

Securing California's Environmental and Economic Future

Protecting *and* Restoring  
*the* HEALTH *and* RESILIENCE *of*  
Sierra Nevada  
WATERSHEDS *and* COMMUNITIES

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy Strategic Plan 2019–2024





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 @SNConservancy

*The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is a state agency with the mission to initiate, encourage, and support efforts to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region, its communities, and the citizens of California.*



Terrence O'Brien, Governing Board Chair  
Jim Branham, Executive Officer 2005—2018  
Angela Avery, Executive Officer  
Bob Kingman, Assistant Executive Officer

Cover photo: Tioga Lake, Mono County

*Photos (Opposite)*

Top left: Kernville, Kern County

Top right: Antelope, Modoc County; photography: Lorissa Soriano

Bottom: Sherwin Grade; photography: Mono County Tourism





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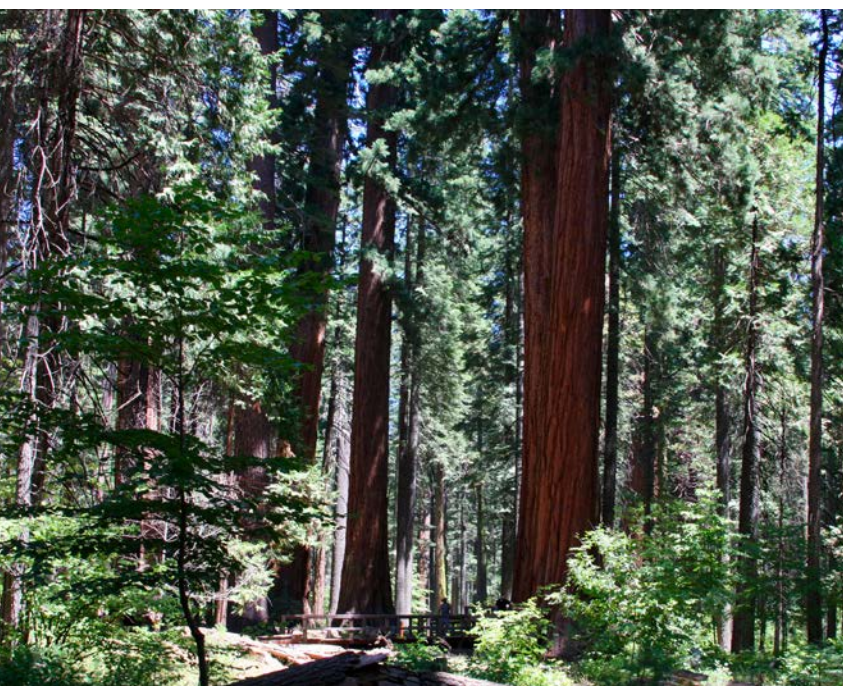


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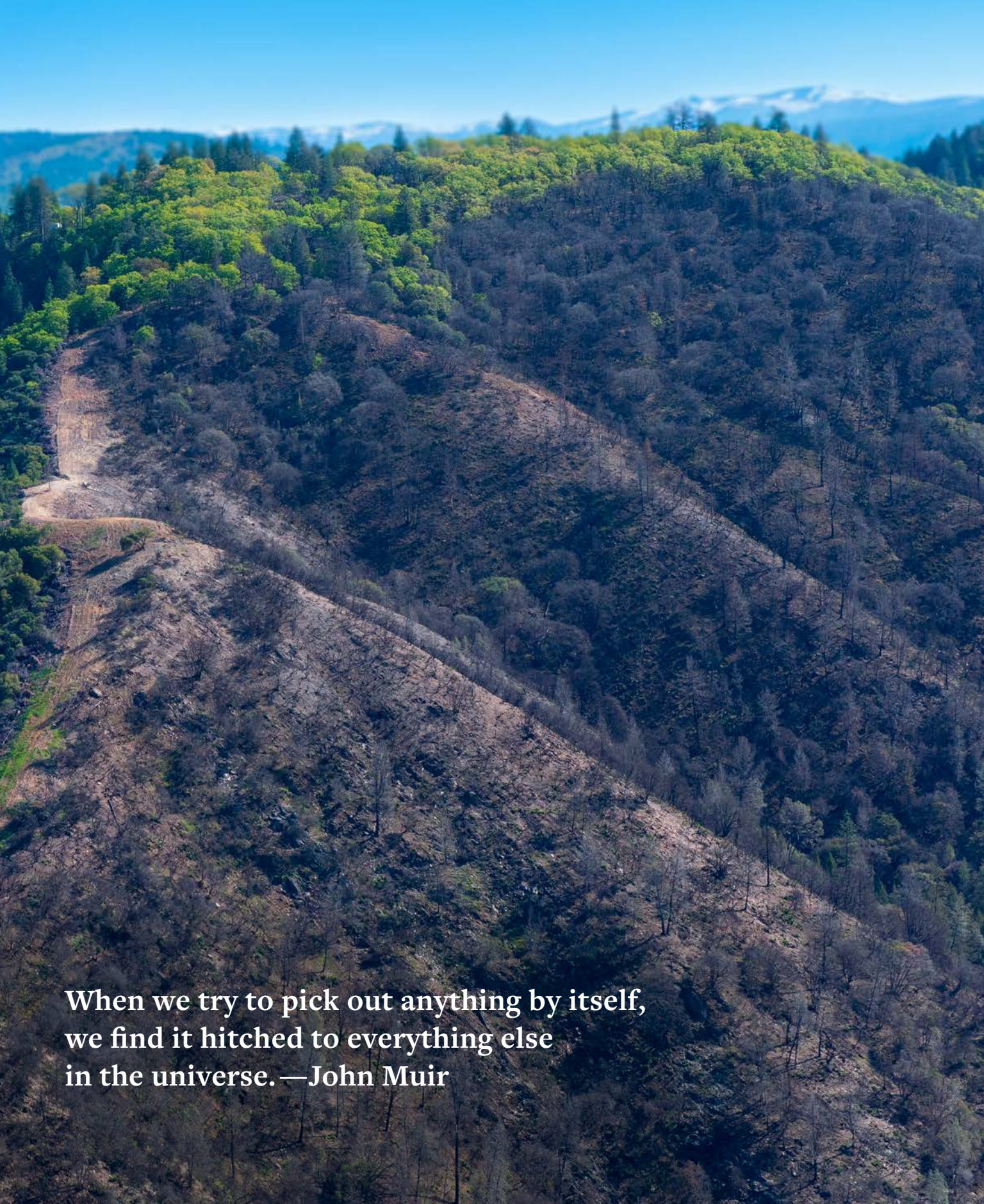
Top: Snowshoeing near Donner Lake, Nevada County  
 Bottom left: Calaveras Big Trees State Park, Calaveras County  
 Bottom right: Feather Falls, Butte County; photography: ray\_explores



An aerial photograph of a vast, densely forested mountain range. The foreground shows a steep slope covered in a thick canopy of green trees, with some lighter green patches indicating different tree species or sunlight filtering through. In the background, a deep valley opens up, showing more forested hillsides under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is a lush, natural landscape.

# INTRODUCTION



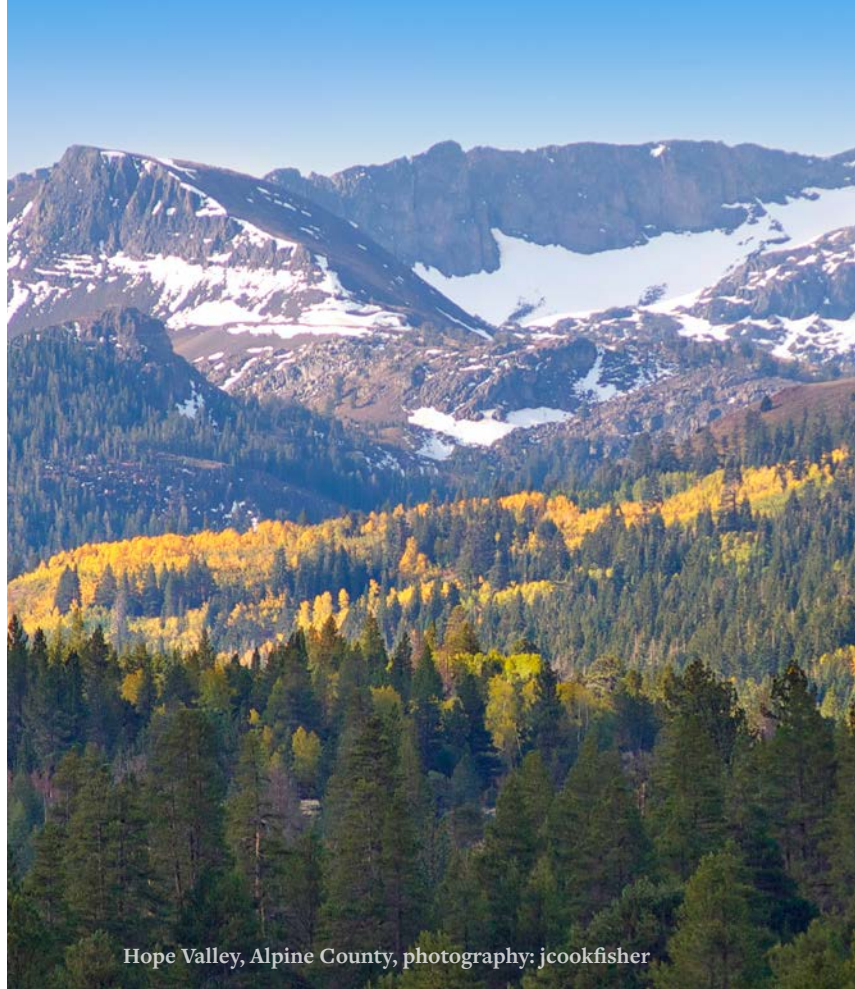


When we try to pick out anything by itself,  
we find it hitched to everything else  
in the universe. —John Muir



# BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Susan River, Lassen County



Hope Valley, Alpine County, photography: jeookfisher

Muir's observation decades ago aptly describes California's continued connection to the Sierra Nevada. California's past, present, and future are inextricably linked to the benefits provided by the Sierra Nevada Region. The rush for gold in the Sierra foothills lured people from all over the world to California, and the outstanding recreational opportunities offered by the Sierra Nevada Region draw millions of visitors today. California's reservoir and aqueduct system, fed by Sierra Nevada rain and snow, provides more than 60 percent of the developed drinking and irrigation water that fuels the world's fifth largest economy. In addition, Sierra forests contain almost 50 percent of the state's total aboveground forest carbon (more than any other region or sector), and its forests and agricultural

lands are uniquely suited to help California in meeting its AB 32 greenhouse gas reduction goals.

It was an appreciation for the critical role this Region plays, and the understanding of the need to protect and restore it, that prompted a diverse group of legislators and private, non-governmental organizations to work together to create the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

## THE SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is a California state agency created by bipartisan legislation (AB 2600) signed into law in 2004. The mission of the SNC is 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.

The statute that created the SNC emphasizes the importance of carrying out the mission in an integrated and complementary manner and the important role an organization can play in providing strategic direction and resources to the Region. The SNC's activities fall under seven statutorily mandated program areas:

- Increasing the opportunity for tourism and recreation in the Region
- Protecting, conserving, and restoring the Region's physical, cultural, archaeological, historical, and living resources
- Aiding in the preservation of working landscapes
- Reducing the risk of natural disasters such as wildfire
- Protecting and improving water quality and air quality
- Assisting the Regional economy through the operation of the SNC's program
- Enhancing public use and enjoyment of lands owned by the public

The SNC Region includes all or part of 22 counties and is divided into six Subregions by its governing statutes. There are numerous differences among the Subregions based on a variety of natural, socio-economic, and historic factors, as well as current conditions. For example, massive tree mortality affects the South and South Central Subregions in a significant manner, while the East Subregion's resources are impacted by concentrated recreational use. For additional details on each of the six Subregions, see "Appendix A: Subregions by the Numbers." This Strategic Plan (Plan) and its implementation considers these differences, and the SNC will strive to deliver the services best suited to each Subregion.

To understand more about the SNC's jurisdiction, vision, purpose, guiding principles, and requirements, please see "Appendix B: Foundations of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy."

## A CRITICAL REGION AT RISK

The Sierra Nevada is an extraordinary region of statewide, national, and even global significance. Beyond the Region's contribution in terms of water and carbon storage, it sustains 60 percent of California's animal species and almost half of its plant species. The Sierra also supplies up to half

**The Sierra Nevada provides more than 60% of California's developed water supply, nourishing communities, agriculture, and industry.**



of California's annual timber yield and produces 70 percent of the state's hydroelectric power, meeting 15 percent of the state's overall energy needs. Agriculture, forestry, and ranching are the most common land uses on private lands in the Sierra. These working landscapes produce a wide range of goods and contribute to the state's overall economy.

Beyond these essential services, the Sierra hosts more than 50 million recreational visits per year and is home to more than 600,000 residents in 200+ local communities—communities that are at significant risk to wildfire and resultant floods and mudslides, and that depend in large part on natural resources for economic sustainability, job creation, recreation, and preservation of community character and culture which are unique to the Sierra Nevada Region.

The SNC and its many partners are making progress in protecting the vital resources of the Region and in communicating the important benefits provided by the Region. However, even with the progress that has been made, the Region's watersheds

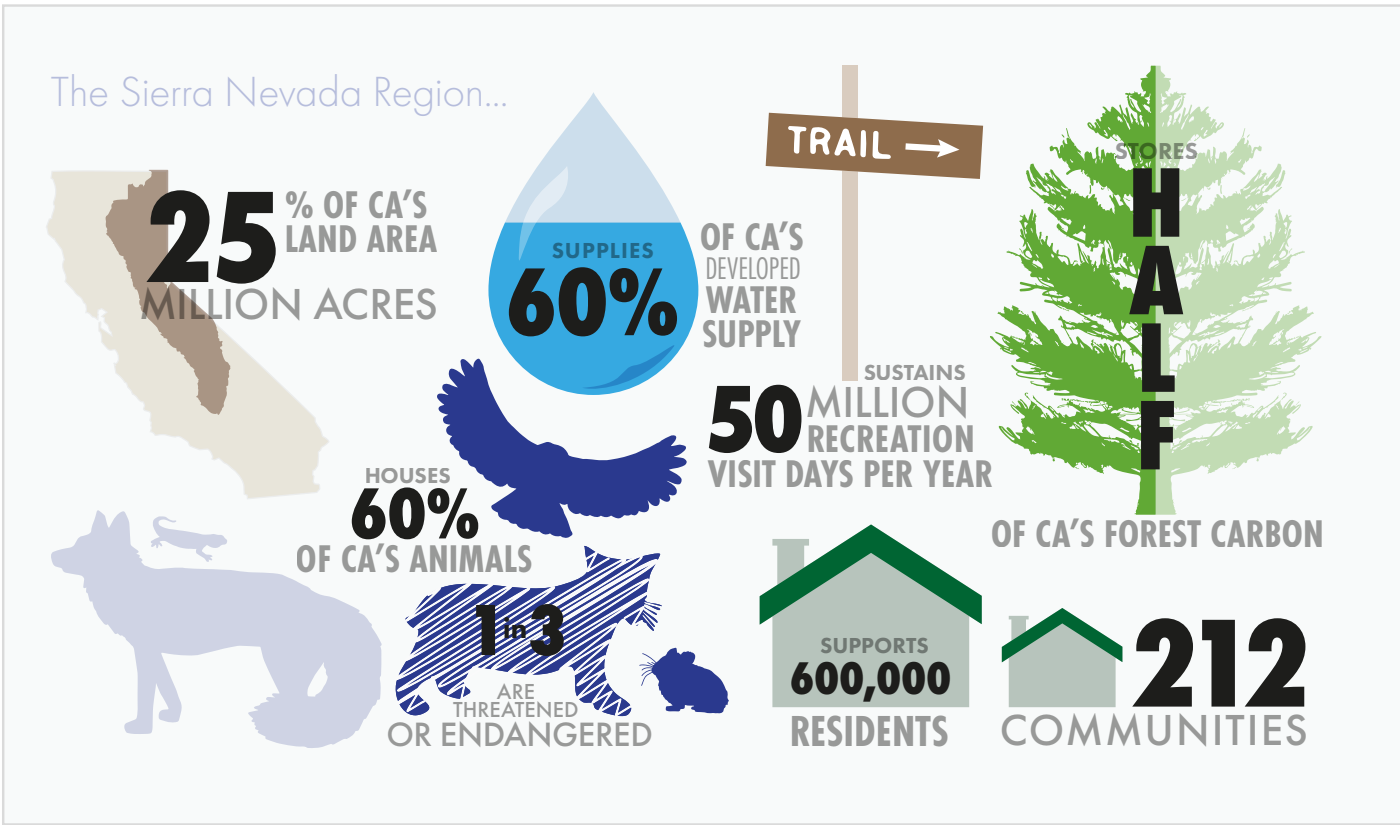
and communities are facing unprecedented risks. For example, this decade sets the new record for acres burned by wildfire on the western slope of the Sierra with one fire season remaining. These fires are not only moving faster and burning larger areas but are burning at far higher severity than in previous times. As if this isn't challenging enough, much of the Region has suffered unprecedented tree mortality resulting from unhealthy overgrown forests, drought, and the ensuing insect epidemic.

