continue to upgrade the SNFCI webpage with more photos, graphics and general information.

Staff will continue to engage federal land management agencies with SNFCI through the Regional Coordinating Council as well as the local collaboratives, recognizing that these agencies are ultimately responsible for management decisions on these public lands. As appropriate, additional resources will be focused on such items as support for market analysis/biomass utilization, business plan development and support for the Coordinating Council. Additional opportunities will be actively sought to submit applications for funding to support both local and Regional SNFCI activities.

Through logistical support, facilitation and general guidance, SNC staff will continue to encourage local collaboratives to move continually towards on the ground projects with quantifiable results. Staff will also look for additional opportunities to support local efforts in new areas of the Sierra Nevada.

### **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.**