Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation
Strategy Project Charter

June 2013

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# Purpose of the Charter

This charter describes the purpose and deliverables, representation of interests, roles and responsibilities, and operational protocols for the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy Project, a multidisciplinary group (Fisher Team) that will assess current information and develop a conservation strategy for the isolated population of Pacific fisher (*Martes* *pennanti*) in the Southern Sierra Nevada, California. The group consists of a Fisher Inter-Agency Leadership Team (FIALT), a Fisher Technical Team (FTT) and a Core Support Team (CST). This charter is limited to the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy Project; future endeavors that result from this effort will have their own governing structure and protocols.

# Introduction to the Southern Sierra Fisher Conservation Strategy Project (SSFCSP)

There are a number of research and management efforts underway to ensure the persistence of the Pacific fisher, an Endangered Species Act Candidate species. This group will synthesize key information on the species’ biology, effects of management actions, and relevant policies to create a conservation strategy for fishers in the southern Sierra Nevada. While strong foundational pieces have been developed for the West Coast fisher Distinct Population Segment, there is a critical need to specifically address the conservation and management needs for the unique and isolated population of Pacific Fisher in the Southern Sierra Nevada.

The SSFCSP is designed to meet the needs of agencies with an interest in the Pacific Fisher in the southern Sierra Nevada. These include but are not limited to the following, listed in alphabetical order:

|  Agency | Mission Statement |
| --- | --- |
| CA Department of Fish and Wildlife:  | Manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public |
| National Park Service:  | Preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations; cooperate with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world |
| Sierra Nevada Conservancy | 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. |
| USDA Forest Service | Sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. |
| US Fish and Wildlife Service  | Working with others, conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. |

# Project Goal

The goal of this effort is to help conserve and sustain the fisher population in the southern Sierra Nevada by developing a Southern Sierra Nevada Fisher Conservation Strategy for use by agencies, other land managers, researchers, and others. The conservation strategy will include, at a minimum, all of the following components:

* Risks and threats to fisher persistence in the southern Sierra Nevada;
* Maps and descriptions of fisher habitat suitability, connectivity, and population distribution and dynamics in the southern Sierra Nevada, and an assessment of the effects of and needs for management activities;
* Identification of key elements required to develop and implement an ‘all-lands’ approach to fisher conservation and management, and potential for fisher re-distribution throughout its historic range in the Sierra Nevada;
* Priority conservation and management activities, and processes for siting, phasing, and scheduling proposed actions (e.g., forest restoration actions);
* Priority research questions to address important information gaps;
* A proposed monitoring program to support adaptive management in fisher habitat;
* Identification and/or development of decision-support tools and database needs to support implementation of the strategy via an Adaptive Management Program; and
* Public outreach and education efforts, including but not limited to web-based updates and public meetings at key points in the development of the strategy.

# Deliverables

The project will produce the following deliverables:

* Draft conservation strategy by early 2014, to be finalized by summer 2014;
* A structured decision-support system and process that is broadly available and easily used by the agencies who will implement the strategy, as well as other interested users. The decision-support system, database, and analytical tools will be designed for easy updating with new information during implementation; and
* A series of opportunities, tools, and resources aimed at informing and engaging representatives of diverse interests and the general public at key points in the development of the strategy.

# Group Structure and Function

To maximize efficiency, coordination, and transparency of the Project, The SSFCSP has a three-part structure consisting of a Fisher Inter-Agency Fisher Leadership Team (FIALT), a Fisher Technical Team (FTT), and a Core Support Team (CST)). The collective term for these individual teams is Fisher Teams. (*For additional information on the roles and responsibilities of each team, see Section 7*).

**Fisher Inter-Agency Leadership Team (FIALT):** A group of federal and state agency representatives that will work to ensure sufficient resources are available to meet the goal and ensure that the products will meet agency needs. The ultimate intent is for the FIALT agencies to adopt the final conservation strategy for implementation, subject to other pertinent policies and requirements of their agencies. Agencies represented are: USDA Forest Service, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service. A list of current members of the FIALT and their alternates are available upon request.