At the same time, many Sierra Nevada meadows and streams are degraded and in need of restoration and

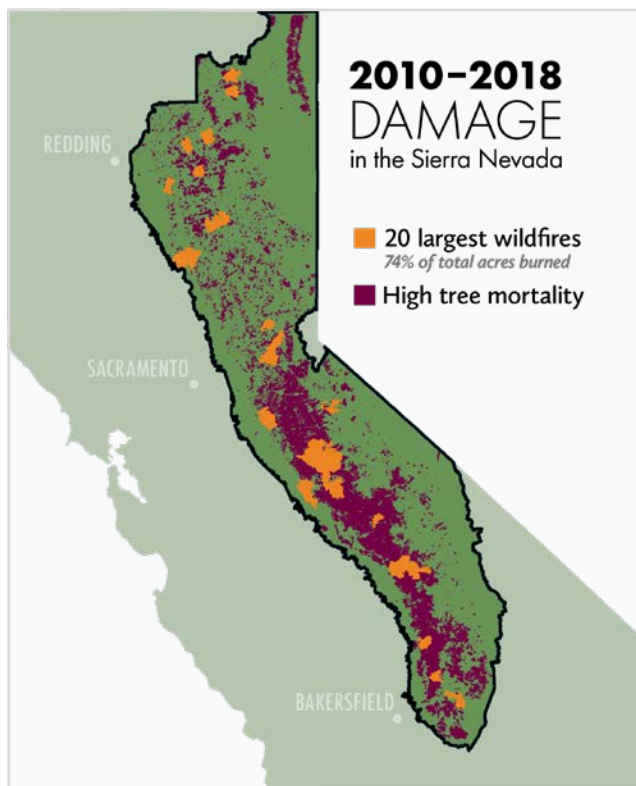
protection. Healthy watersheds are essential to a long-term stable supply of high-quality water and to the timing of Sierra origin waters reaching the reservoirs below, which then serve homes, businesses, and farms throughout California.

Current conditions in the Sierra Nevada are resulting in significant public health and safety impacts. The increase in large, damaging wildfires burning across the Sierra Nevada is having harmful

Healthy watersheds are essential to a long-term stable supply of high-quality water







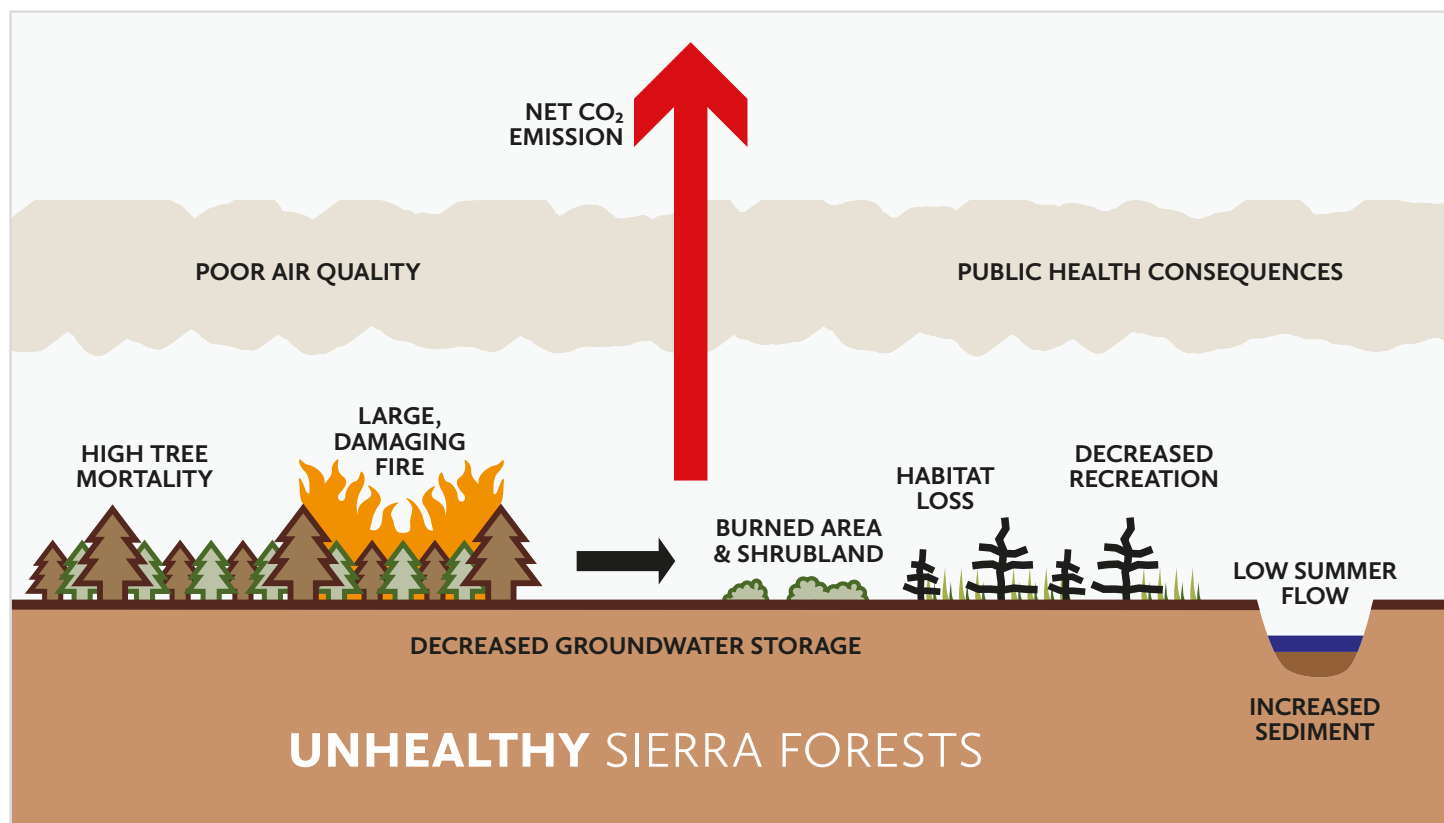
Sierra Nevada forests are unhealthy, so the benefits they provide are in jeopardy. Wildfires are getting bigger and more destructive and tree mortality is skyrocketing.



Since 2010, an unprecedented 112 million trees have been killed by bark beetles and drought.



Over 1.8 million acres have burned since 2010—more than any prior decade. Large, damaging wildfires are changing fire's role from forest maintenance to forest conversion.





The destructive 2018 Ferguson Fire (right/above) burned almost 100,000 acres over the course of a month, emitting smoke that extended for hundreds of miles and forced Yosemite National Park to close for two weeks. Photography: Kari Greer, U.S. Forest Service.



air quality impacts across a wider geographical area. For example, research conducted in 2017 (“Aligning Smoke Management with ecological and public health goals.” *Journal of Forestry* 116.1 (2017) 76–86.) found that smoke from the 2013 Rim Fire extended from California, across Nevada and into Idaho, exposing millions of people to high-density smoke. The research estimates that the Rim Fire had an over five times greater impact on public health per acre burned than smaller resource management fires that also burned in the Sierra Nevada Region. Additionally, the Camp Fire blanketed most of the northern portion of the state in smoke. Air quality in the Bay Area and Sacramento was in the hazardous range for days,

and many public school districts and universities closed to protect public health.

Furthermore, many Sierra communities and citizens continue to face severe economic challenges with numerous communities meeting the definition of “disadvantaged.” The inextricable link between Sierra communities and the natural resources that surround them is obvious. As economic drivers such as timber production have lessened in recent decades, new economic opportunities have been difficult to realize in many communities. While recreation and tourism and agricultural/ranching operations remain important economic contributors for much of the Region, diversifying local economies remains a generally shared objective.





Prescribed fires (left/above) emit less smoke than severe wildfires—smoke is only experienced short-term locally. Prescribed fires protect ecosystems from large, damaging wildfires like the Ferguson Fire.

To make matters more urgent, the Region is facing a steadily changing climate that will exacerbate current threats and create new ones. As has been demonstrated, changing precipitation patterns and increasing temperatures are having a profound impact on the Sierra Nevada landscape, life, and property, affecting its environmental, economic, and social well-being and that of all California.

With all the challenges and heightened risks, significant opportunities are presenting themselves. The state has begun increasing both attention—Governor Jerry Brown’s *Executive Order B-52-18* called for the creation of a Forest Management Task Force—and financial investment for restoring and conserving the critical assets of the Sierra

Nevada for all Californians. The latter includes increased expenditures from the California Climate Investments fund as well as funding in measures such as SB 5 (Proposition 68, the Parks, Environment, and Water Bond in June 2018) to restore and protect the Region’s watersheds and forests.

## MEETING THE CHALLENGES HEAD-ON

Since 2004, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy has been faced with a challenging mandate: to help restore, protect, and conserve the Region’s diverse natural, physical, and living resources. Since that time, the SNC has awarded

**The SNC promotes biomass utilization in order to support desperately needed forest restoration work and to create jobs in Sierra communities.**

over \$68 million in Proposition 84 and Proposition 1 funds for projects throughout the Region. In recent years, the SNC has been playing a stronger role in statewide policy and funding decisions addressing watershed health, water supply, carbon storage, and overall climate resilience. At the same time, the SNC has continued to work with innovative, collaborative efforts

to identify workable solutions to the complex challenge of increasing the pace and scale of needed work.

Clearly, Sierra Nevada circumstances have changed significantly since SNC's first and subsequent Strategic and Action plans were adopted, and the variability associated with a changing climate is altering current understanding about watersheds and forests, leading to even more change in the future. These changes are having impacts on California's fiscal health and environmental future in terms of increased wildfire and corresponding carbon emissions, decreased carbon storage capacity, habitat diversity, and recreation. An ever-changing political landscape and lack of a long-term, sustainable source of project funding makes addressing these issues even more complicated. In 2016, the SNC Governing Board recognized the need to acknowledge and respond to these new challenges. A new strategic plan was called for that could identify known and possible challenges and could focus on the known issues now while also retaining the flexibility to effectively address current and unanticipated problems that may arise in the coming years.

## THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF PARTNERS

It is fully recognized that achievement of the Regional Goals in this Strategic Plan will take far more than the efforts and resources of the SNC. The staff of the SNC is committed to working with, and on behalf of, Regional partners to make significant progress under each of the Goals. It is expected that many partners will see the potential links to their projects and priorities throughout the Plan. Where unclear, SNC commits to working proactively with them to identify ways to improve coordination and achieve shared objectives.



Bioenergy Facility in Quincy, Plumas County





The SNC's future efforts will build off the substantial partnerships in place with a wide range of state and federal agencies, local government, tribal organizations, and the various private and nonprofit partners working in these areas. The SNC will continue to rely heavily on these partners while maintaining and increasing its support through funding, in-kind resources, and technical assistance.

As a state agency, it is important that the SNC's work helps to implement various state policies, plans, and programs. This Strategic Plan has been crafted with several such efforts in mind, including the state climate, water, economic, and environmental goals. For more information on other plans considered during plan development, see "Appendix C: Plan Development."

The SNC views California's tribal organizations as vital partners in achieving holistic Regional health and protecting the Region's current and future resources, and recognizes the important role that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) can play in guiding management and restoration, enhancement, and habitat protection projects. With this Strategic Plan, the SNC strengthens

Sierra Nevada circumstances have changed significantly since SNC's first and subsequent Strategic and Action Plans were adopted

its commitment to proactively work with tribal representatives to achieve shared goals and support development of tribal resources across the Region.

Through this Strategic Plan, the SNC commits to continue and heighten its efforts to support and strengthen its partners through collaboration, capacity building, advocacy, support for policy development, linking resources, and providing funding as available.

## STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

As the organization approached the development of this Strategic Plan, first and foremost was the clear need to check in with partners to identify the most pressing issues and challenges across the

Region from their perspectives. A Regional Strategic Assessment was conducted at the outset, and the structure, strategies, and many of the actions contained in this Plan and in the companion Action Plan were shaped and suggested by partners operating both within and outside of the

Region. In addition, two public comment periods were held to invite the public to comment on the proposed strategies and the draft Strategic Plan. A significant goal of the Assessment and outreach was

to utilize the information obtained to chart a collaborative course that allows the SNC to have the biggest and best impact on the Region over the next several years. Details related to the Strategic Assessment and the public input received can be found in "Appendix D: Stakeholder Participation in Plan Development."

Obviously, in a Region as large and diverse as the Sierra Nevada, not all voices and interests will agree on priorities, needs, or the best way of achieving goals. However, the SNC's experience to date, and the feedback received via the Strategic

Assessment, indicate a great deal of agreement on key issues. This Plan considers a broad range of opinions and perspectives and relies on SNC's governing statutes, mission, vision, and guiding principles to help determine the appropriate course of action. The SNC will continue to rely upon sound, peer-reviewed science, current law and policy, and relevant funding criteria to help support projects and establish programs and priorities. The SNC will likewise continue to pursue and explore new information, ideas, and suggestions and adapt as necessary to implement this Plan.

The SNC commits to playing a lead role in organizing state and federal funding agencies and working with local governments, tribes, and non-governmental partners to develop a strategic, holistic approach to investment in and throughout the Sierra Nevada Region.





