



STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Executive Director
Subject: Accept the State of California's "Joint Strategy for Sustainable Outdoor Recreation & Wildfire Resilience"

Meeting date: February 26, 2024

Prepared on: February 15, 2025

Attachments: A) Joint Strategy for Sustainable Outdoor Recreation & Wildfire Resilience

BACKGROUND/HISTORY:

The Eastern Sierra has an economic model centered around recreation, tourism and the natural environment, most of which is managed by the federal government. These vital natural resources are under pressure from both overutilization and the threat of catastrophic wildfires. The principal economic driver in our Eastern Sierra region is our recreation-based tourism economy and without the natural resources for these activities, the region would realize economic impacts. To rebuild from a natural disaster like a wildfire would take many years and require dependence on outside resources to recover. In light of the current and anticipated wildfire risk environment in California, the recovery may not even be economically feasible.

The goal of adopting "California's Joint Strategy for Sustainable Outdoor Recreation & Wildfire Resilience" is to engage on a state and federal level with programs that can provide funding to mitigate our exposure to these catastrophic events before they happen.

Adopting this plan should enhance our eligibility to receive state-level and federal funding for programs that will be generated from the recent passing of Proposition 4 and the reauthorization of the Great American Outdoors Act, which provide funding for wildfire prevention, recreation infrastructure and programming, and the protection of communities and natural lands from climate risks. By adopting this plan, the Town would become the first in the state to recognize this strategy, and the implementation of its key actions that will address our unique concerns.

ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION:

The joint strategy consists of four goals with a number of specific key actions to address the effects of climate change and the threat of wildfire on sustainable outdoor recreation infrastructure and programs that drive economic activity. The Sustainable Recreation/CALREC Vision Key Working Group, which developed the joint strategy, was awarded Partnership of the Year from the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region in recognition of their efforts. The joint strategy is intended to integrate and augment existing efforts at the federal, state and local level. The four stated goals as presented in the joint strategy document are as follows:

#1 Integrate Forest Health and Sustainable Outdoor Recreation - Integrate the provision of high-quality, sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities with forest health and resilience and wildfire and climate mitigation efforts so that all people can connect to the benefits and wonders of the natural world.

#2 Advance Inclusion and Access for All Throughout California - Plan for and provide a diversity of outdoor recreation opportunities to foster inclusive and equitable access for all Californians.

#3 Promote the Health and Wellbeing of All Californians through Outdoor Recreation - Provide health information, training, and alternative recreation opportunities that promote the health and well-being of all peoples, with consideration of people's needs before, during, and after wildfires and other natural disasters.

#4 Support Economies that Enhance Sustainable Outdoor Recreation - Foster and support robust and diversified economies that enhance sustainable outdoor recreation while investing in the resilience necessary to withstand the impact of climate change, wildfires, and other disasters.

The attached joint strategy includes a number of key actions under each of these stated goals, and provides a comprehensive program effort to address these impacts across the state. As these strategies are implemented by other municipalities, there will be opportunities to combine efforts, across jurisdictions where our areas of interest intersect. Staff will look to integrate these strategies into planning efforts and grant funding opportunities.

BUDGET IMPACTS:

The financial implications of this adoption should provide better access to state and federal level grants to further our initiatives. There may be additional costs associated with the implementation, but the benefits should far outweigh the additional costs.

LEGAL REVIEW:

ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board review and accept “California’s Joint Strategy for Sustainable Outdoor Recreation & Wildfire Resilience,” as published by The California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force in March of 2023, as a guiding document for resource protection.