



SIERRA NEVADA
— ALLIANCE —



SIERRA NEVADA ALLIANCE

STRATEGIC PLAN

2026-2030

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Sierra Nevada Alliance (SNA) enters its 33rd year, its next strategic planning cycle is positioned to address critical landscape-level challenges by emphasizing organizational refinement, collaboration, capacity-building, increasing conservation impact, and shared learning. The board and staff convened in September 2025 to envision the organization's hoped-for future, which is presented in this plan.

The 2026-2030 Strategic Plan establishes three concurrent strategic directions to grow and refine the organization's internal capacity while simultaneously affirming its role as a capacity-builder for the conservation community and positioning SNA as the region's premier hub for conservation collaboration, education, and advocacy.

STRATEGIC APPROACH:

Maintaining discipline around organizational foundations while strategically building on SNA's proven strengths and successes as a capacity-building and collaboration hub.

- **Organizational Sustainability & Refinement:**

- Establish a refined organization with financial, operational, and staffing systems to support a robust and sustainable organization.

- **Growing Conservation Capacity:**

- Strengthen the Sierra Nevada conservation sector through workforce development, enhancing organizational partnerships, and amplifying diverse voices.

- **Strategic Convening & Shared Learning:**

- Establish SNA as the premier hub for Sierra Nevada conservation-related collaboration, knowledge sharing, and advocacy, creating stewards for the region's resources.



SNA HISTORY

In 1991, Tom Knudson wrote a five-part series for the Sacramento Bee called “The Sierra in Peril,” based on an eight-month investigation. It chronicled polluted air, dying forests, poisoned rivers, vanishing wildlife, eroding soil, and rampant development—and won a Pulitzer Prize.

The series revealed the lack of a unified voice for Sierra conservation. In response, the Environment Now foundation and others sponsored a Sierra Now conference. Task forces researched and developed solutions, presenting recommendations to 450 attendees.

A key goal of Sierra Now was to launch an organization to advocate for the Sierra. This led to the creation of the Sierra Nevada Alliance, built on collaboration among conservation groups to share expertise and pursue common goals.

The new, Sierra-based organization emphasized grassroots activism and coordination of regional conservation. Its 1992 mandate included:

- Being the unified environmental voice for Sierra activists.
- Providing technical, legal, and organizational support for partners.
- Pursuing Sierra Now task force recommendations.
- Educating the public on environmental problems.
- Offering models for better management.
- Publicizing degradation in the media.
- Building consensus among advocates.
- Strengthening partners’ advocacy work.
- Building public–private coalitions for sustainable policies.

In 1993, the Sierra Nevada Alliance became a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Laurel Ames, its first Executive Director (1993–2002), ran the office from her dining room table.

Founding board members included Andy Bartlett, Jane Baxter, Linda Blum, Joan Boothe, Peter Brussard, John Buckley, Harriet Burgess, David Edelson, Dan Everson, Warren Haines, John Kipling, Andrea Lawrence, Rick Luskin, Patricia Malberg, Dean Malley, Erin Noel, Joan Reiss, Rob Schaeffer, Marjorie Sill, Kathy Tierney, Frannie Waid, and Kimery Wiltshire.



SNA's GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Mission

We unite people and organizations to protect Sierra Nevada ecosystems and communities.

Vision

Every Sierra ecosystem and community is healthy, resilient, and collectively cared for through thriving partnerships as a legacy for future generations.

Core Values

Inclusiveness

The Sierra Nevada Alliance believes that all people should have a voice in conservation. We strive to amplify the perspectives of underrepresented individuals, BIPOC, and affiliated organizations and disadvantaged communities as a whole, through a commitment to incorporate these perspectives into all aspects of our work. We believe that a sustainable future for the Sierra must be equitable and just.