# FOUNDATIONS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

## ELEVATION OF THE WIP

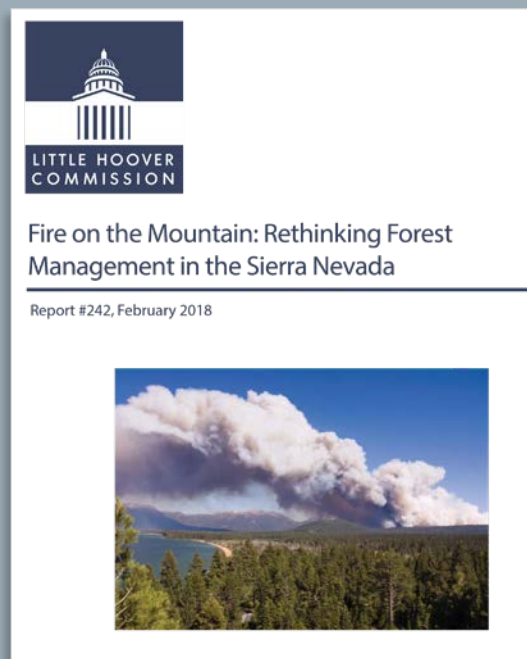
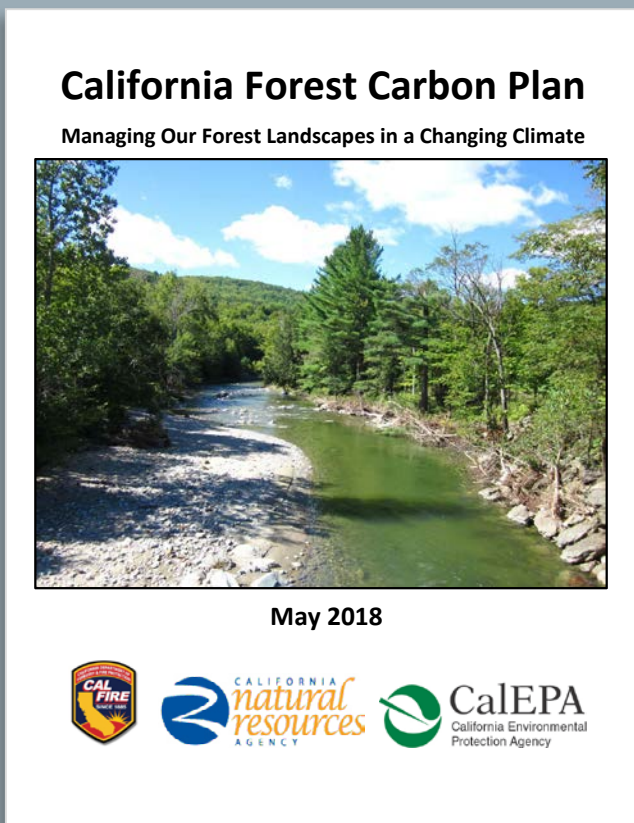
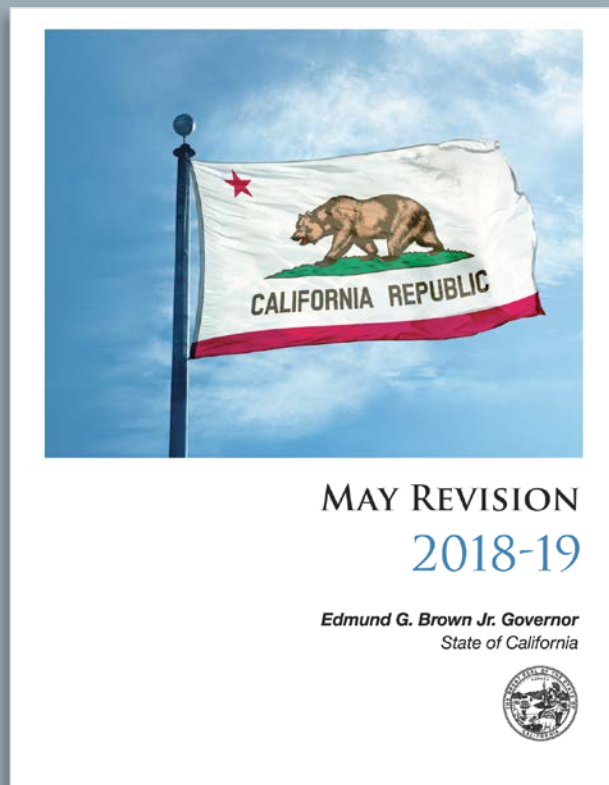
A key element of this Strategic Plan is the establishment of the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) as the SNC's overarching initiative, providing a holistic approach to watershed and community health and resilience. The WIP was launched in March 2015 with the goal of increasing the pace and scale of ecological restoration by increasing investment, addressing policy impediments, and increasing infrastructure in the Region. Since that time, the WIP has been recognized as a model program for focusing resources and activities at the most difficult and dangerous problems and achieving success in breaking down organizational, political, and bureaucratic barriers. While the initial focus has been primarily on forest health issues, it was always intended that the WIP would approach watershed issues in a comprehensive manner. The launch of this Strategic Plan and the success in securing new funding for the SNC have provided the opportunity to expand the WIP beyond forest health.

The magnitude of the challenges resulting from current conditions and a changing climate require a program that can truly increase the pace and scale of needed actions at a landscape level and across all issues. Restoring watershed health and resilience will remain a top priority under this Plan, recognizing that other goals can only be achieved with this foundation in place. However, significant attention will be paid to conserving critical lands, promoting vibrant recreation and tourism opportunities, and supporting efforts to create community resilience. These efforts will

be aided by ongoing communication, education, and advocacy activities designed to inform policy makers, beneficiaries, interest groups, and the public as to the benefits of a healthy, resilient Sierra Nevada and to provide greater understanding of the need for appropriate investment and policy action including the forest and beyond.

By using the WIP as the "umbrella" program for the goals of Healthy Watersheds and Forests, Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities, Vibrant Recreation and Tourism,





Numerous state studies and plans now explicitly call out the need to address the issues that the SNC and its partners have been working on this past decade. The documents pictured call out the WIP as a model for addressing forest and watershed health.



and Strategic Lands Conserved, the SNC provides a more holistic perspective consistent with the SNC mission, recognizing the inherent interrelationships and dependencies between the Regional Goals. The Impactful Regional Identity Goal envisions the SNC and its partners actively communicating the value and benefits the Sierra Nevada Region provides to the state to garner the level of attention, funding, and public policy support that the Region needs to ensure that those benefits continue to support California.

This approach allows a wider and deeper group of partners and agencies to engage in the WIP, more clearly seeing their priorities and programs embodied in it. It likewise provides the SNC and its partners with the opportunity to tell a more compelling story of the peril facing the Region and its communities, the full range of activities needed to restore resilience, and how these activities relate to each other. The elevation of the WIP to drive the Strategic Plan positions the SNC to provide leadership and serve as a catalyst on issues of importance to the Region and the state of California. It also provides the platform for coordination of other efforts and initiatives consistent with the goals and strategies of the Strategic Plan.

## FOCUS ON CLIMATE IMPACTS AND RESILIENCY

California continues to lead the nation in efforts to address the issue of climate change with a variety of state programs in place that institute mitigation and adaptation efforts and actions. The Sierra Nevada Region plays a critical role in these efforts, and healthy forests provide the foundation for that important role. When healthy, the Region's forested landscapes sequester and store more carbon than any other eco-region of the state.

However, the Sierra Nevada forests of today have become net emitters rather than net sequesterers of carbon, due primarily to large, severe wildfire and tree mortality. Governor Brown in his 2018 State of the State address acknowledged the important role of forests when he stated "...We also have to manage our forests—and soils—more intelligently." The Governor has convened a task

force to thoroughly review the way California's forests are managed and suggest ways to reduce the threat of devastating fires. They will also consider how California can increase resiliency and carbon storage capacity.

The strategies in this Strategic Plan will contribute significantly to restoring California's forests to the positive role they can and should play. These efforts will serve to implement the Forest Carbon Plan (FCP), the state's plan for addressing forest health and resilience. The Goals and Strategies of this Plan will assist in addressing the following FCP recommendations:

- Significantly increase the pace and scale of forest and watershed improvements on nonfederal lands through incentives and other mechanisms
- Support federal goals and actions to improve forest and watershed health and resiliency
- Prevent forest land conversion through easements and acquisitions, as well as land use planning
- Innovate solutions for wood products and biomass utilization to support ongoing forest management activities
- Support key research, data management, and accountability

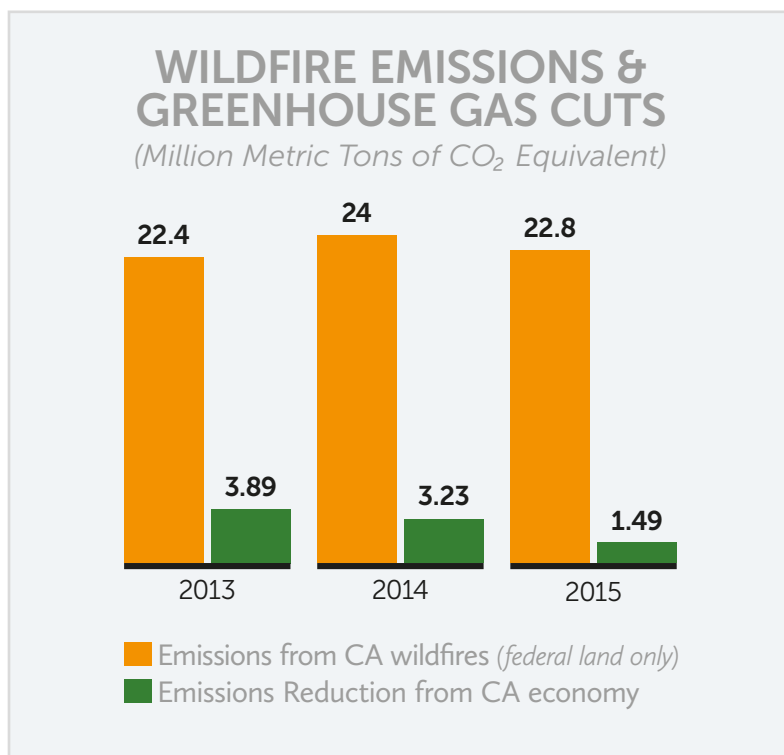


Ecologically sound forest thinning can free up resources for remaining trees. This gives those trees the space they need to grow—and allows them to capture and store more carbon.



At the same time, it is inevitable that changes in climate will continue to occur. In the Sierra, the combination of higher temperatures and changing precipitation patterns (more rain and less snow as the general rule) will affect the environment and economy of the Region's watersheds and communities. This will require innovative, science-based approaches to address changes in plant and animal communities as they adapt to climate change. Furthermore, as the climate changes, recreation- and tourism-dependent economies in the Region will be impacted and will also need to adapt. Warmer temperatures will impact the timing and availability of the water supply, affecting the economy and well-being of the entire state. Healthy watersheds and forests can help to regulate all those impacts moving forward.

The interconnected approach identified in this Plan will focus SNC's work and coordinate with the work of others to ensure that investments maximize their potential climate mitigation and adaptation benefits and assist communities with resilience-building information, support, and resources.



Trees in California should absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, not generate huge amounts of black carbon and greenhouse gas as they do today when forest fires rage across the land. —Governor Jerry Brown, 2018 *State of the State Address*

## STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

The SNC recognizes that, regardless of the provision of new funding in 2019 and beyond, the funding allocated to the SNC for projects and activities to restore resilience to the Region's watersheds, forests, landscapes, and communities will not be sufficient to address the scope and scale of issues in the Region. But, working strategically with funding partners across the state, investments can be coordinated to increase the pace and scale of work that addresses issues across the Region and achieves the Regional Goals set out in this Plan.

This means that, at times, the SNC may be providing funding in support of various activities to carry out the strategies identified in this Plan. In other instances, the SNC will rely on other funding partners to address identified needs in a coordinated manner.





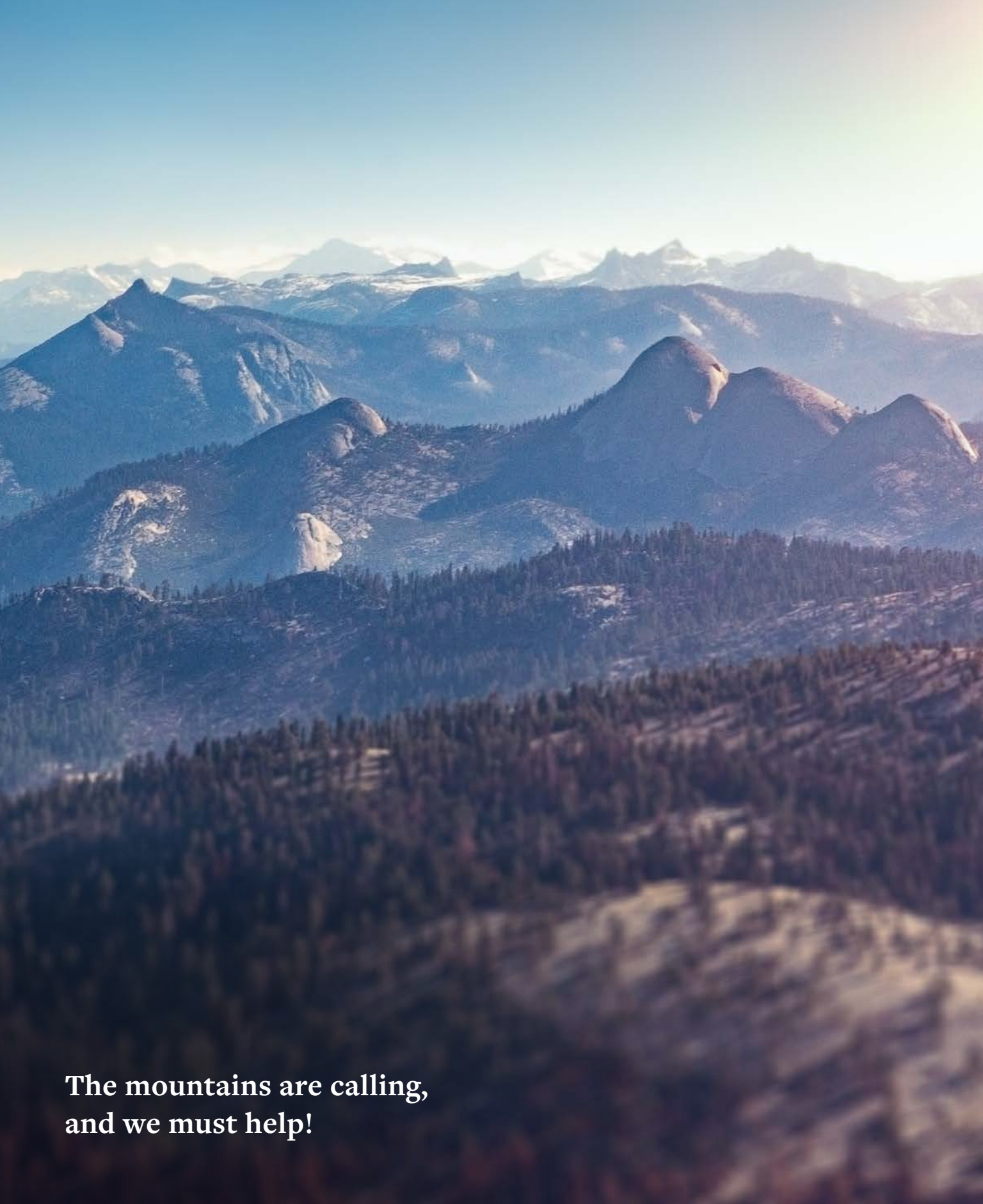
Clockwise from top left: Deer Creek Project, Nevada County; the Rio Bravo Bioenergy Facility in Rocklin, Placer County, which obtains dead and dying trees from the Sierra Nevada under Governor Brown's 2016 Tree Mortality Emergency Proclamation; the Wildland-Urban interface in Burney, Shasta County; Lily Gap Project, Calaveras County.





# REGIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES





The mountains are calling,  
and we must help!



This Strategic Plan is designed to position the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to use its accumulated experience, expertise, and understanding to more effectively address the current conditions, challenges, and opportunities that exist in the Region. While the Plan is specific to the SNC, it can also serve to inspire new collaborations, coalesce partner efforts, and leverage funding opportunities, providing the basis for a more holistic

approach to restoring watershed and community health and resilience.

This Plan is predicated on the understanding that the old way of doing business isn't working for the Region's watersheds or communities. The monumental task that the Region faces requires a bold new approach for SNC and its partners to break down silos and address well-intentioned approaches that are proving to be impediments to action.

**The five Strategic Goals below represent the most critical needs identified across the Region.**



## **HEALTHY WATERSHEDS AND FORESTS**

## **IMPACTFUL REGIONAL IDENTITY**

## **RESILIENT SIERRA NEVADA COMMUNITIES**

## **STRATEGIC LANDS CONSERVED**

## **VIBRANT RECREATION AND TOURISM**



# PLAN TIME FRAME AND ORGANIZATION

The Plan will be implemented in ongoing collaboration with multiple partners throughout the Region, and its strategies will be carried out through specific actions identified in the separate 12- and 18-month Action Plans. This Plan is intended to guide the operations of the SNC for five years (2019–2024), following which an update to the plan will occur. If necessary, the SNC may make changes to this Plan prior to the planned update based on changing circumstances, new developments, and available resources.

The SNC is committed to carrying out activities in each of these goal areas to restore resilience to the Region and its communities. However, there are a number of factors that may affect the level of activity undertaken by the SNC for each goal, including available funding, guidance and restrictions placed upon the funding, state policy priorities, and the role of other state agencies. Consistent with available resources, SNC will continue to take actions in assessing

needs, developing partnerships, addressing policy barriers, pursuing funding, and testing out new ways of doing business in each goal area. Strategies have been developed based on the following model, as appropriate, which has been used to implement the WIP:

- Needs Assessment
- Developing Partnerships and Resources
- Policy
- Funding and Investments
- Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business
- Communications/Telling the Story

The strategies are designed to guide specific actions identified in an annual Action Plan. Examples of how some of the strategies might play out over time are provided in this Plan as a bulleted list under the strategy. It should be noted that the strategies are numbered solely for reference purposes and do not represent priorities. Plan priorities and focus will be identified as actions in the annual Action Plan.



# HEALTHY WATERSHEDS AND FORESTS

*Restore and protect the ecological health and resilience of watersheds and forests within the Sierra Nevada Region.*

Sierra Nevada watersheds and forests are at a critical crossroads of crisis and opportunity, and the many benefits that they provide hang in the balance. Overgrown forests, an extended drought, and a changing climate have resulted in larger and more severe wildfire and catastrophic bark beetle

## RESTORE PRESCRIBED FIRE

infestation resulting in tree mortality exceeding 112 million dead trees throughout the Region from

2014–18. The result is proving devastating to local communities and landscapes and to California’s air and water resources. But with these challenges come political interest and attention, which can, if appropriately harnessed, lead to the increased investment and policy changes necessary to improve ecological resilience, increase social, physical, financial, and cultural well-being of residents, and enhance enjoyment for the Region’s visitors.

The SNC has been actively addressing these issues through funding, policy advocacy, and communications, promoting the need for a dramatic increase in the pace and scale of ecologically sound restoration. The SNC has initiated, funded, and

## PROTECT AND INCREASE CARBON STORAGE

participated in a wide range of collaborative groups working together to reach this goal and

has provided millions of dollars to watershed and forest health projects through the Proposition 84 and Proposition 1 grant programs. In March 2015, SNC established the Sierra Nevada Watershed

Improvement Program (WIP) as an ambitious, visionary, and collaborative program to restore the health of California’s primary watershed through increased investment, needed policy changes, and increased infrastructure to support restoration activities and communities.

Many positive developments have occurred in recent years, including increased funding and policy changes, but the Region remains far short of the goal of healthy, resilient watersheds. As the pace and scale of forest restoration continues, the SNC will work to ensure that efforts include the restoration of meadows, oak woodlands, streams, and lakes that play critical roles in the benefits

## REDUCE CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRE

offered by healthy watersheds. The Healthy Watersheds and Forests Regional Goal continues the SNC’s priority focus on healthy forests

and broadens efforts to better integrate these watershed elements into its programs, reinforcing the SNC’s commitment to preserve, protect, and restore the health of the Region’s watersheds regardless of the threats they face.

It should be noted that increasing wood and biomass processing infrastructure, as well as workforce, equipment, and contractor capacity, are critical components of forest and watershed health. Activities addressing these issues are included in some of the strategies below as well as in the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Regional Goal.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Healthy Watersheds and Forests Regional Goal:





The SNC is uniquely situated to assist all the interests (be they federal, state, local, tribal, private, or nonprofit) in the protection and restoration of these watersheds. The SNC will continue its leadership in this area, challenging conventional “siloed” approaches, bringing partners together, identifying and implementing new ways of doing business, and looking for opportunities to link small efforts to create larger, landscape-scale impacts.



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### STRATEGY 1

Build and improve upon the WIP assessment work already completed and continue to assess needs of, opportunities for, and impediments to restoration of Sierra Nevada forests, meadows, streams, lakes, and oak woodlands throughout the Region. This could include:

- Convening and engaging key partners to assist in assessing needs and in identifying and connecting current and planned programs that address restoration issues; determining how the SNC can strengthen these efforts through staff support, advocacy, and communications campaigns; working with partners, including federal land management agencies, to refine high-level assessments
- Assessing the needs and opportunities relating to wood/biomass infrastructure, workforce, and organizational capacity necessary to carry out restoration activities
- Utilizing data and information regarding critical restoration needs to develop funding strategies and meet policy and advocacy objectives; and utilizing the Watershed Information Network (WIN) to share data and provide collaborative opportunities

## DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

### STRATEGY 2

Actively support the development and continued implementation of collaborative approaches at the Regional, watershed, and local levels to address forest and watershed health; provide leadership in promoting strategic alignment of projects across the landscape. This could include:

- Utilizing SNC staff and financial resources to support collaborative efforts; identifying and connecting new partners/collaborative needs with financial resources; sharing information and lessons learned across the Region
- Providing technical assistance for the development or enhancement of new collaboratives/groups



Mokelumne River, Amador County

## FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

### STRATEGY 3

Distribute available funds for watershed and forest restoration and protection in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact; coordinate with other state and federal funding agencies to ensure appropriate investment in the Sierra Nevada. This could include:

- Establishing and implementing competitive and/or directed grant program(s) that get work done on the ground rapidly and effectively; directed programs are designed to address needs within a specific program (such as fire resilience or meadow restoration), geographic region (such as by county or Subregion), or other priority as identified

### STRATEGY 4

Advocate for and secure increased funding for watershed protection and restoration work in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations. This could include:

- Working with partners to identify funding opportunities and assisting them in applying for funding to implement activities in the Sierra Nevada that support this Goal
- Directly seeking grants and other funding when appropriate and in the best interest of the Region



## POLICY

### STRATEGY 5

Educate key decision makers and funders on the critical need for forest and watershed management activities, including the use of prescribed and managed fire, to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration.

### STRATEGY 6

Identify and share science with decision makers and those that influence them to take informed action and influence policy to increase the pace and scale of ecological restoration.

### STRATEGY 7

Identify and advocate for improvements to state and federal environmental processes affecting forest and watershed restoration projects designed to protect and improve watershed health and resilience.

## DESIGN AND FIELD TEST NEW WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS

### STRATEGY 8

Establish, and continue engagement in, pilot projects across landscapes and ownerships that test new governance, finance, and implementation tools to increase the pace and scale of watershed restoration. This could include:

- Continuing to support partnerships and coalitions across the Region that design and directly implement pilot projects providing for focused, cooperative, and effective action across land ownerships to increase the pace and scale of watershed restoration; identifying impediments and process improvement affecting the pace and scale of restoration
- Identifying opportunities for, and/or designing and directly implementing, new pilot watershed restoration projects or Regional initiatives like the model developed for the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI)



Caples Creek prescribed burn, El Dorado County

### STRATEGY 9

Implement more efficient landscape planning and environmental impact review processes to get work done in watersheds on public and private lands. This could include:

- Assisting in the development and implementation of innovative and effective approaches to streamlining environmental compliance, including working with partners to develop specific parameters for large-scale, program-level California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) on a specific landscape

### STRATEGY 10

Increase the use of Master Stewardship Agreements and Good Neighbor Agreements, Cost Share Agreements, Joint Powers Agreements, Tribal Agreements, and other administrative agreements as appropriate to increase the pace and scale of ecological watershed restoration. This could include:

- Utilizing Good Neighbor Agreements to increase pace and scale of ecological forest restoration on USFS and BLM lands
- Convening and providing partners with technical assistance in developing and further utilizing administrative tools such as Master Stewardship Agreements to increase diverse funding to complete work on the ground

# RESILIENT SIERRA NEVADA COMMUNITIES

*Increase the environmental, economic, and social resilience of Sierra Nevada communities.*

The SNC recognizes the unique challenges that face rural, resource-dependent communities in the Sierra Nevada. The challenges in the Region have escalated over the last several decades. Wildfires now occur on a larger scale and with increased regularity,

## BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY

affecting more acres and public health. We have seen, first hand, the devastation that a catastrophic event like the Camp Fire in Butte County can wreak on the citizens, communities, and natural resources of the Region. With a death toll of 86 to date and over 18,000 structures destroyed, the Camp Fire became California's most destructive wildfire in history. Unhealthy watershed conditions surrounding these communities make them particularly susceptible to drought and resulting impacts such as pest infestations. In addition, a changing climate has exacerbated the situation with increasing temperatures and more extreme weather.

Economically, many Sierra Nevada communities are experiencing a shrinking tax base, a scarcity of skilled workers, and changing demographics. While recreation, tourism, and working landscapes remain important elements of local economies, many communities are struggling with economic diversification and job creation. The result is that significant portions of the Sierra Nevada now

## CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

meet the definition of "disadvantaged." Historically, the SNC has expended considerable effort working to improve watershed and forest health with the goal of reducing natural resource-based threats that put rural communities at risk. Managing forests for health and resilience creates jobs both on the ground in fuel loads reduction opportunities as well as

in infrastructure/biomass utilization. Additionally, the SNC has provided a variety of services that include a grant program, grant writing workshops, facilitation services, and limited CEQA assistance to communities that build capacity in the Region. To bring the Sierra Nevada Region to holistic health, the communities within the Region need support that empowers their efforts to address urgent needs, plan for the future, develop organizational capacity, and envision new tools and partnerships. This will include a focus on biomass infrastructure and workforce development in support of community resilience.

The SNC isn't positioned to address all these needs and issues. And, admittedly, focusing significant effort and potentially significant resources on bringing

## PROTECT OUR COMMUNITIES

communities to resiliency is somewhat new territory for this organization. It is recognized that, particularly in this goal area, partners are critical collaborators. In moving forward and determining the needs of Sierra Nevada communities, the focus will be on direct action that is at the center of the nexus between watershed health and resilient communities, and SNC staff will carry out activities that connect and help strengthen partner efforts, providing them with the resources and leverage that they need.

It is also recognized that there are many aspects to community resilience, including those that lie outside of the SNC's authority and focus. While SNC efforts will address those activities that are consistent with SNC authority, staff will work to coordinate with communities and organizations to ensure that all efforts are contributing to overall community resilience and are supportive of local climate adaptation efforts.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Resilient Sierra Nevada Communities Regional Goal:









Loyalton Biomass Co-Generation Plant, Sierra County



North Fork bioenergy facility groundbreaking, Madera County

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### STRATEGY 1

Work with partners to determine the role/s that SNC can play in assisting communities dealing with climate change and other resulting economic and social impacts. This could include:

- Convening partners already engaged in this work to determine areas where the SNC can take direct action and those where it should support other efforts; assisting communities in conducting vulnerability assessments; and supporting the identification of long-term threats to resilience to balance short-term with long-term resilience priorities

### STRATEGY 2

Coordinate with workforce development organizations, local community colleges, tribes, and communities to determine the best way/s to meet workforce needs associated with watershed restoration, forest products infrastructure, sustainable recreation and tourism, and working landscapes.

## DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

### STRATEGY 3

Develop and implement collaborative approaches that enhance community resiliency and bring entities together to solve problems and overcome obstacles. This could include:

- Continuing to participate in existing community collaborative efforts
- Identifying and connecting new partners/ collaborative needs and financial resources
- Providing funding or other resources for the development of new community collaboratives and the support of existing collaboratives



#### STRATEGY 4

Build capacity and greater community resilience in local governments, communities, organizations, and tribes throughout the Region. This could include:

- Continuing and expanding technical assistance to community organizations, including grant application development and training in grant writing, environmental compliance, business services, and technology
- Funding direct services including facilitation for planning efforts, expanded grant writing, and project management instruction

### FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

#### STRATEGY 5

Distribute available funds in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact and multiple co-benefits and leverage other state and federal funding agencies to improve community resiliency throughout the Region. This could include:

- Establishing a funding program in coordination with other governmental agencies and partners, which may focus on the needs within a specific program (like workforce development or biomass utilization), geographic region (such as by county or Subregion), or other priority as identified

#### STRATEGY 6

Advocate for and secure funding to increase community resilience throughout the Region, including funding for SNC and other agencies and organizations. This could include:

- Working with local communities and partners to identify funding needs and opportunities and assisting them in applying for funding
- Directly seeking grants and other funding when appropriate and in the best interest of the Region

Native American Day  
at the Capitol



### POLICY

#### STRATEGY 7

Working with partners to identify policy changes that will assist in increased community resilience. This could include:

- Identifying and supporting the removal of policy barriers to the utilization of biomass/woody byproducts, workforce development, and resilience planning

# VIBRANT RECREATION AND TOURISM

*Enhance, promote, and develop sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities in the Sierra Nevada Region.*

The Sierra Nevada Region offers tremendous outdoor recreation opportunities that both rely on healthy watersheds and forests and support tourism and economic growth in California's rural communities.

## INCREASE ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS

For many of the communities in the Region, revenue from recreation and tourism represents the largest portions of their economies, and jobs from recreation provide residents with the opportunity to work and thrive in their communities. Consistent with a surging national interest in outdoor recreation's role in the U.S. economy, the Sierra Nevada's outdoor recreation spectrum runs the full gamut: from highly developed ski resorts to backcountry wilderness; thousands of miles of trails for off highway vehicles, over snow vehicles, mountain biking, equestrianism, and hiking; world class fishing and hunting opportunities for a wide range of game; golf courses, marinas, wineries, and public parks; wildlife refuges; caves; and wild rivers. There is also a rich collection of cultural, historic, heritage, and tribal tourism attractions which are tied to both Californian and national history.