**Fisher Technical Team (FTT)****:** This team will: synthesize and analyze known technical and management information as needed to develop the conservation strategy; guide development of the decision-support system, database, and analytical tools; and write the conservation strategy and submit it to the FIALT for adoption. Wayne Spencer of the Conservation Biology Institute (CBI), whose mission is to provide scientific expertise to support the conservation and recovery of biological diversity in its natural state through applied research, education, planning, and community service, will convene and chair the FTT and lead the development of the conservation strategy. A list of potential FTT members has been assembled, comprising researchers, state and federal managers, and others having specific expertise with fishers and forest management in the planning area. CBI will work with the FIALT to ensure that the FTT members cover the range of essential expertise in a balanced and effective team, and will reach out to additional subject matter specialists as needed to inform the conservation strategy. CBI will coordinate closely and regularly with the FIALT throughout the development of the strategy, including before interim products are shared with stakeholders, to ensure that these products meet agency needs and are not inconsistent with agency regulations and requirements.

CBI will also work with the Southern Sierra Nevada Fisher Working Group and others to review interim products to ensure that the appropriate existing information is being appropriately incorporated, interpreted, and applied. If deemed necessary, the FIALT may commission a Science Consistency Review of the draft conservation strategy by a small group of scientists qualified to verify that the management and conservation recommendations are consistent with the science.

**Core Support Team (CST):** The Core Support Team (CST) will serve as an interface between the FIALT and FTT, provide logistical and administrative support for the effort, and ensure that stakeholder involvement and public outreach are implemented when needed. A list of current members of the CST is available upon request.

# Representation of Interests

The SSFCSP will also include representation and/or participation from different local, state, and federal governments, individuals, and non-government organizations with an interest in the Pacific Fisher in the southern Sierra Nevada. These interests include but are not limited to the following, listed in alphabetical order:

* California Native American Tribes with historical, current or potential lands in the range of fishers, including federally recognized and non-federally recognized Tribes
* Fire protection
* Fisher biology
* Forestry industry
* Land and forest management
* Local and regional environment and conservation organizations
* Private land ownership
* Scientists with interests in fishers, forest ecology, fire ecology, or other relevant topics

Each area of interest or agency may be represented by more than one agency and/or organization. Similarly, one agency/organization may represent more than one interest (e.g., a land management agency or local government may also be charged with conservation). Members of the various Fisher Teams as well as representatives of diverse interests and the general public will be listed on a project roster that is updated as needed.

The Fisher Teams will reach out to and communicate regularly with others interested in the Pacific Fisher in the southern Sierra, and provide different ways for them to get involved in the development of the SSFCPP.

# Roles and Responsibilities

***Specific Organization Roles and Responsibilities***

**USDA Forest Service Region 5**: The USDA Forest Service Region 5 is a member of the FIALT and is responsible for FIALT meeting logistics, meeting agenda and meetings material development. In addition, the Region will provide three members to the CST and take leadership in tracking action items and project coordination and management tasks.

 **Sierra Nevada Conservancy**: The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is responsible for leading public outreach and communication efforts for the project, including developing meeting agendas, logistical plans, and meeting materials for communications with the general public. The Conservancy will assist with agenda development and lead facilitation for the FIALT, and will provide a staff member to serve on the CST. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy will also be represented on the FIALT.

**Conservation Biology Institute (CBI):** The Forest Service has retained the services of CBI t to convene and chair the FTT and lead preparation of the conservation strategy. As Chair of the FTT, CBI will develop the decision-support system, database, and analytical tools with input from the FIALT and FTT, and lead preparation of the conservation strategy based on input from the Fisher Teams. CBI will also solicit input and review as needed from other subject matter experts and stakeholders will regularly coordinate with the CST to ensure that the products meet FIALT needs, and will submit the final conservation strategy to the FIALT for approval and adoption. CBI will ensure that the FIALT is aware of any divergent opinions when CBI submits the conservation strategy to the FIALT before the FIALT makes a final approval decision.