Power of one and power of many

The Alliance believes that, to protect and restore the Sierra Nevada for future generations, it will take individual action, as well as collective action. Individuals do make a difference in their daily lives. Groups do make a difference in saving special places in the Sierra. The Alliance believes that, in addition to personal action and local organizing, combining efforts across the region is needed. Action on all levels is effective. Hence, the Alliance works to build the capacity of individuals and groups and works to unite efforts to make regional impact.



Core Values

Sustainability and intergenerational equity

We believe that we have a responsibility to current and future generations to provide them with more equitable access to the beauty, resources, and inspiration of the Sierra. It is not acceptable to exhaust resources or take actions that limit opportunities to experience the full richness of this amazing Range of Light. Hence, we need to utilize resources sustainably and take action that prioritizes access for all and a deeper connection to nature for a more resilient Sierra.

Tangible results

The Alliance believes that we must act to achieve tangible results and that a vision for perfection must not get in the way of achieving realistic, interim changes that lead to our goals. We must work to find solutions that facilitate positive changes. The best should guide the way to the good, but should not be the enemy of the good.

Strategic applications of power to influence change

We believe in collaboration to create community and find equitable solutions. We also believe that all individuals in the community have a right to be included in community decision-making, and that diverse perspectives lead to creative and sustainable solutions.

Focus on solutions

The Alliance is solution-focused. We believe it is important to highlight problems and degradation to the Sierra, but it is equally important to present possible solutions based on a shared vision for a more resilient future. When presented with solutions, our members, the public, and the communities we serve will be more likely to engage. We seek to create solutions.



Core Values

Challenge ideas, not people

The Alliance's primary base is conservation groups, but all voices are important and part of the solution. While we may disagree with particular viewpoints on a given issue, we continue to respect the people behind those viewpoints. Respecting others is important to creating true solutions in the long term.

Mutually beneficial partnerships

The Alliance strives to benefit and support all conservation partners, and recognizes that the Sierra region and the Alliance benefit from partner efforts and expertise.

Community-driven solutions

We don't transfer our problems elsewhere. We support solutions that prioritize sustainability, equity, and justice by centering the well-being of the communities in which they have implemented.

2026-2030 Vision Summary

By the end of 2030, the Sierra Nevada Alliance will prioritize:

- Refining the organization's financial, operational, and staffing systems and structures to support robust and sustainable operations.
- Ensuring a stronger Sierra Nevada conservation sector through expanded workforce capacity, enhanced organizational partnerships, and amplified diverse voices.
- Being recognized as the premier hub for Sierra Nevada conservation-related collaboration, knowledge sharing, and advocacy, actively cultivating stewards for the region's resources.

This 5-year vision will position SNA for sustainable impact, addressing the Sierra Nevada's most pressing conservation challenges while building the collaborative infrastructure needed for long-term ecosystem and community resilience.



Current Landscape Challenges

Public Lands Risks

Instability created by administrative and policy changes; shifting public sentiment; funding gaps; access limitations; insufficient stewardship resources

Natural Resource Threats

Catastrophic fire risk; water/snowpack vulnerabilities; drought; tree mortality

Capacity Gaps

Resources for restoration and monitoring; workforce personnel; coordinated resources and responses

Resilience & Durability

Insufficient resilience among individuals, agencies/organizations, and communities to address or rebound from ongoing and emerging conservation challenges

Organizational Strengths

SNA's Position of Strength

Informed by the strengths embedded in SNA's track record of success, the organization will approach the future by focusing on:

- Creating connections and serving as a 'hub' to amplify partner organizations
- Building capacity for partner organizations
- Convening diverse stakeholders and expanding engagement with new stakeholder groups
- Encouraging and enabling shared learning among partners
- Committing to a robust regional presence
- Ensuring a relevant and nimble response to all challenges
- Creating stewards in vocation and/or in mindset among residents, visitors, elected officials, and funders
- Remaining focused on tangible, mission-driven outcomes
- Focusing all efforts toward serving the environment, both via communities and ecosystems



Strategic Directions

Growing Conservation Capacity

Objective: Strengthen the Sierra Nevada conservation sector through workforce development, enhancing organizational partnerships, and amplifying diverse voices.