Information from the California Travel Impacts Report 2000–2017, completed in May 2018

## IMPROVE LOCAL ECONOMIES

for Visit California, the state's tourism marketing agency, and the Governor's Office of Business Development, indicates that the Sierra Nevada Region generates billions of dollars in revenue annually. Visit California spends more than \$120 million per year marketing California to travelers around the world and relies heavily on the images and experiences produced in the Sierra Nevada Region. The collection of experiences available to Californians and visitors from around the world

make the Sierra Nevada a critical component of the California Experience.

Today, however, many of these benefits are at risk. A changing climate will likely affect recreational activities dependent on snow as well as summer activities dependent on water resources. If the size and scope of severe fire and tree mortality continue to grow due to climate change and drought, these resources and economic contributors may go away completely and take centuries, if ever, to return. Furthermore, recent policy objectives on both the federal and state level actively reinforce the timeliness of SNC investment in recreation and tourism and encourage action to take advantage of rising opportunities.

Providing for vibrant recreation and tourism across the Region is fundamentally linked with

## SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE RECREATION

the outcomes of the other Regional Goals. Sustainable recreation and tourism is dependent upon, and connected to, the health and resilience of Sierra Nevada's communities and the ecological health of California's watersheds and forests. Working with partners to thoughtfully implement the strategies supporting this goal will protect these benefits and the resources that are unique to the Sierra Nevada Region.

This goal specifically addresses the SNC statutory program requirements to provide increased opportunities for recreation and tourism and increased access to public lands in a more significant way than previous efforts, and it may contribute to implementing existing state, federal, and local recreation plans for the Region.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Regional Goal:





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TRAILHEAD

PARADISE



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### STRATEGY 1

Assess conditions, existing resources, needs, and opportunities to support or promote recreation and tourism throughout the Region and identify highest priority activities for the organization. This could include:

- Convening and engaging key partners to assess needs as well as current and planned programs to inform SNC actions, guide funding, and policy advocacy
- Collaborating with funding and other partners to identify the most beneficial role/s for the SNC to play

## DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

### STRATEGY 2

Identify, create, and participate in partnerships to support the development of vibrant recreation and tourism throughout the Region. This could include:

- Providing funding, staff, and/or technical assistance to enhance and support the Sierra Nevada Geotourism Project
- Providing financial and technical assistance to recreation-based partnerships and coalitions across the Region
- Assisting local efforts to obtain federal non-regulatory designations that can attract funding and elevate recognition, such as National Heritage Areas and National Recreation Trails
- Establishing a Sierra Nevada presence in the national outdoor recreation movement through working group participation

## FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

### STRATEGY 3

Distribute available funds for development of sustainable recreation and tourism throughout the Region in a timely and strategic manner to achieve maximum positive impact by coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies and partners. This could include:

- Establishing and implementing competitive and/or directed grant programs that get work done on the ground, including acquisitions for public access, rapidly and effectively; directed programs are designed to address needs within a specific program (such as fire resilience or meadow restoration), geographic region (such as by county or Subregion), or other priority as identified







#### STRATEGY 4

Advocate for and secure increased funding for sustainable recreation and tourism development and increase access to public lands in the Region including funding for the SNC and for other agencies and organizations. This can include:

- Working with other state partners to identify, support, or develop projects or programs that help achieve state recreation priorities
- Providing technical, financial, and/or staff support for community-led efforts to establish funding streams for tourism and recreation development or marketing as well as recreation facilities investment and development
- Directly seeking grants and other funding when appropriate and in the best interest of the Region

### DESIGN AND FIELD TESTS NEW WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS

#### STRATEGY 5

Provide assistance to pilot projects or collaboratives that test innovative governance, finance, and implementation tools that can achieve sustainable recreation and tourism objectives across the Region. This could include:

- Providing funding and/or technical support to partners in establishing pilot recreation collaboratives or Regional initiatives like the model developed for the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI)
- Supporting and leveraging innovative public-private partnerships to address recreation and tourism-related issues such as infrastructure and transportation challenges

# STRATEGIC LANDS CONSERVED

*Permanently protect high-benefit lands that are threatened with conversion, represent unique natural characteristics, or are critical for resilience to climate change.*

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy recognizes land conservation as an important tool for achieving holistic watershed health and overcoming the management challenges of landscape ownership fragmentation.

## INVEST FOR THE LONG-TERM

The SNC provided significant funding for land acquisition in its Proposition 84 grant program, the SNC's inaugural funding program. Over time, as existing funding decreased, the SNC increasingly focused limited resources on the most pressing issues in the Region, such as forest health. While not actively funding land acquisition, the SNC has continued to support partner efforts to gain funding from other state and federal programs.

The Strategic Lands Conserved Regional Goal focuses SNC efforts on strategies to protect high-risk, high-priority lands, including agricultural lands, oak woodlands, and wildlife corridors that are threatened by conversion, possess unique natural characteristics, or provide critical resilience to climate change.

## CONSERVE HIGH-VALUE LANDS

These lands can provide a range of benefits including working landscapes, enhanced opportunities for active management and restoration, climate adaptation, recreation opportunities, and protection of unique, cultural, and natural areas and key wildlife habitat. Additionally, climate change is likely to have impacts as yet unseen on the Region and strategically conserving land to protect the wide range of benefits provided by the Region will become increasingly important as the Region adapts to further changes in the future.

The SNC will consider the opportunities where it is feasible to provide public access to lands

## PROTECT RESOURCES

conserved. This consideration will be more clearly articulated in grant guidelines, taking into account the compatibility of public access with the project goals and objectives, and as consistent with bond funding requirements. Also, SNC will consider funding the acquisition of lands for the express purpose of public access under the Vibrant Recreation and Tourism Regional Goal.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Strategic Lands Conserved Regional Goal:







McArthur, Shasta County



## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### STRATEGY 1

Assess the land conservation priorities of other agencies and partners, climate vulnerability assessments and existing funding programs to identify the highest priority SNC activities to support strategic land conservation. This could include:

- Identifying and connecting current and planned programs that support these activities to assist in determining the best role for the SNC
- Completing and/or updating critical Regional land conservation needs-assessment efforts undertaken by partners, identifying lands that will provide the greatest benefits and face the greatest risks including vulnerability to climate change

## FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

### STRATEGY 2

Distribute available funds, according to their criteria, in a timely and strategic manner to realize maximum positive benefit. This could include:

- Establishing and implementing grant programs funding fee title and/or conservation easement acquisitions guided by the needs assessment and agency coordination
- Coordinating with other state and federal funding agencies to identify programmatic and geographic priorities to determine the most effective use of SNC bond funds and ensure strategic investment at a landscape scale

### STRATEGY 3

Advocate for and secure increased funding for strategic land conservation in the Region, including funding for the SNC and other agencies and organizations. This could include:

- Advocating for Sierra Nevada-relevant funding with other state and federal agencies and the legislature
- Directly seeking grants and other funding when appropriate and for the best interest of the Region



Near Lake Isabella, Kern County, photography: Chris Hunkeler



## DESIGN AND FIELD TEST NEW WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS

### STRATEGY 4

Work with land trusts and other conservation partners to design and test climate-smart approaches to private land conservation, including conservation easement agreements with provisions allowing for active management and ecological restoration, multi-benefit management plans, and long-term ecological monitoring programs to evaluate success.

### STRATEGY 5

Work with SNC County Boardmembers to identify opportunities to improve the cooperation and consultation process and explore utilization of land use planning tools for conservation purposes.

Photography: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



The threatened Sierra Nevada Red Fox

# IMPACTFUL REGIONAL IDENTITY

*Elevated statewide recognition of the value and benefits the Sierra Nevada provides and increased integration of the importance of the Sierra Nevada into state policy and funding decisions.*

The Sierra Nevada Region provides irreplaceable ecosystem services to the state of California which are often taken for granted in policy and funding decisions. From the beginning, elevating the profile of the Sierra Nevada Region and all the benefits the Region provides to the state has been an

## EDUCATE POLICY MAKERS

SNC priority, and, in recent years, staff resources have been dedicated to making progress towards this objective. The SNC has placed a focus on establishing itself as a credible source of information by interpreting and sharing relevant research, creating messaging that supports science-based policy and funding decisions, and developing materials that clearly illustrate the holistic connection between a healthy Sierra

## ENGAGE PARTNERS

Nevada Region and a strong, vibrant future for California. The SNC's primary focus has been on educating key policy makers and advocating for state and federal funding decisions that support the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region.

As the climate changes and threats increase in the Sierra Nevada, the need to recognize resilient watersheds and forests and their value and peril will

become even more critical. Connecting the health of the natural landscapes of the Sierra Nevada to the recreation and tourism experiences they provide and the communities they sustain will be important. Urban-rural partnerships need to be developed and strengthened with those benefiting from the Region in order to increase investments in Sierra Nevada resources and resilience activities. The SNC also recognizes that engaging partners who share the vision for the Region is essential in making further progress and supporting innovative models

## TELL THE REGION'S STORY

for financing upper watershed restoration activities using funds or financing from urban/downstream partners will be critical. Focus in this area will also ensure that Sierra Nevada values and benefits are appropriately recognized and integrated into statewide policy and funding discussions.

With the WIP serving as the umbrella program for activities under this Plan, the SNC will build upon the substantial recognition received to date and will utilize the WIP as the platform for communications efforts. As the WIP network of partners expands, there is a great opportunity for a stronger, more coherent voice for the Sierra Nevada.

Given all the above, the SNC will undertake the following strategies for the Impactful Regional Identify Regional Goal:









## DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCES

### STRATEGY 1

Work with partners strategically to share messaging, communicate lessons learned across the Region, and amplify partner needs and successes in a way that showcases how valuable work in the Sierra is to California and educates decision makers about actions they can take to support, expand, and improve that work. This could include:

- Working closely with grantees to promote project successes by developing project videos, hosting tours, providing presentation opportunities, etc.
- Establishing an in-Region communications network that supports sharing messaging and lessons learned among partners
- Providing financial support for conferences, outreach events, volunteer activities, community programs, and experiential learning opportunities that encourage local stewardship and advocacy for the Sierra Nevada

### STRATEGY 2

Identify and engage leaders and influencers in urban and downstream communities that benefit from the Sierra Nevada. This could include:

- Convening strategic meetings with urban leaders with the goal of increasing the understanding of, and support for, investment in Sierra Nevada resources and resilience activities

### STRATEGY 3

Build and maintain SNC's science and research network to ensure that SNC remains a credible source for science-based policy recommendations. This could include:

- Reviewing key relevant research papers and studies, engaging directly with scientists and authors, and communicating key findings to inform policy







Conway Summit, Mono County

#### STRATEGY 4

Build and maintain SNC's media network to establish the SNC as a credible voice for the Sierra Nevada Region. Use sound science and data to become the 'go-to' place for information and stories about the Sierra.

### FUNDING AND INVESTMENTS

#### STRATEGY 5

Seek funding to bolster and support communications efforts that elevate the image of the Sierra Nevada and educate Californians on the benefits of healthy California watersheds and forests.

### POLICY

#### STRATEGY 6

Educate and influence decision and policy makers to benefit the Sierra Nevada Region, particularly as it relates to climate change response, adaptation planning, and increasing the pace and scale of ecological restoration. This could include:

- Developing and distributing messaging and materials that educate decision makers about the value of work being done in the Sierra Nevada, the alignment of this work with broader statewide goals, and outlining long-term investment needs
- Creating and utilizing communications products including social media and blogs to communicate policy recommendations and key science
- Developing a platform for the research community to interpret and push new research to land managers, policy makers, and partners

### COMMUNICATIONS/ TELLING THE STORY

#### STRATEGY 7

Create outreach and education campaigns/events that encourage beneficiaries to get to know their watersheds through learning activities throughout the Sierra Nevada Region.

#### STRATEGY 8

Utilize the Sierra Nevada Watershed Information Network (WIN) to capture data in a spatial way and/or showcase relevant data that demonstrates how watershed restoration in the Sierra Nevada is critical to the Region and state. This could include:

- Developing and deploying an online, searchable Resilience Dashboard that monitors overall Regional resilience and tracks progress towards successfully achieving the Regional Goals contained in the Strategic Plan of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy



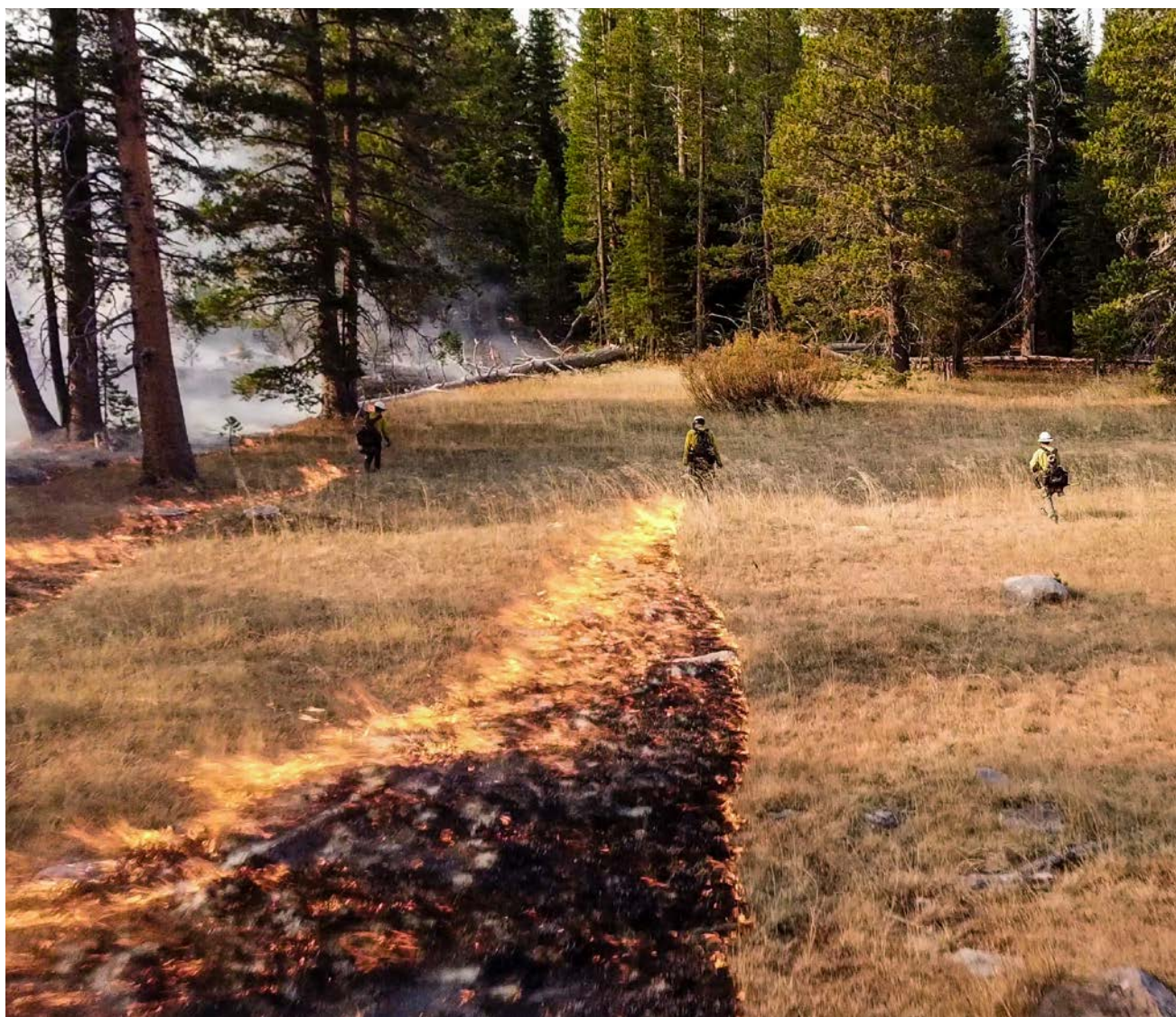
# PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND METRICS

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This Strategic Plan is an ambitious approach to implementing the SNC's broad mission. To fully implement Plan Strategies and achieve Plan Goals, significant funding needs to be provided. The SNC stands committed to pursuing additional funds and more permanent funding sources, and will continue to work with other agencies and partners to maximize the use of

existing funds to benefit the Region and achieve these Goals. This Plan has been developed to be flexible enough for full implementation if funding is provided, or more focused implementation if not. Responses to funding availability will be reflected in future Action Plans.

