

Meeting Synopsis

Thirteen members of the Burney-Hat Creek Community Forest & Watershed Group (BHCCFWG) met for an in-person meeting on Tuesday, August 22nd, 2017. National Parks Service (NPS) representatives discussed a partnership with NASA and new analyses of tree mortality and fuel loading within Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP). Participants reviewed a protocol for incorporating collaborative comments into ongoing and future projects. The group identified areas of need for Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) grant funding and designated the appropriate fiscal sponsor. Group members requested a budget report for the upcoming fiscal year, as well as a list of shovel-ready recreation projects.

Attendees

Janine Book
Greg Mayer
Steve Buckley
Kristy Hoffman
Todd Sloat

Jonathan Kusel
John Owen
Ryan Hadley
Pete Johnson
Deirdre Hanners

Garrett Costello
Patricia Puterbaugh
Lori Martin

Action Items

- **J. Owen** to modify and post July 14th field tour notes online. **DONE**
- **R. Hadley** to follow up with Dan McCall of PG&E and inform Sierra Institute of outcomes. **DONE**
- **Sierra Institute** to investigate Farm Bill CE usage in USFS fuels management projects.
- **Sierra Institute** to schedule next full-group meeting. **DONE**

Meeting Notes

Approval/modifications/facilitator notes

- Group members approved the July 14th field tour notes with one minor change to a comment regarding hazardous tree removal. **Action Item: J. Owen** to modify and post July 14th field tour notes online.
- Group members approved the August agenda as presented.

Field tour overview, next steps for Badger

- S. Buckley and others discussed the key topics covered at the Badger field tour on July 14th including:
 - Planning treatments for the Reading Fire footprint.
 - Implementing prescribed fire on private and commercial lands.

- S. Buckley introduced a report released by the NASA Develop program for Lassen Volcanic National Park (LVNP).
 - The NASA team utilized landsat imagery from 1984 to the present to produce tree mortality estimates down to a 10-meter scale. The team effectively created a “snapshot” of tree mortality throughout the park.
 - In addition, the NASA team estimated fuels loads with LIDAR data.
- NASA created scripts (commands for a computer program) that can be used in future analysis.
- The NASA team is available for another 10 weeks to expand the analysis and potentially incorporate the USFS Badger project area south of LVNP.
- J. Kusel asked how the USFS can be involved with NPS and the NASA team.
 - A. Wittner, Hat Creek GIS specialist, was formerly on the NASA Develop team and is available for meetings with NPS.
- The group identified potential next steps including:
 - Forming a team of USFS and NPS staff
 - Develop a landscape assessment with NASA and other new data
 - Identify priority treatments for work across boundaries
- S. Buckley mentioned that directives for the NASA team are flexible and the Develop team supports interagency work (USFS and NPS).
- R. Hadley inquired about the value of this analysis.
 - The analysis may contribute to a common dataset within the region.
 - Tree mortality information can be used for “triage”, i.e., prioritizing treatments/projects.
- J. Kusel raised the question of proprietary data in regards to private landowners. Are there any foreseeable issues with a large scale landsat/lidar analysis that includes private land?
 - R. Hadley does not foresee issues for his company.
 - P. Johnson mentioned that the analysis might be very valuable for private timberland owners.
- L. Martin asked what the NASA team will analyze over the 10 weeks they are available and if those directives can be amended.
 - S. Buckley replied that they will go forward with analysis for LVNP and the area south of the CFLR. Ideally, the NASA team will institute a method of analysis that can be later applied to a larger area.
- G. Mayer mentioned there is “pretty intensive” stand data on the Badger project area. There was a USFS ground-truth crew working for nearly two years in the area.
- Group members agreed it would be valuable to expand the NASA analysis, and methods derived from this work, to a broader area.

- Notifications should be sent to private entities, informing them of the data collection and methods employed.
- The resulting data is public, and transparency is critical for moving forward. **Future Meeting Topic**: Landsat/LIDAR data collection, transparency, and notifications.
- Group members are interested in having a presentation from the NASA team when their work is concluded. **Future Meeting Topic**
- R. Hadley asked if this data collection could ultimately prolong the Badger planning/implementation.
 - J. Book said that USFS priorities for Badger in FY18 are defining the “where” (project boundaries) and getting surveys started. The data collection will not impede that process but may influence it.