**US Fish and Wildlife Service**: US Fish and Wildlife Service is a member of the FIALT and is responsible for FIALT roles and responsibilities as described in Team and Individual Roles and Responsibilities, as well as providing a technical team member to represent their interests and needs.

**California Department of Fish and Wildlife**: California Department of Fish and Wildlife is a member of the FIALT and is responsible for FIALT roles and responsibilities as described in Team and Individual Roles and Responsibilities, as well as providing a technical team member to represent their interests and needs.

**National Park Service**. National Park Service is a member of the FIALT and is responsible for FIALT roles and responsibilities as described in Team and Individual Roles and Responsibilities, as well as providing a technical team member to represent their interests and needs.

***Team and Individual Roles and Responsibilities***

**All Fisher Team Members**: This includes all members of the FIALT, FTT, and CST. Members are responsible for representing the interests of their agency, governing body, constituency, and membership, whichever apply. Members act in a manner that enhances respect, mutual understanding, and trust among all members. Members contribute experience, expertise, data, and information, to help clarify issues and advance analyses and recommendations.Members are also responsible for communicating news about the project to their agency/governing body/constituency/membership, as well as discussing issues of concern with their agency/governing body/constituency/membership, to better inform their individual team’s decision-making. Team Members will be expected to have sufficient knowledge to advance the dialogue, as well as sufficient time to participate in meetings and the development and/or review of draft deliverables for which their team is responsible.

Regular attendance of the various meetings associated with this effort will advance dialogue and work efforts. If a team member must miss any of his or her meeting(s), alternates should have the capacity to act with the full authority of the member and be briefed beforehand by the member to avoid causing the group to revisit previous considerations and agreements. The roles of the individual Fisher Teams are described below:

**Fisher Inter-Agency Leadership Team (FIALT):** This team provides guidance for the conservation strategy development. It also focuses the project as needed and accepts or provides feedback to the other Fisher Teams (FTs). It provides guidance on what content should be prioritized in communication with the general public. The FIALT will factor in divergent opinions when making a final approval decision on the conservation strategy.

Fisher Technical Team (FTT): The FTT makes recommendations and reports to the Fisher Inter-Agency Leadership Team on a regular basis, and pulls together the information for the actual conservation strategy, which includes: providing local southern Sierra or California regional fisher ecological and biological expertise; providing connections to other resource management fields as they interact with the Pacific Fisher; designing practical conservation measures and options to be applied across large, multiple owner landscapes; and establishing productive relationships and addressing multiple perspectives in a collaborative environment. The FTT will outreach as needed to Subject Matter Experts, who will provide presentations and/or information to the FTT in their various areas for expertise, for consideration or inclusion in the conservation strategy. The FTT may periodically ask Special Topic Reviewers to review specific sections of the draft conservation strategy based on their areas of knowledge and/or expertise. If deemed necessary, the FTT will recommend a small group of scientists qualified to conduct a science consistency review of the draft conservation strategy.

**Core Support Team (CST):** The CST leads coordination for the individual components of the process and supports articulation and integration between the different components to ensure a quality and timely result.

**Facilitators**: Facilitators are responsible for assisting the conveners in developing meeting agendas and meeting materials, managing the meetings, and developing a high-level meeting summary that includes key issues, any decisions or agreements, and action items. Facilitators are neutral with regard to the content being discussed; at the same time, facilitators will provide guidance on the collaborative process and associated best practices, such as ensuring balanced participation, mutual understanding, shared responsibility, and inclusive solutions. Facilitators also provide members with a confidential outlet for discussing concerns about the process. If a member has a concern about the neutrality or performance of the facilitator, s/he should first speak with the facilitator, and if unresolved, should speak with the FIALT, before raising the issue with the group.

**General public (non-Fisher Team members):** The general public can provide feedback on products developed by the Technical Team, provide scientific data for consideration by the Technical Team, and pose or answer relevant questions from the Fisher Teams through the various communications channels established for this group.