The SNC will allocate and deploy its resources and coordinate with a wide range of partners to implement this Plan through





the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP). While the Plan is intended to guide SNC operations over a five-year period, it is essential to maintain the flexibility to adapt to new or changed circumstances over that time frame. As such, the SNC may update the Plan from time to time.

It is also intended that the WIP continues to serve as the state of California's implementation plan for achieving policy

outcomes in the areas of watershed health and community resilience, as well as serving as a roadmap for state and federal efforts on these issues. Partnerships with other state and federal agencies will be critical in this Plan's success.

Specific details on how these strategies will be implemented each year will be provided in the annual Action Plan, to be approved by the Governing Board. The initial plan will guide operations from January 2019 through June 2020. Subsequent plans will be for each fiscal year. Actions will be specific and measurable and will be expected to be completed within the relevant 12- or 18-month period unless otherwise noted. Progress in completing annual actions will be reported to the Board and in the SNC's Annual Report.

Developing and tracking measures of success in meeting the Regional Goals are complicated, given the breadth and complexity of the Region and the Goals. Staff will be tracking progress by identifying whether actions proposed have been undertaken on an annual and ongoing basis. However, staff is also committed to working with partners to develop indicators that, when taken together, will begin to measure ecological health and climate resilience, along with related economic and social resilience, across the landscape. These indicators will be used in completing a five-year Regional Resilience Report, which will interpret the data, helping to determine progress toward the ultimate goal of Protecting and Restoring the Health and Resilience of the Sierra Nevada's Watersheds and Communities.



Prescribed fire, Independence Lake, Nevada County



# APPENDICES





## SUBREGIONAL PROFILE: NORTH

**Counties:** Modoc, Lassen, Shasta

**SNC Grants:** 54 (\$9.8 million as of October 2018)

**Area Representative:** Kristy Hoffman

To hear what Area Representative Kristy Hoffman has to say about the North Subregion, go to <https://youtu.be/rt1JRygdIqc>.

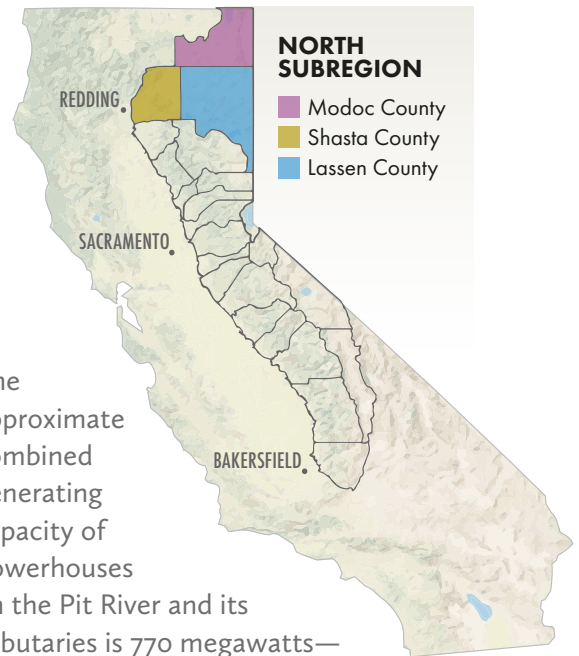
Interesting facts about the North Subregion:

- Approximately 68 percent of the 6.2 million acres making up the North Subregion are held in public ownership. 70,900 people live in Modoc, Lassen, and Shasta counties.
- Eagle Lake in Lassen County is the second largest natural lake wholly in California (after Clear Lake in Lake County). Its closed freshwater, slightly alkaline environment supports an abundance of native fish, notably the Eagle Lake rainbow trout and the largest nesting colonies of Western and Clark's Grebes and possibly Eared Grebes in California
- Burney Falls, located in Shasta County, has a drop of 129 feet. The water emerges as springs above Burney Falls, flowing at 100 million gallons a day.
- Shasta Lake is the largest reservoir in the state, holding 4.5 million acre-feet of water.



- The approximate combined generating capacity of powerhouses on the Pit River and its tributaries is 770 megawatts—approximately 13 percent of California's total hydropower
- Charismatic megafauna unique to this Subregion include gray wolves, Rocky Mountain elk, Rocky Mountain mule deer, pronghorn, and the Greater Sage Grouse.
- At least 250 bird species use Modoc National Wildlife Refuge as nesting habitat and as a stopover to rest and refuel during winter and spring migration.
- The Devil's Garden Plateau in Modoc County, an expansive prehistoric lava flow with sparse vegetation, consists of 300,000 acres. This landscape supports what may be the largest unbroken expanse of western juniper in the world.
- Currently, there are 4,000 wild horses living on the Devil's Garden Plateau which, due to limited water and vegetation, only has a carrying capacity for 200–400 horses.
- The South Warner Wilderness area offers 79 miles of trails with breath-taking scenery and solitude in the far northeastern corner of the state.

Burney Falls, Shasta County





# SUBREGIONS BY THE NUMBERS

## SUBREGIONAL PROFILE: NORTH CENTRAL

**Counties:** Tehama, Butte, Plumas, Sierra

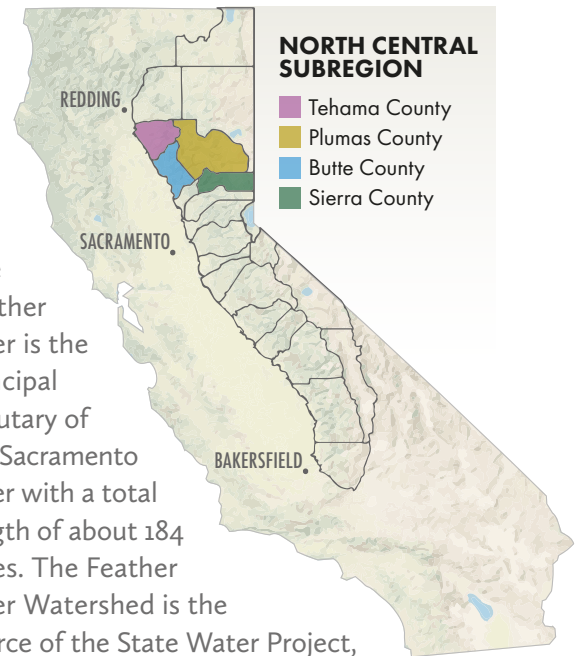
**SNC Grants:** 81 (\$17.6 million as of October 2018)

**Area Representative:** Lynn Campbell

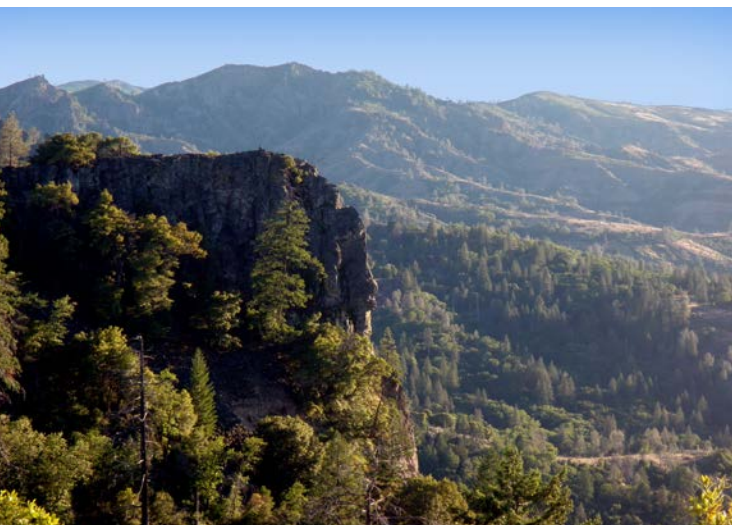
To hear what Area Representative Lynn Campbell has to say about the North Central Subregion, go to <https://youtu.be/lcA96g4nkZA>.

Interesting facts about the North Central Subregion:

- Approximately 106,050 people live in the North Central Subregion.
- After the discovery of gold in the Sierra foothills sparked the California Gold Rush, more than 16,000 miners settled in Sierra County (between 1848 and 1860). By 1880, Sierra County was “crushing” 70,000 tons of quartz and had 266 miles of mining ditches. Today, Sierra County is the second least populous county in the Region with a population of only 3,200 (as of 2010).
- Land ownership varies widely between the counties of the North Central Subregion. In Plumas and Sierra, public ownership is about 70 percent and private ownership is about 30 percent. In Butte and Tehama, that trend is reversed—with more than 80 percent private and only 20 percent public.



- The Feather River is the principal tributary of the Sacramento River with a total length of about 184 miles. The Feather River Watershed is the source of the State Water Project, contributing to the irrigation of 755,000 acres in the arid San Joaquin Valley Westside and municipal supplies to some 25 million people.
- In November 2018, the Camp Fire ravaged through Butte County for 17 days, burning 153,336 acres and 18,793 structures including nearly 14,000 residences in Paradise, Magalia, Concow and other small adjacent communities. In its wake it left 86 dead. The Camp Fire has become the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California history.
- The Oroville Dam is the tallest dam in the U.S. and serves mainly for water supply, hydroelectricity generation, and flood control. The dam impounds Lake Oroville, the second largest man-made lake in the state of California, capable of storing 3.5 million acre-feet of water.
- The North Central Subregion was also the home of Ishi—the last surviving North American from the Yahi Yana tribe. The Ishi Wilderness is located approximately 20 miles east of Red Bluff. The largest migratory deer herd in California, the Tehama deer herd, winters in this wilderness area.



Ishi Wilderness, Tehama County, photography: Kurt Thomas Hunt

## SUBREGIONAL PROFILE: CENTRAL

**Counties:** Yuba, Nevada, Placer, El Dorado

**SNC Grants:** 89 (\$17.3 million as of October 2018)

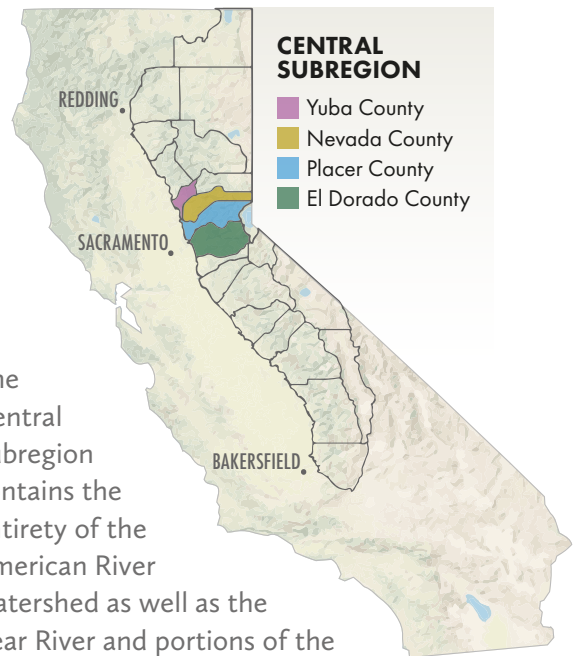
**Area Representative:** Chris Dallas

To hear what Area Representative Chris Dallas has to say about the Central Subregion, go to <https://youtu.be/liDZhXnaZVM>.

Interesting facts about the Central Subregion:

- The Central Subregion encompasses ten percent of the land within the SNC Region but is home to 48 percent of its population.
- 375,000 people reside in the Central Subregion, excluding the Tahoe Basin and county lands outside the SNC boundary, as of the 2010 census. The Central Subregion population continues to grow and will likely be over 400,000 at the end of 2018.
- This Subregion has the highest percentage of privately owned land (64 percent) of any of the Subregions and the most land within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). This creates special challenges to both managing the forests and protecting communities from the threat of wildfire.

- The Central Subregion contains the entirety of the American River watershed as well as the Bear River and portions of the Truckee and Yuba rivers.
- The majority of the Eldorado and Tahoe national forests fall within the Central Subregion.
- Major transportation routes cross the Central Subregion with Highway 80 connecting Sacramento and Reno and Highway 50 providing access to South Lake Tahoe. Amtrak offers a more leisurely and picturesque trip to travelers who want to cross the Subregion by train.
- Most of the major ski resorts associated with Lake Tahoe are actually in SNC's Central Subregion, not within the Tahoe Basin. These include Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows, Northstar, and Sierra at Tahoe, as well as Sugar Bowl and Boreal. This makes outdoor winter recreation a particularly important economic driver for this Subregion.
- Placer County Big Trees Grove is the northernmost stand of Giant Sequoia in the Sierra Nevada.
- The western part of the Central Subregion is the heart of Gold Country where gold was discovered in 1849 at Sutter's Mill, leading to the gold rush.



Highway 80 corridor toward Lake Tahoe



## SUBREGIONAL PROFILE: EAST

**Counties:** Alpine, Mono, Inyo

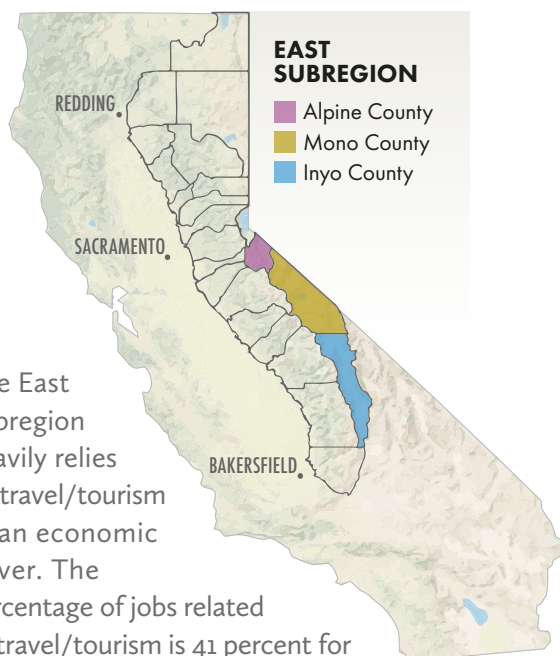
**SNC Grants:** 36 (\$5.3 million as of October 2018)

**Area Representative:** Matt Driscoll

To hear what Area Representative Matt Driscoll has to say about the East Subregion, go to <https://youtu.be/tSQeXc77qlk>.

Interesting facts about the East Subregion:

- Approximately 95 percent of the 7,287 square miles of land in the SNC's East Subregion is publicly owned. The population is estimated at 33,000—4 percent of the whole Sierra Nevada Region.
- Alpine County is California's least populous county with a population of 1,175 (per the 2010 census).
- The East Subregion contains only two incorporated towns/cities—Bishop and Mammoth Lakes. At 7,920 feet, Mammoth Lakes is the highest incorporated town in California.
- At an elevation of 14,505 feet, Mount Whitney is the highest peak in the contiguous U.S. Mt. Whitney sits on a boundary shared with the South Subregion.
- The East Subregion contains 14 of California's 15 peaks that exceed 14,000 feet.