Plum Restoration Project

- G. Mayer discussed the recent public meeting for the Plum Restoration Project.
 - There were approximately 13 members of the public present.
 - Information on the BHCCFWG was shared with the community members in attendance.
 - There are a number of public comments to review regarding the draft project description.
- J. Kusel asked USFS staff how the collaborative group was characterized in the planning process.
 - J. Book noted that the first page of the Plum Project Description contains a section on the BHCCFWG’s involvement in the process.
- The comments being accepted currently are not part of the public comment period legally required through NEPA. These comments are an opportunity for collaborative members and the public to give input on how to proceed with the project.
- P. Johnson noted that there should be a distinction between comments made by collaborative members and a collaborative comment.
- J. Kusel followed up P. Johnson’s comment with a broader question: what makes a “collaboratively designed” project? There should be a discussion on what type of official response the collaborative can/will make on the projects going forward.
 - G. Mayer mentioned that comments from individual collaborative members differ substantially in content (for the Plum Project). A representative comment from the collaborative may require a consensus.
- J. Book discussed the NEPA process as it typically applies to USFS projects.
 - “Scoping” occurs throughout the process until the decision is signed.
 - There is an initial scoping period that corresponds to what the USFS “should do” in regards to the project. This is an opportunity for the public to comment.
 - Following analysis, there is another comment period on the draft NEPA document, which corresponds to what the USFS is “going to do”.

- Both of these comment periods may institute legal standing for citizens or organizations to object to the final decision.
- Legal Standing in NEPA:
 - Individuals or entities providing substantive, meaningful, and specific comments throughout the NEPA process may have legal standing to object if their concerns are not ultimately addressed. Standing equates to some harm (e.g., social, cultural, economic) brought upon the individual or entity as a result of the federal agency's decision.
- J. Kusel noted that the collaborative does not want to interfere with the standing issue. Group members are entitled to maintain their own comments standing for themselves or the organization they represent.
- T. Puterbaugh said the group should definitely have a presence in the planning process for Plum. However, it would be difficult to form a representative comment prior to the draft Environmental Assessment (EA).
 - J. Book recommended the group form a comment prior to the analysis. After that point, it is pretty definitive what the USFS intends to do.
- For the Plum Project, another tier of project planning was added to the process. The USFS is considering this an experimental project design to allow greater participation by the collaborative and the public.
- J. Book described the next steps for Plum, based on the outcomes of group discussion.
 - The USFS will review and modify the proposal based on the comments received through the initial "public feedback" step.
 - By the next group meeting, the USFS will present the modifications to the proposal and have another discussion. **Future Meeting Topic**
- J. Kusel asked if the USFS is able to communicate the nature of the comments and what the sticking points are?
 - J. Book said that would be acceptable and beneficial.

Bioenergy Update

- T. Sloat discussed the status of Hat Creek Bioenergy.
 - An LLC was formed between Hat Creek and West Biofuels (project engineers).
 - The entity has completed a System Impact Study (SIS); however, the project is not officially in the queue because PG&E has not responded.
 - Building permits and site control are complete.
- Hat Creek Bioenergy recently received \$5 million from the California Energy Commission (CEC).
 - Most of the initial funding will be used for equipment.
- J. Kusel discussed the Bio-Mat queue briefly.
 - Three entities are currently in the queue and the price has been climbing. There will likely be a bid soon.

- If five entities enter the queue, the price will begin to drop.
- Sierra Institute broke ground for a small-scale cogeneration facility in Quincy, CA. The boiler will accept 400-500 bone dry tons of biomass fuel annually.
 - The building housing the boiler will be constructed using Cross Laminated Timber (CLT). CLT is widely used in Europe and the market is expected to grow rapidly in North America. This will be the first building in California constructed entirely of CLT.
- The long-term goal for Sierra Institute is to start a network of small-scale biomass facilities throughout Plumas county.