# Consensus-Seeking Decision-Making within the Group

This protocol applies to all Fisher Teams (FIALT, TT, and CST) and other participants in the process. Participants will work diligently to find common ground and seek consensus on issues. The definition of consensus spans the range from strong support to neutrality, to abstention, to “I can live with it.”

If one of the Fisher Teams cannot reach consensus on an issue, and has made a determined, good faith effort to fully explore the issues, understand the information available, and develop inclusive solutions, it may recommend two or more options to the FIALT. The FIALT will then decide which direction to go or recommendation to advance. The different recommendations will be included in the meeting summary or decision document. In the unlikely event that the FIALT cannot come to consensus on a recommendation, then the decision will be based on majority vote in the FIALT.

On occasion Fisher Team members or participants in the public involvement process may be asked to develop and/or review a document developed in between meetings. Best efforts will be made to provide advance notice of this need during the previous meeting and through the project work plan. The document will be distributed through email and a comment window of at least one week provided. If members do not provide comments within the review time it is assumed they accept the document as it is written. If all members can live with the document as written, it will go forward without modification. If not, the FIALT will consider all recommendations (and keep a record of these), revise the document in good faith, and decide on the content of the final version.

# Process Agreements and Meeting Ground Rules

***Process Agreements***

**Members agree to act in good faith in all aspects of this process and to communicate their interests.** Members agree to make a concerted effort to provide requested information to other members or to explain the reason why not. Tentative or sensitive information will be treated appropriately, though it should be noted that some information requested may be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), so confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in all cases.

**Members agree to address the issues and concerns of the participants.** All members have a stake in the issue at hand. Members agree to validate the issues and concerns of other parties, and work to develop agreements that include all the issues under consideration. Disagreements will be viewed as conditions to be managed or problems to be solved, rather than battles to be won.

**Parties will express concerns and support in meetingsthat are consistent with concerns and support they express in other forums, including in sessions with the press.** Outside of meetings, members will represent comments made in these meetings as work group comments. Personal references will be avoided, and members will only speak for themselves. If requested, a member can refer an inquirer to another member, so they can also speak directly for themselves.

**Members agree to only make commitments that they intend to keep.**

**Meeting notes will be prepared with a focus on key points, ideas, and action items rather than as transcripts.** Unless very specific to understanding the content, references will generally be made to the content rather than the members. Meeting notes will be circulated to all members of the work group within two weeks of meetings. Meeting notes can be shared publicly on request.

***Meeting Ground Rules***

**Electronic courtesy**. Turn cell phones, or any other communication item with an on/off switch to “silent.” Do not text or conduct any outside correspondence during meetings. If you must make a call or send a text, please step out of the room. If you do not believe you will be able to participate fully, please discuss your situation with one of the facilitators. If on a conference call and driving or in a noisy environment, please mute your phone when not speaking to ensure all participants can hear.

**Be comfortable**. Help yourself to refreshments or take personal breaks.

**Humor is welcome** and important, but humor should never be at someone else's expense.

**Stay focused on the charter and deliverables**. There are many related topics that people care about. The work groupcannot address all of these. The facilitator will help the group stay focused on the deliverables.

**Use common conversational courtesy**. Don't interrupt others. Use appropriate language. Avoid third party discussions.

**Treat each other with respect.** People are passionate about these issues and in many cases have invested their careers in this work. People offer their time, expertise, insight, and resources in these discussions. Respect the work that people do to advance the conversation and create common ground.

**All ideas and points have value**. You may hear something you do not agree with. You are not required to defend or promote your perspective, but you are asked to share it. All ideas have value in this setting. If you believe another approach is better, offer it as a constructive alternative.

**Avoid editorials**. Avoid ascribing motives to or judging the actions of others. Tell us what is important to you, and what you would like to see.

**Honor time**. In order to achieve meeting objectives it will be important to follow the time guidelines provided by the facilitator.