- The East Subregion heavily relies on travel/tourism as an economic driver. The percentage of jobs related to travel/tourism is 41 percent for Mono County, 33 percent for Alpine County, and 23 percent for Inyo County.
- This Subregion contains four ski resorts—Mammoth Mountain, June Mountain, Bear Valley, and Kirkwood. Mammoth typically has the longest ski season in California, and it has the highest peak elevation of any California ski resort—11,053 feet.
- More than 400 movies and hundreds of TV episodes have been filmed in the Alabama Hills National Recreation Area in Inyo County.
- The East Subregion is home to all or part of 14 wilderness areas.
- The Owens Valley, with over 10,000 feet of topographic relief, is one of the deepest in North America. The Long Valley Caldera in Mono County is one of the Earth's largest at 20 miles long, 11 miles wide, and up to 3,000 feet deep.
- Mono Lake is home to the second largest nesting population of California Gulls in the world—50,000 birds visit the Lake during nesting season. Mono Lake is a unique inland lake, being two to three times as salty as the ocean.

Mono Lake, Mono County

## SUBREGIONAL PROFILE: SOUTH CENTRAL

**Counties:** Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne, Mariposa

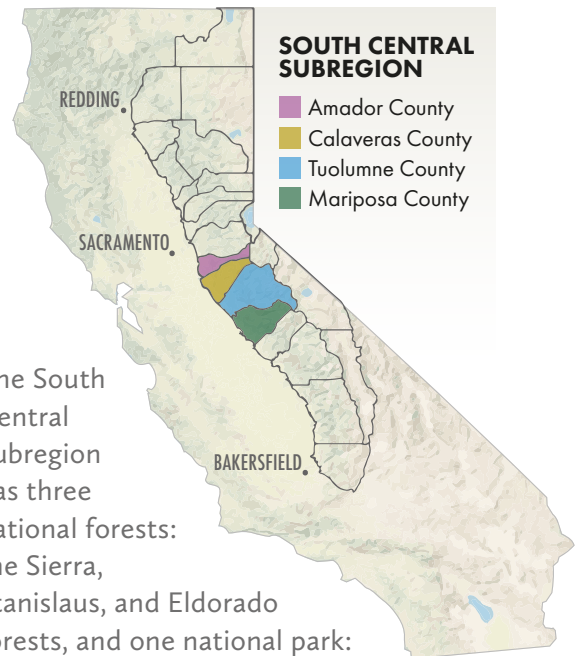
**SNC Grants:** 58 (\$11.7 million as of October 2018)

**Area Representative:** Michael Pickard

To hear what Area Representative Michael Pickard has to say about the South Central Subregion, go to <https://youtu.be/d9ftXwyahME>.

Interesting facts about the South Central Subregion:

- The South Central Subregion is sparsely populated with approximately 156,000 residents living within the four-county area.
- The Subregion contains a diverse landscape ranging in elevation from a few hundred feet above sea level to Mt. Lyell in Yosemite National Park at 13,120 feet.
- The Subregion is dominated by hot and flammable chaparral landscapes and dense pine and fir forests.
- This Subregion is divided between federal (58 percent) and private (42 percent) ownership. The state/counties own less than one percent of the 3.3 million acres that makes up the South Central Subregion.
- The South Central Subregion has three national forests: the Sierra, Stanislaus, and Eldorado forests, and one national park: Yosemite. The Subregion is home to five distinct groves of Giant Sequoias.
- El Capitan in Yosemite National Park is the largest piece of exposed granite on earth. It rises approximately 3000 feet from its base to the summit and is renowned worldwide as a rock climbing destination.
- Yosemite National Park contains over 800 miles of recreational trails.
- Six major watersheds flow from the South Central Subregion: the Cosumnes, Mokelumne, Calaveras, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, and Merced rivers.
- Both the Tuolumne and Mokelumne rivers have direct connections to the San Francisco Bay Area and provide most of the municipal water supply for the Bay Area population.
- The South Central counties of Amador and Calaveras are known throughout California for their high-quality wines.
- Rail Town 1897 State Historic Park in Tuolumne County has provided the set for over 50 American movies and television programs.



Lower Bear River Reservoir—part of the Mokelumne River Watershed, Amador County



## SUBREGIONAL PROFILE: SOUTH

**Counties:** Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kern (all partially in the Sierra Nevada Region)

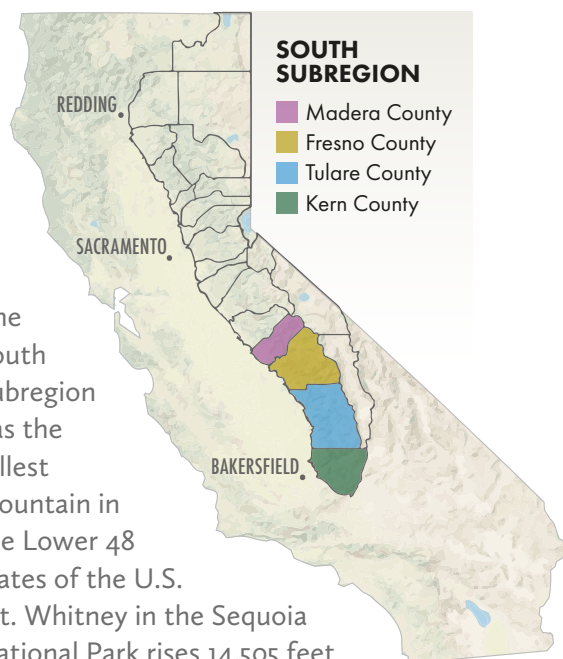
**SNC Grants:** 46 (\$6.6 million as of October 2018)

**Area Representative:** Sarah Campe

To hear what Area Representative Sarah Campe has to say about the South Subregion, go to <https://youtu.be/G29FB1cskR0>.

Interesting facts about the South Subregion:

- The South Subregion contains Sierra and Sequoia national forests, separated by Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, resulting in a unique juxtaposition of national forest and national park land.
- The South Subregion has the largest tree in the world: The General Sherman Tree, a Giant Sequoia in the Sequoia National Park.



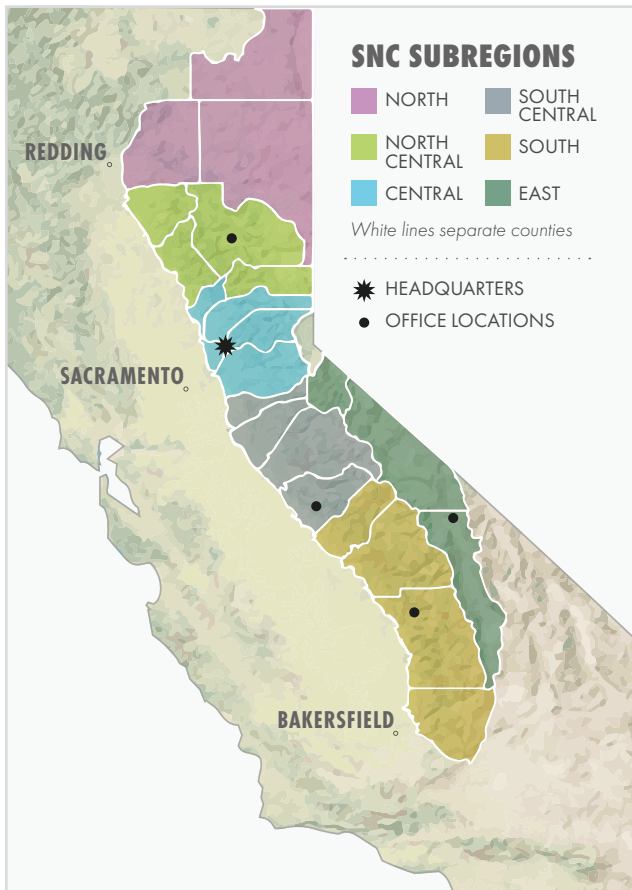
- The South Subregion has the tallest mountain in the Lower 48 states of the U.S. Mt. Whitney in the Sequoia National Park rises 14,505 feet above sea level. Mt. Whitney sits on a boundary shared with the East Subregion.
- The #1, #2, and #4 top agricultural producing counties in the state are in the South Subregion. Fifty-six percent of the surface water feeding those ag lands come from South Sierra Nevada Headwaters.
- The South Subregion has been affected disastrously by tree mortality. The estimated number of dead trees in the counties of the South Subregion is 67,695,000—which is 70 percent of the dead trees estimated throughout the Sierra Nevada Region, and nearly 53 percent of the trees affected throughout all of California.
- All of the counties of the South Subregion were included in Governor Brown's Tree Mortality Emergency Declaration.

The General Sherman tree in Sequoia National Park, Tulare County

## JURISDICTION

The SNC's service area—stretching from Modoc County in the north to Kern County in the south—covers 25 million acres and all or part of 22 counties. Comprising 25 percent of California's total land area, it is one of the largest conservancy regions in the state. The jurisdiction includes the mountains and foothills of the Sierra Nevada range, the Mono Basin, Owens Valley, the Modoc Plateau, and a part of the southern Cascade Range, including the Pit River Watershed. The Region is made up of 17 watershed assessment areas, providing vital water to the rest of the state. The statute establishing the SNC divides the Region into six smaller Subregions.

Staff is headquartered in Auburn, California, but field representatives also work from various locations throughout the Region, including Mariposa, Quincy, Mammoth Lakes, and Three Rivers.



## GOVERNANCE

The SNC is governed by a 16-member Board with 13 voting members divided almost evenly between seven state-level appointments and six local seats filled by members of county Boards of Supervisors in each of the SNC's six Subregions.

The members include:

- Secretary for Natural Resources Agency (or his or her designee)
- Director of Finance (or his or her designee)
- Three members of the public appointed by the governor
- Two members of the public, one appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly and one by the Senate Rules Committee
- Six county supervisors whose districts are within the Region, each representing one of the six Subregions
- Three non-voting liaison advisers: one each from the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

In accordance with the statute establishing the SNC, all agency activities are based on the principles of balance, cooperation, and equity.

The statute requires that the SNC:

- Support efforts that advance environmental preservation and the economic and social well-being of Sierra residents in a complementary manner.
- Work in collaboration and cooperation with local governments and interested parties in carrying out the SNC's mission.
- Make every effort to ensure that, over time, SNC funding and other efforts are spread equitably across each of the various Subregions and among the program areas, with adequate allowance for the variability of costs associated with individual Subregions and types of projects.



# FOUNDATIONS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA CONSERVANCY

## SNC VISION

The SNC's vision for the future is that the magnificent Sierra Nevada Region enjoys outstanding environmental, economic, and social health, with vibrant communities and landscapes sustained for future generations.

In this vision:

- Rich and diverse natural, physical, and living resources are protected and conserved.
- Healthy, diverse, and economically sustainable local communities thrive, prepared for and protected from natural disasters.
- Californians value and invest in healthy watersheds that provide high-quality water, spectacular scenery, and important wildlife habitat.
- Sustainable working landscapes provide environmental, economic, and social benefits to the Region.
- The Region's cultural, archaeological, and historical resources are preserved, visited, and treasured.
- Healthy and sustainable tourism, recreation, and commercial activities are valued and encouraged.
- The role of the forest in sequestering and storing carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is recognized and enhanced.



Bullard's Bar Reservoir, Yuba County

## SNC GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The SNC is guided in its operations by several principles developed as part of its initial strategic planning process:

### OPERATIONS

- The SNC conducts operations openly. Decision-making is transparent, and the SNC always strives to improve communications throughout the Region.
- The SNC strives to engage interested parties and provide opportunities for them to participate in and benefit from the SNC's activities.

### KEY OBJECTIVES

- The SNC seeks to “add value” and build upon existing community and Regional efforts.
- The SNC brings a Regional focus to the issues of the Sierra Nevada, collecting and sharing information across the Region and communicating the benefits and contributions of the Region.
- The SNC encourages community-based solutions and assists communities with technical expertise, information, and resources necessary to achieve local solutions.
- The SNC uses the best available information and science in making decisions, identifying opportunities to fill information and technical gaps, and building on and expanding community information.
- The SNC informs and educates the public throughout the Region and the state about the substantial benefits the Sierra Nevada provides to all Californians, including providing clean water for many uses outside the Sierra and the importance of protecting and enhancing the environmental well-being of the Region.
- The SNC strives to identify and implement activities that result in integrated environmental, economic, and social benefits rather than “either/or” outcomes.

## **IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS**

- The SNC develops program priorities considering the input received through community outreach efforts and seeks to meet community needs.
- The SNC is flexible in implementing its programs, recognizing the need to act based on opportunity, available funding, local and Regional differences, and statewide interest.
- The SNC gives priority to multi-benefit projects and integrated activities (those that address more than one of the SNC's program objectives).
- The SNC encourages projects and activities that leverage other organizations' (government, private, and nonprofit) competencies and funding.
- The SNC evaluates projects considering what is occurring on surrounding lands, cognizant of potential impacts to those landscapes.
- The SNC purchases and/or creates incentives for the purchase, where practical, of resources for goods and services within the Sierra Nevada Region. The SNC diligently seeks opportunities to improve the economic well-being of communities in the Region.
- The SNC makes every effort to ensure that, over time, SNC funding and other efforts are spread equitably across Subregions and program areas, with adequate allowance for the variability of costs associated with individual Subregions and types of projects.

## **WORKING WITH OTHERS**

- The SNC emphasizes cooperation with local governments and other governmental, tribal, and non-governmental partners in providing information, technical assistance, and financial support to assist in meeting mutual goals.
- The SNC coordinates and collaborates with partners to achieve research, project funding, and program goals.
- The SNC convenes and facilitates interested parties to seek solutions to difficult problems to achieve environmental, economic, and social benefits.
- The SNC respects the mission, responsibilities, and obligations of other agencies and organizations.

## **CURRENT FUNDING SOURCES**

The SNC's current budget is made up of funds from the following sources:

- The California Environmental License Plate Fund which serves as the primary source for staff and operations funding
- Proposition 84, The Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coast Protection Bond Act of 2006. Proposition 84 allocated \$54 million in bond funds to the SNC. (Note: most of these funds have been expended.)
- Proposition 1, The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Bond Act of 2014. Proposition 1 allocated \$25 million in bond funds to the SNC.
- Proposition 68, the Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018. Proposition 68 provided the SNC with \$55 million in bond funds.



## APPENDIX C: PLAN DEVELOPMENT

### DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Goals in this Plan represent broad, aspirational outcomes for the SNC and the Region. The Strategies in this Plan represent the specific approaches the SNC will undertake in contributing to achieving the Regional Goals. They have been developed with an understanding of the SNC's available and anticipated resources, expertise, and experience and with substantial input from dozens of partners and stakeholders. They also represent the SNC's assessment of where it can best add value, understanding the roles that a variety of other agencies and organizations play in these efforts. The Strategies are intended to best position the SNC to leverage its work with that of a wide range of partners to magnify the impact of these cumulative efforts. In some cases, this means SNC will be taking direct actions to achieve an outcome; in other instances, its role will be supporting and assisting partners.

