

Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign

The Sierra Nevada is the third fastest growing region of California. According to the California Department of Finance, the current population of 600,000 is expected to triple to somewhere between 1.5 and 2.4 million residents by 2040. Due to poor planning, population growth in the Sierra too often comes at the expense of working landscapes, ecosystem health and community character. Approximately 35,000 acres of large ranches and forest holdings are converted to residential development every year. Sierra Nevada Alliance's Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign works to advance sustainable land use planning in the Sierra Nevada region. We work with local land use groups across the Sierra to build and support a regional smart growth movement to protect working landscapes, preserve lands important for wildlife, watersheds, and ecosystem integrity, and maintain historic town-centered patterns of Sierra communities.

When people think of the Sierra they often envision a pristine wilderness encircling small historic towns. However, the Sierra faces tremendous challenges related to population growth and land use planning that threaten to undermine the ecosystems, communities and rural economies of the Sierra.

**Poorly-planned growth
threatens Sierra water,
wildlife, working landscapes
and rural communities**

This population explosion threatens to destroy wildlife habitat, impair watershed health and permanently alter the rural character and economy of Sierra communities. The Sierra is home to half the animal and plant populations of California, provides over 60% of California's water and almost all of the water of Northwest Nevada, and is visited by over 40-50 million people each year because of its great recreation and rural character. Traffic, sprawling ranchettes, cookie cutter development, and destruction of wildlife and open space areas would drastically change the Sierra we all love.

The bulk of Sierra growth is taking place in unincorporated areas where county governments have the primary responsibility for regulating land use and guiding human settlement patterns. As a result, the county general plan has taken on added significance, not only as the primary planning tool for individual counties, but also as arbiter of the collective growth of the region.

As a result of increasing concerns about growth, as well as pressure from state agencies to comply with planning laws, many Sierra counties are currently updating their general plans or anticipate that they will begin a general plan update in the next 5 years. This presents a significant opportunity to shape better planning in the region.

**General plan updates are
an opportunity to shape
the future of our region**

With meaningful, organized community engagement, these general plans could be updated to protect working landscapes, conserve natural resources and foster growth that meets community needs. With the huge amount of growth expected to come into the



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Keeping light in the range.

Continued on back



region, it is even more important than ever before for communities to be engaged in these general plan updates. Otherwise, they could become a blueprint for rural sprawl.

Sierra Nevada Alliance and the Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign

The Sierra Nevada Alliance was founded in 1993 to protect and restore the natural environment of the Sierra Nevada for future generations while ensuring healthy and sustainable communities. The Alliance works with our network of eighty-five member groups that span the range to strengthen their individual efforts and lead regional efforts to protect John Muir's 'Range of Light.'

In 2005, the Alliance created the Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign to advance sustainable land use planning in the Sierra. Working with dozens of grassroots land use groups across the Sierra, the Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign works to strengthen the skills and capacity of local advocates around the region.

We help local groups develop the tools of policy analysis, grassroots mobilization, media outreach and coalition-building to achieve better land use planning in their local communities. Our particular focus is on improving countywide general plans that are the primary blueprint for growth in the Sierra Nevada. Taken together, these local changes add up to major impact across the region.

Goals of the Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign:

1. Protect working landscapes:

Maintain ranch, farming and timber lands in the Sierra and minimize conversion to rural sprawl.

2. Preserve lands important for wildlife, watersheds and ecosystem integrity.

Identify and protect important natural resource lands including wildlife habitat and migration corridors, riparian corridors, groundwater recharge zones, oak woodlands and unique plant communities.

3. Maintain the historic town-centered pattern of Sierra communities: Ensure that new development mirrors historic Sierra development patterns. Accommodate population growth by developing neighborhoods that use land efficiently, provide a range of housing types, and are town-centered, compact and walkable.

4. Build a regional smart growth movement. Work to ensure that every Sierra community has active, effective advocates to monitor local land use and take action on important issues.

To achieve these goals, the Sustainable Sierra Land Use Campaign utilizes a two-part 'breadth' and 'depth' strategy. The breadth strategy involves supporting smart growth efforts throughout the range, by providing policy information, campaign resources,

networking and trainings to advance efforts in every community. The 'depth' strategy involves identifying target areas where land use plans are likely to have the greatest impact on the region as a whole – and where local advocates ask for our assistance -- and focusing our efforts to improve planning in those areas and hopefully create model policies for the rest of the region.

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