CFLR Program of Work

Crossroads update:

- USFS staff discussed the Crossroads project.
 - Approximately 95% of the data has been returned from the stand exams. There is no timber value.
- USFS staff raised the question of the “nature” of the project. Previously, the project was planned for a Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion (CE); however, the Farm Bill CE is primarily focused on Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and tree mortality objectives. There is a WUI component to Crossroads, but the treatments (fuels reduction) will not address mortality necessarily.
- J. Book commented that there was more or less a directive from USFS leadership to utilize the Farm Bill CE, which may have contributed to its use in Crossroads planning. If the Farm Bill “header” is retained, it may open new opportunities for IDIQ contracts, specifically, for NEPA planning.
- The Farm Bill CE may ultimately still be used, although, it would be a “new thing” to apply it to a fuels management project. If there was a template available from another NF project, then it would be more feasible. **Action Item: Sierra Institute** to investigate Farm Bill CE usage in USFS fuels management projects.
- T. Puterbaugh mentioned a “trust issue” in regards to USFS’ communication of the Crossroads planning. The project has been a collaborative priority for several years and has not been implemented.
 - J. Book noted the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) leader is no longer serving in that role. Finding the appropriate staff to initiate scoping is the current challenge.
- T. Sloat mentioned SNC funding for Crossroads. The SNC category II (planning) grants could fund an external team to conduct analysis and write NEPA documents. B. Jones may be a candidate for this work in a role outside of the USFS.

- Next steps for Crossroads include:
 - Further conversation about SNC planning funds and an external NEPA team.
 - Identify, fund, and schedule land surveys.
 - Researching Farm Bill CE templates for fuels management.
- K. Hoffman noted that SNC funding would come through in March, 2018 at the earliest. Is that within the timeline for planning purposes?
 - USFS staff generally tentatively that timeline.

Burney Gardens:

- Those involved with the Burney Gardens Working Group reiterated that it is difficult to move forward with Burney Gardens without PG&E “on board”. The Timber Harvest Plan (THP) expires in January 2019.
- J. Kusel asked if there are any opportunities to identify appropriate parties within PG&E to discuss Burney Gardens.
 - G. Mayer identified Tristan Leong as the PG&E contact for Lassen National Forest.
 - L. Martin noted that Burney Falls State Park has two PG&E contacts that they work with regularly.
- T. Sloat stated there are three different projects with various PG&E contacts associated with them. The group should identify the individual who is knowledgeable of all three projects.
 - **Action Item: R. Hadley** to follow up with Dan McCall of PG&E and inform Sierra Institute of outcomes.

Recreation/Hat Creek Corridor Updates

- G. Costello shared outcomes from the Hat Creek Recreation Stakeholder’s Meeting on June 28th, 2017. Tammy Taylor, USFS recreation officer, went through a list of potential projects including visitor center improvements and vista points. Most projects are only held up by staffing and/or funding.
- G. Costello has compiled a list of grants to apply for throughout the next year. There are plans to prioritize and narrow the list for greater probability of funding.
- Have any planning teams been deployed for recreation areas?
 - An environmental assessment (EA) for the recreation corridor has become less of a forest priority. However, the administrative work (e.g., road maintenance) can be done pretty easily. Ultimately, anything recreation related that does not require a NEPA can move forward.

- USFS staff hope that by 2019 another recreation EA can move forward. The corridor ties in nicely with Badger, so there is a possibility to fold in recreation under that planning document
- **Future Meeting Topic**: Review list of NEPA ready recreation projects on Hat Creek District.

Funding Outlook

- K. Hoffman discussed the SNC Prop 1 grant program.
 - So far, 35 organizations have initiated the pre-application process and 12 have started filling out fields. This is probably the upper limit of who will apply at this point.
- Plantations in the Whittington Timber sale were discussed as potential SNC projects.
 - Manzanita Chutes is on Manzanita Creek and feeds into Battle Creek. This would be a watershed oriented project and it has access off of the main highway. There is also potential to tie in with LVNP in that area.

Good Neighbor Authority:

- Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) was discussed.
 - GNA enables national forests to enter into agreements with state agencies to implement activities on federal lands using state, federal, or private funding.
- T. Sloat mentioned the next step for GNA includes identifying an area. Snow Mountain may be a potential area.
- Latour State Forest had previously been discussed in regards to GNA. Representatives have not been present at group meetings for some time.

Future Meeting Topics

- Group members added “budget report” as a **Future Meeting Topic**.
- G. Mayer discussed the CFLR annual report.
 - USFS is requesting a description of work done within the CFLR area, as well as numbers (e.g., acres treated) for the report.
 - Action Item: G. Mayer to send out information request for the CFLR annual report.
- Participants agreed upon Tuesday, October 10th as the tentative date for the next full-group meeting. **Action Item**: **Sierra Institute** to schedule next full-group meeting.