Strategies have been developed to guide staff in achieving the Regional Goals. Strategies have been organized based on the following model, which has been used to implement the WIP:

- **Needs Assessment:** What are the highest priority issues or most critical problems to address? In some goal areas, the needs are already well defined; in others, such as Vibrant Recreation and Tourism and Resilient Communities, these needs must first be determined before a pathway to improvement can begin to be developed.
- **Developing Partnerships and Resources:** Who is doing critical work in this area, and what is the proper role of the SNC? Who should be convened to address critical issues? What capacity building might be needed, and how can it be provided?
- **Policy:** Who holds the key to rapidly addressing critical or widespread issues, and what needs to be done to affect change? Is it educational, advocacy/outreach-based work? Is new science or data needed to demonstrate the risks and opportunities that will move lawmakers to act? Or are new laws needed to protect the Region's resources and allow them to grow and thrive? What role should the SNC play in this area?
- **Funding and Investments:** Immediate and ongoing funding is needed to treat the landscape and build the necessary infrastructure for healthy forests, vibrant recreation, resilient communities, and protected lands. Strategies in this area will include seeking new funding and distributing existing funding to meet the highest identified priorities.
- **Design and Field Test New Ways of Doing Business:** Governmental entities can get in a rut or be constrained by regulation and bureaucracy, making little to no progress and spending significant amounts of time and money. Collaborative pilot projects can often demonstrate a new way of getting things done, encouraging a fresh look and redoubled efforts to address barriers to action. In this area, SNC will work with partners to try new strategies and will document and share the outcomes.
- **Communications/Telling the Story:** Developing strong outreach and educational programs is a cornerstone of change—especially when voters, rate-payers, lawmakers, and private funding institutions need to support that change. In this area, the SNC is committed to focusing educational efforts to promote and implement its programs and those of its partners.

## AUDIENCE

This Plan is intended to serve several audiences. It sets out the SNC Governing Board's direction to staff regarding programs and priorities and provides guidance on use of staff and other resources. It will also serve as the SNC's approach to increasing resilience to climate change in the watersheds and communities of the Sierra Nevada. It is intended to identify connections to broader statewide initiatives, ensuring that SNC is making an impact that is greater than what could be done alone. Finally, and equally important, the Plan is intended to communicate to our partners—local governments, state and federal agencies, tribes, private landowners, conservation organizations, community organizations, and private conservation funders—and to the public, the role of the Conservancy in protecting and enhancing the Region's resources and communities.

## CONSIDERATION OF OTHER STATE PLANS

This Plan builds upon and integrates several state efforts, including:

- **California Water Action Plan** and its **Implementation Report**: The 2016 Water Action Plan identifies 10 critical actions that are needed to address California's most pressing water issues and to lay the groundwork for a sustainable resilient future. The Implementation Report provides a summary of key Action Plan activities underway or planned. Action 4 is "Protect and Restore Important Ecosystems" and includes restoring key mountain meadow habitat and managing headwaters for multiple benefits. Under these activities, state conservancies such as the SNC are tasked with developing Proposition 1 grant programs to assist with the restoration of watersheds critical to California's water supply systems.
- **Safeguarding California Climate Adaptation Plan** and **Assembly Bill 32 Scoping Plan** Updates: The 2014 Safeguarding California Plan is part of the state's continuing efforts to reduce impacts and prepare for climate risks. This plan, which updates the 2009 California Climate Adaptation Strategy, highlights climate risks in nine sectors: Agriculture, Biodiversity and Habitat, Emergency Management, Energy, Forestry, Ocean and Coastal Ecosystems, Public Health, Transportation, and Water. The 'Forestry' section outlines the importance of watershed protection, provides models for ecosystem services financing, and outlines relevant policy actions taken to date. The AB 32 Scoping Plan update identifies opportunities to leverage existing and new funds to further drive greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions through strategic planning and targeted low carbon investments. It defines the Air Resources Board's five-year climate change priorities and sets the groundwork to reach long-term goals.
- **Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan** updates and **Funding Guidelines**: The plan sets the guidelines for use of the Cap and Trade Auction proceeds 2016–2019 and the funding guidelines outline the statutory requirements for purposes of state agency funding programs. Investment is encouraged in clean biomass conversion technologies for renewable energy generation and in protection, restoration, and management of natural and working lands to maximize carbon sequestration and reduce GHG and black carbon emissions.



- **California State Wildlife Action Plan:** The California Department of Fish and Wildlife completed the State Wildlife Action Plan Update in 2015 after a multi-year effort involving conservation groups, agencies, tribes, private landowners, and other stakeholders. The action plan identifies and prioritizes at-risk species and habitats and provides conservation strategies to help protect and conserve these species. The approved action plan is a requirement for federal grant funding programs that benefit at-risk species such as the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, Coho salmon, and others. The chapter covering the Central Valley and the Sierra Nevada regions describes how altered ecosystems impact habitats important for maintaining California's wildlife diversity and abundance.
- **California Water Plan:** The California Water Plan is the state's strategic plan for sustainably managing and developing water resources for current and future generations. It is a voluminous document with detailed information about each of the state's hydrological regions; resource management strategies; and plans for coordination, finance, and infrastructure. The plan is updated every five years; the 2018 update is expected in the latter part of the year. The SNC is a member of the State Agency Steering Committee and has participated in the plan's updates, providing information for the Mountain Counties Area Regional Report and advancing the Region's importance to the state's water strategies.
- **California Fire Plan:** The California Fire Plan is the state's road map for reducing the risk of wildfire. By placing the emphasis on what needs to be done long before a fire starts, the Fire Plan looks to reduce firefighting costs and property losses, increase firefighter safety, and to contribute to ecosystem health. The plan is a joint effort between the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection and CAL FIRE, and it is revised every few years with the most recent revision in 2016. The plan focuses on the goals of reducing and preventing the impacts of wildland fire through suppression and fire prevention. Included are land-use planning, community wildfire protection plans, increased fire resistance in assets at risk, improved availability of information, and better interagency coordination in the face of climate change. Many objectives are in alignment with SNC's efforts to promote forest health on private and public lands.
- **Forest and Rangelands Assessment:** CAL FIRE's Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) is required by the California legislature to produce periodic assessments of the forests and rangelands of California. The assessments are completed every five years; the last one as late as 2015. They are used to design the USFS State and Private Forestry programs which provide technical assistance to California land managers.
- **Forest Carbon Plan:** The SNC was a member of the Forest Climate Action Team which worked on this plan for several years. The plan, adopted in May 2018, is a comprehensive analysis of managing California's forest landscapes in a changing climate. Acknowledging the uncertainties of climate change impacts, the plan lays out recommended actions to achieve healthy and resilient forests based on what is known today about the forests and how climate change will evolve in California. The plan acknowledges the SNC's WIP program as a model for collaborative efforts to address forest health and resilience at a landscape level.
- **Bioenergy Action Plan:** This plan was adopted by the California Energy Commission in 2012, based on input from the Bioenergy Interagency Working Group and other stakeholders. The goal of the plan is to promote utilization of the abundance of biomass residues from the state's agricultural, forest, and urban waste streams to produce renewable energy. The plan outlines a coordinated state agency approach to addressing challenges and maximizing opportunities for the development of bioenergy projects that promote economic development and environmental benefit. The SNC is named as the lead agency to promote the development of community-scale woody bioenergy facilities and as a supporting agency in other actions related to forest bioenergy development.

## STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The Strategic Action Plan approved by the Board in December 2015 was intended to guide SNC priorities and actions through June 2018. At the June 2017 Board Meeting, however, the Board directed staff to begin a strategic assessment to consider the potential impacts of contemporary yet unaddressed issues. The Board also directed staff to seek out potential partners who have not participated in earlier planning efforts and to gather and incorporate significant input from stakeholders who operate outside of the Region but who are beneficiaries of the ecosystem services emanating from the Region. Beginning in July 2017 and spanning eight months, SNC staff engaged in extensive outreach, conducting dozens of meetings and gathering written and verbal ideas and input from hundreds of stakeholders. Additional Board input on the planning and implementation of the Strategic Action Plan was provided by the Board Subcommittee, Boardmembers Doug Teeter and Terry O'Brien. The Board Subcommittee met quarterly during the process, providing additional guidance on the development of the Strategic Assessment and its components. Outreach and analysis of input gathered were broken into three Tracks.

### **TRACK 1:**

This track pursued input from stakeholders outside the Region, whose concerns and recommendations are unlikely to have been incorporated into prior strategic plans. Among others, the SNC reached out to 50+ members of the California Water Action Collaborative. These included major companies and agricultural organizations who operate outside of the Region but who are dependent on clean, reliable water from the Region, and who have come together to focus on improving the water reliability across the state. As a follow up to the request for written ideas, staff participated in face-to-face meetings with representatives of some of these entities. Written input supported efforts taken by the SNC to rely on science to help make progress in water and forest resiliency, to bring rural and urban stakeholders together, to support research and pilot projects demonstrating the value of forest and watershed restoration projects, to monetize ecosystem service values, and to understand and represent the needs of all stakeholders. Significant input was gathered in this track, representing the perspectives of agriculture and food processing industries.

### **TRACK 2:**

This track pursued input from current Regional stakeholders and sought their viewpoints on needs of the Region and how the SNC is doing in identifying and meeting those needs. Written input was gathered through the middle of November 2017. Public meetings in all six Subregions were conducted in January 2017 and with various interest groups through February 2018. Staff and the Board Committee assigned to provide guidance to the Strategic Assessment met with key stakeholders representing 20+ nonprofit and non-governmental organizations. Various SNC representatives also met with additional focus groups, including state and federal partners, policy advocates, leaders in communications and outreach, and county supervisor liaisons.



# STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN PLAN DEVELOPMENT



## **TRACK 3:**

This track provided the opportunity for SNC staff and Boardmembers to offer their own ideas and observations and to consider the input gathered in Tracks 1 and 2 in the development of specific strategies for inclusion in a new strategic plan. Issues, observations, and recommendations gathered in the first Tracks were evaluated and considered as the draft plan was developed. Activities in this track were completed in February 2018.

## **KEY FINDINGS FROM STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The following “themes” were common to all or nearly all the Regional Goal Areas:

1. Climate change—and its associated impacts in our Region (fire, drought, pests)—is a key and urgent issue that needs to be considered in all strategies developed to protect the Region, from forest management to developing new sources of funding.
2. There is a need for more education and outreach to inform the public and decision makers about the issues.
3. It is beneficial to plan activities and strategies collaboratively and holistically.
4. The Region has many distinctive, diverse needs and views the SNC as an agency that can assist.
5. Additional funding is needed to address issues. The SNC can help organizations take advantage of existing funding opportunities and aligning state funding programs.
6. Science and data collection, interpretation, application, and meaningful dissemination are needed to support the needs of the Region and to communicate best available practices for the management of natural resources.
7. The SNC can play an important role in funding and incubating pilot and demonstration programs.
8. ‘Learning communities’ need to be developed to share information and strategies throughout the Region.
9. Ecosystem services need to be monetized and utilized to support policy and outreach efforts.
10. An important role for the SNC is as convener both within the Region and between the Region and urban areas and other state/federal agencies.

Significant input was provided that contributed to the development of the Regional Goals. Listed by their goals, common ideas were:

#### **HEALTHY WATERSHEDS AND FORESTS**

11. Forest and watershed health should remain a top priority for the SNC because the threat of devastating wildfires, attacks from beetles, climate change, etc., is too great.
12. Prescribed and managed fire needs to be employed to manage Sierra forests in addition to the use of mechanical tools. Workforce development (training), policy, and education outreach should be focused to overcome obstacles and increase support for the use of these tools.
13. Large-landscape environmental planning (NEPA/CEQA) is lacking; therefore, it is difficult to implement on-the-ground work. Either policy needs to be changed or an entity that is capable of developing environmental plans needs to be created.
14. More science is needed to support this goal by prioritizing projects and establishing baseline studies, post-project monitoring, and data-sharing to demonstrate the benefits of various treatment methods.
15. More infrastructure is needed to utilize the amount of biomass that needs to be removed from Sierra forests to make them healthy and resilient.
16. There is a need for more efficient collaboration between state, federal, and private landowners for project implementation. Bureaucracy and jurisdiction often impede progress.

#### **VIBRANT RECREATION AND TOURISM**

17. Invest in new and existing trails that provide access to public land.
18. Roads and trails have a direct impact on natural resources and, due to a lack of maintenance funding, the resource is getting degraded.
19. Recreation and tourism are economic drivers for the Region's communities.

#### **STRATEGIC LAND CONSERVATION**

20. Fee title acquisitions and conservation easements should return as a focus for the SNC.
21. Long-term management of any land conservation needs to be considered as a priority.
22. Land conservation protects many diverse landscapes and may provide recreational opportunities.

#### **RESILIENT SIERRA NEVADA COMMUNITIES**

23. Human capacity is lacking Region-wide. The SNC should provide funding and/or training to allow organizations to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities and to build the capacity for Subregional collaborative efforts to prioritize, plan, fund, and implement projects.
24. Physical infrastructure is lacking Region-wide. Keep and maintain existing forest products infrastructure but also look for new opportunities to grow forest products infrastructure.



25. Strength in numbers—the SNC could play a lead role in convening partners and modeling collaborative efforts.
26. Recent funding opportunities offered by the SNC have excluded many Subregions from competing. There is a need to broaden the scope of grant programs to reach communities outside of the Central Sierra Subregion.

#### **IMPACTFUL REGIONAL IDENTITY**

27. Know your audience—people will only listen to the message if they know it will directly affect them.
28. Appropriate techniques—message delivery needs to be as diverse as the audiences (social media, print, marketing, workshops, etc.)
29. Find the right partners and examples to highlight success stories of the Region.
30. Organizations in the Region need to work in concert with each other to achieve Regional goals with each focused around their expertise.

In addition, staff opened two public input sessions, inviting interested stakeholders and members of the public to comment on the development of Strategies (May/June) and the draft Strategic Plan (August/September). Input received was carefully considered and incorporated, as appropriate, into the Strategic Plan.

The list of commenters is provided below. Their specific comment letters and emails have been posted on the SNC’s public website (<http://www.sierranevada.ca.gov/about-us/docs/2019sp>).

#### Comments on Strategy Development:

6/17/2018	Jim Phelan/Jim Maddox, Tuolumne County Sportsmen, Inc.
6/17/2018	Randy Morrison, Mule Deer Foundation
6/19/2018	Markley Bavinger, The Trust for Public Land
6/19/2018	Marty Coleman-Hunt, Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council
6/20/2018	Erin Tarr, Bear Yuba Land Trust
6/20/2018	Paul Mason, Pacific Forest Trust
6/20/2018	Members, Tuolumne County Natural Resources Committee
6/20/2018	Steve Frisch, Sierra Business Council
6/20/2018	Chad Hanson, Ph.D, John Muir Project

#### Comments on Draft Strategic Plan:

9/18/2018	Ryan Burnett, Point Blue Conservation Science
9/19/2018	Markley Bavinger, The Trust for Public Land
9/19/2018	John L. Gray, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors
9/19/2018	Steve Frisch, Sierra Business Council
9/19/2018	Marty Coleman-Hunt, Sierra Cascade Land Trust
9/19/2018	Bridget Fithian, Sierra Foothill Conservancy
9/24/2018	Jenny Hatch, Sierra Nevada Alliance





Top left: View near Woodlake, Tulare County; photography: Anita Ritenour  
Top right: Brown Bear in Sequoia National Park, Tulare County  
Bottom: Weber Lake, Sierra County



SIERRA NEVADA  
CONSERVANCY

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