Key Initiatives:

Workforce Development (AmeriCorps, Forestry Fellows, and Ambassadors Program): Deepen program impact and quality.

- Continue to identify and strategically recruit host site partnerships
- Intentionally explore and work to fill emerging workforce gaps
- Ensure long-term program sustainability by diversifying funding sources

Enhancing/Optimizing Partnerships: Strengthen relationships with host organizations to ensure mutual benefit and ongoing program evolution

- Leverage host site partnerships to achieve other mutually beneficial goals.
- Innovate the types of support offered to program participants and hosts.

Workforce Development Strategy: Continue to position SNA as the leader addressing conservation sector workforce challenges.

- Explore new pathways for emerging professionals to enter and remain in conservation careers in the Sierra and beyond.
- Maintain connections with and leverage alumni networks to sustain program involvement and support.



Strategic Directions

Strategic Convening & Shared Learning

Objective: Establish SNA as the premier hub for Sierra Nevada conservation-related collaboration, knowledge sharing, and advocacy, creating stewards for the region's resources.

Key Initiatives:

Knowledge Hub Development: Position SNA as the primary hub for Sierra conservation collaboration, knowledge sharing, and cross-stakeholder learning on best practices and resources

- Reexamine the 'membership model' to ensure an optimal structure

Collaborative Convening: Offer strategic opportunities for partner collaboration and resource exchange, integrating diverse perspectives and encouraging innovative thinking.

- Examine all SNA-hosted events to maximize benefit to the organization, participants, partner organizations, and the broader Sierra Nevada communities and ecosystems.
- Identify existing sources of regional and community-level needs assessments to inform education, collaboration, and resource sharing.
- Improve how we demonstrate the collaborations we facilitate and how this work is communicated and integrated across the organization.

Advocacy and Policy Engagement: Ensure a clearly defined approach to prioritizing and addressing policy-related conservation challenges.

- Define SNA's role as a leader or coalition member/partner on specific policy issues, and ensure the necessary resources (staffing, training, communications, etc.) to fill that role successfully.
- Ensure organization-wide understanding of SNA's advocacy approach



Strategic Directions

Organizational Sustainability & Refinement

Objective: Establish a refined organization with financial, operational, and staffing systems to support a robust and sustainable organization.

Key Initiatives:

Operational Efficacy: Optimize staff structure, fiscal systems, and communications/messaging to support strategic program delivery

- Explore an optimal organization and staffing structure
- Create a comprehensive revenue and development plan
- Improve fiscal reporting systems, with accurate per-program costs
- Deploy a comprehensive communications plan
- Invest in SNA's human capital through professional development and support

Program Evaluation & Alignment: Critical evaluation of all existing programs, services, and grants to ensure mission alignment and resource optimization, as well as a system to assess new funding and program opportunities.

Governance Strengthening: Board development and governance capacity building to provide effective oversight and strategic guidance.

- Clarify the board's identity and role in organizational governance.
- Identify and better utilize existing and needed board skills, experiences, and networks (e.g., board assessment or matrix)
- Transform board meeting materials and agendas and digital collaboration to align with the organization's strategic priorities (E.D. summaries & staff reports, financial reports, program dashboards)
- Initiate a succession planning process as a commitment to SNA's future.



Ensuring Success & Mitigating Risk

Plan Monitoring & Adaptation

Regular evaluation of this plan to ensure the executive director, board, and staff are actively engaged in its implementation, evaluation, and adaptation.

Leadership Commitment

Sustained board and staff commitment to foundational work on organizational sustainability and refinement, and the supporting systems & processes to ensure those commitments endure.

Disciplined Expansion

Resist new initiatives during the organizational development & refinement phase. Establishing and implementing clear decision-making criteria and financial parameters when evaluating and engaging with new opportunities (grants, events, etc.)

Disciplined Expansion

Clear messaging about strategic focus to funders, partners, and the community. Manage external expectations about SNA's role and capacity.

